

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 1 – PREMIER AND FINANCE

Tuesday 4 March 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND TREATY, GAMING AND RACING, VETERANS, MEDICAL RESEARCH, AND THE CENTRAL COAST

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Jeremy Buckingham (Chair)
The Hon. Robert Borsak (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Scott Barrett
Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Susan Carter
Ms Cate Faehrmann
The Hon. Emma Hurst
The Hon. Mark Latham
The Hon. Bob Nanva
The Hon. Peter Primrose

PRESENT

The Hon. David Harris, *Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing, Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, and Minister for the Central 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**

The CHAIR: Welcome to the third hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance for the additional round of the inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. Firstly, I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Jeremy Buckingham, and I am the Chair of this Committee.

Following yesterday's hearing into the Industrial Relations and Work Health and Safety portfolios, the Committee resolved to redact from the transcript adverse comments made about four individuals. I urge media representatives not to report on the comments made and members of the public not to repeat them. Any act in contravention of the Committee's resolution may not be covered by parliamentary privilege and may constitute an unauthorised disclosure and, therefore, represent a potential contempt of Parliament.

Turning to today's hearing, I welcome Minister Harris and accompanying officials. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Gaming and Racing, Veterans, Medical Research, and the Central Coast. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

To the witnesses, welcome again and thank you for making the time to give evidence. 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. I also remind most other witnesses that you do not need to be sworn as you have been sworn at an earlier hearing before the Committee during this inquiry. I remind witnesses in the overflow seating area, if you come forward to answer questions, to please bring your nameplate with you and place it in front of you on the table. This will assist Hansard in ensuring that the correct witness is identified in the transcript.

Ms ELIZABETH MILDWATER, Secretary, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, on former affirmation

Mr TAREK BARAKAT, Deputy Secretary, Hospitality and Racing, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport, on former affirmation

Ms CAROLINE LAMB, Chairperson, Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority, on former affirmation

Ms LEA DRAKE, Acting Commissioner, Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, on former affirmation

Mr PHILIP CRAWFORD, Chief Commissioner, NSW Independent Casino Commission, on former oath

Ms CAROLINE MACKANESS, Director, Office for Veterans Affairs, Department of Communities and Justice, on former oath

Mr SIMON DRAPER, PSM, Secretary, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

Mr SHANE HAMILTON, Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Affairs, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

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

Dr KIM SUTHERLAND, Acting Deputy Secretary, Clinical Innovation and Research, NSW Health, affirmed and examined

Mr MATTHEW TUTT, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. We will hear from departmental witnesses from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We will break for lunch for one hour from 1.00 p.m. and take 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 is allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will now begin with questions from the crossbench.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Good morning, Minister Harris. It is good to see you again, with your extensive number of portfolios. There is a lot of interest here today. I've been in this place a few times in the past couple of weeks. You've probably got one of the biggest crowds so far, except for the Premier, although I think Treasurer is going to get a bit of a crowd. Minister, the Government has brought in a few changes in the gambling space, and we are expecting a Government response to the work of the independent panel indicating reform. Have you done, or will you be doing, any economic modelling on the impact of the changes to ensure that the industry remains sustainable and that any changes are balanced so you don't put the industry at disadvantage?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Absolutely. We are actually doing economic modelling at the moment. Part of the process after the independent panel handing their report to Government was to model some of the initiatives that they were suggesting might be adopted. That was always a part of the plan. We couldn't do economic modelling before we knew what was actually being proposed. It is really important for not just the industry but also the community to understand what the different impacts on the industry might be right across New South Wales. Of particular interest to me is always rural and regional New South Wales. As a government, we have a responsibility to put in place, as we've stated on many occasions, harm-minimisation and anti-crime initiatives, but in a balanced way that also ensures that the industry isn't sent into economic ruin, with the resulting loss of jobs. That modelling is underway. I am expecting to get that report very soon, and that will further inform the Government in deciding future pathways.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Where is the cashless gaming card trial up to?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The actual trial itself is completed. It was basically a trial to look at technology. As you know, our election commitment was to trial the technology on 500 machines. We vastly exceeded that number of machines right across New South Wales, from quite large venues to smaller venues. I note some of the criticism of the trial, but we had to ensure that the technology actually worked. We know that in the community itself, there's a resistance, particularly to new technology, where cybersecurity and protection of personal information is paramount. That always complicates any reform.

We are also talking with colleagues, particularly in Victoria. Victoria is about to start a trial of its gaming card, and we are talking to them, particularly around border issues. I know that MPs in the north of the State have also raised cross-border issues. This is complex. The Government will take the right amount of time to reach decisions, and we have to take into account a whole range of factors. If we get this wrong, then it can be disastrous

for not just the industry but also the State. As I said, paramount to us is protecting those people who have issues and making sure that they have support. We've already put in a range of different strategies to address some of those issues. We haven't been standing still whilst the trial and the other deliberations have gone forward. We also currently have two discussion papers out. The first one is on the third-party statewide exclusion program. The second one is on facial recognition. We would certainly encourage not just industry but also community to comment on both of those papers, which will give the Government more information about how we implement these election commitments.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Do you think gamblers, especially those who are playing poker machines, are naturally predisposed to have a government-controlled card and have the Government look over their shoulder?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think the simple answer is, no, they're not. Part of gambling reform, as with any reform, is about behavioural change. It's about education and making sure that people fully understand the risks. I think you have to be very careful, particularly when you implement a statewide system that takes people's personal details, including potentially their banking details, and have that in a situation that could be exposed to hackers or people who wish to do the wrong thing. I note the former Government ran a trial which finished under us at west Newcastle. That did have cybersecurity issues in the final days of that trial, which changed the way that our trial was put in place.

We also know that, unrelated, there was the out-of-box issue which particular clubs had implemented that was also subject to a former employee being involved in potential blackmail, so these are complex issues. Whenever you do something statewide, it's not easy. I listened to a really interesting discussion yesterday, for example, about eHealth and keeping health records. Some of the issues raised there by the professor equally apply to any system that we would put in place in New South Wales.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I'm involved in the Electoral Matters Committee and have been for the best part of 15 years. I remember starting in this place 15 years ago and they were saying everything was going to be computerised on the voting side of things. I've watched it get to the stage now where nobody wants any involvement in any way, shape or form with electronic voting systems over the internet simply because of security issues. What makes you think that you can get over those things with the security of data in relation to gaming and gambling reform?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's all about risk management. For example, obviously, the banking system has very high levels of security. They have people watching for data breaches et cetera. It's never going to be a perfect system. I'll never sit here and tell you that. I also have great concerns. I'm a bit of a techno freak, if you like. I love technology, and one of my concerns is the Government, potentially, could spend a spend a large amount of money and in two, three, four years it's totally redundant because new technology has come in place. So we are taking our time. I know some people will be critical of that. In the media, there's criticism that we're going too slowly, but this is potentially taxpayers' money, it's industry money, it's community money and we have to get it right. Whatever system we put in place must be robust and have the highest levels of security. We're talking to industry about that on a regular basis as we move forward with that decision-making.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: That raises an interesting point, doesn't it? Because, if you're talking about banks, they have money to burn, quite literally, on systems like that. They've got, obviously, a good reason for doing that, but a lot of clubs, for example, have had poker machines, especially smaller ones in the bush. I am not talking about Penrith Panthers and people like that, although every business has its challenges. How are they going to afford this sort of technology to be put in place to control their problem gamblers?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's part of the discussion that we're having. I talk to venues on a regular basis, all different sizes of venue. What they've said to me is, "We have to be very careful that whilst something might seem a good idea at a policy level, that actual implementation on the ground is quite difficult." I've had that discussion with them about the location of ATMs in premises, about the Responsible Gaming Officers, for example. I spoke to the CEO of Wilcannia, a very small operation, lots of casual staff. The impact on them, compared to, say, a Central Coast Leagues Club or a Mounties is totally different. Whatever we do, we have to make sure that it can be implemented everywhere, and that's difficult. That's why we're taking our time to fully understand the implications, how it might be funded, and whether a cashless system is the way forward. It may be a hybrid system.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: How are you going to identify the problem gamblers to bring them into the system?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: A lot of it is through self-identification at the moment. The new change that we're proposing through the discussion paper is to actually provide for a third-party nomination. If a family member,

for example, thinks that there is an issue, they'll be able to nominate that person for possible exclusion. Again, we have to be careful. That's infringing on people's personal rights.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: That's right. That is a privacy and personal rights issue.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's right. For all those critics out there who say that we're taking our time on this—yes, we are. For good reason. If we weren't, you, rightly, could be critical of an approach that is about speed and not about safety, security and robustness.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Good morning, Minister. I wanted to ask a few questions around Mr Griffin and his move, obviously, from GWIC to Greyhound Racing NSW. To your knowledge, was Mr Griffin, prior to his appointment as CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW, has he had any involvement whatsoever in regards to the Drake inquiry, in the lead-up, in the set-up, in a meeting, in discussions around how that inquiry is going to work?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd probably have to hand that to the secretary specifically. What we did, though, in general terms was we used the vehicle of GWIC, but the commissioner position is independent. That position, and the work that went around that, was independent of GWIC. We were very careful about that for obvious reasons. I think that we were able to achieve that. The quick answer is no, I don't think he did. But I'll hand over to Tarek.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I might come back to you in the afternoon on that. It'd be good to get a bit more detail of whether he was involved in any meetings or had any kind of inside information. I understand the commissioner herself is quite independent. Are you aware, Minister, that in the six months after Mr Griffin first became the interim CEO of GWIC that there was a dramatic drop in disciplinary action that was taken? If I compare the six months prior to his appointment, and the six months at the beginning of his appointment, we saw a 50 per cent drop in suspensions, and over an 80 per cent drop in disqualifications and fines. Were you aware of this dramatic shift in the oversight?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I wasn't. His appointment was before my time.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes. Obviously, the industry have been very highly praising of Mr Griffin at the time that he took that role. I know that you've written to both Greyhound Racing NSW and to GWIC raising some of your concerns. Do you feel like those concerns have been met, and can you tell me a little bit about what those concerns are?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I receive very good advice from the department on the process when this sort of move occurs. It is not a usual move, I have to say. It wasn't that we had concerns, necessarily. It was that we wanted to make sure that there was proper probity, and that we had advice that any potential conflict of interest would be handled appropriately. I have had responses to those initial letters, and we have gone back with some further clarification around that. I'd say that's an ongoing process. Nothing has been identified specifically at this stage, but we will continue to monitor that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you willing to table a copy of the letter that you sent?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. I don't think that is a problem. It's not confidential, is it?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. What's the salary for a role as CEO in GWIC?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's commensurate with public service. You might be able to answer that specifically.

TAREK BARAKAT: It is a band 2 role. That would cover the salary range. I don't know exactly what that salary range is, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If you could find out for me. Can you give me a rough estimate of what that is? Around \$300,000, or less than that?

TAREK BARAKAT: It would probably be in that ballpark.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Around \$300,000. The previous CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW was earning \$600,000, so I assume Mr Griffin is a similar salary or, possibly, more than the previous Greyhound Racing—so that's nearly doubled his salary in moving to that job. Do you see some of these real concerns that you've got someone that was in the regulator role, who has inside knowledge as to how the regulator works, possibly investigations that are currently in train that are highly sensitive, and he had access to that information, and now he is within industry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The appointment of the CEO is 100 per cent up to Greyhound Racing NSW. Obviously, we play no role in that decision-making process. We have written to them about how they would handle any potential conflicts and if any conflicts are notified to us, we would handle those appropriately.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The Greyhound Racing Act provides that greyhound racing participants and former staff members of Greyhound Racing NSW are not allowed to be appointed as GWIC commissioners and inspectors. Do we need to start looking at the Act to make sure that the same is put into place in reverse so that we can make sure that the regulator is entirely independent?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's obviously not something that we've considered at the moment, but we've got the Drake inquiry currently underway, and we'll be looking for any advice that Commissioner Drake gives the Government in terms of greyhound racing in New South Wales moving forward.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, why did you appoint Saranne Cook as the chair of Racing NSW? What probity checks were undertaken as part of that process?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: For all of these appointments, we set up an independent panel to advise the Government on potential candidates. All the probity checks are part of that process. A recommendation is made to myself of people who are appropriate. Then, based on that advice, I make a decision.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did the probity checks reveal her land deals with Racing NSW and, in particular, the fact that adjoining the Bathurst racecourse at 270 Gilmour Street in Kelso, near the 400-metre shoot, on 30 July 2021 Saranne Cook purchased a property in her own name as a sole proprietor for \$985,000 and then, some seven months later on 21 February, sold it to Racing NSW for \$1?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not aware of any of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can I table the title searches—or seek leave to, please, Chair—and hand this up to the Minister so he can have a look at the property deals of the person he appointed as chair?

The CHAIR: Can we just have a look at it before we table it?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: Before we table it, we'd like to have a look at it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: At least he can hand it to the Minister in the meantime.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I can hand it to the Minister in the meantime. I've got copies here for the Committee to have a look at. They're just plain title searches, as I've just read out the details to the hearing.

The CHAIR: Let's have a look at it and then we'll consider it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, would you find it unusual that, when she was the deputy chair of Racing NSW as an individual, Saranne Cook purchased a property next to the Bathurst racecourse in July 2021 for \$985,000 and then, in February of the next year, sold it to Racing NSW for \$1?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: With no knowledge of what has happened, I can't comment at this particular stage. We'll have a look at it, Mr Latham. As you know, whenever something is raised, we have a proper look at it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you expect that this would have been declared as a pecuniary interest under the provision of section 21 of the Thoroughbred Racing Act, and also the code of conduct of Racing NSW—that the person you appointed as chair, then as deputy chair, has had this property dealing as an individual with Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I would expect that anyone would follow the correct declaration processes and declare anything that had a potential conflict.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do you undertake to check—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —those declarations, if in fact they exist, and what the board would have done about this extraordinary property arrangement? A land deal selling this property to Racing NSW for \$1 raises an obvious suggestion that there has been an attempt to avoid stamp duty here. Is that something else that you can check, please?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I said we'll look into it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that the property today is not used for any racing purpose? It's just rented out to tenants like any other property might be, so this has been done for a non-racing purpose. Can that be investigated as well, please?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, we'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Also, can you look into the way in which this was done by a sitting board member, not an employee of Racing NSW—as opposed to employees told to do it and someone gives them the money to do it, and they might feel obliged to. Would you investigate the ethics of a board member purchasing a property and then selling it on to the organisation for which she is a board member for \$1?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. I'm not sure whether we can investigate ethics, but we'll look at the whole issue.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, you've said that you have a very strong interest in Racing for the Regions?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have you been able to track the \$3.7 million grant that was given to Bathurst race club by the former Government in October 2020, to see if the money was actually spent for the purposes that were specified?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Were you aware that they provided \$3.7 million to widen the track, and that hasn't happened; provide four new stables, and they've provided just one, knocking down an old barn and rebuilding it; provide four horse walkers, and only two have been delivered; and provide four treadmills and only one has been delivered. It has been put to me by people in and around the race club that \$2.7 million has gone missing.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'll take that on notice, and we'll look into it. What I have done in terms of that program is—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's not Racing for the Regions. This was a COVID emergency grant.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Okay. I have no knowledge of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you can look into whether or not the \$3.7 million for a racing purpose has actually been expended.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Good morning, Minister. I wonder if we could change tack and look at matters within your Aboriginal Affairs portfolio.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sure.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The 2025 report on government services unfortunately confirms that Aboriginal youth over-representation in detention has not decreased. Do you accept that your Government is simply failing to meet this very important Closing the Gap target?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I don't accept the premise of that question. What I do accept is that it's a very vexed issue. We have a situation that the Premier, the police Minister and the Attorney-General have outlined there is a wave of crime in regional New South Wales and that two important things need to be done. One was an emergency intervention, which was the bail laws. The second part is a range of programs to support families and young people. The Government is undertaking both of those strategies. I was out in Western Sydney just the other day at a meeting where all the agencies, including Corrective Services, DCJ and Aboriginal-controlled organisations were working up programs to combat recidivism—it's one of those words I have difficulty saying. "Reoffending" is probably easier to say.

It is a serious issue. We want to see the figures go the other way, but we also have a responsibility to the community to support communities, but families and young people as well. We've had another example where someone who has offended on multiple occasions has crashed a vehicle in a police chase and not just put their own life at risk but the lives of the other people in the car. As someone who's absolutely committed to the rights of Aboriginal people, sorry business is a terrible thing when it affects a whole community. It is hard. There's no easy way around this. If it was easy saying, "Don't do it," and they stopped, that would be—but that's not the case.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, I entirely recognise that it's not easy. Thank you for letting us know that you were at a meeting the other day dealing with strategies and implementing programs to deal with recidivism. Does that mean that there are actually no strategies or programs currently in place if you're still meeting and talking about doing this?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, what is happening right across communities in New South Wales are programs already in place.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can you give us examples of three programs actually happening now in Moree that are addressing Aboriginal youth reoffending?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice specifically, but I do know that there is a lot of work going on with the local health service and others—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Well, with respect, Minister—

The CHAIR: Order! The Minister is in the middle of answering your question, so allow him to answer.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think the Committee needs to understand that both Mr Draper and Mr Hamilton, along with other secretaries, are having regular visits to Moree. Some of those programs have actually kicked off. I note that the return of bail accommodation tender has now gone out. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that I'm happy with the speed at which this is happening, but the Government is responding. The community is responding. We understand that these issues are very complex. A lot of this is about getting right back to the grassroots and supporting families right from the very beginning. The reason that these young people are acting out is down to a whole lot of factors. I think I told you last time that one of my specialties in education was boys education. Just telling young boys not to do stuff doesn't work. It needs multiple strategies across a whole range of areas. One of the ones that I think that is working well with the police is called YAMs. The police Minister may have spoken about that. That is a multi-agency response to the behaviour of some of these young people.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Have you provided additional funding for YAMs, which I believe was an existing program, not a new response?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, that's happening through the Police portfolio. It has been expanded into—for example, on the Central Coast it's been in place now for just a bit over a year, and I met with the coordinator last week.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So additional funding through your portfolio or—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not through our portfolio. It's not covered under our portfolio.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes, it is a complex area, but we have targets for a reason and we collect data for a reason so we can assess what's happening. BOCSAR released their latest figures on 22 January. In New South Wales we have the highest number of Aboriginal adults in custody ever recorded. That simply is New South Wales failing on target 10, isn't it, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I hate this thing about failing. It's a moving issue. When there are issues in society, which can be drug and alcohol related or can be for economic reasons, numbers will go up and down. The Attorney General acknowledged that some of these initiatives would push the numbers up initially, and so it's no surprise. But it's about the response, and I think the Government is putting in a really strong response.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: With respect to that response and with respect to Dubbo, for example, the Attorney General acknowledged in estimates that there had been no new programs introduced in relation to drug and alcohol offending in Dubbo. Can you give us details of three programs that you've introduced to address drug and alcohol issues for Indigenous offenders and Indigenous youth?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: If you understand the portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs, there is a coordination role but we don't directly implement a lot of these programs. It's DCJ, Corrections, juvenile justice—all of those different things. I'm happy to take it on notice, but it doesn't mean we would have clear oversight of every program in New South Wales that's currently being implemented.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But I think you see the thrust of my questions, Minister. We have figures that tell us that we are failing, yet we have no details of programs that we are putting in place to address these issues. That is deeply concerning because we all want to see—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I said I'm happy to take that on notice and get you examples of programs that have been put in place.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If we look at the BOCSAR figures as at September 2024, almost 32 per cent of the adult custody population were Aboriginal. BOCSAR claims that this increase is due solely to an increase in the remand population. In estimates testimony last Wednesday, Premier Minns acknowledged that the rise in remand rates was a result of deliberate Government policy. Are we failing target 10 because of your Government's deliberate policies?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, we acknowledge that by us bringing in these different strategies there will be a rise in people on remand. The balance to that is, whilst you're putting in the other strategies that you need to put in place, people and the community have told us that these people shouldn't be on the street recommitting those crimes. You can't come in here as an opposition and lecture us on this at the same time you're talking about regional crime. Either you support the Government in cracking down on people who are continually committing these crimes, over and over and over, or you're not. Are you supportive of putting in place evidence-based strategies to deal with this, which takes a long time? Behaviour doesn't change overnight. Putting a program in place won't change the stats in a week or in a month. This takes a year, two years or three years to make a difference.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, we are entirely supportive of evidence-based strategies to increase community safety and improve the outcomes for Indigenous people—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's not the premise of your questions.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: —but you have not been able to provide one example of one of those strategies that you're putting in place. What we do have is numbers about custody, and so this is the only data that we are able to discuss. If we look at—

The CHAIR: Order! Mrs Carter—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think she's putting words in my mouth. I said I would take on notice specific programs in place.

The CHAIR: If you could ask a question rather than make statements, I'd appreciate it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I talk to organisations. We've just been through western New South Wales speaking to a range of organisations that are putting in place a range of—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps the next question, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know the specific name but they are actually putting things in place.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Regarding target 11, as of September 2024, BOCSAR reports that almost 60 per cent of the youth detention population were Aboriginal young people. To give that context, Aboriginal young people aged between 10 and 17 years comprise not even 8 per cent of that population. This is clear evidence that we are failing target 11, is it not, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's evidence that there's more work to do. We acknowledge that and we're doing that work. I think, though, you need to put it in a little bit of context. There are 56,000 young Aboriginal people in New South Wales. I might be one or two out on today's figures, but there are 256 young people in detention. About 112 of those are on remand. I can get you the exact numbers. With what we're talking about, percentages can be deceptive. The majority of Aboriginal young people are doing the right thing and they're very productive members of society. I hate this sort of characterisation that young Aboriginal people are out there madly going on with crime.

We're talking about—the police tell us that across the State they have identified a number of young people who are doing recurrent crime, and they are targeting those people and putting things in place. There will always be an increase when you change the bail law and you say that if you've committed the same offence one, two or three times, you're not going to be released again. Then the figures will go up. But these young people need to be targeted and supported to make sure that they don't get released and then go and recommit crime.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: There was a conscious decision, then, by your Cabinet when the bail laws for young offenders were introduced that it would disproportionately target Aboriginal young offenders, but you decided to proceed anyway?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, not at all. What we saw was—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That's effectively what you just said, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, what we saw was regional crime. We saw communities crying out for assistance and we saw elderly people worried for their lives. The Cabinet made a decision to implement bail reform and to implement and allocate money to programs to address some of the other societal issues.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But you're not able to give us details of these other programs that are currently in place to address offending by—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Look, I'm not going to sit here so you can have your gotcha moment. There are hundreds and hundreds of programs being implemented right across the State—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, I'm very interested in this and would like to hear details of this.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —by Aboriginal community controlled organisations doing an amazing job in leadership, in supporting kids with culture and in supporting families. There's a whole lot. The fact that I can't name three of them—you can go away and make what you want of that, but they are happening. I will get you lists of different programs that've been put in place. I've already made that commitment.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That would be very good. As well as the targets, of course, there are priority reform areas under Closing the Gap. Priority reform area one deals with, essentially, ensuring that it is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves who decide their representation and who choose their own representatives. In the Central West a representative body chosen by the Indigenous community, the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council, made representations and provided their opinion about the McPhillamys project. Are you concerned that that opinion was disregarded and the views of a different Aboriginal group were preferred instead?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The State supported the application. A different decision was made at the Federal level. We are in discussions with the Aboriginal community in detail about who speaks for country. It's a very complex issue because the Federal native title rules don't necessarily interact kindly with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, for example. We understand that this is an issue and there are active conversations with land councils and with Aboriginal people, including one that was directly with the Premier, to raise these issues. We're looking at ways that we can address those concerns.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So, for example, with the issue which has arisen today of claims in relation to Mount Panorama, you will be listening to the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council rather than other Indigenous groups?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for Minister Sharpe; I don't directly have input into Aboriginal cultural heritage. But what we are saying is that there are concerns in community about who speaks for country. They're legitimate concerns. They are inevitable because of the displacement of Aboriginal people. It's very difficult to identify what is a legitimate voice and what's not a legitimate voice given the displacement of Aboriginal people across the State historically. This is a really difficult issue. It's one that we think the Commonwealth needs to address to make the rules clearer. But there is a Federal election about to start, so I am sure that's not something they will address in the short term.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: With respect, it's an interesting approach—if you think about what priority reform area one is trying to say, which is empowering local voices—to say this is a problem that should be solved top down from the Commonwealth. If we're serious about priority reform area one, isn't this about really listening to those elected local chosen voices rather than letting all other voices dominate?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: If you fully understand the system, there are laws. Those laws are being made by parliaments and they have to be respected. Within that framework, we are working with CAPO, for example, on local decision-making on a whole range of different issues to strengthen the voice of local communities. That work is underway. Sometimes they are quite animated discussions, but we are trying as much as possible within those legal frameworks to ensure that local communities have the voice that they need to have.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I get that it's going to take time for the things you've implemented around regional crime to make a difference. When do we see numbers coming down? How much time do you need to make an impact on this?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a question that you can't answer. It is a bit unfair, actually. Regional crime has been happening for a long time. The previous Government had 12 years. They would have made impact through some of the programs they have done. Communities change, so you have got to keep changing your approach. To say that you will eliminate crime or how long will it take is—how long is a piece of string? You've got to be nimble in terms of changing strategies to meet particular problems. That is just the way policy works. If there was a solution, then every State in Australia would have implemented it and no-one would be in jail. Some States have brought down numbers. In New South Wales we brought down numbers for a while, and then conditions change and numbers go up again. It is one of those dynamic things that happens throughout history. I'm never going to be tied to a date or a time on those sorts of things. Even when you implement a program, it may not have the effectiveness that you would have hoped, so you have to change it. That is the nature of policy and the nature of implementing community change.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We might change tack a little bit now and I'll come back to it when we have more time later on. Minister, according to the Veterans Strategy, 60 per cent of veterans live in regional New South Wales. Can you tell me what veteran-specific State-funded centres exist west of the great divide?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You have to understand the responsibility of States and the Commonwealth when it comes to funding services for veterans. The Commonwealth is responsible for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Traditionally, New South Wales has been responsible for commemorations, memorials. We have been moving more into employment, and we have been working more with the Commonwealth to implement wider strategies through other departments, through Health and Education and different areas. We are about to launch our new four-year strategy, which takes into account the royal commission into veteran suicide.

One thing the Federal Government is doing very, very well is the implementation of veteran hubs. That is being done in consultation with RSL NSW and RSL LifeCare with the State Government. We are identifying sites and rolling out those services. When you say 60 per cent, the largest veteran population in New South Wales is on the Central Coast, within my region. We were very pleased to get funding for a veterans hub in Wyong recently. What has been identified is where those numbers of veterans are and then placing those hubs in those communities. For example, Wagga Wagga does have hubs; it actually has two. They were community supported, but they are becoming part of the program as well. This is a rollout by the Commonwealth and supported by the State, making sure that veterans have better access to services across the board, which was identified in the royal commission.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You mentioned the role that the State Government plays in employment. How many veterans were placed into full-time roles in 2024 through the Veteran Employment Program?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I might ask Caroline if she wants to give the specific numbers on that. Do you want them now or this afternoon?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I will get them this afternoon. The follow-up question would be how many regional veterans have been placed in roles under the same program.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, we do have those numbers. One of the big parts of the strategy is engaging local government. There is now a record number of LGAs that are involved in the veterans employment strategy. It is a real success story. It is actually ahead of its target. Craig, with his small team—you have to understand that the department of veterans is about 15 people in New South Wales. The majority of veterans services is done through the Commonwealth. We are looking to expand that. What you will see in the NSW Veterans Strategy is how other departments will engage in that. One of the things I asked for after the royal commission was that we get a whole-of-government committee together to look at how all departments can work towards improving outcomes for veterans, so that is underway as well. I think the department, veterans organisations and the Commonwealth are working in great partnership on this issue. We had our ministerial council—I think it was last week—discussing these issues on progress and all of the States recommitting to work with the Commonwealth to improve outcomes for our veteran community.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: If we can get those numbers for the next session, that would be really useful.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Just a bit more on veterans, Minister. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide released its final report late last year, and there were a number of detailed recommendations. I understand, of course, that this is largely a Federal issue, but is the New South Wales Government responding? I am not just talking about veteran hubs. You might care to address some of the other detailed recommendations that were in that report.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I would like to begin by paying my respects to our current and former serving men and women in the ADF and recommitting New South Wales to supporting better outcomes for them. I often make the comment when I'm speaking to veterans that, as a community, we can't just use special days to think about our veteran community; we have to do it 365 days a year. That is certainly what the Government is focused on. The final report was presented to the Governor-General on 9 September 2024, so it wasn't that long ago. There are 122 recommendations, of which 12 have been identified as directly relevant to or impacting the New South Wales Government. In December 2024 the Commonwealth announced a comprehensive response to recommendations. The New South Wales Government is committed to implementing those recommendations, and the NSW Office for Veterans has been coordinating that response across government, which I just said.

The Veterans Strategy which will be released will be in part a response to the royal commission. It takes us through to 2030 and will encompass many of the recommendations from the royal commission. I am very committed, and I have spoken to the Premier and other Ministers about the importance of departments examining how they can improve things for veterans and their families. As I said, it is pretty dear to my heart, given the largest number of veterans in every age category reside on the Central Coast, Lake Macquarie and in that vicinity.

I spent Sunday at a Saluting Their Service with local veterans and sub-branches, playing lawn bowls. Part of that is not just the social engagement but talking to them about their needs. Of course, I then feed that back into the decision-making processes.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: When do you expect to actually respond in a detailed way?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The strategy is ready to go to Cabinet. Pending Cabinet approval, I would expect that's very soon.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Have you got a feel for the amount of dollars the Government is going to put into it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, that's a difficult thing to quantify because it goes right across different departments. There will be some direct strategies with dollar amounts, subject to ERC, and other things—the lovely Treasurer—but a lot of it is going to be the way that departments do business and how they allocate resources. For example, one of the things we're looking at, which the Commonwealth has asked for, is a box on the enrolment form for students at school to indicate that they are from a family of veterans. Some of the things will cost not a lot at all, and other things, particularly when it comes to health and access to health services, will have a greater cost which each of the departments will have to provide within their resources.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can I table that document that has been circulated, please?

The CHAIR: There is no objection.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Thank you. Minister, who undertook the probity check on Saranne Cooke as the new chair of Racing NSW?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It would have been the probity adviser to the recruitment panel. I can take that on notice because it was a year or so ago, but it would have been an external probity provider.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, would you expect them to bring this \$1 land deal to your attention as something that needed to be explained, at a minimum, by the deputy chair?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's hard for me to—as I said, I didn't know anything about this until today. We'll make inquiries, as I've committed to, and find out if that was—I would assume that if it had come up in the probity investigation, it would have been in the report.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you have expected to be notified of a \$1 land deal of this nature, so unorthodox, by someone already on the board as deputy chair—would you have wanted to be notified of this and get an explanation about it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I would expect that any probity check was detailed.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: In your investigations about this, can you also look at whether or not a finder's fee was part of the arrangement, given that Saranne Cooke lives in Bathurst and might have found this property and a finder's fee is sometimes part of these real estate arrangements?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, if I can, I will.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you also, Minister, have a look at the 2021 and 2022 annual reports of Racing NSW? They're supposed to provide a full account of their finances. Are you aware that there's no mention of this \$1 land deal in any of the work by Racing NSW, as ticked off by their auditor?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, it's before my time. I wasn't aware of it, so I wasn't looking for it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've looked for it and it's not there. How could you explain that, given your responsibility for making Saranne Cooke now the chair of Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'll look into it, and we'll get back to you, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware of concerns of current and former employees of Racing NSW that the auditing process there is not genuine—that things like this are not reported in their annual reports, an extraordinary \$1 land deal, and the auditor basically just ticks off whatever is provided to them? Furthermore, isn't this an argument for the New South Wales Auditor-General to look at this and other arrangements at Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can't comment on the specifics because I wasn't aware of it. What I would say is that the expectation is that any annual report correctly reflects what the organisation does and spends. As I said, we've taken this on notice, and we will look into it more deeply.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Would you normally expect an organisation like this to have in its annual report that it purchased a property for \$1 off its deputy chair?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, I can't go into specifics. It was before my time. I have an expectation that, in reporting their operations, they're accurate and truthful.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you find this to be inaccurate, will you now ask the New South Wales Auditor-General to look at this, but also the other 50 properties that Racing NSW has purchased in the last five years?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice. I'm not sure of the legalities of whether that's possible or not, but I will look into it for you.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that at the Bathurst race club, the original \$3.7 million COVID emergency grant, there's been no accounting to the directors of how the money has been spent?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you further aware at the Bathurst race board that Saranne Cooke's been involved on the selection panel to put directors in and there's a general perception that she has a pretty good relationship with the Bathurst club of her home town?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'll have to look into all of that, Mr Latham. I'm not aware of any of the things that you're describing, so it's very hard for me to have an opinion. I take it, as you're always truthful with me, that these are all facts, but without doing an investigation I can't comment on whether it's right or wrong or otherwise.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I've raised probably 50 matters about Racing NSW with you and I think you've found them to be factual and based on evidence. Furthermore, because a lot of things have gone wrong and come out of this extraordinary \$1 land deal, in January and February of last year are you aware at the Bathurst race club the club secretary was caught paying electricity bills from the COVID emergency grant and had to be disciplined as a result?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that Andrew Small at Racing NSW approves all payments and approves all invoices that go through the Bathurst race club, presumably including the \$3.7 million grant?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: These are all operational issues, so it's not unusual that the Minister would not be aware of these things because we don't get involved in operational issues.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, but I hope you appreciate they're all incredibly concerning and worthy of investigation as part of your portfolio and ministerial responsibilities.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I just want to make it clear, though, that the department and my office don't have an investigative role. When things are raised with us, we refer to the appropriate body.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Didn't you set up an investigation into greyhound racing because of concerns?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We referred that to the appropriate bodies and followed the process.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you aware that early in 2021, Racing NSW, this time putting their own name on it and paying the proper amount, rather than the deputy chair being directly involved, paid \$1.35 million for a property at 252 Gilmour Street, Kelso, two doors down from the property subsequently purchased by Saranne Cooke? That's a purchase of \$2.7 million in total, which seems to correspond with the missing money from the COVID grant. Can that be investigated as well, please?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, if you submit all of these issues, we'll have them looked at.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: That's why I'm here. Thank you.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, on 20 November last year, the House passed a motion for papers on gaming and gaming reforms under Standing Order 52, to be returned within 21 days, asking for, among other things, all documents sent to or provided to or by members of the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform. I stress "all documents". The response by agencies, including yours, was that all documents covered by the terms of the resolution were lawfully returned. Far from it, Minister. Only two boxes, with threadbare information, were returned for non-privileged and two boxes for privileged. I'll ask other agencies about this in other budget estimates, but why hasn't your office returned all of the documents lawfully required to be returned?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I am informed that the New South Wales Government fully complied with the call for papers. Certification letters were provided as part of the relevant ministerial offices' and agencies' return. The New South Wales Government is currently considering the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform's roadmap through the Cabinet process, which makes some of those documents Cabinet in confidence. My advice is that all documents that could be provided have been provided.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, when the return says all documents sent to or sent by or provided to those members of the independent panel, since its creation, that's far from it. I am assuming that all the documents that were sent to those members aren't being considered by Cabinet. For example, the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform report that was released says on page 39:

Throughout the Panel's term, members engaged with multiple stakeholders and experts and reviewed 218 papers and reports, totalling over 2,450 pages of material.

We received publicly 263 pages. We asked for all documents—including reports, minutes and everything—and we got 263 pages back. It is acknowledged that there are 2,450 pages of material. Are you telling me that Cabinet is looking at just over 2,000 pages of material that can't be released? Are you saying here and now that they are all Cabinet in confidence?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I'm saying to you is that my advice is that all papers that could be released have been released.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Who is giving you that advice, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Cabinet Office.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you saying that your department—maybe there is somebody here who was responsible for signing off on that. Did your department perhaps send the Cabinet Office the 2,450 pages of material? Did you look at what exactly the panel on gaming reform was sent—what was provided to it? Were they initially provided to the Cabinet Office? Are you laying blame with the Cabinet Office for this, or was it your department?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm not blaming anyone; I'm just saying the process was followed as with all SO 52s—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you did return.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —and they returned documents. But I'll hand over to the secretary, who might be able to give you more detail.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: As the Minister said, there is a standard process for Standing Order 52s—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There sure is. We're aware.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: —where we review the documents. I am given advice and a sign-off in terms of the various categories. Then we provide documents to the Cabinet Office, who provide them on to Parliament.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Getting back to the facts of the matter, did you say that for all of these reports, or most of them—I am aware of minutes, data, reports, draft recommendations and comments on the recommendations from the members. There is so much that hasn't been returned, and it's clearly not all Cabinet in confidence. Did the department provide the documents or suggest that these documents were able to be returned in the first place? Did you do your job?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The way the process works is at the start of when we receive a standing order, there is a—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, I'm aware of the process. You've just told me what it is.

The CHAIR: Order!

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: The piece I was going to add is that between ourselves and other departments that are affected by a standing order and the Cabinet Office, a process is agreed whereby the categories of documents—covered by Cabinet or not—are agreed and we follow that process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So it was the Cabinet Office—I think that's what you're saying, Ms Mildwater.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's a joint process.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning, Minister, and to all of you. I almost fell off my chair when I heard that Steve Griffin was leaving GWIC and going over to Greyhound Racing NSW. Were you surprised?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think individuals have the right—I knew that Mr Griffin was leaving GWIC in May and that obviously he would be looking for other employment. I didn't necessarily think that's where he would end up. But Greyhound Racing NSW undertook an independent process, I think led by Morris Iemma, and they've chosen a candidate.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What a great candidate: someone who has got inside knowledge of the regulator that you have been sparring with for the past four years. It is quite extraordinary.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's your opinion.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That is my opinion. When did you know that Mr Griffin was leaving in May? When was that made public?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We always knew his contract wasn't renewing.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Back in September, I actually asked Mr Griffin about a case where an inspector had gone to do an audit with Greyhound Racing NSW of the Aussie Mates in the States program, and then two weeks later had accepted a job with Greyhound Racing NSW. I asked Mr Griffin about that, and he said:

I agree with the proposition that it's probably not a good look if the person then left our employ shortly thereon. Had I been aware that that person was seeking employment with Greyhound Racing NSW, that person would not have been sent to that audit ...

He seemed to acknowledge that there is at least a perception issue with somebody going straight from GWIC over to Greyhound Racing NSW. In the course of that, he said, "There's nothing in the legislation to prevent that from occurring", and added, "That's a matter for Government policy". Given this has now happened more than once, will you be looking to amend the legislation to ensure that we don't get people going from a regulator to the people they are supposed to be regulating?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We've got Commissioner Drake looking at all of these issues, and we would expect that when we get her recommendations—she is being very, very thorough—the Government will look to implement her recommendations.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You'd think that with this one you didn't really need to wait for recommendations. It's fairly obvious. It reminds me a bit of back in the financial crisis times—the GFC in 2008. We had all of these stories of banking regulators who weren't doing their job because they were desperate to get jobs with the people they were regulating. It is not a new idea that we need to prevent people going straight from a regulator over to the corporate entity. Surely this is something you could commit to just doing, without waiting for any recommendations?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is something we will look at in the context of all of the reform that is recommended to us. We don't want to pre-empt the inquiry and what may or may not come out of that. We took the view straightaway as soon as the department became aware that Mr Griffin had been approached. We put in place a probity regime. We wrote to Greyhound Racing NSW and asked them to identify how they would handle any potential conflicts of interest, and we have also done the same with GWIC. As I said, nothing at this stage has been raised, and if there is then we will have to deal with that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It is not just about conflicts of interest after the event; it is about the idea that you may have people within the regulator—as I say, it has happened more than once—who are incentivised to be nice to the corporate entity they are supposed to be regulating in order to get a far more highly paid job. This is incredible—as I said, I almost fell off my chair. It is an incredible revelation that he has gone to work for the people that he was regulating.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's your opinion, as I said.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But, as a person, are you not horrified at the idea?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My job is to implement the law and policy as it stands. If policy needs to be changed then we will look at changing policy.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When GWIC was already so under scrutiny, the idea that this could happen—it must have at least made your day a bit worse.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We discussed it with the department and they gave advice as to what we needed to do, and we've done that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The ICAC recently wrote to you on 14 February in relation to the investigation into the Greyhound Racing NSW board, which it concluded. It said there is some doubt as to whether the Greyhound Racing NSW CEO is caught within the Act, and they ask you to consider changing the Act to make sure that person is included in future.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Particularly in light of what has just happened, will you be making that change?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, so that has been referred to Commissioner Drake, and that will form, I'm sure, part of the recommendations of what we need to do. We made the decision that we would wait for the outcome of the inquiry to implement a package of reforms. Doing it piecemeal, all over the place, isn't very efficient. Once we have those recommendations, then Government will deal with that through the proper processes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, I have two quick follow-ups from the questions before. I believe you were talking about veteran services west of the Great Dividing Range. You gave the example of a community service in Wagga that was now being funded by the State. Is that right?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I didn't say funded by the State; I said the Federal Government funds hubs.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So there is no State funding of anything west of the Great Divide?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can take that on notice. I think that's a very broad question. As I said, Veterans is a very small department. It has traditionally had a very defined role, and other departments have responsibility.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Understood.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is not a question I can give a very precise answer to.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In terms of Wagga, are you aware of the work being done by the community through the Pro Patria organisation in Wagga?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, I have met them. Also, the local member, Joe McGirr, speaks very highly of the work they do.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: They are very keen to talk to you about employment because, of their own volition, they have organised employment services. They would love to receive your support, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Excellent. Put them on to Craig.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, you mentioned earlier that one of the responses to the royal commission was just adding a box to a form for the Department of Education.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I didn't just say that; I said some of the changes are very small, and obviously some of the others are larger.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That is a small one. It just means that Defence personnel can enrol their kids in schools without a fixed address. Six months on, we've had the start of the school term. If it is just adding a box to a form, is it not a priority to get that sorted as one of the recommendations of the royal commission?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a question for the education Minister. In our discussions, even though it seems a small change, apparently it is not a small change. They were going to do it in the cycle of when they redo the forms and how that works.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you know when that is?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So that could be years off?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No. The conversation we had is there was an expectation that it would be sooner rather than later.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, if veterans west of the Great Dividing Range need that face-to-face wraparound support for housing assistance, employment services and mental health care, how do they seek support?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Currently, they do it through DVA. Caroline might be able to go into more detail about how it works specifically.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So there's no State-funded support for veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, because it's not traditionally been a State responsibility. This is one of the difficulties. The Office for Veterans Affairs in New South Wales has only been set up fairly recently in terms of history. The current model is the same as what was in place under the former Government. The recommendations of the royal commission will inform us of how we will go, moving forward. That four-year plan is about to be released, but the Commonwealth still has responsibility for these areas.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: But those areas that we've talked about there—housing, employment, and mental health care are all State. Are there any channels for veterans who seek support in any of those State-funded areas?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There are, and Caroline might be able to go into more detail for you this afternoon.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Okay. Did we get a breakdown of the people put into jobs through that employment services program, regional versus—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think she said she will get it to you this afternoon.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Okay. In relation to the strategy, Minister, when are we expecting to see that out?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's got to go through the Cabinet process and then it will be released after that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The last strategy had around a thousand hours worth of engagement and that sort of stuff. How many round tables have you run with veterans on that one?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, the specifics of that—there was thorough engagement, but the specifics are probably better directed to the secretary who undertook that work.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Okay, I'll spend a bit more time on that this afternoon. In relation to transport, I know veterans receive discounts for public transport and that sort of stuff. In relation to regional veterans, how does that help them having a discount on their Opal card?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's an area that's been under discussion at the national level. In New South Wales—and Caroline can correct me if I'm wrong—we have probably one of the widest range of concessions available to veterans in the country. That is being looked at and refined as necessary. As I said, regional transport is a discussion we're having with the Minister more generally through that committee that's looking at a whole wide range of these issues about how government can respond overall.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Will you look into subsidies for transport for veterans to travel to medical appointments where they do have to travel long distances, where fuel subsidies and discounts would be more beneficial?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Certainly we can look at those things, but they come under the relevant Minister.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: On 22 March the Bellingen Magpies will play the Australian Army Rugby League team in a charity match and memorial to Matthew Locke in Bellingen. Are you familiar with that game?

The CHAIR: And they'll win.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Quite probably.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, not specifically.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Matthew Locke was an Australian soldier and recipient of the Medal of Gallantry. He was killed in Afghanistan in 2007. As well as a memorial, this is a fundraiser for Legacy and the Grub Club, which plays an important role in advocacy and support for veterans and camaraderie. How do groups like that in regional New South Wales—if you're not familiar with it, I guess you can't answer the question about support for that, but how do groups like that in regional New South Wales gain the support of the New South Wales Government for these events?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I assume there's a range of grants they could apply for through Sport, through other agencies potentially; might be through regions. We have support for a grant for commemorative services. I don't think it quite fits that category. It's a very specific thing. As I said, the current structure of the department is very defined and mostly those sorts of events would be funded through Federal grants.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Given the importance of this and noting the lack of support in regional areas, is this something that we can look into—how we get more support for these events?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Firstly, I reject that you say that there's a lack of support for people in regional areas.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: State-funded support.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I would say is that we would be happy to have a look at it. It may be something that I can advocate to colleagues on their behalf. As far as I'm aware, we've never received a letter, so we can't do what we don't know about. But where we are made known about different events, we do our best to find support.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Absolutely. Thank you. I know the local member up there, Michael Kemp, is a veteran. If you are free on 22 March, we'd love to have you up there for that day. Minister, in relation to the gold card concession, my understanding is that a lot of pensioners receive a gold card, which gives discounts through Transport for NSW, for instance, as well as licences and driving tests. However, veterans, despite being gold card carriers, are not eligible for discounts on council rates as other carriers are. If that understanding is correct, will you take that up with the local government Minister to see if we can provide equity with this support?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, we've got a whole-of-government committee looking at a range of issues from a whole-of-government perspective in responding to the royal commission. I think that's a first. It has not existed before. I'm pleased to refer that to them to have a look at. I think the role of the State and the Commonwealth is evolving and it's still at its very early stages. As I said, the report was only released in September last year and some of these things will take some time.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That's five or six months ago.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, you've got holidays and the whole thing. You've obviously never been in government—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Not true.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —and understand that the term "fast-track" is used very loosely.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, how often does that whole-of-government committee meet?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What level is that? Is it ministerial?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's at quite a high level, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can we take on notice how often that has met?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I won't make a habit of this, but it was put to me from a local veteran who was very passionate about all this and he's looking for a bit of hope, I guess, for immediate improvements for veterans and his fellow veterans. To be honest, I can't paraphrase it any better than he has done, so if you'll indulge me, I'll read his question that he asked I put to you:

Minister If veterans from Dubbo, Bourke, or Broken Hill were standing before you today, what tangible support could you promise them right now—beyond Tele-Fob-Off, Wifi-Welfare, vague commitments, more reviews, or pointing fingers at Canberra?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, if you understand, and a lot of veterans don't necessarily make the distinction, the responsibility for veterans lies with the Commonwealth. The State services work with the Commonwealth to provide different things, as I said, in health et cetera. It's a role in New South Wales that's still relatively new. I think it was only implemented during the time of the last Government and, as I said, now we've got the royal commission, and it may evolve. But one of our roles has been to help to locate where hubs might be able to go and that's working with other departments to find vacant buildings et cetera, to work on planning approvals and all those sorts of things. We are working really hard on that, but the Commonwealth is responsible. I know it's hard and it's not the answer you're looking for, but it's the truth. If the Commonwealth were to devolve more money to the State to provide services, then we would certainly be interested in that and that's part of the discussion that's happening at ministerial level, but we're not there yet.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What direct lobbying have you had to ask for that additional funding?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: From who?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Have you made—what lobbying have you made to the Commonwealth?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. It comes up at MinSec, yes. We have had discussions with the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has indicated that they want the States to play a greater role. The States

have gone back and in those conversations said that we possibly could do that, but we need to be resourced appropriately.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, there is obviously a lot of talk around funding for reducing homelessness and building new homes. Within the Government's affordable housing agenda, how many homes have been reserved specifically for veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Along the same vein, how many for regional veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Does the Government rely too much on charity-run programs, like RSL LifeCare, instead of providing State Government funded emergency accommodation for homeless veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The environment that has built up over time is that those organisations, funded mainly by the Commonwealth, provide those services. It's a direct relationship. The grant funding comes directly from the Commonwealth to those organisations. The State, in some circumstances, may support that through individual grants, but that's the relationship as it currently stands.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are there any State Government funded emergency accommodation programs specifically for veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We are working with organisations like New South Wales LifeCare to explore and assist them in furthering some of those sorts of initiatives, but I can take it on notice specifically. But, as I said, it has not been a responsibility of State governments.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, in November you stated changes would be made to the Community War Memorials Fund for 2025. Are they major changes?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice. I don't think they are major changes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I think round two closed on 12 February. People are going to start looking for round three. I wonder if we can get an update on what those changes will be.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I am happy to, and Caroline will be able to give you a detailed answer on that this afternoon.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, more broadly on the royal commission, you said the response to that will be wrapped up in the strategy?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You say it's not long, but it is still five or six months. Can we make this a high priority to get this out?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's going to Cabinet, and it will go through that process and then it will be released.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We don't have a time frame for that yet?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's a matter for Cabinet.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: As we see the majority of veterans moving to regional areas, are we able to look within that strategy at a plan to address the disparity in funding between regional areas and metro areas for a lot of these programs?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You make an assumption in your question. I don't know if that's true or not.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We'll find out this afternoon, for instance, about the employment program and those sorts of things.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: A number of regional councils are involved in the employment program—signed up.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you name a couple? Which of those?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There is a list. I'm happy to take that on notice and give you the full list of every single council.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Fantastic. Do you think we have the balance right between what we're spending on ceremonies and memorials versus support for living veterans?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, the responsibility has been with the Commonwealth to provide those services. The set-up under your Government was the current programs. We've continued those programs. If that needs to change, we will do that in consultation with the veteran community and make appropriate changes. But, again, I would say that if the Commonwealth wants the States to take a larger role, then the Commonwealth will have to fund some of that work.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, where are we up to with Hyde Park memorial? Does it need more work done to it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Hyde Park memorial? So you're talking about—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We're updated on a regular basis on the restorative work that was done after the upgrade that occurred in 2018. Some of that work is still underway. I believe that some of it is getting closer to sign-off, but the trust won't sign off on it until they are sure that the work has been completed to the standard that's needed.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is more funding needed for that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The envelope is currently adequate. The builders are actually funding a lot of work under the contract.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, going back to the memorial game in Bellingen that's a fundraising game, I did a quick check on the New South Wales grants website with the keyword "veteran". I couldn't see anything. You couldn't specifically name a source of grants that veterans could look at. How do veterans who are in the community, trying to support their fellow veterans, know where to go to access support for these really important events, or is everything just meant to be done with the sausage sizzle and on the charity dollar?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They have RSL NSW as their peak body, which provides advice for these sorts of things. There's also—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The Bellingen football game, Minister, how does the person organising that—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I just told you. If they reach out and talk to people—they can always write to me. As far as I'm aware, they haven't. They can reach out to RSL NSW and get advice. They can talk to—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But there's not a single category for veterans on the grants website, and when you put "veterans" in as a keyword search, you get drought relief and interesting things like that, which are obviously of concern to some veterans. But it just seems like we are expecting men and women who gave everything for us to be running sausage sizzles to provide for their needs when they return. Is that appropriate?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't think that's 100 per cent correct, because if you actually understand the environment of sub-branches et cetera, you know that many of them have relationships with other organisations, including RSL clubs. They can access grants through that process. They can access grants through—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Just to clarify—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —and quite a few of them have quite a lot of money.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: —the grants they would get through the RSL sub-branch, is that State Government money or is that RSL money?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's RSL money.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If we're looking at State Government support for veterans activities, where is it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's exactly the same as when you were in government. We have specific programs. We are about to release a four-year plan. The next four years—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But we don't have a timetable on the four year plan yet, Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've just answered the question.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes, and I think what you said was that it's with Cabinet, but—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not with Cabinet yet; it's going to Cabinet.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How long until it gets to Cabinet?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's imminent.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Days, weeks, months?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We play this game of trying to tie things down. There's a Cabinet process where you have to lodge things and you go through the process. I don't think you were in government, so you may not be aware of how that works, but it's in the process.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I think the veterans are watching this, and they are very concerned about whether this is actually a priority for this Government or not.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's absolutely a priority.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Hearing talk about process and whatever doesn't give them confidence.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think I'm being verballed, Chair. That's not what I'm saying at all.

The CHAIR: Order! Let's avoid making statements and limit ourselves to asking questions.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, can you provide an update for us on how the veterans' health centre at Concord is going? I believe it's a collaboration with NSW Health.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is. It's actually a great success story. When you ask how it's going, I'd have to take that on notice and know more specifically what you mean.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Just an update of its status.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Sure.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On this question raised by Ms Boyd about the head of GWIC coming over to head Greyhound Racing NSW, we have a cooling off period whereby Ministers aren't allowed, straightaway, to go into employment where they take some of their ministerial knowledge and use it to advantage. Minister, don't you think we need a similar cooling off period where a regulator can take specialised knowledge into the operational arm of a racing code and take advantage of it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's a suggestion that has merit and it will be looked at in the context of what the Drake report recommends to us.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If it has merit, is it too late to veto the Griffin appointment?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think retrospectivity is a very difficult thing. I don't know the legalities of it, so I can't comment.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: When is it expected that he will start at Greyhound Racing NSW? You said he was leaving GWIC in May.

TAREK BARAKAT: I believe he has started, Mr Latham.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You thought he was leaving in May, but it's earlier.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: He has resigned. We can get back to you on notice the exact timeline. He resigned from GWIC and took leave. I'll get you the exact dates. He has started his new employment.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you will look at the cooling off period as a future—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We're looking at everything in regard to this.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: If you think it has merit to have a cooling off period, you don't want an overlap between regulation and operation. Doesn't that apply specifically to thoroughbred racing and Racing NSW, where they are incredibly integrated. Do you support the recommendation for a review of the Thoroughbred Racing Act?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I've indicated to you, there will be a statutory review. We're currently going through the process of finding the person who will undertake that review. After that process, we're making sure, particularly for your benefit, Mr Latham, that we try to find any potential conflicts of whoever that person might be and have them be fully independent, but with an understanding of the racing industry. As you might expect, that's not an easy task.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I'm available, but I don't think you're going to pick me. Is it a one-person review?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes this morning's session. We will have a break for refreshments.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Incisive questions from the Government?

The Hon. BOB NANVA: We're banking them.

The CHAIR: They are banking their questions. They're saving them up for a rainy day. We will reconvene at 11.15 a.m. sharp.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back everyone. The time being 11.15 a.m. we will recommence with some questions from the crossbench.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Chair, if it is appropriate now—or at the end—I have been diligently working through the coffee break to find answers to some of the specific questions that were asked.

The CHAIR: We might do it later on. We'll get stuck into the questions.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Minister, in the hearings of the Drake inquiry, it has been suggested that you gave a direction regarding part of the GRNSW track strategy. What was that all about?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I remember the day when the strategy came out vividly because I was home sick with no voice, sitting at my computer. The build-up to that was that we had received a couple of draft strategies over a number of weeks leading up to that. We were informed the night before that the board would be making a decision, and then we saw the announcement of the possible closure of a couple of the tracks. What I need to make clear is that Ministers cannot give directives on operational issues. There was no directive given not to do—or do—something. What happened was that I had concerns that some of the tracks that were put forward to close were on the list of the safest tracks. I get an update on a regular basis of green, orange and red, in terms of injury rates, so what I asked for was, before a final decision is made, can we get clarification on what the thinking was behind the decision because, obviously, I was going to get asked about it.

But if that's the decision of the board, that's the decision of the board. If that was what they decided to do, then it was up to them to do that. I need to make clear that when you give a ministerial directive, there is a process that's followed. We have advice from the department that's actually drafted legally making sure that it is in compliance with the Act, and then it's sent in written form. It never occurs verbally. That was the context of that. I had received phone calls from a number of MPs asking questions. I didn't know the answers, so that was my instruction to my staff—because I had no voice—to find out what the thinking was behind it.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Would it have been appropriate—not necessarily you, of course, but your department—to be consulted in relation to a major strategy change like that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, Greyhound Racing NSW, to their credit, had provided us with a couple of updates about where they were heading. I have to say, the final release was different from the previous ones. That's why I was seeking clarification. One of the big issues I've had—and it's no secret, I've said it publicly, I've said it to the media—is that I have a responsibility to look at injury rates, and to make sure that Greyhound Racing NSW, particularly through the Government grant that's provided, is addressing those tracks that have specific issues. I don't think it's any great secret that I wasn't happy with the speed at which that was happening. I was seeking clarification. As happens whenever you get an announcement like this, local MPs get a bit antsy. I'd received several phone calls—Maitland was one, the member for Barwon got in contact as well—just asking the question about how this decision was reached. I reached out to my staff to find out if we could get clarification. But in no way—any suggestion that it was a directive is simply not right. If it's a directive, which I said I can't give because it's operational, is always in writing and always based on legal advice.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: When do you expect the Drake inquiry to bring down its report and recommendations?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm expecting, at the moment, that that would be around April. I don't want to put any pressure on the commissioner. I am sure she might even get some questions on that.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Bring her over here and we'll ask her some questions.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, we want to make sure that it's thorough. The Government has made a policy decision that greyhound racing will continue in New South Wales. The Premier has reiterated that, so my job is to make sure the standard is as high as possible. I've been working with GWIC particularly to look at ways that we can improve outcomes.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: That was going to be my next question. What is your intention regarding the future of greyhound racing in New South Wales?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, the Premier has made it clear that greyhound racing will continue and so—

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: But is it going to thrive?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As the responsible Minister, I will ensure that it does thrive and that it does so by being as safe as it possibly can be, that animal welfare is at the highest standard and that the infrastructure is best practice.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Is the Greyhounds As Pets program transferring pet dogs to the USA still continuing?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is, yes, that's currently continuing.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Are you aware of how many dogs are currently in that program?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I can take that on notice.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: If you could, please. Minister, are you going to review the revenue-sharing arrangements between the various racing codes any time soon?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We have had an approach by Tabcorp to review some of the arrangements that are currently in place. A special direct-dealing process was set up. I can't comment on that specifically, but part of any look into this area would have to look at issues such as revenue-sharing et cetera. They have got a special name. What's the name?

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Inter-code agreement.

TAREK BARAKAT: The Racing Distribution Agreement?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. There has been some discussion between the codes around that. At this stage, we're not ruling anything out, but we have to ensure that any decision is actually in the best interests of all three codes. Of course, the Treasurer also wants to ensure that it's in the best interests of the community.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: That's true, but aren't they one and the same when it relates to greyhounds? They've been so badly treated for so long under the current TAB arrangements. I'm not blaming the TAB for that, or the current Government, but isn't past due time that it was looked at fairly and properly?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I understand that that agreement was signed for an extended period of time.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Ninety-nine years, with no review.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What we've determined is that some of these things, with the movement of technology and the changes in community standards, are maybe not fit for purpose anymore. We are looking at those issues but, as I said, it's quite complex because everyone fights for their own turf and there has to be agreement between the different codes. Around the edges we could make a decision, possibly, but the RDA is actually a commercial agreement between the codes. It's not actually an agreement with the Government.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: I've heard that excuse before a number of times.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Minister, do you have a timescale when this TAB arrangement may come to fruition?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, it's a direct dealing. It's inappropriate for me to comment or provide commentary on any of the discussions taking place because it is a commercial agreement. Obviously they will explore whether their current proposal has any sort of acceptance. If not, they would have to go away and maybe redraft it or whatever. That direct dealing process has very strict rules around it.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Is the Treasurer involved in that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Treasurer's office is involved, yes.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: It would be logical for him to be involved. Since he's here tomorrow, I might ask him that question and see whether I'll get a non-answer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, on the review of the Thoroughbred Racing Act, have the terms of reference been determined and, if so, are they broad enough to examine a range of operational matters,

controversies, problems, for instance, that came out of the Rosehill inquiry regarding Racing NSW with an eye to getting best practice legislation in the future?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Where's that up to?

TAREK BARAKAT: The terms of reference aren't finalised yet, but the content of them would be a matter for the Minister and his colleagues in government to determine.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: What's your intention there, Minister, to ensure that all matters are examined with an eye to legislative reform that gets it into the best possible shape—for instance, should Racing NSW be one of the biggest real estate holders in New South Wales. They're topical matters, aren't they?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I will do is make sure that the current Act is fit for purpose. As I said to you, the scenery has changed dramatically, particularly over recent years, so it will be broad.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, we've been talking quite a bit about the failures of Greyhound Racing NSW, and rightfully so. But the elephant in the room is if Greyhound Racing NSW has had failures, then it means that GWIC has actually failed in its role to regulate the industry. I've had a range of emails from whistleblowers with concerns with GWIC's ability as a regulator. One of those contains an assessment by Craig Hollis, who was working at GWIC at the time. He made a comparison of penalties when the New South Wales greyhound racing industry was actually self-regulating compared to when GWIC took over.

There was a dramatic reduction in suspensions, disqualifications, fines and reprimands. He made the point that GWIC wasn't actually doing the work that they were required to do—that they were doing a worse job than the industry itself. That dropped further when Steve Griffin was appointed. There was another dramatic drop in oversight from the industry. Now, obviously, he's gone from being a regulator to an employee, doubling his salary in doing so, from about \$300,000 to roughly \$600,000, based on the former CEO's wage. What is your office doing to investigate GWIC and the failures of GWIC within all of this?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The first thing I would say is that you put forward the notion that everything has been a failure. In fact, the industry has actually made a lot of ground and there's a lot of improvement. So you have to balance that, yes, we want higher standards—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Well, Minister, you've put a special commission of inquiry together because there were some major concerns raised. My point is, if we get to a point where we need a special inquiry into an industry put together because the concerns that are raised are so great, then we have to question how this situation came about. What is the regulator failing to do where a report like the Alex Brittan report came out?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Obviously the department undertook a review into GWIC. The issues that you have raised, I have not seen them. To my knowledge, they haven't been sent to us. This is one of the biggest frustrations that I have. There is a whole lot of scuttle out there in the community and everyone says all sorts of things, but they never actually send it to anyone to investigate. Every issue that has been sent to my office has been referred on. As has been mentioned earlier, ICAC looked at the issue and they didn't have an adverse finding. There were a number of issues that had been raised on a regular basis. That is why we put together the commission of inquiry. So if there are things where—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm happy to provide this to you, Minister, so that you can see that. These are somewhat historic documents.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, the department can look at it. There could be a whole range of reasons why that's the case, not just that people are purposely doing the wrong thing.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But I guess what I'm trying to say is, if we've gotten to a point where we needed a special commission of inquiry into greyhound racing in New South Wales, then the regulator has failed in its role to regulate the industry in some way. Maybe if we don't even want to conclude that much, we need to be able to say, "Has something gone wrong here?" You said your department has looked into GWIC. Is that the only investigation that has currently occurred into GWIC and their potential involvement in what has actually caused this entire commission of inquiry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That was in regards to the Wyee issue, that there was an examination of GWIC's role in that. More broadly, of course if the recommendations come back from the Drake inquiry that says that there needs to be a further look at some of these issues, then we will do that. There's a big difference. GWIC is obviously a government statutory authority. Greyhound Racing NSW is not, so the approach is different.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But obviously the Drake inquiry is set up under GWIC.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not under GWIC. It's parallel.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But it's under the powers of GWIC.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, correct.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It can't really investigate itself if it's—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It wasn't required to. That wasn't in the terms of reference.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's right. That's what I'm saying, that's not in terms of reference.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That doesn't mean that issues may not come up through testimony et cetera that there may be things that need to be looked at.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: My understanding is that no-one from GWIC has actually given evidence at the inquiry. Is that correct?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What was the investigation with your department? Can you give me some more detail about the outcomes there?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was any potential role that they played in the issue that was raised around Wyee.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Did anything come out of that?

TAREK BARAKAT: That final report on the Wyee Greyhounds As Pets facility was referred to Commissioner Drake to consider.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: On the weekend the chair of the Australian Turf Club put out a circular saying that the brick pit at Homebush has been abandoned and the proposal for a replacement track at Wolseley Park has been abandoned. It spoke only of upgrades at Warwick Farm and Randwick. I'm not too sure ATC members want a gym and spa to replace Rosehill, but that's a matter for their vote on 3 April. Given that Racing NSW has said that it would veto the proposal—as it can under its infrastructure powers in the Thoroughbred Racing Act—if there's no replacement track, then why is the Government persisting with this proposal?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I make clear that this is outside the purview of my responsibility. The process that has been undertaken by the Government is continuing. I am aware of the article. I saw the nice pictures and read the article. That's my only level of knowledge.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: He didn't send you the email? I got the email. You didn't get it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't think we got an email. I got it in the morning clips and had a look at photographs.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Draper, you're involved with the USP. You're going to leave early. We might as well make you earn a little bit of your pay. What's going on there? No replacement track—Racing NSW will veto it. What's the point in carrying on?

SIMON DRAPER: The proposal is a proposal of the ATC rather than a proposal of the Government. The dimensions of the proposal, they will define that. They've advised their members what they're thinking of at the moment. They haven't updated any proposal to us. We're in stage two. There's a whole lot of work going on around the elements that we do know about. They've certainly communicated to us that they're considering different options for an additional track. I think in that communication they might have even alluded to—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: They vaguely spoke about other sites could be identified depending on commercial considerations—blah, blah.

SIMON DRAPER: Yes, so I can't expand on that at all. But we're dealing with a proposal that they've lodged with us. It's in stage two. We're doing a whole lot of work on the elements that are well known, particularly around Rosehill. But I can't tell you any more about additional tracks and what the position of Racing NSW is.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, one of the complaints in the racing industry is favouritism at Racing NSW. I put a question on the *Notice Paper* about the treatment of Tim Martin, who's a very fine horseman who, unique among those applying to be a stablehand, has to prove that he's financially solvent. He's on the outer with the CEO at Racing NSW and this is a standard that doesn't apply to anyone else. As Minister, how can you tolerate such an injustice against one individual? If every stablehand had to prove they were financially solvent, you and I would be in there mucking out the stables. There'd be no-one left.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's an operational issue. I have no role in that, so I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on their probity check that they undertake when they're employing people.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, in Greyhounds there was one adverse vets report, and you ordered an inquiry. Why, where you've got so many instances of impropriety, corruption and favouritism, is there no inquiry into Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The inquiry into Greyhound Racing NSW wasn't based on one report. We'd received a number of things which added—I thought we had a responsibility to look into those specific allegations. I checked with the Office of Racing last week and, other than questions on notice, we haven't received direct allegations against Racing NSW. As I said, where appropriate, when you put things forward we ask the questions. That's appropriate, but it was very different. I can tell you that when I took office, on the day that I took office there was a blue folder sitting on my desk—quite a thick folder—full of allegations against Greyhound Racing NSW. I have not received the same thing for Racing NSW.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You've got 30 questions on notice from me. I've got to print them out and put them in a blue folder?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, because they're operational issues, when we asked the question about—I think there is an explanation as to why something did or didn't happen.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Have you got the Rosehill report? It's got compelling evidence from whistleblowers about misappropriation of JobKeeper funding by Racing NSW, avoidance of fringe benefits tax, illegal surveillance of staff, interference in race fields, trying to stop Anamoe running in the 2022 Cox Plate—the list goes on and on. I've got a list here of 30 items.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There's a Government response in the upper House inquiry that will be coming out.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You've got all these matters, so why haven't you treated thoroughbred racing the same way you've treated greyhounds?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's partly to do with the way the Acts are constructed. It's also the way that it's—as I said, we have not received anything other than through yourself. I would have thought if individuals had serious concerns, then they would be writing to the office asking for those concerns to be looked at.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Vin Cox did one time and he ended up being persecuted through the media.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Latham. You'll get another go later. We'll now turn to questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, I understand that you've now finally appointed the three treaty commissioners for that process. How will they report the results of their work?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, they'll do that through reporting. I had a very good meeting with the three commissioners last week.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How will they report the results of their work?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They'll write a report to the Government.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Will Aboriginal communities have a role in assessing that work?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Absolutely. This is Aboriginal designed and led.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What's the process for that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The actual commissioners are designing the process, not the Government. The Aboriginal commissioners—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In terms of Aboriginal designed and led, I understand that you contracted with Naree Pty Ltd to consult on free, prior and informed consent. When did that consultation begin?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That was a precursor.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When did it begin?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The department now has—when did it actually—

SHANE HAMILTON: I'd have to get the exact date.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So you can assure us that it actually began and was completed before the treaty consultation process began?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I think, more widely, there was a view from the commissioners themselves that they should take on part of that role.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I thought the whole design of it was that there would be this prior consultation on free, prior and informed consent so that Aboriginal communities felt really able to take part in this process.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct. The commissioners gave feedback on that. This is the thing: When you give self-determination and you receive advice from Aboriginal people about how they want it to run, you are a very silly government and you don't really believe in self-determination if you tell them, "No, you can't do it that way."

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Was that advice received from the commissioners or from Aboriginal communities at large?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is that it came through the commissioners.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So is that actually a consultation with Aboriginal communities or with three Indigenous commissioners?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're the ones designing the process. This is the whole thing: If the Government designs the process, it is not Aboriginal designed and led.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Will the consultations be held in language?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for the commissioners.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What languages do they speak?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's a matter for commissioners.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What's the due date for the commissioners to report?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Government originally put that it would be a 12-month consultation. If the commissioners come back and say they need additional time then the Government would consider that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do we have a timeline for the process?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There is one being developed at the moment.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But we don't have a due date for the work yet?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's got to go to Cabinet.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When can we expect the revised timeline for the consultation to be available?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Revised timeline?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: There was a timeline; it's now going to Cabinet. It's being changed. When will this work be completed?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, we never put forward a timeline.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When will we know when the work is due to be completed?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: When they've completed their work.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Will there be consultation with the non-Indigenous community?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Part of our discussion is with the commissioners, but separate to their work, is that there obviously would be some consultation with non-Indigenous people as well. We need to be very careful that we fully understand the wishes of Aboriginal people in New South Wales first. The questions that are basically being asked are do you want a treaty and, if so, what might a treaty look like. They're very basic and high level. It's not what's in a treaty, and then consideration—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When will those same questions be asked of the non-Indigenous community?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: This is a matter for Aboriginal people because they're the ones that any treaty would be with. You do understand how it works?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that treaties are normally bipartisan or multipartisan. Will all potential parties receive the same consultation?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct, because then the Government will have to make a decision, which obviously it would consult on.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So the Government will make a decision, or the Government will consult with the people of New South Wales about that decision?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, the whole point of it is that it's done in a consultative way.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So when does the consultation with non-Indigenous people commence?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We don't know what Aboriginal people are asking yet.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If Aboriginal people say there should be no consultation with non-Indigenous people, will there be consultation with non-Indigenous people about a treaty?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think that's very premature and I think it's actually a little bit silly, to be honest.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So for a treaty that is multi-party, you have no view about how all the parties will be consulted?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You're honestly sitting there saying that there would be a secret treaty signed between the Government and Aboriginal people? Is that what—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: No, I'm sitting here asking about the entirety of the consultation process because I think it's relevant for the people of New South Wales.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Our election commitment was to have a consultation with Aboriginal people and then find out what they wish. Then, obviously, that will lead to the next steps.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, on 1 June 2023 you wrote to the chair of Racing NSW, John Williams, requesting an explanation for a series of complaints. Are you able to take that on notice and table that letter for us?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't think that would be a problem.

TAREK BARAKAT: We'll take it on notice and, if we can table it, that's fine.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How were you made aware of these complaints?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, there was a folder with complaints that was in my office when I arrived, which had been sent. Then there were subsequent complaints from other parties that fed in to that. That resulted in a referral to ICAC. I asked the board to investigate. I think that was the purpose of the letter.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: A folder sent by who?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was sent anonymously.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm trying to visualise. As you walked in on day one, there was a blue folder sitting on your desk as the number one priority for you to deal with, and it was an anonymous list of complaints?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They were very detailed. It was also followed up by multiple sources including the media.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Did you receive a response to your letter to Mr Williams?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Are you able to table that on notice as well?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. It went back and forth.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: As well as this response from Mr Williams, were you also aware of external inquiries instigated by the board of Greyhound Racing investigating these complaints?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Did you see these reports?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Eventually.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: As in, before or after you then referred this on to ICAC?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My responsibility under the ministerial code is that if there are serious complaints made, I have a duty to refer to the appropriate body. In this case it was ICAC. I don't get to make a determination whether they are true or otherwise; I do so without prejudice. Part of the process is that I don't publicise the fact. I can now say that it happened because ICAC have published a letter, but before that I couldn't speak about it because it may have impacted on their investigations. I was aware that the board also undertook an inquiry with the external group, who then reported to the board. The board indicated to me that it was legal privilege and wouldn't share—they shared a summary but they would not share the whole report. I received advice that that wasn't appropriate. That then led to a whole lot of issues in terms trying to see what that report actually said. We then finally received that report and also at a very similar time—I think they were very close—received the chief veterinarian's report and therefore launched the Drake inquiry.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So despite the response from Mr Williams, these reports—you still thought it was serious enough to forward these complaints?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you also have a responsibility to substantiate these sorts of complaints before they go up?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I don't. My office and department do not have an investigative function. We have to refer to the appropriate body to do those things, whether it be to police, to ICAC or to another body.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Why, then, did you write to Mr Williams and put the complaints to him for a response?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Because they were operational issues and things that the board should have been aware of and inquire into, because the CEO is employed by the board, not by me.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What was the ICAC response?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The ICAC's initial response was that they may not have jurisdiction. Legal advice was that that may not be correct, and then ICAC has now published their response.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Which said?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It basically said that there was—I haven't got the specifics. I think the letter has been made public.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's been made public, yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's a public letter so you are welcome to read it.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Did it say that none of the claims are substantiated?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I think it said that there needed to be some look at whether the CEO came under their jurisdiction. I think the determination was that they could only investigate the actions of the board; they thought they didn't have a role in looking at the actions of the CEO. Is that right, Ms Mildwater?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Or was it that, out of the 100 complaints, one of them was partially substantiated?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, that came from the report the board got; it didn't come from ICAC. ICAC don't give us any information about their investigation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So despite this ICAC investigation, nothing turned up to be substantiated about the claims?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, ICAC, from my recollection—and I haven't read the letter in a few weeks—

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's on the website. They issued a media release.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Okay, I am just getting through now—the investigation did not identify any evidence of corrupt conduct. Does this sound familiar from the response?

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: That's what it says on the website.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you then think Mr Macaulay, as the former CEO, has any questions to answer in relation to these complaints?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's not my role. As I said, I did this without prejudice. It's not my decision to decide if something is right or wrong; it's up to the investigative organisations. My role is very specific. My duty is to report things and then the appropriate body investigates that. In this case, because of the veterinarian report and other information that continued to come, we instigated the Drake inquiry with an independent commissioner to look at the claims that people were making. It gets to a point where there is so much noise that the board and the organisation finds it very hard to do their job when every day in the media there are allegations being made. I thought it was appropriate that they be looked at seriously. Either there are findings or there are not findings, but that's not for me to determine.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Given there were no negative findings, do you have any regret in relation to—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, not at all, because my duty is to report. My duty is not to show any sort of prejudice. If I was sitting here now and I didn't refer these things and then something had been found, you would have been getting stuck into me that I hadn't undertaken my duty. I did my duty—I can't remember what number; it is blown up on an A3 sheet because I have some interesting portfolios—of my responsibility in terms of reporting potential corruption. That's what I did.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Any complaints you receive need to be forwarded on, regardless of how substantiated they might be or be able to be?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's not for me to determine.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, in budget estimates in September 2024 we understood that there was a commitment for the medical research strategy to be finalised within that calendar year. What is the status of that document?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As we announced at the cardiovascular awards on Thursday night, it is in the final stages of editing et cetera and then it will be released.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Next month, we think.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can you outline the intended priorities for the upcoming plan?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I will take that on notice specifically, because they are quite detailed. I would hate to misquote some of them.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In addition to that 10-year strategy, it was indicated there would also be developed a three-year action plan focusing on short-term decisions. What is the status of the three-year action plan?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Kim, do you want to talk about that specifically?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps I can ask that this afternoon if you're not across that, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Again, I really take offence at the characterisation that I'm not across it. It's very detailed. I would rather you got a proper answer.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: No, absolutely. I understand that. The Microbiome Research Centre—are you able to discuss that or should I follow it up this afternoon for details?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, its current progress is probably better discussed this afternoon.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, you would be aware of the NHMRC inquiry into the use of puberty blockers. What is the New South Wales Government's stance on this issue?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That is a matter for the Minister for Health, I think. It doesn't come under my portfolio.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It is medical research, especially when you look at all the research papers being produced by Westmead.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, it's not covered by our department.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So you don't know whether or not we are going to continue to administer hormone therapies while they're the subject of review?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No idea. It's outside my area of responsibility.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The Lang Walker AO Medical Research Building—are you able to answer questions about that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We can take them on notice. I was at the opening, but I don't have specific details.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So you can't tell us what the New South Wales Government is doing to encourage collaboration between the stakeholders and the research institutes and the programs in that building?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Absolutely. Part of the strategy is working more closely in a collegial way across all of the different institutes and local health districts. The new strategy is built on that. It has been very well received by stakeholders, who are already moving towards building those relationships. They understand that in a tightening research funding environment, particularly from the Federal Government and what is happening in the US, it is more important that they work more closely with each other to share resources, research and outcomes to make sure that New South Wales is at the forefront of medical research.

We joke, as we did on Thursday night, that we are in a bit of a race with Victoria. We want New South Wales to be number one. The strategy is looking really closely at how we can continue to foster those relationships. The consultation has also made sure that our current funding programs will continue to be appropriate. In fact, in New South Wales we are very much congratulated because of our support of institutes outside their Federal funding. We have a grant that supports their operational requirements. I think New South Wales is the only State that does that.

KIM SUTHERLAND: Victoria as well.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Victoria does. We don't like talking too much about Victoria. So there is a lot of work there. We meet with the different institutes. One of the great examples is the network that has been set up to reduce the use of animals in research. That shows that there is a real collaboration to make sure that they're doing the very best work that they can do.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Is that the institute that is also looking at using pluripotent stem cells instead? Are there ethical concerns about the use of pluripotent stem cells?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not specifically—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Have you looked at the ethical constraints around the use of pluripotent stem cells?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll have to take those on notice because I'm not—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Okay. We might come back to that this afternoon.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, in regard to the relationship between yourself and the Minister for Health—and you gave an example before of a research project that wasn't in your portfolio—how does that work when it comes to, say, national strategies of research into cancer treatments? Who determines whether we sign up to those things as a State? Is it you as the Minister for Medical Research, or the Minister for Health?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's a bit of a hypothetical. It depends on the situation. Most of the responsibility for national agreements lies with the Minister for Health. The structure that was set up under the previous Government, which is one we're operating with now, is that my role is more about supporting through specific project funding and also working with institutes and local health districts to raise awareness within government about the importance of the work they're doing and obviously try to attract more funding.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It's just a little bit confusing as to which ones you control. Who sets the overall strategy of where we're headed with our research?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Research comes through the office of medical research and innovation. They develop that strategy. They work within the health department on those things. That's where the strategies come together. It's the model that was set up under the previous Government. In a bipartisan way, we think that it's a model that has great merit. We continue to pursue it.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What's your budget for project funding?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice. It's fairly extensive.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The office that develops the strategy for medical research sits outside the ministry of Medical Research?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The office you just mentioned, that develops the strategy for medical—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That is the ministerial office.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I thought I understood you said that operated out of Health.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, there's the umbrella of NSW Health. Then he has different offices that operate under the umbrella. Susan Pearce is the secretary.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So the office that develops the medical research strategy reports to you or reports to Minister Park?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They report to me, but they also report to the secretary.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, if I was to forward you some concerns that I have received in regard to GWIC's ability as regulator, are you willing to look into those concerns about GWIC, and their ability, and the previous concerns around how well they've actually been regulating the industry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, we've already said that we would do that.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Just in regard to a question that was asked by Ms Boyd before, I think you said that the concerns around Mr Steve Griffin becoming a regulator and then the CEO of the industry he was regulating—that that specific issue has been referred to the Drake inquiry. Can I just confirm that you have specifically asked the commissioner to actually look at this, that you've put that through as a request? Or are you just hoping it may fall into the terms of reference more generally?

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't think he said specifically refer. I'm not sure that you said that in your answer.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't think I said that. No, I don't think I did.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: When Ms Boyd was asking questions about this concern, you said that has been referred to the Drake inquiry.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, I don't think I said that specifically. I think I said we would wait on the report from the inquiry and see if that would form part of any changes that we do. I didn't say they would make a specific recommendation on it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: No, sorry, not a specific recommendation, but specifically that they look into this concern. Because I'm assuming we're quite deep into the Drake inquiry now. I don't know if there's any further hearings.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I would say, though, is you've got to be very careful. Whilst people may not like the look, nothing illegal has occurred. Under the legislation, this isn't stopped.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's the problem.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, but that's a decision for government.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Yes, it's a decision for government to look into it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I said that when we get the recommendations of the Drake inquiry, we would also look at other things as well.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Even if that's not included in the Drake inquiry report, you're going to look further into some of those issues and consider them?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It may be a consideration when we're looking at the total material, if the Act needs to be reviewed.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I guess I'm just trying to say that there's a lot of issues that have come to the Drake inquiry, and I'm not sure that the timeline of this particular issue is going to fall into evidence that that inquiry will consider. I'm not sure. It's certainly not in the terms of reference; it hasn't been referred specifically to the commissioner. It may just be that when you get that report and the recommendations, that hasn't been able to be considered within the terms of reference and the timeline of that inquiry.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We're constantly looking at all of these issues. As I said to you before, this is a bit of a moving feast. As things arise, we will look at them. The difficulty we've had is we inherited a structure out of a great deal of turmoil, and we've made the commitment to make it the best that we can make it. That's not going to happen overnight. It's also quite complex, because one person—for example, you raised all the issues about GWIC not being hard enough. When I'm out talking to the community, and some of the members in this

place, they're telling me GWIC is too hard. A lot of this stuff is perception; it may not be reality. We have to sort through what's real and what's not real.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The evidence that I gave you was just the data that GWIC themselves have put together.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's right, and there may be reasons for that. It may be that more people are doing the right thing and it's been a success. That's what I said earlier.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Immediately following the change of hands from Greyhound Racing NSW to GWIC, there was a drop of suspensions, from 21 to zero.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, but you've got to understand, the CEO doesn't make those decisions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm talking about the regulator generally.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. So are you saying the commissioner, everybody, have all suddenly conspired to do the wrong thing?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm not talking about a conspiracy—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You're drawing a conclusion from data.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's absolutely not what I've said at all, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It may be that people are doing the right thing.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What I have said to you, Minister, is that when Greyhound Racing NSW was overseeing themselves, there was 21 suspensions in six months. The immediate six months following, there was zero suspensions, when GWIC took over. Employees at GWIC raised the concerns and said that they're not doing the job that GWIC is supposed to be doing to actually oversee and regulate the industry. These are concerns that have come up from GWIC themselves. What I'm saying to you is to look into what has happened—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's come from an employee; it hasn't come from GWIC themselves.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: No, it's come from an employee within GWIC.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct. What I've found with all of these things, whether it be racing, whether it be greyhounds or whatever, a lot of employees have a lot of opinions. It doesn't make them fact.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What I'm asking you to do is to look into it, given that the data is also highlighting some pretty big concerns, and being able to look at that and say, "Hang on. Has GWIC actually failed, as the regulator, to regulate this industry?" As you said, you've got piles of evidence and concerns. There was a lot of media reports around concerns in the industry, so you decided to investigate the industry. I agree with your decision there, but my concern is that there isn't any real investigation into the regulator. That should have also been part of that, so we can see is the regulator doing their job. At the moment, we don't know.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have said that if there are specific issues in regard to GWIC, we will have a look at them. It would have been inappropriate to include GWIC in this particular investigation.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I agree, yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, it may be that in those initial days, Greyhound Racing NSW weeded out a whole lot of people, and that when the regulator took over—I don't know, I can't comment, I wasn't in government at the time—the criteria may not have been the same. There's a whole range of reasons why that might be the case. Not that I think the—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, you're picking on one bit of evidence.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: But that's what you're putting forward to do an investigation.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm putting that as one bit of evidence but, again, also then the Alex Brittan report, the fact that we've now got another special commission of inquiry, the amount of evidence that's come through in that inquiry. I don't obviously have time on the clock to list all of them. I'm giving a few examples of why there are concerns around the ability for GWIC to be the regulator.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Who would you have as the regulator, then?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm not suggesting that you change the regulator, but is the regulator performing the function is the question that we don't have an answer to. That's why I'm hoping that there will be an investigation.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: GWIC reports on what they do et cetera. It has not been raised with me specifically, other than people say they are too harsh.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So you feel, as Minister, that you have confidence in GWIC as the regulator, despite all of the evidence that was coming forward that then caused you to actually call for a special inquiry?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They were about different things. A lot of the stuff was around employment and office issues, not about welfare of animals. Remember, GWIC doesn't oversee those things; it oversees the welfare of animals. They're different.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: A lot of things were coming up on the welfare of animals too, particularly in that Alex Brittan report, which I'm sure you would know.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I would argue that the industry itself has reformed and has made changes. It is not perfect, and that's why, as I said, our job is to make them the best that they can be. I think if you're just going on numbers—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Minister, I might move on. I've only got two minutes, so I'll move on quickly.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd have to look at every individual case and understand why they did or they didn't prosecute. It is not about straight numbers.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm going to move on. Are you familiar around the recent temporary closure of the Taree racetrack after the death of two greyhounds?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I am.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: This was described as a \$6 million centre of excellence. It was also described as "one of the safest tracks in the State". After those deaths, it was revealed by GWIC that the track didn't even have a safety rail.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Which has now been put in place.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Which has now been put in place—but it was described the safest track in the State and a \$6 million centre of excellence when there wasn't even a safety rail. What action are you taking to address the fact that actually no greyhound tracks in New South Wales currently meet the minimum standards?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That has been part of the discussion I have been having with Greyhound Racing NSW since coming into the role. Obviously, I'm not happy with the progress. We have discussed it. We have got money sitting in an account that is supposed to be spent to upgrade tracks. None of that has walked out the door. Everyone will have different reasons why they think that's the case. My expectation is that that money gets spent to bring tracks up to standard, and that's—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Just to jump in on that—and thank you for your answer. I have heard a figure of about \$100 million is needed to bring the tracks up to the absolute minimum standards. We don't have that much funding, though, do we?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What's the shortfall?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There is a lot of conjecture on what is the minimum standard, and that's part of the discussion that we haven't been able to find resolution on. GWIC and Greyhound Racing NSW have differences of opinion on certain things. Part of the response to that was that there was an agreement by industry to trial three strategies, which are being trialled, and that will be examined. That's what I talk about—that the industry is trying to do better. You know, I cannot fault—I have frustrations about the speed of things happening, absolutely, but I can't sit here honestly and say there has been no effort. There has been effort. There may be disagreements about how that might happen, what speed it might happen, what actually is a minimum standard, for example, and that's what we have to resolve moving forward.

That's why we will take the recommendations of the Drake inquiry, and we will look at what the next steps are. The industry came from a place where it was shut down to going through a whole lot of changes, which I would argue did have improvements. It is now into the next stage. It goes back to what I have said all the time. As a principal, someone being involved in leadership, it is about continuous improvement. You never stand still. You never reach the standard, so you keep working. Because when you reach a point, you have got to be looking at what you do next. In this industry, where there are injuries—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And a lot of deaths, too.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —then you continually have to examine how and why that happens, and what we can do to alleviate that.

The CHAIR: Members, I have just circulated some correspondence. Mr Draper and Ms Meagher have expressed a desire to leave a little earlier, Ms Meagher at 1.00 p.m. and Mr Draper shortly before 3.00 p.m. They have some important business to attend to relating to the cyclone. I have agreed to that, considering the seriousness of the issue that they are dealing with.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, how many representations have you received from your constituent Brett Partelle about impropriety at Racing NSW?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: A number over a number of years.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Does that include the matter I raised on the *Notice Paper* with you and that you answered in June last year, referring to Mr Partelle's claim of impropriety against the chief executive of Racing NSW concerning coercion and financial inducements?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What we organised for Mr Partelle—not me, personally. Because he is a constituent that I'd represented over a period of time, I claimed a conflict of interest. My office and the department have been dealing with that specifically, so I'm not across the specific details of what happens in there. I think for me to be able—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You claimed a conflict of interest because you are his member of Parliament?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, because I have made representations on his behalf and therefore, at the end of the day, I have got to make independent decisions and I can't do that if there is a perceived conflict of interest.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Isn't it your job? You have been elected to represent him.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct, but I'm saying that, as a Minister, I have a different role to act on advice—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: I find that incredible. I've been around a while and never heard that one before. But you receive all these matters and representations from Mr Partelle—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Just let me clarify. If I take action against Racing NSW, they would be able to claim a perception of bias because I'm acting on behalf of Mr Partelle, because he is my constituent. I have got to be really careful to stay above that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay, if that's your standard as an MP.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, as a Minister. It is different from being an MP.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Having received all these complaints from Mr Partelle, why did you tell the Committee earlier on that you've only received them from me?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, what I said is they went to the department, not me personally, and there has been an arrangement put in place to deal with that, is my understanding, without knowing all the details.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But you referred Mr Partelle's one to the department because you couldn't handle it because you are his local member?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So the department did receive the Partelle material?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. That's being dealt with through—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: And it says here that meetings were organised with him.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, and that's being dealt with through a process, I understand.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did you also receive representations from Wyong Race Club about the inequity of the Racing NSW funding arrangements?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I receive a lot of information, comments and thoughts from a range of clubs in regard to the portfolio, and they all have views about how things can be different. That's different, because that's at a policy level.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: But aren't these all complaints about the way in which Racing NSW is discharging its duties?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So why did you tell this Committee earlier on that the only complaints you've received are from me?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm talking about specific complaints against individuals.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Mr Partelle's is against Peter V'landys.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct, and that's why it was passed on to the department, and the department is dealing with it.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So you received it and the department received it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So why have you said to the Committee that it has only come from me?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Okay, I have been receiving correspondence from Mr Partelle for a number of years. When I came into the role, when that issue came up, I said to Mr Partelle that I would refer it to the department to deal with. My understanding is that an arrangement has been made. There have been meetings with the board of Racing NSW on that issue. It's different. As Minister, I was already in possession of those things before I became a Minister.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Do you want to correct the record from what you said earlier on?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: If that's not specific, I'm happy to do that, but I was talking in my role as Minister, not my role as local member.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Did you also tell Mr Partelle you've received other complaints about Racing NSW that you referred to ICAC, the Ombudsman and the police?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I said, I can't publicly say what I do with some of those things.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You have. You told Mr Partelle, who gave me your correspondence, and I raised it here at this budget estimates hearing last year. And I've got an SO 52, which I will get to eventually, to seek the papers.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: So you have received other complaints about Racing NSW sufficiently severe to be referred to ICAC, the police and the Ombudsman?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The office hasn't. I checked with the office last week and asked if they have received any complaints and the response I got was they hadn't.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Minister, your position—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I haven't received—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Your position is that Greyhound Racing has been subject to an inquiry—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've received verbal—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —because the office received complaints. But because you have received them, Peter V'landys and Racing NSW are a protected species.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, not at all. That's a total misrepresentation.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, what is going on?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: People say things verbally. I haven't received them in writing, is what I'm saying. Lots of people have opinions on a whole range of issues; that doesn't make them right. But when you receive them in writing and there becomes an obvious pattern, I took the view that then you refer.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, would you expect that most racing participants, if they've got a problem with Racing NSW—and there are hundreds of them out there—would write to you as the Minister?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Can you take on notice how many of those complaints you have received—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: —to further correct the record from earlier on?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is we haven't received any. We receive lots of correspondence but as far as I know—when I asked, the reply was we hadn't received anything.

TAREK BARAKAT: I can add, Mr Latham, in response to Mr Portelli, we can get some more information for you, but my recollection was that it was referred to the department and, as you say, the complaints related to the CEO of Racing NSW. Those complaints are appropriately dealt with by the board of Racing NSW. I wrote to the chair of Racing NSW requesting that the chair meet with Mr Portelli. My understanding is that that meeting occurred.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, sure. But I find it extraordinary, because everyone in racing knows that there's a Minister. I don't think many people know there's an Office of Racing. But, anyway, let's move on. Minister, did you tell Minister Kamper it was fine to go ahead in giving Racing NSW Crown land management of five country racecourses?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Minister Kamper informed my office there was a process that had been undertaken, asked my office—not me specifically—asked the office—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Are you sure of that? You never had a conversation with Minister Kamper about this matter. Is that your evidence?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not until last week when we were talking about having questions on notice, they were—I don't have a role in that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: No, but you're the racing Minister. Was there any approval from your office, you, or the Office of Racing that allowed the regulator to run its own tracks and regulate itself?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My understanding is that a briefing note was sent to my office asking if there were any problems, that the process that had been followed was the correct process—so that's the process.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Right. In asking whether there are any problems, did your office write back with problems?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll take that on notice. I wasn't made aware of any.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Okay. Do you to further consider your statement here that you had never had a conversation prior with Minister Kamper?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I do not recall—

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You don't recall.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —discussing it with Minister Kamper up until last week or the week before where he said he'd got all these questions on notice.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Yes, my word he did.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I wasn't even aware of it before that.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, you're aware of it now. Do you think it's right that Racing NSW—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's not for me to determine. It's an independent process that's undertaken by the department.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Well, this is Crown land and you're the Minister for racing. The general manager of industry at Racing NSW, Scott Kennedy, has said that the Crown land management of racecourses is simply the first step to having freehold title. Do you think the New South Wales Government should hand over ownership of Crown land to Racing NSW just because they request it and Peter V'landys has got lots of media friends?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: As I go back to, I have no authority to make the decision about Crown land matters, including the appointment of Crown land managers. The authority is with the Minister for Lands and Property. The appointment of Racing NSW as a Crown land manager aligns with the priorities of Crown land 2031 strategic plan. I was informed when I received the briefing note that there was extensive consultation, that this application from Racing NSW was first applied for in August 2022, and that process to become a category 1 Crown land manager has been undertaken over that period of time.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: As Minister, what consultations or discussions have you had with Racing NSW about your extensive real estate strategy in New South Wales now involving 50 properties, with an

outlay of \$125 million, Crown land management of five racecourses, ownership of Scone, Moruya, Cessnock and Goulburn and also the proceeds of the Rosehill sale? Isn't this something that should be a subject of consultation, not just for the industry, but with you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're operational matters for Racing NSW, but I will say that the CEO had spoken to me about their strategy to ensure that these places were protected for racing into the future and that he had some concerns that, given the financial constraints of the industry, some of the clubs may have chosen to sell land or property that may not be racing related. Racing NSW has a strategy about this. They're going through whatever processes that they have to go through, but they don't have to ask my permission.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: Why isn't their strategy in their strategic plan? There's no mention of this Crown land management expansion.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was only granted very recently.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You said they applied in 2022.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct.

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: There was a strategic plan last year. Why isn't it mentioned?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I don't know. It's an operational issue. It's not something that I can answer.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr Latham. Mr Barrett?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, The Star casino seems to be in a bit of trouble at the moment. What's your message to the 3,600 workers who must be very concerned about their future?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. I have to be very, very careful because there's market sensitivities around this whole issue, so I can't say a lot other than the Government committed to an agreement with The Star around the retention of employees. So far that has been honoured. We want to make sure that, wherever possible, the employees are looked after.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How long does that agreement go for?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It goes whilst they're in operation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That's despite the comments in the paper today from the Premier saying that they won't be supporting those staff.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What we've done is we've put in place strategies to support the retention of those employees. What the Premier has said is that there are a lot of pressures on the budget and that what the Government's done won't be increased, because we have to pay nurses and train drivers and fires and all that sort of thing. The Premier's made it clear that there's going to be no further assistance from the Government, but that agreement's in place and we continue to monitor the situation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What's your knowledge of the potential relationship going forward between The Star and Crown?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's not something I can comment on.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: It must be something you consider, though, at the moment and what that would look like.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They're two private companies. Their relationship into the future is for them. Phil might want to give something, but the regulator obviously has to look at any proposal that may or may not come forward. Look, seriously, this is a really sensitive issue and I don't want to be in the media in any way giving an opinion or something that might influence the current situation.

The CHAIR: Did you wish to add anything, Mr Crawford?

PHILIP CRAWFORD: No.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But perhaps we can come to Mr Crawford this afternoon.

The CHAIR: All right.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, Star is 3,600 employees, but it's also a number of small businesses who depend on Star and their operations. Does the Government have any plans to step in and assist all of those small businesses who depend on the operation of Star?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I refer you to the Premier's comments.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you were a small business supplier for Star, what level of confidence should you feel now?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I refer you to the Premier's comments.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So you have got nothing further to add?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Government is looking at a range of contingencies, but I refer you to what the Premier said.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that because, as you said before, you don't want to be in the media because of it, or because you're legally prohibited from making comments?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You may or may not understand that this company's listed on the share market and any comments that people may or may not make may influence a whole range of things. My strong advice is to not comment specifically on what the Government may or may not do, because it could impact on the commercial sensibilities.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, in December 2023 you announced the big, broad cashless gaming trial. How many people took part in that trial?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There was about 2½ thousand different establishments. As I said earlier—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How many people? How many active participants?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The trial we announced was on technology. We announced machines. We didn't announce people. We announced 500 machines and we got a great response from industry, and there were many, many more machines. There was slight complication in that one of the companies had some technology issues, so some of the companies pulled out. Some of them changed providers. We got a very good overview of the technology trial.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Independent Panel on Gaming Reform said there were 14 genuine active users. How many of those 500 machines did those 14 people use?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, it wasn't 500 machines. As I said, there were 2½ thousand machines.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How many of those 2½ thousand machines did those 14 people use?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When will the Government be responding to the recommendations of that roadmap?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Government has been rolling out a whole range of issues, which I mentioned earlier for Mr Borsak. The Government has now put out two discussion papers, as I said, which are on the first- and third-party exclusion program and facial recognition. The Government is also doing an economic analysis on any implementation of further regulation, and the Government will make their decisions at an appropriate time in terms of where we will go, moving forward.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You say you've done a range of measures. Those measures are two more reports and a discussion paper?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not at all. I'm happy to give you a full list.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Maybe you can take that on notice.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. We've done everything from the positioning of ATMs to Responsible Gaming Officers to removing advertising outside pubs to reducing cash limits on new machines to recently announcing that we were going to remove advertising from public transport. We've done more in less than two years than the previous Government did in 12 years. This is complex. It affects a lot of people's jobs and businesses. It also affects those people who need help. We are doing a whole range of things, including increasing funding to services for people who are experiencing harm. We're also giving more money to the responsible gaming trust in order to do more research et cetera for us. To categorise one small portion of the total gaming reform is very disingenuous, given that this is an environment that has built up over decades.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, I was responding to your answer before, but I appreciate your response there. You mentioned you're doing work around the economic modelling. Wasn't that part of what the panel was tasked with doing.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was made clear to us that until the panel knew what an environment might look like, it couldn't do economic modelling. So we have undertaken to do that, post-report, which has been made public. It also has input from industry and harm-minimisation groups. We've been very transparent with this.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You talked about some of the issues for the border communities. What were some of the issues that have been raised with you on that?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Obviously people are concerned about gambling harm, and we take that issue very seriously. What we know is that this is a lot—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, specifically to the border communities that you mentioned earlier this morning?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The border communities, yes. It has been raised with us by some of the local members in those areas that we need to be making sure there's consistency, because there is the potential, if New South Wales does one thing and Victoria does another thing, that we get the old story of border hopping, and that can affect businesses. It is the same with the Queensland border. You might note that the Liberal Government in Tasmania worked down the pathway of looking at cashless gaming. They've actually stopped that, and said that this needs a more broad, national approach. We have to be aware of all of those issues.

I don't know if, at a departmental level, there have been meetings with Queensland. I haven't met with the new Minister in Queensland yet, but I've certainly met with the Victorian Minister a number of times. I think I described to you the start of a trial there as well, and we'll be looking carefully at that too. This does need a consistent approach. New South Wales is behind the eight ball a little bit because we have one-way communication to venues. Victoria has two-way communication. Before we do anything, we've got to upgrade that communication network to make sure that whatever is decided can actually be put in place. That's because there has been no investment for decades in that area. Mr Foggo, who was the chair of the independent panel, was the one who actually implemented the one-way communication, back in the day, which happened in about—

TAREK BARAKAT: I'll take the exact year on notice but a long time ago.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It was a long time ago.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: We can come back to that.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There has been no investment since then, so we've got a bit of catching up to do.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, with respect, we are talking about the harm that gambling causes people, and it seems like there is a lot of talk about how we have to get all the States together and we have to talk with the Territories. What are we doing to actually stop this gambling harm now, a gambling harm that was arguably caused when Bob Carr made sure that there was a poker machine practically on every street corner?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's exactly what I was saying. This is decades in the making. It cannot be unwound in five minutes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But it shouldn't be taking decades to fix. We're hearing about talking and talking and talking—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: And the previous Government did nothing.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: We had a whole plan ready to go, Minister—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You had a whole plan ready to go; we actually have to implement it.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: —and what has happened to your trial?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Having a whole plan, with a trial that actually got hacked, isn't a great outcome.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And neither is talking about having lots of meetings with States and Territories rather than actually getting on and addressing the issues.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I've just outlined all the harm-minimisation things we've put in place. In fact, our most recent one had support from the harm-minimisation organisations, congratulating the Government on what we're doing. We're doing some tough stuff. I was talking the other day to one venue. Moving ATMs five metres from the gaming room cost one venue \$160,000. Every time we make a change—whether it's Responsible Gaming Officers, limits on machines, ATMs, removing advertising or any of these things that we're doing—there's a cost to industry.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And every time somebody spends too much on gambling, there's a cost to that family as well.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's great to moralise after doing nothing for so long and to now say to a government that has been in place for—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Two years.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —less than two years, "You haven't done anything." The truth is we have done a lot. There's more to do. At least we are honest about it. You guys say, "We had a plan and a failed trial."

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, Wesley Mission has said the Minns Government's modest reforms have had zero to negligible impact on reducing gambling harm. They also said that halfway through the Government's term, New South Wales operates in an even more chaotic and conflicting environment. That's quite contradictory to what you've just been saying, isn't it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What you have to understand is—I don't know if you have done much in behavioural studies?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Not as much as I'd expect from a Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Changing people's behaviour is a difficult thing. The fact that you know something is harmful doesn't stop people from engaging in it. We live in a democracy; we live in a free country. Gambling is not illegal. We have to work at a behavioural level to educate people and get them to change as well. Expecting the industry to take on the total responsibility, at the expense of their businesses and their staff across every community in New South Wales, is not acceptable. The community has to change. When I go and talk to people who use poker machines, they don't want the Government interfering. That's the feedback. That's even what the trial said. They're worried about government controlling how they spend their money. They're worried about government looking after information about where they're spending their money. They're worried about the banks knowing what they're doing with their money.

These are private citizens; these aren't criminals. These are people who are in their sixties, seventies and eighties who enjoy going down on a Saturday afternoon or a Friday night and having a go on the pokies. It's great for us to moralise about whether it is a good way for them to spend their money or not. I don't go and moralise to people if they go to a \$300 restaurant and buy \$200 worth of alcohol. Let's be really careful and honest about this. We tell people that it is harmful. We help them if they really need help. We put in place as much as we can, but it's not illegal. They can engage in these activities. And if they don't do it on a poker machine, the risk is they're doing it online, and then government has no oversight of them.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, could we see a different system in regional and metro areas, given what we were saying before about the impact that it is having, particularly on some of these smaller communities where the pub or club is the only focal point?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That's all the considerations. That's why this is so hard. When I spoke to the CEO at Wilcannia, most of her staff are casuals. Even implementing a Responsible Gaming Officer regime was difficult for them. That's what I mean. It's easy to sit here in a room in the middle of the CBD and say the Government is not moving fast enough, but the practicalities of what this means in the real world have to be taken into account. I would be irresponsible if I didn't listen to those concerns and make sure that, when a government makes a decision, it's not destroying. In Wilcannia, the club is a big employer; it's the only one in town. The community go there for celebrations, birthdays and all that. If it closes, what do regional communities do then? That's why you cannot just say, "Let's extract this out, and it doesn't matter what the effects are." But that's what you're criticising us for doing, because we're examining closely what this actually means.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, we're asking questions as is the process for budget estimates.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You're also insinuating about things as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You've suggested it could be a hybrid system. Then you've talked about other States that are winding it back. Are you winding back from the commitment to cashless gaming?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Our commitment—and you can check our election commitments—was to undertake a trial. We made no commitments past that. You made commitments on that. You even put dates on it. Looking at what we know now, your dates were ridiculous. They were totally out of step, and you would've sent business after business broke.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Minister, the Treasurer said before the election that Labor would take 9½ thousand poker machines out of New South Wales by buying back pokie licences. How many of them have been bought back?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Right, so that was part of what the independent panel looked at. We are examining that, but what I would caution people is this—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, no, this is what the Treasurer said before the election.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, that's what I'm saying. You make those commitments before an election, then you actually get in and you do the work, and you realise what that's going to do. You're in opposition now. You'll find out how hard it is when you're making election commitments with no support. What we found is, it's not the number of machines that's the issue, it's the intensity of play. The State could pay \$60 million to remove those machines and make no difference other than take \$60 million out of the budget that could've been spent on harm minimisation.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Did the Treasurer go rogue making this commitment?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not at all. He was making those statements at a time before we'd actually done the trial and had the evidence to guide us.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Were there other commitments made by this Government that weren't really commitments, depending on what might come over the next little while?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Well, you're a pretty silly government if you get into power, you do proper research, and you find out that your idea in opposition may not fly. Is that what you're seriously contending?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I would suggest that maybe you don't go out and make unrealistic commitments before an election.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We'll see how you go going up to the next election.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: This isn't about us. Your Treasurer's come out and made a commitment before the election, and now you're saying—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Now we've got the evidence.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Now you're going out and saying it doesn't matter what commitments you make before the election. You can make statements—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I'm saying is—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —when you have proper evidence—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, Minister.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —you can make evidence-based decisions.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Point of order: My colleague was trying to finish his question. The Minister was talking over him.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: To the point of order: The question had been asked and the Minister was trying to answer it.

The CHAIR: I think there had been a question, then there was another question. It was a bit iterative. I'll describe it as that. Let's give each other the opportunity to both ask and answer the question. Mr Barrett, conclude your question, and the Minister can begin and conclude his answer.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I apologise if I didn't give you the chance to answer that question.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm sorry that I was speaking over you.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: My question then is, is it okay for the Treasurer to come out and make commitments such as this without having the evidence beforehand, knowing that, down the track, you can change your mind or withdraw the commitment?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'll simply say he wasn't the Treasurer. It was before the election.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, the now Treasurer—the then shadow Treasurer.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It goes back to my point that you make election commitments on the best knowledge that you've got. When you get into government and then you've got all the power of the departments, and you have got Treasury advice, and you've got a whole lot of other things, you may find that some of the commitments you made are no longer relevant and, actually, would not achieve what you thought they may have

achieved. The idea of reducing the number of machines, of course, sounds very attractive, but when evidence shows us it actually would make no material difference, do you think we should go and spend \$60 million on something that doesn't make a difference?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, can I take you to a commitment that you personally made before the election to "fight cuts to Wyong Hospital and health services including maternity care". Can the women of the Central Coast deliver their babies at Wyong Hospital?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Very interesting question. There's been no obstetric births at Wyong Hospital since 2008. In 2020 the former Government stopped all birthing at the hospital. There hasn't been a cut. You guys made the cut. There hasn't been a cut. Services at Wyong Hospital are the same.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Your commitment, Minister, was in relation to maternity care at Wyong Hospital.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Correct.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can the women of the Central Coast deliver at Wyong Hospital?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: You closed the maternity suites.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Your commitment, Minister—your commitment was in relation to maternity care at Wyong Hospital. Can the women of the Central Coast deliver their babies at Wyong Hospital?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: No, because you closed the ward.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, you would know that Gorokan to Wyong Hospital is roughly a seven-minute journey. It's an extra half an hour to get you to Gosford Hospital. How many labouring mothers do you think will get caught out, and does that reflect on your commitment for maternity care on Wyong Hospital?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Not at all. This is a very complex issue. If you—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Have you discussed it with Minister Park?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: —actually want to hear the history, what happened was, where the current maternity ward was, before the previous Government stopped birthing there—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: With respect, Minister—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: —this was not a question about history.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I have to give you the full answer.

The CHAIR: You've asked the question. The Minister is about 15 seconds into his long story, apparently, so let's hear it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Facts matter, Chair.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Which is not answering the question, with respect, Chair.

The CHAIR: We'll see. I think he may well.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Facts matter. What happened was the previous Government, to their credit, with our support—after you tried to privatise the hospital and we fought that off, which is lucky given what's happened with Northern Beaches Hospital—built Block H which now has the paediatric and emergency care. The clinicians, the experts, determined that the current birthing suites that were at Wyong became redundant because the distance from where they are located to the emergency care in Block H meant that it created danger for women. That's what the clinicians decided whilst you guys were in government. What happened was the services at Gosford were increased. We've been talking to the Federal Government about enhancing the facilities there.

We also had—nothing to do with government, but the private hospital decided it wasn't economical anymore because women were going elsewhere for private birthing, either to Lake Macquarie or to northern Sydney to have their births. The private clinic became unfinancial and so in March, end of this month, they're closing that as well. What Health is doing is they're developing a clinical plan to ensure that we can cope with those births. If you have a look at birthing on the Central Coast, it's remained fairly steady. Health have assured

us that there are adequate services. In terms of going from north to south—I tell you from experience. Both of my children were born at north Gosford. I live not far from Gosford.

The CHAIR: Excellent. Minister, how can you tax something you have no oversight of? You just said that you have no oversight of online gambling.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: What I mean by that is we have point of consumption tax, so we can tax activity. What I'm saying is, in terms of regulation, most online gambling is not regulated in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: Why not?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Because they choose to get their licence—probably a really technical answer why not.

TAREK BARAKAT: Online gambling is really the jurisdiction of the Federal Government. You'll recall they held an inquiry into online gambling and advertising. That's something that's not been responded to at this point. Also to the Minister's point, a lot of sports betting operators and wagering service providers are licensed in other jurisdictions outside of New South Wales, so it does temper what we can do, I suppose.

The CHAIR: Is that something that you'd commit to redress? It seems to me a strange circumstance that we have hundreds of millions—if not billions—of dollars now being wagered in New South Wales on an industry that we can't regulate. We can tax but we can't regulate.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It's an issue that we are looking at very seriously, and all of the gaming Ministers across the country are also looking at. It's a very difficult area. One of the things we get asked to do, for example, is to license products in New South Wales which is, literally, I think it's betting on US lotteries. We've resisted a lot of those, which makes industry a bit unhappy. Our commitment is that, in New South Wales, we want to make gambling as safe as possible. I know some people see that that's an oxymoron but, as I said, it is not an illegal activity, so we try to do that. We also understand that the New South Wales economy can benefit from some of this. That's a reality. That's why we have the point of consumption tax. All of these issues are being looked at by Treasury and others in a whole, and that's why my answers before about what we do going forward have to be looked at in the total context of what gambling looks like in New South Wales. It's a really important area and, of course, we are waiting for the response by the Federal Government to their inquiry, too. That will obviously guide some of where we go.

The CHAIR: You may not be surprised to learn that the uptake of medicinal cannabis has been higher on the Central Coast than almost any other jurisdiction in Australia. Public transport is not fantastic there. Many people on the Central Coast who have a valid prescription for medicinal cannabis are losing their licences, their livelihoods and their jobs because they are testing positive on RDT, even though they're not impaired. Is that an issue that you're aware of and what would you do about it?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'm aware of the wider issue because there are discussions within government in regards to it. The Government is looking at a range of issues around this, and I think there are other Ministers who have jurisdiction over this who will be able to give you a more fulsome answer. What I would say, though, is given the population mix on the Central Coast—particularly those with disabilities or who have impairments through work accidents et cetera is high—it doesn't surprise me that people are turning to those sorts of medicinal cannabis remedies to address some of those problems.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Minister, going back to the harm minimisation questioning, how many players would you put in that category that would need to be regulated by harm minimisation?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The official figure is around 1 per cent who have serious problems. What the research is showing us is there may be another group of 5 to 13 per cent—I can get the exact figures for you—that may be categorised as slightly less difficult. So we're only talking about a small number of people who actually play. That's why our focus so far has been on making sure there is support: increasing access to services for counselling, looking at signage because signage is a trigger, moving ATMs away so it forces people to take breaks in play, and reducing cash limits on machines. The Responsible Gaming Officers are really important because they can engage in those conversations. Of course the first- and third-party exclusions are probably the most important reform in terms of helping those people who have serious, serious issues.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: What would be the harm to the communities if the Government stuffs up this attempt to regulate and work on harm minimisation to the people who are actually harming themselves and their families? What would be the effect on communities if it got it wrong?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It would be massive. Rightly or wrongly, because of the way the industry has evolved, it subsidises a whole lot of things. In communities like mine where people are on low incomes, they can

go out and have an affordable meal and a drink, a bit of entertainment et cetera. If we get this wrong and those venues are closing down, it affects everything right across the board. It would mean that those people who are putting themselves through uni or they have part-time jobs, if they're single mothers or whatever—that employment would disappear. I've heard an argument that they'd just move to other jobs. That's a little bit superficial and not really examining in small communities there aren't other jobs. It would mean they may have to leave the town to find employment elsewhere.

It also means—and these are the effects that people don't talk about a lot—that if your little club or pub in your town closes down, you jump in your car and you go to the next place. It's not hard to say why people shouldn't drink drive, but that could be an outcome. It is really important we get this right. It's not just about the evil industry making millions of dollars; it's about how that money's then distributed back into the community. I was talking on the weekend to a number of venues who have their tax money that they do through ClubGRANTS, and then they pay above that. They're funding things like domestic violence interventions. They're funding helicopter rescue.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Even, Minister, for the sake of clarity, I'm a director of a community club. The reality is that everyone gets paid very, very well and, without gaming income, which subsidises all the wages, all the meals and all the functions that are carried on at the club, there simply would be no club.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I agree a hundred per cent, and that's why this is so important. It's easy to wax lyrical saying you should do this or you should do that, but we have a responsibility to the community, both to minimise harm and stop the criminal activity, but we have also got a responsibility to make sure that communities aren't destroyed. I take that very, very seriously.

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: I have a general question, Minister. Is there any additional information you would like to provide the Committee?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, thank you for that question. Going back to some of the earlier questions, one was, "Did the YAM program receive any additional money?" Under this Government, it's received \$12.87 million extra, above what was funded before. People were asking about some of the programs. For example, the Government has announced \$1 million in grants, which includes \$314,000 to Moree PCYC to expand their U-Nites sport and mentoring program; \$152,000 to the SHAE Academy to deliver specialised youth programs with staff support until 2.00 a.m.; to Miyay Birray, with \$282,00, to improve and expand their Street Beat program to operate later until 2.00 a.m. There's also a \$350,000 rolling grants program that will provide flexible grants to encourage innovative community-led activities to support young people. That goes to the three programs.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Minister, can I just check, are they all Moree based?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: They are, but they are examples of—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand the idea of the Moree response; I just wanted to check they're all Moree based.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes. Regarding the question around the funding for the Hyde Park memorial, I'm informed that the Government has also contributed an extra \$800,000 in additional funding for preservation of the original building. That's on top of its normal budget. The rugby game up at Bellingen—

The CHAIR: Which Bellingen will win.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Anzac Community Grants can cover that but they'll obviously have to apply. I'm informed that if people write to myself or the department, we look to assist in any way by pointing them in the right direction. The Saluting Their Service is the Commonwealth grant, and it's fairly substantial. Organisations have the ability to engage in that. The Community War Memorials Fund is changing. The specifics are that they're going from two rounds to one. The reason that's happening is because, in New South Wales—because of a bit of pork-barrelling—we've tightened the grants guidelines. We're actually able to, by going to one round, increase the value of the grants that people can apply for. That's a positive.

From 2022 to 2024, under the Veterans Employment Program, there are about 1,015 people that have been employed. They're ahead of target. They not only work with local government but they're also working with Corrections, Transport and a range of other government organisations to promote veteran employment. There are a series of round tables that occur through the Federal Government—but where State bodies are involved—in order for veteran support organisations to be aware of those programs and how they can engage. Hopefully that covered a lot of those specifics, but I'm sure you'll ask the very good officials this afternoon for some more information. I'd just like to—unless there are any other questions?

The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE: No, that was a very fulsome answer to my question.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I'd like to thank the Committee. I have a very wide range of portfolios. I rely heavily on people to keep across the specifics, but, on most issues, I'm pretty aware of what's going on and where it has on—they brief me to death, probably, sometimes. I really appreciate the opportunity to come and answer the questions. I try not to be aggressive but I'm very passionate about the gaming area. I think we're on the right track but we have to do it right. It's not wanting to offend anyone or anything, it's just I do get a bit passionate about that so I'm sorry if my responses became—

The CHAIR: You were very well behaved—better than most. Minister, you have something else?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There are some corrections. This is to do with Racing NSW. Since becoming Minister, I've received and responded to correspondence from various individuals regarding thoroughbred racing in New South Wales, including relating to the functions and operations of Racing NSW. Mr Latham, unfortunately, the answers have basically said that this is the responsibility of Racing NSW—which is what you get a lot—because I do not have operational responsibilities. Regarding the complaints received about Greyhound Racing NSW, I earlier mentioned that I received anonymous complaints regarding Greyhound Racing NSW. For the avoidance of doubt, I received both anonymous and identified. My office compiled these for me and I then referred them for advice from the department, and that advice was to send them on to the relevant body. Hopefully, that's a bit more fulsome.

The CHAIR: That is more fulsome. We very much appreciate it, Minister. Thank you very much for your attendance. There were a few things taken on notice. I'm sure you will get back to us on those. For everyone else, we will reconvene at 2.00 p.m.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Kate Meagher withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. I hope you're all refreshed and ready to go for the afternoon.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Barakat, earlier this morning I cut you off in regard to the answer around Mr Griffin's appointment as CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW and whether, prior to that appointment, he had met with the Minister or anybody else within the department to discuss the Drake inquiry in any capacity, prior to the inquiry being formed or during it at any point.

TAREK BARAKAT: To the best of my knowledge, no, although Commissioner Drake might be able to give you some more detail. The team supporting Commissioner Drake has been set up external to GWIC, so it sits within Elizabeth's department. So it, headed up by a director, provides us with secretariat support to the acting commissioner. As to whether there's any been any conversations between the acting commissioner and Mr Griffin—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: So he definitely didn't meet with the Minister or anybody else in regard to the formation of that inquiry prior to Ms Drake's appointment?

TAREK BARAKAT: Not to the best of my knowledge, although you'd probably have to check with the Minister if you had any discussions. But the inquiry was set up on the basis of advice from the department to the Minister.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Commissioner Drake, did you have anything that you're able to add to that as to whether you've had any discussions with Mr Griffin at any point during the inquiry itself?

LEA DRAKE: I had a meeting with Mr Griffin and the two commissioners immediately after my appointment—really just a question of introducing myself and good manners. That's about it. So I met with the two GWIC commissioners and Mr Griffin. He was there as the CEO; some senior departmental representatives were also present. We've had no other meetings or communication. Counsel assisting has met with Mr Griffin to obtain background information, answers to specific questions. I didn't attend those meetings, although the director of the office of inquiry and the Inquiry's senior solicitor did so. Other than those background briefings, if the inquiry has required any information from GWIC, the director of my office has dealt with all of those inquiries. Really, it was just that one meeting—"Hello, how are you?" and shake hands. Thereafter, there have been some direct inquiries by counsel assisting and some meetings with the director of my office.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Has he provided any specific evidence to the inquiry, or more just answering questions as they—

LEA DRAKE: Answering questions.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I have some questions which are probably better directed to Mr Tutt. Thank you for coming at short notice. In regard to the CEO position, is there any record that's made of who the CEO meets with? Is that something that's documented? If I said, "Could I find out whether or not the CEO has met with these people", are those details you could provide on notice?

MATTHEW TUTT: Not really. There might be sort of diary notes in individual diaries, but not as a rule.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: It's not specifically recorded. I was just wondering—and perhaps this is something to take on notice with that understanding—whether or not you could find out whether any meetings took place between the former CEO and a man by the name of Shayne Stiff over the last 12 months?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: We were talking to the Minister this morning about the fact that the Greyhound Racing Act provides that greyhound racing participants and former staff members of Greyhound Racing NSW are not allowed to be appointed as GWIC commissioners or inspectors. I'm just wondering if GWIC has any inspectors or commissioners that have formerly worked within Racing NSW, Racing Victoria or other racing codes outside of greyhound racing?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to take on notice if there were any individuals. I believe not, but I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: And any sort of details that you're able to provide around that. The number of individuals, for example, would be really helpful. This morning I also talked a little bit about the fact that it's been stated publicly that not a single track appears to meet—or appears to have ever met—the minimum track standards set by Greyhound Racing NSW concerning animal welfare. Would that be a breach of the Greyhound Racing NSW operating licence?

MATTHEW TUTT: That would probably be a matter for GRNSW. The commission doesn't have any involvement in the operating licence between the Minister and GRNSW.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Even if it pertains to issues of animal welfare?

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission has no involvement in the operating licence, whether it's got matters to do with animal welfare or otherwise.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Going back to Commissioner Drake, thank you for your time today. It appears to me so far that no-one from GWIC has actually given any oral evidence at the inquiry. Is somebody giving evidence, or have I missed somebody that's giving evidence?

LEA DRAKE: No, you haven't missed anybody.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Can you give me an explanation as to why no-one at GWIC would be providing evidence as part of the inquiry?

LEA DRAKE: Not without going into details of what might be in my report.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm sorry.

LEA DRAKE: But I can be of assistance to the extent that I haven't considered—I've considered the cooperation I've had and the information supplied to be sufficient to proceed to other inquiries, and I haven't thought a personal appearance to be necessary. If I had, I would have called them. Despite the fact I'm a commissioner of GWIC, it would not have caused me to not call. I haven't felt the need.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: The last hearing was on 13 February. Was that the final hearing?

LEA DRAKE: It is intended to be, yes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I know that the Minister alluded to this this morning as well. Obviously you've had a huge volume of materials, and that's expanded beyond the original scope. Are you anticipating to still have a report together for 30 April?

LEA DRAKE: Yes, that's what I'm anticipating. I suppose there's some question about whether we get one printed in the formal way or simply get it out and then print it. I would prefer to do the former rather than the latter. There is a huge number of submissions and questions keep arising. The staff are very busy and we're doing our best, but I'm anticipating we'll be able to do that. I'm sure the department is desperate for us to do it.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: But if there's a change in the date, it might be a day or two here or there rather than—

LEA DRAKE: If something new arose. But on my present assessment of the material before me, I don't think it's necessary.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You said that there's a lot of people doing a lot—and there's a lot of public interest. Do you have any update on when written evidence submitted to the inquiry might be made public?

LEA DRAKE: Statements will always be available, subject to some question of public interest arising from those documents. I think they're automatically available. There are some other documents that I have to decide about. I'm in the process of doing that now with my team so that everybody can have a look at what is going to be available. There is also a public interest question in relation to those. We're in the process of deciding that. I'd like to do it sooner rather than later because it makes the report writing easier.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: You're hoping to get that completed in the next month or so?

LEA DRAKE: Definitely. It'll be—

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I guess before the two months, yes.

LEA DRAKE: We've only got six or seven weeks. It's on the agenda. It's being done as we speak. I can't give you a time.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's all right. I also wanted to ask, the Minister talked about potential legislative reforms to ensure staff who work at GWIC could not be subsequently employed by Greyhound Racing NSW. In your understanding of the scope of the terms of reference, is that something that you have the ability to look into?

LEA DRAKE: It's possible. I just thought I'd say that I don't understand that GWIC is the regulator for GRNSW. That's not my understanding. So when questions are put on the basis of people at GWIC transferring employment to GRNSW, that is not a question of someone employed by the regulator moving to the regulated. GWIC is actually the regulator for the industry at large. I just make that distinction. Whether the Minister in the end decides to restrict that kind of transfer, and depending what organisation is left after the report for it to be applied to, that's another question. I just thought I'd make that clear.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If we could just pick up on that then, Ms Drake, because I'm interested to know how much of that is semantics, in terms of if GRNSW is the commercial arm of the racing industry?

LEA DRAKE: I don't think it's semantics. They're two separate organisations and one is either the regulator or not the regulator of the regulated. I think that is a question that would be beneficial if it was made clear at the end of the report, or in the outcome the Minister visits. I just think that the basis on which some of the questions were put was not entirely accurate for that reason.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, I hadn't finished the question. The question was do you see Greyhound Racing NSW as the commercial—what do you see it as, in terms of part of the industry? Is it the commercial arm?

LEA DRAKE: It's an operational arm of the industry, I think. That's a convenient way to describe it. I think it'd be beneficial if we weren't seeking a definition, if it was clearer than that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I guess historically there has been a lot of conflict between Greyhound Racing NSW and GWIC in terms of a bit of animosity between the characters involved. Also, we've had years and years of this on this Committee, investigating of that particular tension. Do you not see there being any conflict between—

LEA DRAKE: I can't comment on that because it's something I might deal with in my report.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's just that you made the statement that you didn't see it as being a regulator for—

LEA DRAKE: That kind of regulator, bank to banking regulator, is a much clearer situation that was relied on, and I just thought I'd make the point that I don't think it's as clear in this situation as it is in those other ones. Both organisations have welfare responsibilities, I think, and one has an operational responsibility, much more clearly. GWIC's responsibilities are for the industry at large, as well. It's just not as clear as it was put in some of the questions.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sure, but that's the only regulator we have for this industry.

LEA DRAKE: Maybe. I can see why you make the point, but I don't think it's as clear as that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think there's all different sorts of regulatory models and I'm on record as saying that I don't think the GWIC one is a particularly effective regulatory model.

LEA DRAKE: I can't comment on that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Can we just clarify, then, I know that my colleague has asked these questions as well, but just to be absolutely clear, when Mr Harris said this morning—and I'm getting the transcript or someone to actually write down for me what the words were—that he had forwarded on the communication from ICAC to yourself, in terms of whether or not the CEO of GWIC should be included within the ICAC—

LEA DRAKE: Whether they were included, or whether they should be?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Whether they should be. The ICAC letter that was sent to—sorry, I'm just trying to find it now. I asked the Minister about the ICAC recommendation that he'd got in a letter on 14 February that asked the Minister to consider whether or not any kind of legislative change was required to the ICAC Act to ensure that the CEO of Greyhound Racing NSW could be included in it. He responded with, "Yes, so that has been referred to Commissioner Drake, and that will form, I'm sure, part of the recommendations of what we need to do."

LEA DRAKE: It wasn't sent to me by the Minister's office. I think it was sent by ICAC direct. That's my recollection. I can check, but I think it was sent by them. The question arises about the structure of GRNSW. It might be that a recommendation arises about that, dealing with the question raised by ICAC, but it's a matter for consideration for the report, at present.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: The other point then is about any changes required to the appointment terms of people working at GWIC and whether or not they can then go on to work for Greyhound Racing NSW.

LEA DRAKE: That would arise out of determining what kind of structure GRNSW should end up as.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So that may be part of the report?

LEA DRAKE: It might be.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Let's leave that bit there. Can I ask Mr Tutt—welcome to your interim role. The quarterly life cycle report for October to December, ordinarily it would have been published in mid-February, but it's not been published.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When is that due and why has it been delayed?

MATTHEW TUTT: Soon. There was a request to change the template. The commission is just considering that. We would normally publish it, for the one ending on 31 January, sometime in late February. We haven't done that yet, but we'll be doing that shortly.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We put some questions on notice about this life cycle reporting. The Minister responded, saying:

I am advised that the Commission's lifecycle and injury reports for July to September 2024 were delayed as a result of resources being directed towards the production of the Commission's annual report and assisting the Drake Inquiry.

Does that accord with your understanding as well?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to check that is the actual case. I thought he might have been referring to the life cycle report ending in January.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes. The October to December quarter is the one that we were asking for and we were told it was delayed because of resources being directed to the Drake inquiry.

MATTHEW TUTT: I'll take that on notice, and I'll provide a response to that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Which then begs the question: How much of GWIC's resources are being taken up by the Drake inquiry?

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission's asked to provide certain information directly to the Drake inquiry, but overall, the resources aren't significant. When the requests are made, we promptly provide a response, but overall, that's fairly manageable.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's a bit of a strain on the admin side, but it's not affecting the operational side of its core functions.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's correct. It's not affecting the operational side of the commission at all.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good. That's what I wanted to hear. The recent New Zealand decision to close greyhound racing in that country—I think we've asked previously about dogs being transferred out of New South Wales into New Zealand and how we track that, but I don't think we've asked about how it comes back the other

way. Are you expecting any sort of influx of dogs wanting to be brought into New South Wales, coming out of New Zealand, now that they can't race there?

MATTHEW TUTT: Not particularly. I know that it certainly might be something that the New Zealand participants might explore, but we're not particularly expecting a great influx into New South Wales.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Have there been any discussions, that you know of, between yourselves, or even has Greyhound Racing NSW told you of any discussions with New Zealand racing authorities?

MATTHEW TUTT: Certainly not at my level, but I can certainly take it on notice as to whether there's been any discussions with the commission more broadly.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When you register those incoming registrations from dogs brought in from other jurisdictions, do you normally note the jurisdiction they've come from? Does the register work like that?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'll take it on notice as to how that actually is effected. There is a record, I understand, in our system that reflects where the greyhound has come from, but I can confirm that if I take it on notice. Just back to one of your last points about the resources for responding to Commissioner Drake's inquiry, the resources that were mostly expended by the commission have been from our data analytics team. That's probably the most resource-heavy thing that the commission has been involved in. But otherwise, operationally, it's not affecting the way the commission goes about its operations.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So the same sort of people or the same resources that would be applied when we ask all of our questions on notice and those sorts of things—it's that sort of department?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right—that sort of data-rich response.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand. Apologies, then, for my next question. Can you take on notice how many greyhounds have been transferred from New Zealand to New South Wales for each of the past three years? If that is something that you have available, it would be interesting to see.

MATTHEW TUTT: I'll take that on notice.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: This morning we were talking about the US greyhound export program. I understand that the Minister took on notice how many dogs are now part of it. Have there been any further reports of injuries or deaths in that program since it started back?

MATTHEW TUTT: Directly to the commission? Are you asking have there been any reports directly to the commission as to how many deaths?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Or that you're aware of. Are you aware of any injuries or deaths since it started back?

MATTHEW TUTT: We are—since it started back, sorry?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes.

MATTHEW TUTT: No, I'd have to take that on notice as to whether we've been provided with information since it started back.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I might come back to that later.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Mr Hamilton, these are probably to you, but I'm happy if you direct them to the person who is most able to answer. How much are the treaty commissioners each being paid?

SHANE HAMILTON: Equivalent to a band 2 in the public service.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Over what period? Is it a full-time job or is it part time?

SHANE HAMILTON: Full time over two years.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And roughly what's a band 2?

SHANE HAMILTON: Salary-wise, you mean?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes.

SHANE HAMILTON: I'd say around \$300,000.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And because it's a full-time job, that precludes them undertaking other employment while they're doing it?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The Minister this morning wasn't sure about consultations in language. That question really goes to how these consultations are being structured so that there are no barriers to consultation. Do you have any thoughts about that?

SHANE HAMILTON: They haven't indicated to us directly whether language would be part of that. But it's probably fair to say that if you think about Aboriginal languages, they are really just slowly rebuilding, given the establishment of the Aboriginal Languages Trust, which has only been in place for a couple of years now for the rebuilding of those languages, because historically they were decimated. That's something that the treaty commissioners are considering, but they haven't said they're going to provide that everywhere. To be honest, it's mainly because languages are not fully developed across the State. As I said, part of having the Aboriginal Languages Trust is to rebuild those languages. I think it's probably fair to say that most of it would—they'll consider languages being used, but I'd imagine it's probably not going to be extensive.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In terms of the design of the process, again, I wondered whether we were a little bit at cross-purposes this morning, because my understanding of the process was that it was essentially to begin with this free, prior and informed consent process. I understand that was delayed, so they're almost running simultaneously. I understand the Minister's words in terms of the commissioners designing it, but to what extent are local Aboriginal communities—I suppose, is it ground-up or is it all top-down?

SHANE HAMILTON: I would say it's entirely ground-up. Prior to the treaty commissioners being appointed, we had really talked a lot about the principles of free and prior informed consent. If I can just explain that, before we undertake an extensive consultation with community, the principles of that, the questions that we may be asking or the information that we might be seeking from communities—they're fully informed of the basis of those questions or the information or the background. For example, we might explain to communities or people that we are engaging in communities what a treaty is and what it isn't, and examples from other jurisdictions that have undertaken treaty consultations, so that when the treaty commissioners do get to the point of talking with communities, communities fully understand not just the question but the content that is related to that. That's the principle of free and prior informed consent. There's a view of the treaty commissioners that initially it was ensuring that we, post-referendum, were understanding and acknowledging that many communities were still feeling the effects of the—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Processing that result.

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, and we were mindful of ensuring that those principles were carried through. I think the treaty commissioners have acknowledged that and will follow that process.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How much of the allocated treaty consultation funding has actually been spent to date?

SHANE HAMILTON: I think I've got that answer here.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

SHANE HAMILTON: I'll come back to you with that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: While we're looking at costing, what's the cost of the contract with Naree Pty Ltd in relation to that free, prior and informed consent consultation? I'm happy for you to take that on notice too if that's easier.

SHANE HAMILTON: I do have a figure, but I'll just confirm it and I'll come back to you on that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I have some questions about the transfer of Me-Mel/Goat Island. I understand that \$800,000 has been awarded to Primary Communication Partners for a communication and engagement services project for that transfer. What are the KPIs under that contract?

SHANE HAMILTON: I'm not aware of the contract and the contract hasn't been carried out by Aboriginal Affairs. Aboriginal Affairs is a member on the committee of the transfer but, as I understand it, that is being managed by another department. It's not something we're managing directly.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Is there anybody else here who can help us with that?

SHANE HAMILTON: I don't think so, no.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What other department—to whom should these questions be addressed?

SHANE HAMILTON: I think it's Heritage, but I'd need to confirm who is actually managing it. I can probably get that answer for you, but it's not us directly.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could. It gets confusing sometimes to know to whom these questions should be properly addressed.

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes. In that case, it's because it sits with National Parks, I think. They're responsible for the transfer. But, as I say, we're a member of that committee.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What about the \$1 million that was invested to focus on ensuring the Aboriginal community remains at the heart of engagement while shaping the vision and future options for Goat Island? Are you able to answer questions about that?

SHANE HAMILTON: I'd say it's the same again.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do we know how many Aboriginal businesses submitted tenders for these projects?

SHANE HAMILTON: No.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Who would know that?

SHANE HAMILTON: It would be Heritage.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Okay, all of these questions go to Heritage?

SHANE HAMILTON: Particularly Goat Island because they have the direct responsibility for it.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What about funding for Aboriginal-targeted services under the new National Access to Justice Partnership? Is that you?

SHANE HAMILTON: No.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Who would that be?

SHANE HAMILTON: DCJ.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: DCJ for the bulk of the National Access to Justice Partnership, but also for any funding allocation to Aboriginal-targeted services?

SHANE HAMILTON: It could be the DCJ or the Attorney General's office, I'd imagine.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But not Aboriginal Affairs?

SHANE HAMILTON: No.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How much discussion or consultation do you have with AGs and DCJ about this type of project?

SHANE HAMILTON: Through the normal process in government when Cabinet submissions or submissions are going up, we get the opportunity to comment on them, whatever that might be—whether it's a program or introduction of legislation. We would comment on it, yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Were you invited to comment on the funding received from the Commonwealth for some 500 family, domestic and sexual violence workers and the decision was made to prioritise that funding going to ACCOs to meet Closing the Gap initiatives? Were you invited to comment on that decision?

SHANE HAMILTON: I'd have to check. I probably was. I'd need to check on where that would have come from—whether it was from a committee that I might be on and whether I had commented. But generally we are consulted.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are you aware of any other funding streams where they're also being used to prioritise Closing the Gap targets?

SHANE HAMILTON: Look, there's a number of different—maybe if I can explain Closing the Gap. We don't have responsibility for funding of the entire Closing the Gap budget; we have responsibility for a portion of that, which I can talk about. But CAPOs or CAPO partners would have a particular agreement with a department, in this instance either DCJ or the Attorney General's department, on a particular program that's been funded to go towards Closing the Gap. They would have the finer details on the contract they'd have with a CAPO partner organisation. Then some of the work that needs to be done and the targets that are set are set within the Closing the Gap implementation and some are not necessarily part of that. They're other sort of business as usual.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Does anybody have overall oversight on, I suppose, the budget allocation for Closing the Gap initiatives? Who would that be?

SHANE HAMILTON: We have oversight of the entire envelope of the Closing the Gap budget. For a portion of that budget, we have a direct contract with CAPO on certain parts of that ourselves. I think it's about \$33 million out of the \$221 million, and the balance of that sits with other government departments who have that contract arrangement or partnership arrangement. I can give you the overall where the \$221 million is broken down and what it's funded for, but we have a coordination role across government. But I can give you the breakdown of the \$221 million.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could give me that on notice, that would be great. As well as the coordination role, I guess I'm really interested in who sits at the Cabinet table and takes responsibility for how we're going on Closing the Gap?

SHANE HAMILTON: The Minister has responsibility—because we've signed up to the national partnership agreement and our commitment under the agreement in partnership with CAPO, and then the deliverables under that through an implementation plan. We get agreement on what we're really going to focus both the effort and the dollars on. We help coordinate that between ourselves and New South Wales CAPOs. Our role is to coordinate across government and CAPO's role is to coordinate across those agencies or those organisations that form a part of CAPO.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Other than the targets that BOCSAR seems to collect data on, the data's really patchy, isn't it, and a lot of it sits as a sort of nest inside Commonwealth data. You can split out New South Wales data, but that's not always straightforward. Are you happy that we've got enough data, or we're collecting enough data? If we're not measuring, it's hard to know whether we're meeting. Do you have any comments on the sufficiency of the data that we're collecting?

SHANE HAMILTON: I think there are some measures where we don't have enough data to measure the Closing the Gap; that is true.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In particular, which ones would you point to?

SHANE HAMILTON: I'd have to just check which ones they are, but there are. It's fair to say that some are better than others and there's more work to be done, but that's part of Closing the Gap. Priority reform four is not just about data sovereignty but it's about government being able to capture and share that data with Aboriginal community controlled organisations so that when it comes to decision-making, that can be done in a joint way. The community will capture their own data, or have their own data through the services they provide. The Government has the same. Priority reform four is about respecting those principles of data sovereignty but bringing those two together so that joint decisions can be made.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And of course there's no data sovereignty without data.

SHANE HAMILTON: That's true, yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What percentage of Closing the Gap funding is reaching Aboriginal controlled organisations?

SHANE HAMILTON: Quite a bit. Again, I can give you the exact amount of money that's going directly to ACCOs through Closing the Gap.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes, if you could. And in terms of ACCOs, what's being done to help build capacity?

SHANE HAMILTON: There's a particular program that's related to capacity building of Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Again, it forms part of Closing the Gap and I can give you the breakdown of that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Okay. Is it just funding, or are there partnership initiatives where people are working alongside ACCOs and helping with governance or mentoring programs or anything like that?

SHANE HAMILTON: It's both, yes. It's both dollars and support and working alongside. I mean, the whole notion of Closing the Gap is us working in partnership. It's not us making all the decisions. It's being done in a joint way with our Aboriginal partners.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Absolutely. You can provide details of that?

SHANE HAMILTON: I can give you the breakdown of that partnership stuff, yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are there ACCOs in some areas that are missing out on mentoring because there aren't suitable mentors or partners, or there can't be bridges, or are you happy that it's happening across ACCOs and across all areas?

SHANE HAMILTON: I guess it's probably important to note that not all Aboriginal community controlled organisations are part of Closing the Gap and part of that agreement. There are many that fall outside of the Closing the Gap funding. If you're a member organisation of NSW CAPO and you're part of Closing the Gap, there's obviously access to funding through that program. Then there are other Aboriginal community controlled organisations outside of that in other different areas.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Just to help me understand, can you give me an example of an Aboriginal controlled organisation that might be outside of CAPO?

SHANE HAMILTON: Local decision-making or organisations or groups are not part of CAPO.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Like the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council?

SHANE HAMILTON: Not directly. They're a standalone land council. NSWALC is a part of CAPO but that doesn't mean to say that Orange land council is going to get funding through Closing the Gap.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that \$3.5 million was allocated by the Government for an accountability mechanism on Closing the Gap, but that apparently is still being negotiated. Can you say why that process is taking so long?

SHANE HAMILTON: It's not a matter of being negotiated. It's part of the national partnership agreement. There was funding provided to CAPO to undertake the work to develop the independent accountability mechanism. They did that. Then they presented a report late last year. We have responded to them. We think there are some issues with the model that they'd developed thus far, but what we had discussed is that we would come back together to work through what the next steps might be on that model.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When will that be happening?

SHANE HAMILTON: It's happening now. We had our last meeting last month with CAPO and the Minister. We agreed on a way forward, which would be there's money set aside for that next stage, but we need to come back and have a discussion around what that next stage looks like.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When will that next discussion be taking place?

SHANE HAMILTON: At an officer level, that's happening now, but I think our next meeting's in June so we'll bring it back to the next meeting.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that the New South Wales Aboriginal Procurement Policy aims for 3 per cent of government contracts to go to Aboriginal businesses, but there has been no updated data published for 2023-24. When will that information become available?

SHANE HAMILTON: That's not something I'm—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Is there somebody else who can help me with that?

SHANE HAMILTON: I think it sits with Treasury.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm a little bit confused. I understand that there might be overlap. But with these things that take a whole-of-government approach, I would have thought that somebody within Aboriginal Affairs would also be interested in that information and have a watching brief on it.

SHANE HAMILTON: We can probably find out but, in terms of the actual expenditure in the policy, it's not developed by us.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It's just that this is, I would think, an important policy goal that doesn't appear to have been reported on, and it would be good to know. What about the New South Wales Aboriginal business growth road map? Do we know what has been achieved with the \$10 million allocated there?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, I can give you a breakdown of that. Did you want that now?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm happy to take it on notice, if you can provide it.

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What percentage of government contracts in 2023-24 were awarded to Aboriginal owned businesses?

SHANE HAMILTON: Again, that would sit with either Finance or Treasury—the same as the procurement.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Mr Draper, before you go, just indulge me for a second. This blue folder that appeared on the Minister's desk—how would that have got there? This would have arrived during caretaker mode yet, somehow, it made it to the desk of the Minister. It made it into the Minister's office before he did.

SIMON DRAPER: I'll try to answer. I don't like to speculate, and this really is speculation. I wasn't in my current role at that time. I think at that point I was working at the Reconstruction Authority, so I don't have any direct knowledge of it. During the caretaker period, if items like that are received, they may be included along with any briefing materials that are presented to the new Minister after they're sworn in. That's one possibility. Usually, there are briefing documents prepared for the Minister. If there are things that have arrived in the interim, they would be provided to the new Minister to be dealt with as a matter of course. I'm only somewhat speculating.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Back to you, Mr Tutt. We were talking before about the US greyhound export program. Have there been any changes made to that program—for example, to crate sizes or veterinary oversight or anything—since it was halted last year and then recommenced?

MATTHEW TUTT: That program is administered by GRNSW. It's not administered by the commission. Those sorts of questions would be best directed towards them.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Was GWIC was responsible, though, for stopping the program from going ahead?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Greyhound Racing NSW made that decision?

MATTHEW TUTT: They run the program. The commission has no involvement in the GRNSW USA program.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But if you had concerns about the way that the program was run, does GWIC get involved to go in and give advice? I know that an audit was undertaken of that program, so GWIC had some involvement in its design.

MATTHEW TUTT: That's really as far as the involvement of GWIC has gone. There was an audit done in October of 2023. That was an audit based on whether that program met the New South Wales best practice guidelines for rehoming. That was the only involvement the commission had in relation to that program. It doesn't have any other oversight role when it comes to that GRNSW program.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that even after the deaths?

MATTHEW TUTT: At all.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that because they're no longer participant greyhounds?

MATTHEW TUTT: That's right. They're greyhounds that aren't within our jurisdiction. The whole program itself that's administered by GRNSW has no oversight by us.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Has GWIC asked, though? Or is it just not within its remit at all?

MATTHEW TUTT: It's not within our remit. It's nothing to do with us.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So we have no guarantees that anything has changed in terms of that program. We had big concerns with it after dogs were dying and found boiling to death on tarmacs. It got paused, and it has now been restarted. It looks to me like there was a bit of publicity, so they stopped it for a bit and it has started. This is a regulatory gap, is it, if we've got no ability for GWIC to get involved when dogs are dying?

MATTHEW TUTT: It's a program run by GRNSW. As I said, the commission doesn't have any involvement. The reasons—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. Under the new eTrac—it's not that new anymore, but it's still relatively new—is GWIC still, in addition to the voluntary reporting, validating proof of life?

MATTHEW TUTT: We are. Our e-tracking program sends out notifications to participants, and that requires participants to check their greyhounds in. That's a program that has gone through a couple of different tranches and is an ongoing program.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Essentially, GWIC used to phone the participants up as well. Is it doing that?

MATTHEW TUTT: Now it sends out notifications via email and via SMS. That then provides that participant with the notification to have their greyhound checked in. That's run by our traceability team. As I said, that's an ongoing program.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But there's no actual communication directly. Maybe it was a false hope to think that you might catch something in someone's voice when they were telling you what dogs they still have.

MATTHEW TUTT: If there's an issue where a notification isn't responded to, I know our traceability team does, on occasion, make direct contact with participants. That's to ensure that they can actually check where the greyhound is. The traceability team have a variety of different ways in which they will communicate with the participants. Some may not have access to emails or mobile phones, so they go through other ways.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In the last budget estimates, I was asking about how, basically, there's a bit of a disconnect between the Veterinary Practitioners Board and GWIC when it comes to allegations of wrongdoing from vets. The veterinary board was saying unless GWIC actually goes through with the prosecution, there's nothing for the vets board to do. GWIC was saying that they were referring matters off to the vets board and saying, "It's up to you to deal with." So we had this stalemate situation. In the last estimates, I was told that GWIC was seeking a memorandum of understanding with the VPB. How has that progressed?

MATTHEW TUTT: We did seek that with the VPB, but the VPB advised us that they declined to enter into that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That's really good to know, thank you. I know who to follow up with next. Also in that last estimates, it was said that GWIC was working on having Greyhound Racing NSW make public the treatment outcomes of injured and euthanised greyhounds. Has any update been done on that?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to take that on notice.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I asked some supplementary questions in September, and I was advised by GWIC that since May 2023, 17 greyhounds had been sent to council pounds, 16 of which were approved by the commission. What happened to the greyhound that was sent without prior approval from GWIC? It's quite detailed.

MATTHEW TUTT: It is a detail that I don't have before me, but I'll take that one on notice.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: If you could take that on notice—and also which pound it was sent to, how GWIC followed up and where that dog is now—that would be really useful. Also, on what basis were the other 16 approved and which pounds did they go to? On 16 December, GWIC updated its Race Day Hydration and Hot Weather Policy so that now they have to be provided water in their race day kennels if it's over 32 degrees. I've asked in many previous estimates about the idea of these dogs racing in up to 38 degrees, despite their body temperature then being sometimes 41½ degrees, I'm told. Why won't GWIC take action to lower that maximum racing temperature?

MATTHEW TUTT: The Race Day Hydration and heat policy was devised by GWIC in consultation with our veterinarians. The 38-degree temperature was the temperature that was settled on by the commission, having regard to the veterinary advice that we received.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But when you say that, there's always a little bit of art to this as well as science in terms of it might be optimal for a dog not to race at all on a hot day. Obviously we're talking about an industry that is racing dogs for a living, so there would've been a bit of a give and take, I assume. When you say that there was consultation taken with the vets, does that mean that they gave you evidence that this wouldn't increase injuries? Or that this wouldn't cause the dogs any additional distress? Or is it just where we landed it?

MATTHEW TUTT: The 38 degrees is certainly consistent, as I understand it, across other jurisdictions in relation to their heat policy. That was the temperature that the commission landed on. Having regard to the evidence, the commission obviously took steps to inform itself of what was appropriate and, as I said, that was where we landed.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It's one of those things that in greyhound racing I just think—I watch my dogs. It gets to about 26 and they're flat on the ground. Too hot. The idea of a dog racing at 38 degrees seems quite extraordinary.

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission take other measures, of course, in hot weather. They have baths immediately available for dogs to cool down in those sorts of temperatures. There are a whole range of measures that are taken at tracks to ensure that greyhounds, especially racing in summer months, have access to adequate facilities to ensure that their welfare is looked after.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Has there been any breaches to the hot weather water policy since this new version was brought in on 1 January?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'd have to check. I don't believe so, but I'll have to check.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How is GWIC monitoring to ensure that participants are complying with that hot water day policy?

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission's stewards are obviously in attendance officiating at all race meetings. They're there and they have OTVs, or on-track veterinarians, who are also employed or contracted by the commission, so they're present at the tracks.

SIMON DRAPER: Sorry, do you mind if I depart?

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's fine.

SIMON DRAPER: Sorry, I meant to do that in between the questions. Is that okay?

The CHAIR: Sure. Thanks.

(Simon Draper withdrew.)

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Mr Tutt, I'm wondering if you can just give me some background information on the investigation that was done by GWIC in regards to the two deaths at Taree.

MATTHEW TUTT: So any death or serious injury is subject to our Race Injury Review Panel. That panel meets on a regular basis. I believe it's monthly. Out of that panel comes recommendations and, essentially, a review of each incident. I don't have the minutes from the Race Injury Review Panel that dealt with the Taree matters, but they are provided and that assesses those injuries.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Are you comfortable to table those minutes for the Committee to see?

MATTHEW TUTT: Subject to any other matters that might be confidential. Perhaps if I take that on notice, and then we'll confirm that we can provide those minutes.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. My understanding is that those two deaths were caused by the fact that there was no safety rail at Taree. Are you aware of how many other tracks across New South Wales do not have safety rails?

MATTHEW TUTT: Not off the top of my head. I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: If you could take that on notice. Is it only a handful of tracks or is it the majority?

MATTHEW TUTT: It'd be a small number. The majority would have the safety rails.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: What action is GWIC able to take if there is no safety rail at a particular track where deaths are occurring?

MATTHEW TUTT: Safety rails—as are all the minimum track standards—are matters for GRNSW. The commission doesn't have any enforceability powers or statutory powers in relation to the minimum track standards.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: In regards to the Taree facility, what was investigated? It was Greyhound Racing NSW, then, that voluntarily shut the track down until they put the safety rail in—after the investigation?

MATTHEW TUTT: After the incidents involving those two dogs that you're talking about, commission executives met with GRNSW executives and discussed that very point—the installation of a safety rail. Those discussions resulted in racing ceasing at Taree until such time as a safety rail was installed. That's occurred, and racing has resumed at Taree.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Thank you. I understand that the role of chief veterinary officer at Greyhound Racing NSW was vacant for a very long time. I'm not sure if you're aware if it's still vacant. From what I'm hearing, my understanding is that animals are waiting extremely long times to then get veterinary treatment signed off because that role remains empty. The process within Greyhound Racing NSW is that the chief veterinary officer signs off on a dog getting urgent medical treatment. The information I'm getting is that greyhounds are being left for hours, and sometimes days, because that role is not filled and there's nobody else to quickly sign off on veterinary treatment. Is that similar information that GWIC has received or looked into?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware of it, but I could take that on notice as to whether the commission itself has received similar messages.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Is that the sort of thing that GWIC could investigate? Are you the right body for people to go to?

MATTHEW TUTT: The commission doesn't have any investigative powers in relation to GRNSW. Similar to some of the comments that Commissioner Drake was making, we don't regulate GRNSW. It's not a matter that the commission would undertake an investigation into those sorts of things.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: Where would people go? Would they have to go to the RSPCA, for example, because it's an animal cruelty matter?

MATTHEW TUTT: Again, the commission's not involved in matters that that might go to GRNSW. Some of those matters may even be subject to some of Commissioner Drake's current inquiry.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I just have a clarifying question in regards to the quarterly outcome reports. In regard to the catastrophic injuries, is the percentage of catastrophic injuries reported as a percentage of the total number of injuries, or as a percentage of the total number of unique races?

MATTHEW TUTT: In our figures for the financial year ending on 30 June 2024, there were 22 category—which is the deaths on a racetrack. There were 22 across the year, which represents a decline on previous years. In the period from 1 July to 31 December 2024, so the last six months after that, there were seven deaths on New South Wales racetracks which, again, represented another decline of somewhere around 40 per cent.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: I'm just looking at some of the data in regard to percentages and how those percentages are worked out in regard to the injuries. I'm just trying to work out whether the percentage reported is a percentage of injuries, or if it's a percentage of unique races. Maybe I'm looking at some older data.

MATTHEW TUTT: Without knowing precisely what document you're referring to, we normally report injuries as marking over a thousand starts. It might be, for instance, an injury rate of 40.2 over 1000 starts in a reporting period. It would be normally over a thousand starts, which would be how we reflect our injury reporting.

The Hon. EMMA HURST: That's helpful. Thank you. Some of the questions I asked the Minister this morning in regard to penalty comparisons and regulatory action—I've said that I'm happy to give this to the Minister. This is some of the older document details that have come forward from Craig Hollis. Are you aware of this? Is GWIC continuing to look into this original analysis of the regulatory action taken by GWIC compared to when GRNSW was the regulatory body? Is that still being assessed in the most recent years?

MATTHEW TUTT: I'm not aware of that document that you're referring to, but the commission opened over 700 cases in the last financial year. All matters are investigated by the commission, and disciplinary action is taken where appropriate in relation to those matters. I know that just in more recent years, the disciplinary actions that the commission has taken have been reasonably stable, between around the 90- and 120-participant mark per year. Those are our statistics over the last few years. But as far as that analysis that you're referring to, I'm not aware that we do that continuously.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Going back to the questions about how GWIC doesn't have the capacity to go and inspect or re-audit the Aussie Mates in the States program, does that mean that, when the team from GWIC previously went over to the US with Greyhound Racing NSW to look at the program, it didn't need to do that?

MATTHEW TUTT: That was done at the request of the Minister's office, so we did that. As I said in the previous answer, that was done as an audit to see if the program met best practice guidelines for New South Wales rehoming.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And that was because the Minister wanted that?

MATTHEW TUTT: I have to take that on notice as to how it actually came about but, to travel overseas, an approval process from the Minister had to be made and was made. As I said, that's when the commission undertook that audit.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Because Greyhound Racing NSW paid for GWIC to go on that. If it's not something that GWIC was obliged to do under the regulations, it just strikes me as another example of potential regulatory capture, no?

MATTHEW TUTT: No.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: You will no doubt be aware of reports of greyhounds being physically forced into starting boxes at Gosford, I think at the beginning of February. Have you seen that, and what is GWIC doing about it? At what point is a dog that doesn't want to get into a starting box cancelled from racing rather than being made to race?

MATTHEW TUTT: I haven't seen that footage.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Will you take that on notice, then?

MATTHEW TUTT: Yes, I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I've got a couple of questions for Mr Barakat, and then I'm moving on to Veterans. The terms of reference for the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform included a responsibility for developing recommendations for government on the future required infrastructure investments, and the impact on employment and industry. This doesn't seem to have been done. Why is that the case?

TAREK BARAKAT: That was a decision the panel itself made at the time. Part of the economic modelling that I think was spoken about a little this morning is considering that—impacts on industry, impact on employment, and feasibility of implementation of various options. That work is being done, and the panel asked for that work to be done before Government made a decision. That will be provided to Government to consider as part of its response.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So the panel themselves decided to move away from those terms of reference?

TAREK BARAKAT: As the Minister said this morning, the panel made the decision based on the fact that it didn't have in front of it a clear model for cashless gaming to recommend that, before Government made the decision, it should be required to undertake some independent economic analysis. And that's what has happened.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Where is work on that new analysis up to?

TAREK BARAKAT: It's almost complete, I think. It'll come to the departments first, as is standard practice. Treasury's assisting us with that, and then we'll prepare some advice and provide that to Government to consider in the preparation of its response to the report.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: At this point you've got nothing you can reveal about what it's finding about the impacts this might have?

TAREK BARAKAT: No, unfortunately, I can't at this point.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, did you give me a time frame before that I missed?

TAREK BARAKAT: I didn't give a time frame. We will be providing it to Government with some advice in the near future. As to when Government responds to the report itself, it's a matter for Government.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Who is conducting that modelling?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take that on notice, unless the secretary—

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: It's a company called CIE. It's an independent organisation procured under the department.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Were they provided terms of reference from the panel or from the Minister?

TAREK BARAKAT: They were provided a scope of work during the procurement process from ourselves and NSW Treasury based on some of the deliberations and advice from the panel.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Will they be going out to industry as well to consult on that, or is it a desktop?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to check if they have spoken to anyone during the preparation of the report. If they haven't then the answer would be no, but that's not to say that further consultation can't occur if Government would like it to.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Would you be able to table that scope that they were given?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can take it on notice and, if it's appropriate to do so, I'm very happy to do so, yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What are we thinking that the infrastructure investments are going to look like for government? Are they going to be loans, buybacks, grants?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think these are probably questions for Government. I think Government has got an independent report in front of it, which makes a range of recommendations, and the Government will need to respond to that. Once it knows what it wants to do, then it will need to consider how to implement whatever its decision is.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Minister mentioned several harm minimisation measures. I don't have that list in front of me, and I don't think you'd have it off top of your head. Are you able to table that list, along with documentation of when they started work on those measures?

TAREK BARAKAT: Sure. I can read through the things that have been implemented to date if you'd like me to, but otherwise I'm happy to take it on notice, and I can include commencement dates for some of those reforms as well.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes, some documentation about when those things were picked up.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, that's fine.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What impact have those things had on gambling habits and losses?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think we'd have to—we will be evaluating these reforms, as is standard practice. Some of them—the example that springs to mind is ATMs are now required to be five metres from gaming machines and not have visible signage. That really only came into effect early this year. We've got Responsible Gambling Officers in venues with 20 or more gaming machine entitlements, which came into effect 1 July last year. So they are relatively recent, some of them, so they'd probably need a bit more time on the ground for us to actually make a meaningful evaluation as to their impact, but we will be doing that.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I suspect a similar response, but what reduction are they having, from what we've seen, in relation to money laundering?

TAREK BARAKAT: Reduction in relation to money laundering?

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Yes.

TAREK BARAKAT: I think that's probably a question for the police or AUSTRAC. It's not something we have a remit to oversee but, if there's any information we can provide on that, happy to do so.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Particularly with that earlier question about the impact it's having, if you do have any information, would you be able to provide that on notice?

TAREK BARAKAT: Sure. Yes, we can provide that on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Ms Mackaness, are you familiar with the Scheyville Veterans, Families and Community Centre?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: I am.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: On 22 February there was an official opening. My understanding is there is, or at least was, an issue surrounding the occupancy contract centred around that. National Parks wanted to have access to the refurbished buildings for purposes outside the veterans scope. Does that ring any bells with you, and has that been sorted?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: I actually attended the opening event. The group of veterans out there, led by Mr Brett Wild, has done an absolutely extraordinary job. They received a \$5.5 million grant from the Commonwealth but not from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. It's a slightly separate project. There's a series of hubs being rolled out under the Department of Veterans' Affairs that have also received about \$5 million. So \$5 million was allocated to a Hawkesbury south-west corridor hub that is yet to be built. This one runs in parallel. The restoration has been to some historically significant SAARS huts, and the opening was absolutely beautiful. It sits within the national park, so the responsibility for licensing and leases sits with the national park. I can't actually comment on that because I don't know.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What's the role of the Office for Veterans Affairs with the hub?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We haven't formally had a role because it's not one of the official Commonwealth hubs that are focused on wellbeing. It sat slightly separate. However, we have communicated quite a lot with Mr Wild and we're very supportive of the veterans out there. We've been out to the site a couple of times. We talk to our colleagues. I think the relationship over the lease is a fairly recent—so the buildings are just finished and they're working out. Obviously it's within a national park so they have national park guidelines as to what fits under their Act. I think the relationship has been very good. They've done an amazing job restoring these buildings that were at great risk of being lost.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So you're not sure, then, exactly where that occupancy contract is up to?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: No, you'd have to follow that up with the national parks and wildlife portfolio under Minister Sharpe, I believe.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What's been involved with the development of the new strategy so far in relation to consultation with veterans and ex-services organisations?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: It's been absolutely continual and iterative. The first ever New South Wales government strategy was launched in 2021. We did extensive consultation for that despite COVID. Surveys online, workshops with people—that's all been recorded. The current strategy that we've been working on has been a six-month process. We've operated the first strategy for four years, obviously. The first two-year action plan was reported on. We then worked through the next two years. In the meantime, we've had three years of the royal commission. My team, small as it is, has also been leading the work on the New South Wales Government response into defence and veteran suicide. The royal commission was launched in April 2021. We established an interdepartmental committee in June 2021. That's been operating for three years so it's had all the departments sitting on that.

We've had serious work responding to the royal commission—to notices to give responses to questions, preparing the Minister to be present in the royal commission to answer questions about New South Wales engagement. We've been tracking very closely what the issues are. We've also held—as part of our first strategy, we committed to annual forums in the regions. We've had one in Nowra and one on the Central Coast. We attend lots of forums with DVA. We sit on the Commonwealth, State and Territory Committee and listen to the work that comes through from every other State and Territory, and the Commonwealth. We've sat on working groups. A good example is incarceration. South Australia was an early leader in establishing a veteran strategy for incarceration from—two-fold, because veterans actually are in a lot of custodial jobs, uniform to uniform, but we also, sadly, have veterans in jail.

That piece of work was shared through that forum. We've then looked at that in New South Wales and worked with our counterparts in Corrections to look at developing their own strategy, which they have been actively working on during this period. When we talk about the next strategy, it's built on four years of delivering the first one; three years of working through the royal commission and listening to all of that evidence and responding to evidence; and six years of sitting on Commonwealth, State and Territory Committee. The committee sits underneath the Veterans' Ministerial Council so there's a hierarchy there. Under the Commonwealth, State and Territory Committee, there are actually working groups for each of the key issues. Employment is another really important issue for veterans. We established the first Veterans Employment Program in the country, and that's a key focus of the recommendations under the royal commission. That's, again, continuing in the next strategy.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The reason that it's, at this stage, only three months late—the other one has expired. Are we just waiting for the response to the royal commission?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: No, not at all. We started working on the strategy for 2025-30 in June of last year. It's quite a big piece of work so we built on all the work we've done. Of course, it had to go through all of the processes of consultation with our colleagues and our interdepartmental committee, so the report from the royal commission was only delivered in September. We'd been working in preparation, then we looked at that. Then we've workshopped with our colleagues, we've workshopped with key ex-service organisations and then we've written the strategy. It's sitting now with the Minister in February, ready for Cabinet. It's been a very pressured, tight time frame to develop a new five-year strategy. As the Minister said, it's sitting waiting for Cabinet approval.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The forums you mentioned there—one down the South Coast, one up the North Coast—can I implore you to take one west?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, you certainly can.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That'd be very much appreciated.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Does the Office for Veterans Affairs break the State down into regions or zones?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, we do. A couple of things—the census data in 2021, our office has developed an interactive tool so they can actually use that data to drill down to every local government area. That's been very useful. The Minister was able to quote the Central Coast as one of the highest veteran populations in every age category. We've shared that with everyone including the Commonwealth because we've put together this interactivity and that's helped guide what we're doing. My team helped while we were waiting for this afternoon. The census says 60 per cent of veterans in New South Wales live in regional areas.

Our Veterans Employment Program tracks where veterans are being employed in the State. We're about to publish the two-year report on the current data, which tracks where veterans are getting jobs. You asked before and the Minister did quote that we had 1,015 veterans employed to September 2024. That's the first two years of the four-year tally, so we're just over halfway to the 2,000. As an example, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development hired 55 veterans between April and September 2024. We're tracking how many veterans are getting roles in different departments and where across the State they're getting the roles. Those previous reports are all online and the next one will be published in the next month.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So a geographic breakdown of where they are, beyond—

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, as much as we can because not every veteran—all of our data is voluntary. We've been encouraging veterans to self-identify more and more. Sometimes veterans have concerns because they've had security clearances and so forth. We don't capture every single veteran but we're trying to say, "It's a good thing. We want you to identify because we want to be able to support your employment."

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: What's the success rate of that program? How many veterans engage with the Veterans Employment Program and then don't end up in a job?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We're tracking that veterans have a better success rate than the average population and in some areas it's a higher success rate. I'm just looking for where I had some data.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm happy for you to provide that on notice.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: If you're interested in more data, we can get that to you.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: That'd be great if you could provide it. Does the Office for Veterans Affairs have a charter or a mission statement to clearly outline what the roles and responsibilities are?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: It is complex. We have put an explanation on our website of what the Department for Veterans Affairs does because they have the national legislated responsibility. You quite rightly referenced this morning that States provide frontline services, so there are agreements in place—for example, with Health—for the State to deliver services. Our National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare is a New South Wales initiative, and it is largely funded by the State Government and there has been some Commonwealth contribution. It's leading work in complex, multidisciplinary health care for veterans, and it is getting referrals nationally. The royal commission looked at that as a leading example of best practice of health care for veterans.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Is that the facility at Concord that I have heard of?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, the National Centre for Veterans' Healthcare.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'll just go to the foreword from the last strategy, which talked about the strategy bringing together New South Wales Government initiatives available to veterans. What are the most subscribed and utilised initiatives that they'd be referring to in there?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We try to bring together the landscape, I guess. We help every single veteran who contacts us either by letter to the Minister, letter or email directly to us, or phone call. The team is amazingly committed. If someone rings us up and they're homeless on the banks of the Hawkesbury, which happened, we will group up anyone we can to try to help, whether it's the local police, the RSL or health. We refer people to RSL LifeCare, which has specific services, or to the Commonwealth. A lot of our information is referral or best advice, or to go to this facility. We've helped people that have needed assistance into aged care because they've had a crisis. We just try to send people in the right direction. We often get letters asking us, "Where do we get funding to help with this?" If we don't have a grant program, then we'll refer them to the Commonwealth or we'll refer them to a sporting grant program. Our mission is to try to help veterans and their families, genuinely, and that's what the team does consistently every day.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Am I right in inferring, then—this isn't me being smart; I'm just trying to get my head around it—that the role of the Office for Veterans Affairs is sort of a facilitation or almost a case management role?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: It's facilitating because, as the Minister rightly referenced, we're a small team. My team sits on the Commonwealth interjurisdictional group on veterans because there's a research project. They're tracking that, but they're encouraging Corrections to actually do the heavy lifting and develop and deliver a veterans—it's the same with Transport. Transport for NSW is a huge organisation. They employ a lot of veterans. We meet with them. The Veterans Employment Program, we've encouraged them to establish their own network within Transport to support veterans in employment to encourage veterans to apply for roles. Local government, we've done the same. We've encouraged local government to establish veteran employment programs. We're up to 29 out of 128. That's an amazing achievement. Right across the State, local government is starting to take up

just a simple pledge: "We support veterans and their families, and if you apply for roles here we'll take you seriously."

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: In relation to some of the concessions, I mentioned earlier this morning concessions from Transport. Is that just money that Transport doesn't take, or is it money that the Office for Veterans Affairs reimburses Transport for?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: It's a Treasury budgetary decision through Transport, so Transport wears that. Again, the interdepartmental committee tries to group up and focus everyone's attention to try to coordinate for the best outcomes for veterans and their families.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: The Afghanistan war memorial to be built in The Domain—is that still on track for a 2026 completion?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: It is. We've been working since it was announced in July. There's been a lot of consultation with Afghanistan veterans from the different cohorts. There are cohorts going back to the 1990s, as you'd appreciate. It will be a memorial to recognise all contemporary service, including, of course, Afghanistan and Iraq. But veterans themselves are very passionate about acknowledging their counterparts. There's been a lot of death and suffering through other peacekeeping operations as well as through Afghanistan and Iraq. We're at the stage that we have a well-developed design, and we're hoping that will be promoted to the public soon.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Just as a follow-up question in relation to the Veterans Employment Program, it sounds as if it's mainly looking at government and local government. I wonder whether you have any relationship with the Franchise Council of Australia, for example.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We hold annual veteran employment forums that are broader than just the public service. We had a focus on the housing industry and the building industry, for example.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I mentioned franchising in particular. You may be aware there's a significant body of academic evidence that demonstrates that former service personnel do very well as franchisees because they enjoy the structure but also the opportunity to learn new skills. Do you invite franchising groups to those fora that you run?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We haven't, but I'm keen to know more about that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I would encourage you to do that. There's significant evidence that they do very well as franchisees.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: There's a Veteran Community Business Chamber and also The Prince's Trust help sponsor veteran initiatives. So we're aware of them, but we don't have a role specifically. The Commonwealth leads some of the business initiatives with veteran employment and defence industries, which is bigger scale than—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Not quite franchisees.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: No, but non-government sector, private sector employment.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Dr Sutherland, the medical research strategy that we understand we're to receive soon, does that align with the principles and the recipients of the flagship medical support program that was announced at the end of last year?

KIM SUTHERLAND: Yes. The strategy is due for release next month. The principles of it are very broad brush. You were asking about the action plan, and I'll talk about that in a moment. The strategic directions are that we do want to have a thriving ecosystem, so all the different parts of the system working together and us playing a particular coordinating and communicating role. We want to focus on strategic investment. That will be informed by evidence, by horizon scanning, by really understanding what the state of the science is. Of course, MRIs play an important role in that, the medical research institutes. We're also looking to what our inherent strengths are already in New South Wales, so that we can—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What does New South Wales do better than Victoria, for example? What are we going to focus on, so that we're not competing with other States?

KIM SUTHERLAND: Exactly. That's the process we've put in place. We could say that we're very strong on cell and gene therapies. We're very strong in precision medicine, particularly in paediatric precision medicine. We'll have a proper process to go through in order to identify those areas, then we'll have a—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So that process isn't part of the plan that's about to be released?

KIM SUTHERLAND: No. The actual foundation for the process is in the strategy. Then what we will do is we'll run that process every few years, to say this is where we're going to focus our efforts because the science has moved on, and we can see—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And there'll be funding for that?

KIM SUTHERLAND: We have funding for programs. What we'll do is potentially pivot those programs as we change the priorities, as we go through this process.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And the funding will be for startups. The funding will be for PhD scholarships. What will the funding be for?

KIM SUTHERLAND: There's a range of funding mechanisms that we have. At the moment, we have support for the medical research institutes that you were talking about, where we fund the indirect costs of research. Those medical research institutes, they get grant funds from NHMRC or MRFF, so national funding, but we know that those funds don't cover the full costs of research. So the funding that we give for the MRSP, the Medical Research Support Program, actually tops up that funding so that we are covering much of the indirect costs of research.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Then who owns the research?

KIM SUTHERLAND: The MRIs.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: We're investing in it, but we don't have a stake in any commercialisation of that?

KIM SUTHERLAND: Commercialisation is a different consideration and we do give—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If the MRI owns the research, then they own the rights to commercialise, don't they?

KIM SUTHERLAND: There's a proper policy around intellectual property. The inventor has some rights and the organisation, so the PHO in which they work, and the team also has IP. We also have—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Sorry, that's your standard contract then for that? Because if the inventor is employed by an organisation, they have no rights to the IP, other than moral.

KIM SUTHERLAND: I can come back to you with our proper policy, but it is a third, a third, a third. The inventor does have some rights to the IP.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That's in the MRIs, but what about in—

KIM SUTHERLAND: That's everywhere.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Everywhere that gets New South Wales Government funding?

KIM SUTHERLAND: Yes, or any research that's undertaken.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'd love to get details of that on notice, because that's very different to the way I understand how the legislation works.

KIM SUTHERLAND: If I misspoke, I apologise, but that's my understanding.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: No, I would love to get the details of that on notice, if I may.

KIM SUTHERLAND: We do have a policy, so I can very happily send you that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That would be great. The Microbiome Research Centre, have you calculated the cost of the investment in the transnational research involved? At UNSW. Is it located there? I think it's going to be.

KIM SUTHERLAND: I understand it's in St George and Sutherland. I think that's in South Eastern Sydney LHD. That's not directly funded by the Office for Health and Medical Research.

The CHAIR: It's time for a break. Thank you very much, everyone. We will have a 15-minute recess and reconvene at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will now reconvene. Mr Hamilton, you said you had some answers that you would like to give. Please fire away.

SHANE HAMILTON: The question on how much has been spent of the \$5 million on the treaty consultations—\$375,000, which is made up of operational expenses and treaty commissioner salaries. The treaty commissioner salary is \$324,000. The Me-Mel responsible Minister is Minister Sharpe, and it's the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. I think you asked me about funding to Aboriginal community controlled organisations?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes.

SHANE HAMILTON: Out of the \$221 million in total for the Closing the Gap funding, \$192 million has been provided to Aboriginal community controlled organisations. That represents 85 per cent. The business road map you asked about—\$5.6 million of that is for the Indigenous Chamber of Commerce and Yarpa. That's supporting Aboriginal businesses. The balance is the round table work that we've done thus far and will continue to do, and the rest is for the taskforce that has been established. You did ask me about procurement. In terms of the work that has been done and reviewed, there will be a new policy in June, I understand, of this year. That will be delivered. The other thing I thought you asked me about was the breakdown of funding. I thought I could give the breakdown in relation to, as I mentioned, what Aboriginal Affairs funds out of Closing the Gap.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But not the total Closing the Gap funding?

SHANE HAMILTON: I can give you the total of \$221 million, but the component for us—there is actually \$38 million now in total over a four-year period.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So, of the \$221 million, you are responsible for \$38 million over four years?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, and that's broken down into seven schedules. Schedule one is about shared decision-making and partnerships, and that's at \$9.1 million and a further \$5 million in 2024-25. Supporting local partnerships is a total of \$9.7 million. The Aboriginal community controlled organisation partnerships fund is \$1.5 million. The New South Wales Aboriginal-led accountability mechanism is in total \$1.6 million. The Aboriginal community controlled organisation comprehensive support package is \$1.9 million. The data sovereignty development approach is \$6.1 million, and building a model for Aboriginal data sovereignty is \$3.1 million.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And that data sovereignty work includes better data collection?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, both on the government side and community side.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And that's going to fund the dashboard that is under development?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I think that dashboard is due for an update in about two weeks.

SHANE HAMILTON: The dashboard on what?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I thought the dashboard that gave the breakdown of some of the New South Wales stats indicated that it would be next updated in two weeks. I haven't got it in front of me, sorry.

SHANE HAMILTON: From the Productivity Commission?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: No, it wasn't the Productivity Commission because that's Australia-wide, but there was a New South Wales Government one that I found.

SHANE HAMILTON: I'd have to—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The problem with the Productivity Commission one is that you can drill down for some State figures, but it's not everything and I find it can be quite tricky to understand the New South Wales figures compared to some of the other States.

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes.

KIM SUTHERLAND: Chair, I could also clarify a question, if that would be okay. The policy I was referring to on IP is for a public health organisation. If it's occurring within the LHDs and when we're providing money, for example, for the Medical Research Support Program, the requirement is that there is an appropriate IP policy in place within that organisation, but it's not guided by our policy.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Does it include that you get a share in the IP because you have funded part of it?

KIM SUTHERLAND: We're only funding the indirect costs of research for those organisations.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That makes more sense to me.

KIM SUTHERLAND: Apologies.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: No, it's a complex area. We're trying to rationalise questions a little bit. Is there anybody here who can answer questions about matters to do with the Central Coast?

The CHAIR: I can have a go. No, I don't think there is.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Thanks, Jeremy. On behalf of a Minister? That's very kind. I have one question about racing, which is probably for you, Mr Barakat.

TAREK BARAKAT: It could be.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It is to do with the Racing for the Regions Program and the disposition of those funds. I understand that in 2021 there was close to \$8.5 million allocated in relation to building stables and associated infrastructure at Gosford, which has taken some time to be spent. Do you know anything about that particular project?

TAREK BARAKAT: Racing for the Regions is an allocation of funding provided by the former Government to Racing NSW to do certain things, so it's not something we oversee. We provide the funding on the basis that certain milestones have been hit. I have information here on Gosford, for example, in relation to stables and associated infrastructure.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Who is responsible for overseeing those programs?

TAREK BARAKAT: Racing NSW. But I can tell you that the information from Racing NSW—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But it's your money.

TAREK BARAKAT: It's government money. The Government has provided an allocation to Racing NSW for specific projects in regional areas. I think there are nine in total.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The total funding was something in the order of \$67 million.

TAREK BARAKAT: I think there is \$67 million in total, about \$58.6 million of which is to Racing NSW for infrastructure projects across nine thoroughbred racecourses. And there's the balance, which I think sits with Crown Lands to upgrade racecourses on Crown land.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: There appears to have been some practices associated with some of those projects whereby Racing NSW has required land to be sold to them so that they can construct and then retain the infrastructure themselves. Was that the understanding of the way the funding was to be allocated?

TAREK BARAKAT: Not to my knowledge. As I said, this is funding allocated to Racing NSW, so these are probably questions better directed to them. I'm happy to take it on notice if I can, but I think the answer—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps I might frame them and put them on notice as supplementary questions—that might be the best thing. Dr Sutherland, in relation to medical research—I'm just trying to work out which ones. The Lang Walker AO Medical Research Building wasn't an LHD—that's you. That's medical research?

KIM SUTHERLAND: I think that's in south-west Sydney and it's to do with the Ingham Institute, which is a medical research institute. To qualify for the Medical Research Support Program, there are criteria. You need to be based in New South Wales, you need to primarily do health and medical research, you need to be an independent organisation, and you need to have at least \$3 million per year for the previous three years in order for us to support the indirect costs of research.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Independent—but this building is associated with WSU. Does that compromise independence, if it's associated with a university?

KIM SUTHERLAND: It's a joint agreement for that building, so it's not wholly owned by the institute.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The areas of research have been identified as addiction medicine, diabetes, Indigenous health, mental health and paediatrics. Are all of those five going to be proceeding, as far as you're aware?

KIM SUTHERLAND: I don't know the details around that particular building. I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The NSW Health and Medical Research website, which displays milestones from 2011 to 2023—is there an intention to update it?

KIM SUTHERLAND: The website is referring to?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The NSW Health and Medical Research website. Apparently, our milestones stop at 2023. Did we do anything in 2024 we'd like to tell people about?

KIM SUTHERLAND: We certainly did. Yes, we'll be updating the website, particularly in the light of the release of the new strategy.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What issues are there with workforce retention in the medical research workforce?

KIM SUTHERLAND: Actually, I think research has a positive role to play in retention of workforce and it's been a big part of the conversations that we've been having in developing the strategy—really having regard to how we can be innovative in the way that we support the workforce for everyone to have a role in research, either in the translation of research into best practice, so patients are benefiting, but also you can have additional welcome challenges in your work life.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are there issues because a lot of the research tends to be funded on a three- to five-year contract term basis, and that makes it very difficult if you've got researchers having to move location, change projects all the time?

KIM SUTHERLAND: Absolutely. There are inherent problems and issues with the system that we need to be able to address. I think working together as a system helps us overcome some of those short-term contract issues. But also there's some funding that we do. We have a grant fund for elite researchers where we're trying to encourage researchers to relocate to New South Wales, so we're strengthening our own teams here—really thinking about how that will then enrich other people's working lives in joining those teams and having opportunities for training.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How many researchers do we lose overseas every year?

KIM SUTHERLAND: I don't have those numbers.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: A lot, I think.

KIM SUTHERLAND: I would think there would be a significant number.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: While we're still with you, Dr Sutherland, the Australian Teletrial Program, I believe, is looking at improving health care regardless of geography. My understanding is that New South Wales isn't part of that research project?

KIM SUTHERLAND: That's right. It's got a bit of a history to that. All of the States and Territories, except for New South Wales and the ACT, are in the ATP, the Australian Teletrial Program. However, there's almost a parallel program called the Rural, Regional and Remote Clinical Trial Enabling Program funded by the MRFF, so funded federally. We administer the funds for that. That has a very similar set of goals. We have recognised that there may be some benefits in coming together and so we are now in conversations with the other jurisdictions to think about the next application for remote trials and supporting clinical trials in rural areas to do all the jurisdictions together. We're in conversations about that at the moment. Our RRR program, which is how we refer to it, is a five-year program and that funding is until 2027. The ATP program runs until next year. That's why those discussions are starting now.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: So if the research continues, maybe we will bring it under one umbrella.

KIM SUTHERLAND: Exactly, and it's really about trying to encourage the clinical trials for everybody, so really improving equity for the people of New South Wales is our particular interest.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Back to veterans, I just wonder, what support does the Government offer to charities working in the veterans space?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Again, it's mostly collaboration with ex-service organisations, so the major funding—again, we're talking the Commonwealth has billions of dollars compared to the State funding for veterans because it is traditionally Commonwealth. The grants programs that the Commonwealth offers for ex-service organisations are large. A good example—you asked about homelessness previously—is the Commonwealth gave \$30 million in funding for Veterans' Acute Housing Program, so \$1.5 million of that went to Homes for Heroes for the LifeCare program and \$4.1 million went to Legacy for housing in Coffs Harbour. The Commonwealth has the lion's share of funding distribution to charities and ex-service organisations to support veterans, and then the hubs are connecting veterans and their families to various services, including State government services which are available to veterans and their families.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you remind me again where those hubs are?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: I have to remember the list: Wagga Wagga, Nowra, I think Coffs Harbour. There's one being established in the Hawkesbury, Hunter, Tweed, North Coast, Queanbeyan, Palerang, and there are existing hubs in Shoalhaven, Riverina and currently a temporary one in Newcastle will move to Maitland, and LifeCare also has a collaboration with the northern beaches RSL sub-branch in Dee Why, for one. LifeCare and RSL have been working together to support hubs. The one in Queanbeyan is utilising an RSL existing building. LifeCare has had investment from the Commonwealth and is rolling that out.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Earlier we talked on the whole-of-government committee looking at the response to the royal commission. Are you more familiar with that than the Minister?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes. I chaired that one.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Can you tell me who participates in that committee?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We have every cluster represented, so Treasury, police sits on it, Coroner—so where there are very specific recommendations, we have people. Health sits on it. Every cluster is represented but where there's a specific focus, so Corrections, police and Health, they're absolutely there.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: How regularly does that committee meet?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: At the moment we're only meeting quarterly. Last year in the sort of lead-up, while we were developing the strategy, we communicated a lot out of session.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: You talked about the breakdown you can provide as far as population. Is there a breakdown you can provide me as far as services available, or spending by the OVA as far as different regions?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: That's really complicated because we don't fund specifically in the regions; we connect and ensure that services are delivered. Again, another good example is my team went down to Nowra and connected the Service NSW people and the local health district into the RSL LifeCare-run hub. We're building awareness, connectivity, local government, New South Wales services, hubs to ensure that everyone is aware of where to direct people. Another is the GambleAware program. They run services all over the State and we've made sure that RSL LifeCare and their hubs know where those service providers are so that they can refer people to those services.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Do you have a remote team, a mobile team? I'm thinking, for instance, with this Matthew Locke day coming up on 22 March, is that an opportunity for some of your team to get out into the public and meet these people and hear their concerns face to face?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: So we already commit—we've only got two people who work in the veterans employment team, but they go to every transition seminar that is run in New South Wales. That captures all of the people leaving the Defence Force. We have those one-on-one conversations. We've grouped up and have representatives from other parts of New South Wales government attend as well. We do occasionally venture out as a team and run a forum, but we're a small team. We would leverage, I guess, our colleagues in other departments in other locations to support some other activities in the regions.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: When there are government programs, such as the affordable housing programs, are there sections of that ring fenced for veterans?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: That \$30 million from the Commonwealth was specifically for—

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Sorry, are there any State Government programs?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: We have Link2home—a 24-hour phone service—and Rent Choice Veterans. They're programs that the New South Wales Government established specifically for veterans and their families. RSL LifeCare provides the frontline support for homelessness and crisis housing, and then refers people in to those New South Wales Government services. Again, it's a team effort, depending on what the needs and challenges are for the veteran and their family at any particular point in time.

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: I'm pretty much satisfied at this point. Are you able to provide for me the breakdown of the employment thing per region? Can you provide that for me online?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: Yes, sure.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I have one question about the design of the cashless gaming trial. How many people did you intend to have using that to test it?

TAREK BARAKAT: I can't speak for the Government. Not that I was a member of it, but I don't think the panel itself set a number of people that it wanted to participate in the trial.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Was there some understanding that, for it to be statistically meaningful, you'd have to have two, 2,000 or 200,000?

TAREK BARAKAT: There was an understanding from the panel of what the trial could and couldn't do. That's why there was a focus of the trial looking to determine the feasibility and acceptance, as opposed to trying to run a double-blind, peer-reviewed scientific trial. It was more about trying to get an understanding of the feasibility and acceptance from individuals and industry about implementing this sort of technology.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So the objectives were the feasibility of having cashless gaming, and a secondary objective of how acceptable that would be to people engaged in gambling, and clubs and pubs and places where gambling occurs?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think the acceptance piece was more on acceptance generally. What would need to be done to make this—the Minister spoke about behavioural change this morning—acceptable to people more broadly? The feasibility was from a cost perspective, from an impact on industry and employment perspective, and from a technology and data security perspective.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that there were 14 people who were using the technology. Does that provide you with any meaningful result?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'm not going to sit here and say that the panel and, I'm sure, the Government wouldn't have preferred there to be more people participating in the trial. But I also don't think that means nothing was learnt from the trial. There was a fair bit the panel gleaned—and it's called out in the report—around people's concerns. The Minister spoke about government intervention in gambling activities, people having concerns about their data and their privacy, and the technology not necessarily being particularly frictionless to start off with—there being some clunkiness to it. Learning those things ensures that, if Government is to make a decision along those lines at some point in the future, it has an understanding of the types of things that would need to be addressed.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are you aware of any other Government program that would have been decided on the basis of 14 people in a trial?

TAREK BARAKAT: Government hasn't made a decision in relation to this yet. It's still considering its response. I think that's probably a hypothetical question.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll keep going on the line of questioning in relation to cashless gaming. Wouldn't another one of the key reasons that only 14 people were genuine and active participants—I think that's how it was described—be because it was voluntary and they could go elsewhere to gamble? Isn't that also a reason?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think that's probably a reason. The panel made the decision early on to make it a voluntary trial and not to mandate venues to use it, for reasons that I'm sure you're well aware of, Ms Faehrmann.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes.

TAREK BARAKAT: To be fair, yes, people had an option, so they could go elsewhere.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Was that in any way surveyed by the participants? Did you get information or data around that being a reason?

TAREK BARAKAT: As to the number of people who decided not to participate?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, that's right.

TAREK BARAKAT: I'd have to take that on notice. There were surveys done. As to whether that specific question was asked, I'd need to take that on notice, but I'm happy to.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I want to ask you about the mandatory six-hour pokie shutdown. My office has asked this and I may have asked this in budget estimates before—yes, I have. I've been told consistently that there was no collection of that data in terms of how many venues in total have applied and been granted the exemption. Is that still the case?

TAREK BARAKAT: I've got a total figure here, which I'm happy to share with you.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Great.

TAREK BARAKAT: The best information I have is that there are approximately 673 venues. Whether that's venues which have applied or which were just granted it early on when they were first introduced, I couldn't tell you. But the figure I have here—the best information I have—is 673 venues. That's some of the information we provided to the trial, so that's as at August 2024.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's at August 2024. Do you have the breakdown of pubs and clubs?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'm sure we could provide that on notice. I don't have it with me now.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I believe that there were some concerns expressed around the extent of the exemptions granted and also the factors that were used for the clubs and pubs to want the exemption. Firstly, does the Government have that data as well?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, it's on our website. We did a review of the existing shutdown hours exemptions, and that's now on our website. It was also provided to the panel.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of what's on the website, for example, for the 673 venues, is it the number of venues that said it was because of this, or is it just more general that that?

TAREK BARAKAT: I'll take that on notice, but it is publicly available. I'll come back to you and let you know. The purpose was to provide that picture about what's occurring and, to your point, to acknowledge that some of these exemptions have been in place since 1997 or 2003, so what may have been justifiable then doesn't necessarily mean that's the case now.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: If it was justifiable at the time. I'm aware that the Government is considering the panel's recommendations, but is there anything at this point in time that the Government has committed to or that you're looking at in terms of those 673 venues? Is there any plan to reassess what has been granted to them?

TAREK BARAKAT: I think the panel makes a specific recommendation in relation to this. To be fair, I think the Government will make its position known in relation to that recommendation when it responds to the report wholly.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: With what the panel considered and the information that the panel was provided, is there information from those venues as to turnover in those particular hours?

TAREK BARAKAT: Turnover between—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What is the shutdown period that they're operating.

TAREK BARAKAT: I don't know that that was provided to the panel. Through the centralised monitoring system, if you were going back all the way to, say, 1997, it would be a significant piece of work. But you could probably look at the data—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The last year or two would be useful.

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, we could, and I'm happy to take on notice what we can provide and also what's appropriate to provide. I'm happy to do that and come back to you.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll turn to a slightly different issue, but in the same area of gambling. I want to get an update. Last year in May the Parliament passed a motion in relation to the Government recognising the links between gendered violence and gambling, and pokies in particular. The motion called for the Government to ensure that actions to reduce the pervasive and destructive presence of gambling are a key component of any plan to end men's violence against women. It was unanimously supported with very positive statements by the members who spoke to it for the Government in the House. What has been done since then to acknowledge that and to ensure that it's a key component of any plans? Do you have that information, or should I be asking—

TAREK BARAKAT: I've got some here. The Office of Responsible Gambling would be the main entity that takes carriage of that. It's provided face-to-face training on the intersection between family and domestic violence and gambling to its counselling workforce in GambleAware. The office is also working with the family and domestic violence sector so support services can support clients experiencing gambling harm and link them to the counselling services that GambleAware provides across the State. There's also research being funded. I think the RGF has provided a grant of about \$195,000 to the ANU to look at development of evidence-based prevention programs and intervention services in New South Wales.

Then, through the Community Benefit Payment Scheme, which is effectively where venues seek to have a gaming machine threshold increase the number of machines they can operate, ILGA would determine a payment into this Community Benefit Payment Scheme. About \$6 million out of that scheme is currently funding around 20 organisations that have, as part of what they do or focus on, preventing sexual and family violence. Those

organisations are located across Murrumbidgee, Hunter, Illawarra and Central Coast as well as metro Sydney. In addition to that—and I can get more information on this on notice if you'd like me to—the Office of Responsible Gambling also has two actions in the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan, which relate to research and cross-referral.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's useful, thank you. I've asked before about data that's collected in relation to pokies losses. I understand Wesley Mission has been asking for some time for venue-by-venue loss data. It's published every six months in Victoria, but we consistently get the justification from New South Wales that it's about tax data and privacy provisions related to the publication of tax information. But we don't need to publish the tax data; the information can still be published in terms of venue-by-venue loss data. So why hasn't this happened? Why isn't Liquor and Gaming—I know it's probably an ILGA thing as well, but you would probably know the reasons why this isn't happening.

TAREK BARAKAT: I know what you're referring to. We have provided an answer to Wesley, and we do meet with them quarterly and discuss these things and others.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'm asking you now.

TAREK BARAKAT: I think we'll provide it on notice because we did get some specific legal advice to some of those points that you've just raised about tax and things like that. I'm happy to provide that answer to you, which I think is the same answer we provided to Wesley, as to why that isn't occurring in New South Wales. But we did say to Wesley we're very happy to work with them to look at what we can try to publish, given what we understand to be legal impediments to publishing this data.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What I understand after my conversations about it is that it's the privacy provisions relating to the publication of tax information. So I know I can't ask you this, and it probably would have been a question for the Minister in terms of a policy shift, so we'll wait and see.

TAREK BARAKAT: Leave it with me and I'll provide you what we can on notice about that advice so you've got that information.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'm sorry if an update has already been given this morning because I've been between two committees, but I noticed that earlier in the year there was an exclusive about a response by the Minister—discussion about facial recognition and where that's up to. We're waiting for everything else in relation to the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform's recommendations. Is this a totally separate component of the response to address issues with people who are addicted to gambling?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes. The Government made an election commitment on implementation of mandatory facial rec. We're actually now in consultation about that. There's a discussion paper that's out publicly now. I think the close for responses was 14 March but we've extended that, after some feedback from Wesley and others, to the 28 March to give people more time. Aligned with that, we've also got a discussion paper on third-party exclusion schemes. That will be where third parties could seek to have family members excluded from venues who are suffering or at risk of suffering from gambling harm. Then linked to all of those things is the development of a statewide exclusion register. You'd be aware, Ms Faehrmann, that venues currently have to offer self-exclusion, but there's actually nothing that links all venues across the State. We are in market now—I think actually the tender has recently closed—for a company to come and develop that integrated back-end system so that there's a single register in New South Wales so that, if you're excluded in from a venue in Byron Bay, then it applies to a venue in Ulladulla or, you know.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Has that been successful? Is that successfully used in, for example, Victoria or Queensland—not that anybody has the extent of pokies that we do, of course—to deal with gamblers who have that addiction when their family members or themselves want to be excluded from every club or pub with pokies? Has there been successful use of facial recognition technology across the State to do that or is this a new thing?

TAREK BARAKAT: It's relatively new. They use it in South Australia and I think it does have some success there. I'm pretty sure it's South Australia, yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Across the State?

TAREK BARAKAT: Yes, it is. I'm happy to take that on notice and provide some detail on how that works, but the only one that really springs to mind where it is a similar sort of set-up would be South Australia currently.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll have a look at the discussion paper.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In relation to Veterans Affairs, I believe that I understood the Minister this morning to say that the funding arrangements in respect of grants to do with memorials—there had been two rounds a year and they'd been collapsed into one. Is that correct?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: That's correct.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm just wondering what the total dollar amount available for grants each year is now.

CAROLINE MACKANESS: It's \$250,000.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What's the biggest grant that can be made out of that?

CAROLINE MACKANESS: If the Minister approves, it will be \$15,000.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That's great. Thank you very much. Mr Hamilton, a few more questions for you, if I may. Have you had a chance to look at the Ombudsman's report in relation to the OCHRE program?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: There is a very interesting discussion in that about the overlap between OCHRE and the national agreement on Closing the Gap. I understand that there'll probably be work to be done about how they're reconciled. The observation that OCHRE actually lends itself to bottom-up, but Closing the Gap seems to be top-down, and that's creating tension and is difficult to reconcile—I'm just wondering if you have any comments about, if Closing the Gap actually is top-down, whether the Ombudsman's report is an opportunity to perhaps reconsider the way in which we're approaching some of these issues.

SHANE HAMILTON: I think it absolutely is an opportunity for us to reconsider where we're currently at. I would say that Closing the Gap is a national partnership agreement between the peak organisations and the Government or governments across the country. OCHRE is a policy that has essentially been around since 2011. There were extensive consultations done in the development of that. I think it's also an important point to make that OCHRE is not something that the government at the time came up with, nor is it a government-driven initiative; it's something that's actually been driven from the community. It's what the community, as a result of those consultations, said were the key principles upon which any future programs or policies should have those practice principles in place. If you think about the particular priority reform around government changing the way it operates, then I think OCHRE principles lend itself to embedding those across government because they are what communities have told us, so to ignore them would be to ignore what community told us way back in 2011.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps we might revisit this next time when there's been more time to reflect on the Ombudsman's report. I have some quick questions about how many land claims are outstanding. Do you know how many land claims are outstanding?

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, I'll just get that for you. As of January this year, there were 41,383 Aboriginal land claims awaiting assessment, either undetermined or part undetermined.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What percentage of the New South Wales landmass does that represent?

SHANE HAMILTON: I'm not sure. I'd have to take that on notice. I don't have that percentage.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could, I'd be very grateful. If we've got over 41,000 outstanding, do you have any figure historically over how many have been resolved?

SHANE HAMILTON: No, I don't have the breakdown of the numbers.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are you able to take that on notice?

SHANE HAMILTON: I can, yes.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That would be great. Thank you very much. Also please provide what percentage of the landmass that represents, as well—those resolved claims.

SHANE HAMILTON: Just to note, again, this is a Crown Lands—they deal with the claims themselves. We obviously are interested in it because the Minister has responsibility under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, and, of course, land councils are those that are putting the claims in, so we track the numbers. We'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: That'd be great. The Stolen Generations Keeping Places program received just under \$37 million over four years. A number of survivors are saying they haven't seen meaningful progress. Can you confirm how much of the funding has been spent?

SHANE HAMILTON: The actual expenditure number I can get you, but I probably need to explain the Keeping Places project. Probably a couple of years ago now, we put together a business case which was seeking funding to return the sites of the former homes to the Stolen Generation organisations. In last year's budget we were successful in essentially the balance, if you like, with a commitment that we would come back at a later point for the final amount of funding. I think, in total, it was about \$124 million. We have spent some money to date on essentially infrastructure on the sites to make them safe because survivor organisations wanting to go back on there—the removal of asbestos and other things to make it safe, so it's more a safety aspect.

Whilst we work with survivor organisations to redevelop and replan what those keeping places or healing centres upon their wishes of what they want to turn those into, it's also important to understand that the owners of those sites are the local Aboriginal land councils. So in order for Stolen Generation organisations to purchase it from them, we would need to negotiate with the land councils who own them. What we've started to do is understand that—again, I would say with free, prior and informed consent—our survivors are able to understand what options might be available to them in order to purchase those sites from the land councils. With respect to the local Aboriginal land councils, as well as owners of that, we would need to understand their wishes as well, so there'll be this land dialogue negotiation process that we'll undertake. We're in midst of that right now. We're working with what we refer to as respectful urgency, because we recognise that our survivors are getting older.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do you have any idea of how many outstanding claims remain unresolved?

SHANE HAMILTON: Of the land claims?

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Yes, of the claims by survivors. Or they're all part of a negotiation so it's difficult to—

SHANE HAMILTON: The Keeping Places—the ultimate thing is to return the sites. The wishes of the survivor organisations is to have those sites purchased and then they can have them as healing centres for them into the future, and families and community as well so it's not a land claim as such.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It's a land use or land—

SHANE HAMILTON: Yes, because land councils already own those sites so they'd have to negotiate with land councils to purchase them.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: You may not have any visibility over this but I am wondering whether you are aware there was information provided to a breakfast radio show about a 17-year-old Indigenous boy—a District Court matter that was heard under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act. It was a closed court and information was not meant to be released, especially information released in such a way that, I imagine, would have had a negative impact upon the person who was involved. I wonder if you were aware of that and if you were involved in any cross-government consultation to make sure that this type of thing never happens again?

SHANE HAMILTON: No, I'm not aware of the case. I haven't been involved in a case such as that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that there is—what's been reported in the press—a police investigation into the matter so hopefully it's resolved in that way.

ELIZABETH MILDWATER: Mr Chair, I've got a couple of follow-ups, if that's okay. Mr Latham asked for the name of a probity adviser earlier; it's APAC Probity company. Also there was a request of the Minister for some letters that he'd written to Greyhound Racing NSW and the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission. I have those letters here to table.

The CHAIR: All right, we're happy to accept those. Thank you very much for your attendance today and answering a thorough set of questions. We very much appreciate it and very much appreciate the work you do for the people of New South Wales.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.