

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 2 - HEALTH

Friday 22 August 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

WATER, HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH, YOUTH

CORRECTED

The Committee met at 9:15.

MEMBERS

Dr Amanda Cohn (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Banasiak

Ms Abigail Boyd

The Hon. Mark Buttigieg

The Hon. Greg Donnelly

Ms Cate Faehrmann

The Hon. Scott Farlow

Ms Sue Higginson

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Cameron Murphy

The Hon. Nichole Overall

PRESENT

The Hon. Rose Jackson, *Minister for Water, Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Youth*

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**

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the second hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 2 - Health for the inquiry into budget estimates 2025-26. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Dr Amanda Cohn and I am the Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Jackson and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Water, Housing, Homelessness, Mental Health, and Youth.

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

CORRECTED

Ms ELIZABETH WOOD, Deputy Secretary, Health System Strategy and Patient Experiences, NSW Health, on former oath

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

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

Mr RICHARD GRIFFITHS, Acting Deputy Secretary, People, Culture and Governance, NSW Health, on former oath

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

Mr PAUL PLOWMAN, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Sydney Water, affirmed and examined

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

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

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

Dr BRENDAN FLYNN, Executive Director, Mental Health Branch, NSW Ministry of Health, affirmed and examined

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

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

Professor HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE, Commissioner, Natural Resources Commission, affirmed and examined

Ms JULIE DIXON, Acting Mental Health Commissioner, Mental Health Commission of NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr ALFA D'AMATO, Deputy Secretary, Financial and Corporate Service and Chief Financial Officer, NSW Health, 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'll hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m.

This morning we will start with questions from the crossbench; I'll start with some of my own. Minister, police continue to be first responders to mental health emergencies. We're at a moment in time where there is extraordinary consensus that that is not the right approach and that all relevant stakeholders support reform in this space. You're on the record as agreeing with this Committee's findings that we should have a health-led response to mental health emergencies, but it's been over a year since we delivered that recommendation. Where is this reform up to?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Thank you for the question, Chair. It is a significant reform and one that I'm committed to. Where we're up to is we have spent the last little while working pretty assiduously within government to develop an agreed framework across the relevant government agencies, primarily New South Wales police, NSW Health—particularly the mental health branch—and NSW Ambulance to come to an understanding about what they think might be the right approach to undertake this reform. It is a significant reform. It's important and worthwhile, but it's quite a significant change to the way that thousands and thousands of calls that are currently being managed by police are being managed by other responders. I know that that might seem slow to you. I accept and hear feedback that people want this to be a change that occurs. That's something that I want that too, but it's also something of such significance that I don't think we should rush it.

As I understand the Deputy Secretary, Elizabeth Wood, briefly touched on yesterday in Minister Park's budget estimates hearing, we have now commenced an outward-facing consultation period. That has just commenced. Again, I recognise that probably you and others are going to say, "Jeez, can't we get on with it?" But, as I said, I'm not going to apologise for the fact we're taking the reform seriously. That outward-facing work will, from my point of view, most particularly include consultation with mental health consumers, their families and their loved ones. Some initial contact has already been made with peak organisations representing those groups.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: That consultation is certainly welcome, but it's not just my own personal opinion that this is urgent. This is an issue where harm continues to be caused to people in the community for as long as we have inaction on this issue. At a budget estimates hearing in September last year you told us that you anticipated a new model would go to Cabinet by the end of the year. Then in June this year at question time you gave the same response that work was underway within government between those relevant agencies progressing to explore what an alternative model might look like. So I'm sure you can understand the frustration for people who care deeply about this issue that you've essentially given this Committee the same response, over and over again, for a year that you're having conversations within government and that it's complicated. Where are we now that's different to where we were when I asked this question in September last year?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I do take on your point that it's not just your concern about the pace of this reform. Certainly I've heard from and met with others who have echoed that sentiment that this is something that they think is important and that we need to progress. The significant change that we have made—the progress that we have made—is that we have now reached a point where there has been a whole-of-government agreement on a framework to engage with external consultation. That has taken a little bit of time, probably longer than I would have liked. But the reality is, as I've said, this is not a minor reform. You wouldn't be satisfied and I wouldn't be satisfied if the change that we were putting forward was tinkering around the edges. You would rightfully call that out as a missed opportunity and a minimal change.

If we want to have the significant change—the bigger reform that isn't just tinkering around the edges—it has taken some time for the different parts of government that are currently involved in this piece to share their experiences, their understandings and their perspectives. That has now happened. We have now reached that whole-of-government agreement point to go out on that consultation piece. As I said, it has taken a little bit longer than I would have liked. But that is actually quite significant progress that we have achieved in the last little while. Those conversations with external stakeholders I imagine will be very well received, although people will, I imagine, indicate, "Yes, this is great, but we're keen to ensure the pace of this continues."

The CHAIR: I have no doubt that people with lived experience of a mental health crisis and their families, clinicians, experts, frontline workers and their respective unions will all want to be part of these conversations. What is the time frame now for that consultation work that you're undertaking?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, it's just commenced. I might ask Ms Wood to briefly elaborate on the time frame. I do understand that you'll have more of an opportunity to ask her questions in detail this afternoon, but just in specific response to questions around the time frame. Ms Wood, do you want to briefly mention how long we're anticipating those conversations with the groups that Dr Cohn mentioned might take?

ELIZABETH WOOD: We have just commenced, as I mentioned yesterday and certainly the Minister has outlined. We're anticipating six months to get through this consultation. We're very conscious of the level of sensitive engagement that needs to occur with both consumers and families, as well as the work that we need to do with our workforces to really design what is a true co-responder response. We have to make sure that the community is always safe, as well as all of our staff across all agencies. I agree in terms of the urgency and the need to get this right, but I think we do need to take a considered approach and I'm confident with the time frame we have.

The CHAIR: While that significant piece of work is being undertaken, I wanted to ask you about the Mental Health Acute Assessment Team model. This Committee examined a number of alternative models through our inquiry, particularly focused on some models in other jurisdictions, but the MHAA Team was established in 2013 and became a standard service in Western Sydney in 2015. I understand it's been extremely well received by consumers, by their families and by the staff who work in that service. Why hasn't that been expanded further in the interim, given this is a model that's already in place in New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The answer to that question is because at the moment there are a number of similar overlapping co-responder type models that exist in different districts. There's the one that you have mentioned in Western Sydney LHD. Obviously some districts and local police commands have PACER, which has elements of co-responder models as part of that. Up in Hunter New England they have similar sort of more virtual models that also include engagement with Health-led responses as part of the work that they're doing. We haven't expanded them or scaled them statewide because we wanted to do the work to make sure that the model that we adopted was one that was widely accepted, informed by consultation with the groups that you've mentioned, and so, in response to you rightfully identifying, we have done a little bit of this work in some areas and it has been successful.

I agree with you. We didn't just want to pick up one of those models and scale it statewide without having done this work. Similarly, I get a lot of positive feedback on PACER. People say to me, "PACER is working well in my area. Why don't we expand PACER?" I think there were questions yesterday as well, "Why isn't PACER

CORRECTED

statewide?" The answer is because we're doing this work to identify the best models that work in the best ways for local communities and then we hope that will underpin a statewide response.

The CHAIR: Community living support programs have been found to not only reduce mental health hospitalisations and improve people's wellbeing, but they are also cost saving, and there are not many initiatives in Health and Mental Health that actually save the Government money. Why is this not being expanded further in the 2025-26 budget?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think there are just a lot of pressures on the budget. I'd agree with the initial premise of your question, which is CLS is an excellent program. Obviously, as the Minister for both Housing and Mental Health, I am extremely interested in effective programs that support people with mental illness to be housed in a stable, safe and secure way. CLS is an excellent example of that. I agree that it works well. I agree that it's a cost saving. There are lots of different things that we would love—in an ideal world if the budget pressures weren't as they are—to have significantly more expanded. But I think the service that we do deliver operates well. We will always look for opportunities to do more, particularly engaging with the Commonwealth or other levels of Government that might be able to provide funding assistance. At the moment, as you know, we only have a one-year Health agreement with the Commonwealth, which is making it challenging for us to budget into the long term. We would hope, once we had a multi-year health funding agreement with the Commonwealth, that some of those areas of priority, of which CLS is one, would be able to be expanded. But at the moment some of those budgetary pressures make that very difficult.

The CHAIR: Given those budget pressures, though, the evaluation of community living support programs found net savings of about \$86,000 per person over five years. That's actually a really short return. Surely it would be better for your budget pressures to actually fund an expansion of CLS.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Sometimes the way that those—seeing those programs as investments that lead to savings is accounted for can be challenging for areas like mental health, housing and homelessness. I would say your point is well made. In terms of the way that those savings are accounted for and realised in the budget is a broader whole-of-government challenge. It's not one that we have a solution to in Mental Health. We regularly make the case that spending money on mental health services—CLS is a great example, but there are other examples too—saves the State money; that actually the criminal justice costs, the housing and homelessness costs of not doing that work are more substantial. But perhaps the Treasury officials over in the Macquarie Room—you know. We make that case and we work, as others do, through budget processes to try to have that realised. But it's not always straightforward.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, I think you probably know what I am going to ask you about first up: the pause on environmental water across New South Wales, which is incredibly concerning. I'm sure you're aware that delivery of this environmental water is critical to the health and functioning of wetland ecosystems and provides vital water for dependent ecosystems. I'm sure you're aware of the species that they support, including providing habitat for threatened species, like the Murray cod, silver perch and many birds. I understand there have been technical issues that have been raised by NRAR—or by DCCEEW, we're not sure. I'm hearing different information from different experts. Is there some kind of information issues paper, something that the Government can produce—you can produce—so that the public knows what the hell is going on?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I'm more than happy to do that, Ms Faehrmann. I am obviously aware of the issue that you've raised. I'm aware of the critical importance of the delivery of environmental water. There is no question from my point of view that that must be resolved. That's a non-negotiable, from my point of view, for all of the reasons you have identified. I also agree with you that it's not just that there are potentially conflicting pieces of information. It is a complex issue and so I am more than willing to take on providing some kind of information paper or public briefing that might explain what has happened. I'm happy to answer questions here today, but in answer to that specific question of are we willing to be open and transparent about what has occurred and our plan to resolve it? Absolutely.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Great. In the spirit of openness and transparency, what legal advice has been obtained by you, by the New South Wales Government, in relation to this?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There was an initial piece of legal advice that was obtained by the CPHR division of DCCEEW in relation to an environmental water event that they—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: And CPHR is?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Conservation, Heritage Programs and Regulation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That would be CHPR.

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Apologies, Ms Faehrmann. It's within Minister Sharpe's areas of responsibility. Within DCCEEW I obviously have responsibility for the Water Group. Ms Jones is here with CPHR—am I saying that right?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's fine.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That division is with Minister Sharpe. Minister Sharpe is the environmental water holder.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, so the legal advice?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They obtained legal advice in relation to a watering event they wished to undertake that raised a question about whether or not that event was permitted under exemptions that they had regarding the take of water. They obviously consulted with Water Group. Water Group also obtained their own legal advice through the Crown Solicitor's Office that, in a way, confirmed that there was some legal uncertainty. This is not something that had been brought to our attention before. It wasn't resultant of a change that we made. To be honest, it came out of nowhere; it was unanticipated, both for CPHR and for Water Group. As soon as it was identified that there was some legal uncertainty, we have taken action and are progressing a regulatory amendment which we hope to have finalised soon—it is in drafting at the moment—to clarify that legal uncertainty.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you suggesting that the legal advice obtained by the environment Minister's office and the legal advice obtained by the Water Group differ?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, they were consistent.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Would you be able to provide that legal advice?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'll have to take that on notice. As you know, Ms Faehrmann, legal advice is subject to legal professional privilege, and our waiving of that—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It doesn't have to be.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right, but our waiving of that is not something that we do lightly. Certainly, in relation to the CPHR legal advice, I'm not in a position to make any comment on that; I'll have to discuss that with Minister Sharpe. But I'll take on notice your request to have the legal advice or a summary of the legal advice made available. I'm not going to commit to that today; there are standard legal professional privileges that sit over that legal advice. But, as I said, I'm happy to articulate the fact that it raised question marks that were unanticipated.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Maybe expand a bit on that then. If you can't provide the legal advice, I think as water Minister you need to be able to explain what the issue is in terms of pausing environmental water releases at this significant time, which could have such a significant impact. What did that legal advice say?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I might ask Ms Jones to try to—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What's your talking point? Have you got a few sentences just to summarise from the Minister's perspective? Because I have to say, the Government's been very quiet on this. We've heard from stakeholders, conservationists and First Nations communities. The stories that I'm seeing say that the Minister—it says that the Government isn't really responding to questions on this.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't think that's fair. We have responded to multiple media inquiries and attempted to provide clarity and statements in relation to this. To be perfectly honest, Ms Faehrmann, it's quite complicated. It is whether or not the take of water moving from a regulated system to an unregulated system, I understand, from different water sources is accounted for as water take under the Water Management Act. It is not straightforward to explain. Ms Jones, did you want to try to give a brief, couple of sentence summary to Ms Faehrmann as to what the legal issue that has been raised is?

AMANDA JONES: Happy to, Minister. As you mentioned, it's about water moving from one water source to another. When we think about environmental water and what it's used for—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: No, Ms Jones, we won't go there, actually. That's fine. Let's do that this afternoon, just in terms of time.

AMANDA JONES: I could add, though, Ms Faehrmann, if you'd allow me, that—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: No.

AMANDA JONES: —the release of this kind of water is managed under water sharing plan rules.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Yes, Ms Jones. I am aware of all of this, so I don't need the time taken up, thank you. I'm needing to know where the Government is sitting on it. It's also quite a political decision at this point.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I just completely reject that, Ms Faehrmann. It's not a political decision; a legal question's been raised and we're resolving it. It's got nothing to do with politics.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, are you aware that in the 2023 review of the non-urban metering framework, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder made a submission regarding metering implementation issues and challenges that are unique to the delivery of water for the environment and that it wasn't clearly addressed in the options paper—that they were critical issues that needed to be carefully considered and resolved? Why weren't those concerns raised by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder in relation to the unique aspect of environmental water and how it's measured taken into consideration?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They were taken into consideration.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In what way?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The requirements on the environmental water holders, to the extent that they must account for and meter the water that is taken for the purposes of environmental watering, are consistent with all other forms of water take.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That is exactly the opposite of what the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder was saying was their concern. The submission pointed out things like watering of some wetlands requires mobile pumps which cannot meet the telemetry metering requirements; attaching meters to some regulators impedes fish passage; hydrological assessments modelling is used at some sites; river gauging is used for in-stream and environmental flows; and a water balance method is used for flood plain overland flows. It's very different. That's what the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder was asking to be taken into consideration.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, and we have been taking those things into consideration, but ultimately, I'm not—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That all environmental water has to be measured the same way?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: I'm reluctant to do this, but the Minister is being talked over. The question should be posed, but the Minister gets into about the third sentence and then is cut off at the knees. That's just not the way these proceedings operate. The Minister must be allowed to answer the question posed.

The CHAIR: I made the same ruling three times yesterday, and I'll continue that way.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ultimately, we have taken those concerns into consideration and we'll continue to work with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. But my position is this, Ms Faehrmann—and, to be honest, I'm a little bit frustrated that it's not well accepted and understood: Ultimately, we must be able to measure the delivery of environmental water under our water sharing plans. The rules at that fundamental level apply to everyone for a good reason. We cannot have fair sharing of this valuable resource if environmental water holders think that those fundamental rules about accounting for and measuring the amount of water that they are taking don't apply to them. They do apply to them.

We are more than willing to recognise some of those differences between take of water for environmental use and take of water for irrigation. But my understanding is that right at the beginning of the creation of the water management framework, environmental water holders had a level of consistency with all other water holders in relation to their obligations. That includes their obligations to measure and meter the amount of water they are taking, albeit for a different purpose. If they refuse to do that, and if they can't do that, that makes our job very difficult because we don't know how much water is being taken for environmental purposes. To the extent there's a pushback on what I consider to be baseline compliance with measuring and metering, then I'm not particularly sympathetic. How can I have a fair water management system and water sharing plans that fairly allocate this valuable resource if environmental water holders don't think they have to tell us how much water they're taking? I think they do.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Good morning, Minister. I'm sure you will be aware of the public statements by the CFMEU new New South Wales executive director outlining the union's push into the New South Wales multistorey residential construction market, which has been described as their jewel in the crown. Have the CFMEU had any contact with you about moving into the residential apartment market?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, they haven't.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, with respect to the CFMEU statements, they've outlined that when it comes to the Government's work, "The builders who are going to get that State Government money are not our builders." Will the Government rule out entering into any arrangements with CFMEU-aligned builders?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's entirely hypothetical; I don't know who those builders are. We have a clear procurement framework, which I'm happy to get Ms Pinkstone to outline, in relation to what builders we use. I don't have any involvement in that; I'm not engaged in it. I don't know the builders that we use or don't use, other than that my expectation—and I've obviously made that clear to Homes NSW—is that the procurement of those building services is consistent with government procurement frameworks. Other than that, I'm not involved and I don't really have a view.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, the Queensland Government has implemented the best practice industry conditions and it was referred to as the CFMEU tax. Will the New South Wales Government rule out introducing any similar conditions in New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have no familiarity with that. That provision in relation to the Queensland Government that you have referred to is not one that I have knowledge of or familiarity with. Certainly we've had no conversations along those lines. That's not something that is in any way under consideration by the New South Wales Government, and it's been the subject of no briefings or conversations.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, I just want to turn to clarify some points. In supplementary questions for the last budget estimates, you outlined at question on notice 243 that there were 92,635 public housing properties as at 28 February 2025. It was also indicated that there were 94,470 public housing properties as at 30 June 2024, which is the same figure that's reflected on the Social Housing Residential Dwellings Dashboard. Minister, why has there been a reduction of 1,835 public housing properties over eight months?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The change that you are referring to primarily relates to the transfer of properties from the Homes NSW—or formerly Land and Housing Corporation—portfolio to the Aboriginal Housing Office portfolio. The previous Government had a program—and one that I supported in opposition and continue to support now—of ensuring that, where Homes NSW properties were tenanted by an Aboriginal person and that home would be better managed by the Aboriginal Housing Office, the transfer of the ownership and management of that home to the Aboriginal Housing Office occurred. The figure that you are referring to is correct. You will see that that refers to what we call public housing. That's Homes NSW, formerly Land and Housing Corporation, owned and managed housing. But AHO housing, which is still part of the Homes NSW family, has had an increase relative to the decrease of the public housing figure.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: As at that point, what was the figure of homes for the Aboriginal Housing Office?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In 2023-24, are you referring to?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you have it as of 30 June 2025?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We have preliminary data that we can provide on that but, obviously, that is relatively recent data. The figure I have as preliminary data for 2024-25 is 6,552 AHO properties.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How many public housing properties?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's 92,709.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, you indicated that as at 30 June 2024 there were 155,905 social homes in New South Wales, while indicating that you project the number of social homes to be approximately 139,900 at the end of 2030-31, in accordance with question on notice 2025. Why are you projecting the loss of 16,000 social homes?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can only imagine that, Mr Farlow, whilst I don't know the second figure that you referred to and the source of that, that figure related to the Homes NSW portfolio and did not include CHP or ACHP properties. The figure that you are referring to that was provided in relation to 2023-24 social housing dwellings, the 155,905, is the total social housing portfolio in New South Wales—so Homes NSW properties, AHO, community housing providers and Aboriginal community housing providers. I don't know without further information, but I can only imagine that the other figure that you've referred to does not include some of those categories. There's absolutely no question that we are on track to deliver record increases in the social housing stock in New South Wales, not just because of our own budgetary commitments but because of commitments through the Commonwealth and the Housing Australia Future Fund. There's just no doubt that that is the trajectory that we are on and that, in fact, we are on track to increase our stock by historic numbers.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, are you projecting, then, that there'll be 139,900 public housing and Aboriginal housing properties by 2030-31?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will have to take that figure on notice. That's not a figure that I have and am able to provide clarity in relation to, but I'm more than happy to take on notice what that figure refers to and provide clarity to you in relation to our projections.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, as at 30 June 2024, you indicated that there were 315,004 bedrooms in public housing in New South Wales, the reference being question on notice 245. You also, at question on notice 246, projected that 275,000 bedrooms are projected at the end of your Building Homes for NSW program. Why is there that loss of 40,000 bedrooms?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, without having the source of that data in front of me, it's challenging for me to know whether or not the component parts that have led to those figures are similar. I reiterate my answer before: There's absolutely no question that we are increasing stock by historic numbers. You don't put \$5.1 billion in the budget and project increases of 8,400 New South Wales government-funded homes alone, let alone those delivered by our community housing partners and funded under the Housing Australia Future Fund, and not project a significant increase in the number of not just social housing homes but also social housing bedrooms. I'll have to take on notice the comparison between the figures that you have provided, but my answer is very clear. Our projections are all a significant increase in stock, which is much needed.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, why did DCJ quarterly statistics reports on social housing delivery end in June of 2024?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know the answer to that. Do Mr Tidball or Ms Pinkstone have any information in relation to that?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: We have produced additional information. Mr Farlow, if I can take that on notice, I'm happy to respond. But the amount of data we have provided has grown, so I'd need to look at whether it's been replaced by something else that we're providing in a different format, but happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: If we can come back to that in the afternoon, perhaps?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, the productivity commission's *Report on Government Services* shows that recurrent funding to community housing providers was reduced in 2022-23, when it was \$178.4 million, to \$133 million in 2023-24—a 25 per cent cut. What's the figure in 2024-25?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't have the figure here. Ms Pinkstone, do you have that figure?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, I can take that on notice for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: If you could also take on notice the projection over the forward estimates relating to that as well.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's the funding from the New South Wales Government to community housing providers?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Funding from the New South Wales Government to community housing providers.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's fine, we'll take that on notice for you, Mr Farlow.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, I understand that Homes NSW has acquired three sites at present as part of a land audit, those being 20 Nelson Road, Box Hill; 451 and 633 Alford's Point Road and Old Illawarra Road at Menai; and 72, 84 and 86 Menangle Road at Camden. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I think that's correct.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How much was paid by Homes NSW for those sites?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ms Pinkstone is advising me that the figure was \$30.39 million.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Where was this funding sourced from?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The budgetary allocation that we received under the Building Homes for NSW program.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What sites is Homes NSW negotiating to purchase at present as part of the land audit?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I know some of those. Ms Pinkstone, there may be others that I'm not aware of. The ones that I'm primarily aware of are Transport for NSW owned sites at Woolloomooloo, at North Eveleigh, there's one at Hurstville, and the forth one is escaping me in terms of—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Haberfield, is it?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can go through them.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it is at Haberfield. Thank you, Mr Farlow. So those four Transport for NSW sites are ones that are under active negotiation between Homes NSW and Transport for NSW in relation to our acquisition.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We're transacting on one with SOPA at the moment, and I can go through those if you'd like.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Let's go to that SOPA one. I understand that it was indicated that it's been transferred to Homes NSW and agreements have been exchanged, but the transfer of ownership hasn't been completed. Is that correct?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right. We've exchanged on the purchase of the site, and we're just going through the settlement process. On the site, it needs to be subdivided, so we're just in the process of doing that with SOPA.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How much has that site been costed at?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can take that on notice and get back to you this afternoon.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the source of funding being the Building Homes for NSW package, how much has been apportioned within the Building Homes for NSW package for land purchases as a result of the land audit?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will have to take that on notice. In a way, it's a little bit iterative, Mr Farlow. As you know, the land audit is the land audit that never ends—it just goes on and on, my friend. As sites become available into the future, it may be that Homes NSW identifies a site that currently is not in the land audit that they think, "Wow, this is a fantastic opportunity," and really want to snap that up. That will obviously have a budgetary impact. We have \$5.1 billion as part of the \$6.6 billion that was allocated for Housing and Homelessness specifically for capital delivery. Exactly how much of that is going to be used for the purchase of land under the land audit, I will have to take on notice.

As I said, we will provide you what figures we can, but I don't necessarily want to give you a commitment that I won't be back here next year or the year after, saying, "Actually, that changed," because an opportunity presented itself in the land audit in six months time and we thought, "Wow, what a great site. We want to grab that one and deliver housing on it," in which case, obviously, we will have to make that right within our budget. But we would be prepared to do that if a good opportunity to deliver more housing presented itself.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you have a provision within that budgetary allocation for land purchases in general?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What is that provision?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do you have that figure?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No. I can get it for you.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would say, Mr Farlow, in general, we prefer to redevelop our own land. It's obviously cheaper. We spend less of that \$5.1 billion on land acquisition, and many of the projects that we are delivering are redevelopments of our own land. But, yes, there are provisions within that budget for land acquisition. We will need to acquire more land to deliver housing—we can get you that figure—but that is just part of making sure that we have enough opportunities to deliver on the 8,400 homes.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, with respect to those acquisitions, is Homes NSW required to pay full independent market price for that land?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Land identified under the land audit?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Yes.

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, we are. There is a process through the Government Property Framework to determine or resolve disagreements or disputes in relation to the value of land. The Valuer General has a role to play there. But, yes, the Government Property Framework, which is obviously administered by Minister Kamper, does have the provision that we pay market rates for the land.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, with respect to some of these projects under the land audit, what's the status of the Carriageworks proposal?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I mentioned, that is the North Eveleigh site. That is currently owned by—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Transport for NSW.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —TAM, I think it is now called. We are negotiating with them. There are still some Transport assets on that land—operational assets that Sydney Trains use—so Sydney Trains is needing to relocate them. But I did recently have a conversation with Transport for NSW about needing to resolve that urgently, and Matt Longland from Sydney Trains was part of that conversation and accepted that. We are in negotiation with them. We are seeking to resolve that as quickly as we can, but it is absolutely still our intention—and we are negotiating with Transport to have that resolved as soon as we can, hopefully by the end of the year.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, when do you expect to commence construction on that site?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: If we can stick to the current time frame that I am anticipating—although, as we have already seen, sometimes I give time frames here at estimates that end up being challenging. Nonetheless, we are hoping to resolve those issues with Transport by the end of the year. We would hope that once that occurs, we could commence construction on that site next year. Most of that land is vacant. As I said, it does have some operational assets on it, but once they are removed, we should be able to commence construction. I will say, Mr Farlow, that the team at Homes NSW are not waiting for the land transactions to be resolved to commence the planning and design work for the homes. That is occurring concurrently. We don't currently own those sites; they are still owned by Transport for NSW, and we are negotiating with them. But our team is still doing design work and doing planning work so that once the ownership is transferred, we can commence construction as quickly as possible.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: When do you expect that site to be completed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know if I have a date for that. Do you have a date for the North Eveleigh site?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No. It has to go through planning.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We can take on notice what time frames we can provide for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I might turn to some of the sites that I think are in your control already. With respect to the Kellyville site, when do you expect construction to be commenced?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will look that up. Do you have it there, Ms Pinkstone?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: These sites are in due diligence with the agency, which is Sydney Water. There is a proportion of the site that we were going to take over, and so it's part of a broader negotiation process. All of these sites from the land audit are going through the due diligence process. Those ones that we have transacted on were relatively straightforward, but there is some complexity on these other sites in terms of ownership and titling issues that we are working through at the moment.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the Box Hill site—my apologies, that is one that has been transferred across, as I understand it. When do you expect to commence construction on that site?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: For the ones that we own, I can come back to you with the construction time frames.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We will return to that this afternoon, then. With respect to the Housing Australia Future Fund, Minister, on my analysis, New South Wales will deliver 3,848 dwellings under the HAFF funding while Victoria is delivering 4,315, despite having a smaller population than New South Wales. Why is Victoria getting more money out of this program than New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's a great question. I encourage you to take it up with—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ask the Federal Government?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —Minister O'Neil. I will be very open, Mr Farlow. We were disappointed, particularly with round one of the Housing Australia Future Fund. I have expressed that disappointment publicly. I have expressed it privately to the Commonwealth. We do have the biggest population. We have the biggest intake of net migration. We are desperately in need of housing solutions in New South Wales. HAFF round one was disappointing and underwhelming from a New South Wales Government perspective. HAFF round two, we felt better about. We're in a better position there. But I assure you that we have been forcefully making the case to the Commonwealth that some of the HAFF settings are disadvantageous to New South Wales, and that is a problem.

I will identify one. The HAFF currently uses a very narrow financial feasibility framework to assess, basically, value for money yield. That is a problem in New South Wales because our land values are so much higher than every other State. Yes, you get less bang for buck in our State because you have to pay more for land. That is the reality. We have an expectation that the Commonwealth recognises that and doesn't take a very narrow assessment framework that discounts that quite significant factor. We've been forcefully making that case to the Commonwealth, and we will continue to.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, how many HAFF applications has the New South Wales Government submitted, and how many have been approved?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know if I have information in relation to how many we submitted in the first two rounds. Ms Pinkstone, do you have that? Or we could take it on notice.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can get you the total. We were successful for all in round two.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That was 14.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, the 14 sites.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, round two was better, with 14 applications and 14 sites. Round one, as I said, two sites—Lane Cove and Maroubra—but I will have to take on notice how many applications we put in.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, NRAR received their full funding request of \$36.3 million and your Government increased that further by \$19.9 million. What is that \$19.9 million getting New South Wales taxpayers?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Proper compliance and enforcement of our water laws, which I think—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you saying that we weren't getting proper compliance of our water laws before you chucked in that \$19.9 million, or are you meaning to say "improved"?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, improved, if that is a word that you'd prefer. I think I've been open with the fact that NRAR has been doing a good job since its creation a few years ago, but there have been challenges in relation to the delivery of compliance. I will give you two examples because we have made not just funding changes but also regulatory and legislative changes: one in relation to the non-urban metering framework and the other one in relation to—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just because of my limited time, is this \$19.9 million to facilitate the proper enforcement that's coming through with the proposed legislation? Is that to help facilitate that legislation being administered?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, not the entire \$19 million. But in part, yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Is that additional \$19.9 million being totally covered by water licensing charges and water user charges, or is there a component of that money being funded from funds elsewhere?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, my understanding is that NRAR's budget is funded in the same way as part of the WAMC budget, which is IPART regulated and based on recovery from water users, although Ms Jones may be able to elaborate if there is part of the NRAR budget that is supplemented from DCCEEW or other sources.

AMANDA JONES: WAMC costs are spread from the State as well as water users, so they're proportionally allocated. IPART identifies what share water users should pay and what the Government should pay.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much more compliance are we going to wring out of water users for this additional money, given it has some of the highest compliance rates in the State? When you look at a regulator, I think it's 99 per cent overall. Mr Barnes is shaking his head in the background.

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: You can ask Mr Barnes in the afternoon.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I couldn't get a clear answer from him from a briefing before, but it has a reasonably high compliance rate, so I'm curious as to how much we're going to increase that compliance rate by and whether that is value for taxpayer dollars?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: For example, as I have indicated, compliance in relation to the non-urban metering framework is significantly lower than that and, in fact, it has been—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: There have been overall issues with the rollout of that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I accept that, Mr Banasiak, and I have been open about the range of issues that have contributed to that. I merely make the point to you that there is quite a significant compliance gap in relation to that specific issue. But I will also say this: It is absolutely not fair to say that NRAR's only role and the only thing that they will be expending their budget on is compliance. They have a significant educative role, and we would be hoping that that work would be expanded. We accept that almost everyone wants to do the right thing and that education and support for people to do the right thing is as important, if not more important, than the compliance role, because most people do.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you able, on notice, to provide a bit of a breakdown in terms of how much of that \$19.9 million would go towards education versus compliance versus whatever other activities NRAR will be doing?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's fine. I can take that on notice, and perhaps in the afternoon—I know your time is limited—you could ask Mr Barnes some questions directly.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: The community benchmarking survey—how much weighting was put on that regarding the need for more funding and expanded powers? I know that the survey was only a small sample of the public, and it asked some fairly benign questions about whether you think water theft is an issue. If you asked 100 kids whether they wanted ice-cream after dinner, most would say yes too. What weighting was put to that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That is probably a question for IPART. I understand that those kinds of community surveys are a requirement of IPART submissions processes. IPART expects organisations to ask the community the kind of questions that you have articulated. IPART then makes decisions about how much weight to give them in the determination of the fair and efficient prices.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Was that survey paid for by IPART or was it paid for under the WAMC funding?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I suspect it was paid for by NRAR—by the organisation that was doing the submission.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, earlier when we discussed the release of the legal advice for the environmental water freeze, you said that it was first sought because of a watering event that was going to take place. Where was that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know that. As I said, that was something that—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Jones, do you know what that is?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —Minister Sharpe may know. Do you know, Amanda?

AMANDA JONES: I would need to check.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's not the watering event that we were undertaking, as I have indicated. It was by the CPHR group within DCCEEW.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that the Water Management (General) Regulation 2025 that is due to replace the 2018 reg differentiates metering requirements for water pumped from a river and water taken as floodplain harvesting. Are you aware of that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It seems appropriate and it seems sensible, so if that can happen, I assume it can also happen for environmental watering.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it can, and that is, Ms Faehrmann, the path that we are looking to use to resolve this issue. As I said, I really want to be clear to you: This isn't political and this isn't as a result of a change that we've made or a decision that we have undertaken. Quite genuinely, an unexpected piece of legal

CORRECTED

advice was received. I will take on notice how much of that I can share with you. We are using a regulatory pathway through our water management regulations to resolve that. That is literally being drafted by PCO in consultation with the relevant DCCEEW entities right now. We recognise we have to resolve this. We very much hope it is a short, temporary pause whilst these legal issues are resolved.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of a short, temporary pause, quite a few people have expressed concern about the fact that there is due to be a release of water on 1 September that is critical for the breeding event of certain waterbirds. This is the spring breeding season. Will it be fixed in time for that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will have to take that on notice. I've seen the media reports that you are referring to that reference that event. That's not something that environmental water holders have specifically raised with me, although I remain open to engaging with them on that. I would say there's quite a bit of water in the system now. Thankfully, this issue has arisen at a time when we are not in dry conditions; we are in wet conditions. But let me take on notice that specific event and how we might manage it because, whilst I have read that media report, I haven't received any formal or official correspondence or information in relation to it.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There is a clause under the 2018 regulation—clause 233—which actually allows the Minister to grant an exemption to a holder of a licence where it is not possible for water to be measured using metering equipment. Would you exercise that discretion for environmental water and for this particular watering event?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would consider it, absolutely. As I said, I have taken on notice the specifics. I am happy to receive advice, but I would be willing to. There is no agenda here to limit or halt environmental water delivery in New South Wales, and if we need to use some of those provisions in the short term, we will. We are actively working on a solution right now because—I recognise the point that you've made—we absolutely have to get this fixed.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The Connectivity Expert Panel has also reported that the allocation policy in New South Wales allows borrowing against non-irrigation accounts to underwrite general security water for irrigation. Will you commit here today that any unused water in environmental water accounts will be preserved and not used to improve water availability for irrigation?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That is absolutely not my intention. That has not been something that's been suggested to me. I could not be clearer, Ms Faehrmann, that I do not—this was an unexpected and unintended event. It is in no way my expectation that environmental water would be used for any other purposes than environmental watering and, if there is a short-term or temporary pause on the delivery of that water, it will not be used for other purposes. That is in no way our intention.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You said earlier that all water—the water needs to be metered. Water that is used needs to be metered. Rainfall run-off isn't; there is an exemption for that. The connectivity panel, in fact, expressed their concern that it makes up to 44 per cent of floodplain harvesting—rainfall run-off—but 61 per cent of that is exempt. It almost sounds like this is a slap down to environmental water when, really, there is a hell of a lot of water in this State that has been taken, again, by the big irrigators—floodplain harvesting water. That isn't measured, Minister.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There are a range of exemptions. You are right: Environmental water holders have a range of exemptions. It's true that exemptions operate. In relation to rainfall run-off, to be honest, the advice that I've received—and I'm happy to try and provide more detail, or you could ask this afternoon—is it is extremely difficult to accurately meter and measure rainfall run-off. It is a very challenging event to measure. We of course measure—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I think the same could be said with environmental flows.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: To some extent yes, but specifically in relation to where environmental water holders are taking water from a regulated water source. To be honest, Ms Faehrmann, that should not be particularly difficult in a regulated system for them to measure. Nonetheless, I don't want you to think that I don't recognise that of course there is a difference between water taken for the purposes of environmental watering and irrigation. They're clearly different purposes. Having said that—and again, I reiterate—I do expect baseline compliance with metering and measuring what we can because otherwise we don't know. There are other forms of water that we take that we cannot measure. It is very difficult. I am happy to continue a conversation about rainfall run-off, but the advice that I have is that it is very challenging to accurately measure and meter rainfall run-off.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll come back to this in the afternoon with Mr Barnes as well. How long before the six unregulated water sharing plans and the one regulated water sharing plan will be remade and put out for public consultation? Where is that up to, and when can we expect them to be finalised?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Are you referring to the plans that expired?

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The six that concurrence wasn't—yes, that's right.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We would hope to have them resolved as soon as we can. We don't have a time frame on that. It is our expectation that some additional consultation may be necessary. There has sometimes been criticism of us in the past that we haven't done the kind of consultation that the community expected. We're very mindful of that criticism and are wanting to do better. In the circumstance where we may need to do some additional consultation, we are hopeful that that will happen soon. I don't like to have the plans expired and not remade. On the other hand, Ms Faehrmann, they're 10-year plans. It's important to me that we get them right, and we're going to be responsive to feedback that we need to do better with consultation. Sometimes that might take a little bit more time.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that not having the water sharing plans in place, the same situation has continued as under the old water sharing plans. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, that's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So, 100 per cent allocations were made on 1 July to irrigators, including carryover ability and capacity.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would have to check. Is that what occurred, Ms Jones?

AMANDA JONES: We can confirm the water allocations this afternoon, Ms Faehrmann, but yes, the licences continue. Conditions on licences continue without the plans in place.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, did you get any legal advice about that at the time?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not that I recall.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But you're confident that that's all—to allocate the water on 1 July without existing water sharing plans in place.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The annual water determination allocations. I should clarify, Ms Faehrmann, I have received legal advice in relation to the operation of the Water Management Act and what occurs in the instance where the plans lapse. I have received legal advice in relation to that, which confirms the evidence that I am providing to you, that the provisions and conditions on the existing licences and plans operate. I can't recall whether that specifically referred to the issue that you have raised in relation to allocations. I will take on notice as to whether that specific issue was referenced in the brief that I received in relation to what occurs in the event of lapsed plans.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Good morning, Minister. Going back to earlier, my colleague Dr Cohn was discussing the PACER program and the fact that we're changing the State's response, pointing out that people who are experiencing mental health issues are literally still being killed by police through these responses in New South Wales. I just want to note that, in Lismore, there is currently no-one filling the PACER. Can you explain what is happening there?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can, Ms Higginson. I've visited the Lismore local area command and met the superintendent—I think is her title. Excuse my ignorance of police hierarchy. They're extremely supportive of their PACER program there. They have tried again and again to recruit their PACER clinician, and they simply cannot find anyone who is suitable. I have engaged with the Mental Health Branch. We've engaged with other local mental health organisations to try and promote the advertisement to try and encourage someone to apply. I think it is a really frustrating and unsatisfactory situation. We would love to have someone playing the PACER role in Lismore, but quite simply, Ms Higginson, we cannot find someone who has the relevant skills to fill that role at the moment.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there anything that is happening? If there is a call today in Lismore or that area for a mental health call-out or a welfare check, who would be the person that would go and undertake that at this point in time?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I imagine it would be police. I don't know. I am happy to take it on notice. Mr Flynn, you may know—although you may not—if the police have any, essentially, plan B provisions or other provisions in place to manage the vacancy in PACER. I'm not sure if they do. I'm happy to take that on notice. As I said, Ms Higginson, it has been raised with me. We've had specific and direct conversations about what we can

CORRECTED

do to try and resolve this situation, but at the moment we simply don't have an applicant who is suitable for the role.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: A number of us in the community are really concerned, because we've got National Party MPs and others doing a bit of lynch-mob politics that the streets are suffering and need cleaning up. I'm very concerned about the escalating circumstances there and vulnerable people. Is it possible for you, as Minister for Mental Health, to issue some form of directive to assist to try and temper and calm the circumstances, provide some kind of leadership guarantee that something is going to happen there to provide the systems and services the most vulnerable people in that part of the world need.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not quite sure in terms of my legal capacity to issue some kind of directive, but absolutely I am more than happy to take on engagement with the local area command there to make sure that, in the absence of someone in the PACER role, they are mindful of those issues that are significant in your community. I have to say, Ms Higginson, I found the local police to be very responsive. The police leadership that I met there were very responsive to these concerns.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: As you know, Minister, it's not the individuals—it's the uniforms, it's the weapons and it's the circumstances. Can you tell me the primary reasons Homes NSW has not accepted the lands that have been provided to Homes NSW for public housing through the land audit? Minister Kamper said in estimates two days ago that a number of those land audit areas of land were refused by Homes NSW. What are the primary reasons?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In a way, they just weren't the most suitable land for the delivery of our housing aspirations. As I answered in relation to Mr Farlow's question earlier, we have to pay market value for land that we receive under the land audit. That's the provisions under the Government Property Framework.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So is it primarily money?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We just have to be mindful of making best use of every one of our \$5.1 billion. When we have opportunities to purchase land under the land audit, we are making pretty careful decisions about whether or not this is a site that we're going to be able to maximise the delivery of housing. If a site has constraints, it's not well located, there is no transport around—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is there a reason? Are you able to provide transparent reasons for why each lot may have been considered not suitable?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We could do that. As I said, it will be things like the location wasn't suitable, the zoning wasn't suitable, you couldn't deliver a lot of homes on it or it was a single lot in an area that we didn't feel as though it was a priority for delivery. Because we have to pay for that land—as I said, that's the provisions under the Government Property Framework—we're mindful about making sure that the sites that we select and pay for deliver the most yield to us in our Building Homes for NSW program.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Good morning, all. Minister, what is the status of Warragamba Dam this morning?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm happy to provide some information in relation to that. The latest advice that I have is the dam has been slowly rising and is now close to capacity. A small spill is forecast to occur in the next few hours. Obviously, we have provided all of the relevant notifications and alerts to the community in relation to that. My understanding is the spill is, as I said, likely at some point today on the back of higher than anticipated rainfall, particularly near the dam wall. As I said, the community has been alerted through all of the relevant notification protocols.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: With the alerts, are flood warnings in place, essentially?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know. We don't issue flood warnings. Mr George from WaterNSW might be able to provide more information. We don't issue those; the SES issue those. We just notify the community—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But you're not aware that anything like that is in place? You've just let them know that it's going to spill?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Our responsibility is to indicate that the expectation is that the dam will reach capacity and will spill. But in relation to minor flood or major flood or any kind of flood warnings or alerts, we leave that to the SES.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Given that this is yet another instance of this occurring, Minister, will Labor commit to reintroducing our previous Liberal-Nationals Coalition plan to raise the Warragamba Dam wall?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely not. That is not, in any way, a sensible use of billions of dollars or a real solution to flooding in the Hawkesbury-Nepean. We stand by our election commitment to cancel the Warragamba Dam wall raising. I think that it's a preposterous non-solution to that problem.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That is very disappointing to hear. Moving on, just clarifying points raised by Ms Cate Faehrmann, NRAR—the Natural Resources Access Regulator—issued a stop work order to your department for noncompliance at Toorale station. Has NRAR ever had to issue such an order to a government agency before?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can ask Mr Barnes in relation to whether it has issued a stop work order to a government agency before. I will just clarify, Ms Overall, whilst the stop work order was issued to DCCEE, it was not issued to the Water Group; it was issued to CPHR, the New South Wales environmental water holder. That is under Minister Sharpe. But, Mr Barnes, have you ever issued a stop work order to a government agency previously?

GRANT BARNES: No, we have not.¹

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, you raised the point earlier this morning that some of this has arisen because of conflicting pieces of information and the complexity of the water laws. You have previously committed to simplifying water laws that could be contributing to issues like this. When are we going to see that happen?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is not fair to say that the issues at Toorale are related to the matters that—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So they're not related to the complexity of the water laws, as they stand at the moment, which you spoke about earlier?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. I think that there was an issue relating to—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: A "legal uncertainty", I believe was the term that you used.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. The issue that Ms Faehrmann was discussing in relation to the pause on the delivery of environmental water by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is separate to the issues that NRAR has responded to at Toorale. I mean, they're all linked to water and water is complex, and the ongoing task—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And they're all linked to the water laws, generally speaking—the regulations?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, they are linked to water laws.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, and the complexity of those water laws that you committed to simplifying.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, we are undertaking a program to try to demystify water for people in the State. But ultimately—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is that happening? Is that progressing?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I think we're making some progress.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great. Minister, is it correct that WaterNSW is sacking 300 staff, one-quarter of its workforce, because of an \$80 million shortfall?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is correct that WaterNSW is engaged in a transformation process that does involve staff reductions, and that is because IPART issued a price determination that required it to undertake that transformation process.

¹ In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 2 September 2025, Mr Grant Barnes, Chief Regulatory Officer, National Resources Access Regulator, clarified their evidence.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So, that's yes. Given the NSW Productivity and Equality Commission's report of July last year, has your Labor Government delivered a new funding model for local water utilities?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We have not delivered that yet.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Has your Government provided any new funding for the Safe and Secure Water program since claiming it was fully allocated?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, we have not delivered extra funding for the Safe and Secure Water fund. But I'm happy to report that there is still a reasonably significant amount of funding in the fund and we are, in fact, desperately trying to expedite the delivery of projects under the fund, because some of the allocations to which you refer have been sitting inactive since 2019, which is a non-optimal situation. Our priority is getting those projects moving, and that is occurring.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just to clarify then, Minister, it's not fully allocated?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's fully allocated to projects, but it is in no way fully expended and some of those allocations have sat dormant for many, many years with no progress. That's not a satisfactory situation to me.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will you reallocate those?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: If, in discussions with the water utilities, those projects have no prospect of progress then perhaps we will reallocate that. But that will be done in consultation with those proponents. To reiterate, it's not acceptable to me if an allocation has been made under that fund years ago and no progress has been made. We're very clear that our expectation is that if you've received an allocation under the fund, you get on with delivering the project.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And there is no new funding?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not at this stage.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In the past 12 months, have more than a handful of town water and sewer projects progressed to shovel-ready stage?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can take on notice exactly how many projects have progressed to shovel-ready in the past 12 months.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'd appreciate that. The exact number would be wonderful. Given the Treasurer says that water infrastructure underpins the Government's housing targets, has any new funding been committed for water infrastructure?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: At the moment our priority is progressing the projects that already have funding. We have, for example, allocated additional new funding to projects such as the Yass water treatment plant, which—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was that an election commitment, Minister?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I believe that was an election commitment, so that is an example. We have also been working jointly with the Commonwealth under the National Water Grid to provide opportunities for water infrastructure funding in New South Wales. There have been a number of examples there. One that comes to mind is Kempsey, which has been the recipient of significant funding under the National Water Grid. There are others. I can provide the details on notice. So those are examples of areas where new additional water infrastructure funding has been allocated to try to support both water security and growth.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Back to NRAR, is it your Government's top water priority, even though the Inspector-General of Water Compliance has previously said only 0.28 per cent of accounts are overdrawn?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is water compliance our top priority?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, working with the regulator, given that the compliance is 0.28 per cent?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have so much love and respect for NRAR, and I don't want Grant to take this the wrong way but, no, NRAR is not my top priority in water. I'm very sorry, Mr Barnes, to have to say that here. I know that you recognise that we're very supportive of the work that NRAR does and want it to continue doing that, but it isn't my top priority in water. My top priority in water is water security—

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Figuring out the complexity of the laws?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —water quality and ensuring water infrastructure to deliver housing growth.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: All very important. Since the independent panel's report was published in May, has there been any tangible progress on the Wilcannia weir project?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The tangible progress that we have been making in the Wilcannia community is the provision of the emergency bores for that town and the upgrade of the water treatment plant. If you want more granular detail in relation to the progress of those two projects, I could ask Ms Jones to elaborate or you could ask her this afternoon.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I will ask her this afternoon.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In relation to the weir itself—the weir replacement—no, we have not progressed that since May. We are still considering the quite comprehensive report and recommendations of the independent panel. We are very thankful for their work. They provided quite a number of findings and recommendations for us to consider. To be honest, one of the reasons that we had to undertake the independent panel was the absolute trashing of community trust that occurred between the years 2019 and 2023. We don't want to repeat those mistakes. I appreciate you don't want to hear me talk about that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We've got that. We haven't progressed it since May. Is your Government proposing to lower the Louth and Tilpa weirs as well?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We are working with the Commonwealth in relation to the delivery of the Northern Basin Toolkit. I have met with Louth community members who have expressed concerns in relation to the project at Louth Weir. We are working with the Commonwealth—those projects under the Northern Basin Toolkit are Commonwealth funded and New South Wales Government delivered—to see whether there may be solutions that are suitable. I will be very clear with you, as I have been with the Louth community. I support fish passage. That is what those projects are intended to deliver. They support fish passage too. But it is fair to say that they have a different view to the one that the department had proposed in relation to how that can be done at Louth. That is something that we are considering but, as I said, because it's Commonwealth funded, we have to secure agreement from the Commonwealth in relation to our delivery of that project, and we're still working through that with them.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Of the water sharing plans due to commence from 1 July, how many remain outstanding?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I believe it is six or seven.

AMANDA JONES: The Belubula regulated plan has been made, so there are six.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. It's six now. Apologies, Ms Overall. It was seven, but Belubula was finalised and so now it's six.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Has your department yet finished analysing the Northern Basin Connectivity Expert Panel: Final Report, July 2024.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, we have not completed all of the analytical work. There are some elements of that that are still ongoing.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Of the 77 sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism sub-projects, how many are complete?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do you have that?

AMANDA JONES: None are complete. All are in progress. They are due for completion in December 2026.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are any behind schedule?

AMANDA JONES: We're on schedule to meet the December 2026 deadline at the moment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: For all 77?

AMANDA JONES: Obviously, wet weather is causing us some concerns right at the moment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Of the 140 to 150 landholder agreements promised on the Murrumbidgee last year, how many have actually been negotiated?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do you have that figure?

AMANDA JONES: That's just commencing next month, with the landholder negotiation scheme and the declaration order now having been made.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: So the answer is zero.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you have an idea of time frame—the expectation for that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, similar to the SDLAM projects, we are required to have completed that piece of work by December 2026. That's the time frame. We don't want to rush those. We would be keen to have those negotiations wrapped up as quickly as possible. But, on the other hand, when you are negotiating with landholders, we want to make sure that we give them adequate time to consider the options and the offers that we put on the table. That project, like the others, has a December 2026 deadline under Restoring Our Rivers. If we can get some of those done before then, we absolutely will, but I'm mindful that we're negotiating with private landholders and I don't want to be putting unnecessary time frames or restrictions on those conversations.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We'll go with the vibe. Has the pilot for the coastal sustainable extraction project commenced?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't believe it has.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Has the framework been developed and peer reviewed?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Has it moved to peer review, Ms Jones? The framework is in development. I'm not exactly sure whether it has reached peer review.

AMANDA JONES: It hasn't reached peer review, no.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies finalised and are implementation plans ready as yet?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As you possibly know, our expectation is that we will have those plans done by the end of the year. I anticipate that I will receive information from the department in relation to the release of those plans imminently. We've committed to them being done in 2025. The current advice I have is that that is still on track.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We are heading towards the end of August and there's not a lot of time left to do that, but at this point you believe it's on track?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. That's my advice.

AMANDA JONES: It's correct.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Amanda is nodding and saying that's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Has the draft Murray Valley Floodplain Management Plan been delivered yet?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, it's commenced.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It's commenced? What is the expectation for the delivery date?

AMANDA JONES: The plan is in place, so it manages the approval of flood works. The plan is in place.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that's an ongoing matter.

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

AMANDA JONES: The plan is in place, and it sets the rules for floodplain works approvals.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What about the Billabong Creek Floodplain Management Plan? Is it commenced, delivered, operating?

AMANDA JONES: Billabong Creek, I think, is in progress.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Perhaps Ms Jones could take that on notice and provide clarification of the status of that plan this afternoon.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Has the Minimum Inflows Method Review pilot begun in the Border Rivers and Murrumbidgee, as scheduled for this quarter?

CORRECTED

AMANDA JONES: The methodology for minimum inflows has been reviewed by the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer's independent panel. That's a methodology that sets a potential framework for us to consider in terms of advising the Minister about any water sharing plan rules. That's the status of that work. We're due to have reviewed those clauses in those water sharing plans by the middle of next year.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: To clarify for myself, what was scheduled for this quarter? The review of the pilot?

AMANDA JONES: There's not a pilot. It's a methodology that is being reviewed by the office—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And that was due for this quarter?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, and that has occurred, and I have received that.

AMANDA JONES: That is completed and the report is released.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is reconnecting the northern basin fish passage, as we've mentioned, on track despite the backlash around all this? We have qualified that previously. That is what you said, that you're taking into account the—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is on track. As I said, I'm being honest about the fact that I have received community feedback, specifically in relation to the Louth Weir, that that community would be interested in seeing a revision of that. We are trying to be mindful of that, taking that into consideration. It is still our expectation that we will be able to deliver that project by the time frames that have been indicated by the Commonwealth but, at the moment, we are working through what we might be able to do to address some of those community concerns.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are there delays with any other Northern Basin Toolkit infrastructure projects?

AMANDA JONES: There are four programs and the Water Group is responsible for one. The other three are under Minister Sharpe.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Is that Reconnecting Watercourse Country?

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Minister Sharpe manages Reconnecting Watercourse Country and those ones, and we are on the fish passage project that you are referring to with Louth and Tilpa. That's the one that we're responsible for.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: There has obviously been a lot of consultation and a lot of examinations, reviews and plans. But we've got staff cuts, we've still got missing funding models, we've got programs that possibly aren't progressing as rapidly as you've admitted you would like to see, difficulties with reforms—you've talked about the complexity of the situation in relation to Toorale station and perhaps complexities, shall we say, around things being on time and delivered when they need to be. How can New South Wales residents, particularly in our regional and rural areas, have any confidence in the ability of you and your department to manage this really critically important portfolio?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Because the proof of the pudding is in the eating. That's exactly what we're doing.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We've just gone over the proof of the pudding here, Minister, of things that are missing, not being done, behind schedule and not progressed, as you've pointed out, to the point that you are happy with it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We've done a lot of incredible work, actually. I'm not going to sit here and say—"Are you perfect?" No.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No, that's not what we've said.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We approach the task with humility and determination. We have actually made a substantial amount of progress in terms of—as Ms Jones has said, all of our SDLAM projects are on track. We now have 16 of 20 water resource plans accredited with the Commonwealth. When I became Minister, that number was something like seven. We are on track to deliver our regional water strategies. There is lot of excellent work that we're doing in relation to trying to reset the non-urban metering framework, which—again, when I became the Minister, compliance was in the toilet.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Some good work being done, Minister, but we're getting stop work orders that have never occurred before, we've just gone through a litany of projects and proposals that you've stated are not happening, are behind schedule and aren't as they should be. You've said yourself that the complexity of it—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I feel as though Ms Jones indicated that many of those projects were, in fact, on schedule.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: There are some. I'm happy to go through and do an analysis to come back to you later on which of those are and which aren't. We do need to provide the New South Wales voters with confidence that your direction and leadership of this portfolio, which is critically important to them, is occurring as it needs to.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have confidence that that is what we are delivering for the community. As I said, I don't come here with any boosterism. There's no "mission accomplished, job done". But there is a hell of a lot of work happening. There are a lot of long-term and long-running mistakes that we are resolving, and I feel as though we're making a lot of progress.

The CHAIR: Are there any questions from the Government?

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: No Government questions.

The CHAIR: There being no Government questions, we'll break for morning tea. We'll be back in half an hour.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will resume with crossbench time.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand there are properties identified in the land audit. Is there a central fund for social housing into which the revenue from sales of properties identified in the land audit is being funnelled?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm trying to think about the best way to answer that question, Ms Boyd. Are you referring to sales of properties identified as surplus through the land audit to private owners? Is that what you're referring to?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, that would be helpful. Where does that revenue go?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: To the agency that is the owner of the land. Not to Homes NSW.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: No portion of that revenue is earmarked for Homes NSW?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's not hypothecated in a formal way. But, just to be clear, Homes NSW has received a historic budget allocation of \$5.1 billion. There's no question in my mind that we have a substantial amount of revenue and a substantial opportunity to participate in both the land audit and redevelopment of our own sites. But there is no formal hypothecation.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand that three out of 55 possible sites Homes NSW has purchased so far. How much money did Homes NSW spend on each of those three properties?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We provided a figure earlier of \$30.39 million for all three. I don't know whether we have here the breakdown. Ms Pinkstone is saying we'll be able to provide that on notice for you, Ms Boyd. That 30.39 figure is for all three sites.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did that money then go into the agencies that had the land? Is that where it has been funnelled through?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, that's right. We did a land transaction with the agency that owned those sites, Camden, Menai and Box Hill.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Was any stamp duty paid for those purchases?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I might have to take that on notice. Apologies, Ms Boyd. If we could try to seek clarification on that quickly, that would be great.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Did the funding for those purchases come out of the Building Homes for NSW package—that \$1 billion funding?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it did.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We spent \$33.9 million of that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It was 30.39.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, \$30.39 million of that, and we've paid other government agencies with it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Correct.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Do you anticipate using any of that \$1 billion of money that's still left on actually building new homes, or is it all going to be spent on buying land from other agencies?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, the \$5.1 billion, which was the budgetary allocation for the housing delivery component of the Building Homes for NSW program, includes both money for land acquisitions and home redevelopment, building the homes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That \$5.1 billion is a billion per year, I think we discovered.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, that's right. Yes is the answer to your question. Some of that money will be spent on land acquisition. A quite significant portion of it will be spent on procuring builders and developers to build the homes that we have committed to delivering.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It was recently reported that two-thirds of publicly owned surplus land identified through the land audit has been sold off for other purposes. Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I know the reporting to which you're referring. Obviously that's a question for Minister Kamper just to the extent that, Ms Boyd, the way that the land audit works is that government-owned land is identified as surplus to needs through the land audit. We are given the opportunity—first opportunity—to see whether those sites are suitable for the delivery of housing under our program. You've mentioned a few that we have already transacted on and there's more under negotiation currently. Sites that don't meet our needs for whatever reason, of course will be activated for housing through the private market. That has always been clear. Our commitment is a third of our housing will be social and affordable housing. That still leaves two-thirds, as you've correctly identified. In terms of the nature of those sales or the nature of those transactions, I'm not familiar with that because that's managed through Minister Kamper and the land audit team.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Would it be fair to say, though, that when that land audit was first announced it was announced as something that was going to free up land for housing.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, I want to be clear that this is not being managed by me. My understanding is that the transactions of the other two-thirds are explicitly for the delivery of housing and that Property and Development NSW—again, this is in Minister Kamper's area—are explicitly using contractual terms to ensure that it is housing that is delivered on that land. Again, that is not within my portfolio directly, but it is my understanding that housing will be delivered on that land. It will just be different tenure types.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Why did Homes NSW not bid for that land?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: For a range of reasons. Some of the sites are lot size too small. Some of them have inadequate zoning—they're either zoned incorrectly or, to be honest, we're not able to utilise them to the extent that we would want. Some of them don't have the right transport or infrastructure links. There are a range of reasons why some of those individual sites wouldn't be suitable for social housing. We have a historic amount of money to spend on housing, but we have to make sure that we're maximising every single one of those 5.1 billion dollars, and some of those sites don't deliver maximum outcomes for us.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But they do for private developers?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I don't know who they have been sold to or what the details of that are. If a private market developer thinks that they can deliver housing on that, I'm actually comfortable with that because I think we need the delivery of all types of housing. But I'm not directly responsible for managing those transactions.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay, but the audit has resulted in public land being sold off to private developers—correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Correct, for housing.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What pre-development application discussions did Homes NSW have with the City of Sydney council in relation to redeveloping public housing dwellings at 4-6 Raper Street, Newtown?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't have that information in my head. Ms Pinkstone, do you have that available or will you take that on notice?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We haven't had negotiations with the City of Sydney on those sites. They're within our portfolio and planning for redevelopment usually occurs internally before we go to the City of Sydney.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I understand that Homes NSW decided that it couldn't redevelop those properties into new housing. Is that correct?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right. We made the decision to sell those properties in Raper Street. In the same street we had a number of other properties and we have consolidated the site, and we're building a new-generation boarding house on that site with 10 units for women escaping violence and older women.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Those neighbouring five terraces—I understand three of them are in the process of being developed into that boarding house.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But why not those other two properties?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The condition of them was extremely poor. I don't know if you've seen them, Ms Boyd, but they were beyond repair and the various zoning and development requirements of that site indicated that the potential cost of a redevelopment was not value for money in terms of the yield that could be delivered. That happens occasionally. We have a historic pipeline for delivery, but the reality is that sometimes a local site or local controls don't stack up. The site at 10 Raper Street absolutely stacks up and we are delivering 10 units there for older women.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But, again, you're selling these off. You're selling off public housing, presumably to people who think they can do something with those sites. Why can't we do something with those sites?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't want to speak for potential purchasers of that site. I would imagine that those sites would be redeveloped into single dwellings and we don't generally redevelop one for one. If we're going to spend money redeveloping our sites, we want uplift. We want yield. I'm not hiding the fact that we are all about maximising delivery. That is not always possible on every site.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But Labor promised to end privatisation and asset recycling, and we have a Labor government selling off public housing sites and selling off so-called surplus land to private developers. Homes NSW, we thought, was designed to actually provide more public housing.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's exactly what we're doing.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is it fulfilling its promise?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're absolutely fulfilling that promise. I've always been clear, Ms Boyd, and I've said repeatedly and on the record, it's not the case that no public home will ever be sold under a Labor government. What we ended was the mass privatisation of the estate, with billions of dollars' worth of assets sold to fund core services like maintenance. We've put an end to that, but there will absolutely be decisions made on a site-by-site basis to maximise the delivery of public housing, and that is exactly what we're doing.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But less privatisation is still privatisation.

The CHAIR: Minister, New South Wales unfortunately has the title of lowest per capita funding for community mental health services compared to other States. We also have the wooden spoon for number of psychiatrists per capita. I'm going to borrow some words from Jonathan Harms from Mental Health Carers NSW, who said, "If you only fund crisis services, of course you are only going to get crises." When will we see meaningful uplift in community mental healthcare that actually keeps people well in the community?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Year on year on year we're making budgetary decisions to invest in community mental health. That was reflected in our budget last year and it's reflected in our budget this year. You will see the initiatives that we are funding year after year—and I appreciate that they're not as much as some people would like; I accept that. But every year the budgetary allocations that we are making are going towards community mental health because, having done the gaps analysis and committing to that work, it highlighted exactly the same issue that you have raised, that that is the area that is most primarily in need of funding, so that is exactly where we are directing our resources.

The CHAIR: It's good to hear you acknowledge that should be a priority. When you look at the 2025-26 budget papers, there are a number of community mental health initiatives in there. I don't mean to criticise any one of those in particular, but it's perpetuating a paradigm of small, one-off grants to individual organisations and

CORRECTED

individual locations. This Committee conducted an inquiry that found that that kind of siloed, fragmented funding was not a good use of public funds. When will we see that significant uplift either in public services or in long-term core funding to NGO services rather than perpetuating this approach of small grants?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, at the moment part of our longer-term funding challenge is that we only have a one-year funding agreement with the Commonwealth. In this year's budget that was a significant challenge in terms of longer-term funding in the Health portfolio because clearly Health is jointly funded with the Commonwealth, and that partnership is incredibly important to underpinning the delivery of our services. With only a one-year funding agreement, that presented some challenges in terms of long-term funding. Nonetheless, every budget that I have been responsible for as the Minister has seen the initiatives that we have announced fit fairly and squarely into the community mental health space. Regarding your question about when will we see a meaningful uplift, I don't want to make commitments about future budgets, and I'm not here to talk about that, but you are right. That is the area that is the most in need, and that is the area where we have committed funding in all the budgets in which we have delivered.

The CHAIR: I had an earlier question about the Community Living Supports program. There are a couple of other extremely effective and quite cost-effective programs I wanted to ask about. One of those is the Pathways to Community Living Initiative. Will you increase the investment to stage two of PCLI as it was originally intended?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not going to guarantee that, but I'm not going to rule it out either. My biggest concern right now is delivering PCLI stage one. I agree with you again: The Pathways to Community Living is a good initiative. It is cost-effective and it is an important part of ensuring that people who have long-term, complex mental illnesses who currently are essentially living in hospitals have a pathway to community living—a program that when I became the Minister was just so delayed, so riven with funding gaps and non-delivery that we have been really focused on getting stage one fully delivered. We now have two sites identified for Pathways to Community Living projects. One is in Hunter New England LHD, one is in Northern Sydney LHD, and we are very hopeful of having genuine progress in relation to the delivery of the housing component of the PCLI happening quickly. We still have funding for other capital under that program where we have not yet identified a suitable location for those beds. Again, that is my top priority, getting that moving. We have seen progress, but it's one of those projects that you inherit and it is an absolute basket case, and you have to try to get it back on track.

The CHAIR: Along a similar vein, I wanted to ask about the step-up-step-down services. They've been found to cost one-third of inpatient care. You just talked about people who have been functionally living in hospitals because there isn't appropriately supported accommodation for them in the community. These initiatives are highly likely cost-saving rather than a cost to the Government. Will you be expanding step-up-step-down PARC services?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: At the moment we don't have any specific funding allocated for more PARC services, although, again, I accept your point that they do play a particularly valuable role. I think the south-east LHD has a PARC at Bondi that has continued ongoing funding and we think plays an important role. There have been discussions about potentially an additional PARC service linked with the St Vincent's hospital network. We've been trying to think how we might make that happen. As I said, there's not a specific budgetary allocation to deliver that at the moment, but we are in conversations with St Vincent's Hospital about how we might make that work. They are good; they are valuable. There's a lot of different quality, valuable services that we would love to fund under the budget, and we just have to try to find a way to prioritise funding where it's most needed, and that's what we're doing.

The CHAIR: In response to one of my questions earlier this morning, you talked about the consultation that's being undertaken about the alternative models for mental health emergencies. I've already been contacted by people who are listening to this hearing who are very interested in this and who have not heard anything about that consultation. Where can they find public information about the consultation that you're doing? How can people be involved if they haven't been directly invited?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: To reassure those people, it's literally just started this week. If they have not been engaged, it's not because we're not interested in hearing those voices; it's because we have really just started to reach out to some of the peak groups and core organisations that will be our partners in that consultation. I don't know whether we have even a public website yet or landing page. Elizabeth might take on notice just how people can be part of that and what programs we'll have underway to engage people, but, as I said, to reassure people, it's only because it's only just begun, not because there's any inclination not to include those voices.

The CHAIR: Can I take from your answer a commitment to provide that information publicly with an opportunity for people to feed in who haven't been directly invited?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Sure. Elizabeth, who is running that consultation through NSW Health, can take on notice that and a commitment that we will work with you and others to make sure the voices that want to be heard as part of that absolutely can be.

ELIZABETH WOOD: Just to reassure you, Chair, if you have information already from individuals, we're very happy to have those directed through to us just so we can make sure we capture them in our consultation planning, by all means.

The CHAIR: I absolutely will. There's a certain type of very bold individual who feels comfortable ringing a parliamentary office about this. I want to make sure this is as open as broadly as it needs to be because we're talking about particularly marginalised groups of people.

ELIZABETH WOOD: Of course. As I said earlier and yesterday, we are very conscious that this is a very new model, and it does require extensive consultation and co-design. We're very keen to hear from as many as we can through that process, so very happy for you to forward them to us in the meantime. But we will certainly make sure that people are clear on what the consultation process is and how they can be a part of it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Just to reiterate, Dr Cohn, I'm very clear that we have peak groups and organisations that are representative of cohorts within the mental health system. But then we also just have individuals with lived experience, either as consumers themselves or as carers, who are not part of that ecosystem and who do want to be heard. We're clear that there should be a pathway for that too.

The CHAIR: With the changes coming to ADHD prescribing, there'll be a number of people able to access treatment for ADHD from GPs. Currently the IPTAAS reimbursement for travel for rural and remote patients doesn't allow reimbursement for people accessing a GP specialist. Would you support IPTAAS being expanded so that people can access a GP specialist such as an ADHD prescriber?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's a very good question, Dr Cohn. Allow me to take it on notice, merely because this is the first time it's been brought to my attention. I'm very happy to look at that and the team at NSW Health can assess that too. You rightly identify the intention of that reform is to provide pathways to access health care for people who are struggling to see a specialist. We want GPs to be able to play that role and, if there's a way that we can provide some support for that through the IPTAAS, let me take that on notice and come back to you as to what we might be able to do there.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, the Government has \$193 million to fund the development of Woollahra train station. Does Homes NSW have any land there identified for social and affordable housing?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't think that we do have any landholdings in Woollahra.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Has Homes NSW been doing any work in terms of social and affordable housing around the potential Woollahra train station site?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't think we have.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, just following on from the earlier session, you ruled out raising the Warragamba Dam wall. I'm interested to know what your alternative position or message would be to the 70,000 people living below the wall.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My message to them would be that the idea that raising the Warragamba Dam wall is a solution to the flood risk that they face is, unfortunately, a total illusion—that it is not a solution to the flood risk they face, for a range of reasons. For one, it's a multibillion-dollar boondoggle of a project. Some 40 per cent of the floodwaters that those communities face come from tributaries that are not connected to the Warragamba Dam. I suppose I can understand why people would like to think that there was one easy solution to that challenge, but there's not, and it's completely misleading to them to suggest that there is. I would give a commitment to the community that I know that the Reconstruction Authority is working extremely diligently on the Hawke-Nepean Valley Disaster Adaptation Plan, or DAP, which was the commitment that we made to that community—a range of infrastructure upgrades and local and regional solutions to flood risks. That is meaningful, practical, on-the-ground work that is actually intended to provide flood management and disaster adaptation to those communities.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And that's your solution? So the next time it floods, you have no short-term or long-term solution to protect them and their homes?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, we do have those things. Those things are systemically and thoughtfully set out in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Disaster Adaptation Plan, which I know is in the final stages of preparation at the Reconstruction Authority. Those are practical solutions. Dangling a solution like raising the Warragamba Dam wall out there as though it's some silver bullet is incredibly misleading. It's been

CORRECTED

debunked multiple times as a solution. As I said, I actually think it's incredibly unfortunate and unfair that those communities have been told that this option is going to help them, when all of the evidence is that that's not the case. We're not interested in those kinds of airy-fairy solutions; we're interested in real work, real planning and a real strategic approach. That's what the Reconstruction Authority is working on now.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, you announced on 30 June that you've delivered 1,711 social homes. Of those, I think 1,408 were new. How many of those were allocated to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're on track to deliver our commitment of 50 per cent. I'll have to take on notice whether it was exactly 50 per cent of those homes. The commitment was 50 per cent of the homes that we're delivering under the Building Homes for NSW program, which is 8,400. It may be that it's 45 per cent in one year and 55 per cent in the next year, and so I can take on notice that exact figure. There are obviously some privacy concerns in relation to information around the allocation of homes and who they're going to but, nonetheless, I will take on notice what we can provide to you. But I am very clear with Homes NSW that we are well on track to deliver our commitment of 50 per cent of those homes to survivors.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Thanks, and I'll cover that a little bit more this afternoon. Minister, what is the average length of stay in TA at the moment?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do I have that here? Just give me a tick. I have a range of information. Do we have average length of stay in temporary accommodation? I might have to take that on notice or see if Ms Pinkstone is able to pull that up as we're answering questions.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I'm also interested in the average length of stay for women and children in a refuge as well, if you have that.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Sure, so average length in temporary accommodation and average length in a crisis refuge for women and children. That's fine. As I said, I don't have that here, but we can—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine, I'm happy to come back to it. Minister, you committed \$10 million for crisis and transitional accommodation in the budget. How much of that will be provided for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I believe our budgetary commitment was \$20 million, and we are still working through exactly how that \$20 million will be allocated. It will be allocated to crisis accommodation. As I said, I don't have an exact breakdown yet of which form of crisis accommodation—women and children fleeing domestic violence, young people et cetera—will receive allocation under that budget. But, obviously, it goes without saying that women and children fleeing domestic violence are a major cohort who use crisis accommodation, and so my anticipation would be that there would be specific funding allocated for that as part of that budgetary commitment.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And that is over a four-year period?

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

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How much is it anticipated you spent this financial year?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The \$20 million is over one year, isn't it?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, this year.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. Apologies, Mrs Maclaren-Jones. That is a one-year commitment, so that \$20 million is anticipated to be spent in the next 12 months.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: The average nights in temporary accommodation is 28.2 at the moment for the last financial year.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: The figure I got at last estimates was 26 days, so it's gone up.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it has increased slightly.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Did you have that for women and children?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I don't think we have that broken down; I think that's just a statewide average. But we can see what level of more granular detail we might be able to provide.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That'd be great. In relation to that \$20 million for this year, what's the time frame of how you intend to allocate that fund?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're just finalising that now. We would hope to have that done by, I would say, the end of September. Mrs Maclaren-Jones, there's no question from me that that funding is not adequate to solve the problem of unmet demand in crisis accommodation. I feel like I need to put that on record. There's no suggestion from me that with that funding, which we were pleased to secure a \$20 million injection of for the next year, there is still going to be a lot of pressure on crisis accommodation. I say that because, as we are allocating that money, we do need to be thoughtful about maximum impact. We want to make sure that we are maximising the outcome and the impact of that \$20 million, and that's the process that we're working through now. But we do hope to have that finalised by the end of September.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might move on to the Mental Health portfolio. In February the Premier said that paying higher costs for locums and VMOs to replace psychiatrists who had resigned was short term. This was something you also reiterated in budget estimates. We're now six months on and we're still in that emergency measure. What's the total cost of these emergency measures?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The cost of the VMOs and locums—is that the question?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The figure that I have in terms of VMO and locum costs—and I think this figure is from the beginning of 2025, although I may clarify the time frame of that figure—is \$16,032,617.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: This is coming out of the Mental Health budget?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It's coming out of the Health budget, yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How many locums have been employed—and VMOs?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Let me just see if I can find that here. I might have to take that on notice or see if I can have that figure provided to me. I don't have a figure here on locum employment. Do you have that?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Richard might have it.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We are going to see if we can get that for you.

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

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Mr Griffiths has that. Richard, do you mind?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: While Mr Griffiths is pulling that up, Minister, are you aware of the fact there are some VMOs that are working 10-hour shifts—or they're actually being paid for 10-hour shifts but actually only working eight?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I was not aware of that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is anyone in your department aware of that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Richard, are you aware of that?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Yes, Mrs Maclaren-Jones, we are aware of that. We factor in some travel time for those visiting medical officers.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Are you able to provide that locum figure for Mrs Maclaren-Jones?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Yes, we recruited 81 locums. That equates to about 60 full-time equivalent officers.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How much money has been spent accommodating public mental health patients in private hospitals?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The cost that I have for private patient care is \$3,071,738.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, is your Government committed to providing the 25 per cent wage increase if deemed fair and reasonable by the IRC?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Once the decision is handed down by the IRC, how quickly will you implement their findings?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would imagine that we would move to implement those findings as quickly as we can. I actually haven't been briefed on a time frame for that. Obviously, we don't know when we are going to receive that information. As I said, I don't know whether it is a matter of weeks or months. That is

CORRECTED

information that I have not been briefed on. I'm happy to take that on notice—although, to be clear, we absolutely are committed to respecting the findings of the Industrial Relations Commission and would intend to proceed to executing that outcome without delay.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Has any funding been allocated in the budget in relation to the wages?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not specifically, no. The budget is not based on hypotheticals. It's not guesswork. At the moment, putting funding aside for the purposes of meeting a completely unknown Industrial Relations Commission outcome would be guesswork. It would be hypotheticals. We just don't know. We will have to make provision for that and manage that once the commission has made a determination. We accept that. We are up-front about that. But we haven't just guesstimated a figure and put it in the budget, because that's not good budgetary practice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, in relation to the NSW Police Force, Health and also Ambulance, and their working group to deal with Police Force response and incidents in the community, have you been involved in that workforce in any way, or been briefed on it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have been briefed on it, yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What is the latest update in relation to it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That we have now had a whole-of-government agreement in relation to a framework for that project going forward, and that is the community consultation that Dr Cohn has been asking myself and Deputy Secretary Wood about. I've been very clear that that work between those different organisations has been happening within government—it has not been a piece of work that we have engaged externally with—and that is the work that is commencing now.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to Official Visitors remuneration, will you commit to indexing the remuneration for them, particularly in the wake of cost-of-living pressures?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The remuneration of Official Visitors is managed by Minister Park.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Minister, are you aware of the particular incidents involving police when they are conducting welfare checks, and would you commit to having the investigations made public and reporting on that?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know what particular instances you are referring to, so it's hard for me to make comments about making information publicly available when I'm not clear what information—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I'm referring to—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Police reports? I can't commit to making police reports public, if that's what you're referring to.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: No, incidents where police are interacting, obviously, with an individual who has mental health issues. It has been reported quite broadly, hence why there is the working group. Moving forward, would you make a commitment that those instances would be reported annually?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can take on notice what kind of data we might be able to provide. I imagine that you are referring to police reporting information.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes, and the impact it has on individuals with mental illness.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely. I can't make commitments in relation to making police reporting data publicly available. That is not something that I have responsibility for. I haven't discussed that with Minister Catley, and so I wouldn't want to make a commitment about it. If there is an interest in having more information publicly available, I'm sure that is something we can look at. No, I'm not in a position to make commitments in relation to the public release of police information.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, with the 8,400 social homes promised, outside the Wollongong, Newcastle and Central Coast areas, what is the percentage of that for regional areas across New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That is actually something that I will have available. I might take it on notice and just ask Ms Pinkstone if she is able to pull that up whilst your questions continue. I give you an assurance that we recognise that we have a lot of pressure on social housing in regional New South Wales, and

CORRECTED

we acknowledge that that pipeline has to include a significant proportion of new homes in regional New South Wales. Ms Pinkstone, if you wouldn't mind—

REBECCA PINKSTONE: It's approximately 70 per cent in metro areas and 30 per cent in regional and rural New South Wales.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But in that 30 per cent, you are including Wollongong, Newcastle and Central Coast?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Outside metro areas, absolutely.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's right. So 30 per cent for all of regional New South Wales—

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Regional and rural.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: —including those areas. Minister, the social housing waitlists in the regions—how are they tracking?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't have a regional breakdown here, although that information is publicly available. There is a lot of pressure on the waitlist. I can provide information on notice in relation to the waitlist in specific districts, if you like. I have general, statewide waitlist information here, not broken down district by district. I accept the premise of your point, which is that there is high demand for social housing everywhere in New South Wales, and that includes in regional areas. In some regional areas, it's particularly significant.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Indeed, there is. In August 2024 you issued a media release on the 3D-printed social housing in Dubbo, stating construction was expected to start in late September. When did construction commence?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We could take that on notice. It is complete now and tenanted.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't have that—Ms Pinkstone is confirming that it is now completed and tenanted. I don't have a construction date.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You published another media release, Minister, in November 2024, stating construction had commenced. I am presuming that that is October/November 2024, rather than August. Are you aware of the reason why there was a delay for construction to commence?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not. I'm happy to take that on notice. I would say my assumption would be that it could have been, one, weather-related—3D-printed housing is a little bit weather-dependent—or, two, because this is quite new—obviously, many times I have pointed out that this is the first time that we have delivered, in Australia, 3D printing for social housing. It's a new and innovative program. It may have just been that we required some—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If you can take that on notice to clarify that, that would be great. Your media release also stated the build would take 16 weeks. How long did it take?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, I am happy to take that on notice, although I believe that it was around 16 weeks.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It was 20 weeks, actually. It similarly stated that tenants were expected to be able to move in come February 2025. When were the properties able to be occupied?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't have that. As Ms Pinkstone said, they're occupied now.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, you have another media release that was issued on 15 May 2025 suggesting that the tenants would be moving in in May 2025. What was the reason for the delay between the construction being completed and tenants being able to move in? You'd committed to February 2025 but did not move in until May 2025. Why?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I will take that on notice. Based on the timeline that you have articulated in my media releases, if we were able to turn over two incredibly high-quality social homes between even October 2024 and May 2025 with tenants moving in—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We're getting to that. You did.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —that is an excellent outcome.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It has still taken seven months from construction starting to when the tenants were able to move in, not 20 weeks as the media release explained. The reason for the delay—were

CORRECTED

there additional works required to be undertaken? Were there any defects, for example, that had to be attended to in these particular projects?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Not that I'm aware of, but I'm happy to take that on notice. I have already indicated that I'm happy to take the questions in relation to the slight delay on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: A slight delay from 20 weeks to seven months.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I would reiterate that I feel as though that is an excellent turnaround time—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sure you do.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —for the delivery of high-quality social homes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You also claimed that the costs were going to be 10 per cent to 20 per cent less than. How much were the costs to complete these projects in entirety?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, I will take that on notice. That's not a figure I have.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Your media releases said \$815,000. I'd like to know whether that was the finalised cost, or were there any additional works that may or may not have required additional funding prior to the tenants moving in in May 2025?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Absolutely. I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you also aware of the median price for such a property in Dubbo?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have to say, unfortunately, I am not aware of the median house price in Dubbo.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It is \$445,000 according to realestate.com. That might also factor into the figures that you use are the 10 to 20 per cent less in terms of the construction costs.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I imagine that that is a sale price that you've referred to—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's a median. It's a median, not average—absolutely.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: —not a cost of delivery price. Just to be clear, they are different figures.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm aware.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great if you could provide that information. I appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Minister, I have questions about the Albury Wodonga regional hospital project's lived and living experience consumer working group. By leave, I table the terms of reference for that group.

Document tabled.

I have a copy, so you can refer to the document as well. While that is being done, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System found that involvement from individuals with lived and living experience must not be tokenistic or constrained by institutional agendas, and it issued warnings against processes that engage consumers just to validate predetermined outcomes. The Productivity Commission inquiry into mental health found that consumers only being included where they agree with existing system priorities creates distrust and disengagement.

Noting those findings, these terms of reference for the lived experience working group for the Albury Wodonga hospital redevelopment—and that is being run by New South Wales Health Infrastructure—include prerequisites and requirements that participation is at the invitation of Albury Wodonga Health. Participants must agree to commit to promoting awareness and understanding of the project's benefits; they must obtain authorisation from the project team member leading the activities prior to publicly discussing any matters relating to those activities; they must acknowledge and understand that Albury Wodonga Health reserves the right, at their discretion, to withdraw the invitation to participate in the working group; and they must acknowledge that information discussed in the meetings is confidential. In your view, are those requirements for lived experience participants in this process in keeping with best practice?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have to say, obviously, Dr Cohn, this is the first time that I have seen this information. I don't pretend to be across the terms of reference for the Albury Wodonga regional hospital lived and living experience consumer working group, prior to you bringing them to my attention. The principles that you outlined in relation to best practice for lived experience engagement I am familiar with and do think are important. Yes, at first blush, I would say that some of these provisions do appear to be quite restrictive and perhaps not necessarily in keeping with the principles that you have correctly identified as being consistent with best practice. But that would be a very initial assessment.

I would say that those best practice principles in relation to lived experience engagement are consistent with the analyses that were done in relation to the Towards Zero Suicides programs and other programs that NSW Health has run where we have done analysis and evaluations of those programs and they have also identified those kinds of principles as being the basis of best-practice engagement with lived experience. I am committed to those and am happy to take a bit of a deeper look at the documentation that you have provided. I accept your point that some of that seems a bit restrictive.

The CHAIR: I appreciate your comment that you are willing to take a look at it. In particular, there is this provision to remove people from the working group.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Do you know whether that has happened, Dr Cohn?

The CHAIR: That was going to be one of my questions.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know whether that has happened. I'm happy to take on notice whether that's happened and, yes, if it has happened because people have spoken publicly or been critical or something along those lines that people convening the working group didn't appreciate, then I accept your point that, in that circumstance, that would seem problematic to me. I don't know whether that has occurred. If you don't, I can take it on notice and provide you with information.

The CHAIR: I don't, and certainly this has been brought to my attention by people with lived experience in the region who don't want to participate in this lived experience working group under these conditions.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Understood. It's good feedback to hear that. As I said, we will take on notice the detail here and any specific examples that we're able to ascertain and perhaps talk to you about how we can ensure that people who have lived experience, whose voices we want to hear, feel welcome as part of the working group.

The CHAIR: My related question is about the Albury Wodonga Health redevelopment, which, again, is a cross-border health service, but the redevelopment is being managed by New South Wales Health Infrastructure. They are currently proposing the inpatient mental health facility at level 6 of the multistorey building without any access to green space. Are you aware that back in 2021 there was co-design work undertaken for an upgraded version of our Nolan House inpatient facility which envisioned a standalone mental health facility consistent with newer best practice facilities, such as at Dubbo, Hornsby, and others in the Murrumbidgee LHD?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I have to say, I am not familiar with the 2021 piece of work that you have referred to. I am familiar with the proposition that Nolan House would be delivered on level 6 of the new hospital. I'm advised that there are a few reasons for that. Just to be clear, I'm advised there will be no other patients or health services delivered on level 6, that it will be exclusively for mental health consumers and that, in terms of green space, there is intended to be an open courtyard. Again, I don't know the exact design of that courtyard and the green space within it but, specifically, Dr Cohn, I've been advised that one of the reasons for that is that that is the only facility or area within the redevelopment where the open space is not overlooked by other health facilities.

Previously, I understand, the site on level 1—the courtyard, the open space—could be overlooked by others. There are obviously privacy concerns and, to be honest, we don't want other health patients and consumers gawking at mental health consumers as they use their outdoor space. The decision to have the site on level 6 and the courtyard there so that it could not be overlooked was for that reason. That's just the advice I've received. I have to say, that did not refer to work that was done in 2021. It may have provided alternative options, so you'll have to let me take that element on notice.

The CHAIR: I'd be delighted to provide you with a copy of the 2021 clinical services plan, if you are interested. In terms of the advice you're being given about what alternatives are, this is a redevelopment that has been significantly pared back—"value-managed"—by Health Infrastructure to fit within the funding envelope that was allocated by the previous Government; it actually wasn't by your Government. The challenge I would leave you with is—the question on notice—were all options considered for delivery of a standalone best practice mental

CORRECTED

health unit? Is it the value-management or the funding constraints that have resulted in a suboptimal solution on level 6?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, I will take that on notice. I'm not sure why those decisions were made and the basis for them, but I am happy to take that on notice and try to provide you with some additional information.

The CHAIR: I had a couple of questions about the contingency plans for the resignation of the staff specialist psychiatrists. The first one is that I am aware of a small number of psychiatrists who resigned in protest demanding systemic change to the mental health system. Because of some of the individual circumstances of those individual clinicians, some of them are now wanting to return to their previous positions. In some local health districts that has been reported to be extremely difficult. There has actually been a preference given to locum or VMO arrangements now rather than rehiring those staff specialists. Why is that? Surely it's better for patients, for the health system and for other staff to have permanent staff specialists in those roles.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I am also familiar with that and have had dialogue with the royal college of psychiatrists about it. I would say my understanding is that those pathways to return differ district by district. In some districts that has been more straightforward but, yes, in others it has been difficult. It is difficult for me to comment on individual decisions around hiring staff. I am not directly involved in that for good reason. The Minister doesn't make decisions or issue directives in relation to who should be hired for what positions and how. It is, in fact, very appropriate that you don't have that level of involvement.

I have been very clear through Dr Flynn and Dr Wright. I know they—you can ask them this afternoon or you can ask them to elaborate now—have been engaged with the district chief executives to try and make sure that the pathways for those who wish to return and fill vacancies are as straightforward as possible and are as consistent as possible across districts. But, as I said, there is a limit to how much any of us can get involved in individual hiring decisions for specific roles at the district level. Did you want—

The CHAIR: Certainly. I think it's not the role of this Committee to get involved in specific, individual hiring decisions either. As a matter of policy—to confirm—it is your view that it's preferable to fill those roles with permanent staff specialists rather than continue to rely on VMOs and locums in the future.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it is. We recognise that we have ongoing vacancies in staff specialist roles. If there are suitable people to fill those vacancies, our policy position is that that should happen.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Minister, regarding the 300 roles that have been called, in terms of voluntary redundancy, what is being done to ensure that experienced and knowledgeable staff, or at least significant knowledge, is retained within WaterNSW?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The management of that transformation process is being done collaboratively: the project working group with the leadership of WaterNSW, the relevant trade unions and other staff representatives. Because it is currently at a voluntary redundancy stage, I would say that there is an effort to ensure that very valued staff within WaterNSW are retained in the organisation. As I said before in relation to other questions that were asked on this, this is a consequence of a decision by IPART. WaterNSW is required to undergo this process and is very clear that it wants to do that in a collaborative way with its valued staff. There is to be no compromise on the capacity to deliver its legal and statutory obligations.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How is that being undertaken in terms of ensuring the core functions are retained and the level of knowledge within WaterNSW is retained for critical things such as water quality across the State? Will the budget cuts impact Sydney's drinking water and ageing infrastructure?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I can ask Mr George to elaborate now, although I imagine you will be able to ask him questions this afternoon. My answer to you is that I have been clear that WaterNSW needs to manage this process collaboratively. They have a project working group to do this. We're still in the early stages. The EOIs for the voluntary redundancy round haven't even closed. There is a way to go on this journey. I have been very clear, and the organisation is clear, that those core responsibilities which you outlined cannot be compromised as a result of this process. If there is any suggestion that that might occur, Government will need to be involved to ensure that its core statutory and legal obligations are not compromised. There is still a while to go as part of the transformation process. I think it's too early to say what that might look like.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Were you concerned in terms of the increases? What WaterNSW put into IPART was requesting an increase of 25 per cent before inflation for 2025-26 and each subsequent year until 2030. Were you worried about that and, particularly in light of increasing staff numbers in WaterNSW, that in fact the organisation may be becoming unsustainable?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I was concerned. I was concerned in relation to a number of the increases that were put forward. We think cost of living is a major issue right now. I have to say, that is why independent price regulation through IPART is a core part of the price determination process, Ms Faehrmann. As you say, those organisations are required to make the case to an independent regulator that they are structured in a way and delivering services in a way that is necessary and efficient. That is as it should be.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you have confidence in the board, the CEO and the CFO?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I do.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Turning to a different issue now, the Natural Resources Commission, who I will ask a question of later today—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: He's there.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Professor Durrant-Whyte, yes. When they reviewed the unregulated water sharing plans, it suggested improved protections for wetlands. A lot of work was then done by the water science group in the 18 months leading up to 30 June this year to map wetlands, including a lot of work on a detailed layer of wetlands below Ramsar-listed wetlands and below another—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The directory of—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia, thank you very much. However, Water Group significantly reduced the number and size of those wetlands after all of that work. Why did that happen?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Because it was made pretty clear during the consultation process that whilst there would be and should be expanded wetland protection, some of those map overlays had not been ground-truthed and captured sites that were in no way justifiable as protected wetlands. There were numerous specific examples brought to the attention of the department through that consultation process. What we have done is expanded wetland protection and committed to a process of review and ground-truthing wetlands. Ground-truthing wetland mapping across a State the size of New South Wales is a significant undertaking. We weren't able to do that in time for the water sharing plan renewal, but there is a commitment to review and look at that. Just one example that comes to my mind is Lake Centenary. Is that the one, Ms Jones?

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Which is not in any way—no-one would argue is any kind of protected wetland. It is a recreational lake in part of south-west New South Wales. It was captured as part of that mapping. That's just one example of where, unfortunately—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You said "improved protection for wetlands". There is something that was being worked on, maybe after that or at the time, which was a minimal harm test for wetlands. Do you know what that is?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not familiar with that provision.

AMANDA JONES: I think that refers to when works approvals are being considered and then the harm test is reviewed.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Does that replace what would have been the mapping and protection of those wetlands in water sharing plans?

AMANDA JONES: No, it's separate. The wetland mapping identifies wetlands where there is held water, under a definition of wetlands. As the Minister said, the mapping layers that we had in addition, and we were originally consulted on, proved to be inadequate and that's what we will review. But there's protection—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Jones, are you saying the mapping that was undertaken by the water science group, their 18 months of work, was inadequate?

AMANDA JONES: No. The mapping that the water science group did was actually confirming that the Ramsar wetlands are given, the important wetlands in the other atlas are given. But there were some other wetlands that were retained in the various water sharing plans that were able to be validated within the time frame. There is a whole other layer of mapping where, as the Minister said, there were aberrations in the information. We had wetlands identified in an airfield so, clearly, the mapping layer—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There possibly was a wetland in an airfield.

AMANDA JONES: No, it's not.

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Ms Faehrmann, I assure you that there were—

AMANDA JONES: There were mistakes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: There were mistakes, and this is why we do consultation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Just to be clear, in terms of having a few mistakes like that, instead of saying, "Oh, this shouldn't have been there," and carefully working to have the mapping corrected, Water Group just dismissed that 18 months of work on that more detailed wetland layering?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We had to make a decision, Ms Faehrmann, about how we approached that. As I said, we are doing that more detailed work now, and where there—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But they won't be incorporated into this 10-year round—or could they be?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: They absolutely could be.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Due to them now being paused?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. We can make amendments to water sharing plans in the public interest, with the concurrence of the Minister for the Environment, at any stage. Absolutely, our commitment is to do that review. Yes, I recognise that it's a big undertaking. It's a big piece of work. We do want to get it done. But including that mapping layer when we knew that there were inaccuracies was not something that we wanted to do, so we have committed to doing that ground truthing thoughtfully and considering the local information.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How long is that process taking? This is the 18 months work by the water science group—what does ground truthing entail and who is undertaking it?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not sure of the exact agency within the Water Group that is undertaking that ground truthing. Who is doing that, Amanda?

AMANDA JONES: We'll be doing that consultation later this year and have a result by the middle of next year.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: To be clear, the water science group isn't within the Water Group, is it?

AMANDA JONES: We have a water science group within Water Group, but I'm not sure if that's the water science group to whom you're referring.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The one that undertook the initial—

AMANDA JONES: We have a water science group that was part of the map review.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Will we be doing the ground truthing, though, or will that be done by—

AMANDA JONES: Yes, we'll go to the community, and we'll work through the map layers to confirm what land areas are actually wetlands, to make sure that we have accurate mapping.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Minister, if we could turn to homelessness in regional and rural New South Wales, are you aware of the figures relating specifically to regional areas when it comes to homelessness?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I am. If you're referring to, for example, information in the statewide street count, yes, I am familiar with the regional—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you share those with us?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Let me see if I can get that up for you. I can't remember off the top of my head the different breakdowns in the street count areas.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you aware of what the 2020-21 census said about those figures?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Apologies, Ms Overall. We've got that up now. For example, in the street count for 2025: Byron Shire, 291, which, pleasingly, was a decrease from 348 in 2024; Tweed Valley, 155, also a decrease from 174 in the previous year; Coffs Harbour, 99, also—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Do you have—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: You asked this question and I'm—

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you. Do you have an in globo answer for regional New South Wales?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No. Perhaps Ms Pinkstone can add up the different—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be great, rather than going through each one. That's all I would like to know, just the whole figure, because it is—

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Sure. It's publicly available information, but that's fine.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you, and it's your job as the Minister to be across these figures as well.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We literally are providing you a line by line—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The figures are different from the 2021 census. That's where I'm going with this, noting that the 2021 census was much lower than what Homeless NSW suggested were the actual figures. That's the point that I'm trying to ask you about, Minister. Let's move on to homelessness figures more broadly. Are you aware of the figures for veterans who are experiencing homelessness?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, I don't know that figure off the top of my head, but I am familiar with the fact that we do see an overrepresentation of veterans in homelessness.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates 5,800 veterans are homeless every year. This is not a disparagement in any way, but I'm sure that you would be able to tell me the figures for women and youth homelessness, if asked.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As in, do I have a figure in my head, without referencing notes, of how many women and children are experiencing homelessness?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: No, I'd have to look at my notes for that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: To come back to veterans, Homelessness NSW has previously said that one in 10 people sleeping rough in New South Wales is a veteran. Is there any provision in the current budget for veterans specifically in this regard?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: The way that we manage homelessness services in the budget is through a number of different programs. We fund specialist homelessness services, which do provide dedicated and specialist care. We have a \$100 million Homelessness Innovation Fund. There are 70 projects that we've funded through that fund. I can't recall whether any of them are specific to veterans, but I'm happy to take that on notice. We generally try to operate a "no wrong door" policy in relation to homelessness, which means that the services that we fund meet any homelessness need in the community, so that we're not bouncing people between different doors. Having said that, we do recognise that there should be specialist service provision for priority cohorts, and so there are specific programs that are for some of those different cohorts within our funding. But as I said, I'd have to take on notice whether or not, for example, under the Homelessness Innovation Fund, we've had any specific propositions in relation to veterans.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be appreciated. Still pinpointing veterans, are the support services and programs only for those who are already homeless?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It is fair to say most of our homelessness programs at the moment are crisis response. I think that is a comment—and a criticism, in a way—that could be applied across our homelessness services, that we don't do enough in terms of prevention, we don't do enough in terms of early intervention. Most of the programs that I've mentioned—our specialist homelessness service funded programs, our Homelessness Innovation Fund programs—do generally focus on crisis response. We've just released our new Homelessness Strategy, two weeks ago, in Homelessness Week. That is a 10-year plan to reorientate us towards prevention, towards early intervention. But that is a 10-year plan of which we're one month in, so there's still a bit of work to do to realign our services to ensure that we're not just meeting people when they're in crisis, but that we're actually intervening early.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We'll be watching that one closely. Is any social housing specifically set aside for veterans who may be, or are at risk of, experiencing homelessness?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't think that we do currently specifically allocate social housing for veterans. We have a lot of demand for social housing. We have a priority waiting list which meets the needs of people who are experiencing significant crisis. Being homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness is a priority

CORRECTED

category for the priority waiting list. But, no, we don't set aside or specifically allocate social housing for veterans at the moment.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: We should qualify, we know that there are other programs through Defence and things, but we are talking about those who are at risk of homelessness as well. I'd appreciate that additional information; it would be very helpful. Turning to look at your office expenditure, how much have your staff salary costs risen by?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know whether I have that information here. I may have to take that on notice. I don't have that information here. I'll have to take that on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I believe media reports have suggested those rose \$400,000 to \$1.4 million, with a 40 per cent increase. You'll take on notice to confirm whether that's the case? Is that correct?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know whether that's correct, but I will take it on notice to confirm that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How many staff do you have?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: In my ministerial office, excluding DLOs?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes. I suppose I'm getting to the point of the increase. Is that for just your ministerial office or would that increase apply to your staffing more broadly?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know where that figure has come from, so I'm not sure of the component parts of it. I can try to provide information in relation to how many ministerial staff I have and how many DLOs are in the office. My understanding is that, in general, office budget figures are inclusive of staff costs and other costs attendant—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Salary on-costs as well?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Perhaps even stationery and other things.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Office costs too, yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As I said, my understanding is that it is a broader category of costs that are captured in that figure but, without having the detail, I'll have to take it on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I am happy to have that detail provided on notice. That would be helpful. Your motor vehicle costs are up as well. Are you using your private vehicle more for your duties as well?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I don't know that that motor vehicle cost captures my use of my private vehicle.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, that might be on notice as part of that detail.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Again, I don't know how that figure is captured, so I'll just take that on notice. But I don't think that includes any private vehicle costs. I've certainly never reported any, so I can't imagine how that would be captured.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Perhaps you'll need to take this on notice as well: Are you able to provide for confirmation the overall office expenditure increase?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, as I said, I'm happy to take those figures on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I have one more question very quickly before I hand to my colleague. We were directed to ask the question of you yesterday by the Minister for Women on this particular program. Could you tell us a little bit about how the Washing Machine Exchange Program worked?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Sure. We entered into a partnership with The Good Guys to meet the cost-of-living pressures that a number of low-income residents in New South Wales are facing and also try to improve our water and energy efficiency by replacing expensive and less energy-efficient top-loading washing machines with more energy-efficient and water-efficient front-loading machines. Actually, this was a program that was first commenced with the previous Government in 2022.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It was very popular.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. We were able to provide just over 8,000 machines. We have now done that. Those machines have been fully allocated under that round.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you aware of how quickly they were allocated?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I believe it was within six days that we received EOIs that were at the level to have the full program allocation. Quickly, I think, is the answer.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, very quickly. You mentioned low income. It was low income as well as pensioners?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. It was pensioners, veterans and people who were categorised under certain Commonwealth Government income support categories.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sure that you won't have this to hand, but perhaps you could take it on notice as well: a breakdown of those who did make the applications, if that's possible.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's right. I don't have that to hand, but I am happy to provide that information.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The Minister for Women yesterday said that it was your program, but she suggested that it was ongoing. Obviously, this allocation was very quickly snapped up. Is it something that will be rolled out again?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's our intention. It was popular. We feel as though it ticked a lot of boxes. It's cheaper for people to run those machines. They're more energy efficient; they're more water efficient. If we're able to provide those kinds of practical, cost-of-living and help-the-environment initiatives, we will. There is an intention to have future rounds. We are just looking at that now.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Great. One aspect to it, though—and it is hearsay; it's just talk—was the suggestion that there has been a glut of these washing machines, unopened, appearing on social media trading posts. Is that just a coincidence?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not familiar with any of that. To be fair, I have been made aware of two instances of recipients of the machines attempting to onsell them—two out of over 8,000. We've been in contact with those people to try to understand what has gone on and why they might be doing that. When we deliver the machines, we don't just leave them unopened in a box. We actually install them. That is an important part of trying to make sure that they are achieving their purpose. I have not heard of any instances of machines unopened. As I said, I have heard of two instances of people trying to onsell them. We've engaged with those people and, for future rounds, we will again be looking at ways that we can ensure, in the provisions of the arrangement, that we're achieving the goals that we want to achieve.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: It goes where it's supposed to go. That's great.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Minister, on a day with weather probably a little different to today, back on 16 March 2023, you posted on X, "Hey everyone. Sweltering out in Western Sydney today. Sweaty emoji. How good is it going to be when Labor opens the beautiful Prospect Reservoir to swimming so local families have a place to cool down. Sunglasses emoji." When will this happen?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: As soon as we can. What we've done is look at a range of what I would describe as low-hanging-fruit swim spots in Western Sydney. The principle that I was reflecting on in that post remains the same, which is that it's often very hot in Western Sydney. It's hotter than it is on the coast, and there's not enough access to free public recreation and swim spots. Obviously, we've had Pondi come online and Lake Parramatta. There are others that we are identifying. I think there has been one out at Putney or Meadowbank—I'll have to take on notice the exact suburb.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There is one at Putney.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We're doing work to identify those sites. Prospect Reservoir is challenging because of its relationship with the Sydney drinking water network, and we don't want to make any mistakes in relation to bringing that online. But we are actively considering what options might be feasible there. As I said, in the meantime, whilst we consider that slightly more complicated site—one that is directly linked to the Sydney drinking water network—we are activating other sites that don't have that same risk profile.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Prior to the election, you were confident that, potentially, it was opening by July 2023 for a trial for one year. Obviously it has proven to be much harder than you thought.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes. There have been a range of risk factors that have been surfaced as we try to activate that. You don't always have access to all of that information when you're in opposition. You do your best with the access to information that you have. As some of those risk factors have been surfaced, we have been working through those. But, as I said, we're very committed to the principle of trying to activate more water-based recreation in Western Sydney, because I do think that it's an equality issue. There have been examples

CORRECTED

where we've been able to do that in a low-risk way, but we are still working through some of the higher risk issues at the Prospect Reservoir.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: On 20 August 2023—nearly two years ago—you commenced a feasibility study. How has that study progressed and how much has it cost?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'd have to take on notice the cost of the feasibility study. It has progressed. The feasibility study did a range of consultation and a range of government agency engagement and consultation. It was part of surfacing some of those risks that I have just mentioned. Now that we have that, we are just exploring ways that we might be able to manage or mitigate those. As I said, I don't want to pretend that it is straightforward because when you have a site that is in any way linked to the drinking water network, you have to be extremely careful about managing that. WaterNSW, for example—with its assets elsewhere—manages extremely stringent special catchment provisions in relation to sites that provide Sydney drinking water, as they should be. So we do need to be mindful of that. That's part of what has been surfaced as part of the feasibility study. Nonetheless, we're creative and determined to find solutions that meet our goals—our goals being people in Western Sydney should have as much access as they can to beautiful, natural, free recreation and swim spots. We've been able to do that a little bit of that work at alternative sites and we're just still working through that at Prospect Reservoir.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is the feasibility study concluded now?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, it has.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I take it from the concerns that you're outlining in terms of Prospect Reservoir, that it's possible that you won't be able to swim there?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm not going to make any commitments. We are still exploring options. All options are still on the table, we're just figuring out exactly what the mix might be. Again, there are just so many different ways that you can approach this, Mr Farlow. You can say, "everyone run and jump in." You can say, "motorised or non-motorised watercraft." You can say, "swimming". You can create barriers. The reservoir itself is quite big. You can identify different areas. There is a range of different approaches and level of recreational engagement that might be possible. We are just exploring which of those we think meet that mix of achieving our goal of more swim-based recreation in Western Sydney without creating risks that are unacceptable to the drinking water network.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So the proposal at Prospect Reservoir isn't dead in the water?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I love a good water pun, Mr Farlow.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Back to housing, with respect to community housing providers in particular, what dedicated funding streams are available within this budget for community housing providers provided by the New South Wales Government?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I was talking to Ms Pinkstone about this in the break because we do really value our community housing provider partners. The information that we were discussing—and you might be able to explore more with her this afternoon, as I understand time is about to run out—is that we anticipate that 40 per cent of the new supply pipeline that we are delivering as part of our Building Homes for NSW program will be done in partnership with community housing providers.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Did you say 40 per cent?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, 40 per cent. They are valued partners. I've said before many times that I think our community housing sector in New South Wales is one of our secret sauces. I think they do a great job. We want to engage them and partner with them to deliver homes. We do think they can bring a value-add. We want to build the public housing stock. We've got clear plans to do that. I'm not apologetic at all about a strong partnership with community housing providers. As I said, the figure that we are looking at is 40 per cent of our new pipeline done in partnership with community housing providers.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Previously I think you had advised that it was 30 per cent. The Government has revised that, have they, to increase it to 40 per cent?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, I think we have. We think that there are valuable opportunities for us to engage with them to maximise the delivery of housing, and we want to do that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: At the moment, though—and while I take your word that 40 per cent is what you aspire to achieve with community housing partners—is there anything on the table at the moment for community housing providers to access?

CORRECTED

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: What we have at the moment is what we are calling a direct dealing framework with them where they are able to engage with Homes NSW without any kind of complicated bureaucratic rounds or processes. They come to us and say, "We have this site. We think it has this development potential. We would need this capital support from Homes NSW to deliver that." We work through that and are quite regularly engaging with them and, in a way, constantly assessing their proposals and making determinations to partner with them. I don't know if I you have anything to add, Ms Pinkstone, but it's a constant and ongoing process.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: They're actively developing and delivering the projects now. Of our delivery last year, 824 were through public housing and 583 were affordable homes through the community housing sector. They're delivering the projects in partnership with us. For example, the HAFF projects that were successful—the 14 sites—will be delivered in partnership with the community housing sector. That's the delivery model. I suppose it's just a different way of looking at how the partnering's occurring and the program as opposed to, for example, a direct grant for the Together Home program.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: We consider it a waste of time to say, "This is a specific and complicated round where you have to get your application in at this time and fill in all of this paperwork." That's just bureaucratic nonsense from our point of view. As Ms Pinkstone said, our approach is "We are open for business with community housing providers. Approach us with projects that you think add value, and we have a direct dealing framework to finalise those arrangements and get on with the job of delivering the homes."

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How does that work? Community housing providers come, knock on your door and say, "We've got this site here. We think that you could partner with us in delivering 50 social houses."

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: Yes, occasionally. That's right. Yes, they do. Not necessarily me personally but, through Homes NSW, they do do that. We also, with our redevelopment sites, go to them and say, "We are redeveloping this particular site. We think it would be good to do it in partnership with a community housing provider. Who is active in this area? Who already has tenant management responsibility in this area? Would they be a suitable partner?" It's a two-way street but, yes, community housing providers are able and welcome to approach Homes NSW with those propositions.

The CHAIR: Minister, in the short remaining time that I've got, I want to ask you about the virtual psychiatry hubs. I understand that those were introduced as a contingency measure to respond to the resignation of the staff specialist psychiatrists. How much has the Government spent on those virtual hubs to date?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: It has spent \$3, 398, 939.

The CHAIR: At what point will the virtual hubs be ceased, or is it becoming a permanent feature of the mental health system?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: My feedback and my view is that they have been well received, they are playing a valuable role and that we do not intend to discontinue them.

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes.

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: That's my view too. Thanks for agreeing with me.

The CHAIR: Some of the feedback that I've received was certainly that they were necessary in situations where there's no other means to access specialist psychiatrists advice but that, in some instances, the lack of local knowledge of the psychiatrists employed at the virtual hub meant that decisions or advice was not as good as it would have been by someone who actually knows the local area and the capability of local health services where the calls are coming from. Do you not accept that it would be better to have someone who's either based in that area or who has significant knowledge of that area rather than clinicians trying to serve the whole State virtually?

The Hon. ROSE JACKSON: I'm sure that there have been instances where what you have articulated are true. In the modern era, it's not just psychiatry health services that are delivered virtually. There is a range of telehealth and virtual health services that are now delivered online. Like you, I've received feedback that, occasionally—in all delivery of health services that is done virtually, you sometimes miss very local knowledge. You sometimes miss the benefits that come from face-to-face engagement. That's true and I have heard that feedback too. But what we're trying to do here is find a balance—yes, acknowledging, that, particularly perhaps in mental health, there are occasions and times when sitting down face to face with someone is very valuable and very important—with the fact that, particularly for some of these specialists, even putting aside the challenges that we have had this year with staff specialist psychiatrists and the wage dispute, there were vacancies and challenges accessing face-to-face psychiatrists for years prior to this and that, if we can use virtual services and

CORRECTED

telehealth services to augment—where we can—local face-to-face provision, we will. It's not just psychiatry that is having care delivered that way; it's happening across healthcare delivery.

The CHAIR: I have more questions, but I'll save them for Dr Flynn this afternoon. It's time for Government questions, if there are any.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: The Government has no questions.

The CHAIR: There being no Government questions, that's the end of the time the Minister has with us. Thank you for your attendance this morning in answering our questions. We'll resume at 2.00 p.m. with the departmental witnesses. Thanks, everyone.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. We will start this afternoon's session with questions from the crossbench and some of my own questions, which will be for the Mental Health Branch and other health witnesses, if that helps you organise your time. My first question is about medical agency commission costs. It might be for Mr D'Amato. I understand that in 2023-24, \$43.8 million was spent on commission fees to agencies for recruitment of locum doctors. Have you got that figure for 2024-25?

ALFA D'AMATO: Give me a second and I'll pull up the figures. It sounds about right; it sounds correct. It takes a little bit of time for the system to upload, sorry.

The CHAIR: No problem. I quoted the figure for 2023-24 and I'm after the figure for 2024-25.

ALFA D'AMATO: For 2024-25 we haven't finalised the accounts yet. It will be probably another couple of months before the financial statement is finalised. I can only provide an estimate that is unaudited.

The CHAIR: Sure, that's all right; I'd appreciate an estimate. I can move on and come back to you, if that would be helpful?

ALFA D'AMATO: Yes.

The CHAIR: I am interested in an update on the reforms enabling GPs to prescribe medication for ADHD, which was an excellent initiative. In another life I may have been one of the GPs who put in an expression of interest for that program. Where are things up to in terms of the preparation of the training for the two different tiers of prescribers?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I have very high-level details of this program. It's actually largely run by another division within Health, although it's certainly true that the Mental Health Branch, Health and Social Policy with paediatric input and the office of the Chief Health Officer are all involved. I do understand that from 1 September the training will become open for general practitioners. Again, I can come back with more details on notice, but I understand that essentially there are two things being offered. The first is capacity for continuity of care and the second is extra education and capacity building and support for GPs around diagnosis. The emphasis at the moment, as I understand it, is very much on the first group, just in order to ensure better access to continuity of care.

The CHAIR: For prescribers who are currently already prescribing under the other designated prescriber scheme, will that be recognised or will those GPs need to complete training again?

MURRAY WRIGHT: I think we should take that on notice because it is being run through the office of the Chief Health Officer and I wouldn't want to mislead you.

ALFA D'AMATO: Chair, if you would like, I have the figures now. I'm just confirming the figure for 2023-24 is \$43.8 million, and the figure currently for 2024-25 is—as I mentioned, unaudited—43.2.

The CHAIR: Have you also got how many different agencies were contracted in this year?

ALFA D'AMATO: I don't have it with me. Let me ask—

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I'll get that.

The CHAIR: Coming back to ADHD, obviously medication can be life-changing for many people living with ADHD. It's an important part of treatment options but certainly not the only one. Is there any work being undertaken by the Mental Health Branch to improve accessibility and equity of access to other kinds of management types for people living with ADHD?

CORRECTED

MURRAY WRIGHT: As I've mentioned, there's a working group chaired by Dr Chant, which has got representatives of general practitioner organisations, the Mental Health Branch, paediatrics and pharmaceutical services, and the focus right now, as Dr Flynn said, is on the continuing prescribing. But it's also about developing appropriate education packages for the identified GPs. Those education packages will actually be including the fact that medication is not the be-all and end-all in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. There will be two levels of training ultimately and there'll be one level of training for the continuing prescribers, and then at a later date there'll be more rigorous training for the initiation prescribers. I would expect that that training will be substantially about the non-medication treatments and also about the importance of a detailed and longitudinal assessment to actually make the diagnosis, as you're well aware, and so it certainly doesn't rest on prescribing medication alone. That would not address the needs of everyone with attention deficit disorder.

The CHAIR: Absolutely, and I would agree with you. I suppose the concern is that this very simple change enabling significantly greater access to medication could inadvertently, without that attention, set up a situation where it's far easier to access medication and not other types of treatment.

MURRAY WRIGHT: It could, but I think that with the linking of the prescribing rights to a broader range of clinicians, including the GPs, that education will be about the non-pharmacological treatments that are necessary. There is also talk about having mentoring-type relationships for some of the GPs with the initiation so that they can get advice. I think the desire is not just to open the floodgates and have more prescriptions; it's about providing access to the GPs to appropriate education and support so that they can make more nuanced treatment plans for the people that they're seeing.

The CHAIR: Is my understanding correct that GPs are being compensated for their time to undertake that training?

MURRAY WRIGHT: That is my understanding.²

The CHAIR: You might be about to take this question on notice as well, but I am interested, with the GPs that have already put in their expressions of interest for the tier one training that is due to start in September, what is the balance of metropolitan and rural and regional GPs who will be participating in that first training?

MURRAY WRIGHT: I know there's a sensitivity to that issue and that issue is represented in the working group which I'm a member of, but I couldn't tell you what the breakdown is. I can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that answer on notice. My other question in relation to medication is about supply disruption for a number of common ADHD medications at the moment. I understand that is a nationwide issue, not a uniquely New South Wales issue. Is the department doing any work to support people who might have difficulty accessing ADHD medication?

MURRAY WRIGHT: I think one of the issues is about substitution of the different medications, and that's certainly an issue that's important to address. That becomes important when you have a specialist initiating a prescription and then you have a continuation prescriber. That has been addressed in the working group; I can't tell you exactly where it's landed. But the issue of securing the supply, that's not something that I'm privy to. We can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I think Dr Chant's probably the right person to have put that question to. I understand there are other medications where the department has actually stepped in with temporary arrangements to support supply. I will go to my colleague, Ms Cate Faehrmann.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Dr Cohn, I can come back to you, if you like, with that figure.

The CHAIR: Please.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: At the moment we have 62 locum agencies on the register, but that is a figure that goes up and down from time to time. Agencies will come on the register and agencies will come off. If it's okay as well, I could provide some clarity for my answer this morning about the number of locums that Ms Maclaren-Jones asked about. I advised that we had recruited 81 locums, which we had 81 locums recruited at this point in time. The cumulative number, though—what we've recruited from the time we began the program—is 195. Obviously some have come in, finished their contract and exited, but we've got 81 in the system at the moment, which equates to around 60 FTE.

² In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 28 August 2025, Dr Murray Wright PSM, Chief Psychiatrist, NSW Ministry of Health, clarified their evidence.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Jones, I might go back to you now, if you could continue from where I asked you to pause until this afternoon in relation to what is your understanding of why the environmental water has been paused across the State. What are the issues?

AMANDA JONES: Thank you, Ms Faehrmann. For planned environmental water, that type of water release is managed under water sharing plan rules, and that is the intention of the policy position. What was identified is that the nature of that water release is that it often doesn't stay in channel. What it does, and what its intention is, is to move across the landscape. When it does that, to get to wetlands and important areas that need the water—sometimes forests—it can move between different water sources. When that water moves between different water sources, technically it could need to be licensed because it's technically take.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: When you say moving between different water sources, what do you mean?

AMANDA JONES: From a regulated water source to an unregulated water source, for example. This is a very technical issue. It's not the intention of the policy position. The policy position is that this type of water is managed under water sharing plan rules, it should be released for the purposes that it's intended and it doesn't need to be licensed as well.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What's the difference between that and—for example, I understand you could consider all flows in the Barwon-Darling are travelling between water sources. Water for irrigators below the Macquarie Marshes travels through water sources.

AMANDA JONES: In the Barwon, it's mainly staying in the water source. For example, we are actually advertising at the moment for consultation on environmental releases from the Snowy, which will start next month. In that case that water stays within the water source, so within that river system. That is an example of environmental watering that is continuing. This is where water actually moves through the landscape and, downstream of where it's been released from a regulator, it moves across different types of water sources.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Well, of course it does. In an ideal situation, the whole point of environmental flows at some point is to reach the Coorong, isn't it? That's a lot of different water sources.

AMANDA JONES: Absolutely, and that's the reason why we'd never considered it also needed to be licensed. It's like asking environmental water to clip the ticket twice, if you like. That water release is covered in water sharing plan rules. It was never designed that it should be also needing to be licensed—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Why is the pause necessary, though? It's not suddenly as though somebody woke up and realised this was an issue.

AMANDA JONES: Actually, it kind of is—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The flood plain harvesting was identified as an issue.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Point of order: I think the witness is entitled to answer the question instead of being cut off.

The CHAIR: I always allow latitude for members to interrupt and redirect if needed after the witness has had at least a sentence of answering the question.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: To the point of order: That wasn't a request to redirect. The witness was answering the question and got cut off. I just think that's unreasonable.

The CHAIR: I'll allow the witness to continue answering the question.

AMANDA JONES: Actually, this came to light only recently because our colleagues in CHPR in DCCEEW are doing everything they can, as managing the environmental water holder's entitlement—the New South Wales environmental water holder's entitlement—to make sure that everything's up to speed and current. It was actually in their review of that situation and different water releases that this was identified. It's unintended. It's going to be addressed, as the Minister was saying this morning, as quickly as possible. It's a really technical issue.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How is it going to be addressed?

AMANDA JONES: By a regulation change that actually makes it very clear that planned environmental water does not need to be licensed as well. It's managed under water sharing plan rules.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barnes, the stop work order at Toorale—briefly explain why that has taken place.

CORRECTED

GRANT BARNES: It's a result of a lengthy investigation. We've concluded that the operators of Toorale are complying with their lawful obligations as described under the works approval. However, the works approval itself is deficient and, in our view, not concordant with the principles of the Act, primarily because the way the regulator works at the Boera Dam at certain configurations allows for the diversion of water into the western flood plain. That currently is not being recorded, reported and debited against a relevant water access licence. Our stop work order that we've issued requires the operators to debit the water diverted against the water access licence.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: How long have you been investigating it?

GRANT BARNES: We have been investigating Toorale since 2019. We concluded the initial investigation back in 2020 with the issuance of a direction to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to meter the site. It was then proven by National Parks and Wildlife Service that that was practically impossible, so a modification was made whereby the water moving around that site is now modelled, and that modelling is incorporated into their operational maintenance plan. This latest investigation commenced in 2024.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: With the installation of accurate metering of active works with entitlements 100 megalitres and over in the northern New South Wales basin, where is that up to in terms of the installation? How much of what is required has been done?

GRANT BARNES: As it potentially relates to the carriage of environmental water, there's a handful of investigations underway at the moment. I think you know, Ms Faehrmann, that the legal obligation is on the works approval holder, not on the water access licence holder, so in this instance the CEWO has no primary legal exposure. It is the works approval holder, and it's that entity that we are working with at the moment to determine whether or not water has passed across a noncompliant work.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But there are quite a few, I would say, noncompliant works in the northern basin, would there not be, Mr Barnes? Are a lot of them being issued with stop work orders—is that the technical term?

GRANT BARNES: Broadly, yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Along with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder?

GRANT BARNES: We've committed, post the review of the non-urban metering regs, to focus on the top 400 licence entitlements in the State. Of that, there is about upwards of 3,000 works that we are auditing. It's estimated we would have completed that audit process by the end of this year. We find at the moment that noncompliance sits at around 60 per cent for works greater than 500 millimetres, and noncompliance is similarly for northern inland works and southern inland works. Irrespective of whether you're carrying environmental water or providing water for irrigation purposes or town water supply, we are finding much more needs to be done by works approval holders to get into compliance with the non-urban metering regs.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: To be clear, when you're saying that a lot more work needs to be done and there is still a lot of noncompliance, are you issuing stop work orders for those other big irrigators as soon as you find noncompliance?

GRANT BARNES: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So every time they're told to stop and fix?

GRANT BARNES: When we first encounter, what we need to do is assess whether or not the works are within scope for the regulations. Our second assessment is whether or not the works may be afforded an exemption. Once that calculation is made, we are then looking at the circumstances of the water user. You'll know that one of the reasons why the non-urban metering regs were reviewed was because of difficulty obtaining meters and difficulty accessing duly qualified persons. That was all taken into account a couple of years ago. Despite that, we have found numerous circumstances where water users have not satisfied us that they're taking the right steps and they have been served with directions. I will come back to you on record, but my recollection is I'm thinking 20 to 30 directions have been issued to works approval holders over the past 18 months.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: You'll forgive me if I continue the questioning from Ms Faehrmann, and we may be going over ground that you are all better aware of as we try to get a grasp on what is a very important issue. Mr Barnes, you suggest that this current investigation has been going on since 2024.

GRANT BARNES: The Toorale one, yes, that's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, sorry, it is Toorale that we're continuing on. But this stop work order is the first time that such a thing has happened, which we qualified this morning.

CORRECTED

GRANT BARNES: The first time NRAR, the independent regulator, has issued a stop work order against the New South Wales Government.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Did the New South Wales Government receive correspondence from the Commonwealth in relation to ceasing the environmental water flows, and can it be tabled if so?

GRANT BARNES: I can't speak to that. I have no knowledge of any correspondence.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Ms Jones, any correspondence that we're aware of?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not aware of any correspondence to the department, no.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Again, it may be a difficult question for your consideration, but in terms of trying to understand this issue more comprehensively, is the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder struggling to comply with the Government's rules on water management and regulation? Is that part of what we're seeing has arisen here?

AMANDA JONES: The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is the licence holder. The Toorale action that Mr Barnes was speaking about is actually about the works holder, and that's National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Explain it to me, please. Is it the crossover between the two that is causing the issue? I'm trying to nut out why we're at the stage that we are of a stop work order, but we don't seem to be pinpointing—"fault" is not the word that I'm looking for here, but where the issue has arisen from.

AMANDA JONES: The issue of the stop work order at Toorale and the issue of pausing environmental water releases are separate issues, and I think that's where the confusion comes from.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Could you explain to me, then, what the stop work order means in terms of consequences?

GRANT BARNES: Very simply, if the regulator at the dam is operated under condition X, and water is moving across into the western flood plain, then that water must be accounted for against a relevant water access licence. If the regulator is open, passing water unhindered down into the lower Warrego, there's no obligation on the works approval holder to account for the water.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And that's it? Does the stop work order cover any other regulating infrastructure? That's the extent of the impact?

GRANT BARNES: I speak broadly about "the regulator". There are elements of infrastructure distributed around that vicinity but, for simplicity, it's how the Boera Dam regulator operates. On certain flow conditions, it passes water to the western flood plain, and we've interpreted that to be requiring the recording, reporting and debiting against the water access licence.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Simon Banks, in the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder's media release on 18 August, said that the temporary pause is due to a recent shift in how held environmental water is interpreted under various New South Wales water sharing and policy frameworks. Is that what is causing the problem—the shifts in understanding?

AMANDA JONES: That goes to the issue I was speaking about, rather than the Toorale stop work order. It's a temporary pause while we sort the regulations such that it makes it really clear that planned environmental water is managed under water sharing plan rules.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I guess this will come back to Ms Faehrmann's point that Simon Banks has said that they won't resume environmental water actions until obligations are being met. Is that correct?

AMANDA JONES: You'd have to ask the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder that question. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder would put in an order for water to be released against one of their licences, so it's up to them when they decide to do that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I still don't think that we're fully across that issue as much as it deserves, but I am going to move on so I can spend a little more time trying to be better across it as well. Can I talk with someone about *The domestic and stock rights review: What we heard report*.

AMANDA JONES: You can speak to me about that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you tell us where that currently stands?

AMANDA JONES: It's been released; it's been published.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And publicly available?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: When did that happen?

AMANDA JONES: I think in the last week or so. I'd need to confirm the date, but I can do that.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Are you aware of on-the-ground reports suggesting that there are issues in relation to stop work orders about drawing water under the BLR for basic farming tasks such as providing water or crop spraying, or even washing down machinery?

AMANDA JONES: I might ask Grant Barnes to speak to that.

GRANT BARNES: Yes, I'd be happy to. I think what you're referring to is a recent conclusion of an investigation where staff encountered a water user who was using his stock and domestic BLR for mixing of chemicals and applying that to a crop. That's a commercial transaction and it's not afforded under the Act in the basic landholder right. Our staff, our investigators, have done the right thing in evaluating the harm that was being caused, which was minor; the public interest, which was determined to be minor; and the individual's culpability. Did they know what they were doing was against the law? No, they didn't. They had a reasonable understanding that it was okay. But where this individual failed—and, frankly, we encounter this on very rare occasions—was this individual was not receptive to our advice or guidance.

You might want to infer from that that perhaps they didn't behave in the manner that one would hope when our staff were on farm. As a result, we had little confidence that the water user was going to get into compliance, so we took the steps to issue an interim stop work order. That water user now, I am pleased to report, is in compliance. They are mixing their chemicals using a lawful source of water. They're not using their basic landholder right. I would add that we've taken thousands of enforcement actions over the seven years we've been in operation. We've issued two in relation to a basic landholder right. It's not a priority for NRAR and I see no reason, in the current context, why basic landholder rights would become a priority for NRAR.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: This may have to come back to you, Ms Jones. In relation to the review that has been done, the *What We Heard Report*, is there anything going on in terms of modernising the rules around the BLR and water access? Is there any work going on in that space?

AMANDA JONES: I can report to you that that was published on 14 August. The *What We Heard Report* concluded that there was no need to change the current arrangements. Basic landholder rights are because a river passes past your property or because you sit atop an aquifer. It's unmetered take, and it's really for domestic purposes. That's the fundamental principle. As Mr Barnes has just mentioned, in all of NRAR's prosecutorial work, it's very rare to come across an instance where there's any action required to be taken for these types of rights. I'm aware from some of the submissions we received on this topic that some farmers would like the rights extended, but those rights being extended would take water from others, in that this is not a right that is for commercial purposes; it's for domestic purposes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What was the objective of the review? To simply say that everything is all in order and we're happy the way it is?

AMANDA JONES: From the review, what we know—and I think Mr Barnes would agree here—is that there's a degree of confusion about what these rights are.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'd say yes.

AMANDA JONES: I think the action that the department might take—and I'm sure that NRAR would join in this—is to do some education around what these rights are.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: What sort of education? What will that involve?

GRANT BARNES: From our perspective, we commit to visiting 2,000 water users every year. In that interaction there is an opportunity to talk with them about their understanding of their rights and obligations, what their water access licences might require of them, what their works approvals might require of them, and where they might be able to access an exemption or, in this case, how they might be using their stock and domestic licences or even their basic landholder rights. We find that farmers appreciate that one-to-one engagement. This previous one I mentioned is distinct, but in most cases we find that the advice that we're giving water users helps them better understand their circumstances and ensures that by the time we leave the farm gate, they are fully in compliance.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is this the first such review that has occurred in this regard, or is it a regular thing that takes place?

CORRECTED

AMANDA JONES: No, this is a review that, in my knowledge, is the first time we've looked at this in probably many years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will it be something that becomes more regular?

AMANDA JONES: I think that what we'll need to do is monitor—and particularly monitor compliance—over the coming years.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And education and awareness as well, from the perspective of the farmers. Ms Jones, could I quickly take you back to what we talked about this morning? You mentioned the Minimum Inflows project. Do you recall that from this morning? It's on the border rivers and Murrumbidgee.

AMANDA JONES: The minimum inflows methodology—we had the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer stand up an independent panel to review the methodology that we have developed. The reason that we did this work is because, in our regulated water sharing plans—and particularly those plans in the northern basin—we have a requirement to review the minimum inflow assumptions in those plans by the middle of next year. The minimum inflow assumptions are really assumptions we make about how much water might be coming into a dam, and that is something that we take account of every year when we're doing water allocation decisions.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Twice you clarified this morning that it was a review of the methodology, and you said that it wasn't a trial.

AMANDA JONES: Yes, that's correct. It's not a trial.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: But the project plan timeline, according to the Water Engagement Roundup February 2025, includes trial method in two valleys on the proposed project phasing. It has developed method, method reviewed, trial method in two valleys. Is that something different or something outside the methodology?

AMANDA JONES: We are about to commence some community engagement on both the minimum inflow methodology and also the connectivity work that the independent panel on connectivity made recommendations about. Before we would do any trial, we are consulting on the methodology.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Now we're getting to it, though. So there will be a trial, in consultation with—following this review of the methodology.

AMANDA JONES: The trial will be potentially developing new water sharing plan rules that we would test. Trial probably is not the clearest word to use. It's testing what changes might be made to water sharing plan rules and the impacts of those rule changes.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you for the clarification—I think. We also briefly mentioned the Murray Valley floodplain management plan that you said had commenced.

AMANDA JONES: Apologies, I misheard you. I thought you said Murrumbidgee, and it's the Murrumbidgee plan that has been finalised and released. The Murray is in development.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In development?

AMANDA JONES: And being consulted on.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Is there a time frame for that?

AMANDA JONES: I can take that on notice and come back with the time frame.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That would be lovely. If I could talk now with WaterNSW. Mr George? The decision to—I don't like to use the word "sack"—move on 300 staff members—was it a matter of cost savings?

ANDREW GEORGE: No, it's a matter of the revenues determination by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal to allow, if you like, a significant revenue shortfall on what we—

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Of \$80 million?

ANDREW GEORGE: Of \$80 million per annum.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: So that was the primary driver behind the need to—

ANDREW GEORGE: Correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: —make these cuts of 300 positions. It's not that the jobs were unnecessary, or the roles were redundant; it was a matter of the bottom line.

CORRECTED

ANDREW GEORGE: Correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The alternative saving measures in addition to the \$860 million in deferred capital works and \$133 million in operational costs, were they considered before this decision was implemented?

ANDREW GEORGE: Correct. Our pricing submission to IPART already included significant efficiency savings and cost deferrals, as you've just referred to. The \$80 million revenue shortfall is on top of those efficiency savings that were proposed in our pricing submission.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Will any programs or business functions be affected by the cuts?

ANDREW GEORGE: Absolutely.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Can you tell us how many, which?

ANDREW GEORGE: We are having to defer even more capital work—more projects around the State—because there simply isn't sufficient revenue allowance to fund the planned capital works. We're going through that prioritisation process at the moment. We're doing that on a risk-based basis, engaging with our customers on their priorities as well. We're currently in a round of engagement with our customer advisory groups, and we're speaking to them about our capital works program and what we can safely proceed with, at least this year, given the funding constraints we have.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I presume—and it is a presumption—that customers would then be presenting their concerns around what all of this might mean for them, and to ensure that they continue to get the level of services that they've signed up to.

ANDREW GEORGE: It is a very difficult proposition to suggest that we can remove \$80 million from the business per annum and continue to meet the levels of service we proposed in our pricing submission to IPART. I am not going to sit here and pretend that that is the outcome that will be achieved, because it simply can't.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: The cuts, in terms of the staff, is that spread evenly around the State or will some areas be more impacted than others?

ANDREW GEORGE: Some areas will be more impacted than others.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Rural and regional areas?

ANDREW GEORGE: It's not based on geography; it's based on function. We are looking at, very deeply, the way that the revenue allowances have been proposed. We obviously need to continue to meet our statutory and legal obligations. We are taking a scalpel to this, not a sledgehammer. We're being very careful. We're looking at the functions that we perform that are commercial and those which are not, which are discretionary. If we can no longer afford to continue with discretionary functions, they will be the sorts of things that we will be seeking to stop doing.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I think it would be fair to say the cost of doing business has increased substantially over the past few years.

ANDREW GEORGE: It has. In our pricing proposal of our operating cost increases, around 40 per cent of that was due to new or changed regulatory obligations.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: New or changed?

ANDREW GEORGE: Correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Was there any discussion about reprioritising capital projects, such as the \$301 million for environmental inflows on the Hawkesbury?

ANDREW GEORGE: Yes. We have written to the Government. We have shelved that project. We will not be proceeding with it.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How much is WaterNSW paying in interest each year?

ANDREW GEORGE: I'll have to take the interest bill on notice.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: If you could, please. If you're able to provide that, that would be very helpful. I'm not sure who this one will go to: non-urban water metering reform. Is that you, Ms Jones?

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: How much has the New South Wales Government spent on the non-urban metering reform rollout to date?

AMANDA JONES: I can take on notice the question of how much the non-urban metering reform cost in terms of establishing what the reform should be. It's not a cost to government for the rollout of the reform.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: No. The funding and the cost, if we can have the breakdown of that on notice, that would be helpful.

The CHAIR: I have some questions for the Acting Mental Health Commissioner. If you could come up, Ms Dixon. While you're getting settled, I have a couple of quick ones to the Mental Health Branch relating to the virtual hub. Have you got any figures of how many calls that hub has been receiving per day, per week, per month, or however you're recording that?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I do have some data, Dr Cohn. This data is as of 27 July, so it's a little old. But, up until then, for the western New South Wales hub there have been 1,686 referrals, and the Hunter New England hub, which is largely doing more work inside the district rather than serving other districts, was 588 consultations. That's now a little old and I am aware that, in the past month, since that data has been sent, we know the western New South Wales hub has gotten busier. We understand some new metropolitan services have come online and also western New South Wales has started some 24/7 coverage. I'm not sure if that's seven days a week, but it certainly is doing some overnight coverage.

The CHAIR: Could you take that detail on notice?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: We'll come across to Ms Dixon. Thanks so much for attending; I understand you're in an acting role at the moment. Last year, SafeWork NSW issued the Mental Health Commission with three improvement notices relating to psychosocial hazards in the workplace. Can you update us on what work has been done to improve the psychosocial safety at the commission itself?

JULIE DIXON: Absolutely. I was actually not there for the past year, but I've just come back. The work done between the two acting commissioners, Wayne Jones and Deb Howe, and more recently Jennifer Black, the current commissioner, has been quite extensive. To give a snapshot, there has been and continues to be—Adapsys, we've engaged to actually lead a whole culture improvement in the workplace, which includes the commissioner, the two directors and the entire team. We have been working closely with SafeWork, who recently did come back into the workplace, and we provided them with the previous SafeWork action plan as well as the people matters—so the action plan. They came back with favourable feedback indicating that there continues to be extensive work undertaken to improve workplace culture.

Those things include setting a very clear direction, so the commission has a brand-new strategy, which is really about leading, driving and measuring reform in suicide prevention, mental health and wellbeing across the whole of government. We're setting a really clear direction. Each of the team members, by the end of August—it's 80 per cent now—has a performance talent plan. We're looking at very individual work plans which flow, obviously, down from the strategy, as well as looking at professional development. There's an extensive amount of effort being taken. We've also got a psychosocial wellbeing working group as well.

The CHAIR: That's very helpful. Moving forward from now, what's in place to continue to monitor the wellbeing of your own team following the change that has been made?

JULIE DIXON: Good question. We will continue to have a psychosocial working group that feeds into the workforce health and safety committee. We are looking at icare's workload tools. Obviously the current people matter survey is out now, and I'm actually meeting with the whole team on Thursday next week to talk to them about it. We've gone through all the different key elements of work to improve workplace culture, and we've got a question and answer session for each individual staff member that's keen to talk to us more and to gain more ideas about how to continue to improve the workplace. The retention of staff is about 79 per cent. There was quite a big turnover when I was there a couple of years ago, and there is quite a considerable retention of staff now as well.

The CHAIR: You might not have this to hand, but have you got that retention figure for previous years—that figure of 79 per cent compared to previous?

JULIE DIXON: I don't. I can take it on notice. I'll take it on notice and come back to you on that. I do have it somewhere.

The CHAIR: It is a helpful proxy for the wellbeing of your staff. The statutory review of the Mental Health Commission Act that was undertaken last year received significant feedback about the functions of the

CORRECTED

commission in terms of being very broad and being spread very thin. You mentioned the strategy in response to my previous question, but can you talk about what work has been done to address the findings of the statutory review?

JULIE DIXON: Yes, absolutely. We did previously have an annual charter letter from the Minister for Mental Health. However, there isn't one currently, and that's enabled us to regroup and refocus, knowing that the suicide prevention legislation, which I believe is going to the upper assembly potentially next month—we're preparing to lead the administration of that legislation. I think you're aware too, Amanda, that we're actually leading the development of a new 10-year mental health and wellbeing strategy for whole of government and an associated outcomes framework as well. We're really focused, which aligns to our new strategy, on whole-of-government work and actually looking at how to better support government agencies and departments that are interested in delivering on the new statewide strategic plans for suicide prevention, if the bill passes, and also on the strategy as well.

The CHAIR: I wanted to ask about the suicide prevention legislation which passed the Legislative Council but not yet the Legislative Assembly. There's obviously a significant role to play for the Mental Health Commission in implementing that work. Does the commission currently have the capability to do that?

JULIE DIXON: What we're doing is partly through a—as I've just mentioned, relooking at the focus of the commission and what that work is over the next 18 months. We're also looking at realigning resources. Most of the budget—the \$9.18 million that the commission has received this year—is for employing staff. We have been looking at the funding attached to that budget, and I've just recruited a manager of suicide prevention, a manager of Aboriginal suicide prevention and another support officer for that work as well.

The CHAIR: Fantastic, thank you. You mentioned the consultation that you're doing at the moment as part of the wellbeing strategy. Can you talk us through how that works? I'm particularly interested in how you're ensuring that priority populations have the opportunity to meaningfully feed in.

JULIE DIXON: We have embarked on a multimodal consultation approach. We engaged First Nations Co., an Aboriginal company, on the pre-qualification scheme. They have engaged 478 Aboriginal individuals, as well as 110 organisations across many parts of New South Wales, to consult with them widely about not only their views, ideas and aspirations about building a better mental health system but also looking upstream at the social, cultural and commercial determinants of health as well.

We also have 23 priority population groups. We've held 31 round tables so far. We've had engagement with 300 organisations, and that is growing—we have another 20. We have an enormous, overwhelming interest in engaging, which has been fantastic. We've also got the Department of Customer Service Have Your Say, which is a five- to 10-minute survey. As of late last week, we had 4,500 responses and 35 submissions as well. We've also been undertaking community visits across New South Wales and have been holding workshops at forums as well.

The CHAIR: Can you let us know who the populations are on your list?

JULIE DIXON: I've got a list. It's 23—it's an extremely long list. Do you want me to read them all out?

The CHAIR: If you take that question on notice, then you can provide it in writing.

JULIE DIXON: Yes, I will. I'll take it on notice.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. You mentioned regional visits. Which communities in rural and regional New South Wales have you either visited or got firm plans to visit?

JULIE DIXON: The commissioner has visited the Mid North Coast, Hunter New England—and I think went to Wagga and Albury as well—so far. She's got more plans to go to Dubbo and Parkes, and also inner Sydney and Illawarra and Shoalhaven coming up too at the end of the year.

The CHAIR: This is obviously a huge project. What's the timeline on this work?

JULIE DIXON: We're looking to hold government round tables in October and November to talk about the themes from what we've heard. We're looking to then develop the strategy. We're aiming for the end of next year, which will also hopefully align with the legislation and rollout of State plans as well.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I just want to ask a few questions of Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte. Firstly, does the NRC have a view about the freeze on environmental water?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No, we're not involved in that at all.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You did, though, make recommendations about the wetlands mapping—we'll move to another issue—in terms of identifying and protecting the wetlands in the water sharing plans.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What do you think of where the department has got to in terms of protecting wetlands in the new water sharing plans?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: We make recommendations on wetland protection under each of the water sharing plans that we review, and we get a response from that in each case. Generally, they are followed.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of each of the water sharing plans, the NRC made a recommendation around the fact that more wetlands needed to be protected. They needed to be mapped. They needed to be—

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No, nothing on the mapping. There are very specific wetlands associated with specific water sharing plans. We have no involvement at all in the mapping of wetlands.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you saying that all of your concerns are met because the wetlands that you're worried about will now be protected in the remade—these are the remade ones that weren't given concurrence.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Those met your concerns.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No. Let's be clear here—we make recommendations under these. We don't do any of the mapping. If there are wetlands as part of the particular regulation system, then we will make comments on them as part of that and they're published, of course. That's the extent of the NRCs involvement.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: With the comments that you've made, which I don't have in front of me—I have looked at a few of them over the—

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But I don't have them in front of me. In every one of the remade water sharing plans that the environment Minister didn't give concurrence, your feedback was—

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: They're not remade. These are the reviews of the water sharing plans.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sorry, the reviews.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You're satisfied now. Has the NRC been provided the opportunity to look at what came back in terms of the mapping project and what I was asking about before?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No, not at all. We are not involved in the mapping of prescribed wetlands at all—just to repeat that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Would that be something that the NRC would look at if it was asked to by the relevant Minister?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: There is a lot—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I know you have a lot of work on your plate.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Yes. We are heavily involved in, as you know, the connectivity thing and then, with another hat on, minimum inflows and so on and so forth. That would be at the discretion of the Minister.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Did the NRC get legal advice regarding the water management principles at a certain point in time?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Let me be clear here—that advice was actually, initially at least, given to the water department. It was then subsequently shared with us. We then sought joint advice, which we have received. We are now working together on, effectively, the implementation of that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Has that advice been made public?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: No.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Would that advice be able to be made public?

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: I don't think that's for me to address. That's probably for my colleague.

AMANDA JONES: What we have done is actually ask the Crown Solicitor to draft a guidance so that that could be made public.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What's the time frame on that, Ms Jones?

AMANDA JONES: I can come back to you, but it's in the coming month or so.

HUGH DURRANT-WHYTE: Yes. We're in process.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. I'll go to Mr Barnes again. We'll go back to Toorale. Did landholders downstream communicate with NRAR about environmental watering from Toorale in the period leading up to the stop work order?

GRANT BARNES: I think there has been contact that various parties have had with NRAR representing their interests. I wouldn't want to go into the specifics. I don't want to betray the confidence of the particular informant.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Did the Inspector-General of Water Compliance at the Federal level also talk to you about any concerns in relation to Toorale?

GRANT BARNES: Not directly that way. I raised with the inspector-general concerns that I had about how the actions we were contemplating taking with the department may be perceived. I sought his advice on how to best conduct the issuance of the stop work order.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I know that the question was asked before about whether you've taken any action against the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder before. Has NRAR made any enforcement actions, including official cautions, advisory letters or anything of the like, to DCCEEW, the environment Minister, WaterNSW, the MDBA or the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder before?

GRANT BARNES: One of the common tools we use is a formal request for notice of records and information—it's a 338A. Of the entities you've just listed, I can think of a number of instances where those notices have been issued. They're an important part of the investigative process. They aren't, though, an enforcement tool.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is it the NRAR's view that the CEWH, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, has committed any act of wilful noncompliance at Toorale?

GRANT BARNES: My board chair, the Hon. Craig Knowles, and I met with Dr Simon Banks on Tuesday afternoon, and we conveyed again that our investigation does not portray or seek to portray any wrongdoing on behalf of the CEWH. As I said in my previous answer, the investigation goes to the obligations and then liabilities that arise from the works approval, to which the CEWH is not a works approval holder. There is no primary means, therefore, that we could enforce anything against the CEWH. Even if that was part of our contemplation, legally, no.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you have advised them that they won't be subject to prosecution?

GRANT BARNES: Not and won't.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's good. I assume they're acting with haste, then.

GRANT BARNES: An abundance of caution, I think, Ms Faehrmann.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That is excellent. I have a technical question about where NRAR as an organisation sits in the whole machinery of government. Are the members of NRAR's staff considered persons exercising functions under the Water Management Act?

GRANT BARNES: That's correct and are employees of the New South Wales Government under the Secretary of DCCEEW.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I will jump to another issue quickly. An enforceable undertaking was given by Illawarra Coal Holdings for the rehabilitation of Wingecarribee Swamp. Has that rehabilitation commenced?

GRANT BARNES: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is it on track to be completed by mid-2027?

GRANT BARNES: I think it is in the early stages of implementing the project. But all parties have signed up, they're on board and I think there's really encouraging first steps.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: This is to restore a swamp. I can't imagine that has been done successfully, anywhere, in the past. How are you monitoring it? We're very critical about the fact that you can't repair. What's NRAR doing from that perspective?

GRANT BARNES: I share your sentiment. Restoration is not the word that I would use. There are investments going on at Wingecarribee to rehabilitate some of the lost condition and improve some of the biodiversity values in the site. But it would be a long way, an unimaginable stretch, to think it was restoration.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might begin with some follow-up questions in relation to psychiatrists, particularly the 195 locums that you mentioned before. Just to clarify, the figure is 195. Is that locums and VMOs combined?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: That's locums.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you have the figure for VMOs?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I do, if you bear with me. Locums, though, because they're specialist locums—they're psychiatrists—they're paid as VMOs on a day rate. I can get you the total number.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Of those who had their contracts ended, did any of them have a new contract put in place or have they gone back into working in the public sector at all?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Sorry, do you mean the staff specialists that have resigned?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Out of the staff specialists that have resigned, we've had about 11 of them come and take up a locum role. Sorry, just bear with me, I've just got to find the number of—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I'm happy for you to take it on notice, if it's easier.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I might need to.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes, just a breakdown of the two.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I can come back to it a little bit, afterwards, if you like—this afternoon.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. You said there were 60 FTE positions overall. From the start of the resignation process, has that been consistent at 60 or has it fluctuated?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: It's fluctuated.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What has been the highest number?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I think 60 has been about the highest at any point in time.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the \$16 million that's been spent since it began, to what date was that?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I might need to take that on notice as well, if that's okay.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes. The Minister said this morning that the money is allocated from Health. Is it Minister Ryan or Minister Jackson who has overall control over the budget?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: That's probably a question that's best responded to by my colleague, Alfa D'Amato, who I think might have stepped out.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. He might also be the person to ask about the \$3 million spent on treating public patients in private. How many actual patients were treated?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Yes, that's not for me.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. I might move to some questions on the new Office for Youth and also the Advocate for Children and Young People. What is the overall budget for the new office?

ZOE ROBINSON: It sits at approximately \$18 million.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How does that compare with the previous budget for the advocate's office?

ZOE ROBINSON: It's quite substantial in terms of an uplift, but that's because we now have grant programs as well. You might recall that the operating budget for the Office of the NSW Advocate for Children

CORRECTED

and Young People sat at around \$4 million, and that included ERE and opex. And then, obviously, with the addition of some funding from the Office for Regional Youth, that has seen an increase in that, and then, substantial grants.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What was the Office for Regional Youth's budget allocation previously?

ZOË ROBINSON: I will have that here somewhere, so I will be able to give you that.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Also, what was the amount for grant funding previously?

ZOË ROBINSON: The transfer that came across in terms of employee-related expenses was around \$3 million, grants and subsidies that came across from the department of Regional was around \$3.9 million, and other operating expenses were \$1.6 million—so that's a total of around \$8.5 million.³ We also received a transfer in terms of the SPC grants that sat within DCJ. That means that we had employee-related expenses that came across of about \$144,000; grants, \$4.9 million; and opex, \$241,000—so that's \$5.3 million that's come across there.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I've had some concerns raised with me, particularly from the regional youth perspective, about changes that have occurred over the past few years. With the changes happening now and the new office, are you seeing or do you anticipate any impact on current programs or any future programs that might be rolled out?

ZOË ROBINSON: I think the important thing with this new office is that we want to engage young people in the focus and, I guess, what the office is going to deliver. That is a process that's being undertaken. Obviously, the work that has been done across the board for young people has always been informed by what children and young people need, and so I imagine that it will continue to be informed by that. The issues that, for example, came out of the Youth Summit or all the polling done have remained the same in terms of cost of living and mental health, so I imagine that programs that continue to meet those needs will be programs that will continue. I should also flag that I am not one to commit to something when it's beyond my term, and so when there is a new advocate, it will also be a matter for that advocate to assess and understand what's needed.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That takes me to my next question. What does this new office look like and how is it going to be different to the current role of the advocate, particularly from a statutory point of view? Will that independence still be there?

ZOË ROBINSON: In terms of what the new office does, obviously it brings people from across government who have been focused on youth, so that is all in one place. That is in response to the fact that in the Youth Summit survey, for example, 76 per cent of young people who participated in that survey said they didn't feel like they were heard by government. The intention is that this is a mechanism young people can engage with to feel like they're being heard. I would say that, across the time that the offices have existed, everyone was engaging with young people quite repeatedly. In terms of the statutory functions, one of the key functions of that office is the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people in New South Wales. In terms of delivering on that function as a statutory officer, it is clear that it will remain and make sure that's always in the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people. That function will always remain. There has been no change to the legislation or the statutory functions, so it's a matter of making sure that, in practice and process, we set up things to ensure that independence. I think the important thing is demonstrating not only internally but also externally that we continue to be independent and a voice for children and young people where it differs from the Government.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Mr Tidball, is there any intention of changing the independence or the statutory role that currently exists?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No. The functions of the advocate, as Ms Robinson has indicated, as set out in the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014, remain and there is no change contemplated to those statutory functions. The advocate, of course, will direct the office consistently with those functions. Should it be the case that there are any functions that are inconsistent with the statutory functions of the advocate, they will be managed very collaboratively between myself and the office but with me exercising, for example, my GSE Act responsibilities and those things. Clearly the advocate and I have had an excellent relationship. Clearly this is a

³ In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 11 September 2025, Ms Zoë Robinson, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, clarified their evidence.

CORRECTED

change. The expectation would be that I would be moving in lockstep with the advocate, ensuring that the legislative lines of responsibility were delineated and expressed appropriately.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are there any plans to review the Act?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: No.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the Youth Advisory Council, will that continue under the new model?

ZOË ROBINSON: Yes. The Youth Advisory Council, wonderfully, is enacted. It's part of the Advocate for Children and Young People Act, so that remains.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Have there been any changes around staff at all or anticipation of any changes, whether it will increase or decrease?

ZOË ROBINSON: In terms of what came over, there is minimal usual retention changes in that regard. At this stage, the office is funded for 42 positions, and there is no vision to alter the current staffing of the office.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I have some more broad questions, and I'm mindful that you're finishing up, so thank you very much for the service you've given over a number of years. I've asked previously about the strategic plan. I want to get a bit of an update on that, and I'm mindful that obviously a new advocate will be looking at it, but is there anything that you could provide today?

ZOË ROBINSON: Yes. The *Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024* is currently being independently reviewed and is very close to being finalised. We will likely release that report next week for people to undertake. Obviously it's important that was done independently to make sure that we also deliver the things that we said that we would deliver in that. As you would appreciate, that was a whole-of-government report in terms of looking at what people were delivering across government. That has been a big deal in terms of reviewing it independently and making sure we've got all the indicators. As you say, with the new advocate coming in, I think it's important that they have the opportunity to design their own strategic plan for children and young people. The wonderful thing is that work and consultation continues with children and young people across this State, which can inform any further strategic plan.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I might move to questions more broadly around homelessness. The last annual report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicated that only one in 23 people were able to access homelessness assistance. I noticed the strategy that was released the other week does talk about a bit more data gathering and things. I'm interested to understand how we're going to capture that cohort that we know are being turned away, whether it's because of lack of resources or because they are just unable to get that support. How are we going to capture that?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We do capture that through the existing data capture through the CIMS system for all of our specialist homelessness organisations. We're collecting, colloquially, the turn-away rates. We do realise that people are not getting assistance, particularly in relation to housing assistance.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you have that breakdown? Is it done by district or by SHS?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, I can get that by district, absolutely.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are you able to do it by SHS or by suburb?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Let me take that on notice.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I'm interested in getting a breakdown—

REBECCA PINKSTONE: If there's a trend—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: —in whatever way it's captured that's easy, to get an indication of how many people have been turned away annually and maybe quarterly and also if it's captured by age group, and whether it's women and children or single adults, males, and that sort of stuff.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I think we could get it in the categories of the service delivery by the SHS, absolutely.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That would be great, thank you. In relation to the \$20 million that's being provided, we know that SHSs are generally under pressure, with cost of living and expenses generally going up and insurance. How much of that money will go to the back end to keep them functioning and their doors open, as opposed to actually going out to those that need it?

CORRECTED

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We're currently developing the plan for that \$20 million. It's twofold. It doesn't have a requirement around a capital or an opex expenditure under that \$20 million. But what we're trying to do is say, "If we're investing in different crisis homelessness responses, how can we use that to divert people from temporary accommodation?" Because we know that it's directly related—the rates of homelessness. That's the piece of work that we're doing. We'll have that. We're in the mapping stage to identify where the high areas of demand of temporary accommodation are and where we could intervene to provide proof of concept that crisis responses, through a specialist homelessness service system, will help us divert from that temporary accommodation system.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the accreditation process, I assume every SHS now is accredited?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: There is obviously a number that are accredited that aren't funded under the current model. Recommissioning is next year. Is that right?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We're actually underway now in recommissioning. We have this financial year to finalise that and, as you're aware, that's a direct negotiation with the current existing specialist homelessness service providers.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: For those that are accredited—and particularly that believed or were under the understanding they would be able to enter into the tender process for this round—what options do they have moving forward if the recommissioning is only for existing?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: The main option is the Homelessness Innovation Fund. That's exactly the fund that was established to provide \$100 million over the four years, to provide alternative options. We've had a number of organisations come in to test different models of supported accommodation, for example. They're registered, but they're not currently funded as the SHS under contract. That's their main vehicle, to work with us through that program.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's currently funded, I think—it's 22?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: It's for four years.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Sorry—22 organisations are funded out of that at the moment?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, we've had 70 over the last round in 2024-25.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How much has been extended of that budget so far?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can get that for you.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Are all of those 70 listed on the website?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: They should be. We use the SmartyGrants website to do that. Let me just check the HIF for you.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I'm happy for you to take it on notice, if it's easier.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes. I do have it here, but I—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. Just the amount that has been—

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, we had an allocation of \$30 million and I think it was 27-point-something. I'll get that for you.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: And then how much is planned to be spent this financial year and the subsequent ones as well.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We have \$20 million earmarked for this financial year.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the street sleeping register, have funds been allocated for that?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: They have. We're currently just looking to finalise a tender to establish the register as well.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: How much has been allocated for it?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice for you.

CORRECTED

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: That's fine. Also, the time frame for when you expect it to be up and running.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Absolutely, I can take that for you. It's out to tender at the moment. I think it's about to close.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you know how much was spent over the last financial year on temporary accommodation for commercial purposes, like hotel/motel?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: The entire temporary accommodation budget for last financial year was \$166,083,000. That is primarily commercial hotel or motel accommodation.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you take on notice that breakdown?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Between supported temporary accommodation with an NGO versus—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Commercial, yes. Also, do you have a separate breakdown of the annual funding for the last financial year for SHSs and the Homeless Youth Assistance Program?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, I absolutely can.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Then, separate to that, any additional funding that might have gone towards pilot programs over the last two years.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: For example, the street outreach programs and those types of things?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes,

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Absolutely I can.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Then, with that list, when those pilots are due to finish.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: The pilots are due to finish in this financial year.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: So 2026.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Which means we don't know if you're going to continue them then until next time.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Do you have a breakdown of how many households were assisted in the last financial year?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: In terms of new public housing?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: From a homelessness perspective—so households.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, I don't have the final data for this last financial year yet.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Could you take that on notice?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I will.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Touching on the out-of-home care space, "establishing mandatory arrangements to enable timely monitoring of children in out-of-home care who present at homelessness services", has any work been done around that?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: If I can assist, Mrs Maclaren-Jones, I think my evidence touched on that the other day in the course of Minister Washington's estimates. As you may recall, the Ombudsman's inquiry required us to keep a dashboard, which has been developed, which is in place.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Is that public yet?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: It can be.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes, that'd be great.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I'm very happy to provide it—to table it—and to clarify that point.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to the strategy, just one question. I think it's page 15. You refer to the SHARE model. What is that? It's based out of the UK.

CORRECTED

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice and come back to you. There is a number of research reports that sat underneath that strategy.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: In relation to developing a stronger workforce, on page 19 of the strategy it refers to looking at improving service standards, workforce practices, framework capabilities—all of that. Do you intend to attach a funding to that to support the SHSs?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We're working with Homelessness NSW on that as our industry partner. Obviously under our contract with them, they already have a number of programs that they're implementing for services in SHS. But, in particular, the focus on Housing First is one of the areas that we're working with them, to have a specialist training response not just for SHS but also including community housing providers and public housing staff in terms of what that means in a system to work from a Housing First perspective.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: What's the overall budget for the strategy for this forward budget—first 12 months and then onwards?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We have our existing budget for homelessness. And the additional \$528 million that we received, we're using that money to fund these initiatives, like the new street sleeping register. That will come from that bucket.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: But there's no overall budget attached to the strategy and implementation?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, not in that way.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: It's just individual projects.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to some of those discussions before around Building Homes for NSW package, originally it was indicated that \$4.4 billion would be the new funding component. Is that still correct?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is it still the case that it's 6,200 homes that are anticipated to be new and 2,200 to be replacement?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right. There's the replacement component.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to those 6,200 new, when do you anticipate that they will be complete?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: It's a four-year funding package but a seven-year program altogether.

The CHAIR: Back to the Mental Health Branch, one of the recommendations of this Committee's inquiry into outpatient community mental health services was around accessibility of information and service directories. The Government, in supporting that recommendation, talked about the implementation of the mental health Single Front Door, which was meant to begin in early 2025. Can you update us on the progress of that program?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I can, Dr Cohn. There has been significant progress this year with implementation of the mental health Single Front Door, but it has not proceeded at the speed that I think we would have outlined at possibly the previous budget estimates hearing in February. We are looking at a go-live date for the first seven districts that currently use a private provider to be early to mid-2026. The work that's going on this year—there are two significant pieces of work that have been completed. One is the contractual arrangements with healthdirect. It's quite complex. We're really keen to make sure that—because we're fortunate to get the investment, we want to do it properly. The second piece of work is finalisation of the scope of requirements—what the expectation for healthdirect would be when a consumer calls in terms of the application of the triage instrument and what all of the pathways potentially can be for someone in psychological distress. I always imagined the answer to that could be anything between 000 and a Men's Shed.

We just want to make sure that people tell their story as few times as they need to and there's one key place. The current work involves particularly engaging with districts and consumers and PHN partners around trying to make sure that, what happens if someone's referred to a district or to a PHN service, it's understood that there's a sense of being able to estimate what that workload will be. We just want to make sure that, when we start with those seven, we've got a really high-quality service. Then the aim will be, after that, to move across the State. So it's a good news story, we just want to make sure that we do it properly.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Can I just clarify something I've inferred from your answer: Those seven districts are a priority because they currently engage private providers and that's slated to end through this work?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I would phrase it that we have chosen to go with the seven simply because they are already used to, in a sense, not delivering the phone line themselves in-house. But, yes, that contract between the Ministry of Health and the provider, which is Amplar Health, will not need to continue once the Single Front Door is up and operational with those first seven.

The CHAIR: That brings us to afternoon tea. We'll break for another 15 minutes. We'll be back at 3.45 p.m.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. I understand Ms Pinkstone has some answers to questions that were asked earlier today.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I do. In relation to SHARE, it's a data platform that frames and assesses prevention and homelessness initiatives. It's run by the UK Centre for Homelessness Impact, and it allows you to weigh up your interventions, the cost and the benefit to the clients. I think Mrs Overall had some questions on defence personnel who are homeless. We do collect that information in the SHS data collection. For the 2020-21 period, it was 0.4 per cent of clients presenting. It's actually been relatively stable—up until 2023-24 it was still 0.4 per cent, and we're waiting for the latest data for the last financial year. There was a query about the breakdown of the regional street count at the—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Yes, in globo.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: —larger numbers. Metro was 851 people and regional was 1,340, and 650 of those were from the Northern Rivers.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Sorry, 650?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, 650 were from the Northern Rivers alone, of that 1,340. There were also some questions about the land audit and the cost and the breakdown. For the Box Hill site the acquisition cost was \$19.75 million, for Menai it was \$3.65 million and for Camden it was \$7 million. We haven't finalised the current deal with the Sydney Olympic Park Authority, but we've exchanged on \$25.7 million. There was a query from Ms Boyd about stamp duty. All government agencies are exempt from paying stamp duty, so we don't pay that. There was a query about the TA figures and the difference for women and children. It is a higher rate, at 31.5 days. We do have the data for the waitlist broken down by regional New South Wales, but it is on our allocation zones, so I can submit that back to you. It's based on the DCJ allocation zones and districts.

There was a query, as well, about rural and regional new supply. When you exclude Wollongong and Newcastle—they're part of the metro figures—it's 27 per cent in rural and regional areas. There was also a query about the MMC project in Dubbo. The original contract sum was \$815,000. With variations, the total completed cost was \$853,000 for the two properties. The construction time frame was five months. The remediation works for internal finishes took four weeks. Overall, the price was cheaper by about 10 per cent to 20 per cent when you consider conventional builds in regional and remote New South Wales. On the issue that you raised around why there were some delays, it was the first of its kind, as a pilot. We were testing that technology in that area. The reason that we chose Dubbo was the relatively stable climate enabled us to go in. We already owned the land, and some of the work that we've done through that project has informed lessons learned for us in terms of the finish that was required inside the property. Once we did that, we needed to internally render the inside of the property.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: And just coming back to the—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mrs Overall, this has actually all been in crossbench time.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Oh, I'm sorry.

The CHAIR: We might have to add a couple of minutes back. This was just the update before the session.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Can we just start at 20 minutes for crossbench time rather than use this? We're happy with that, if we can get the answer to that question.

The CHAIR: No problem.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: My apologies. The land you said that—so the department already own the land?

CORRECTED

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's right, Homes NSW-owned. We selected Dubbo for the climate. It was relatively stable, but it also gets very hot out there, and we wanted to test that technology in that environment. In terms of the veterans funding breakdown, we do have a product called Rent Choice Veterans. The budget was \$634,510, and we're currently supporting 48 clients with a three-year subsidy under that program. We also have a phone line, Link2home, for veterans. For the last financial year, we received 626 calls through that line. Ms Maclaren-Jones, I think, asked a question about women and youth in the street count. We don't collect that level of data because it's just by sight, not to interrupt anyone, on a street count. I have applications in round one and two. In round one, we put four applications in from the State. We were successful on two, and then in round two we put in 14 applications, and we were successful in all 14.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I did want to supplement my answer to Mr Farlow's question. I'm just conscious of time.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We've decided that we'll give Opposition time later on. Circle of life; it all comes back.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Sure. On the DCJ quarterly statistical report on housing delivery—and I'm not sure why it had not been updated since June 2024. Just to be very clear, it had been authorised to be updated, so it's a problem at the tech end, but just to confirm that the latest data available on the DCJ website was to September 2024, not June 2024. I can confirm that we have just updated the data, which I believe to date is the most recent available quarter, with data to March-June 2025. In addition, DCJ has—I alluded to other reporting changes over the past two years, with data on the social housing waiting list now reported monthly, which includes the number of people in the general and priority list by allocation zone, and the number of newly housed people on the waiting list register.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With the quarterly statistics report, can I confirm that is now available on the Tableau?

MICHAEL TIDBALL: I am told it is. I have not personally—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: So on the Tableau? Okay.

MICHAEL TIDBALL: Mr Farlow, I would prefer to say I've sighted it, but I'm told it is.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That's fine. Thank you. I'll look it up and see. We might come back to that later on.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Before I go to my colleague Cate Faehrmann for the recommencement of our crossbench time, I just wanted to indicate we're going to try and let witnesses go as we can, appreciating that it's a Friday afternoon, and there are a lot of people here. In the first instance, Professor Durrant-Whyte and Ms Dixon, there are no further questions for you. We'll do the best we can for the remaining witnesses.

(Hugh Durrant-Whyte and Julie Dixon withdrew.)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Ms Jones, I just wanted to see if we could get any more clarity around the decision in terms of the environmental water freeze. At the beginning of the day, the legal advice was referred to—that legal advice needed to be sought because of environmental watering action or event. What was that? Have you found that out?

AMANDA JONES: I haven't, so I'd need to find out what specific event, but it was instigated by CPHR of DCCEEW.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sure, Ms Jones, but this is budget estimates, and it's a very significant event, something which the department is now looking at working up new regs to incorporate. I'm sure the history is well known through the department in terms of what the environmental watering event was that triggered the need for legal advice. Again, it's still very opaque.

AMANDA JONES: I'll take that on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So you don't know?

AMANDA JONES: I don't know which specific—whether it was—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: So Water Group wasn't informed?

AMANDA JONES: We did become involved in seeking the legal advice. We didn't initiate the legal advice. Whether it was a specific event or a general question, I can't confirm.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You're saying that you're not sure whether this upper House Committee can know what that watering event is?

AMANDA JONES: If we can find out—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's what you're taking on notice?

AMANDA JONES: No, not at all. What I will find out is was it a specific event or was it a general question, and we'll try to figure that out now.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: WaterNSW—Mr George, I want to turn to the issue of PFAS. What has WaterNSW done to monitor the prevalence of PFAS in waterways and streams? The PFAS, not in drinking water but in other parts of the State—and not in dams, so waterways themselves.

ANDREW GEORGE: Waterways downstream of the dams? That's probably a jurisdictional question. We haven't monitored downstream of the dams.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What about the contamination in Lake Medlow? The tributaries, the other parts that Lake Medlow sits within—that's obviously a Sydney Water catchment.

ANDREW GEORGE: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What about the water that's coming out of there and going into tributaries? Because Lake Medlow is contaminated.

ANDREW GEORGE: Sure. Obviously we monitor the water in Lake Medlow. We're working with the likes of the EPA to monitor water that is released to the environment downstream. But that's the environment downstream. That's why we're working with the EPA, and the EPA is monitoring that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In part of the documents that I got released under Standing Order 52 last year, including from WaterNSW—and I have some documents to table, which I'll get you to have a look at—there is a communication within WaterNSW that suggests that the tributaries of Medlow Dam were sampled by ALS, which is Australian Laboratory Services, I think. Is that correct?

ANDREW GEORGE: Correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That returned results at higher concentrations. It's already indicating that. This is a comprehensive catchment risk assessment. In that email—that's down the bottom of the first page. Over the second page, at the top—that Lake Medlow and Cascade dams release and/or spill into sensitive downstream receivers, being the Blue Mountains National Park, and are considered as a freshwater habitat. You would know that the species protection for high conservation value streams is 99 per cent, and that it says here that sampling to date indicates that results exceed the 99 per cent threshold in all results from the three sampled dams at Cascades and at both depths sampled in Lake Medlow for the 99 per cent UCL threshold. Has testing been undertaken to see whether that threshold is being—as the ALS has already done. It sounds like the threshold is also being breached outside of the dams and in the tributaries.

ANDREW GEORGE: I confirm my answer before. It has been, and we have obviously disclosed that to the Environment Protection Agency as the regulator for that, because this is not sampling as per, say, the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. This is under the national environmental management plan for PFAS, the NEMP, which has different guideline values for—as you've noted, and that's what this is referring to.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Part of this email as well, which is the actions out of that catchment risk assessment—maybe it was a meeting. The actions to be completed—at the end of the email it says "review of Federal legislation in regards to notification obligations for potential pollution of World Heritage listed sites." Did that happen?

ANDREW GEORGE: My understanding was that the result of this review was that we were to notify the EPA, which is what we did.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But the question is, does WaterNSW have an obligation to notify any Federal agency in relation to the World Heritage listed sites or a risk to them?

ANDREW GEORGE: My understanding is no, but I'll take that on notice to confirm. I'm not aware that there was a requirement to notify a Federal agency.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr George, you're aware of the research into the dead platypus that was undertaken in terms of PFAS—PFOS, really—and the PFOS levels of those eight carcasses, or maybe 12. The second highest found in the State was found in Wingecarribee River, with, I think, 390 parts per trillion of PFOS

CORRECTED

in the body of that platypus. You know where that is. Does that indicate that PFAS levels could indeed be quite high in some of the areas within the park? Who would be responsible for testing that?

ANDREW GEORGE: Again, on who's exactly responsible, certainly the EPA has a role there, which is the role they have been undertaking. We're working very closely with the EPA in relation to all of these matters, as well as other agencies.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Are you responsible for the water within the catchment—WaterNSW?

ANDREW GEORGE: Yes. We're responsible for the protection of the catchment for the purpose of supplying water for drinking water supply and protecting and enhancing the environment.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: In terms of monitoring that water to see whether there is PFAS, you think that should be the EPA that should do that?

ANDREW GEORGE: Downstream of the dams, in the natural rivers, is not an area that we have jurisdiction. But in the catchment areas, upstream of the dams, we do.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: If you're aware of PFAS in those dams that is potentially spilling into the tributaries—

ANDREW GEORGE: Downstream, yes. In the Blue Mountains example, that's the case. We've obviously disclosed that to the EPA. That is the only place that we are aware of that though. We have undertaken sampling across all dams across the State. We found largely no detections or very low detections below the threshold values.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Where is that flowing into when you say—is that Cascades and Lake Medlow?

ANDREW GEORGE: Correct. That's right. They're in sequence. They spill down.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's World Heritage, though, where they're spilling into.

ANDREW GEORGE: No, I don't believe so.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That water with PFAS in it doesn't make its way to—

ANDREW GEORGE: Eventually down into the Hawkesbury.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It doesn't make its way through the World Heritage—

ANDREW GEORGE: I don't believe so, but I'm happy to take that on notice. It's on the northern side of the Blue Mountains.

The CHAIR: Coming back to the mental health branch, I'm continuing to follow up recommendations of the mental health inquiry that were supported by the Government. The next one I wanted to ask about was the framework for change regarding trauma-informed care in mental health services. I understand that previously health services were provided with a trauma-informed mental health care organisational self-assessment tool from the ACI. Since then, what have been the results of that? What has been the change that's occurred?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I don't have an update and would need to take any evaluation on notice to come back to you around. Certainly it's a recommendation from the inquiry that was noted. We were comfortable. At previous estimates we might have discussed the intervention being very much around the ACI's framework for trauma-informed care and trying to ensure that all health practitioners, not just those in mental health, were attending to that, were becoming skilled in that and were practising that. I will need to take on notice both the existence and outcome of any evaluation around that framework.

The CHAIR: I appreciate it being taken on notice and, to clarify my question, the recommendation was around consideration of a centre of excellence for trauma-informed care, and the Government's response was that their preferred approach was embedding trauma-informed care—

BRENDAN FLYNN: Though the ACI, yes.

The CHAIR: —through the system rather than establishing a centre of excellence. The Government response particularly talked about the framework for change, which is why I'm now following that up.

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes.

The CHAIR: If I could come to recommendation 16, which was around data collection and sharing. At the time of the Government response to the inquiry, I think you were finalising some work for the AIHW to support sharing of aggregated State and national mental health data.

CORRECTED

BRENDAN FLYNN: Again, the branch within Health is not the data owner of mental health information, and we would need to ask the relevant part of NSW Health, which is inform, to come back with that information. But obviously, in preparation for today, I did note that, and I think we talked about AIHW data integration and also looking at some of the information sharing with CMOs.

The CHAIR: Could I ask about the peer work framework?

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes.

The CHAIR: I understand that's been a significant piece of work. It was recommendation 18 of the inquiry.

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes, and I found my tab in time. Sorry, I'm looking for tabs.

The CHAIR: That's all right. My opening question is an easy one: Where is it up to?

BRENDAN FLYNN: It's good news. It's about to be launched by the Minister—I think, in October is the plan. The statewide peer workforce coordinator, Jessica Radovan, has done an enormous amount of work in consultation with the lived experienced workforce both in mental health and suicide prevention and particularly with industrial entities as well. The framework is due to be launched by the Minister later this year. As I said, I think it's October, and the ministry is considering whether or not a complementary policy will go out. I don't think there's a definitive decision on that. I might leave that there. I could update on our recruitment to the peer workforce numbers.

The CHAIR: That would be welcome and relevant.

BRENDAN FLYNN: We really try very hard to get to our target. Our target is 255.3 and the latest update is 239.6, which I think is a significant improvement, potentially, since we last reported.

The CHAIR: Absolutely. There was also a question of award reform and the need for negotiation with the Health Services Union for peer workers specifically.

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes.

The CHAIR: Is there an update on that front?

BRENDAN FLYNN: I am really not in a position to update that. Award reform is not something that's within the remit of the Mental Health Branch, but I do know that there was some consultation, and that issue was raised by the HSU. We would probably need to take it on notice, unless Mr Griffiths felt able to respond to that now. Otherwise, we might need to take that one on notice.

The CHAIR: That's all right. I've got more questions for Mr Griffiths, anyway.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I'll just see if I can get some information on that award reform, Dr Cohn.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I had some other non-related questions that were going to be for you, anyway. I'm wondering if you're the right person to update us on the budget announcements from the Government around creating the internal locum agency.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I wondered if you might ask me that, Dr Cohn.

The CHAIR: It's an excellent initiative. We love it when the Government copies The Greens' election policy. What's the progress on implementation?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: We have received some budget to proceed with implementation of—I won't call it an internal locum agency, but a placement function for contingent workers. The reason that I'm being a bit cautious about calling it an internal agency is what we would like to do with that function is use that as a way to engage the workforce more proactively but also to look at the reason that people are opting to move to locum work to see if we can retain them in the public health system in a period where ordinarily they would disconnect from the service and move to locum arrangements.

At the moment, we are recruiting to the implementation team. We have a team of about 11 that will undertake the design of the service, obviously the market interaction, and within about a two-year period we aim to go live, so 2027. There's a lot of work in the lead-up to that period as you can imagine in terms of setting up administrative processes. There's also some work that we're doing in terms of streamlining the engagement process for locum medical officers where we aim to engage and stream for health once so they don't need to continue to do that checking process that at the moment I know is a point of frustration, and I think you and I have had conversations about that in the past. So, yes, it's underway. The team is being recruited as we speak.

CORRECTED

The CHAIR: Excellent. That's a great update. While I have you, Mr Griffiths—this is tangentially related to mental health. I asked Minister Park some questions about the safe staffing level rollout yesterday. Can you provide an update on the figures exactly for the hospitals that have been included so far of where the recruitment of nurses is up to?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: I might take that on notice if that's okay. We can provide you that update in the numbers, but I'll get some information and take it on notice.

The CHAIR: That's no problem. Just to clarify the information I'm after, often the Government media releases announce that another hospital will be coming on board or is on its way towards, and I'm really seeking specifically how many new positions have been created at that particular hospital and, for each hospital, where it's up to, so whether they've been advertised, whether they've been filled, exactly how many positions have been filled for each hospital on that list.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: That's fine. We can do that. Dr Cohn, did you want me to just give you an update on—it might have been Ms Maclaren-Jones actually—the number of VMOs in psychiatry?

The CHAIR: I'm interested in that too. Go ahead.

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Just a little bit of a caveat: As you'll know, Dr Cohn, a VMO arrangement isn't a classic full-time equivalent arrangement for hours. We do our best to convert that to an equivalent. We have 317.5 VMO arrangements at the moment in psychiatry. To give you some context, at the same time last year, we had 217.4 FTE VMOs. There is a number of those, obviously, that are associated with locum day rates, so I'll talk to you about those. It equates to about 60 FTE or so that we have recruited centrally, and there's some historic locum arrangements that have been carried over as part of the administrative arrangements, and that totals to around about 104 FTE.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mr Plowman, one of the flagged challenges with making Edgecliff a TOD site was flagged as being within respect to water and sewerage services in the area. Are there any planned upgrades from Sydney Water to alleviate those concerns as part of the forward capital program?

PAUL PLOWMAN: There weren't any flagged concerns with a TOD development in that area. I presume you're talking about the train station development that you referred to earlier?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No, I'm talking about Edgecliff station. I think the Minister at the time when it was put that it wasn't listed as a TOD development—this is Edgecliff station—was because of water and sewerage concerns within the area.

PAUL PLOWMAN: At the time, because development in what we call the Bondi system—there wasn't a lot going on there. We didn't actually have up-to-date models in terms of the capacity. We've since advised government that there's plenty of capacity in that system.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: There is no infrastructure improvements, but you've revised the advice to Government, have you?

PAUL PLOWMAN: Depending on the development. One of the things we advised the Government on TODs, we did the analysis on the trunk infrastructure, the big piece of infrastructure, and the capacity within those catchments. We've always maintained that, depending on the particular development, there might be very local infrastructure that is required. For example, if you put a big building in an area where there wasn't a big building, the normal pipes that have been servicing those houses in the area will have to be upgraded. Very minor works, but things that would need to happen.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to trunk infrastructure, there was no requirements in that area.

PAUL PLOWMAN: We haven't flagged anything yet.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ms Pinkstone, back to you, where I think we'll probably spend the rest of the session. With respect to the 6,200 new social homes, it was flagged that it was intended that the 50 per cent would be for domestic violence victim-survivors. I'm just wondering how that is intended to be managed by the New South Wales Government.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We basically are in the process of finalising the data. We're really looking at female-headed households on the Housing Register—mums and kids. My view with the team was to take a holistic view so that we're looking at both the allocations for new supply and our allocations in total. We've been looking at female-headed households. There are various categories on the Housing Register. Domestic violence is one, but there is at-risk. We're looking at all of those categories and prioritising those in terms of the allocations.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Would that be a change to the priority waitlist?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, they're already priority categories.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the Aboriginal Housing Office and the repair of the 3,500 Aboriginal Housing Office homes, how is that program progressing at the moment?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: In the last financial year we've been undertaking a number of programs. The major one was the transfer of properties from the Housing portfolio to the AHO and Aboriginal community housing providers. The maintenance expenditure, I can get for you for the AHO. I'll come back to that one for you. It's here somewhere.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Similarly, how is the program progressing with respect to the 30,000 public homes to be repaired?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Absolutely on track. Last year our social housing portfolio—our public housing budget was \$682 million. We actually overachieved on that with \$729 million expenditure and 440,000 works orders which were there to upgrade—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Congratulations. Sorry, I was just congratulating you. I didn't mean to stop you.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: They were there to upgrade properties. Wherever possible, we're also doing that in the context of our vacant properties to make sure that we are bringing them up to standard, and a higher standard, before we're reletting them.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: How many houses has that taken out of the system while they're being repaired and upgraded?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Our vacancy rate at June 2025 was 97.8 per cent occupancy rate. You can see where the properties are vacant, but we've remained pretty static. For example, vacant properties in 2023-24 were 6,682.⁴ Last financial year they were 6,828. So yes, on track in terms of that time frame, but putting extra funding into those when they're being upgraded.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to modular housing that's being used in social housing at the moment, how many new social housing dwellings are currently being delivered by Homes NSW using either modular or prefabricated construction methods?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: This year our target is 90. We've completed most of the pilot programs, and that was testing the industry. We'll be ramping up that program in the forward years as well, just testing that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What are you finding in terms of the difference between both time of construction and cost in using modern methods of construction?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: In terms of cost overall, we haven't seen that much of a cost differential at the moment. Obviously, if you take into account the time, that's where you see the difference. But we always thought that would be the case; it's a very small part of the industry at the moment. Part of what we've been doing is trying to work with councils that are open to test that technology. But I am confident that, over time, we'll get those savings. It's broader than just new supply, though, for us. We're also looking at the broader concept of a kit of parts, because, for us, if we can get efficiencies in, for example, bathroom changes or kitchen changes and be able to roll that out at scale, we'll also get savings in our maintenance program.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Moving forward, are you looking at any particular suppliers or are you looking at a program in which you're inviting the industry to participate?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That's exactly right. We'll be going to tender for those sites with builders.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Do you have any forward estimates for how many you're planning on delivering each year?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I can take that on notice for you. It's 90 and ramping up across the future years.

⁴ In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 16 September 2025, Ms Rebecca Pinkstone, Chief Executive Officer, Homes NSW, clarified their evidence.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What criteria do you use to determine whether a project will use modular construction?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Several different. We are looking at it in the context of local planning provisions and where we can develop that product. There are different councils with different regulations that enable that to happen. At the moment we're testing it on homes and duplexes, not so much residential flat buildings. That been a focus. At the moment, those pilots have been in regional and remote New South Wales. The issue for us also in using MMC in those remote communities is the cost of construction is really high. The Aboriginal Housing Office has been doing this for a number of years, using MMC, so we've also learnt from the pilot programs that they've delivered in regional New South Wales.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Ms Pinkstone, is Homes NSW currently constructing, or has it constructed, secondary dwellings on any Homes NSW properties?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We do have a second dwelling program, and I could get you that data. I can let you know that across the MMC modular homes for this financial year, we're looking at 16 Aboriginal housing homes, 109 public housing homes, and 47 teacher and police homes through the Key Worker Housing Program. So 172 across all of the programs in Homes NSW this financial year.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the secondary dwellings, how many properties—and you might want to take this on notice—under the possession of Homes NSW would have a secondary dwelling as part of it?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that one on notice for you.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Thank you very much. With respect to one development, the program at—

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Sorry, Mr Farlow. Actually, our demonstration project this financial year on secondary dwellings is 13 dwellings: three in the Illawarra, four in the greater Hunter, and six in the Illawarra and greater Hunter we're at the DA stage for.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Fantastic. Thank you very much. What's the status of the development at 6-10 Southview Street, Bulli?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Is that in the media reports today?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I don't know of any media reports today. Maybe you can tell me about them.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I think I've seen one in the media today. We are planning a residential flat building in Bulli, a three-storey development. That's a construction of knocking down two older dwellings and constructing a new residential flat building in Bulli.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is that site zoned for residential flat building at present?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I'll take that on notice for you.

The CHAIR: Mr Griffiths, I have more questions about safe staffing levels. I will argue that clinicians who are understaffed can't provide trauma-informed care, so this question is very relevant to mental health. My understanding is there are a couple of areas that are still under negotiation in terms of what safe staffing levels will look like; one of those is very small hospitals. Can you provide an update on the status of negotiations about peer group D hospitals?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Again, I'll have to take that on notice, if that's okay.

The CHAIR: That's all right. Can I add MPSs to your list of things to take on notice?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Okay.

The CHAIR: And are you able to provide an update on the review of Birthrate Plus?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS: Again, I'll take that on notice for you, just to be sure that we provide the accurate response.

The CHAIR: That's all right. That was very quick. That's the end of my questions for you. If I can come back to the mental health branch. I understand that there was a Federal budget initiative about a year ago to do with wraparound care for complex patients in primary care. That was previously referenced by the Government in terms of an opportunity for improving integration between primary care and mental health services, or embedding mental health care within primary care. Has there been any progress on that?

CORRECTED

BRENDAN FLYNN: I'm loath to say there's no progress. I'm probably needing a little bit more information around the program to identify it. Was it in the Federal budget?

The CHAIR: Yes, it was in the Federal budget and it was referred to in the Government response to our inquiry. This is what I continue to refer to. At the time, it was a recent announcement, but it's now about a year old. It was \$71.7 million over four years.

BRENDAN FLYNN: I think it's being delivered by Primary Health Networks, though, isn't it?

The CHAIR: I haven't got that in front of me.

BRENDAN FLYNN: It's a Federal investment, so it's not something we would necessarily have visibility over. I'm certainly happy to—

The CHAIR: But I imagine that there's a component of this, if it's to do with integration with mental health services, that might include acute services or community services that are NSW Health.

BRENDAN FLYNN: We'll come back with more. I'm honestly not sure. I mean, mental health services, as you know, can be provided by a whole spectrum of services and professionals, and I'm just not sure the extent to which that program overlaps with our delivered programs. But it certainly would interact, I think, with some of our funded programs.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I'm very happy for you to take it on notice. I'd be surprised if there was no interaction or engagement with NSW Health services.

BRENDAN FLYNN: Yes. I think that's accurate.

(Michael Tidball withdrew.)

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr Barnes, what do you know about why the environmental water freeze has been put in place?

GRANT BARNES: As I said previously—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Have you seen the legal advice, by the way?

GRANT BARNES: No. As I said, the Hon. Craig Knowles and I met with Dr Simon Banks on Tuesday to understand his concerns. He expressed that he was uncertain about their legal position. I have reiterated to him, and he has suddenly said publicly, that this is not related to Toorale—so I think we can put that one aside.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Where did the uncertainty come from?

GRANT BARNES: I'd be speculating at this point, Ms Faehrmann. But what I can say, and what I've assured Dr Banks, is the investigations that we have on foot that are not related to Toorale are working on a policy position that our Water Group colleagues communicated to us many months ago. It sets out a clear position for us to then apply the new non-urban metering regulations. That position has not changed, and the way that we are pursuing those investigations, therefore, has not changed. From my perspective, whether there's legal advice out there that brings into some uncertainty the plan on environmental water is not a consideration for us in terms of the investigations that we have ongoing. I'd also again reiterate that it's against the works approval holder that we are pursuing, albeit that there is—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: This is Toorale now?

GRANT BARNES: No, I'll stay away from Toorale. There are other investigations that we have on foot around these allegedly noncompliant works. There are some works where we suspect there may have been environmental water conveyed, and we are working with the works approval holder and the New South Wales environmental water holder to work through the circumstances so that we can come to a conclusion about whether there was a breach of law. If there was a breach of law, the onus will be on the works approval holder primarily.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But my impression from what the Minister said this morning was that that watering event didn't take place. They sought the legal advice first to see whether or not that event was permitted—these are the Minister's words from this morning—under exemptions that they had in relation to the take of water.

GRANT BARNES: I believe Simon Banks, as I said before, is acting under an abundance of caution. I don't believe he wants his water associated with potentially noncompliant works.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You've said very clearly here today that you're not going to prosecute—no, that was Toorale, wasn't it? Now I'm getting confused. That conversation was Toorale.

CORRECTED

GRANT BARNES: The Premier's memorandum makes it very clear.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I'll just rephrase that. In terms of sending a message or saying to the CEWO that they won't be prosecuted while this is being sorted out, this is about this issue in terms of the statewide environmental water freeze. Have you issued that assurance to him while this is being sorted out?

GRANT BARNES: We have no involvement in the conveyance of water through a water sharing plan. That's a matter that we have no authority over. What we do is look at the licences and the approvals that enable the take of water. The policy advice we have is that that pertains to held environmental water. I understand that there's now some uncertainty as to the status of planned environmental water. But until my colleagues formally convey to NRAR that the policy position has changed, we will continue to do our work, restricted to held environmental water that's conveyed through nominated works.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: If you could just explain for me and the Committee, then, when the Minister says that they obtained legal advice in relation to the watering event that they wished to take but raised a question about whether or not that event was permitted under the exemptions that they had in relation to the take of the water, what were the exemptions?

GRANT BARNES: I don't know, Ms Faehrmann.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: You don't know, as NRAR. Ms Jones, could you please explain?

AMANDA JONES: We didn't initiate the legal advice. However, we then became involved in the advice. I also haven't seen the advice personally either. As I understand it—it is what I explained before, which is that in terms of planned environmental water, there was a question about whether, when water moves from a regulator across a landscape and moves into different water sources, it could technically need to be licensed. As I agreed with you, Ms Faehrmann, that doesn't make any sense in terms of a policy position, and it's not intended. Water sharing plans manage the use of planned environmental water. It's also not a statewide pause. As I mentioned to you, there will be environmental releases in the Snowy. That is planned environmental water. It stays within the water source. This is an anomaly—a technical issue that is being addressed by the Minister as quickly as possible.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: My question, which I'm sure you know—let's forget about the legal advice and ask that general question in terms of the environmental watering events. What is the exemption that is being questioned here?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not certain. It's the New South Wales environmental water holder who has made the request to have this clarified.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sure, but you're here representing the whole Water Group—the department.

AMANDA JONES: The environmental water holder is Minister Sharpe and CPHR. The licences for that water are held with them.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is your department working and assisting with the changes to the regulation?

AMANDA JONES: Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Don't you think, therefore, that you'd need to know what you're fixing? What is the issue?

AMANDA JONES: What we're fixing is to make it clear that WaterNSW doesn't need to be licensed for planned environmental water to be released under water sharing plan rules. The other aspect to fix is that, for held environmental water, when water is released and then some of that flow returns to a river system, the returned water to the river system can be accounted for so that it doesn't get accounted against the held environmental water licence volume. There are two cases.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you. That's the clearest answer I think we've had all day. Blueberries, Mr Barnes.

GRANT BARNES: That's hardly a segue.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: It's not a segue. NRAR did a compliance audit of blueberries back in 2020. It was blueberry farms, I should say, not the berries themselves. It found that quite a few were not compliant. Out of 31 farms inspected around the Coffs Harbour region during the first two stages of the clampdown, 28 were alleged to be noncompliant with water laws. That was the case at the time?

CORRECTED

GRANT BARNES: At the time. Yes, that's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What's the update on that?

GRANT BARNES: In relation to your question from the previous hearing, we explored those open directions. Now I can say that there are four remaining directions that have not been complied with and are now subject to escalated enforcement action.⁵

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there an ongoing program of monitoring those farms in that area? How frequently does it happen?

GRANT BARNES: I would say it's a hotspot for us and an area of attention. There's some systemic noncompliance in that area and quite a lot of work is necessary to get those growers fully into compliance. There's more work to be done.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There are still four growers that aren't complying in terms of the take. Is that correct?

GRANT BARNES: With the previous work we did where there were directions issued, you rightly noted that they were outstanding. I can confirm now, as of today, there are four remaining directions that have not been met. That's a concern for us and warrants escalation.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That's from 2020, so that's five years. Did you want to elaborate on what some of the directions and noncompliance are, in terms of those four?

GRANT BARNES: It mostly pertains to the maximum harvestable rights and whether or not they're able to achieve those. We've identified circumstances where those exceedences are quite large, and we then require them to seek the necessary approvals through our colleagues at WaterNSW. That process tracks through. Typically those approvals are issued and they get a zero-share WAL. Then they have to trade water in. That's a very difficult thing in those environments where there's not an active trading market.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Okay, so there are four blueberry farms that have been taking more water than they are entitled to for five years. They're not complying. You said some of them are quite large in terms of the extent of how much they're taking that they're not entitled to—why don't you put a stop work order on those?

GRANT BARNES: They're about to find themselves before the courts, Ms Faehrmann. A stop work order—

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: But to stop them taking the water?

GRANT BARNES: The stop work order will have effect. Where the correction will come is through a court-imposed sanction. The court may well determine to put additional restrictions on their operations through prohibition.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Is there somebody that can talk about the Safe and Secure Water Program funding?

AMANDA JONES: Yes, I can.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I understand that some of that funding has had to be handed back by local water utilities. Is that correct?

AMANDA JONES: No, that's not correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: The information I've got in front of me is that Rous County Council is about to have to hand back half a million dollars of the Safe and Secure Water Program funding because of grant expiry timelines. Maybe they're overreacting. Is that what you're saying?

AMANDA JONES: I'm not sure handing back is what they might need to do. I'm happy to take that particular instance on notice.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Thank you.

AMANDA JONES: The grants are paid in arrears. The councils need to spend the money first, and then they're reimbursed.

⁵ In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 2 September 2025, Mr Grant Barnes, Chief Regulatory Officer, National Resources Access Regulator, clarified their evidence.

CORRECTED

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Special purpose water access licences—I understand that some are being applied for, for Aboriginal licence holders. Is there an update on that?

AMANDA JONES: I'm glad you asked that, Ms Faehrmann, because at the last couple of hearings we've been reporting that there are only two cultural SPALs. I can report that there are now six, and we have 25 in assessment at the moment. While that's not an absolute windfall—I acknowledge there's much more work to do—we're very hopeful that this is a reflection of improved relationships with First Nations people and Aboriginal communities through our regional Aboriginal water committees, and us improving our engagement with communities about opportunities for cultural licences.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There's this peculiar clause in the Water Management Act around this, of course, which is that the licences can be issued to Aboriginal people, but there's no direct or secondary commercial benefit that they can—

AMANDA JONES: For cultural SPALs, there's no cost—since 2014, there's been no cost for applying for those or for maintaining those licences. That continues to be the case. Under the Closing the Gap work, we're looking at economic uses as another opportunity, and what targets there should be around Aboriginal access to water. That work is in progress.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: That work is in progress currently? It's ten megalitres, is that right?

AMANDA JONES: A cultural water licence is limited to ten megalitres, that's correct.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: What work does the department, or the departmental staff who handle issuing the licences, do to make sure that, once granted—and it's stupid, I'm not saying that Aboriginal people should not be able to commercially benefit from this. What is the department doing and asking to assure themselves that it's only being used for cultural purposes? There is a very fine line between what a cultural purpose is and any other direct commercial benefit.

AMANDA JONES: If there was any compliance action to be taken or reviewed, that would be a matter for NRAR. But the application itself is usually identifying what the cultural purpose is. With so few licences, we haven't had cause to be concerned about that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: There has been no audit of the program or anything internally?

AMANDA JONES: No.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Not that I'm pushing for that.

The CHAIR: Before we go back to the Opposition for their last block, I'm advised that the only witnesses we need to keep are Ms Pinkstone, Ms Robinson and Mr Barnes. Accordingly, everyone else can go.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I'm sorry, I do have just one more for Ms Jones.

ANDREW GEORGE: Could I take the opportunity to address a question I took on notice earlier, Ms Overall?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Yes, thank you.

ANDREW GEORGE: In relation to our interest costs, for financial year 2024, it was \$67.5 million. For FY 2025, being last financial year, it was \$88.3 million.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Thank you, I appreciate that.

(Elizabeth Wood, Michael Tidball, Richard Griffiths, Andrew George, Paul Plowman, Darren Cleary, Murray Wright, Brendan Flynn, Grant Barnes and Alfa D'Amato withdrew.)

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Just one very quick question please, Ms Robinson, and then you, too, can head off. The Office for Regional Youth specifically—that will no longer exist as it has previously.

ZOË ROBINSON: Correct.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's it. Thank you.

(Zoë Robinson withdrew.)

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Ms Jones, one more for you—Lake Centenary, Temora. Where and what is happening with that particular project as well?

CORRECTED

AMANDA JONES: I'm not aware of the project that you're referring to, so did you have any more information about it?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I don't. That's the only information I've been provided.

AMANDA JONES: I'll take on notice then. But I can let you know that the Murray floodplain management plan will be exhibited from 29 September to 16 November.

(Amanda Jones withdrew.)

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: Ms Pinkstone, I'm definitely of the view that modern methods of construction need to be explored to find the most efficient ways to get more done in this regard. Of the—

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: You needed Mr Barnes, didn't you?

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I did, yes.

The CHAIR: We needed Mr. Barnes. He was on the list of people who needed to stay.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That's okay.

The CHAIR: I think he's joined their Friday afternoon enthusiasm. We'll need Mr. Barnes back.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: I can do it on supplementary if he's already gone.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: They've all departed. It's just Ms Pinkstone is holding down the fort now.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: In the exploration of modern methods of construction and the fact that you're testing some of these to ensure that we're getting efficiencies of scale and time, when it comes to the 3D printing—you talked about the 90 more properties that are planned for the modern methods of construction. What the number of the 3D-printed homes that are planned as part of that?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I don't have that with me. I'll have to come back to you.

The Hon. NICHOLE OVERALL: That'd be great. If there's a schedule around that, I'd be very interested to know.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: That was 109 this year, not 90 for public housing and 16 for the AHO. Mr Farlow, just on the Bulli project, we're in early consultation with the community on a site at 6 to 10 Southview Street. It's three properties that we're aiming to redevelop into a three-storey residential flat building with 16 homes in it. The advice I have is that's in line with current planning provisions for that area.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to some other issues, are you aware of a case raised at the "Your Housing, Your Say" event in Glebe, where an elderly resident described being terrorised by a violent ex-prisoner in her building?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, I am.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: What action did Homes NSW take with respect to that complaint?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We've been working in line with our antisocial behaviour policy with identified individuals and taking action under that policy against them. I will say that when these incidents occur, the tenant is responsible for that, even if they have visitors to their properties who might be the people who are committing that antisocial behaviour. We're working with the tenant to address those issues.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is the tenant still housed within that building?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: They are.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Has Homes NSW taken any further action with respect to the other tenants in the building who've raised concerns and supporting them?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Yes, my team has gone out to contact tenants in the building and just reiterate our policy—some of these issues relate to criminal activity or alleged criminal activity—and reiterating that it's very important for tenants to raise that activity with the local police. We have a memorandum of understanding with the New South Wales police on those incidents, and we can use that for any future tribunal action if necessary.

CORRECTED

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: With respect to the Waterloo South redevelopment, what's the progress of that development?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We've signed the contracts. As you're aware, we're in the stages of planning for that site. I can get you a detailed breakdown of planning milestones for Waterloo South.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That would be helpful, particularly in terms of when you expect to commence on that site and also the expected completion date for Waterloo South as well.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Sure.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That would be good. In that vicinity as well, are you aware that the common room in the current Waterloo South building is currently uninhabitable and that tenants have been left without communal space?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, that hasn't been raised with me. I can follow-up on that.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: If I can flag that with you as well. In those developments pending the redevelopment, what's the status in terms of any maintenance requests and the like at present? What is Homes NSW doing? Are you maintaining the buildings?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Absolutely. It's the same process. Tenants are able to either log those maintenance requests online or through our maintenance response centre. We've already commenced the relocation process. We've identified a number of sites, including over the Waterloo metro and a site with City West Housing that's just been delivered. We've commenced that relocation process with tenants, to start the early freeing up of sites to be redeveloped.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Going to Wade Street Towers, what's the current status of that? Is it on track for completion in 2025?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: It is.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Are any of the 148 units now refurbished and habitable?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: No, we're doing all of the upgrade works and then we'll commence tenancing. It's a big site to bring back online.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I just want to understand a little bit more about situations where social housing tenants might be subletting their accommodation through Airbnb and other type of things. Obviously it's not allowed, but do you keep a record of how many times that it's been brought to your attention?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: We have a tenant fraud unit within Homes NSW that receives all of those—sometimes tip offs—allegations about that sort of activity and others. Our tenant fraud unit is responsible for reviewing those and investigating.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I have a question with respect to the Mandalay precinct activation. What is the estimated breakdown of the 380 dwellings between social, affordable, key worker and private housing?

REBECCA PINKSTONE: Can you prompt me, Mr Farlow? Mandalay?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Mandalay in Nowra. This is around the Nowra foreshore precinct.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I will have to take that one on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That might be it for us. We will give you a slightly early mark—maybe.

REBECCA PINKSTONE: I feel so loved here.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: If you would like to go to the end, we could do it. I've got enough. I'm feeling guilty at the moment.

The CHAIR: There are no further questions from the Opposition?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: No.

The CHAIR: Are there any questions from the Government?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Not at this stage.

The CHAIR: There being no questions from the Government, that concludes today's hearing. Thank you to our remaining witness.

CORRECTED

(Rebecca Pinkstone withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.