

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 8 - CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**Friday 7 March 2025**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

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

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**The Committee met at 9:15.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Emma Hurst (Chair)

Ms Abigail Boyd

Ms Cate Faehrmann

The Hon. Mark Latham

The Hon. Aileen MacDonald

The Hon. Jacqui Munro

The Hon. Bob Nanva

The Hon. Peter Primrose

The Hon. Emily Suvaal

### **MEMBERS VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Ms Sue Higginson

### **PRESENT**

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

## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 812  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

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**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the third hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service for the additional inquiry into budget estimates 2024-25. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meet

ing today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Emma Hurst. I am the Chair of the Committee.

I welcome Minister Chanthivong and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Better Regulation and Fair Trading; Industry and Trade; Innovation, Science and Technology; Building; and Corrections. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of their evidence at 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.

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**Mr GRAEME HEAD, AO**, Secretary, Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

**Ms NATASHA MANN**, Deputy Secretary, Fair Trading and Regulatory Services; NSW Fair Trading Commissioner, NSW Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

**Mr JAMES SHERRARD**, NSW Building Commissioner, NSW Department of Customer Service, sworn and examined

**Ms TRINA JONES**, Rental Commissioner, NSW Fair Trading, NSW Department of Customer Service, on former affirmation

**Mr GARY McCAHON, PSM**, Commissioner, Corrective Services NSW, sworn and examined

**Dr ANNE-MARIE MARTIN**, Deputy Commissioner, Security and Custody, Corrective Services NSW, on former oath

**Mr LUKE GRANT**, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Governance, Corrective Services NSW, sworn and examined

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

**Ms REBECCA McPHEE**, Deputy Secretary, Investment NSW, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

**Professor HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE**, Chief Scientist and Engineer, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

**Mr SIMON ROWELL**, Executive Director, Fostering Innovation Branch, Investment NSW, Premier's Department, sworn and examined

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

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

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Thank you, Minister and witnesses. I am calling in from the Northern Rivers. I still have power at the moment, but if I do drop out, it is because I am joining the many who have lost power. I am grateful to the Chair for giving me the opening time to ask questions. Minister, could you please give the Committee and me an update on the review that you promised in relation to phone calls? Last time we spoke at budget estimates, we were talking about inmates at correctional facilities across New South Wales being able to have access to free phone calls. You assured me that the acting commissioner at the time, Mr Leon Taylor, was looking into this for you. Could you please give the Committee an update on where that is up to?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Thank you, Ms Higginson. I hope you can hear us. I want to start by extending our thoughts to the community up in the Northern Rivers. They have been through quite a lot. I know the Government is doing all that it can to support our community. Just a quick update on the discussions we've had regarding phone calls. The short answer is yes, the former acting commissioner has done an analysis about the options that are available to us regarding inmates and their ability to make phone calls to contact their family and friends. There are a number of options that are currently before me. I'm going through the process of considering which option is best, given the Government's resources, and also trying to make sure that we have a balanced approach regarding inmate phone calls, bearing in mind our physical constraints but also the security basis as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Am I to imply from that answer, Minister, that the fiscal constraints may mean inmates won't have access to free phone calls on a basis going forward?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think if your question is about an unlimited universal free phone call arrangement, that's not the Government's position. But I'd also add that some inmates already do get access to free phone calls. I've said that the analysis that has been undertaken is currently before me; we're considering what is the best option for inmates to make contact with their family and friends. In addition to phone calls, I would also add that there are other avenues by which inmates can make contact with their family and friends, whether it's through the tablet system, the Official Visitors Program and the AVL suite. There are other avenues

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in addition to the phone calls, but we are certainly examining how to expand them and make phone calls free, but also cheaper as well.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, would you be in a position to guarantee to this Committee that in any decision you make, you will weight the heaviest and highest priority to the overwhelming evidence that when inmates have contact with their loved ones—and this means free and accessible contact with their loved ones—their wellbeing and the rate of recidivism is markedly lowered? Will that be a priority consideration for you when you're looking at these options? Also, when will you have made a decision about this very important matter?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, I've said that the options are currently before me, and I'm carefully considering those options and also the impact they may have on the wider Corrections network. The factors that you have outlined are, yes, I recognise as being inputs towards inmate contact and also part of their engagement in the Corrections system to reduce recidivism. These factors will be taken into account, and I'm considering those options at present.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Also, can you please guarantee to the Committee that when you're making a decision you will also factor in, right now, the particularly special case of parents of children—inmates? There is a campaign taking place right now by the children of inmates who are suffering on the outside because they can't speak to their parents who are inmates, as well as those parents who are not able to have proper access to communications with their children?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, we're all aware and acknowledge that contact between inmates and their family and friends on the outside is important. Of course, those considerations will be taken into account as I make a decision on the options that are being provided before me.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, sorry to interrupt. I'm referring to a particular category right now with inmates, and that is the parents of minors who are not currently able to access phone calls with their children. This is about children being able to access contact with their parents. Do you accept that they are a particular and special category?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly where children are involved with inmates who are in a correctional facility, we understand that these are important contacts. I would also add that I am advised that there have been over 750,000 family video visits as of a few weeks ago. As I mentioned, phone calls is one form of contact, but there are also other forms of contact that are made available to inmates. But the factors that you have raised are certainly areas for consideration for me as I carefully go through the options that have been presented.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** What about the timing? You haven't answered that. When will you have made a determination?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly I suspect by the next estimates there will be an answer for you. But the options have just been recently presented to me, and I want to carefully consider those options. Looking at part of the broader communication from inmates to their family and their friends and some of the higher risk categories that you mentioned are certainly areas of focus for me. I will make those decisions carefully and in consultation.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, can I just point out that the Government is now taking over the Junee correction facility and it's now made the decision to take over the massive Parklea facility? If the Government is considering that it's fiscally troubled about providing free and accessible phone calls to inmates, how do you remotely propose to be able to do this, given you're taking over these two prisons in the coming period?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, on Junee, the Government made the decision to bring Junee into public operations, public hands. It is an essential public service as part of our justice system. That decision or the formalisation of Junee coming back into public operations will be done at the end of this month. As members would be well aware, the Premier and I made the decision and the announcement to bring Parklea also back into public hands as part of the justice system, because we've never hidden our preference for public ownership, public operations, for what are essential public services. We will continue to take those considerations into account as we make changes and reform to the correctional justice network.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, will you be taking on board the Inspector of Custodial Services' reports and shutting down those wings of Bathurst that are not fit for purpose and those other premises that the Inspector of Custodial Services has provided in her other reports regarding other facilities? There's serious concern about the fact that some of the current cells and units and wings of these archaic Victorian-era centres are inhumane. They're not fit for purpose. They are, arguably, a breach of the Government's duty of care to inmates. Many of these still have ligature points, and they are just not fit for purpose. Have you got a proper program of shutting these wings down?

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, I want to note the important role that the Inspector of Custodial Services plays as part of the oversight of correctional facilities. I welcome the ICS's report. In regard to those facilities that you've mentioned, in particular Bathurst, Corrections is currently carefully considering those recommendations in regards to Bathurst. On the second point, your point about shutting down these wings, making a decision like that must be taken into account not only at a specific facility but how it's part of the wider Corrections network of a number of our facilities and also bearing in mind the level of demand for prison events as time proceeds.

**Ms SUE HIGGINSON:** Minister, have you had conversations directly with the Premier about his law and order agenda and the ever now increasing and escalating prison and remand numbers? Have you had direct conversations with him about the plan?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes. It's a whole-of-government decision, the decision that we made, regarding Corrections and also our tough bail laws, to keep our community safe, in particular for those serious domestic violence offenders.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Thank you, Minister, and your officials. Minister, under the New South Wales real estate legislation, is there a problem—is it illegal for an individual to own a property but a separate government-created body to be falsely listed as the landlord in a residential tenancy agreement?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's quite a technical question. I might ask the Fair Trading Commissioner to provide an answer if she can.

**NATASHA MANN:** I don't have the answer but maybe Ms Jones, the Rental Commissioner, might come up and address that question.

**TRINA JONES:** Apologies—could you please repeat the question so I can answer that appropriately?

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Is there a problem in New South Wales real estate legislation? Is it illegal for an individual—a private citizen—to own a property but for a separate government agency to be falsely listed as the landlord in a residential tenancy agreement?

**TRINA JONES:** No. There could be—

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Point of order: The current phrasing of Mr Latham's question is seeking a legal opinion. I wonder whether he might rephrase it or perhaps withdraw it.

**The CHAIR:** It seems like the witness was going to make the same point. Perhaps, Mr Latham, you want to rephrase that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Is it consistent with the statute to do that?

**TRINA JONES:** I would have to understand the details of the context that you are describing. It sounds to me like you may be describing a headlease agreement, where one person is the owner of the property and another person headleases that tenancy. I'm not sure if that's the context of the question.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** To be consistent with the statute, there needs to be a headlease or a sublease, does there?

**TRINA JONES:** I'm not sure about which statute you're referring to. In the context where one person is the property owner, another person can be the proverbial landlord given that they have the headlease. But they're effectively the head tenant under legislation. There are models where the government may headlease properties from private providers, and that happens all the time.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Minister, do you expect that public agencies would act with a higher level of integrity and honour if they are acting as the landlord on behalf of a private citizen in a residential tenancy agreement?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Of course, Mr Latham. Expectations of public behaviour, I think, in one sense, are always higher for public representatives and also government agencies.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Would you be open to writing into the real estate legislation and laws in New South Wales high levels of transparency and integrity for public sector agencies that are performing this landlord role?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We'll always continue our ongoing reform regarding rental legislation. The Government has got a good track record since it has come into office about the changes that we've made to get a more balanced environment for renters who are doing it tough.

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**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In what circumstances would you think a public sector agency would act as the landlord for a private citizen, using their public resources for that private advantage and all the costs?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I would really want to understand the context that you're stating in your question, Mr Latham. Are you suggesting that public sector agencies who are property owners are not abiding by the law and are not performing as the standard? I'm not sure.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Thanks for that invitation, Minister. I can bring to your attention a case study of the Deputy Chair of Racing NSW, Saranne Cooke, owning as an individual a property at 270 Gilmour Street, Kelso, or Bathurst, adjoining the 1,400-metre chute of the racecourse. In owning that property in the middle of 2021, she used Racing NSW, effectively—she's a board member, but as a private citizen she held the property—as the managing agent for the property. I'd like, after the people opposite inspect it, to table the residential tenancy agreement that was reached between Racing NSW, supposedly, as a landlord—they never disclosed that Saranne Cooke actually owned the property—with Kirsty Delaney.

You guys over there normally want to inspect these things and have a look at them before they are tabled. I am seeking to table this agreement. I will speak to it. The problem was, Minister, that in using these public resources, Kirsty Delaney, who had rented for quite some time, said these were the worst people ever to deal with. Ultimately she was evicted for no reason and left homeless for six months. There was an argument about the bond return, even though she had left the property in very good condition.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order: I am not quibbling with what Mr Latham is putting forward, but I would suggest that the procedural fairness resolution states that adverse reflections should not be made on third parties where procedural fairness can't be afforded to them. I suggest that the question as it's currently framed is not in accordance with paragraph 13 of the resolution.

**The CHAIR:** I would remind the member to be mindful about adverse mention. This has come up in other committee hearings as well. Just be mindful of accusations and using names of people who aren't able to be here today to have a right of reply.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Chair, the name I'm using is Racing NSW, which is a public agency established by this Parliament, and they're acting as the landlord.

**The CHAIR:** That's fine. It is the individuals' names that were part of the point of order.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I'm outlining what they did as the managing agent for the property: the eviction, the homelessness, the argument about the bond return, and using unqualified people from the Bathurst race club to do the property inspections. Don't we need to guard against this sort of practice, Minister? It seems completely unethical. It's a corruption of public resources for a private individual on a board to be using the agency for these managing agent purposes—placing the ad, vetting prospective tenants, reaching the final agreement and all the other things I've mentioned.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Obviously officials who are in the gaming and racing department fall outside my ministerial responsibilities. But certainly the issues around the rental regulations that you're referring to, I understand that Minister Harris was asked this question as well and he is currently looking into the matter.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** He wasn't asked about the tenancy agreement, which I found out about subsequent to the hearing on Tuesday. Do we need a prohibition on this sort of arrangement, where a private individual holds a property in their own name—they paid nearly \$1 million for it—and uses the public agency on which she's a board member? And they used public resources—their property section and three different property managers—to provide this benefit, which looks like a corruption of public resources given all the things they did? It's also got to be said that they did it very poorly.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly. I can't comment on individual cases which I obviously don't have the background information on, but I'm happy to consider the details that you've just mentioned and how the rental regulations could be tightened in the future. The ongoing journey of rental reform continues. Whilst the Government has made significant reform and will continue to consider all reform—in this specific case, I'm happy to receive the details you've got and then ask the department to examine carefully about where it may fit within my portfolio responsibilities. I suspect, as Minister Harris has also stated, he's also looking into the matter from another angle as well.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Thanks for that undertaking, Minister. I'll hand up this residential tenancy agreement for you to look at on notice. Perhaps also establish some standards inside the government to ensure that an organisation that's set up—in this case, for managing and running thoroughbred racing in New South Wales—doesn't have a head of power in its own legislation to act as a managing agent on behalf of private

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individuals, albeit a board member in these extraordinary circumstances. The Government could do something about that because it just appears to be a waste of public resources and plainly wrong.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly the Government will always consider these issues as they arise. The ongoing journey is always of legislative reform. To make things more transparent and make people accountable is always part of the Government's agenda.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** So you'll undertake to have a look at this rather unique arrangement and see what we can do inside the Government?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's correct. Once we get all the information from yourself regarding this particular incident and how it connects to the rental regulation framework, certainly we can consider it. But Minister Harris is also—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Do you know of any other circumstances in the New South Wales public sector where a body with a head of power—in this case, thoroughbred racing—but no private rental managing agent authority in their statute has actually done this? It seems to be stepping outside the law, doesn't it?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm not aware of any, at least in my portfolio. I can take that on notice.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Moving on to a separate topic I did raise with you on the *Notice Paper*, and I would appreciate an answer, when did NSW Fair Trading last review the safety and regulation of pet food products in New South Wales? What were the results of the review?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm advised that the safety of pet products is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, if I'm not wrong. I might hand over to the Fair Trading Commissioner.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Fair Trading hasn't reviewed the standards and safety at all, at any time?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Only for the pet foods.

**NATASHA MANN:** No, I'm not sure it sits squarely within our portfolio. In the time that I've been in the role, we haven't reviewed it, but I can certainly look into that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What's that period you've been in the role?

**NATASHA MANN:** I've been there for three years.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Could you check if it was done earlier than that, on notice?

**NATASHA MANN:** I can.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Good morning, Minister. Thank you, everyone, for being here. Minister, were you at the Advanced Manufacturing Readiness Facility opening on Wednesday?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No, I was launching the industry policy at roughly the same—earlier in the day.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** The Minister for Domestic Manufacturing and Government Procurement was there. Is that correct?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We're a team. We divvy up our work.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Who is responsible for manufacturing in New South Wales?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** My role as Minister for Industry and Trade is to set the policy framework regarding a whole-of-government approach to stimulate our local manufacturing sector. Minister Houssos has the procurement focus regarding to domestic manufacturing.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Why was she at the Advanced Manufacturing Readiness Facility official opening and you weren't?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's a question you should ask her.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But you decided to launch an industry policy, which directly related to advanced manufacturing, at the same time.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Advanced manufacturing or local manufacturing is part of the industry policy. It's one of our three core missions. The Government is doing a lot of work to stimulate our manufacturing sector. Divvying up all the work is, I would have thought, good teamwork.



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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But if it's one of the most important things, why didn't you go to the launch and schedule that? Were you invited to the official opening?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, we divvy up the work—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, were you invited to the opening of the AMRF?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We are a team focused on delivering a policy framework. We'll continue to, as I said, share the workload and continue to work on what is an important sector for the New South Wales economy.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Would you say that the following industries are priorities for New South Wales: agriculture and agrifood resources, defence and aerospace, clean energy and waste, medical and life sciences, digital systems and software, international education and the visitor economy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That was a long list. Can you just repeat that question again?

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'm not going to repeat it, Minister. Would you say that—if you weren't listening—

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I was, but it was just quite a long list. I'm just trying to get clarity.

**The CHAIR:** A point of order has been taken. I'll hear the point of order.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** A lack of courtesy to the witness was just extended there by the member. I just ask that the procedural fairness resolution be upheld.

**The CHAIR:** I think probably the member was just frustrated, because the question was fairly long, to have to repeat it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** It was also fairly clear.

**The CHAIR:** I will remind both the Minister and the member to be mindful.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, would you say the following industries are priorities for New South Wales: agriculture and agrifood resources, defence and aerospace, clean energy and waste, medical and life sciences, digital systems and software, international education and the visitor economy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes. In the document on the industry policy, I'll refer you to page 14. The key sectors that we've identified are the ones we believe will make the greatest contribution to the missions that we've set out, but that doesn't come at the exclusion of other sectors like the ones you've identified. The industry policy makes that clear.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You said in a speech in November 2023 to the James Martin institute that, for you:

... industry policy crystallises into a very simple multiplication. It is really a four-by-four by five approach! It is four missions reviewed every four years, with five focus sectors, and two enablers.

You said that you would:

... focus on five sectors—we're looking at sectors like life sciences, agritech and food, defence and aerospace, energy and critical minerals—with the enablers being technology and innovation and of course, manufacturing.

What happened to the four-by-four by five commitment, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's what consultation's actually about: engaging with the sector. I had a concept and a direction that I wanted to proceed, but I think making sure that you get input from industry and from companies to say, "These are some of the other things you need to consider." I would have thought that good policymaking involves engagement and being open to new ideas. No-one has a monopoly on good ideas.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That's right. I'm wondering why, then, you have essentially repeated the ideas that the Government has already outlined. Why are you doubling down on a housing target of 377,000 homes by 2029 when the Premier has explicitly said that it will be extremely difficult for New South Wales to meet that target?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Because we want to make housing one of the top priorities for the New South Wales economy. We want it to be a coordinated, whole-of-government approach.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you responsible for that, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The target regarding housing is a national agreement between the States and the Commonwealth to build housing.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** This is your policy, so will you take responsibility if the Government doesn't meet the 377,000 target?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** These are missions targets. Of course we take our responsibility seriously to make sure that we can coordinate government resources in addition to sending a clear signal to the private sector that these are some of the really acute issues that are important to the New South Wales economy. We want everyone to be working together to have a coordinated approach within government and outside of government as well.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Have you got modelling to show that your policy will lead to the outcome of 377,000 new homes by 2029?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The agreement, the missions and the targets are ambitious, but we want the New South Wales economy to be ambitious.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But in building this policy to say that you're responsible for this, do you have modelling that shows that your policy will help build all of these homes for the people of New South Wales?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The policy is directed at absolutely supporting initiatives to ensure that we build the adequate number of formal dwellings for the people of New South Wales.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That's right, but did you ask for modelling from your department or from Treasury?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We will always continue to do ongoing analysis regarding any policies that we create.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** With that modelling in mind, what has that modelling demonstrated to say that your policy will improve the Government's chances—which are, as the Premier said, extremely unlikely—of getting to 377,000 new homes by 2029?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That doesn't mean we shouldn't set ambitious targets. Everybody knows that it is a very difficult environment for the residential construction sector.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I understand it's difficult, Minister, but I'm trying to understand how this policy actually does anything to achieve this goal.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** First, it provides a focused, coordinated, whole-of-government framework to ensure—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But it's just repeating something that already exists.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No. What it does is make sure we send a clear signal within government and to the external private sector that these are the really important, acute issues that are impacting on the New South Wales economy. It's strategic, it's forward looking and it requires coordination across government to achieve some of these targets.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Do you think that the Government's net zero targets are achievable?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** They're ambitious targets and we should all be working towards them.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Have you read the Net Zero Commission's recent annual report?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Net Zero Commission is a matter for Minister Sharpe, but we've set a whole-of-government framework, with the targets—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But are you responsible for this, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** This is your industry policy. Are you aware that the Net Zero Commission has said in their annual report that unless the pace of build of renewable generation is accelerated, the road map targets will not be achieved in 2030.

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We'll continue to work towards that. These are ambitious targets that we have set. A challenge for Government and for the economy—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I understand they're ambitious but—

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I don't know why we should be talking down ambitious targets for all of government to focus on and for the sector to collaborate with the Government on to ensure we can address some of these really acute issues but, more importantly, to provide economic opportunities for the New South Wales economy.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What measurable impact will your industry policy document have on the Government's targets, and how can you possibly know that if you haven't asked your department or Treasury for modelling?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, as I said, this is a whole-of-government, strategic, forward-looking industry policy—the State's first industry mission-based policy to address what are really important issues for the New South Wales economy.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But, Minister, didn't these targets already exist?

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Point of order: These are obviously important issues being raised by the honourable member that deserve a decent answer. The Minister is seeking to answer them and the member then keeps talking over him and asking another question. I ask that he be allowed to simply complete his answers.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** To the point of order: I am asking clarification questions, given the Minister has repeated a lot of the things that he is saying. I'm trying to get to some of the detail in his answers.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Further to the point of order: A clarification question requires a clarification answer.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That's the problem.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** I ask that the Minister be allowed to clarify.

**The CHAIR:** What I'll say is that there has been quite a bit of both the Minister and the member speaking over the top of each other. That wasn't the first instance that that was happening. I remind both of you that that makes it very, very difficult for Hansard in regard to the transcript. Let's make the questions nice and clear, and let's make sure that the Minister is given adequate time to answer.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, what is the point in restating the targets that the Government has already announced?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The industry policy, as I said, is strategic, forward-looking document which keeps all government departments focused on addressing very important societal challenges that we have. It provides better coordination and collaboration. It is consistent and provides clarity for the industry and for the private sector to work with Government to address these issues. The targets that are set are ambitious. They involve national agreements which may have been agreed around the housing targets, for example. There are also some State targets that are in there regarding our social and affordable housing and our consumer and energy and infrastructure energy road map and also the transport rolling fleet emissions.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you familiar, Minister, with the 2022-23 budget reply speech that the then Opposition Leader and now Premier Minns gave, where he promised that an elected Labor Government would set a target of 50 per cent minimum local content for future rolling stock contracts by the end of Labor's first term? Do you stand by that commitment?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It is a commitment that's detailed in the document. It is under the local manufacturing target. Manufacturing is an important sector for the Government. The records do show—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Can I just draw your attention to the discrepancy which is that the Premier said he would implement that by the end of Labor's first term but this policy is that it is 50 per cent local content by 2035.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The target that is set is meeting an election commitment that we've got while guarding local content, and we'll continue to ensure that manufacturing is stimulated in that way. I think you have misunderstood the document, and you've misunderstood the policy. We want to make sure that manufacturing, which, in all fairness, as the statistics show, went backwards over the past decade, which has had significant impact, in particular on regional communities—so we are trying to restimulate the manufacturing

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effort, setting clear guidelines using the powers of procurement to make sure that we continue to reach these guidelines. Manufacturing is not a flick on, flick off industry. It does take time to build up the foundations.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What part of this policy are you responsible for?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** My responsibility is to address a whole-of-government approach to ensure—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But do you have KPIs that you can be measured against?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** —that all government departments and all programs are continually monitored and validated to ensure that we meet these particular missions.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So you're going to evaluate and monitor these goals?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** On page 46, I refer you to the evaluation programs that the Government is running.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But are you responsible for those, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We're all responsible to make sure that we work together to reach the ambitious targets that were—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How much did this policy document cost?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm happy to ask the deputy secretary to answer that, but I understand that most of that was actually internally resourced. Deputy Secretary?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, thank you. We did do most of the policy development in house. The only part that we used an external consultant for was running an industry consultation round table. We used the James Martin Institute for Public Policy for that, and that engagement cost \$22,000.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** They didn't listen to your four-by-four by five suggestion, obviously. Have you been able to secure any finance through ERC or Cabinet to support this policy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** First of all, a number of policies already have resources attached to them. They're in appendix A. I'd refer you to read that. It's actually a very good, detailed list of some of the resources that are available, but all budget considerations go through the normal budget process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Will you have any budget associated with this policy document?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The budget process will go through the normal ERC budget process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But what will you go through the budget process to fund?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I just said, I'm not going to—future programs. The policy will guide future programs that the Government may consider, and all budget bids will go through the normal ERC process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'm just trying to understand what the point of this industry policy is if you've not got any budget behind it.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Once again, I think you've managed to misread and misunderstand it simultaneously.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is my understanding correct, then, that there is very little in the way of new information, because all of these targets are actually monitored and administered by other Ministers, and that, according to appendix A, the budgets that are associated with them are not in your purview? I'm really trying to understand what the point of this document is if there is no funding and there is no particular policy that you are responsible for. Is my understanding incorrect?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, your understanding is totally incorrect.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How is that? You're saying there's no policy or budget.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Your understanding is totally incorrect. What this is about is, you create a coordinated, clear strategy for government—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** No, it's a policy. It's not a strategy; it's a policy, Minister.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I disagree with that assessment.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You're calling it a strategy. This is the industry strategy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Let's not get into semantics.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I think it is quite important, because you in fact have been in a semantic game with this. Is this a strategy or a policy? I understand there is a trade and investment strategy in addition to this industry policy.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** You're misunderstanding the document. You misunderstand the policy and the strategic framework that I have set with the industry policy.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So this is a strategic framework?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** You can play word games if you like.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'm not trying to play word games; I'm trying to be clear.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** Order! I will hear the point of order.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** The length of the questions are often longer than the answers being provided by the Minister. I ask that courtesy be extended to the Minister to provide some answers to what are often lengthy questions.

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** Further to the point of order: Simply repeating a question doesn't actually aid in the conversation.

**The CHAIR:** I do agree about the repeating aspect of it. There is no rule about the length of the questions or the length of the answers. I remind the member to allow the Minister to complete his answers.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, in your media release in September 2023 about the Innovation Blueprint, you said, "There's no room in the budget for spending that might not be delivering for the people of New South Wales." Have you determined that investing in your industry portfolios and this policy is not delivering for the people of New South Wales, or have you actually just not been able to convince your Cabinet colleagues that anything in here is worth funding from your portfolio?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We continue to fund programs that support the industry policy initiatives.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Could you outline what those are, please, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** They'll go through the normal budget process. I'm not here to outline Cabinet decisions that are being made. The industry policy sets a clear direction. There are a number of programs that already are being funded. For example, the Government has already committed \$8.4 billion into social and affordable housing. That's not a small ticket item.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But it's not your portfolio, Minister.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** This is about setting a strategic framework—a whole-of-government, giving clarity and certainty both within government and outside government. I'd encourage you to read the comments that have been made by those within the sector that have actually welcomed the Government's new approach to industry policy to address some really important societal challenges that the New South Wales economy is facing.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I think I am getting different feedback to you, Minister. I don't think you would like me to read out the feedback that I've been receiving. Did you ask your advisers or any departmental staff to request an extension to the return date of the SO 52 for the Innovation Blueprint documents, which are due on 12 March, next Wednesday?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I understand you've asked for the SO 52 and documents are currently being gathered or collated for you. Once that's finalised, you are welcome to peruse them, of course.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That wasn't my question. My question was have you asked your staff or the department staff to request an extension?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You haven't asked anybody in your staff to request that extension?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Not that I'm aware of.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Could you please confirm if you've been able to secure any finance to support the Innovation Blueprint?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Innovation Blueprint will be released shortly. I welcome you to read the Innovation Blueprint once it is released.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When will it be released?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Shortly—in the next few weeks.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** In the next few weeks?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** In a few weeks, yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** We know that the four I's framework has been scrapped. What I'm asking is not so much about the substance as about the funding and the investment that the Government is putting into the Innovation Blueprint. Have you able to secure funding through ERC and Cabinet for any policy programs in the Innovation Blueprint?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Innovation Blueprint will be released shortly. I encourage you to read it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So it will have funding proposals and policy that is attached to funding?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government said it will be releasing its Innovation Blueprint shortly and that any budget decisions regarding programs go through the normal budget bidding process. We will continue to follow that process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So far that normal process has led to no funding in this space. Can I just clarify—in your policy framework document here, where it says it's a policy, not a strategy, it notes "MVP (Minimum Viable Product) Ventures 2024-2025". Could you please confirm if that will be an MVP Ventures grant in 2025 and 2026 and into the forward estimates?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government, through Investment NSW and through the OCSE, has allocated about \$100 million towards supporting the innovation sector over the forwards. The programs that are outlined on page 11, which you've just outlined will continue, are all working towards supporting the industry policy's mission objectives.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You say it will continue—

**The CHAIR:** Order! We're going to crossbench time.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* this morning there's a story about strata, once again. I wanted to ask you a few questions about that. I think I asked you last time you appeared before budget estimates about the strata manager Whitney Wang and the company PSMG. Fair Trading has suspended Mr Wang—a 10-year ban on them as a strata manager—yet it's in the paper this morning that he has been allowed to continue trading before his appeal is heard at the NCAT. How can that happen? How does a ban by NSW Fair Trading not stay in place?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I can't comment on individual cases without knowing the full details.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Let's deal with the law, then, as you and your officials are able to exercise it. How has this happened?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, the Government has moved a number of reforms regarding strata and strata managers to ensure that they behave in the best interests of the owners' corporation and the residents. Specifically on the legal technicalities of the law, I might ask the Fair Trading Commissioner to provide further advice.

**NATASHA MANN:** Thank you, Minister. NSW Fair Trading took very decisive action against Whitney Wang and PSMG. We cancelled both licences back in July for 10 years. The very next day, that was appealed in the tribunal. This is a decision that is subject to administrative review, and it was reviewed by the tribunal. The tribunal decided that the licence disqualification should not be in place, which means it has the effect that they are both back in the market, essentially. The substantive issues have been heard on 4 and 5 February, and we are awaiting the response. If the question is "Would Fair Trading prefer them not to have their licences in place now?", I think the answer is yes. We have seen enormous consumer harm. But it is an administrative decision, which is reviewable, and we are where we are. That's the framework that we have to operate in.

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**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So Fair Trading is here saying that strata manager Whitney Wang has caused enormous consumer harm. They are now trading and still dealing with consumers as a strata manager. Is there anything that NSW Fair Trading can do in terms of alerting people, or is it just standard practice at this point and consumers won't know unless they google and work things out themselves?

**NATASHA MANN:** We have alerted people. A number of the consumers are under active case management by us. They are complainants, so they're very aware—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** But if they're not complainants. Before they contact you, is there any way that you slap something on Mr Wang and his company so that, when people go there, it says that NSW Fair Trading has tried to place a 10-year ban on him? Can you do that or not?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes. There are two ways that we have done that. The first is that we've done a very broad and active social media campaign. We have worked with the associations to try to get the word out about this particular matter. It's broadly known amongst those who live in strata plans managed by Mr Wang and PSMG that this action is underway. The second way that we do it is we have a public register. If people look at the public register—it's a new feature—we have a banner where people can see that these particular people are under compliance action with Fair Trading. We are taking steps to try to alert people, to the best of our ability. We are hopeful that the tribunal decision—it was heard on 4 and 5 February. We're awaiting that decision. It's a reserved decision, but we are hoping that it is favourable to us.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, back to this, then, is there anything from your perspective that can be amended in terms of the law? Are you looking at this to see whether reform is needed so that this doesn't occur? Is that part of what you're looking at?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly the Government has initiated a number of reforms into strata.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes, I'm aware of those.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We will always continue to consider all issues to ensure that we lift the standard of strata managing agents and also to improve the level of transparency with information flows like having to disclose, ongoing, any personal relationships that a strata manager may have with a service provider. These things are certainly being considered ongoingly.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Just to be clear, after that situation—so NSW Fair Trading places a 10-year ban. Mr Wang goes to appeal it. He lodges an appeal, I assume, but it's not granted at that time, but he can still trade. Is that correct? Just very quickly because I can probably do more this afternoon on this.

**NATASHA MANN:** What happened was he went the very next day.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Just lodged it.

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, so we then appealed that stay decision.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That's the answer I'm after. So it wasn't heard but he lodged it, and that was when NCAT said, "While we consider this and while we go through this process, you can continue trading." Is that a fair—

**NATASHA MANN:** No. The decision was heard and NCAT said that the stay ought to be lifted, and so we then appealed that decision and our appeal was entertained. But ultimately the appeal came to the same conclusion, that he should continue to operate until the substantive issues are heard and determined. As I said, they were heard on 4 and 5 February. We are hoping that they will be determined very quickly.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I'm sure a 10-year ban by Fair Trading wasn't taken lightly.

**NATASHA MANN:** It was not.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** That is concerning, Minister. Will you take that back to your department to look at whether reform is needed?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, of course, Ms Faehrmann. As we continue our ongoing journey of reform in the strata sector—as I said, we've passed three tranches already in less than two years and there is ongoing work on the last phase of the statutory review. Also, as I mentioned at the last estimates, we have made some inroads into the commissions-based structure within strata as well.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I'll get to that. That's another question. The McGrathNicol report released on 26 February—I asked about the report at the last estimates, which was in September I believe. At that point, 10 September last year, there were questions around different draft versions. At the time, I was advised by you,

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Ms Mann, that it was with the legal team. That was 10 September. What has been released, of course, is the summary of findings and recommendations. That's 24 pages. How many pages was the report that was handed to Fair Trading by McGrathNicol, if that's the summary?

**NATASHA MANN:** I can't recall the number of pages, but what I can say is that the summary of the findings and recommendations—for full public exposure. The other thing that I will say is this was an internal investigation or review conducted, and ordinarily regulators would not release publicly internal reviews that we conduct for our broader investigation. On this occasion, I felt that the public interest warranted us releasing the findings and recommendations, but it is not regular to do that. This is something that is new for the regulator. I think it has been very well received by people across the community. They wanted to see what the report said, what the findings were, what the recommendations were. I know you have read it, but it is extremely disturbing to see some of those behaviours and to see really that the strata managing agents have a fiduciary obligation, they're supposed to be acting in the best interests of consumers, and they clearly on occasions don't appear to have done that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** We might get to details later today as well. Minister, what's the Government's process now to respond to any of the recommendations arising should they need government action and reform? What's the time frame for that?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, when I read the executive summary of findings, it was a concern to me regarding some of the issues that were identified with the behaviour of Netstrata. I'd also make the point in particular around the commission structure that the report—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Can I jump in? I have 30 seconds. When did you see it? As I said in my questioning, in September last year it was already with Fair Trading. How long have you had this in front of you?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, we've had ongoing discussions about the Netstrata investigation for many months but, in terms of the final executive's summary of finds, I've only received that in the last few weeks. Certainly the Government will continue to consider the findings and take any broad investigations—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I assume the department has provided not just this but hopefully maybe recommended next cause of action as a result of this report.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's correct.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I would like to think some work has already done.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The short answer is yes, the work has been done, but I'd also clearly make the point that in one of the findings regarding the commissions, Netstrata disagrees with that finding. There is a legal contestability issue here. They believe it's a service-for-fee arrangement, but the findings are commissions based. That's got to go through procedural fairness in an open contestable legal contest about which version best reflects the different versions of what that is. The findings of that are part of Fair Trading's broader investigations and what actions it may take.

**The CHAIR:** Interior designers have not been able to negotiate appropriate definitions for their work within building enclosures to be included in the proposed building bill, which I'm sure you're across. As it currently stands, they will be restricted from undertaking minor changes to non-load-bearing structural work and coordinating specialist services. Obviously this is going to impact all home renovations, slowing down the process and also increasing the costs. Are you able to provide an update on what is actually happening in this space and how you plan to address the issues that interior designers are facing?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, I have been engaging with the Interior Designer Association about their work as part of the Government's building bill reforms. They have raised a number of issues regarding their work and their scope of work. Firstly, I can say that we are considering introducing some mandatory licensing for interior designers on residential buildings. But the scope of what interior designers are able to perform, that is not expected to change as part of our building reform agenda, but they're conversations we'll continue to have. If you'd like further information, I'm happy to ask the Building Commissioner to elaborate.

**The CHAIR:** I may come back in the afternoon if that's alright. Minister, I don't know if you saw the article that was published earlier this week by the CEO of the Design Institute of Australia. I'm happy to provide a copy of that if you don't have one with you. I just want to read an extract from that to you. She said:

... the unwarranted lack of recognition for interior designers, is yet another stumbling block in the way of improved housing supply and affordability ...



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The current transition to a new building code in NSW presents a unique opportunity to rectify the oversight that has caused the sidelining of interior designers, and which is contributing to further pressure on the timeliness of building approvals, housing affordability and supply.

Minister, surely you agree that in the midst of a housing crisis the last thing the Government should be doing is creating roadblocks or expenses for that construction process. This is a time we really need all hands on deck to accelerate new housing. Have you had any briefings or advice on the impact that this is actually having on the delivery of new housing? I know you said that you believe the scope is not expected to change. Have you had any briefings as well and advice on the effect of that—by not actually changing the scope and making sure that interior designers can do the work that they've been qualified to do?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Our building bill reform, which is currently going through the drafting as a result of the consultation process, there was a request to extend, which the Government agreed to. Certainly the whole principle or premise of what we're trying to do in the building bill is to streamline, harmonise and remove as many regulatory barriers as we can so that housing supply—I would add quality housing supply—can continue. The work of interior designers is a part of that. We don't want to impose any further regulations that may inhibit our goal to supply housing. But also an important focus of professions within the housing space is also risk-based. We want to make sure that those trades or professions who are in a much more riskier part—for example, the structural, the electrical or the plumbing—get properly and appropriately licensed and regulated, because it does impact the safety of residents, and the safety and the confidence of the home buyer as well.

In terms of the work of interior designers, as I said, we are proposing to provide mandatory licensing for them in the residential sector. We're also mindful that as it moves up the classes—that is, from class 1 to class 2—the complexity in the building structure increases significantly. Hence, we want to make sure there is trust and confidence and appropriate regulatory standards which maintain the level of safety for residents and bring in confidence and trust to the sector. We will continue to liaise with the DIA as part of our reforms in the building bill.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, my understanding is that the industry agrees with the idea of licences, but I think it's also important to recognise that there wasn't ever any incidents or concerns around safety. We're talking about people who have rigorous training and who have worked in this space for decades. Their clients are being forced to engage with other areas for really simple things which interior designers are more than capable of doing but are now being really restricted from being able to do. My understanding is this is clearly not a safety issue that's happened. I understand these issues existed prior to your appointment as Minister; this was an oversight in the regulatory framework that caused red tape, which needs to be resolved so that interior designers can do the work that they're very capable of doing. Will this be a priority that will be rectified, so that we can remove the red tape and fix the oversight in the regulatory framework that was put into place prior to you taking on the portfolio?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly the views of the DIA will be taken into consideration as we finalise reforms of the building bill. I'm advised that the DIA has been part of the architecture and design licensing working group to ensure that the regulations we implement reflect a balanced approach when it comes to regulation which doesn't inhibit housing supply—quality housing supply, I would like to reinforce. As I said, that's an ongoing conversation we're having.

**The CHAIR:** As I've raised previously, there is a real gendered element to this issue as well. Women make up 81 per cent of Australian interior designers, and recognising interior designers in the new building bill will be a significant boost to females participating in the construction industry. I know the Minns Government has invested \$20 million in their Women in Construction program. Yet, at the same time, another whole group of women in the interior design space are currently being pushed out of the industry because of the oversight. How are you working to reconcile this where, at one moment, we've got investment to make sure there are women in construction but, at the same time, we've got this major oversight and red tape that is pushing interior designers out of the construction industry—which is a predominantly female industry?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** From my discussions with the DIA, I'm aware that interior designers by profession are predominantly females. We are encouraging more women to get into the construction sector in general, including into residential construction. As I said, the work that we're doing in the building bill is risk based and making sure we harmonise building regulation reforms to make it easier for the sector to do its work, to ensure that we can bring trust and confidence back to the system. The work of the DIA is a part of conversations that we're having. I don't believe those to be mutually exclusive events—the work that we're doing with the DIA and the work of the building bill. I think these things must work in unison to ensure we can continue to deliver building regulations that are going to be long term, that are going to be risk based and that really focus on the areas to make sure we don't have some of the legacy issues that we're dealing with at present.

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**The CHAIR:** Minister, can I get a commitment from you that, as this bill goes forward, interior designers are really considered, particularly around the scope of their work, and that you are open to consider how the changes made prior to your appointment are affecting that industry and what changes will need to be put in to—as I said, my understanding is there's a lot of support for things like a licensing system, which you mentioned. Of course that doesn't overcome some of the problems that have been put through previously. Can I get a commitment from you that you will make sure that we find a way through that red tape to make sure that we actually protect this industry and protect those who are working in this industry?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The short answer is yes, of course, Chair, we will continue to engage with the DIA. Can I also take this opportunity to thank the DIA for their positive engagement with the Government. In any consultation process, there is never going to be universal agreement with everybody. I think it is just about finding the balance, finding what actually works and making sure we stick to the principles of what the reform is actually about—quality building, trust in the market, improving standards and making sure that those regulations are not inhibiting a quality supply onto the market.

**The CHAIR:** When can we expect an update regarding the next steps of the new building bill and a resolution of the issues actually facing interior designers?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I just said, the department and the Building Commission are currently working through the submissions that we've received. There has been quite a number of submissions—I think over 100 submissions. We want to give each one of those submissions a due process and careful consideration. Certainly, if you would like a briefing further down the track, we'd be happy to organise that for you.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Thank you, Minister and witnesses, for attending. I thought I would start with the model constitution and turn to clause 9 and the resolution of internal disputes. It states:

- (1) The following disputes must be referred to a Community Justice Centre within the meaning of the Community Justice Centres Act 1983 for mediation ...

I won't read the rest. The Government announced that Community Justice Centres are closing on 30 June. What advice has been provided to the incorporated associations in New South Wales who use the model constitution? When was the advice provided and, if not, why not?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Can I just clarify, with community justice, is this relating to strata or Corrections? I am a little bit unclear on what this particular function relates to in a particular portfolio. Are you able to clarify that for me?

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** It is mainly with Fair Trading. Fair Trading provides the model constitution. But it can be for disputes where there is no resolution. The model constitution states that if you haven't got a resolution, go to a community justice centre, basically:

- (a) a dispute between 2 or more members of the association, but only if the dispute is between the members in their capacity as members ...

You can read it.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Can I first make a couple of points? Where possible, the Government does try to provide mediation, support and advice when there are differences between individuals or organisations within, for example, the property sector. For example, Project Intervene is one of the projects that we have that tries to take disputes that are going to the court to try mediation. I think it has been a good success. It's an important function of what we do. As you know, legal disputes can be not only financially really hurtful, but also emotionally draining. We do have models to try. Specifically, that is quite a technical legal issue. I might ask the Fair Trading Commissioner to provide some answers that might address some of the issues that you've raised.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** If that's the case, I might come back to that in the afternoon.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Of course.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'll put that aside for this afternoon. I'll turn now to the Strata and Property Services Commissioner. The position is vacant, I believe, with the departure of Mr John Minns. He resigned, citing the lack of adequate budget and resourcing. Is that something that you as Minister would agree with?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No, because the Government has just invested \$8.4 million in the Strata and Property Services Taskforce to implement the Government's strata reforms to obviously inform, enforce and conduct audits. I don't agree with that assessment. Regarding any employment arrangements with the former

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Strata and Property Services Commissioner, he is an employee of the department. I'm happy to ask the secretary to provide any commentary.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I might come back to that in the afternoon instead. With regard to the commissioner position, has a recruitment process for a new commissioner commenced?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I am advised that that's correct.

**GRAEME HEAD:** Yes.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** When will the commissioner be appointed?

**GRAEME HEAD:** My understanding is that the period of advertisement has closed now, so the applications are being assessed. I don't know what the specific date for interviews is at this stage, but basically it's happening now and there should be an appointment shortly.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, you mentioned the \$8.4 million investment into this taskforce. Does this taskforce exist yet?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, it exists.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** What will be their annual budget?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The allocation of \$8.4 million is over the forwards, so if you divide that by four—if my maths is correct—you get \$2.1 million.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** That's \$2.1 million per annum?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** If you've got \$8.4 million and you're dividing it by four, what has the initial funding allocation been spent on?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The work of the Strata and Property Services Taskforce is to bring together some specialists. We obviously need the human capital to conduct the work that the Government is implementing regarding its strata reforms. It's both compliance and enforcement but also educative as well to ensure that the sector is aware of the new rules and the new reforms that the Government has implemented.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** In the afternoon I might ask more about the taskforce, but I want to turn now to underquoting. Again, there is a taskforce for underquoting. We haven't really heard anything since August 2024. What is the current status of this?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Underquoting, as part of the establishment of the Strata and Property Services Taskforce, is a priority. We've been engaging with the sector about how to lift the standards. I can also advise, in terms of underquoting, that almost 380 inspections were conducted in the 2023-24 year.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Sorry, how many?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** There were 379, to be exact, in the 2023-24 financial year.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Of those, how many have been prosecuted?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I understand there have been a total of 148 breaches, and the value of the penalty infringement notices equates to about \$143,000.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Is the taskforce investigating measures to strengthen underquoting laws? That's quite a big number. Or is it just a big enforcement crackdown?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Underquoting is an issue that was raised with the taskforce and stakeholders. Can I also add that, in terms of underquoting, we currently have legislation and laws in place that prohibit underquoting. An agent must give a reasonable price to a buyer, and that price must be backed up by evidence. Last year we conducted a number of campaigns. I recall four. About 95 infringement notices were handed out. We will continue to work with the sector. Part of the solution to prevent underquoting is regulatory; the other is the standards of behaviour amongst agents. That's why our close engagement with the REI is an important function to lift the standard and ensure that agents, particularly new agents, are aware of their legal responsibilities when it comes to underquoting and that there are significant penalties involved for those who are found—and they will be prosecuted—for underquoting practices.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** But, at this point in time, underquoting—it shows it's still going on. There doesn't appear to be any slowing down. You say there is action, only because you have said it today, but there doesn't appear to be any visible action.

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I said there are strong laws in place, regarding underquoting. It is against the law to deliberately underquote, and there are significant financial penalties involved for those who are found to have underquoted. But I said part of the longer term solution is both regulatory and also lifting the performance in standards, and that's why our engagement, our work with the industry and the sector, to lift the standard, to lift the performance, to make agents aware of their legal responsibilities to the market and to a potential buyer is really important. It has to be a multifaceted approach when it comes to addressing underquoting.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Are we waiting for the appointment of the new commissioner before we get more-rigorous reforms put in place?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No. The work in underquoting is ongoing. As I mentioned, we conducted four enforcement campaign blitzes last year. I recall 95 penalty notices were issued. So we do take this issue seriously. It came out of our engagement with the sector through the taskforce and the work of the taskforce. The work is always ongoing, and the recruitment process for the commissioner is a matter for the secretary, but that doesn't preclude the good work that the department is already currently doing.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Will we see any legislation in this current term to deal with this?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We will continue to consider what are the best approaches. As I said, it's not just regulatory. It also has to be about normative behaviours of agents—to lift the standard, to make sure they are aware of their legal responsibilities to potential buyers. So we need to tackle this issue on multiple fronts. But if you are asking me, "Is the Government considering further reform?", we will always consider further reforms to bring greater transparency and confidence back to the market.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you consider, say, \$2,200, as the average fine, to be an effective deterrent when real estate commissions on average can exceed, say, \$40,000 or \$2 million on homes?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, we'll be on the ongoing journey of reform. Whether those penalty notices are adequate or not—

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** So "watch this space"?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We will continue to consider all those. But, as I said, regulation has to be part of other arms of how we improve the standards of performance. In all fairness, I would prefer not to hand out any penalty, or the department would prefer not to hand out any infringement notice, because it means that people are operating according to the law and actually lifting the performance and the standards.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** So "watch this space", in other words. I now want to turn to the construction industry. We are seeing a lot of construction companies battling to stay afloat, and it is by far the worst performing in, say, the whole of Australia. Why do you think this is so, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's no secret that the residential construction industry has experienced significant difficulties. Namely, the cost of finance has been extremely difficult for a lot of builders to get through, but there are also issues around skills shortages, which have been building up for quite some time, and also the change in cost of materials. These are the core factors which have put significant pressure on the sector. But one of the ways the Government is working on its reform is to actually improve the level of standard of quality build to prevent builders from having to retrofit the works that they have done, which, of course, will release labour to the market, will actually improve the cash flow of builders. You may be well aware that to potentially retrofit a building work the second time can cost up to 12 per cent of the original capital cost. That's not an insignificant amount for a company that's, obviously, got lower margins and doing it tough in a very tough economic environment. We need to make sure that the quality standard is there, the regulatory frameworks are there. If there's more confidence in the market, I think more builders, more construction companies will want to come onto the market because they know buyers have greater confidence in the sector.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I acknowledge everything that you have said there, Minister, in terms of construction companies. You've got in place TODs, so we really need to keep up with building. There have been a lot of insolvencies. What safeguards or supports are being considered to prevent further collapses? Given all of those things that you have just said—cost of living, increase in building and construction, and skills shortages—but having to also want to build all these houses, New South Wales has a target. It doesn't appear that the Government is investing in this industry at all.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I have to respectfully disagree with that assessment. I think the Government is doing significant work in the housing space. It is a top priority for the Government and it is the work of the planning Minister to reduce regulation in the housing supply space. As you know, transport oriented development is an important part of delivering more of the missing middle, shall we call it, generally, and the work of the HDA to speed up development applications. In addition, in my portfolio, there is the work of the

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building reforms to improve standards, to increase quality and to bring confidence back to the market on top of how people live, whether it is through strata or through rental reform. That is part of the Government's whole suite to ensure that the housing agenda is being managed and the reforms are afforded in each one of those aspects.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I understand that, Minister. You've outlined the difficulties and the different departments that you are trying to spread it across, but what specific measures is the Government implementing to support small- and medium-sized businesses struggling with rising building and construction costs and interest rates?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government doesn't control interest rates or the cost of finance, but what we are trying to do is bring confidence back to the market, which is really important. Our building reforms have seen an uptick in the level of quality builds. I think for any investor or any company, what they are after is regulatory certainty and regulatory clarity, which is what the Government is actually delivering both in my portfolio space and also my colleague the planning Minister.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you believe it's enough to give the industry confidence to continue to invest and that home builders will have the confidence to build in such a challenging environment?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, our reform has not only clarified the regulatory framework but we have actually taken a number of steps, as I said, to speed up the DA process and to make sure there is quality build in the market. You can talk about supply and demand in the market but, at the core of it, it's actually about confidence and trust. If a home buyer doesn't believe or is unsure that they are going to get a quality build, which would be the biggest investment in their lifetime for 99 per cent of Australians, they won't come into the market and there will be no activity. That's why our reforms, both through the planning Minister and the building reforms that we are currently going through, will give the market the clarity and the certainty in the regulatory framework that it actually needs.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I understand that. As Ms Faehrmann alluded to this morning with regard to the push to clean up the strata industry, that's just one part of it. I don't believe that, say, owners in these strata schemes are given any confidence when you would think that the appointment should have been made by Fair Trading of a qualified person to run the business while the appeal is on foot. There are so many strata owners affected by that. I don't think that there is any confidence in what you are doing here.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, the Government has moved three tranches of strata reform in less than two years. Some of those are about making sure strata companies work better. As I said, the standards are now set for strata managing agents to ensure that they disclose any conflicts of interest, that they disclose the commission breakdowns for insurance work that they have done and that they disclose any conflicts of interest or personal relationships they have with a supplier. That is a huge confidence booster for residents and for the owners' corporation that strata managing agents are acting in the best interests of residents. I do think that the Government's reform has actually really given the boost and the confidence that the strata industry needs. The reform has been long coming, in all fairness; I wish some of these reforms had been done even prior to our election to office. In addition to the reforms, there are also significant punitive measures in place for those who are found to have deliberately contravened the new strata laws that we have.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Just on that, with the NCAT focus, from this article, it appears to favour eight staff over 500 schemes in allowing an appeal process where somebody—a strata manager—is allowed to continue to operate whilst on appeal. That doesn't give anybody any confidence, especially the owners.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Like I said, I'm not privy to the article that you're referring to but what I do know is that the Government has moved significant reform to improve the standards of behaviour and to improve the level of disclosure when it comes to strata managing agents, in addition to increasing the punitive and penalty measures in place for those who are found to have contravened the law.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill 2024 introduced new provisions regarding animals in rentals that were due to commence on proclamation. Can you provide an update on when those provisions will actually commence? When will proclamation be?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, I can provide an update on that. At the moment, we are going through the consultation process of the drafted regulations regarding pets and regarding no grounds to make sure that it actually works in practice. Now, I'm advised that that finalisation of those draft regulations should be completed by the end of the month.

**The CHAIR:** So we can expect the actual commencement around late April?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, once it has been gazetted and the draft regulations have been signed off, which I mentioned is at the end of this month—that's the expectation—then we also want to go through

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a very short education campaign across the sector to make sure that those within the sector are aware of the new rules. We want this to be the smoothest transition possible, given the significance of the rental reforms that the Government has implemented.

**The CHAIR:** Great. That consultation on the draft regulation section is happening right now?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's correct.

**The CHAIR:** Who has Fair Trading consulted with? Does it include groups like RSPCA, Animal Welfare League, Lucy's Project and the Tenants' Union?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm happy to ask the Rental Commissioner to identify which specifically, but I do know that our consultation process is always extensive to make sure that voices within the sector—both those in the property and those in the advocates—get their opportunity. I might ask Ms Jones to further enlighten.

**TRINA JONES:** I can confirm that all of those stakeholders have been involved. It's an iterative process. We've had roundtables but we've also had workshops, particularly on the pet guidance. We have a range of pet welfare organisation, property management experts and tenant advocates involved in those sessions so we're really trying to do that in line with the people who will be most impacted.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Jones. Minister, you'll recall that when those groups were consulted on the primary legislation their feedback was rejected, essentially, and the bill that came forward was very different to the consultation draft. Is there a risk that the same outcome will happen here with the regulations—that those groups won't actually have their concerns heard?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No, all groups will have their concerns heard and I will always take on board the comments and the advice and suggestions that every stakeholder has. As a government, we have to listen to those across the spectrum and we have to deliver a package that is balanced, that is reasonable and that is also practicable as well. In short, yes, of course we will consider those thoughts and those suggestions, but the final package that the Government will deliver will ensure that is balanced and practicable.

**The CHAIR:** We'll now go to questions from the Government, if they have any. No questions?

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Chair, just on an unresolved issue, can I get my document tabled please?

**Document tabled.**

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

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to budget estimates.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I turn to the issue of fire doors. I've been approached by the fire brigade union, and Fire and Rescue NSW also have concerns, about fire doors with activated bolts. Fire and Rescue NSW has said that, during a fire, these are activated to secure the door shut by locking into the door frame. They suggest that manufacturers are using fire bolts as a shortcut to pass fire resistance requirements under the Australian standards. Firstly, are you aware of this issue?

**The CHAIR:** Fire safety is important to the Government.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Of the particular bolts on the door.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** For this particular issue, I might ask the Building Commissioner to answer because it's quite a specific one.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The risk, of course, is that they're bolting at certain degrees in fire and occupants and firefighters can be locked inside or outside a building as a result.

**JAMES SHERRARD:** Yes, I can answer all those questions. The fire bolts, you're correct, fire out of the fire door and secure the door once the temperature gets to 200 degrees in that local area. We've had a number of meetings with Fire and Rescue about fire doors. Indeed, we're hosting a workshop on fire bolts and fire doors at our initiative, co-hosting with Fire and Rescue, in the next couple of weeks. The issue, as you correctly point out, is the question of access. As far as a safe and compliant system, that's not in question at this point in time, although there is some debate over the certification of them. But the question really is can the fire brigade access after that area cools down in order to get to other areas, so we're working on it at this point in time.

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**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I understand the same concerns have been raised by the ACT Fire and Rescue, and Fire Rescue Victoria, as well as in the industry forums. I think there's no doubt about the risks that they could keep, for example, occupants or the firefighters locked inside a room if they lock at the wrong time. Does the Government know in which buildings these fire doors have been installed? Has a paper trail been established so that, if there does need to be urgent remediation, something can be done?

**JAMES SHERRARD:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I have heard a number of people talk about this as potentially the next kind of flammable cladding saga, they're that concerned about it. Minister, have you been briefed on this matter?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** On this particular matter?

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think in the fire doors one, fire safety is a part of the national construction and the building Minister's remit as a general topic.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Possibly.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** In terms of the fire doors, that hasn't been raised, but certainly we can take that on notice to make sure we continue to examine the issue.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Minister, I'd also suggest that you request an urgent briefing as opposed to just taking the issue on notice, given the serious concerns.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Of course.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Back to the report and Netstrata contesting findings. I think you might have mentioned before "different versions". In relation to this report, were you referring to different versions of the report or different versions of findings that Netstrata is quibbling over?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No, different interpretations of the findings. That is, the McGrathNicol report raises the issue of commissions that I believe hasn't been properly disclosed. But Netstrata say no. Their view is that it's not a commission; it's a fee for service. Therefore, it's a contestable arena here—one saying black, one saying white. So that process to determine what is the more accurate version will have to go through a legal contestability framework.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** For example, under section 2.2 of the report, on page 2 of the Summary of Findings and Recommendations, it states that Netstrata was provided "with the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report before it is finalised". Ms Mann, in the September budget estimates I asked you the question, has Netstrata been involved in that report as well? You replied, "They have not." Why is this report seeming to contradict what you told me?

**NATASHA MANN:** There's no contradiction. At the time of budget estimates, they had not received or reviewed the report but, pursuant to the public undertaking, they were afforded the opportunity to do that, and they have done that subsequently. I will say that after they provided their response to McGrathNicol, McGrathNicol's findings went from six breaches up to nine breaches, so it actually had the opposite effect. That's the reason and the timeline of it.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** On 10 September last year, you said the first draft report was delivered to the legal team in Fair Trading "late last week".

**NATASHA MANN:** That's right.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** You're saying that between that time and the time of release of this, which was a week or two ago, was when Netstrata first got the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report before it was finalised by the independent investigator?

**NATASHA MANN:** That's correct. I've got a timeline here, if it would help clarify the matter.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Yes, thank you, because they provided a 67-page response on 1 November.

**NATASHA MANN:** As I mentioned at the last hearing, I had received the first draft of the report on 5 September. Netstrata was provided the report on 2 October. They provided their response to McGrathNicol on 1 November. That's the first time that they were able to do that—sorry, on 2 October it was provided to them; on 1 November they provided comments. As I said, that then resulted in the number of breaches that McGrathNicol found increasing from six to nine. Then the summary report was sent to them on 17 February. They responded

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within two days on 19 February and, again, that's pursuant to the undertaking. The final report was issued to me on 25 February, and I released it the next day, on 26 February.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I've got some more questions about animals in rentals. Will the regulations that we were discussing before be approved by Cabinet or is that a final approval decision just with you as Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I understand it, it will just be based on the regulations to me as Minister, which will go forward to be finalised and then approved. As I mentioned, we want to make the smoothest transmission possible. These are significant reforms and the regulations obviously examine the practicality of how we implement those reforms. Therefore, an educational campaign or partnership across the sector will be part of it.

**The CHAIR:** Will they be made available for public consultation before they're finalised, at any point?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We're going through the consultation as we speak now.

**The CHAIR:** But a public consultation? Will they be made public? I haven't seen a copy, for example. Is that something that will be made available to people before it's finalised?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** My understanding of the procedure is that we are going through the consultation process at the moment to have it finalised so we can implement the Government's reforms as soon as possible.

**The CHAIR:** That will be a closed consultation process rather than a public consultation process?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's open and closed, I suppose, in one sense. It's open to all stakeholders who are engaged with Fair Trading as we implement these reforms. But if we were to go through a broader public consultation, I think that would significantly delay the implementation of the reforms. What the Government wants to do is implement these reforms as quickly as possible, making sure that the transition is smooth so that if there are things that require further change we'll make them as we go. I'm happy to offer you a briefing, if that would help.

**The CHAIR:** That would be good, thank you. When do you expect the consultation to be finalised? You have a bit of a timeline around the consultation process?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The consultation process will be finalised shortly, and it will be formalised by the end of the month. I'm happy to ask the Rental Commissioner to give an exact date, if that would help.

**The CHAIR:** I might speak with her this afternoon. We've got a few more questions. Can you explain any options that tenants will have under the new regime? For example, if they're concerned that their landlord or potential landlord is not complying with the new rules regarding animals and rentals—and I know, within the strict terms of the legislation, that going to the tribunal was their only option, and I know that you know my concerns around that, given the power imbalance between tenants and landlords that's already in place—are there going to be any other ways to safeguard tenants? Have you asked, for example, Fair Trading or the Rental Commissioner to offer support to tenants to help with assisting with landlords, investigating reports for any wrongdoing on behalf of landlords, or anything like that outside of that tribunal process, which is quite a big step to take?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The short answer is yes, Chair. That's mainly through the Rental Taskforce, which the Government has established and allocated \$8.4 million working towards. It's both a compliance and enforcement and an educational role to ensure that the sector is aware of the new rules so that we can have the smoothest transition possible on what is a significant reform.

**The CHAIR:** So tenants can actually go to that body if they have concerns that landlords are not following the rules, and they could go to them prior to going through the tribunal process.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, we would always prefer things not to go to the tribunal because it is time-consuming for both sides, and it's better to try to mediate and at least clarify the new rental reforms. Certainly, that's one of the roles of the Rental Commissioner and also the taskforce that's been established.

**The CHAIR:** I'd also like to ask you some questions about short-term rental accommodations and the short-term rental accommodations register. Are you able to advise how many enforcement actions have been taken with respect to breaches of the code of conduct for short-term rentals?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I might ask the Fair Trading Commissioner, in terms of code of conduct breaches, or the Rental Commissioner.



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**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, it's actually the Rental Commissioner who has those figures.

**TRINA JONES:** As it relates to the short-term rental register, that's the responsibility of the department of planning, but we certainly keep an eye on it as we are responsible for the code of conduct within Fair Trading. In terms of the contacts and responses, NSW Fair Trading holds the code of conduct. The code applies where there are issues relating to noise complaints, significant issues, and significant issues raised by another regulatory body like Local Government or the police. Last financial year we had 59 contacts, which included 17 complaints and 42 inquiries. That came under the consideration of the code. Since the code's inception, we've had 288 complaints and 627 inquiries. What I would also like to add is that this is something that my team are looking at specifically, and we're considering how we can improve our responses to the issues that may be raised under the code. We're speaking to Local Government NSW and some other larger local government areas that are impacted by issues in short-term rental accommodation.

**The CHAIR:** What sort of powers or resources does Fair Trading have available to be able to investigate potential breaches of that code of conduct? Are they able to go out and actually investigate, or are they mainly just responding to some of those complaints that come in and collating what they can?

**TRINA JONES:** The NSW Rental Taskforce will be looking at the code of conduct matters within Fair Trading going forward. The code steps out our responsibilities and our obligations as it relates to the Fair Trading Act. There are penalties that can apply, and there are enforcement actions that we can take. It includes a range of measures, from warnings, to education, to statements of complaints, to outright strikes against hosts and guests should they be deemed to be warranted. For us, we're really going to be looking at what the major risks and harms are in the community, who the offenders are, the types, and what action we can take so that we can have lasting outcomes.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Minister, do you think there is a reasonable public expectation and a responsibility for you that when people go into a supermarket in New South Wales, according to the labelling they've got on the various packaging, they can be assured that, if they follow the labelling and instructions, a product is safe, no-one is going to be injured, and none of the animals or people around them will be injured from that consumption?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Of course product safety is important. People who consume go to their supermarket and, whatever they buy off the shelves, they like to have confidence it has gone through the food and regulatory processes that have been established before those foods come on to the shelves.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Do you think it's a problem that we've got pet food products that are basically unsafe—dogs and cats choking to death—and the labelling will say in fine print, right at the bottom, "Don't leave your dog alone with this rawhide treat chew", implying if you leave them alone, they could well choke to death? You've got to stay with the dog, but not everyone reads the fine print. Would you look at the labelling of those products—Vitapet and the like—to ensure that there's a very clear, obvious instruction to the consumer about the danger involved, and it's much more than fine print so there's an awareness of what you're buying?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I believe around food standards, in particular pet food standards, it is a matter for Minister Moriarty. In terms of any consumer law aspects that Fair Trading can enforce, certainly we would consider that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** I realise that about the Food Authority, but I would have thought, in this matter, the low-hanging fruit is to at least take some responsibility for the labelling that is underway. A lot of these products are made in China or Thailand. They're made with chemicals that make the dogs vomit. The choking is the most severe problem. Haven't you got a responsibility for all the labelling of products that are sold?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That might be a very technical legal matter. Can I ask the Fair Trading Commissioner to provide Mr Latham some advice in terms of Fair Trading's role in food labelling?

**NATASHA MANN:** As the Minister said, and I reiterated earlier, Mr Latham, NSW Fair Trading actually has no remit regarding pet food regulation.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Even on labelling?

**NATASHA MANN:** No, that's right. It is the NSW Food Authority, and they have that authority by virtue of the Food Act and the food regulation. The other point I will make is Fair Trading is the consumer protection regulator, but under Australian Consumer Law we look at unsafe products for persons—for humans. Animals like pets are not within the remit of that. That's the legal situation.

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**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Minister, I think since the time of Syd Einfeld—well before your time—consumers in New South Wales have looked to the Department of Consumer Affairs, now Fair Trading, for playing a role in the safety of all these products that are available. There are nine million pets in New South Wales, and 2.3 million households own pets in our State. Would you consider simplifying this by Fair Trading taking over the pet consumption and labelling role?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I certainly acknowledge your concerns, Mr Latham, regarding pet food, but at the moment the NSW Food Authority does have jurisdiction over this matter. The Minister for Agriculture may consider this, and certainly that's something for the Government to consider.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** On a separate matter, what's the interaction between Fair Trading and the New South Wales police in a circumstance where, at a charity, someone misappropriates the funds that are raised?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, as fair trading Minister, I do oversight charities and their performance and disclosures. If there are criminal behaviours, we would work with the NSW Police Force to ensure that those who are doing the wrong thing—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Who actually does the prosecution if it gets that far?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Fair Trading Commissioner, what's the legal avenue there?

**NATASHA MANN:** It will depend on the circumstances of the case. We work hand in glove with police on these matters. If the fraud is substantial, it is likely that New South Wales police will assume prosecution. However, we also do prosecutions of fraud, both for charities but also for trust account fraud for real estate agents.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** On notice, and not the details but just the numbers, for each of the last three years, how many prosecutions have been undertaken by Fair Trading in those areas?

**NATASHA MANN:** For real estate agent trust account fraud?

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** For both the matters you mentioned: charities and real estate. You say "substantial matters". What's the cut-off there? How much money needs to be misappropriated before it becomes a police matter?

**NATASHA MANN:** There is no set threshold. It will depend on the circumstances in each case. Often, if there is an organised crime element, the police will take that on. If it's a straight real estate trust account fraud, we will retain—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** What about a fundraiser where they raise a lot of money and \$50,000 was siphoned off to a different purpose?

**NATASHA MANN:** I wouldn't like to comment on the specifics.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** How does that normally qualify?

**NATASHA MANN:** If there's a specific matter that you have, I'd very much welcome you providing me with the details of that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Thank you, I'll do that. Minister, just following up the Hon. Jacqui Munro's questions earlier, in terms of industry, what are you responsible for?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As my role is the Minister for Industry and Trade, my role is to coordinate a Government policy to bring the whole of government together, working towards the three identified missions that we've identified in the document, which are the most pressing, acute issues that are affecting the New South Wales Government.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Is there a sector that you're directly responsible for? It sounds like you're the Minister for industry coordination.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's setting the Government's strategic framework regarding industry policy and taking it on a different path, with the ultimate goal of building a much more resilient and productive economy.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In the era of DOGE, shouldn't we just abolish this industry function? It sounds ridiculous that all you do is coordinate policy and that you've got a small army of bureaucrats to do that as well.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I disagree with that assessment. This is about making sure the Government and the sector are focused. In all fairness, the public commentary from the sector has been nothing

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but supportive. You would have seen the article on InnovationAus this morning, with both Professor Roy Green at the CSIRO and Ms Esther Koh from the Centre for Policy Development coming out to support it.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There has never been a public dollar spent that Roy Green didn't like, I can assure you.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** This is where we want to go.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** NSW Labor is home to a number of high-profile AUKUS opponents, including Bob Carr, the Hon. Cameron Murphy and the Hon. Anthony D'Adam. Do you support AUKUS?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** AUKUS is a Federal Government matter.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** As the industry and trade Minister in New South Wales, you won't issue a statement as to whether you support or don't support AUKUS?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** AUKUS is an agreement between the Commonwealth, the United States and the United Kingdom. If you're asking whether I support the defence and aerospace industry, the short answer is yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Will you ask the Premier, for example, to appoint a specific defence industry Minister, given it's going to be critical for New South Wales?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Defence is a Federal matter, Ms Munro. As the Minister for Industry and Trade, I am focused on making sure there is a whole-of-government approach to stimulate our local manufacturing sector.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** If there were AUKUS benefits in New South Wales—for example, around Port Kembla or even in Newcastle—would you support that industry being developed to support AUKUS?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said—I'll repeat it—I support the defence and aerospace industry where there are opportunities to provide jobs and to grow regional economies.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And you would say that AUKUS would allow you to do that?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** AUKUS is, of course, part of the broader industry and the agreement between the Commonwealth, the United States and the UK.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you doing anything as industry and trade Minister to set up the kinds of industries that are required to support AUKUS? Are you doing any of that work?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government is doing work in the defence and aerospace industries to ensure—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** To support AUKUS?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As part of the broader framework. It may be valuable information to you that 40 per cent of the nation's defence and aerospace happens in New South Wales.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'm asking specifically about programs or initiatives that you have championed or implemented that support AUKUS.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** All of our defence and aerospace industry in New South Wales is part of stimulating not only our local manufacturing but also the IP that comes with it. The Government does a lot in supporting—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you doing anything for AUKUS or not? It sounds like you're not.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** —SMEs, in particular, in this area to make contact with suppliers and buyers to ensure we can stimulate the industry.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Other Labor States, like South Australia and Western Australia, have come out to support AUKUS. I'm going to ask one more time: Will you, as the industry and trade Minister, support AUKUS, like your Labor compatriots in other States?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** AUKUS is a national agreement. I support the national Government in its desire to provide greater security for the nation. New South Wales will play its role to ensure that we stimulate the local manufacturing industry.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Where is the trade strategy?

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As part of the Government's approach to a structured strategy, that is currently being developed.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are we going to see it?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** At the appropriate time, once it has been finalised.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Yesterday the STICs and the TICs were asked to provide feedback on the trade strategy and were given a deadline of Monday. Do you think it's appropriate that they get five days—a weekend, even?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The trade and investment strategy is part of the Government's staged approach to policy development. The Industry Policy is the overarching objective of where the Government wants to go, addressing the acute issues in the economy, being supported—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But I'm just talking about the trade strategy here. Do you think it's appropriate that our senior trade and investment commissioners received a couple of days, including the weekend, to respond to your trade strategy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The trade and investment strategy is currently going through the development process, and we'll continue to take feedback internally and externally.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So you're comfortable with our senior trade and investment commissioners being given five days, including the weekend?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm not aware—if you have a specific email or document that says that's the case, I'm happy to see it now.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'm asking if that is something you're comfortable with.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The trade and investment strategy will continue to be developed. I'm happy to ask the deputy secretary to—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But do we know when it's coming, Minister? You said originally that it was this integrated policy set of documents with strategies and they're all supposed to work together, but now we have an industry policy and not a strategy; you've called it a policy. We don't have any trade strategy. We don't have the Innovation Blueprint. When can we expect the trade strategy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, as part of the Government's approach to having a staged, clear policy development—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But it's not clear, Minister.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** —the industry policy is being supported by the Innovation Blueprint and the actual trade and investment strategy. Can I also make the point, Ms Munro, that your senior colleague the member for Oatley has criticised the Government saying that they don't need any more reports, any more strategies and any more ideas, but you're saying, "You need to do more of this." I'm a little bit confused.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** No, Minister, I am holding you to account for the promises that you have made as Minister. That's what I'm asking about. I am asking about your plans.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, the Government has a staged process to ensure the policies that are released are consistent and clear and have policy alignment.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'm glad our trading partners will be comforted by the fact that we have a staged process. Do the STICs have any KPIs or any formal review processes with you?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I might ask the deputy secretary to determine the KPI performance.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** If you don't have any KPIs associated with you, that speaks for itself.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's inaccurate. I will ask the deputy secretary to provide that.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Thank you, Minister. I'm happy—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Honestly, I'm happy to ask later.

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**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Point of order: I've been sitting and listening very intently to the exchange that has been going on. The Hon. Jacqui Munro has now interrupted the Minister mid-answer multiple times. I'd ask that you direct her to the procedural fairness resolution under paragraph 19 to treat witnesses with courtesy at all times.

**The CHAIR:** I will remind the member to allow the Minister to answer the question. I do understand that you may want to come to other witnesses this afternoon, and maybe just make sure you make that clear that you will come back to that this afternoon if you want to continue to ask questions directly to the Minister.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Ms McPhee, I'm very much looking forward to speaking to you this afternoon. Minister, have you met with Atlassian?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, I recall in an informal sense.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Informal? It's not in your diary disclosures.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, all my diary disclosures are happening. I recall meeting their head of public policy a while back. I can't recall the exact date. I've met obviously Mr Mike Cannon-Brookes and Mr Farquhar at events—for example, I think the event we held around the Dexus building down at Central.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you aware that the Premier met with Atlassian in a formal meeting on 19 November last year?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Meetings with the Premier are a matter for the Premier.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Why didn't you attend the meeting?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I've met all stakeholders, including those for Atlassian, and the Premier has met—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But you haven't had a formal meeting with them.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I've met Atlassian formally, and obviously they're part of the engagement that we've had in the development of the Innovation Blueprint.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So you have met Atlassian in a one-on-one formal meeting?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I recall, I met their head of public policy, yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How long ago was that?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I couldn't give you the exact date, but I know that it would have been appropriately disclosed.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** We're not talking about the second half of this year. Did the Premier tell you that the Sydney Startup Hub had to be closed following his meeting with Atlassian?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** One, I don't discuss conversations I've had with the Premier or anybody in public.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Unfortunately, you don't discuss enough of the things that you do in public. I'm wondering why you hadn't met with Atlassian before announcing that closure of the Sydney Startup Hub and immediately before the closure.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** One, the decision to close the Sydney Startup Hub has been supported by the sector.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** It has been supported by Atlassian, of course.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's supported by the sector, and we've had extensive engagements with the tenants down there to ensure that the framework that we wanted to deliver for Tech Central actually delivers for the people of New South Wales.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That's certainly not the feedback that we're getting about the Sydney Startup Hub tenants. They haven't actually been given the courtesy of proper engagement and actually had to reach out to you, which you admitted at the last budget estimates, before you would speak to them—almost two years into your term.

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Point of order: I take a point of order around this gratuitous commentary from the Hon. Jacqui Munro. It doesn't assist at all in the exchange of questions and it isn't, in fact, a question. I just ask you to remind her to withhold such commentary because a lot of it is quite discourteous to the witness.

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**The CHAIR:** There has been a little bit of commentary all through this morning. I ask the member to restrain.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, have you asked your department to write a Tech Central strategy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's currently being developed—as the media release that was released last year.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So this is in addition to the Innovation Blueprint?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, that's correct.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Can we expect that every innovation district will have its own strategy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We'll continue that policy development as we speak.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When you said that you wanted—there was a quote that you gave—"a clear and innovative strategy" that takes us beyond "a complex and confusing tangle of programs", can I confirm that there will be additional strategies to the ones that you've already said? I've already shown you this, reflected this back to you. How is adding more strategies that are not incorporated into the ones that you're already developing—like the Innovation Blueprint—not "a complex and confusing tangle of programs"?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Well, it's not. The Tech Central strategy that is being currently developed is about making sure there is a reshaping and realignment of the relationship between government and the sector to ensure we give policy clarity and consistency. Tech Central is focused more than just on innovation; it's actually focused on the broader precincts of how we can actually grow the sector within that precinct, whether it's the cultural aspect, the transport needs, the cultures within the organisations. I think it's more than just a place. It's part of the much broader economic structure.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When can we expect that, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We want to always take a carefully considered approach in our engagement—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** A whole-of-government approach?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** —with the sector on this particular front.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When can we expect the strategy? You're making announcements like the closure of the Sydney Startup Hub. We've got an Innovation Blueprint apparently in the works, which we were told, by your department, was actually completed last year. When can we expect the Tech Central strategy? We've got to put another deadline on something.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Like I said, we are going through the development process as we speak. We want to make sure that stakeholders are given adequate time and input to make sure that the final product meets the needs of the sector for the long run.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I think the stakeholders that you're engaging with are very, very keen for some clarity. Can you give them some clarity on when they can expect a Tech Central precinct strategy to be delivered by your Government?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's why we're going through the engagement process. It will be released when the policy is finalised.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you familiar with the Tech Precinct Cooperation Agreement?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Could you please tell me about that, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Can I just clarify—is this the agreement between Tech Central and the GCC?

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

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** If you're not sure, then how can I be sure?

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Because you're the Minister.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The impression that I get—you're not only confusing all of us; you seem to confuse yourself.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, I'm asking you a question about something that is clearly within your purview, the Tech Precinct Cooperation Agreement. I'm asking you about it because I genuinely don't know what it is. I've got this Atlassian Central Project Development Agreement signed in 2022 with the Government. It speaks about the framework agreement and the Tech Precinct Cooperation Agreement. As the Minister, I'm asking you what that is.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm advised that that particular agreement you're referring to was one signed by the former Government and Atlassian. Specific further details on that—I might ask the deputy secretary if she has further information she would like to advise.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Ms McPhee, I'll ask you about the specifics of that later. It's a \$22 million agreement, so I will get into those specifics. Minister, have you met with anyone in the planning department about the Central Sydney Precinct State significant precinct development?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think obviously we continue to meet across all of government regarding the development of the Tech Central strategy.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But have you met with anybody in the planning department about that?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I regularly take advice from, obviously, the secretary, and I regularly meet with the planning Minister to discuss a range of issues.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But have you discussed this issue?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, of course we discussed this and other issues where there are co-joining input into the policy development.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Who's leading on that?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Tech Central strategy is being led by Investment NSW.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So it's being led by you, as the Minister.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's correct.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What parts of the Central Precinct: Strategic Framework are you committed to?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We're going through the process as we speak to ensure that the policy that is finalised meets the long-term future of the sector.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You're saying that the Central Precinct: Strategic Framework that already exists is being abolished and you're doing something new?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm not saying any of that. What I'm saying is that the Government is currently developing a considered policy agenda regarding Tech Central to ensure that it provides clarity and certainty for the sector going forward.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What is the status of the Central Precinct: Strategic Framework, and what parts of that are not currently in play?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, there is a difference between the agreement. We'll continue to consider those agreements.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** No, not the agreement. This is the strategic framework, Minister. I've moved on from the agreement.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, as part of the policy development process—it shouldn't come as a surprise to you, or anybody, that we'll consider the status quo of what's happening and, therefore, we are engaging with the sector to determine where changes need to be made.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you committed to the 25,000 new jobs in the area, for example, affordable workspace for startups, and 250,000 square metres of net lettable floor space?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** All of those things will be considered as part of the policy development process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So we can't rely on your Government to deliver the 25,000 new jobs in that area?

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government will make all these considerations as it finalises the policy.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** It's very difficult, Minister. What measurable progress has been made in implementing the priorities outlined in the NSW 20-year R&D Roadmap?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Obviously R&D is important, and we'll continue to work towards that particular goal. As I say, the industry policy is a part of setting that strategic framework to ensure that we continue to provide R&D and support to the R&D sector.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But the R&D road map is in that big triangle; it's under your industry policy.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What measurable progress has been made in actually implementing those?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think one great example is the RNA manufacturing facility we're building near North Ryde. I might ask the chief scientist to provide further and specific details on the R&D work that the Government, whether through his organisation or others, is contributing to this goal.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'll ask about that this afternoon. What is the annual funding allocation for the implementation of the road map?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'll have to take that on notice, but I know OCSE, or the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer—that's an organisation—has a budget of around \$104 million, which includes both the opex and the capex.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What level of funding has been allocated to the Western Sydney Startup Hub? How did it compare to the Sydney Startup Hub?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'll have to take those specific details on notice. I think that's funding that's allocated but, as part of our innovation policy development, we'll continue to make sure that all areas in the innovation sector is properly supported.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Out of 12 meetings or so you held with companies in the second half of last year—this is the Q3 and Q4 diary disclosures—just under three-quarters of them were actually with companies that were headquartered interstate or overseas, like Zetaris, BlockTexx, Amazon and Microsoft. Are these companies more important than New South Wales based startups and scale-ups?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Why are you meeting significantly more with overseas and interstate companies rather than supporting New South Wales based companies?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We are supporting New South Wales based startups. That's why in the engagement process that we've done—including in developments around regional New South Wales in the Hunter, the Illawarra and down in the Riverina—we've engaged with small- to medium-sized businesses. We'll continue on that front.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Could you confirm with me that the MVP Ventures grant has been extended into the forward estimates?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I'm advised, it's part of the grant process going forward—the MVP, yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** The 2024-25 title of the MVP Ventures in your big triangle will be extended to next year? It doesn't just relate to that—

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The budget allocation has been provided for the MVP in the forwards.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So it will remain? That's a bit of an error in that triangle.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No, it's not an error. I think that is an incorrect characterisation. The MVP program has been funded in the latest budget allocations.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So it goes into forward estimates? How is that not an error? It says 2024-25 specifically. It doesn't go on to list any other years. People in the sector are rightly worried—after your Government has already slashed funding to it in the first place—that it's actually going to be cut entirely.



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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That, I think, is a misunderstanding. The Government is funding MVP. As records will also show, Ms Munro, prior to the Government coming into office, your Government had actually slashed \$188 million from the budget in the innovation sector.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Okay, Minister. I am glad to hear the MVP grant is going to be committed to. Can I just understand, in relation to the NSW Decarbonisation Innovation Hub, why have there been no recent public updates on the progress of projects or outcomes of the hub?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'll have to take that one on notice in terms of the hub. We support the work of the clean energy sector. That might be more appropriate for Minister Sharpe.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Have you visited the NSW Decarbonisation Innovation Hub?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I can't recall every trip or every visit that I have had over the past two years.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Just going back to something Mr Latham referenced earlier, are you responsible for the NSW Decarbonisation Innovation Hub?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That particular organisation is the responsibility of Minister Sharpe. My job as industry and trade Minister is to ensure that the Government, across all departments, is focused on the acute issues that are concerning the New South Wales economy.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Good morning, Minister. On the NSW Industry Policy that was released this month—and I know my colleague has been speaking with you in relation to this as well—did any consultants help write the policy?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I answered earlier, I think predominantly it has been an internally resourced policy development, with some external assistance more around the engagement process and coordinating our round tables. Is that correct?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** That's correct.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So not in the writing of the actual document?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's correct.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Did AI help write this document?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As in the AI group?

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** No, as in, did you use artificial intelligence? Did you use ChatGPT? It's just things like, even on the first page—forgive me, I'm a bit of a pedant—it says, "a forward-looking agenda." That is what a policy is, isn't it? Is there a backward-looking agenda? I will go past all my comments, particularly on the Premier's—well, what does he mean when he says, "New South Wales has strong advantages to become a global super power"?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, the industry and trade policy is about addressing some of the acute issues that are impacting the New South Wales economy and, going forward, making sure we take advantage of the economic opportunities that are available for the people of New South Wales.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** It's just that I am also struggling—and I did hear Ms Munro speaking about this as well—to understand the value of this document.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We will certainly have a look. I think I would also add, if I can, Ms Boyd, that external commentary around the policy, as headlined this morning, was that it is ambitious and comprehensive. It has been welcomed by stakeholders within the sector.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Fine. We will agree to disagree on whether it's ambitious or comprehensive. One of the things that particularly annoys me is the lack of reference to accessibility when it comes to housing. Again, one of the focuses of the industry policy is apparently around housing. We've had this discussion before many times in relation to disability accessibility and New South Wales's failure to adopt the National Construction Code minimum accessibility standards. Yet, yet again, we have another document that doesn't even make reference to accessibility, even though we have "safe, secure and affordable". When will New South Wales finally sign on to the National Construction Code and allow there to be new houses built for people with mobility needs?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, can I say around social and affordable housing that it's in one of our targets. As you will be well aware and as I mentioned last time, the Government is leading from the front when it comes to accessibility housing.

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**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** No, it's leading from behind. We are the only State, other than WA, to not have minimum accessibility standards in new builds.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government has been leading from the front in trying to encourage industries to meet the minimum standards, as you are well aware.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But it doesn't work; that's why it has been mandated everywhere else.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** With accessible housing, the Government, through Landcom, has met the silver standard regarding accessibility. Our \$8.4 billion investment in social and affordable housing is part of the target within the mission of the industry policy.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** But that's not what I've asked you. I've asked you why New South Wales is the only State other than Western Australia to not mandate the minimum accessibility standards for new builds?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The first point I'd make is that the Government is making engagement with the sector on this front. We did issue a paper earlier this year, and we're engaging with the sector to determine what is the best way to consider liveable and accessible housing. We've continued that work to ensure that, whilst we want to get there, we don't add any further difficult pressures on what is an industry that has gone through some difficult financial and structural times.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** The other people who are going through some very difficult financial times are people with disability in this State. We are estimating that around 20 per cent of people require accessible homes, yet every time I ask about this I get told largely nonsense about the industry and costs on the industry. I presented you at last estimates with data showing that the industry was overestimating the costs of implementing these standards by over 10 times. When it comes to people with disability, what can you tell them in relation to their ability to buy a new home that's accessible?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I would tell those in the disability sector and the advocates for people with mobility needs that the Government is working through the implementation of the liveable housing standards as part of the NCC. We are open to change, unlike our former colleagues, who outrightly rejected any standards in liveable housing for people with disability.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** So did Labor in opposition.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's a matter of fact that the former Government outright rejected any support and assistance in the residential construction sector for those with disability.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** You're both as bad as each other when it comes to people with disability.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's an assessment I disagree with. We are working through the implementation process. We are carefully considering the impacts and the changes that this will have across the sector.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Why is it that New South Wales is so different to all of the other States and Territories when it comes to this issue? Why are we so behind? This has been years and years now.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think part of it is because the former Government outright rejected the work that needed to be done.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** I think there is only so long that you can blame the former Government.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** This Government is open to those changes. These are very difficult times for the housing construction sector.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** Can I just remind you, though, that when I tried to make this change and lobbied the previous Government for this, it was Labor who voted against it and said they were worried about the impact on the industry. I don't think you can be blaming the other side for this. Why is it that New South Wales is four or five years behind everybody else when it comes to this issue?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Government is working through the policy implementation in a carefully considered way. We are acutely sensitive to the pressures within the housing construction sector. Housing is essential to the way our economy will function for the future.

**Ms ABIGAIL BOYD:** When will this be fixed? What's the date?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** This is being considered, as I mentioned. An issues paper was released early this year. Consultation is happening with the sector, and we'll continue to work through the policy development carefully.

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**The CHAIR:** Minister, I was asking earlier about the short-term rental accommodation register. I'll have some more questions this afternoon for Ms Jones, but what I've heard is that there are some major gaps and problems around the enforcement of the rules, particularly around the cap. There's a lot of confusion as to who is enforcing it, and there is confusion also about the fact that it seems unenforceable in many situations. Is that something that you have been briefed on? Are you aware of the concerns in this space and are you looking to address them?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, there was a review in the short-term rental accommodation space. This particular review is under the auspices of Minister Jackson, who is carefully considering the review outcomes and will obviously propose appropriate changes in due course. But in terms of the regulatory framework in short-term rental accommodation, it's Minister Scully, Minister Jackson and myself, whereas, from Fair Trading's perspective, it's around the code of conduct. We'll provide the appropriate input into the Government's response to the review.

**The CHAIR:** And is there a timeline for your work in that space?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I suppose the Government's response is a matter for Minister Jackson.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, according to your diary disclosures, you visited Vow food on 8 October—which is one of the several cell-based-meat startups here in Australia. Can you tell us a bit more about that meeting?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, in my role as the Minister for industry and innovation. Vow Foods is an advanced technology food company. It was important for the company, who I've engaged with and seen at a number of engagement events, to ensure that we continue to support this particular industry, in terms of its innovation.

**The CHAIR:** I think we have spoken previously about the fact that there is a major opportunity for New South Wales in this space to become a leader in the production, sale and export of cellular agriculture. But, obviously, funding is needed to really support and grow this industry in New South Wales. Did you discuss with Vow any government supports currently available or that may become available to help this industry to grow?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's not my nature to disclose private conversations I have with anybody. But, in general terms, of course, I'm always happy to articulate to stakeholders the level of grant and funding programs that the Government has as a general program, not necessarily specifically on discussions with individual organisations.

**The CHAIR:** I know that the former Liberal-Nationals Government previously gave Vow a \$25,000 Minimum Viable Product grant. Are you looking at pushing for further grants and support programs specifically targeted for this sector? Can we expect something in the upcoming budget? Or is that something that your office is pushing for?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The upcoming budget issues will go through the normal processes. Certainly, what we want to do in this space where government support needs to be more targeted and more focused in particular on areas that support the industry's mission objectives—so I think making it clearer to the sector about where the Government's priorities are, which will then be supported by its multiple policy levers, whether it is in the procurement space, in the planning and strategic land use planning space or its innovation sector, is where the Government wants to direct the limited government resources to ensure that it meets the broad objectives that the Government wants to pursue.

**The CHAIR:** Are you willing to meet with Magic Valley? They are another Australian cell-based meat producer, who is eager to set up in New South Wales. Are you open to meeting with other organisations that are working in the same space?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** All meeting requests come through the normal channel. I'd always consider those requests where the diaries actually permit.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. You mentioned the Government's priorities and fitting this into the Government's priorities. Is this an area that you see can really excel in New South Wales, given that this is an innovative and new industry right across the world? Do you see New South Wales as really being at the forefront globally on this, potentially?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, as part of our industry strategy, it is both innovation and technology but also the manufacturing space. So, certainly, it fits within the Government's priorities to determine how to stimulate where it can and also try to help these future companies grow.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank you. Minister, in a press release this week regarding Parklea, you said:

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Unlike private management, the Corrective Services NSW's operating model is not based on a profit motive, it's based on the objective to reduce reoffending following release from prison, which focuses on rehabilitation, education, and safe reintegration into the community.

In light of the risk that you identified yourself in that press release regarding private prison management, how are you going to ensure that Clarence Correctional Centre puts a priority on rehabilitation and education, rather than profit, while it remains in private hands?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, the Clarence correctional facility has an agreement with Corrections NSW to operate in accordance with that agreement. Rehabilitation and reducing recidivism is a core part of what Corrections does, and bringing Parklea back into public hands is part of making sure it's part of a wider integrated network and to also access the full suite of government resources, both in terms of education, training, the issues around Justice Health, around mental health—

**The CHAIR:** Obviously, there was the recent Ombudsman report in regards to this particular facility, and their conduct towards inmate discipline was contrary to law, was unreasonable and oppressive. I just want to understand what you are doing to address the risks here of this one prison remaining in private hands.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, I can say that the Clarence correctional facility is a contract signed by the former Government that doesn't expire, if I recall, until 2038.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that. I just want to know what risk. I understand you're in a difficult position.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, in terms of the operation, we will continue to monitor and supervise. I might ask Deputy Commissioner Mr Taylor.

**The CHAIR:** I might come back to him. I just want to know what you are doing as the Minister to address the risks and concerns. I understand you are in a difficult position with that contract. I just want to understand what the Labor Government is doing to address those risks.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Recently the Government passed legislation on the Inspector of Custodial Services, making sure inmates have greater confidence in the mechanisms for which to raise any issues of mistreatment or where they feel they have been unfairly treated. Legislatively, we have actually made the reforms to bring that confidence back into the system.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Minister, to take you to your trade role, how many of the MOUs signed probably about six years ago for the supposed investment of the aerotropolis have actually resulted in investment?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The aerotropolis would be a matter for the planning Minister. My role is to make sure we can stimulate particular sectors in and around the industry and the aerotropolis.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Have you stimulated any MOUs? I think it is true of your predecessor Stuart Ayres. He stimulated many more press releases about the aerotropolis than jobs and investment. What have you been doing in this space?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** In this space, I work closely with the planning Minister to make sure that the release of the industry policy is part of that to ensure that we have a coordinated whole-of-government approach to stimulate the sectors that are important to the New South Wales economy.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In your stimulation role, are you aware of any MOUs that have resulted in actual investment and construction at the aerotropolis?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I might ask the deputy secretary for specific advice around any MOUs we may have signed.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I can actually confirm that the Bradfield Development Authority is responsible for those MOUs, which sits within Minister Scully's portfolio.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Are you aware of any MOUs resulting in investment? I think people who work in industry, trade, innovation, science and technology would have some awareness about this. You couldn't be blind to it, surely.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I refer you to the relevant authorities to respond to those questions.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** There is a lack of a coordination role here to know what is going on. Minister, do you think, in general terms, unfortunately, the new airport at Badgerys Creek in our part of the world is being overhyped and overpromised? It will open about the size of Coolangatta and it has, in various press releases, promises and stimulations around the place—the Federal Government industrial land on the airport site itself, the Mamre Road industrial park, the Sydney Science Park, which has a nice new metro station for horses

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and cows at the moment, and the aerotropolis, which I think has one building there. Isn't it time for your Government, and you in particular, to bring this back to some sense of reality as to what's possible for investors instead of holding out all this false hope for people in the region?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As you rightly say, Mr Latham, it is in our neck of the woods. Certainly, the community of south-west Sydney changed substantially in the development and the Western Sydney airport is part of that growth. I think it will be the gateway for a lot of aeronautical flights, particularly in parts of Asia. We saw, for example, Singapore Airlines sign up to the Western Sydney airport. In my conversations with other industries, we are trying to engage more organisations to actually set up in and around the airport.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** But do you think there is any realistic possibility in our lifetime that these four large industrial and commercial areas that have been allocated on the airport site itself—Mamre Road, the science park and the aerotropolis—could possibly go close to being built out?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, we should be ambitious about it and make sure it can be finalised as soon as possible. The Western Sydney airport is a significant public investment from the Commonwealth, and the State Government is also building surrounding infrastructure, like the road off the M7, to connect it to the airport.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** In that ambition, what are you doing as Minister? What have you achieved so far in bringing jobs and investment to these precincts?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, we will continue to engage with the sector. One of the focuses that I have had as trade Minister, Mr Latham, is to access the fastest growing economic block in the world, which is the South-East Asian market.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** How many South-East Asian investors have you got for these four precincts?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Can I just finish the point that I was trying to make. For example, as trade Minister, the focus is in diversifying our export base. As you may be well aware, there is certainly heightened concentration risk within our export base, so diversifying of products to market is a focus for the Government. In good feedback that we have had thus far—for example, we are having a number of inbound buyers from Singapore and from Vietnam looking to obviously gain products from the New South Wales economy. I think part of this will hopefully be done through the Western Sydney airport, once it's finalised, as we ship goods and products out.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Have you got any tangible examples of that? Budget estimates tends to be about results rather than rhetoric. Have you got tangible examples of what you've just said?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** In terms of the fly in—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** A single job, a single investor or a single project that you, as Minister, for all these fancy titles, have brought to our very important part Sydney in these four industrial precincts.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly we are engaging with our trading partners here domestically, making our industry associations—for example, in the meetings that I've had with the meat and livestock association, I continually raise with them the opportunities to export meat and livestock products to a fast-growing consumer market, both in food and beverages. Trading relationships do take time and are part of the fundamentals to make sure you engage with your domestic businesses and your foreign buyers.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** You've had so many engagements you should be on *Married at First Sight*, Minister. Seriously, this is all just rhetoric.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'd be a pretty bad contestant, I suspect, Mr Latham.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Who's inside the Advanced Manufacturing Readiness Facility?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The AMRF is a matter for Minister Scully. It's comes under his—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** You don't know who's in there or what it's doing? I visited Bradfield. All they had was Liverpool council putting new street signs on saying it was Bradfield—hello!—and a crane building this thing. Who's in it?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I've said, the AMRF comes under Minister Scully and he'd be in the best position to answer that.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** But surely, as Minister for Industry and Trade, and Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology—this is, I assume, another wasted public investment out there in these precincts. Which companies are in this fancily named Advanced Manufacturing Readiness Facility? When I get off at

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Campbelltown station today I'd love have a loudhailer and say, "Minister Chanthivong has told me these are the great companies where you can get a job at the Advanced Manufacturing Readiness Facility." What is it, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think the Advanced Manufacturing Readiness Facility, as I said, is a matter for Minister Scully and it comes under his administrative discretion.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** That's not much of a loudhailer message. They'll throw tomatoes at me if I say that. Seriously, it's an advertisement for DOGE, isn't it?

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** If I could turn to Corrections, Minister, and ask how many Corrective Services staff were suspended on full pay over the past year?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm advised that the latest figure that I have about Corrections officers who have been suspended for a range of misconduct is about 82.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** That is the same as when I asked last year, so they're still suspended. I'll move on to my next question. Why do so many remain suspended on full pay, Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I said all staff misconduct goes through the procedural fairness process. Certainly where misconduct occurs, it will be reviewed appropriately and the appropriate actions will be taken, but it does need to go through a procedural fairness process.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** What steps have you taken with regard to this procedural fairness?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Employee and employer relationships regarding officers and where there are allegations of misconduct is a matter for the department. I'm happy to ask—

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'll ask this afternoon on that one. Minister, do you know what the cost of having so many suspended on full pay is to the budget of Corrective Services?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'll have to take that specific question on notice. I could also add as part of the reforms that the Government is implementing, the role of the professional standards investigations has now been moved out of Corrections and into the department to not only speed up the assessment of misconduct but also give it a greater sense of independence.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I might ask about that this afternoon. Minister, what is the extent of your contact with the New South Wales police commissioner on dealing with inmates being held on remand?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, Corrections obviously houses those alleged offenders who are sent by the courts. Of course we will continue to liaise very closely with the NSW Police Force. I know that the deputy commissioner, in his role as the acting commissioner, has met with the police commissioner regarding the remand intake, obviously based on the bail laws that the Government has implemented.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** The police commissioner, Karen Webb, called for an emergency meeting with the acting Corrective Services commissioner about her concerns about what she called cell ramping: inmates being in police cells for days. Did that meeting occur in reference to that?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I understand that the former deputy and currently acting Corrective Services commissioner has met with the police commissioner to discuss this very point.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Given that, can you explain why cell ramping is occurring despite there being, I presume, 918 vacant beds at the Junee Correctional Centre as of this week?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I make the point, Corrective Services don't determine the number of alleged offenders that come into the system. That's a matter for the courts. In terms of working through the remand system, one of the things that we are doing is actually bringing greater connectivity between our different remand centres. At the moment, our major remand centres are at Parklea and Silverwater. They operate on a time base depending on when alleged offenders come into remand. By actually bringing Parklea back into public hands, we'll be able to get greater connection and integration with our remand network—and also working with the NSW Police Force.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I turn to Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre. I'm really concerned that I've just heard that it is currently in partial lockdown today, with three main wings—I believe Brady, Theresa and Willett—being in full lockdown. In December there were eight full lockdown days and 22 partial lockdown days, which includes public holidays. I understand 30 out of 31 were in some form of lockdown. In January we saw four full lockdown days and 17 partial lockdowns. This is having an impact on staff. Currently there are 30 staff members on workers compensation. Today there are 17—this is just with the one

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correctional centre—on sick leave, with 10 vacancies on the roster not being able to be filled. If you cannot manage the correctional centres under government control, how do you expect to take over Junee and Parklea?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think I disagree with that last comment about the Government's ability to manage correctional facilities. They are complex and volatile environments. But, fundamentally, any operational decisions that are made are really based on the safety of our officers and also of other inmates as well. I'm happy to ask the deputy commissioner or the commissioner to further elaborate, particularly on Silverwater.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'll do that this afternoon. Minister, my concern is that, over the last 12 months, the prison population has increased but the number of prison officers has decreased. So there has got to be an impact there on both the prison population but also the prison officers. What planning did you do to accommodate the expected increase in the remand population?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** One, the Government obviously has implemented significant bail reform to keep our community safe. It is an important part of what any government does to make sure that the community feels safe and that there are strong laws in place for those who are engaged in serious offences. In terms of the remand population, yes, there was an expectation that the remand population would increase—

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, I'll just pull you up there—sorry. I was more concerned with, say, the wellbeing of the prison officers who are having to supervise the inmates and people on remand—how it's impacting their wellbeing.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly we have been planning for an uptick in the remand population. We have bed planning processes in place to ensure we are accommodating that increase. Certainly there's still capacity within the system to ensure that any increases in demand can be accommodated.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I understand, but it's having a knock-on effect. The police are having to supervise prisoners awaiting bail hearings, and then they're there for days before they can be transferred to the jails. Then this stops police being on active community. So while you say that you're trying to keep the community safe and also the wellbeing of the officers, it is having the opposite effect.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, we were all expecting the increase in the remand population, and we understand that obviously it flows down through the workforce. But some of the reforms that we are doing as part of the Astill inquiry recommendations are addressing some of the workplace issues that Corrections has been experiencing.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Have you met with the police commissioner? I understand the commissioner has, but have you also met the police commissioner to resolve this issue?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I regularly have conversations with the police Minister. If there are urgent issues that require my attention or meeting with the police commissioner, I would always be happy to meet with her.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I might turn back to Junee Correctional Centre. It has a sharp increase of vacant beds. Has Corrective Services reduced the number of prisoners being sent to Junee because you don't know what you're doing or because Corrective Services has no confidence in being able to look after that number of prisoners under their watch?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, I disagree with your assessment of the Corrective Services team. Our officers work extremely hard in a very volatile and complex environment. All allocation of inmates is an operational decision based on a risk assessment of the inmates to ensure that they are accommodated appropriately.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I don't think I got an answer before. Have you, Minister, met with the police commissioner?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I said—

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** It's a "yes" or "no".

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The police commissioner has been in meetings where I have been present and, as I said, part of the discussions that we have is that, where appropriate, if there are operational issues—and she has met with the former acting commissioner. The acting commissioner of Corrections will then advise me on the next appropriate steps to take.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** So you haven't actually met with her personally.

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I have answered how the meeting processes actually work. I said in operational decisions, it's best that the two heads of the operational organisations meet to discuss issues and, if there are recommendations for Government, then that will be acted upon appropriately.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Were there any recommendations that needed to be acted on and have you done them?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We will continue to engage with our colleagues at the NSW Police Force. I'm happy to ask the deputy commissioner to further provide some light on discussions he has had with the police commissioner.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I can ask that this afternoon, Minister. With regard to management of correctional services, how is having 918 beds empty at Junee good management?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, all operation matters and the allocation of inmates are operational matters and they are risk-based, depending on the inmate and the inmate's profile. They will be allocated appropriately. I'm happy to ask the deputy commissioner to provide some detail on how the inmate allocation operates.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'll ask this afternoon when we have more time, Minister. When Junee is under Government control, can you guarantee the continued operation of Junee without any reduction in current staffing levels?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** All staff who are offered a position to work with Corrective Services and the decision whether an employee wishes to work with Corrective Services are matters for those officers. But the department has encouraged all officers to be part of the wider Corrective Services network and family.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you know how many currently are employed at Junee Correctional Centre?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I can take that on notice.

**LEON TAYLOR:** It's 332 at transition. And to part of your earlier question, we've instructed DCJ talent acquisition to continue to recruit from the transition so we can continue to grow the inmate population down at Junee as the statewide population grows.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, do you know the dollar amount of economic contributions Junee Correctional Centre provides to the local economy of Junee?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, I would say that Corrections—it's by no accident that a number of our facilities are based in regional New South Wales to ensure that, as a major employer, we contribute to the local economy. But if you are asking me for a specific economic number, then I will have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I believe it's about \$7.5 million annually to the local economy. I might move on now to the Cessnock Correctional Centre. Are you having trouble hearing me?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** No.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, do you know which section of Cessnock Correctional Centre the Inspector of Custodial Services has recommended closure of?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I said all recommendations by the ICS will be carefully considered by the Government and by Corrections to ensure that any decisions to mothball or close our facilities are done with a wider impact on the network.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you know why area 1 was closed?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's an operational matter. I'm happy to ask the deputy commissioner to provide details.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I will use that for this afternoon then. What measures will you be taking to improve the working conditions for staff at Cessnock Correctional Centre?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I wouldn't say just at Cessnock. I would say, at all of our correctional facilities, it's the reforms we are doing through the Astill inquiry to change the culture. We have just appointed a new commissioner to Corrections, who will oversee the implementation of those reforms and continue to modernise Corrections in the way it operates.



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**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you have a plan to address areas of concern for Cessnock and other correctional centres? I think you just answered that one.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Can you outline some measures or examples of how you will deal with this?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Deal with what?

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** With the improvements or the recommendations.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes. As part of the Astill reforms, we have a multi-tiered committee structure to monitor the reforms and to engage with stakeholders. The secretary of DCJ sits on the most senior steering committees with other stakeholders to ensure that the Astill recommendations are being implemented.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** As I said earlier, because we have seen an increase in the prison population because of the bail laws, what specific measures have you implemented to accommodate the significant increase resulting from the change in bail laws?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Certainly, we are changing the way we receive our inmate population. Members may be well aware that those on remand are at a much more heightened level of anxiety than the general inmate population. Making sure the clinical psychological assessment of those on remand is changing—the physical reception is part of the change. That is why bringing Parklea back into public hands will be part of making sure that the remand reception process is also integrated with our work at Silverwater and across the whole network.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You have alluded to some of those risks in your answer there. In terms of overcrowding, what are you doing on that side of things?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Firstly, I would say, at the moment we have capacity of just under 2,000 spare beds that can accommodate the increase in the remand population.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Then there are the other risks we see where we have inmates assaulting staff. What steps will you be taking to reduce this?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I think it is very concerning. As I mentioned, our officers work in a very complex and volatile environment. Not long ago I visited a number of our correctional facilities to see, firsthand, our tactical response team, where there is a disturbance or violent actions of inmates against our officers or inmates on inmates, to ensure that order can be maintained. This is one example of where our Corrections officers are actually working towards maintaining that sort of stability in our facilities.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, you have just spoken about assessing inmates. Are they are being assessed while they are in the police cells?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Obviously, alleged offenders who are in the police cells are a matter for the police to manage. But once they are forwarded to a correctional facility, then Corrections will undertake the appropriate risk assessment of any alleged offender who is on remand.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, you just said that you had 2,000 beds available.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Thereabouts.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Why is the police commissioner complaining about cell ramping if you've got 2,000 beds available?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I said there are logistics involved in alleged offenders being brought to remand. As I mentioned, Corrections doesn't determine the number that comes into our remand centres. We will obviously accommodate those who have been sent by the courts and sent by the police to our centres.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** What measures are you taking to reduce increases in self-harm incidents?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** For example, we are investing significant resources into anti-ligature points. You would be well aware that \$16 million has been allocated towards removing ligature points at our facilities, in particular, our older facilities. But there are also issues around better clinical assessment. You may be well aware that as part of the Astill recommendations we have installed 400 CCTV cameras at Dillwynia alone. For example, officers at Dillwynia now must wear body-worn cameras. The Government is doing

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significant work in its triaging and clinical assessment of offenders—those on remand and those in our system—and also investing in the physical structures to ensure that we can remove our ligature points as quickly as we can.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, with the increase in the prison population, will you be increasing the number of Corrective Services staff across New South Wales?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As I said, in the operation of staffing we will continue to make sure that our officers are well supported to accommodate the increase in the prison population.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You said that you've got—did you say CCTV cameras?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That's correct.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** They are sort of physical things. What measures will you put in place to better support and ensure the safety and wellbeing of not only the prison population but also the prison officers? With the increase in the prison population, you would assume that there would be an increase in incidents at the correctional centre. There are a lot of safety concerns there, Minister. Are you managing it?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The short answer is yes. We will continue to make adjustments to the operations of our correctional facilities to make sure they meet the needs of the system.

**The CHAIR:** I have a couple more questions in regards to Clarence Correctional Centre. You mentioned legislation that had passed, but I would really like to hear from you in regards to what you are doing to address the very specific risks identified in the recent Ombudsman report specifically in relation to Clarence Correctional Centre.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Ombudsman report or the ICS report on any of our facilities will be carefully considered by Corrections prior to the implementation of those recommendations. Certainly the wellbeing of our officers and inmates in general at any of our facilities will continue to be monitored. Where appropriate, changes will be made.

**The CHAIR:** The five recommendations from the August 2024 Ombudsman report regarding the Clarence Correctional Centre have not been implemented. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm advised that they are currently being considered carefully to ensure that we continue to operate our correctional facilities appropriately.

**The CHAIR:** So they are being considered for possible future implementation, but at this point in time, there has been no specific action taken?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I'm happy to ask the deputy commissioner to provide advice on this, but we consider all the ICS and Ombudsman reports.

**LEON TAYLOR:** The recommendations of that report were received in parallel with the Ombudsman's report into inmate discipline. We have a team that is working on those matters that were raised, both at Clarence specifically, and then more broadly with the Ombudsman's report across the State. That work is well progressed. Perhaps this afternoon—Deputy Commissioner Grant is leading that work and we have just about finished the first stage of that work. The new commissioner and the Minister are visiting Clarence next week. I'm yet to brief the commissioner on the Ombudsman's report, but certainly that will be a feature on the commissioner's agenda when he meets with Clarence next week.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, in general, what more work is being done to ensure inmates across the board have access to counselling and other mental health treatment and support, noting the critical role this can play in promoting rehabilitation and reducing recidivism?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** We'll certainly ensure that Corrections will continue to implement programs to support the efficient running of our correctional facilities, both from our officers' perspective and for inmates as well. As I mentioned, in terms of inmates, it's a better, improved clinical assessment, removing the ligature points and maintaining any tactical responses that Corrections may need to deploy to ensure that we can maintain order and stability in our facilities.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Minister, I want to clarify who made the decision to close the Sydney Startup Hub before the Innovation Blueprint was released and before a Tech Central strategy was released?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The engagement with the tenants at the Sydney Startup Hub has been engaged for quite some time.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** No, I'm just asking who made that decision. Was it you?

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The decision was made by the department. I'm comfortable with the department's decision, based on the fact—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So you're not taking responsibility, as the Minister, for that decision?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** I said the decision was made by the department based on engagement because, fundamentally, the Sydney Startup Hub was no longer commercially viable. The tenants at the Sydney Startup Hub support the Government's decision. The Government made the decision that is appropriate for the sector going forward.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You're not taking responsibility for the decision. Where are the tenants going to be moving? Where are they going?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** This is part of the ongoing process that is happening now.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So you announced it before you knew where they were going?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Some of those will be going to Tech Central. We have made the engagement process—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What is Tech Central?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The decision has been made—

**The Hon. EMILY SUVAAL:** Point of order: The Minister has been interrupted by the Hon. Jacqui Munro about four times in two questions, including at a time when she remarked quite gratuitously, which you have previously ruled on. I was loath to interrupt, but it's becoming quite ridiculous.

**The CHAIR:** I remind the member to give the Minister a chance to answer the questions.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** You were just explaining that some of the tenants were going to Tech Central. What is Tech Central? When you say "Tech Central", what does that mean?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The Tech Central hub in the CBD is part of the movement. The Sydney Startup Hub was no longer commercially viable. The tenants and the stakeholders agree and support the Government's decision to close the Sydney Startup Hub and will be transitioning to the new locations as part of the transition process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So they're all going to the Tech Central hub?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** That depends on the tenants' decision about whether they would like to relocate. That's part of what—

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Will they be supported to relocate?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** As part of the transition process, we will continue to have that engagement with the tenants down there.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I just wanted to raise something that Ms Abigail Boyd raised yesterday with Minister Houssos. Your diary disclosures are incredibly broad and they just list that you are speaking about portfolio matters in your different portfolios. I'm just wondering if I can get a commitment from you to actually be much more specific, like we were when we were in government, with the actual purpose of the meeting listed. I'm happy to table a diary disclosure, for example, from the Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney in 2020, who was very specific about the actual purpose of meetings with organisations. Will you commit to that same level of detail in your future diary disclosures?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** My disclosures are in accordance with the rules of meeting disclosure, and I will continue that process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So you are not going to provide further information that would actually assist the taxpayer to understand how you are undertaking your duties as Minister?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** My disclosures will be disclosed as appropriate.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Unbelievable.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Minister, the Government announced that the bond rollover scheme is finally set to commence later this year. Is there a date for when the scheme will start operating?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Are you talking about the strata bond?

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** The rental bond rollover scheme.

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**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** You mean the Portable Rental Bonds Scheme?

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Yes.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Our intention is to have that implemented by the end of this year.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** But do you have a date, though?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Towards the end of this year.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Has a design been finalised?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It's going through the process of development at the moment regarding the portal bond scheme. It's one of the measures that the Government is taking to help support renters.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** So it's still in development?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** It is a significant reform that requires both rule changes but also the IT and systems development.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Has there been any extra funding given to the Rental Bond Board to implement it?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Yes, an allocation of funds has been given to the portable bond scheme. Just bear with me; I think there is a figure that I have.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You could take it on notice.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** Here we go: \$6.6 million.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** What impact has the resignation of staff psychiatrists from Justice Health had on the availability of programs for inmates in correctional centres?

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG:** The matter of psychiatrists is a matter for the Minister for Mental Health, and Corrections is obviously accommodating those particular changes as best we can.

**The CHAIR:** Questions from the Government? No? Fantastic. That brings us to the end of the morning session. Minister, you are released. Thank you for your time this morning. We will now break for lunch and we will be back at 2.00 p.m.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Thank you and welcome back to budget estimates. Before we start with crossbench time, I want to recognise that Mr Head and Mr Tidball need to leave early. You're both welcome to leave when you need to go.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** It's just disaster related, Chair. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** A hundred per cent. Thanks for letting us know. When you need to leave, please make your way out. I have some questions for Ms Jones. We were talking about short-term rentals early on. You gave me some of the actions that can be taken in regard to penalties and other enforcement actions. I'm wondering if you can provide a breakdown of what sort of enforcement actions have actually been taken in those cases that you had raised.

**TRINA JONES:** Yes, absolutely. As I said earlier, Fair Trading are responsible for the code of conduct, so the figures that I'm referring to there relate to the code of conduct matters. In this financial year, the types of issues that have come under are misrepresentation, so there were 14 matters relating to that. There were 14 matters relating to noise and parties or disturbances. There were six matters relating to issues relating to the premises register that we would've spoken to the department of planning about. There were 10 matters relating to damage to premises or use of shared facilities. There were issues relating to personal information—four specific matters on that. And in that time there were about 11 general matters as well.

As I said earlier today, these issues are now sitting with me and the Rental Taskforce. I've asked the team to do a comprehensive review of our processes within Fair Trading from the moment we become aware of an issue that could be under the code of conduct but also proactively through working closely with local governments. I've had a conversation with the City of Sydney. I've also had a conversation with Local Government NSW and

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they've provided me with who they think are the key local government areas to work with. That's absolutely the intention of me and the team over the next couple of months.

**The CHAIR:** With those cases, are they sitting with you and the team in regard to further action, or were there warnings or penalties or strikes already put into place for any of those?

**TRINA JONES:** There has only been one strike since the code of conduct came into force. There have been a handful of warning issues. I think there's an opportunity for us to improve in this area. That's something I'm very focused on.

**The CHAIR:** How many full-time equivalent staff from Fair Trading are assigned to work on the code of conduct breaches?

**TRINA JONES:** In the taskforce we would work on a range of regulatory priorities and issues. The taskforce has kind of two limbs. The original taskforce is a team of multidisciplinary resources from across Fair Trading. So we've got policy expertise, we've got complaints-handling expertise, compliance and enforcement expertise, intel—so the people who do the data and the analysis—and we have project arms as well. Then within my branch we have a direct prevention and compliance team, so we've got 13 FTE focused on prevention and compliance specifically as it relates to issues like the code of conduct. We have three roles that are focused on what I would say is complex dispute resolution issues. This would fit that criteria because you've got to get in touch with a number of parties, understand whether there have been police issues, local government issues, plus the host and potential impacted residents. That's absolutely a focus for us and that would enable us—it's about 16 FTE, and then a broader team. We've got a partnerships coordinator and somebody that can help us to track our outcomes as well. We're equipped to respond.

**The CHAIR:** I mentioned before that there's a lot of confusion from councils and others in the space about the enforcement of the cap. Are you able to provide any clarity about who is responsible and what enforcement actions could be taken—and how—in this current space?

**TRINA JONES:** The enforcement of the caps sits outside of Fair Trading. They are a responsibility under the planning legislation and that sits between the department of planning and local governments. Depending on that local governments context—I know there are different areas that have particular limits in place—they would be responsible for those caps. All of that information is helpful to us, of course, in our consideration to the code of conduct, but we're much more focused on what would be often called "party houses" or issues that are causing significant disturbances to residents, or very poor experiences for guests or outcomes for hosts.

**The CHAIR:** I think we have Mr McCahon here today as well. You were recently appointed to the role of Commissioner for Corrective Services NSW. The media release from the Minister regarding the appointment says the new commissioner:

... has a mandate to implement significant reforms that will deliver a more accountable and transparent corrections system that keeps the people of NSW safe.

Mr McCahon, I was hoping that you could talk a little bit about what reforms, as commissioner, that you'll be focused on and priority areas or issues that you've specifically been asked to address?

**GARY McCAHON:** There is a program of works that's planned for the reform for Corrective Services NSW, which I am still working my way through. Essentially, the approach centres around the management of our staff, the safety of our staff, the support services and programs for the inmates within our care, and oversight of all the implementation of the Astill recommendations.

**The CHAIR:** Where are we up to with those recommendations?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Consistent with the Hon. Peter McClellan's recommendations—he saw that the secretary would have an oversight, particularly with an eye to there being a degree of separation from the commissioner, who is clearly charged with the administration of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act. I can give you as granular as you would like, in terms of the 31 recommendations. There is a three-tier governance process, with the taskforce being chaired by myself, then two other subsidiary committees that work within that framework. We have 15 recommendations closed of the 31. We've got six which are closed or near closure. Can I on notice, perhaps, give you a schedule of where we're at with the 31 recommendations? A lot has been achieved.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I understand that.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Within those there has been some funding, which was announced, that also supports a women's strategy that's very focused on Dillwynia, but also looking at the take-outs from Commissioner McClellan's report, looking at the treatment and services that we provide to women inmates in the system system-wide.

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**The CHAIR:** Ms Higginson was asking some questions this morning about general access to tablets and iPads for inmates. I just want to get an update on how many inmates currently have access to tablets in New South Wales corrective centres, and the percentage of the total population that have access to a tablet.

**LEON TAYLOR:** I can probably assist with that.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Can I also correct something I just said? In terms of actually closed of those 31 recommendations, six are actually closed. But I'll provide that on notice. The expert on the tablets is in fact Mr Taylor.

**LEON TAYLOR:** There are two types of tablets. We have 12,223 tablets, to be precise, across Corrective Services NSW correctional centres. On top of that, we also have IPTVs—there's 800 of those—at the Macquarie and the Hunter rapid-build prisons. Clarence also have their own solution, so that's about another 1,200. I won't do the maths on that in my head. The centres that don't have tablets—Parklea doesn't have tablets. As the State moves in to operate that, that will be a priority for us to prioritise capital. The Government has approved for us in the forwards to bring the tablet capability into Parklea—if that answers to your question, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, thank you. That is the end of my time. Ms Cate Faehrmann.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Back to fire safety, but a different area of fire safety, I have been contacted by a number of people in the community who live in apartment buildings who have been concerned about the requirements around retrofitting in terms of sprinkler systems for fire safety. I understand that on the Fire and Rescue NSW website there is a question asking, "Will older buildings require to be retrofitted with sprinkler systems?" It says, "No, older buildings will not be required to be retrofitted with sprinkler systems." I have been contacted by a number of people who are very keen to know what the definition of an older building is. Does anybody have that level of information here today?

**NATASHA MANN:** I don't.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Take it on notice, maybe.

**GRAEME HEAD:** On notice, yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Who would that be directed to, anyway? Is it Fair Trading?

**NATASHA MANN:** The Building Commission.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** The Building Commission, is it?

**GRAEME HEAD:** Yes.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Secondly, could we get an update on what Fair Trading is doing in relation to the obviously appalling situation with lithium ion batteries and what's being done, basically, to ensure that we have safer products on the market?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, absolutely. Fair Trading has been very active in this space and is actually leading the nation in the regulatory domain for lithium ion batteries. What I have done is I have declared e-micromobility vehicles that use lithium ion batteries under a specific piece of legislation, which means that they are now subject to the highest level of regulation—so that's the e-bikes, e-scooters and hoverboards. From 1 February—so it has been a month now—sellers have to ensure that their products comply with the standard. From 19 February, sellers have had to provide consumers with key safety information at the point of sale.

This is really important. We've actually worked with our government colleagues in Fire and Rescue, the EPA and others to make sure that the information consumers are getting at point of sale is comprehensive. It's how do you charge your battery safely, what chargers do you use, what to look out for, how to dispose of your batteries safely and so forth. From August this year, not only will you have to comply with the standard, but sellers will also have to test and certify against the standard. By February next year, not only will they have to test and certify but every one of them will have to be stamped and labelled. That means I can send my inspectors out and they can quickly look to see whether this is a compliant device or not.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** How does all of that apply to shared bike schemes?

**NATASHA MANN:** To the extent that a shared bike scheme uses e-bikes—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Pretty much most of them.

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes. All of those e-bikes, at the point of sale, will have to comply with the new regime.

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**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** So existing? There are a hell of a lot of existing shared e-bikes and older e-bikes out there. You're talking new, which is a good step. What is the plan for the ones that are out there now?

**NATASHA MANN:** Our remit has really been about—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** It probably falls out of your remit, doesn't it?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, so nothing retrospective at this point. But we're keeping a very close eye on things and we may expand going forward. At the moment, it's very much about consumer safety at the point of sale.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** In terms of safety information or requirements, for example, for the operators, just in terms of getting that safety information to their riders, is that still not Fair Trading?

**NATASHA MANN:** I think what I would say—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Is there a whole-of-government working group on this issue?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, there is. I meet every fortnight with the Commissioner of Fire and Rescue, the EPA head and so forth. We're talking about these issues a lot. What we would say is that although the requirements are only at the point of sale going forward, we would encourage everyone to look at the bikes and the batteries that they're utilising and make sure—many of them will already be complying with the standard. But, if they don't, they should be addressing that. We're seeing more and more fires. We're looking to New York and looking—18 deaths. It's very, very scary. And that's the reason that we've really taken decisive action. The Minister at the consumer Ministers' meeting said that he would like other jurisdictions to follow suit. Ideally, we would have a national regime, not just New South Wales. And, to that end, Fair Trading is convening a national working group, and we are going to try and bring our colleagues along with us in this journey.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I assume a national working group, then, would also be responsible for working—I assume it's the Federal level—for doing what is possible for clamping down on online sales of dodgy cheap batteries because—

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, that's right. The importation of UNS would be a great solution. But, in terms of what I have available to me, I have written to the online platforms, advising them that these are the new requirements. We work with online platforms in a variety of things in Fair Trading. They're usually very responsive to us, so I'll be continuing to work with them and make sure that they're applying the law to the best of their ability.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Thank you for that. On another line of questioning, I saw that Fair Trading started recruiting for a strata and property taskforce. Talk to me about that in terms of the make-up of that taskforce and the new roles in that taskforce and the budget.

**NATASHA MANN:** Absolutely. The Minister mentioned that we've got \$11.8 million allocated over four years for the strata and property taskforce. It's made up of a multidisciplinary team. There are new roles, and then there are existing Fair Trading roles. We kicked that off last year. We've been building it out. At the moment, there are 42 people in that taskforce. Predominantly that's frontline compliance staff. We have 10 inspectors, we have 10 investigators and we have 13 mediators. But, as you mentioned, we've got roles out for recruitment. We're really looking to bolster and strengthen the capability and the numbers of people that we have in the organisation, with a laser-sharp focus on strata and property. So we're looking to actually double the number of inspectors, double the number of investigators and also add some mediators: 10 more inspectors, 11 more investigators and four more mediators.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Where does that sit?

**NATASHA MANN:** That sits within Fair Trading, as well.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Is the 11.8 additional? Or has that been allocated from somewhere within the existing—

**NATASHA MANN:** It's additional over four years. It is augmented. As I mentioned, we've moved some Fair Trading staff into the taskforce to be specialists in that area. But it's in addition to that.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I did hear that, as I was coming down, there were questions before I left the office about the Rental Taskforce—the same questions, I think, you responded to in there. What's the budget envelope—again, I think I missed it—for that?

**TRINA JONES:** I'm happy to answer those questions. We've got \$8.4 million over the forward estimates. And, as I said, that's for 13 new FTE in total. And the taskforce, similarly to the property and strata taskforce, is

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made up of existing resources and new resources. That's about making sure that we have that absolute focus on the issue, and we're bringing all of the best minds in the organisations together to work on the problems.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** This is for, for example, preventing no-grounds evictions. Has that process started yet?

**TRINA JONES:** The regulations are currently being finalised. While the legislation has passed, it hasn't commenced yet. Once that commences, it will, obviously, start. But, in the meantime, we're certainly tooling up to be ready for that, making sure that we've got all the processes internally, that we've got all the education ready, and we've already commenced our communication campaign with the industry and the sector. The taskforce is effectively getting ready, in terms of the intel models that we'll use to prevent and act on breaches of the law.

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** I assume that the idea is to have a visible Rental Taskforce so that there will be online or phone numbers for people to phone in relation to this, which is different to what they can do now in terms of making complaints. Is that correct? This is for the renter.

**TRINA JONES:** The Rental Taskforce is about making sure that we have good regulation of the rental market. That's about operating within the existing processes. When you contact Fair Trading, we want people to continue to contact us in the same way. What happens now is that the taskforce are established and ready to respond to those issues, particularly issues that are relating to our regulatory priorities. For example, with rent bidding, the taskforce has had significant wins with the 99 per cent compliance rate on non-fixed price listings and issuing over \$140,000 in penalties.

We've had wins on intervening on issues where people are illegally selling background checks, and that has resulted in refunds to the consumers of almost \$50,000. The taskforce is also taking a really strong view of speaking to both the tenants and the agents and the landlords so that we can get the whole picture and make sure that we can prevent problems before they start and identify systemic issues that can help us contribute to our reform agenda. It's really just about having a strong focus and then taking action to prevent and act on breaches of the law.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Ms McPhee, you may want to get comfortable. Firstly, just on the industry policy paper, how much was spent on consultants? Was it just the James Martin institute?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** It was just the James Martin institute of \$22,000.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How many staff were working on that in Investment NSW?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'll have to take that question on notice. A small team were dedicated but working across. I'll look into that for you.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How long were they working on that, or when did they start?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** It predates my joining Investment NSW, but I believe through 2023. But, again, I'll come back to you and take that one on notice.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And they had other tasks as well?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** There were other tasks as well.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Can I just be really clear about the MVP Ventures grant? It notes that it's only 2024-25 in the industry policy. Is that, essentially, incorrect?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** That is. That's an error. That is the title of the current program that is live on the grants website. But the grants website does also note that the next program will commence on 1 July. That program is funded over four years. That runs right through to 2026-27. We're happy to correct the online industry policy because we don't want to cause any concern.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Yes, that sounds good. This is a really small thing, but is there a better pixilation option for the image as well? It's a bit rough and it's a bit hard to make out. On the Tech Central precinct, is your department aware or engaged with the Tech Precinct Cooperation Agreement?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, we are.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Could you please explain to me what that is?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, absolutely. It's called the Tech Precinct Cooperation Agreement and it was signed by the Government in 2020. It's an agreement between the Government and Atlassian. It is a commercial agreement, so I can't speak too much about the details, but it describes how we will work together to help the Tech Central precinct achieve its full potential.



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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there an end date to that agreement or—

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'll take that question on notice.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Okay. In terms of the agreement, are there elements of it that are public that don't relate specifically to commercial aspects?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** No, I don't believe that agreement is public.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** With the Atlassian Central Project Development Agreement, which partly is public, do you know what mechanism that was made public through?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'm assuming that is a—no, I'm not going to assume; I'm going to take that question on notice.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Okay, thank you. Obviously there are large parts of that that are redacted, but I want to understand how that came through because that actually does have an end date, which I think is 2029 or 2031? It is 2029.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** That agreement relates specifically to the delivery of the Atlassian headquarters building.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** There's been no extension or amendment to that agreement, to your knowledge?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** No.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there a plan to engage with the tenants from the Sydney Startup Hub to get them into this Tech Central hub? Does that plan involve any financial assistance?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, there is a plan. That engagement is ongoing; we met them earlier this week. The focus of the engagement at this stage is to understand the needs of the tenants who are currently at the Sydney Startup Hub and to determine what changes, if any, we need to make to the layout and the programming down at the Sydney Scaleup Hub, which is where we will offer those tenants alternative accommodation.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you just dealing with the anchor tenants?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** We're dealing directly with the anchor tenants, but of course we meet with the subtenants as well.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there a timeline on that for the move? I know October is the end date but is there an inclination to move people before that? I presume there is.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** There's a program plan in place that looks at design and delivery of any changes that need to be made, and we're in that consultation period to understand what the tenants are looking for. The speed at which we can deliver that will depend on the design. But of course we will work with those tenants, because we already have the Scaleup Hub, to identify what's most convenient for them if they wish to move.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** With regards to the Tech Central precinct strategy, I know the Minister was reticent to provide a date for that—I'm sure you won't provide me with a date either. But in terms of what is actually contained in that and what other departments are being involved in that process, who is involved?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, that work has kicked off. The work that we're leading is the Tech Central economic development strategy, and that work is underway at the moment. We're engaging with external parties and partners in the precinct, as well as with other government agencies. I don't have a full list but it will include the likes of Transport for NSW, who are a key landowner in the area, the planning department, the office of the chief scientist and other government agencies.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How does that relate to the Central Precinct Strategic Framework and also the State-significant precinct development that is underway?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** The Central Sydney Precinct and the development application is actually being led by Transport for NSW, as a major landowner in the area. They have put in a development application, which is sitting with the planning department.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you meeting with the planning department about that precinct DA?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** No, that's being dealt with predominantly between Transport for NSW and the planning department. We have met with both of those parties, partly in order to provide clarity, I think, to the

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questions you're asking, which is the role of the economic development strategy, which Investment NSW is leading, and the role of that place development application, which is being led by Transport.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When did Investment NSW involvement start with regards to the Tech Central strategy? What are you calling it? The Tech Central economic development strategy?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** It is, at heart, an economic development strategy; that may not be the branding we use when we publish it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Okay. We can use that for now.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Investment NSW has been involved in the precinct for a number of years, working with alliance partners. In terms of the development of the new strategy, it was a proposal that we put forward to Government at the end of last year that we should refresh the strategy, and they announced that in December.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is every innovation precinct going to have something like this? We've got Macquarie Park and we've got the same at Westmead. The Minister referred to regional areas that he's interested in. Will there be discrete, geographically specific strategies for those areas as well?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I think the first step is the release of the Innovation Blueprint, which does have a focus on innovative place outcomes. The decision to develop a specific Tech Central strategy came off the back of a realisation that there was potential for that precinct to achieve more if the strategy was opened up to look at other areas—like creative industries, housing revitalisation and the night-time economy—to support the overall growth of that precinct. There are no plans at this stage for other dedicated strategies, but that may change over time.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** At the last budget estimates hearing, you noted that there's extremely limited direct investment in defence from the New South Wales Government. Is that still the case?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, that is the case. We support the defence and aerospace industry predominantly by engaging with businesses looking to either invest in defence and aerospace in New South Wales or by local companies—typically small- and medium-sized enterprises—looking to either export their goods or showcase their goods at trade shows. We provide that type of support, not direct financial investment.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you looking at how other States are engaging with these industries, and taking any policy examples from them?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** We do engage with other States around their trade and investment strategies. There are both formal mechanisms—the ministerial round tables and associated senior officers' groups—and also informal discussions between my teams and the other States' teams.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are there any particular policies or programs that other States are engaging with that relate to AUKUS that we are looking at implementing here?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to take that question on notice.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That would be helpful. Do the STICs and the TICs have KPIs?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** They have performance plans so, yes, they have KPIs. They sit within my broader organisation within the trade and international team, run by an executive director who is onshore. We do cascade business goals and department goals through our performance and development process, and that includes to the international network. Those network offices also produce business plans to support delivery of their outcomes during the year as a normal part of managing a department.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are those made public?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** No, they're internal performance and internal planning documents.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there a review conducted by the Minister or yourself with regard to the actual achievement of those internal goals?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** That's part of our internal performance management process.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How often do they occur?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** We have ongoing conversations through the year—as you would expect as part of people management—with regular weekly, monthly, six-monthly and annual processes.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** There has been a concern that, in the past, those performance reviews haven't occurred, and that decisions were made basically without regard to the performance of certain commissioners. Are you aware of those concerns, and is it something that you've investigated at all?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'm not aware of any of those concerns, but if you have anything you want to bring to my attention, I'd happily hear it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I'll write to you privately. With Techstars, my understanding is that a minimum of six of 12 Techstars companies that are chosen have to be from New South Wales, but the other half don't have to be from New South Wales. I'm wondering how that decision was made.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** If it's okay, I might invite my Executive Director, Fostering Innovation to join and help me answer that question.

**SIMON ROWELL:** Just to understand, the question was how was the decision made to set a target of six out of 12 of the Techstars applicants having to come from New South Wales? I wasn't around at the time that this was created, but I'm happy to take that on notice for anything we can find.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That would be good. Basically, the concern is that New South Wales taxpayer money is going to interstate or potentially overseas companies. I'm wondering if there's any mechanism to shift this. Is this a decision that would be with the Minister or is this a decision that Investment NSW can shift?

**SIMON ROWELL:** For that question, we'd have to have a look at the program guidelines. What I can share that goes to your question is that I understand that those targets were exceeded for the amount that have come from New South Wales. From what I understand, within cohort one we have at least around two-thirds that are New South Wales based. Within cohort two I think that's higher: over 80 per cent. So, in some respect, those targets are being exceeded already.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I did have a look at the lists. I'm obviously glad that there are as many from New South Wales as possible. But it does seem a little odd to me that there are some in Victoria, New Zealand even and Queensland. There's one in Israel. It's just perplexing and a little concerning, as a program that's run out of the New South Wales Government. We'd love to know if there's a possibility for that to change. The annual report for the department—obviously, it's the old department—says, regarding the MVP Ventures, that in 2023-24, 60 businesses received funding support of up to \$50,000 to assist in their endeavours to commercialise their products. I'm curious about how much money was actually distributed in total.

**SIMON ROWELL:** I might take that, Ms Munro. A number of these programs are underway still, because these programs were awarded in that time, but some of the programs do take longer to actually complete the activities. We will have to get back to you on the amounts that actually would have been expended or shared at the moment.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you anticipating that you'll fully expend the budgeted annual amount?

**SIMON ROWELL:** That depends on a range of factors, some of which are up to the organisation that is undertaking the work. Obviously they have to meet certain milestones and payments to be able to qualify for that. I think in the MVP, that might actually be a series of stages as well. That would be a limiting factor for whether all the money would be spent, and there might be other reasons as well.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** It would be good to get a breakdown of how much was expended and also if there were any organisations that didn't receive their full allocation because of some discrepancy in their own reporting or some reason that they didn't fulfil the terms of the contract. Is that possible? It doesn't have to list the company but just a report on the number.

**SIMON ROWELL:** Sure. We're happy to take a look to see what kind of aggregate data might be available for how many applications are fully completed and fully funded.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Also, in that, not just not fully funded but that were terminated for some reason, essentially. Also, if there could there be information about what percentage of that was distributed to regional companies, that would be helpful.

**SIMON ROWELL:** Sure. I'm just taking a look if I've got that to hand, but I think we'll have to come back on that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is the Women's Entrepreneurship Industry Reference Group still active?

**SIMON ROWELL:** I don't believe that group is still active. That has completed its task of this sitting, which was a report, and I understand that work is now completed.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Will the Quantum Computing Commercialisation Fund be extended? Will it be funded in the forward estimates?

**SIMON ROWELL:** I'm not aware that that is a program within our portfolio. Possibly, it might be within the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer, but I'll have to have to check.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you working with Treasury on its work to investigate the viability of a venture capital fund?

**SIMON ROWELL:** As part of the Innovation Blueprint policy development process, one of the key bits of feedback that's come out of that from industry has been the mismatch of venture capital funding across certain sectors where there might be, certainly, strong evidence of investment into places like fintech and software as a service and less strong evidence in other areas, particularly, for example, like manufacturing.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When you say that, do you mean private investment or government?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Private investment. That's what the data showed. As part of that, yes, we are advising the Government on what might be some approaches to help address those gaps in venture capital funding.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And one of those is some sort of VC fund, like Victoria or Queensland?

**SIMON ROWELL:** That would be one of the options that might be explored, yes.

**The CHAIR:** I've got some more questions about the access to tablets in New South Wales correctional centres. In regards to the facilities that do have access to tablets, do these inmates have access to a personal tablet in their cells, or are the tablets just generally shared, for example, in the library.

**LEON TAYLOR:** No. For maximum security, they are given that tablet as they are locked in their cell in the evening, and then they have that available to them all evening. The phone call function ceases at 10 o'clock. The other functions can be used for as long as they have charge in the tablet.

**The CHAIR:** I know Ms Higginson has previously asked questions in former budget estimates about facilitating access to counselling through the tablets and the iPads, and Corrective Services said at the time that that's something they were looking into. Where is that work up to?

**LEON TAYLOR:** Can I ask my colleague, Deputy Commissioner Grant, to speak to that? That's a functionality we've looked at that has some challenges, so it is not one we're about to implement. But I'll allow my colleague to explain more.

**LUKE GRANT:** We were really interested in using the MindSpot app, which is available generally in the community. It is funded by the Commonwealth. That seemed to be a very good strategy for managing things like depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite our best efforts and having people working on it for a lot of months, there were some software and other issues that ended up meaning we couldn't use that app. So we are now engaged in discussions, and some money has been allocated. The project hasn't started yet to work with the Black Dog Institute and other people at the University of New South Wales to try and find an app that would actually meet that purpose. So it's not through a lack of effort. The tablets themselves are a platform where you can put anything on it, but you have to find things that are actually compatible with the system and that can't be undermined for other adverse purposes and so on. It has been a real challenge, but we are committed to constantly adding things to the tablets, as they become available, to improve their utility.

**The CHAIR:** Apart from the counselling apps, I think you were also looking at, specifically, video counselling itself. Is that still something that's on the table?

**LUKE GRANT:** The tablets themselves are not activated to run videoconferencing. We do have, however, standalone videoconferencing suites that enable professional visits to occur. I think if you combine it with the lawyers, last year there were something like 225,000 of those professional visitors. That included assessments with psychiatrists and others. Very few of those would be in the form of counselling, but there is technically an opportunity to do it. But there are other ways of people having counselling in custody, in terms of the use of our own psychologists.

We've got about 200-odd psychologist roles, and our services and programs officers do counselling around wellbeing and around various mental health issues. In addition to that, Justice Health, as the health provider, provides a variety of services. Beyond that, there are very specific counselling services for people in some circumstances. We've heard about the Astill inquiry. As a direct consequence of that, some funding was made available to provide services for counselling specifically to women who were affected by that. There's a tender out for that. That's going to be an ongoing thing.

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**The CHAIR:** When you say the video counselling is not activated, I assume that was a choice that was made.

**LUKE GRANT:** The videos on the tablets?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**LUKE GRANT:** With the tablets, we purchased a series of solutions. We're under contract with a provider. They do have a video capacity. That capacity—the way it was designed wasn't to occur in the in-cell space, but they could potentially have been turned on in the day areas. Instead of that, we opted—and it came about during COVID, separately—to introduce tablets for the purpose of having visits. The primary purpose is for people to contact their families. I think I heard the Minister say before that since we started that project we've had about 750,000-odd video visits done by tablet. We've had those tablets also running since that time—since COVID. There are about 150,000 a year—something like that—occurring. We didn't activate the tablets for that purpose because we had an alternative. With the tablet solution, there's a cost associated under the current contract, whereas the video contact that we provide, ourselves, in our tablets is actually for free; we don't charge inmates for that service.

**The CHAIR:** What about secure messaging services to contact friends and families? I know that the ACT prisons have made that available since 2008. Is that something that has been considered?

**LUKE GRANT:** Absolutely. The solution has been developed, and we're just negotiating with staff as to how that would occur. Notwithstanding it being secure messaging, it still requires a level of vetting and supervision and so on. We have a solution; we've worked out the solution. We've made it bespoke to our requirements. All of our security requirements have been put into play. We're just about ready to go out for a trial, but we need to negotiate with our staff and work out what the consequences will be, because we'll require some level of monitoring and supervision to make it work.

**The CHAIR:** I imagine that currently they have to spend time checking, photographing and doing other things with letters that are sent. I'm assuming it would be a switch—

**LUKE GRANT:** There is so much sense to it—exactly. You can imagine how much easier it is to interrogate a digital message than it is to actually look at something that could be written in various forms of script. We're absolutely looking forward to it and it's something we're committed to doing. We've built it into the specs of the solution from the outset. We made a conscious decision to incrementally introduce functionality because so much could potentially go wrong. We've been waiting for so long to have this solution. We don't want to jeopardise it by having a problem because we don't test something out properly before we put it into play, or to have some industrial problems arise from different people that have concerns about it.

We're progressively introducing content, and we've only seen the beginning of what the tablets will be able to do. We've just brought online now a learning management system that we've built from the ground up that will enable people to do more interactive, educational stuff on the tablets. We've always had the capacity to run videos or to have instructional material in static forms, but now we have a proper learning management system that's similar to what public servants have for doing online training. That captures what people have been doing and gives you access to a whole range of solutions. That's something we're rolling out in a couple of jails with a view to a widespread rollout a little bit later in the year.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have a rough timeline on the trial for the secure messaging services?

**LUKE GRANT:** I'll have to take that on notice. I'm sorry, I don't have that in my mind.

**The CHAIR:** That's all right. Do the current tablet devices allow for the creation of things like art and music and writing?

**LUKE GRANT:** No. Well, not directly—not using the tablets—but they can include things. For instance, one of the programs that one of the community organisations—the Community Restorative Centre—runs is a music writing workshop. The videos that are around those sorts of lessons have been incorporated into the tablets as a video that you can watch to encourage you to write music. More recently, we're really interested in Aboriginal art in custody. A lot of Aboriginal people love to paint, and they paint a lot in their cells. They often rely upon each other to capture the images, so we've started to develop some material. We've made the first one of those videos, which isn't on the tablet, to explain the nature and origins of various styles of Aboriginal art using a very eminent Aboriginal art curator. They allow themselves to do that. In terms of having an iPad where you can do the artwork, they don't permit that.

**The CHAIR:** It has still got some limitations. Can you provide an update as to when inmates will have access to the AustLII resource—the Australasian Legal Information Institute—on the tablets?

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**LUKE GRANT:** There's definitely some legal information on there. I'll have to take that on notice to see where we're up to. I don't have that detail.

**The CHAIR:** I understand it was something that Corrective Services was looking at making available to inmates. If you could take that on notice, that would be fantastic. When will access to the Australian Electoral Commission website be reinstated for inmates so that they can enrol to vote in the upcoming Federal election?

**LUKE GRANT:** I know that's definitely the plan. I can't tell you the date. I'll have to give you the date for that as well. Just to explain something, it's not a simple matter, pointing these devices at websites. One of the problems with most websites is that they've got capacity for people to use the keyboard for other purposes. If it's an external internet site then people from the community can log into the same site, share the password and communicate. That's why you might've heard about us having to take off things that you might assume to be as benign as the BBC or the triple j website. People found workarounds and were using it to communicate with each other to engage in criminal activities, which potentially undermined the whole utility of the system, and people are too worried about it. We do a lot of work to get a website to work and we test it. Even when we test it, we find that there are problems with it. The Electoral Commission one, we're definitely having that; I just have to find out where we're up to with making it come live.

**LEON TAYLOR:** Can I just point out, however, for the upcoming Commonwealth election, for the first time in prison, mobile voting will occur, similar to what happens in retirement villages and those types of places. Notwithstanding the issues that we have around the AEC website, for the first time, this upcoming election, inmates—other than in a handful of our very small centres—will have an option to vote via mobile polling, whereas in the past it has just been postal voting.

**The CHAIR:** We mentioned before that many of these inmates will have access to tablets in their cells. My understanding is that they may suffer from battery limitation without access to a charger, for example, and that limits their use. Is there an update on the rollout of chargers for inmates or some other way that they can make sure they're able to use those tablets for longer periods inside cells?

**LEON TAYLOR:** We now have in-cell charging everywhere. Around Christmas time that change was made.

**The CHAIR:** What about the supply of keyboards to inmates? I think keyboards may have been mentioned briefly.

**LUKE GRANT:** Those devices were never designed for someone, say, to do a tertiary program. They've got an on-screen keyboard. Mr Taylor mentioned that the IPTVs that are in some centres have got keyboards. We have a separate system for inmate educational purposes, the Offender Access Computer Network, which is not an in-cell device. For people who are in their cells, we're trying on a limited basis to enrol people in distance education programs through two universities. To do that, we're using laptops that are secured. A secured laptop is much better. The tablet is not the solution to everything. It is a convenient, simple-to-use device, but it won't solve problems and they haven't built it to do work on a tertiary program. In the day, people can access the offender access system. There's a standalone, networked computer system for that purpose. Ideally, the use of secured laptops for the purpose of enrolling in external programs is our preferred approach.

**The CHAIR:** What is the current contract for the supplier for the telecommunications services to New South Wales prison cells? Do we still have a long way to go on that current contract?

**LUKE GRANT:** No, we don't have a long way. We've gone through five years of the first phase. The contract for the telephones and the contract for tablets is the same contract. It had a three-year extension, so I think it has got another two years left to go. I can give you the exact date for that, unless you have it now. Do you have it?

**LEON TAYLOR:** No, but it's the options around extending that that the Minister discussed this morning. There are some options in front of him in triggering the next extension around the issues that Ms Higginson has raised with the Committee.

**The CHAIR:** So there will be sort of an opening up to tenders for the future of that space?

**LUKE GRANT:** Absolutely. It won it on a competitive tender the first time around, and very importantly when that occurred, which was more than five years ago now, the cost of calls was reduced. Not only did the calls go down by about 25 per cent but we also introduced the tablets within the same cost structure. We've already done well and we're going to do better on that, even within the life of this contract.

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**The CHAIR:** Just to turn back to the Astill inquiry, I note that the Government allocated \$30 million to implement the recommendations. Based on early modelling, will that be enough to deal with all of those recommendations or will there be more work to get done?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** It's a \$30 million allocation over four years. The Astill implementation— notwithstanding that special purpose allocation, there will be, within the existing allocation of resources within Corrections, a contribution from it. We will work through the recommendations systematically, which we're doing. Should it be the case that there is a need for additional funding, that will be considered in future budget rounds. But I think that \$30 million is a pretty powerful launch pad for the work.

**The CHAIR:** You did mention the women's strategy earlier as well. Could I just get a bit of an update on where the work is up to in that space?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** There is quite a comprehensive women's strategy, which has commenced with— again, from that allocation—\$1.2 million of that amount just mentioned over four years. The strategy sets out a number of elements to it. It has six enablers: connection and belonging, health and wellbeing, identity and transformation, safe environments, community participation, and learning and work. I would be happy to table this report or to provide this strategy to the Committee. It sets out the strategy focus areas. It talks about each of those heads, which I've just alluded to—those six heads—in quite some detail.

**The CHAIR:** Is that strategy going to be made public?

**LEON TAYLOR:** We haven't made a decision, and it has an end date of 26 June, so it's to develop the strategy and implement it. Obviously the implementation will certainly be public. We haven't made a decision.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** That is something that I would like to socialise with the Minister. But I think that in terms of where we're going with the strategy, we would want to be clear and transparent to our staff, and to the community and obviously inmates in the system.

**The CHAIR:** Are there external stakeholders that have been involved in the development of that strategy, or is it just more done internally?

**LUKE GRANT:** If I might speak, the secretary is referring to a strategy which is in draft form. There's a consultation strategy at the moment that has just been signed off, and it absolutely involves people with lived experience plus the stakeholders. We have a very effective women's advisory council in Corrective Services. One of the members of this House, Ann Symonds, was one of the initiators of that advisory council, and she made a great contribution to the women in custody space. It has been running since that time. They would be our first group that we'd go to to seek advice about what they thought about the strategy. They're aware of it. They've gone through various iterations and drafts, but the finalisation of the strategy will not occur until the feedback has been provided and has been absorbed into this approach.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Tidball, what are the next steps and priorities in implementing the Astill inquiry recommendations generally?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** We have an ongoing governance framework, as I said, with three tiers to it. That work is ongoing and will continue. It will report in consultation with stakeholders, including the PSA, and we constantly update our progress on the work that we're doing in relation to those recommendations. There are challenges in those recommendations—a couple that we need to work through very closely with the PSA and with our staff, which we will do. But I am very happy to provide to the Committee a written update on where those recommendations are at. It will move forward over the next year, with more of those recommendations being in an active state of implementation.

**The CHAIR:** Tell me if I'm overstepping here, but is there any chance of getting an understanding of what some of those challenges are that you mentioned?

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** I am happy to say that I think that there is a challenge around one of Mr McClellan's recommendations in relation to staff in intimate relationships working together in the same location. That needs to be worked through in a careful way. That would be an example of such a recommendation.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Taylor, at previous budget estimates you advised that there was—I think it was March 2024. We spoke about the number of inmates in custody for animal cruelty offences. Are you able to give an update on how many inmates are in custody now charged with animal cruelty offences?

**LEON TAYLOR:** I can—so 102, currently, inmates charged with animal cruelty, and 27 of those are convicted and sentenced and 75 on remand.

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**The CHAIR:** I'm happy for you to take this on notice if you need to, but it'd be great to get a breakdown of what specific offences those offenders had committed—acts of bestiality, serious animal cruelty—

**LEON TAYLOR:** I have that. So 58 of those 102 inmates have a bestiality conviction or charge: five inmates for both bestiality and possess bestiality material, six of those inmates convicted or charged with bestiality only, and 47 inmates convicted or charged with the possession of bestiality material only. If I pre-empt your next question—

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I'm sure you will.

**LEON TAYLOR:** So 60 of those 102 also have a charge or a conviction for a sex offence, and 57 of those 60 sex offences relate to children.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Chair, can I supplement my earlier response just briefly, if I may?

**The CHAIR:** Sure.

**MICHAEL TIDBALL:** Just in relation to the progress with recommendations, the Government accepted 20 recommendations in full and accepted 11 recommendations in principle. As I've said, I am happy to provide a more fulsome written report on where it's at, but six recommendations are closed. I make the point that the CAS Act amendments have been made, and very relevantly in relation to the Astill inquiry. The law has been changed to make it easier to convict prison staff who have sexual relationships, through amendments. The CAS Act amendment passed in February 2025 to remove the requirement to prove that a sexual relationship between a member of staff and an inmate poses a risk to the safety and security of the prison. Under the change, all sexual relationships between staff and inmates will be illegal, without having to prove risk, with staff facing criminal liability, including a potential prison sentence.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I will start with strata. I was wondering whether providing non-mandatory model strata agreements is being looked into.

**NATASHA MANN:** The answer to that question is yes, absolutely. At Fair Trading we're constantly looking at ways that we can help demystify for people living in strata—help them make the right decisions. One of the things that we have discovered through our increased focus on the sector is that many agreements are different. They're hard to compare. They outline costs in using different methodologies. So what we would really like to explore is could we as government create a standard pro forma strata managing agreement so every strata manager had to describe their services in the same way, so that consumers are comparing oranges with oranges.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** In doing this, who are you consulting with for the content, and will that be released?

**NATASHA MANN:** We're very fortunate that we have experts with deep expertise and a deep level of investment in this. We will be using that stable of experts that we have. But, absolutely, once we have a draft agreement, we will then go more broadly to broader public consultation to make sure we've covered off on everything that needs to be covered off on and that it is indeed an accessible agreement for consumers to use.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Have there been discussions on whether you'd make the plans for model strata agreements compulsory?

**NATASHA MANN:** We're still thinking those things through. I think the model that it has been compared to is the residential tenancy agreement, so we would be looking at that as a starting point for how we go with a model strata managing agent agreement.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Is there a plan to ban insurance commissions for strata managers?

**NATASHA MANN:** That's a very big question, but I'm happy to take that one. The Government and the Parliament, as you know, have just passed significant reforms around disclosures that commenced in early February. That's important around accountability. It's important around consumers knowing where there are conflicts, where there are commissions or where there are other fees for service. There is a question, though, about whether disclosing those things cures those things. The Minister asked me in September last year to look at the issue as to whether those sorts of commissions—strata insurance commissions—should be banned altogether. I have followed his instructions, and I have done that. We've held multiple forums. I've had multiple conversations with many people from consumer groups to industry—strata managers, associations and so forth. I've provided my advice to the Minister's office. We believe that there is a way forward. It's not going to be easy.

As you know, strata managers have charged lower in the managing agreement and then, in the background, they've had to subsidise their fees through taking of insurance commissions. If we were to ban them, it's not something that can happen overnight. They would have to recalibrate their whole framework. We also don't want



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to see strata managers go out of business. We need a vibrant and sustainable industry. We've only got 4,000 licensed strata managers. We've got 1.2 million people living in strata and growing. We've got 86,000 strata plans, so we need the strata managing agents and the industry to continue to be sustainable. From the consultation that we've done, we think there is a way to wean off those insurance commissions and actually charge up-front and clearly in the agreement. Ultimately, that is a matter for the Government and the Parliament.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You've answered my next question, which was will there be time to bed this down? I believe you've answered that. Are there any reforms under consideration to further regulate termination fees or notice periods to make it easier for strata plans to shop around?

**NATASHA MANN:** There was a reform in the most current tranche of legislation which does make it easier for strata managing agreements to be terminated. There is already reform in that space. We're always open to developing further ideas for the Government to consider that would make that easier. I would say, we are aware that some strata managing agents offer cooling-off periods, so it's a "try before you buy". Either the managing agent or the building owners are able to terminate the agreement if one or the other is not happy. I'd like to encourage other strata managers to use a similar process, because people don't want to be locked in. I think having to go to the tribunal and seek to have agreements terminated is probably not ideal. There are reforms already in place to make that easier for consumers, but obviously, we're always open to further suggestions.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Ms Mann, you said you have provided advice to the Minister. How long ago was that advice given?

**NATASHA MANN:** The Minister asked me to provide advice by the end of the year. I provided it very late last year, to his office, I should say. I'm not sure if he has actually received it. I have not given him a briefing on it yet. But certainly his office has the advice.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** In the past, have you provided advice? What's the usual timeline between when the advice is given to the office and when you provide a briefing?

**NATASHA MANN:** That can obviously vary. What I will say is that I know the Minister is very focused on this issue. That's why he asked me to do that piece of work. I am expecting that we will have conversations about it shortly. I know that the office is already thinking very carefully about it.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you have a timeline for when you think you'll get a response?

**NATASHA MANN:** No, I think I've done what the Minister has asked me to. Of course, he is usually very responsive. We are very much looking forward to having some of these conversations. I will say that this is something that will be subject to much further consultation in terms of how any ban would be implemented and what it would look like as well. It's not a process that's going to happen overnight. What I would say is that I am seeing leadership in the strata management industry as well.

There are many people and leaders in that industry who have come to me and said, "We agree. We think the time is right. We're already going to do this ahead of any legislation." They are already taking steps to stop insurance commissions flowing. There is leadership being shown. But, as I said, we do need a sustainable industry. We need consumers also to be informed about what they're paying for, what their rights are and things like that. On the other side of things, it's important that we're working with consumers so that they fully understand what it means to live in strata and what their rights and responsibilities are while living in a strata building.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** On the flip side of working with consumers, how many complaints has Fair Trading received in, say, the past two years relating to strata management, particularly for conflicts of interest, overcharging, phantom fees, kickbacks or other commissions?

**NATASHA MANN:** I think that what was the interesting thing to me as commissioner was that the number of complaints to Fair Trading was quite low. I think there is a variety of factors related to that. The first is that I think people are busy. They are living in strata buildings and they often don't have the time or expertise to engage in some of these things, so they may be unaware. I think the second thing is that they didn't realise that NSW Fair Trading was the regulator and could investigate these matters. We're trying to turn that around now. I think that is turning around. In terms of the numbers, last year, we received 462 strata complaints.

What I will say is that the complaints that we were receiving relate more to repairs and maintenance of common property, rather than the conflicts issue. However, with a lot of the media coverage and also a lot of the work that we have been doing in this space, that is starting to shift. We do have live investigations underway in relation to strata managers and conflicts and fees and things like that. I think the community is growing more informed, and I would encourage people that do have issues with strata managers to come to us. We have a laser-sharp focus on the issue. We have assembled a taskforce within Fair Trading. We're building our capacity. We are building our people. Please come to us and we will progress these matters as a priority.

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**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You mentioned the taskforce just then. The Minister confirmed that yes, it has been established. There is an annual budget out of that \$8.4 million. How many full-time equivalent employees are assigned to the taskforce?

**NATASHA MANN:** Currently, there are 42 assigned to the taskforce and they're predominantly front line. There are 10 inspectors, 10 investigators and 13 mediators. As I mentioned earlier, we are recruiting for more. We are looking to double those frontline numbers. We are looking to recruit another 10 inspectors, another 11 investigators and another four mediators. We are building that capacity. We do have that laser-sharp focus.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Are any of these employees redeployments within Fair Trading or department or DCS? Or are they all new?

**NATASHA MANN:** No. There's a combination of existing roles and new roles. That bolsters the strength of the taskforce, absolutely. Not just new roles—they're augmented by existing roles also, people that were working on these issues but were dispersed throughout the organisation. And it's really about bringing these people together in a very focused way so that we can achieve the right regulatory outcomes and protect consumers' interests.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** When they're reporting, the reporting lines—is the taskforce under the direct direction of the Strata and Property Services Commissioner?

**NATASHA MANN:** It is. Just as a point of clarification, both the Rental Commissioner and the Rental Taskforce and the strata commissioner and the strata taskforce are part of my team. So they report to me, and they're part of Fair Trading. Fair Trading has always had the responsibilities. We've always had the legislation. But this is really about us pivoting our regulatory priorities, our regulatory focus, and really honing in on these issues of strata property and rentals. So it's really a recalibration of our organisation at NSW Fair Trading to be tackling these issues.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** And you mentioned before about awareness of issues, that people hadn't complained before because they didn't know who to complain to. Is the public able to contact the taskforce directly? Or is it through other channels?

**NATASHA MANN:** The taskforce sits in NSW Fair Trading. So we would encourage people—the front end for them looks no different. They still complain to NSW Fair Trading, as they would have. But it's more in the back end now. All those complaints now go to the taskforce and are managed through that focused resource.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** If I understand, then, if somebody makes a complaint through Fair Trading, will that be then referred to the taskforce?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes. The taskforce is part of Fair Trading, the dedicated workforce in Fair Trading. So the matters will flow to the taskforce, who will be dealing with them.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Will then the taskforce be empowered to look at the issues of education and training for strata agents and other participants in the strata systems?

**NATASHA MANN:** Absolutely. And you raise a very good point. Education and training is a very key element to uplifting the strata sector. The strata commissioner has always had the powers of the Fair Trading Commissioner delegated to them to tackle the issue of training and CPD, and that remains the case absolutely.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'm just wondering with regard to the scope. Is it just focused on strata? I think you said it includes property services.

**NATASHA MANN:** That's right.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Can you just explain what the full scope of—

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, absolutely. You're correct. It is the Strata and Property Services Taskforce. What that means is it is looking at strata issues, but it also looks at other property issues—for example, underquoting. Underquoting is a difficult issue to tackle as a regulator. We are working very hard on, potentially, new ways of tackling underquoting, and that is within the remit of the taskforce. One of the things that I am very keen to do—and we've just done it for the first time last week—is to really start naming and shaming those agents who we fine for underquoting. We haven't done that in the past. We're going to start doing that now, because really we need to use all of our regulatory tools to stop underquoting. It's a hard thing to prosecute. That being said, we do have prosecutions in the pipeline, but there are also other ways that, as a regulator, we can stop this behaviour. Naming and shaming is one. I also just wanted to take you back—I know you mentioned earlier about the penalties and whether we would look at—

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I was just going to ask that as a follow-up.

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**NATASHA MANN:** I just did want to clarify that, whilst the penalties are on-the-spot fines of \$2,200, if the matter goes to court there is a \$22,000 penalty per breach. Potentially an agent could have breached multiple times, so that penalty then does add up. There's also a provision which is as yet untested and unused but does exist, which says that the court can order commissions to be removed from an agent that has engaged in underquoting of the properties. If the commission was \$30,000, for example, there is a provision in the existing legislation which would allow that commission to be removed. I'm keen to test that provision and we intend to do that. And then there are also remedies under Australian Consumer Law for false and misleading, which, again, has very high penalties. So there are options available to us and we're very much looking at how we avail ourselves of the best options in each circumstance.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I know you have said the minimum is \$2,200 and you have that \$22,000 as the maximum. It doesn't appear, though, that Fair Trading usually would try and go for the maximum penalty. It appears at the lower end. You just said "naming and shaming", wouldn't it be—if there's clear evidence of underquoting, wouldn't that be where you would aim rather than at the lower end?

**NATASHA MANN:** Fair Trading, almost without exception, issues fines at the highest level that we can issue fines and that's the \$2,200 mark. For us to get those higher penalties, we need to prosecute a matter in court. As I mentioned, we have a few of those matters in the pipeline that we are looking to prosecute in court, and that's where we can get some of the higher penalties. The other option, of course, that we have available to us is licence removal. That's a very powerful option, actually. Again, we are exploring under what circumstances we might do that. It's a significant thing to do, to take away somebody's livelihood. It's not something that we can do easily and we wouldn't do it unless there was good reason to. But it's certainly another regulatory tool that we have.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Can I ask, how many cases have been taken to court where you have sought to go for the maximum?

**NATASHA MANN:** In my time, there have not been any prosecutions of underquoting. That is something that I have asked the taskforce to look at very closely. We want to start prosecuting these cases. They're not easy ones to prosecute. They take a lot of investigation. We have to take lots of statements. Sometimes vendors don't want to come forward and give us—they've sold their house, they've moved on and they don't actually want to get involved. It's a difficult thing. That being said, I can assure you that the work that we are currently doing is very pointed and I have confidence in the team. I am hoping that, by the time that we are sitting here next time, we will have some prosecutions before the court.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You said that the alternative was to remove the licences. As an alternative to taking it to court, how many licences have been removed?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, I have that information for you. In the 2023-24 year there was one permanent disqualification and 16 temporary disqualifications that were issued. This year to date there have been 11 temporary disqualifications and seven suspensions. So, as you can see, we are starting to move on this. We really want to make sure that industry changes its practices but, of course, we also rely on the agents to do—there needs to be uplift and industry needs to be doing its part as well. The regulator can't shoulder the whole load. We do expect—and I know that REI in New South Wales is focused on trying to lift standards as well. So it's a joint effort; it's not something that we can do on our own.

**The CHAIR:** I've got a couple of questions quickly for Mr Taylor. In respect to the 27 individuals that you identified as having been convicted of bestiality-related offences, are you able to provide a breakdown of how many of those individuals have also been convicted of child abuse or child sex offences?

**LEON TAYLOR:** Yes, on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, sure. And, on notice, are you able to also provide what type of child offences those people have been convicted of?

**LEON TAYLOR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** It feels like quite a big jump in the number of inmates in custody, particularly for bestiality offences. Is this unusual compared to historical data? I'm only looking at the number—nine from March in 2024 to this data that you've given us today. Does it sort of—

**LEON TAYLOR:** We might look at that on notice, if that's okay. I noticed that as well as I was preparing for my evidence today. If you will allow us to do that, that has been—I won't speculate, though. We'll get BOCSAR to probably assist us with an answer or notice.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you—just to get a bit of an idea as to the data and if we've suddenly got a big jump or if it's been moving up and down quite significantly for some period of time.

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**LEON TAYLOR:** The fact that there are 75 on remand might indicate additional policing and other things, but we'll give you a thorough response on those.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful, thank you. We've now come to 3.30 p.m., which is afternoon tea. I understand that Mr Head and Mr Tidball probably won't be returning, so thank you both for your time. We'll now break for afternoon tea for 15 minutes and be back at 3.45 p.m.

**(Graeme Head and Michael Tidball withdrew.)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to budget estimates. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** My question is for the Chief Scientist and Engineer. We've only got a few questions and then we can let you loose into the world. Could you give an update on the state of funding to the quantum industry? I understand that, through your budget, there was some funding that went to the Sydney Quantum Academy.

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I want to get an update on that and whether that included funding to the new Australian quantum group, and also if there's anything regarding the Quantum Computing Commercialisation Fund that has been extended under your budget.

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** There's a variety of sources of funding for the quantum industry. I'll start with the Sydney Quantum Academy. There was \$1.5 million in the last budget, but we also managed to secure, for various reasons, another \$3 million. So we provided \$4.5 million over three years for the future of the Sydney Quantum Academy. Separately, we provided through the RAP budget \$1 million for Quantum Australia, which was secured from the Federal Government, which brought in \$18 million. Interestingly, Quantum Australia is actually really only an 18-month project. So it's quite a short thing, relatively, although it spans "three years", quote unquote, if you see what I mean.

Separately again, we also provided funding through the RAP program for the ARC training program in quantum as well, which also was at the University of Sydney—so three separate sources of funding. I can also update you on the investment fund round that we ran a year and a half ago, which was, in the end, very successful. We did the initial investment, for example, in Diraq, Q-CTRL and a number of other areas. Separately, those companies—for the \$7 million I think we put in—have raised an additional over \$120 million, so that's been super successful.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that commercialisation fund now at its end?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It always was only a single round, but I will say the Physical Sciences Fund, which is not being run this year—it will be run again next year—often has quantum computing companies apply to it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that ARC training program similar to the SQA remit?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** No. SQA is an entirely New South Wales government effort and has been for quite a long time—six years now—whereas the ARC one is dominantly Federal funding, basically. We just provide leverage funding, effectively.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What's the value of funding the Federal Quantum Australia—

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It's \$18 million.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But what's the measurable impact that you're hoping to achieve with the funding?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** In total, with the quantum programs that we run, our strategy—and we have a pretty well-defined quantum and semiconductor strategy combined, in effect—is to build the quantum and semiconductor ecosystem in general. That spans attracting companies here—and we've been quite successful doing that—as well as growing local companies and, for example, investing in the equipment to manufacture quantum systems, and the support that we provide through training programs because, again, that's a very big attractor for people wanting to come here.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Does this fit under the industry policy in any way?

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**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It does in the manufacturing one, yes. Despite the way the Feds have gone, New South Wales is leaps and bounds ahead of anywhere else in Australia and most of Asia in the scale of the quantum industry that we actually have here.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I totally agree. We mentioned the Decarbonisation Innovation Hub to the Minister. Are you able to provide an update on that please?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes. The Decarbonisation Innovation Hub is actually funded by the Environmental Trust, so it's technically run through DCCEEW and it's in Minister Sharpe's portfolio. Having said that, we established it and we basically mind it, but we do not fund it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When you say "we", your office?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** OCSE. I apologise. We mind it and look after it and so on. But the primary recipient of the innovation hub is a consortium that's led by UNSW and the University of Newcastle.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** With something like that, what was the reason for passing it over to DCCEEW?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** No, it started there. It was originally a Matt Kean initiative, so it was out of his department at the time. He chose, for various reasons, to fund it through the Environmental Trust. But we established it out of the report that we wrote on decarbonisation innovation.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What is the status of the RNA research facility?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** The RNA pilot manufacturing facility?

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Yes.

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It's about halfway finished now. The walls are up, the roofs are on, some of the equipment has arrived and so on. The building itself should be completed by the end of the year. We're hoping the TGA will approve it for human use—as in human RNA—in the first quarter of next year. To remind everyone, that's a fairly large capex: \$109 million in total.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Do you have any interaction with the Macquarie Park Innovation District?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, we do. A lot.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What is that?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It's mainly because there are a lot of companies there that have a lot of interest in this area, which is not the only investment that we, as a government, have made in that area. We also fund the Genome Foundry in that area. We also funded a program in biomanufacturing and—to follow on from an earlier question—Vow was a part recipient of that funding. There's quite a mixture of different things that are going on, and I've given presentations for the group that runs Macquarie Park.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That, again, you would say, fits under the local manufacturing park?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, absolutely. Again, I'll emphasise, in addition to the capex, there is effectively \$119 million in an investment fund allied to RNA industries, which is designed very explicitly as a venture capital fund rather than a granting funding program and is also designed to bring in companies who want to manufacture phase one, two and three clinical trial RNA in the facility.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** With those projects, have you been asked to provide information that relates to the targets that have been set by this policy?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** I'm not sure I understand that question.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** There are a series of targets under each of these pillars that the Minister has released that relate to local content and value-add, essentially.

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** No, we've not specifically, from the RNA project, been asked to contribute to those, to the best of my knowledge at least.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Any of your projects?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, we work very closely with Investment on the industry strategy in general.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** With all of the projects that you're responsible for through your office, are you being asked to provide information?

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**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Can I take that on notice?

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Yes, of course. Do you have any responsibility or relationship with the 20-Year R&D Roadmap?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, my office wrote it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you measuring the progress of those goals?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes. Effectively, almost everything we do is aligned to the 20-Year R&D Roadmap. The semiconductor and quantum piece is very explicitly a program that we have in digital. The bio program also lines up all the different bio programs I've just been talking about, and clearly there's a big energy stream as well in that road map. Everything we do is lined up with that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Do you report on that progress against the road map?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, we do actually. We report, effectively, to the Minister every time we meet, which is about every six weeks, in a fairly standard template.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that something that is ever made public?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** No.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So it's a private briefing?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there an intention to make the information contained in those briefings, at some sort of high level, available?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** No, not at this point.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Okay, but 20 years is a long time. It would be good to know how we're going in the meantime.

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Not long enough for research.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Fair call. We'll develop the 50-year strategy next. Unfortunately, the industry policy, I think, only goes to 2030 or 2035. Just finally, did you have any input on the Innovation Blueprint?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, a huge amount. My office was very heavily involved with investment, and we are effectively co-authors of it, I would say.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Very good. Hopefully, I'll see you at the launch, if I'm invited. You'll be invited; I'm not sure if I will be. And just very finally, do you have anything to do with the Space+ Program?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Unless it's under a different name, no.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there anything to do with space?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes. We run the Space Research Network, and it is co-located at the Space Industry Hub, which is down at Cicada.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What is the funding for the Space Research Network?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It's about \$1 million a year.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And what happens in that network?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** It's one of a family of networks. We run the Defence Innovation Network and the sensing network, but it's called something slightly different—NSSN. And they, all three, are innovation networks, and their big objective is to create the ecosystem in that area, particularly around research and attraction of Federal Government funding, particularly in that area. They have all been very successful in doing that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is the Defence Innovation Network aligning with the goals of AUKUS?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that explicit?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes. We have very specific calls for proposals around AUKUS Pillar 2 and, for various reasons, there is an involvement in AUKUS Pillar 1 as well.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that public?

**HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE:** Yes, it's on the DIN website.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Fabulous. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** The Hon. Aileen MacDonald, did you have further questions for the professor?

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Professor. You can leave if you'd like. Thank you so much for your time today and for joining us.

**(Hugh Durrant-Whyte withdrew.)**

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I will come back to Ms McPhee and her colleague. Are there any plans to update the Investment NSW home page because, at the moment, on the home page, when you click "find out more", it goes to a 404 page not found?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** The Investment NSW website was updated earlier this week when we launched the industry policy, so I'll need to check whether there's been a technical glitch. It worked for me the other day with the new information which links to the industry policy. So, yes, it has been updated.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** There was information about the Going Global Export Program listed in the annual report. There was a report of the 15 New South Wales fintech companies going on a three-month Going Global Export Program into Singapore, but it's not actually listed on the website, except for a 2021 program. I'm aware that there was an Austrade program that occurred, but I want to understand why it's not listed on the New South Wales website.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Just to be clear, that's in relation to that specific Going Global program. It was in the annual report because we obviously run a lot—we've got 14 ongoing at the moment. It was that one.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** This one was specifically referencing 15 New South Wales fintech companies going into Singapore, but it wasn't listed on the website as any of the projects.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Let me take that one on notice.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Last budget estimates we got advice that there was one business currently in residence at the International Landing Pad. Have any more businesses taken up residence?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'm going to pass you to Mr Rowell for this question.

**SIMON ROWELL:** There are four businesses that are incoming, that have applications that have been approved. I guess at some stage in the near future they may come to operate out of the International Landing Pad.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** So four have applied and been approved?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But you're not sure when they might actually use the space?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Not right now, but I think that's ultimately—they're able to join from now, but it's partly down to their needs specifically. But we're ready to host them.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How many spaces are available?

**SIMON ROWELL:** I understand that there are five spaces that are available at the International Landing Pad.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** How do you manage that? Are you expecting to only have, for example, five successful applicants, or is the intention that you have 50 successful applicants and then you have some sort of booking system?

**SIMON ROWELL:** I think in the last budget estimates, this was discussed. It's still in the stage of working through what will work most effectively. If there is a significant extra amount of demand, we will find a way to manage that most effectively. Obviously, it's really an interesting opportunity to have these organisations with us.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there one business still there, or no-one is there at the moment?

**SIMON ROWELL:** The information I have now is that there is no business there at the moment.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** There was an MOU with Living Lab in Jakarta signed for up to a four-month residency for startups. What is the status of that arrangement, and were any of those four incoming businesses related to that MOU?

**SIMON ROWELL:** My understanding is that is still current. I'm not sure whether any of those specific approved organisations are part of that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that something you're generally tracking?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** We were also advised last estimates that there was an intention to sign MOUs with Sci-Hub in Ho Chi Minh City and also Common Ground in Kuala Lumpur for a reciprocal agreement. Could you give an update on the status of those MOUs, please?

**SIMON ROWELL:** I'll have to get back to you on those ones.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you setting any goals or KPIs around how much foreign investment these arrangements with businesses at the landing pads are expecting or ideally targeting?

**SIMON ROWELL:** I'm not aware of their specific KPIs for investment required. I think it's key just to get them in the location and work from there.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** When the announcement was made in September last year, it was noted that up to nine New South Wales companies will be given the opportunity to base themselves in South-East Asia. Have any companies been selected to do that?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Can I confirm which program you're referring to there?

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** My understanding was that that was related to the MOUs.

**SIMON ROWELL:** I'm not aware at the moment, so I'm happy to take that on notice and get back to you with that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** The Female Founders program—what's the most up-to-date number of the amount of women who have completed the program?

**SIMON ROWELL:** If you bear with me a second, I have that information. This program is over two years, from 2023-24 and 2024-25. That is for a total of six cohorts, with 50 women in each cohort. I understand that four cohorts have been completed now. The fifth cohort is currently underway and the sixth cohort will start in May.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Will that be funded into the forward estimates?

**SIMON ROWELL:** This program was only ever designed to be a two-year program, so the sixth cohort will be the last cohort of this program.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there any program that is designed to specifically engage female founders into the forward estimates?

**SIMON ROWELL:** What I'd refer to here is the ongoing work to help develop the Innovation Blueprint. The Minister has made various comments about diversity being a really important part of the innovation ecosystem and the need to address where there are imbalances, particularly on gender, and how we can get more female founders and enterprise investors into the innovation ecosystem. As you know, that blueprint is under development and being finalised, so there'll be more to say on that in that document.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'll follow up from where I left off. With regard to the one real estate licence that had been cancelled and the 16 temporarily suspended for 2023-24—and then you said there were 11 this period—are they specifically for underquoting or are they for other breaches, such as rent bidding?

**NATASHA MANN:** There'd be a whole range of breaches included in those figures.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Are you able to say how many would be just for underquoting?

**NATASHA MANN:** Not today, no.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Is this information public?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes, it is public. One of the initiatives that we are taking is to try to make these things more available. We have a *Property Matters* newsletter, where we publish the last prosecutions, compliance



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outcomes and so forth every couple of months. We are trying to get this information out more than we currently do.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** That would be your "name and shame" initiative?

**NATASHA MANN:** Partly that, yes.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** If someone wanted to look, where would they start?

**NATASHA MANN:** I would encourage them to subscribe to our *Property Matters* newsletter. That's a new initiative. We are surfacing a lot of this information. They should follow Fair Trading on socials—so on Facebook and LinkedIn. We do a lot of sharing of our outcomes on those platforms. Where we are aiming to get to is to have a "year in review" where we publish all of this data regularly.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Will that be on your website?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes. The intention would be for that to be on the website, absolutely.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** And are there, with real estate agents, warnings?

**NATASHA MANN:** Yes. We would be looking to publish as much data as we can. That includes warnings, fines that we've issued, disciplinary action that we've taken and also prosecutions that we've initiated. The other thing that I'm looking to do—and the team has done a really good job of this over the past few months—is the public register. In the past, people would look on the public register, and there weren't a lot of details about the licensed real estate agent. The team has done a great job of working to surface a lot more of that detail. For example, in the Whitney Wang matter that was referenced earlier, if you go on, you'll see that it says "subject to compliance action from Fair Trading". We're really trying to surface a lot through that platform as well.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** But at the moment, the general public would have to go deep diving to find this information?

**NATASHA MANN:** We publish as part of the department's annual report. That's the general place that most agencies publish their data, but we would like to go further. We're obliged to do that. We would like to go further than that obligation and publish more frequently, more widely and in a more accessible way. So the annual report is a starting point, but, as I said, subscribe to our *Property Matters* and you'll get all of the outcomes that we're achieving. Social media is a great place, and then, as I said, that year in review is something that we're working towards also.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I'll move to Corrections now. I asked the Minister previously about staff that had been suspended from community corrections, and the number was 82, I think he said.

**LEON TAYLOR:** Across all of Corrective Services, and I have a more up-to-date number of 79.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** And they're all suspended with full pay?

**LEON TAYLOR:** I'll correct the record if I'm wrong—I think three, from memory, are without pay; the others are with pay.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I asked the Minister and he said he'd provide this on notice. I don't know if you would know, but do you know what impact this is having on the budget for Corrective Services? Like, a figure?

**LEON TAYLOR:** No, I will answer that on notice. But clearly there is a cost that we can aggregate for those 70-odd people that are without pay and provide on notice.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** The Minister also mentioned that sometimes the length of time is for procedural fairness. Of the, say, 79, have any of those been going on for longer than 12 months?

**LEON TAYLOR:** Yes, there are, and part of the Astill recommendations—and the significant focus of Judge McClellan's inquiry—was around the professional standards processes that existed in Corrective Services in those times and some failings that allowed a longer period of time before Mr Astill's criminality was identified to occur. The new model and the decision of the Government to move professional standards and investigation into DCJ is resulting in a complete rebuild of that function, including how it reports and how it manages Corrective Services misconduct. One of the features around that is timeliness.

Some of the periods of time—particularly where other agencies, particularly police but there's also ICAC and other bodies, are involved in matters that involve our staff that make some of those periods of suspensions particularly lengthy and make it challenging for professional standards to put allegations to staff—will continue, for some of those, to be lengthy. In the handover with the commissioner, we've already shared that list of people.

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It's certainly our intention to work with DCJ, as they are rebuilding the professional standards and investigations model for it to be more efficient, so that, particularly for low-level matters and people that are suspended, there's a real triage of those matters and only those people that absolutely warrant being suspended to maintain the safety of staff, inmates and the integrity of the system are ultimately suspended.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I did ask the Minister about the New South Wales police commissioner requesting an emergency meeting—and I understand that has occurred—with regard to what she called "cell ramping". Were there any recommendations or a strategy put in place to deal with that?

**LEON TAYLOR:** The meeting with the police commissioner a week or so ago was a productive meeting, and we mainly went to the data sharing between police and Corrective Services. There are a number of agencies beyond police, particularly Legal Aid, the judiciary and Justice Health, that also assist in managing the flow of inmates from police cells ultimately into Corrections custody and before the courts. It might be helpful in our answer to this question just to point out that in New South Wales, Corrective Services receive people bail-refused directly from police stations. In other States, there are police watch houses between police stations and Corrections. In this State, people come straight from police stations to Corrections and we mean what would otherwise be watch houses in other States. That is to maximise the policing out on the street, so people come to us before they've even been before a court.

There are lots of pressures on the system at the moment, as you're aware. The remand numbers really have gone through the roof in 10 years. The amount of people on remand has gone from 24 per cent to 45 per cent. But there are other pressures as well. For example, through COVID, the practice of the courts has changed. In 2019 we had 90,000 people that we presented before AVL; last year it was 350,000. Courts have changed their practice. Lawyers have changed their practice in terms of access to—their client's first appearance in courts is now predominantly by AVL. Early guilty pleas by AVL—there are lots of different factors.

The commissioner and Deputy Commissioner Grant met with the Chief Magistrate yesterday. Their practices influence the flow of inmates through the system significantly. We work with Justice Health in terms of the people that they put on medical holds within metropolitan Sydney. That prevents us moving people on remand that we would otherwise seek to move out into the regions and other places to free up metropolitan beds. They are working with us to minimise the people that they hold for health reasons that prevent us from flowing inmates through the system. It is a systemic response.

Following the meeting with the police commissioner, we made a number of operational changes. We converted some beds at the Shortland Correctional Centre in Cessnock from a sentence cohort to a remand cohort. On Friday a week ago 55 beds in that correctional centre started receiving remand inmates. We have at the MRRC—the Minister mentioned in evidence this morning that we continue our hanging points program. There are 55 beds at the MRRC that are turned off for those works to happen at the moment. Whenever we do that, that causes significant pain and potential blockage in the system. But that work is too important not to do and those beds come back on in April.

We continue to adjust the system to manage the demand. We influence the demand very little but we need to respond with the supply. In the week that's just gone—last night the only inmates that we knocked back from police were in Tweed and Lismore for the weather event that's occurring at the moment. Then the night before that, on Wednesday, which I just pulled out in the break, Amber Laurel, which is the complex out at Emu Plains that services the Sydney metropolitan area—there were two inmates that we refused from the police, one in Granville Police Station, one in Penrith Police Station, and that's because at ten past four in the morning we had to take an inmate to hospital and staff had to escort that inmate to hospital and close the cells. And one inmate on that same evening in Dubbo we were unable to receive from police because the cells were full.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** The Minister mentioned that there were—I believe he said 2,000 beds were available. Obviously that's across the State. Then at Junee there are also beds there, I presume. Why aren't those beds—is it because they're not set up for remand?

**LEON TAYLOR:** No, they are. Maybe I'll answer the question first by mentioning that in Cessnock—which was a line of questioning this morning, if that's the case. Cessnock, for example, is a 750-bed jail if we opened every bed. As you pointed out in your questions this morning, there is old infrastructure at that facility. So 250 old beds are turned off at Cessnock at the moment. We are operating that as a 500-bed facility. As was mentioned this morning, Corrections—as with many public agencies—have some very new and some very old infrastructure and kind of everything in between. At Cessnock we have 500 beds that are early-1970s vintage, and we have 250 beds that are brand new.

So we've taken the decision at that centre, as we do across the system, to operate new, fit-for-purpose beds at the expense of older infrastructure where we can. That's an example where we have mothballed two of those

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old wings in favour of the newer wings. If we suddenly got a surge in the inmate population, we could turn those beds on. They're minimum security, so they're for sentenced inmates. That really doesn't address the remand issue that your question started with. Junee is a 1,280-bed centre. It has never operated at 1,280 beds. I'm not sure there's been, ever, too many inmates in that centre over 900. That centre will grow. I mentioned in my evidence this morning that we will continue resourcing that centre and recruiting to that centre to initially grow that centre to be able to accommodate 944 inmates.

There are 628 operational beds in that centre at the moment. That centre's operational stake was planned to reduce over the period of transition, which is not uncommon, and I think I discussed that in my evidence in September as well, to support the transition to—we have the GEO staff that have come into Corrective Services that are required to do Corrective Services training. Working cooperatively with the operator, GEO, down there, we reduced the stake in that facility to enable the transition to happen in a safe way. It's also, when the State operates that centre from 6.00 p.m. on 31 March, we can operate that centre safely and efficiently and can ramp that up.

Later in the year, from March, we will be able to increase the population in that centre, which will take some pressure off as well. At that centre, we can pretty much hold any inmate of any security classification or gender. But the pressures are on the metropolitan, so we need to place people and place people carefully. Just because someone's from the metropolitan—we need to place them properly. Where we can place people in the regions, we can; but often people are from Sydney—their families are in Sydney and they're attending court in Sydney. Just because there's an empty bed in Junee doesn't necessarily mean we can fill it with where the pressures are, right?

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** During your discussions with the police commissioner, was the issue of, say, transport for prisoners discussed in terms of who has ultimate responsibility of transporting from—

**LEON TAYLOR:** No. That has been discussed at other times with police, but not at that meeting. The issue that was discussed in that meeting was some of the transport around the weekend bail court, which is having an impact on police operations. But so far as the conversation around the boundary between Corrections court escort responsibilities and police, that wasn't a feature of that conversation. Nor is it a factor in the current pressures that we're experiencing at the front end.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Did you say it's not a—

**LEON TAYLOR:** Being able to move is not a significant factor at the front end. The issue is having cells full or closed to be able to receive fresh receptions from police stations.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You mentioned that we have a significant in-prison population where people are on remand. What measures have been implemented to accommodate that? It sounds like you can turn beds on or off. I'm sure it's not that simple, though.

**LEON TAYLOR:** It's not. It's one thing to house inmates. Inmates on remand are largely held in custody as maximum-security inmates. It's more the services and the challenges that come with remand inmates. Inmates on remand are far less stable than sentenced inmates. Operationally, we have greater challenges in managing an increasing remand cohort. Our uses of force were up in the last 12 months, as were assaults of inmate on inmate and inmate on staff; unscheduled escorts to hospital; the amount of people who ultimately find themselves at risk of suicide or self-harm that we have to manage; and the AVL issue that I mentioned a minute ago.

We are addressing all of those additional pressures—some of those cross over with our Justice Health colleagues—to make sure that we can adjust the system and our resources to focus on the demand that is coming through the door. The number of prisoners in custody is still lower than March 2020, when COVID came along, by about 950, albeit the proportion has really flipped with the sentenced to remand mix. The work that we are required to do is far more labour-intensive in terms of managing the features that remand inmates present and also presenting them before the courts and giving them access to legal.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** With the increase in remand, and then you've got inmates that have been sentenced, in terms of programs for inmates that have been sentenced, are they still able to—are they still having those programs? Or is it, with the population mix—

**LEON TAYLOR:** We have the same amount of program staff as we had before the cohort changes. We do 250,000 or something hours a year. It is the same thing. It is reprioritising some of those program staff to do additional remand programs. Some of that will come at the expense of sentenced programs. It is in Deputy Commissioner Grant's area if you want a more detailed answer about remand programs. There are some areas that we are looking to expand in response.

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**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** While we are on remand, there has also been an increase in the number of First Nations people. The remand population has increased. That is directly attributed to the Government's bail laws. Are you still planning on the run to accommodate the expected increase or do you think you knew what was coming?

**LEON TAYLOR:** Our planning is a little more sophisticated than "on the run". We are an agency that does have experience in responding to crisis, but we are certainly not deploying a crisis response here. We are methodically planning. We are responding to data. The commissioner gets regular data around the flow in custody. We have just been maturing that data and how it's presented. That allows the commissioner to make informed decisions, well evidenced by data that comes from the front entry points of the system. We can see where the trends are going and we can respond. We also get data from our DCJ colleagues, particularly in Legal Aid and places like that, so we can foreshadow where we think the pinch points are and respond.

The courts are changing their practice again in July. Regional bail courts will be dealt with centrally in Sydney. That was one of the topics of conversation with the commissioner and deputy commissioner yesterday with the chief magistrate. We are connecting with the chief magistrate and the magistrate in charge of bail—that was a topic of conversation with the police as well—so that we can work together as a system, which includes Legal Aid, Justice Health and the other agencies, so when the changes that come in July through court practice, we can be as ready as we can to make sure that we're not having to implement a crisis response when there is something on the horizon that we know is coming.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You mentioned Justice Health prior. Has there been any change in the number of forensic scientists working in prison hospitals?

**LEON TAYLOR:** The numbers are an issue for Justice Health. But I can report that the provision of psychiatric services in Corrections has not noticeably declined through the current industrial actions and resignations of psychiatrists within custody. And I don't think we've seen evidence of our section 19 under the health Act, where we have to take people to hospital, where there's been significant delays. I'm sure there have been delays. But, insofar as the issue that we're talking about, front end, we don't think that that is a major feature in the blockages that we're working to resolve.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Just on that, has there been any change in employment status of the forensic psychiatrists, from staff specialist to VMO? And if so—

**LEON TAYLOR:** All the psychiatrists work for Justice Health. We have psychologists that aren't, obviously, caught up in the resignations. So that's a question for the health Minister and Justice Health.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You said that sometimes they'll have to wait. Do you know what the average time would be for an inmate to wait to see to a psychiatrist?

**LEON TAYLOR:** I'm not sure. Anyway, we'll see what we can provide on notice. Our answer might be to refer you to Justice Health.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you know what percentage of the prison population requires mental health treatment?

**LEON TAYLOR:** We know that there are 40 per cent of inmates in custody with known mental health condition. Unless my colleague has anything, the treatment provided by Justice Health would be a question for them in terms of treatment that they provide. But certainly a high proportion of people in custody have a mental illness.

**LUKE GRANT:** I will clarify the answer as well if I might. Really importantly, when we quote statistics around mental health, there's a big distinction between someone having a mental health disorder, like an anxiety, depression or some situational mental health response to custody, and people who've got serious mental illness. People with serious mental illness are often overstated when it comes to the prison population. It's bigger than the community representation, but it really is a disservice to prisoners to assume that they're all a bunch of mentally ill people. But the number is definitely high. Justice Health manages the serious mental health, but Corrective Services puts a big effort into managing mental health more generally. So we have psychologists, and in the last period of time, the last 12 months, we had 46,000 sessions with our psychologists working with subacute mental health impairments. We had 13,000 sessions of people working with suicide, self-harm, 3,500 on cognitive impairment.

And our other group of non-custodial staff, the service and programs officers, engaged in 2,094 sessions of mental health support and 13,000 sessions related to general improvements in wellbeing. So there's a lot that we can actually do for the people's mental health, and a lot of it's situational to try and improve the environment that people are in as well. And only the narrow end of it, the top, is what Justice Health really need to focus on,

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which is the seriously mentally ill. And we do that collaboratively with them as well, and we've got mental health screening units. We've got beds that aren't gazetted beds for mental health patients. There's quite a big effort that is undertaken between both groups. So we share the responsibility very broadly.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** I spoke to the Minister about staffing shortages—prison population is increasing—leading to extended lockdowns. How many prisons in New South Wales are currently understaffed and what is being done about this?

**LEON TAYLOR:** We have a challenge at the moment, as with many in the public sector—particularly frontline services and law enforcement and emergency services agencies—around workers comp. We are fully established. We don't have a high vacancy rate across the agency. We have a higher rate of workers comp in the last year or two, and that is affecting our availability to fill our rosters in some centres. You mentioned one this morning, Silverwater women's, which is a centre today that has got some partial lockdowns for that very reason. It is a real focus of Corrective Services to work to get our staff back to work. DCJ looks after workers comp and injury management for us as an agency, but that doesn't mean we wash our hands of that responsibility to do everything we can to make sure that our staff are fit, healthy and available for work. We are implementing and have implemented a number of measures that are really starting to bear fruit in terms of returning people to work.

We have a long way to go, particularly in the psychosocial injury space, to get people back to work. But we have a pilot program that we ran recently at a couple of correctional centres. We actually haven't waited to fully evaluate it before we rolled it out further because—and I would find it in my notes if I had a bit of time—it is having a great effect in terms of returning people to work early. We are putting additional roles on to really intensively case-manage people that go on workers comp, over and above injury management, and that's really bearing fruit. When I had a handover with the commissioner on Monday, that was one the top three items that we spoke about because we want to get our people to work and we want to operate our centres at full capacity. Where we can't do that, to make sure our centres operate safely, from time to time we do need to shut this area and that area progressively so that we make sure that we have sufficient staffing levels. That's what we do. To answer your initial question, we don't have a high vacancy rate that we need to recruit to.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** As we mentioned this morning, at Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre, when there is a lockdown or staff shortages, how does that impact access to education, work and rehabilitation programs? Are they put on hold or what happens there?

**LEON TAYLOR:** It depends. That is probably the quite unsatisfactory answer to that. When inmates are locked in cell for any reason, be it an operational reason or otherwise, then they don't access other services and programs. It's often the case that when they're out of cell for a partial lockdown, the industries and the other things would still continue. But there isn't a policy that when we have a partial lockdown the other parts of the purposeful day cease, which includes education and industries and those other things. Those decisions are made locally, depending on staffing levels and the activity of the prison on that particular day.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** New South Wales has one of the highest recidivism rates in Australia. What does this say about the effectiveness of our current rehabilitation programs?

**LUKE GRANT:** I'm happy to answer that question. First of all, there are lots of definitions of recidivism. I presume you're talking about making national comparisons. There's only one measure which is in the *Report on Government Services*. If you read the preface that actually accompanies that, it's not in the Corrective Services performance framework. The Report on Government Services states:

Low or decreasing rates of re-offending may indicate a safer and more secure community environment and the promotion of a more law-abiding life – however higher rates may also indicate more effective policing and detection of offences.

The measure itself that you're referring to includes the extent to which people who are on parole are brought back into custody. It's not just necessarily an offence that goes into that category. So the rate is high and, relative to the other States, it's higher. But it's not possible to determine whether that's the effectiveness of our Police Force or the enthusiasm they have for arresting people, or whether it's a measure of our success from a program perspective. Our preference is to actually evaluate individual programs and to see whether they have an impact.

But putting all those caveats aside, if you looked at the last report, which is the 2025 report, the statement for return to prison—which is the one that people are most interested in—going back to 2020, is a terrible figure, with 51.5 per cent coming back. But the next year it was 49.1 per cent and the last year it was down to 48.8 per cent, so it's tracking in the right direction, even relative to ourselves. We can compare ourselves to ourselves, but other factors like policing and the effectiveness of the courts have a big impact on that number. We prefer to look at our programs and whether they have an effect, and we've had some really great outcomes from some of our programs.

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Probably the most exciting one in recent times is the effectiveness of our traineeship program. Putting people into a traineeship where they're doing 12 months of vocational training plus being partnered up with our overseers, who are fantastic role models, has had a profound impact on reoffending results. And as a consequence of that, we're putting a lot of investment into a program like that. A couple of years ago we had about 200 or so trainees and now we're up to well over 700 trainees, so that's an example of a program that works and we're trying to focus on. We're paying more attention to that type of thing. Another thing to recognising, if you look across the jails—we've spoken about the custodial staff. The people that are delivering programs are a small fraction of the total population. We're trying to make it "know everyone's business" in Corrective Services, so we're training our custodial staff, for instance, to do brief interventions with prisoners.

They represent the bulk of our workforce in jails, so every opportunity they interact with someone, we want them to do that; it shouldn't all come down to just programs. We're trying to change the environment and improve the programs. The introduction of the tablets, which we've discussed a lot today, was an attempt to try to improve social bonds with people's families, but also to provide information and give people a sense of agency. There's a lot going on in that space that we're very happy with but we'd rather be judged on a high-quality evaluation that looked at and compared like for like rather than comparing ourselves with other States. But I do admit it looks pretty embarrassing when you look across that line and you can see that other States appear to be doing better than us.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** You mentioned policing in court matters. Would another factor also be how many inmates, when they're released from custody, are released into homelessness?

**LUKE GRANT:** Yes.

**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** Do you have figures on people who have been released where they don't have homes—and I'm not counting where they might have three days? To me, that's still probably released into homelessness.

**LUKE GRANT:** One of the problems we have with people exiting custody—the ones who we're managing on parole, we know where they are and we know where they're living. One of the requirements for signing exiting custody on parole is to actually have a reasonable place to go to when they're released from custody. A large number of people are unsentenced people who leave unsentenced as well, and we've got no capacity of tracking where they come from. But as a cohort—one of the things we do know when people come into custody—we try to discover their circumstances before they came in. Over the last year the average percentage of people who are coming into custody who have been either sleeping rough or were homeless was about 10½ per cent. So 10½ per cent of people, when they come into custody, say they've been living in a homeless environment.

We're very happy with some work that's underway at the moment in partnership with Homes to try to improve those outcomes. We have a range of things that have changed in that space recently, including a whole series of new programs and the potential to create connections for people as they transfer out of custody. First of all—we mentioned the tablets already—we now provide information on the tablets for people to help them try and understand what the steps they need to take are to try and get a tenancy for themselves. In addition to that we've got two telephone numbers that people can call for free from jail that relate to mobilising and getting homelessness services in place before they exit custody.

We have a large program called the NEXUS program, which is for people in custody for a short time—I'll just get a booklet or something. They'll have a series of modules to focus on for their planning for release. We now have people who can actually make provision for accommodation prior to release by—I can't remember the name of the program; let me try and find its name so I'm not misrepresenting it. There's so much going on in this space; it's very exciting. It's the Inmate Early Assessment Scheme and it enables people three months before exiting custody now. These are all quite new things. We've had Set to Go for a little while, which is more about the temporary accommodation that you're describing. We're also doing some new work and trying to piggyback on what Homes are doing around training people of how to keep and sustain tenancies through the Rent It Keep It program that they've introduced to try to provide training, which we're going to put into the tablets as well, for people to do that.

So there is a lot happening. It's a high-risk proposition for us. It's very hard for some people who exit custody straight from court appointment to put in place anything. We've got to let them out the moment the courts decide to release them but, for longer term people or for people on parole, quite a lot of planning goes into that space. Whilst, as I said, we don't have very good metrics on it, when we have followed it up on tracked individuals, virtually no-one from jail is released from custody and walks straight out into a homelessness situation. There's some form of accommodation—even unsatisfactory accommodation—they go to.

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**The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD:** So it's the sentenced population that you do have control of in terms of whether they're released into homelessness or not, and you've outlined some of those programs that you've got in place. What other steps have you implemented or are you looking to implement so that, when they are leaving custody, they go into either stable employment—you mentioned the traineeship program—and housing.

**LEON TAYLOR:** I'm happy to talk to education because it's one of the things that we're really focused on that comes out of getting inmates into vocational training. We have more than 2,000 inmates at a time involved in vocational training. We've got 722 inmates in traineeships as we speak, but our works release program—we have nearly 200 inmates at a time participating in works release. We also have another program called Pathways to Employment, which works to connect inmates directly with employers and have them employed before they exit custody.

In 2024, 156 inmates had a job before they left custody, so they were released and turned up to their employer essentially the next day. Those types of pathways really provide opportunities for inmates to change their life and end up in employment and prosocial things that hopefully mean they don't come back to us. There was an evaluation a few years ago by BOCSAR around traineeships that had stunning results in terms of the effect of traineeships in prison on recidivism. Traineeships lead to work and employment and money.

The other thing I just might mention in finishing my answer—in preparing for my evidence, I had staff just look at one of our works release centres. That centre had 24 inmates on works release. The average bank account of those inmates is \$17,000. Some inmates had up to \$60,000. By working in works release, where they earn not a jail wage—they work at award wage or a legal industry wage—we have inmates exiting custody with a job and with skills. Hopefully, Justice Health have sorted out their health and. If they've done our programs, they've dealt with some of their criminogenic factors, and a bit of money in the bank. People like that, who are on the perfect pathway, are unlikely to come back. So that's where we continue to focus our efforts and grow.

**LUKE GRANT:** The big area that we do need to change, though, is changing community attitudes towards people exiting prison. Countries with a hardline approach to justice, like Singapore, have a superior approach nationally to the way prisoners are treated. The stigma of a criminal record is such an overpowering thing. We can give someone vocational skill, but they can exit jail and they can't get a tenancy and they can't get a job because people take such a turn. If you want to look to a fabulous model, the Singaporean model and their Yellow Ribbon campaign is an extraordinary campaign of success to change public attitudes towards people exiting custody, and getting business to contribute to it and the community to contribute to it. We can only do as much as we can do.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I had a question about what's happening with the STIC. I understand there are two left. Do their contracts run out in April?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** April, yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are they going to be replaced or re-engaged?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Those roles are being removed, per the election commitment, as those contracts come to an end. We'll replace those roles with trade and investment commissioner roles. Those two roles are now under recruitment. That's out in the market.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you aware of where those current STICs are working from? Are they working from the countries or regions that they are representing?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Both of them?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** They're in those countries?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** We've had reports that that's not the case for at least one of them.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** That's not my understanding.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are there any plans to release any updates with regard to the 20-Year R&D Roadmap? The chief scientist said that he provides regular updates, but are there any plans to make public the progress that has been made on the goals that were outlined in that road map?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** The R&D road map is something that's run out of the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer, so I'll refer you to his comments earlier.

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**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** The department's annual report listed around \$200,000 that was spent on reviewing the department and its funding arrangements. This was prior to the machinery of government change. Were those reports related to the machinery of government change? What were they for? Is that \$200,000 down the drain because the Government then changed all the responsibilities anyway?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** They were Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade engagements. I wasn't in the department at that stage, so I don't have any knowledge of what that work was relating to. I don't believe it was specifically related to Investment NSW.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I guess we have to put them through for a couple of different agencies to look at it. Somebody will hopefully have an answer to that, which is one of the problems with machinery of government changes. Does Investment NSW have any dealings with the NSW Skills Board?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Yes, we do.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What work are you doing with them?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** There are a number of elements. One is in relation to where we provide support to companies establishing in New South Wales. We work with our Skills colleagues in relation to potential skills plans for those businesses. There's one in place, for instance, for Kongsberg, who recently located in New South Wales and is creating 500 new jobs. We also manage the State skilled migration scheme on behalf of Minister Whan, and we engage with the Skills Board on that as well.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Do you have input into that actual list of what skills are required?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** It works two ways. It definitely flows from the skills list to the migration list. But, yes, we're engaged in that process of developing the skills lists.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Do you determine that skills list or provide advice about the skills list knowing that there will be particular companies coming into New South Wales? Is that the idea?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** It's more of a macro view of the existing skills gaps and where there are particular hotspots of trades and skills needed and less workforce available.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Were they consulted in preparing the industry policy document?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'll have to take that question on notice. Sorry, I actually can answer. Yes, we did engage with our skills department as part of the steering committee that oversaw the development of that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And that included the Skills Board?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** I'll have to check that.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What is the current number of participants enrolled in the Driving Digital Skills program?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** That isn't an Investment NSW program, so I would have to check who that is run by.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** That comes under Minister Whan's portfolio?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Again, I would need to take that on notice to find out.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are you familiar with the Infrastructure Build Out Program?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** No.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** I understand it was cut. It was possibly before your time. Are you measuring impacts from the Western Sydney Startup Hub and outcomes that are occurring as a result of the activities there?

**REBECCA McPHEE:** Mr Rowell, do you have a response to that?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Western Sydney Startup Hub has been supported for a number of years now. I can report—give me one second to find the relevant piece. I believe there are currently 55 businesses resident in the Western Sydney Startup Hub. Like every other program, there'll be regular reviews of how it's performing and what we can do to improve.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is there going to be any public reporting about the activities that the Western Sydney Startup Hub undertakes and the success or otherwise of those programs?



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**SIMON ROWELL:** I'm not aware of any specific reporting just relating to that. There might be some that come through broader departmental reporting or broader reporting that comes through.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Is that area included in the Innovation Blueprint?

**SIMON ROWELL:** When you say "that area", can you clarify?

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** As in, the Western Sydney Startup Hub. It is part of, maybe, the Westmead precinct, in a way.

**SIMON ROWELL:** Yes. The Innovation Blueprint is a fairly broad document that looks across a whole range of areas, including places, which was mentioned. It's likely it will absolutely touch on the various hubs that we do have in New South Wales, and Western Sydney is already a priority for the Government in terms of innovation programs. So, yes, it will consider what innovation is in Western Sydney and how it can do more to promote it.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** What are the Western Sydney-specific innovation programs that are currently being run by the Government or with the support of the Government?

**SIMON ROWELL:** We mentioned the Western Sydney Startup Hub as one. I did want to make sure I've got the right terminology. There is a Westmead Innovation Ecosystem Fund, which actually runs the Westmead Biomedical Accelerator by Cicada, which is a \$7.84 million program to incubate biotechnology, diagnostics and digital health businesses.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Just to clarify, is that through the Investment NSW budget or the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer?

**SIMON ROWELL:** That's through the Investment NSW budget. There has also been a Western Sydney pre-accelerator program as well, which largely operated in 2024.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** But that's not running now.

**SIMON ROWELL:** I understand that that has now been completed.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And no budget for the forward estimates?

**SIMON ROWELL:** That program was designed to be completed last year and, as mentioned, these types of questions will be considered in the Innovation Blueprint.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Does the Innovation Blueprint contain specific funding measures? You mentioned it was quite broad.

**SIMON ROWELL:** That information will come out in the Innovation Blueprint itself. Obviously, as has been mentioned, there are a number of programs that are already being delivered by Investment NSW in Western Sydney and also, obviously, funding decisions do need to go through appropriate government processes.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Are there any more in addition to that—the Westmead biomedical one, the pre-accelerator program and just funding for the Western Sydney Startup Hub. Is that right?

**SIMON ROWELL:** What I would say, in addition to—those are programs which are deliberately targeted and, I'd say, exclusively in Western Sydney. We do have other programs which run more universally, appropriate to New South Wales. We have the Minimum Viable Product Ventures program we've talked about, which, I said, we will look into information for you for, but it is open to organisations based in Western Sydney. We also have the Boosting Business Innovation Program, including the TechVouchers which, likewise, has a number of university partners, some of which are based in Western Sydney.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** My understanding is that the universities distribute that money—as in, the universities collect that money and then they distribute the money according to their programs.

**SIMON ROWELL:** That program is \$11 million over four years. Universities are each allocated an equal share of that funding, and they are then responsible for attracting the right candidates and applicants and going through that process. Once those processes have been completed, the projects have been completed, and the checks are conducted by the Government, then the payments are made after that to those.

**REBECCA McPHEE:** If I may also make a correction to my earlier statement, Driving Digital Skills was a program which was run by Investment NSW and ceased in 2023.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Mr Rowell, were there any other programs that you wanted to list?

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**SIMON ROWELL:** Again, there are other programs Investment NSW operates, including Female Founders, which you've mentioned, which may have founders based in Western Sydney as well.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** And that's all?

**SIMON ROWELL:** There are other ones as well, like the Techstars accelerator program. Again, each of them might have the opportunity for Western Sydney founders to apply.

**The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO:** Or Western Australian founders, as it were. Actually, could you list all of the programs that are running and anything else that you wanted to mention?

**SIMON ROWELL:** Nothing that I'd mention right now.

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

**The Hon. PETER PRIMROSE:** No.

**LEON TAYLOR:** Chair, can I clarify a few items of earlier evidence? In response to a question from you, Chair, around the AEC website, I will just clarify that when the AEC website was available, there was no capacity to enrol or vote. That will remain when that website comes back online. I will refer to my evidence around mobile polling, which is a new feature that is about to start. Also, I mentioned 79 currently suspended employees of Corrective Services. That is as of 28 February. At that time there were five suspended without pay. In relation to in-cell charging, my evidence was that we were charging in every correctional centre. We are deploying in-cell charging progressively throughout the system, and we currently have in-cell charging in 10 correctional centres.

**SIMON ROWELL:** Chair, if I may provide one clarification for earlier evidence to Ms Munro about the size of the International Landing Pad? Just to clarify, there are 20 desks in the International Landing Pad. I think my earlier evidence was five. That reflected an assumption that businesses might take up to three desks each. That is just to clarify that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you all for your attendance today. The secretariat will be in contact in the near future regarding any questions that were taken on notice and any supplementary questions from the Committee.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**