

FRIDAY, 8 AUGUST 2025

ESTIMATES—LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE—CUSTOMER SERVICES AND OPEN DATA; SMALL AND FAMILY BUSINESS

Mr Speaker (Hon. Pat Weir, Condamine)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Jon Krause, Scenic Rim)

Committee Members

Mr JP Lister MP—Chair

Mr AJ Baillie MP

Mr MA Boothman MP

Hon. MC de Brenni MP

Ms NA Boyd MP

Mrs ME Nightingale MP

Ms JE Pease MP

Members in Attendance

Dr CAC Rowan MP

In Attendance

Hon. SJ Minnikin, Minister for Customer Services and Open Data and Minister for Small and Family Business

Ms Alissa Lang, Chief of Staff

Mr Chris Ireland, Senior Policy Advisor

Mr Benjamin Nance, Policy Advisor

Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business

Mr Chris Lamont, Director-General

Ms Irene Violet, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services

The committee met at 9:00 am.



Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Good morning. I declare this hearing of the estimates for the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee open. I acknowledge the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people of this state and their elders past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge the former members of this parliament who have participated in and nourished the democratic institutions of this state. Finally, I acknowledge the people of this state, whether they have been born here or have chosen to make this state their home and whom we represent to make laws and conduct other business for the peace, welfare and good government of this state.

I am Jon Krause, the member for Scenic Rim and Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Under the provisions of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001, I will preside over today's hearing. The members of the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee are: Mr James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and chair; Mrs Margie Nightingale, the member for Inala and

deputy chair; Mr Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville; Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Ms Joan Pease, the member for Lytton; and Hon. Mick de Brenni, the member for Springwood, who is substituting for Mr Michael Healy, the member for Cairns. The committee will be joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today.

I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at my discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for the broadcasting of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting our witnesses here today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. However, I ask all present to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use, including members. Please note the first three rows of the gallery are reserved for department and ministerial staff supporting the minister. Members and others who are attending to observe are welcome to sit in the remaining rows or in the gallery upstairs.

The House has determined the program for the committee's estimates hearing. Today, the committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2025 for the portfolios of the Minister for Customer Services and Open Data and Minister for Small and Family Business this morning and then the Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers. The first session will examine the proposed expenditure of the small and family business section until 11 am. We will suspend proceedings for an intermission from 11 am until 11.15 am. The second session will examine the proposed expenditure of customer services and open data from 11.15 am to 12.15 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to each of those portfolio areas may only be raised during the times specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House, which is available throughout the chamber and on the committee's web page.

I remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. In respect of government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides that a member may ask any question that the committee determines will assist it in its examination of the relevant appropriation bill or otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being effectively spent, efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and departmental officers and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or director-general.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Customer Services and Open Data and Minister for Small and Family Business open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish you may make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Mr MINNIKIN: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As we begin the final day of budget estimates for 2025, I start by acknowledging the work of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker and thank them for chairing these proceedings over the past two weeks. I also recognise the work of parliamentary staff, departmental staff, ministerial staff, committee members and anyone else involved in these proceedings. I thank the member for Condamine and the member for Scenic Rim for their leadership over the fortnight.

Nine months ago, when we came into government, we made a number of commitments to Queenslanders, in particular, to deliver a small and family business first approach. The LNP is the party of small and family business. In his budget reply speech last year, the now Premier made the point that 'an LNP state government will prioritise putting Queensland small and family businesses first'. Now in government, we have a budget that provides the funding and programs to deliver exactly what we said we would. There is \$130 million in new funding to deliver on the *Small and Family Business First Action Statement*, including making it easier to: access government services; access tailored support to start, grow and thrive; respond to red tape and other pain points; and boost procurement opportunities.

Today, I can announce that small business owners can access free cybersecurity support through a partnership between the Crisafulli government and Cyber Wardens, a federal government initiative delivered by the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia, known as COSBOA. Our agreement will give small businesses the support and certainty they need following a botched and rushed process by the former Labor government that saw them appoint a company that has since collapsed.

The budget delivers programs such as our \$40 million Secure Communities Partnership Program to implement crime prevention measures and improve community safety in public commercial precincts and business strips. For the committee's benefit, applications for the first \$10 million tranche of the program have now closed. Assessment is underway with grants to help support small business, their staff and local communities that deal with vandalism and crime. There is no denying the impact that rising crime levels under the former Labor government had on Queensland small business owners and their staff.

The budget provides funding for a \$19 million apprenticeship support program and additional grant funding for construction and professional care-provider businesses to improve business management, productivity and bookkeeping. It allows us to continue to tackle red tape after refocusing the Queensland Small Business Commissioner on red-tape reduction as part of our first 100-days plan. The budget provides an additional \$16.8 million to extend the Small Business Support Network to June 2028. This important network provides financial and wellness support right across the state. We have reversed the decision by the previous Labor government to axe the program on 30 June this year.

We refocused Queensland Small Business Month in May to provide targeted and timely support to small and family businesses so they can recharge, renew and rebuild and we have supported small and family businesses with rapid and ongoing support through the three natural disasters we Queenslanders faced in the first half of this year. In my short time as minister, I have had the opportunity to join with members right across the state to talk with hundreds of small and family business owners and their staff about the plans of the Crisafulli government. I am often inspired by the passion of the small and family businesses I have come across. I have listened to their stories and, with my department, we are working with them on solutions.

At the risk of missing many, we have met fishing businesses in Cairns, butchers and clothing store owners in Ingham, cafe owners and hairdressers in Cardwell. I have joined the member for Townsville for early morning coffee catch-ups with local businesses on at least two occasions and his North Queensland colleagues at sandwich shops, clothing stores and cafes right across the region.

We have met pub owners in Rocky, dagwood dog manufacturers in Yeppoon and optometrists in Mackay. We have sampled local produce from the Western Downs, Dalby and the Sunshine Coast. I have met with four-wheel drive and camping stores in Sarina, barbecue and heating retailers in Toowoomba, air conditioning businesses in Kingaroy and cooler room businesses in Capalaba. We have met military exporters in Kunda Park, cafes in Kowanyama and Caloundra and hundreds of other small family businesses at Chamber of Commerce events hosted from Springfield to Southport and from Gympie to the Glass House Mountains.

For the first time in over a decade Queenslanders have a government that puts Queensland's 495,000 small and family businesses first. This is a government for small and family businesses and their staff. In closing, I am pleased to advise the committee that the Crisafulli government has also secured an in-principle enterprise agreement with customer service staff, recognising the great support they provide to Queenslanders.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will move to questions now and go to non-government questions first. The member for Lytton may ask the first question.

Ms PEASE: I too acknowledge the great work of the public servants who have been working hard in preparation for estimates. To them and to the parliamentary staff, thank you for your great work. Director-General, can you advise how many small businesses received state government energy bill relief in the 2024-25 budget?

Mr Lamont: Could the member restate the year that was mentioned in her question, please?

Ms PEASE: I asked about the 2024-25 budget.

Mr Lamont: I will see if we can get that. There was \$133.25 million in funding available under the former department of energy and climate change. They were the lead for that particular program. I do not have a figure, I am sorry, because this department did not administer how many received the funding.

Ms PEASE: I actually have a copy of that, and I would like to table the document for the benefit of—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the matter that is being spoken about appears to refer to an appropriation that is not being considered here. It refers to a different portfolio and a different time period. I seek your ruling as to whether it is appropriate.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: all of the budget papers have a reference to the 2024-25 operating year, which is very consistent with other state budgets. The examination includes the operating environment, which the department of small business and the minister have a lot to say about. For those reasons, it is entirely within the bounds of relevance of this portfolio.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: energy rebates fall within the portfolios of the Treasurer and Minister for Energy. There was an opportunity to submit those questions in the estimates hearings last week.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you for your points of order, everyone. I believe the director-general had actually already answered the question. The member for Lytton was moving on to a further question. Member for Lytton, you are a member of this committee, are you not?

Ms PEASE: Yes, I am.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You have tabled this document?

Ms PEASE: I have.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Has it been circulated?

Mr MINNIKIN: I have not received a copy of it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could we get a copy across to the minister and other officers, please. Before determining the points of order on relevance to the portfolio, I need to hear the next question, given the first one was answered.

Ms PEASE: As you can see, around 205,000 small businesses were eligible to receive a \$650 credit on energy bills, paid for by the Queensland and Australian governments, during the 2024-25 financial year. Director-General, can you advise the total funding for energy bill relief for small businesses in the 2025-26 budget?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I have already raised a point of order in relation to those matters relating to the energy portfolio, and I would submit to you that they should have been put to the Minister for Energy at a previous session.

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am going to go to the minister first.

Mr MINNIKIN: My point of order is the period that was asked about was 2024-25. This is an examination of the current financial year's budget. I believe the opportunity for the member to ask that question presented itself earlier in the estimates process when the Treasurer and Minister for Energy was at the table.

Mr de BRENNI: I will outline why the Leader of the House and the minister are both incorrect in their points of order. The question was to the director-general about the 2025-26 budget. I also want to refer to the Small and Family Business First Action Statement and the minister's message when he released it earlier this year. He talked about the operating context, including cost-of-living pressures. The minister's Small and Family Business First Action Statement has an entire section relating to the operating context, which states—

Key challenges facing the sector include:

- rising operating costs, particularly ... energy ...

The question is relevant because we are seeking to determine the operating environment of Queensland's small businesses.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is it on the same point of order?

Dr ROWAN: No, it is a different point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

Dr ROWAN: In response to the Manager of Opposition Business's point of order: whilst he has referenced documents, the processes that we are going through today relate to the appropriation bills and those matters that are the financial responsibility of the relevant minister. With respect to that, we are looking at the 2025-26 budget and the operation of the financial and appropriation bills under the remit of the relevant minister. This is not part of the responsibilities of the minister who is currently under questioning at the estimates hearings today.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand. I will seek some advice. Members, thank you for your points of order. The specific question asked about the level of financial support for energy rebates and is a question that should have been directed to the Minister for Energy and Treasurer. However, given the remit of the minister in relation to small business and the contexts in which they work, I will allow the question. If the director-general or the minister are asked questions of a similar nature, they should respond in the vein of their portfolio responsibilities.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the question that was asked had a lengthy preamble which related to non-pertinent matters to this hearing. Can I suggest the question be restated?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Southern Downs. I have made my ruling in relation to relevance and given clear guidance to the director-general and minister. Member for Lytton, would you restate your question, please?

Ms PEASE: Can you advise the total funding for energy bill relief for small businesses in the 2025-26 budget?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Director-General, in light of my guidance, you have the call.

Mr Lamont: I can only answer with respect to the portfolio budget statements of this department. There is not an allocation. My understanding is that Treasury, as other members have commented, is responsible for this area of policy.

Ms PEASE: So that would be zero allocation to small businesses.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will not take the points of order. Member for Lytton, we will get further today if you refrain from making those comments, in line with the Speaker's ruling earlier this week. I will ask you to ask your next question.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, is the cost of energy a key operating factor for small businesses?

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I believe that is asking for an opinion. I believe it is hypothetical.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. Member for Lytton, that is seeking an opinion, which is not in line with the way questions should be asked under the standing orders. You could rephrase the question, however.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, can you confirm this statement under 'Operating context': 'rising costs, particularly for insurance and energy', which is in the key challenges facing the sector?

Mr Lamont: I believe the member is quoting from the small business first action statement. To go a little further than that, there are a range of issues that impact the cost of operation for small business. There are 495,000 of them in Queensland. It is very difficult for me to give a sense as to which of those businesses may be affected by particular impacts on operating costs. Electricity costs would be one of them, though.

Ms PEASE: Operating costs for small businesses are higher. With the absence of energy bill rebates, it would be correct that operating cost are higher?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: in relation to the question as asked. There are imputations in it. I would ask that you consider the question being rephrased.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the question to the director-general is purely a matter of fact and I think it is well within his capability to determine that. It is a pretty simple question. It does not ask for an opinion. It asks for an assessment of fact.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: my point of order related to an imputation contained within the question and I ask for it to be rephrased.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Deputy Speaker: the Leader of the House is well aware of what imputations are. I submit to you that there was no imputation in that question whatsoever. There was no indication or allegation of wrongdoing by any individual. That is what imputation is. The question did not contain an imputation.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you for your points of order. Member for Lytton, I have sought advice and the advice received is that questions asked of the minister should be framed around budget measures or policies and procedures regarding budgets. I am not going to rule that there were inferences or imputations in your question. However, if you could rephrase it in terms of what is relevant to the budget that would assist matters rather than seeking to make arguments in the question.

Ms PEASE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Director-General, did the minister request advice from you or your department regarding energy bill relief for small businesses in the 2025-26 budget?

Mr Lamont: Considerations around the small business first action statement were primarily related to the government's election commitments and the consultation that we had with various industry groups. In keeping with the previous comment around the portfolio responsibilities, the department does not have expertise with respect to energy so we did not provide advice in that regard.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, have any small businesses, business chambers or the Small Business Commissioner raised any concerns with the department regarding the ending of the energy bill rebate and the impact that it will have on small business?

Mr Lamont: Directly with me, no. I would need to confer with my department and during this session come back to you on that. I am aware of a number of reports from industry associations and groups that have cited operating costs as a major issue. They have included, with respect to your question, issues like energy, insurance, wages, interest rates et cetera.

Ms PEASE: My question is to the minister. What advice have you sought from your director-general to limit the amount Queensland small businesses will pay on their energy bills in 2025-26 given the ending of the state government energy bill relief measures?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I believe you have already accepted that this is a topic that does not pertain to the appropriation or the question before us. I ask for your ruling on that.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: it would be no surprise that I would submit to you that the director-general's role is to provide advice to the minister in relation to a range of initiatives that go to supporting small businesses. One of the pieces of advice could have been around support for energy. We are simply asking whether or not that advice was sought of the director-general.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank members for their points of order. Minister, I have previously given guidance to both you and the director-general where these issues cross over between portfolios. Minister, you have the call.

Mr MINNIKIN: We have spoken for probably the last 14 minutes on an area of public policy that is outside the SDS or the direct remit of my ministerial charter or areas of responsibility. I believe that the opportune time to talk about the impact of energy costs or anything along those lines was presented to the estimates process earlier last week when the Treasurer and Minister for Energy appeared before estimates.

Ms PEASE: Given that you are the minister for small business and we have heard from the director-general that the issue around energy bills and other outgoings impact the operations of small businesses, did you make any representations or seek any advice to support businesses with energy relief?

Mr MINNIKIN: As I previously outlined, the reality is that when you look at the factors that affect small business there are a range of things that affect small business. What the department and my remit is to make sure that the government's election commitments are put in place and create the right operating environment for small business to thrive. Our laser lens focus and work, including with other departments, has been on things like red-tape reduction and improving access to services. We have made it very clear that we have a productivity issue in this nation and in this state. That is something that we believe is impacting Queensland's future prosperity.

There are a range of things that will always affect small and family business. One of the things that certainly has not helped is the fact that for the previous nine years and nine months we had a Labor state government. As we know, electricity prices continued to climb under the previous state Labor government. We also know that insolvencies skyrocketed. We are starting to see small business

conditions and confidence slowly but surely return to Queensland. There is more work to be done, but I am acutely aware, as the Minister for Small and Family Business, that there will always be external shocks that we have no direct control over. I will always acknowledge that they do impact small and family business. There is a range of factors, and many of them have been enunciated by the director-general.

Mr de BRENNI: Director-General, is it true that you were formerly a chief of staff in the Howard government?

Mr LISTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: can I ask that the link between that question and the question before us and the Appropriation Bill could be established because I certainly cannot see how it applies.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I hear another point of order, I would like to seek some advice. I have sought advice and director-general I will ask you to respond, please.

Mr Lamont: Twenty years ago I was a ministerial staffer on secondment from the Department of Defence. In the 20 years since I have been privileged to serve governments of both colours at a state and federal level.

Mr de BRENNI: Did you go through a merit-based selection process for your current position or were you directly appointed to the position of director-general?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Springwood, there were two questions there. I will allow the questions, but in the future could you just go one at a time please?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member for Moggill?

Dr ROWAN: My point of order relates to the fact that processes undertaken in relation to the appointment of directors-general would be a matter for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I submit to you that perhaps that line of questioning should have been directed to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, whose session was on Tuesday of last week.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you for that point of order, member for Moggill. I will take some advice on that. Member for Springwood and Manager of Opposition Business, my advice is that that question about appointment processes does fall with the remit of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Do you have a further question?

Mr de BRENNI: Given that the director-general's salary is funded from the appropriation for this portfolio, my question is to the director-general. Director-General, I am advised that you contacted several ministers including the Premier, the Deputy Premier and other ministers about a director-general role prior to your direct appointment. My question is: which of those cabinet ministers committed to provide you a director-general role?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the member's question was predicated on relevance that the budget funds his salary. His appointment was conducted under previous budget funding. It is not a matter for the minister before us. It is spurious. We are wasting time here. Can I suggest that we get back to something that is relevant?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: in relation to the question as asked by the Manager of Opposition Business, I ask for authentication in relation to the comments that he made with respect to the content of the question as asked.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the question is quite a simple one. If the director-general chooses to provide a clear explanation to resolve the matter then he is at liberty to do that.

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: regardless of whether the question is simple or complex, the question goes to the heart of should it even be raised at this particular committee during this process today. All those appointments are done through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I submit to you respectfully that the question is out of order.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the Leader of the House and your previous ruling stated that this was clearly within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Therefore, I ask that the question be scrubbed.

Ms PEASE: Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you moving on to another question?

Ms PEASE: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: In that case, I do not need to rule on all those points of order—several as they were. However, I do not note, member for Springwood, that that question would have needed to be authenticated. I would ask that we move on to the next question.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, I would have relied on advice coming to the opposition via whistleblowers. However, the member for Lytton has a further question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think we should move on.

Ms PEASE: My question is to the director-general. Are you aware of the Secure Communities Partnership grants announced by the Premier in Bundaberg during the election campaign?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: clearly this does not pertain to the appropriations or the question before us. The member has said so in her question. Can I suggest that it be ruled out of order, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: this is a funded program by this agency. It is very relevant. I think the director-general and the minister are well aware of the program.

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: with respect, the director-general was appointed in January this year. I would be happy to field any questions in relation to the lead-up but I think, to be fair, the director-general was not even here last year.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I want to ask the member for Lytton that the question was about the Secure Communities Partnership Program, a program funded through your department, Minister?

Mr MINNIKIN: Yes. I am happy to answer.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you restate the question asking the director-general if he is aware of that particular program, it is certainly in order.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, page 2 of the SDS refers to \$40 million over three years to improve community safety. Are you aware of that program?

Mr Lamont: Yes, I am—the \$40 million Secure Communities Partnership Program I believe the member is referring to, yes.

Ms PEASE: My question is to the minister. I would like to table a copy of a Facebook post and a screen snapshot from an ABC News article when the grant program was announced by the LNP.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will just wait for that to be circulated.

Ms PEASE: My question is to the minister. This announcement was made with the owner of Network Car & Truck Rentals. The owner told me that he has been advised that he is ineligible to apply for this grant. Are you aware that during the election campaign the now Premier encouraged small businesses just like Network Car & Truck Rentals to apply for these grants despite them now being ineligible for the grants?

Mr MINNIKIN: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt you, Minister. Can I seek clarity? Did the member refer to events prior to the election and therefore well prior to this budget? Again, I want to get back to relevance to the question before us and the appropriations that we are considering, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member is asking a question about a program funded through the department. There is some context around the question. The minister has the call.

Mr MINNIKIN: I am happy to provide information about the \$40 million Secure Communities Partnership Program. The background to this particular program is to improve security at public commercial precincts and business strips to protect small and family businesses from crime and economic loss. We all know partly the reasons why a lot of that has come to the fore, particularly in the last 10 years in the lead-up to the last election.

Examples of eligible measures under this program include the installation of CCTV, bollards, lockable fencing and enhanced perimeter security. Applications for the Secure Communities Partnership Program must include endorsement from the local officer in charge of the Queensland Police Service confirming the project's relevance to local crime issues and the positive impact it will have in the proposed location.

Local councils are able to apply for up to two grants—that is up to \$400,000 each. Of the \$40 million, the first tranche was \$10 million. That is round 1. That closed on 11 July this year, with 48 applications received. The outcomes of that process will be due in September, next month. In relation to that, we made sure that all chambers of commerce and councils were advised of that particular program. Obviously, during the lead-up to the election, the narratives of these programs—

Ms PEASE: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I am wanting clarity around relevance to my question and the response.

Mr BAILLIE: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I find the minister's response extremely relevant and I would like to hear the rest of the answer.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the question was asking if the minister is aware of certain issues.

Ms PEASE: Yes, my question is around the ineligibility of this business that was used during a campaign.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I believe the minister is being relevant to the issue of eligibility and criteria for the scheme and was coming to the answer.

Mr MINNIKIN: This is the benefit of the minister providing the committee fulsome detail of what these programs are about. I thank the committee for allowing me the time to go through the background as to what they are all about and some of the eligibility criteria.

You can appreciate that, being the minister, I have responsibility for that being an election commitment and hitting the ground running with it. This is a very important point. In relation not just to this grant but to any other grants—because there are several that the department offers—I, as minister, am completely at arm's length to those businesses that are successful. Everyone is eligible to apply. I said earlier this tranche is \$10 million and we were oversubscribed.

Ms PEASE: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: I am going to move on, if I may.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: the minister is being very responsive to the question as asked. He is outlining the criteria and significant information in relation to the operation of this grants program. I would submit to you that he be permitted to continue his answer.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I got the sense the minister was about to round out his response, so if you have anything very briefly to add, Minister.

Mr MINNIKIN: Very briefly, Deputy Chair: I do not get involved operationally in any grants as to who wins or who does not.

Ms PEASE: Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker. Minister, just confirming from your response that businesses like Network Car & Truck Rentals are not eligible to directly apply for grants under this community safety program.

Mr BAILLIE: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: the minister has provided a fulsome response regarding eligibility.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Townsville. That is not a point of order. Minister, you heard the question. You may reply.

Mr MINNIKIN: It is all part and parcel of what we are doing here this morning, going through things as fulsomely as possible. I made it very clear earlier that this is a \$40 million program. This first tranche, round 1, is \$10 million. There will be—and there have been—very specific guidelines as to the way this program will be outlined and run. I outlined only a matter of minutes ago the criteria for this particular grant program. One of them is making sure that we drive value for money.

One of the things we made very clear coming into government is respecting Queenslanders' money. Under my watch as minister, I wanted to make sure we had tight protections in relation to eligibility criteria. I think these are eminently sensible things; for example, making sure that if we have a Secure Communities Partnership Program there should be buy-in from local Queensland police, local councils, small chambers of commerce and local governments. I think that provides a lot of protection to make sure that whoever is eligible for these grants makes sure that money is spent wisely. I have said already that it can be used for a range of things. We are not being overly prescriptive—CCTV, bollards, streetscaping, whatever—working hand in glove with local councils. This is merely the first round. There will be subsequent rounds. I would invite everyone to always make sure they dive into the business.qld.gov.au website.

Ms PEASE: Minister, given that businesses like Network Car & Truck Rentals are in fact ineligible to make an application directly for the grant and similar businesses were encouraged to apply directly for these grants, will the minister now issue an apology to Network Car & Truck Rentals and others?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: that question is clearly argumentative.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, there is an inference in that question and it could be described as argumentative, so I would ask you to rephrase it if you could.

Ms PEASE: Minister, given that businesses like Network Car & Truck Rentals were under the impression they would be able to apply directly to the government for these grants, are you in a position to provide written advice to all of those small businesses to say they are no longer eligible?

Mr MINNIKIN: I made it very clear in my opening statement that in Queensland we have 495,000 small and family businesses. It is important to note that towards the end of this month we will probably be in a position to update that number through the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It may well be that we now have possibly even over half a million small and family businesses. In relation to my ability to correspond on every single grant to half a million plus small businesses, the way I approach it is very simple. We have a range of different grants as part of our \$130 million package for small and family businesses. Now we are describing just one. I have said already this is the first round. There will be subsequent rounds as well. Those terms and conditions, if you want to call them that, are there for all to see. I would encourage anyone to work with their local police, chambers of commerce and councils in order to drive value for the taxpayers' dollar.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are going to move to government questions now. We will come back to you in due course, member for Lytton.

Mr LISTER: Minister, I note that on page 2 of the SDS it refers to enhanced cyberskills for Queenslanders. Minister, can you outline how this will apply to the cyber preparedness of small and family business in our state?

Mr MINNIKIN: Cybersecurity, as everyone would know, is a growing issue for many Queensland small and family businesses. We equally know that cyber attacks do not respect state boundaries. They are indeed a national issue. According to the federal government, cyber attacks are reported every six minutes in Australia. The average cost of a cyber attack for Australian small businesses rose by eight per cent in 2023-24 to just under \$50,000: \$49,600.

During Queensland's Small Business Month back in May, Queensland-based IDCare participated in workshops run by my department across the state. The Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, COSBOA, ran two Cyber Warden sessions online. For the benefit of the committee, I can announce today that the Crisafulli government is the first state to join with the federal government to deliver free online cybersecurity support for Queensland small and family business. I would like to repeat that: we are the first state to join with the federal government to deliver free online cybersecurity.

In fact, we have progressed things. We have signed a memorandum of understanding to utilise the Cyber Wardens program, which offers a range of tools and strategies to mitigate the financial risk associated with cyberthreats. There are free on-line training courses, resources and webinars tailored specifically for small business. The program helps owners and their staff spot common red flags, use AI safely, and take simple steps that make it more difficult for cybercriminals to launch costly and devastating attacks. Cyber Wardens is being delivered, as I said, by COSBOA, and I thank the Australian government for their support. I really do give them a gold star and thank them very much.

In addition, the program is supported by an industry alliance led by Telstra, the CommBank and the Australian Cybersecurity Centre. The program will allow Queensland small and family business owners and their staff to be trained to become cyberwardens, the cybersecurity equivalent of a fire warden or first aid officer. This partnership will allow cyberwardens to provide state-specific training materials for some of our key industries including health, construction and tourism. I thank COSBOA chair Matthew Addison and his team for their partnership. I know they are keen to see other states and territories follow the lead of the Crisafulli government.

Cyber attacks are a growing global scourge, and a national approach to supporting our small and family businesses is an appropriate response. Our collaboration with Cyber Wardens and the federal government signifies how seriously we are taking the risk and threat of these online attacks. This is another example of how the Crisafulli government is putting small and family businesses first.

Mr LISTER: Minister, going back to 'enhanced cyber skills' on page 2 of the SDS, can you outline why this intervention has been required?

Mr MINNIKIN: The Crisafulli government has methodically uncovered and is resolving a range of issues left behind by a failed former state Labor government. This department is no different to the myriad other departments. Cybersecurity support for small and family businesses was absolutely one of them. In fact, within a week of coming to government I started asking questions about a contract announced by the former state Labor government. It was a contract awarded to Cryptoloc Holdings. This contract was announced by the former small business minister and member for Bundamba on 30 September last year. That was just hours before the caretaker period began.

What caught my eye in the first week or two after becoming minister was an amber flag alongside the company's ability to make ongoing payments. There was a flag that something did not seem right, and I probed and asked questions within the department. Within a few months it became clear that this company that had been awarded a \$15 million contract was unable to meet its contractual obligations. This company signed a contract with the former Labor government and is now unable to deliver the contracted cybersecurity program for small and family businesses. This is despite an initial payment of just under \$2 million—\$1.938 million—during the caretaker period last October.

On 8 January this year the contract was terminated. My department is now seeking recovery of funds from Cryptoloc Holdings, reflecting this government's commitment to transparency, accountability and respect for Queenslanders' money. On 3 April this year the Supreme Court registrar ordered that Cryptoloc Holdings be wound up and that a liquidator be appointed, which has now occurred. My department is liaising with the liquidator in relation to winding up the company and is listed as a creditor.

The director-general of my department has also referred several matters to relevant Commonwealth agencies following Cryptoloc's contract termination. The department is collaborating with these agencies. Cryptoloc Holdings' founder, Mr Jamie Wilson, self-declared bankruptcy on 13 June this year. As I said earlier, the Crisafulli government recognises the need for cybersecurity support for small and family businesses. It is critical. This is why I was pleased to announce that we have signed an MOU to utilise the Cyber Wardens program, as mentioned earlier. This offers a range of tools and strategies to help mitigate the financial risk associated with cyberthreats.

Under the memorandum of understanding we will do a range of things: promote Cyber Wardens as a key cybersecurity resource for small and family businesses; share training and resources, including industry-specific tools; and boost cybersecurity awareness and resilience across Queensland. Finally, Queensland small and family businesses are getting the support they need in this critical area of public policy. This is another example of how the Crisafulli government is putting small and family businesses first.

Mr LISTER: Minister, that is quite extraordinary. Continuing on with page 2 of the SDS and 'enhanced cyber skills', can you advise who the accountable officer was who was responsible for the decision to issue that contract?

Mr MINNIKIN: I want to thank the member for these follow-up questions. I believe they are of critical importance. The Crisafulli government made some very fundamental commitments to Queenslanders before the last election including, as I have said already, respect for their money. However, when it came to other people's money in this case, the former Labor minister and member for Bundamba, the member for Springwood and the opposition leader showed very little respect. I table two articles quoting the member for Springwood—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, just a moment: is leave granted for the minister to table that?

Mr LISTER: Can we inspect those documents before we decide if we can grant leave?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You may do that. Minister, the process is that you need to seek leave to table documents.

Mr MINNIKIN: I seek leave then, through you, Deputy Speaker.

Mr LISTER: Deputy Speaker, may I suggest that we consider this while the minister continues with his response.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, if you are able to continue without the documents being tabled, you may and we will consider that tabling.

Mr MINNIKIN: Certainly. For the benefit of the committee, one of those documents being tabled is in relation to the member for Springwood's comments and also this quote from the now opposition leader, Mr Steven Miles—

Cryptoloc's success is testament to Queensland's thriving innovation system.

That was the now opposition leader back on 8 November last year. The next article, titled 'Cash for access concern', references the member for Springwood. I think what really concerned me is that it is almost as though it is a case of, 'There's nothing to see here. Move along.' As I outlined in my previous answer, the government announced the awarding of a cybersecurity tender just hours before the election caretaker period began and it took one briefing—let me repeat that: one briefing—from my new department within a week or two of me taking office for me to realise that something was not right. The member for Bundamba and former Labor minister told the media that it was not his fault—again, no respect for other people's money. The opposition leader was quick to pass the buck as well. I have already tabled the articles with their responses.

Make no mistake: the former Labor minister totally botched the process. This has actually raised more questions than it has answered. It really goes to the heart of the mismanagement by the former Labor government, and in particular a few Labor MPs. For example, why did the member for Bundamba, in his then role as minister for small and family business, not do his proper checks? Why did the member for Springwood accept donations from this company? Why did the member for Murrumba and now opposition leader give such a glowing endorsement of the company before the contract was awarded? Perhaps the biggest question goes to the former Labor treasurer and member for Woodridge. Why did the former Labor treasurer, Cameron Dick, approve an additional \$10 million in Labor's last budget? I refer to page 17 of Budget Paper No. 4 from 2024-25. Why was that extra \$10 million given? These are questions that need serious answers from opposition members. The release of Labor's last budget brought the total commitment to \$15 million, and that is less than four months before announcing the contract. It just does not add up.

Today, Queensland's small and family businesses finally have the opportunity to access proper cybersecurity support. We have also ended the duplication where the same program, incredibly, was being offered at the state and federal level. It is just unbelievable. Like I said, there are still questions that the former Labor government need to answer. It is beholden on those Labor members here today to put those questions to the Leader of the Opposition and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I thank the member for the question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister sought leave for the documents to be tabled. Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, I refer to page 1 of the SDS, specifically red-tape reduction and a refocus on the Small Business Commissioner. Can you provide outcomes of the commissioner's refocus and other government initiatives?

Mr MINNIKIN: I know that the member is a keen advocate for small and family business in the Theodore electorate and I commend him for doing that. The Crisafulli government wants Queensland's small and family businesses to just get on and operate in a business friendly environment that fosters innovation and growth. We want to make sure that businesses are given the opportunity to thrive. As everyone knows, excessive red tape is a burden on the competitiveness, innovation and productivity of small and family businesses. It diverts time and resources from business activities impacting the broader economy through lost growth and employment.

My policy team and I are working on a whole-of-government opportunity suite to reduce red tape, such as timeliness of government decision-making which I often hear is something we will work on across government. The Crisafulli government is cutting red tape to help small and family businesses thrive. The Small and Family Business First Action Statement sets very clear priorities. A key focus is tackling red tape and other pain points with the Queensland Small Business Commissioner leading the charge under a new statement of expectations. The commissioner is actively engaging stakeholders, including the Queensland Productivity Commission and the Night-Life Economy Commissioner, gathering feedback and working with government departments to identify practical solutions.

Earlier this year, I wrote to 120 Queensland chambers of commerce asking for red-tape challenges and solutions for the commissioner to act upon. We know that small and family businesses are impacted by red tape across government which is why the Crisafulli government is responding by developing a range of red-tape reduction initiatives, including, but not limited to: firstly, pausing the Best Practice Industry Conditions—BPIC—which was increasing cost and compliance on large infrastructure projects by more than 24 per cent; the Building Reg Reno changes, reducing unnecessary financial reporting red tape for over 50,000 tradies; the Local Government Red Tape Reduction Taskforce to provide advice on how to reduce red tape for local government; master agreement with community

housing providers, cutting red tape by reducing the number of lease agreements from about 2,000 down to just 114, simplifying compliance and allowing community housing providers to focus on home delivery.

Furthermore, we will be implementing free disability parking permits for more than 3,000 disability parking applications per month. This will be followed up by further changes to kick in later this year, for applicants to hold up to three permits. We will be continuing the digital transition to move away from paper-based forms within my department, working with Safe Food Production Queensland to deliver a new digital accreditation application for horticultural businesses which actually went live in February this year. From September, next month, the Queensland Building and Construction Commission—QBCC—licences will be integrated into the digital wallet in a phased approach to give small and family businesses in the construction industry the option of carrying digital accreditation. There will be a new dedicated small business concierge service to streamline government support and deliver a one-stop shop to improve access to government services, and the five business days On-Time, Every-Time Payment Guarantee for small and family businesses. It keeps going. There will be easier processes for small and family businesses tendering for government work with simplified procurement processes, standardised contracts and smaller tenders.

This is another example of the small business-first approach we are taking across the whole of government. An online feedback form was also added to the Queensland Small Business Commissioner's website earlier this year in February. That enabled businesses, chambers of commerce and other key stakeholders to share their red-tape experiences and practical ideas for improvement.

As at 30 June this year, the Small Business Commissioner and her team have received around about 327 red-tape examples from small and family businesses, chambers of commerce and peak bodies. They do relate, though, to a broad range of industries. When you look at the breakdown, it is interesting: construction, around about 17 per cent; accommodation, 15 per cent; professional scientific and technical services, 10 per cent; agriculture, fishing and forestry, seven per cent; and retail trade, five per cent.

In closing, the most common red-tape concerns raised with the Small Business Commissioner included permits and licensing, including: timeliness, 25 per cent; compliance and auditing, 22 per cent; planning, 18 per cent; taxation, nine per cent; employment and IR, eight per cent; and procurement, seven per cent.

Mr BOOTHMAN: My next follow-up question is in relation to page 1 of the SDS, specifically the Small and Family Business First agenda, including over \$130 million over four years of funded activities. Can the minister advise on any targets for government procurement to support small and family businesses?

Mr MINNIKIN: The member for Theodore is a smart advocate for small and family businesses. I have said already a couple of times we have more than 495,000 small and family businesses across Queensland and they are absolutely a powerhouse, contributing about \$131 billion to the local economy and employ about a million Queenslanders. I can inform the committee that work is underway to deliver on the Crisafulli government's election commitment and that is to make it easier for small business to tender for government work with simplified procurement processes with standardised contracts, small tender amounts and streamlined tender processes. They are very important points.

I was happy to confirm in my Small and Family Business First Action Statement that we are maintaining the small and medium enterprise—SME—procurement target. In 2024-25 financial year, the spend with Queensland's SMEs was \$8.1 billion or 29.23 per cent of total spend. While just short of the 30 per cent target, this is the highest result since the SME procurement target was introduced back in May of 2020. I am focused on making it easier for local small and family businesses to thrive as valued suppliers to the Crisafulli government.

I have been working hand in glove and very closely with Minister O'Connor and the Department of Housing and Public Works to finalise a review of the Queensland government's procurement approach. In May, I joined Minister Mickelberg and almost 100 small business representatives at a major public transport project event which was held on the Sunshine Coast. That was gearing up to support our major projects such as the Wave. The revised Queensland procurement policy will make it easier for local businesses to tender for government work and share in approximately \$180 billion of government procurement in the lead-up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and beyond.

For further information for the member asking the question, we are continuing to support small and family businesses, including mentoring, financial counselling and business wellness counselling. Critically, there is support available for small and family businesses, including the work of our dedicated small business procurement adviser. That is to position themselves to benefit from the significant procurement opportunities in the pipeline.

In conclusion, my department is also investigating micro-credentials to help small businesses be ready to supply work to government.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will revert to non-government questions for a period. Member for Lytton.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, I refer to SDS page 1. Could you advise what date former members of the small advisory council were informed that their appointments had been terminated?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, was that the Small Business Advisory Council?

Ms PEASE: That is correct.

Mr Lamont: On 9 July, the department wrote to the previous members of the advisory council advising that their appointments had ceased.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, did the department provide any advice or recommendations to the minister on who should be appointed to the new body?

Mr Lamont: Yes, the department did provide advice to the minister. There were a number of suggestions on who might be suitable across a range of industry sectors.

Ms PEASE: Minister, is it correct that you chose the members of this new body?

Mr MINNIKIN: As the director-general has just outlined, there were a range of potential candidates brought to my attention. It is something that was discussed by me and also with the department. In some cases I wanted to get some more background information, request CVs and find out suitability. I believe that added value to the process.

My background is in the private sector prior to coming into state government. There are many people I know throughout the state, but I wanted to make sure that this ministerial advisory group was not top-heavy or maybe just in South-East Queensland—with maybe two or three categories of reps in respect of where they have come from. For me to get real value, I needed to make sure that the people on this ministerial representative group were a good cross-section of the small and family business segment across the state.

It is challenging because, as I have said now several times, when you have just on half a million small and family businesses, you have to be careful that not all of the participants are from, say, retail or from the construction industry. That is why at the moment I think there are nine or so on the committee. We had our first meeting, which was probably one of the best online meetings I have had in quite a while. That is the benefit of working hand in glove with the department and key stakeholders.

I reserve the right to add more members as we see fit. In fact, only a few weeks ago I was in Kowanyama opening a digital knowledge centre, which I might speak about later. The reality is: in my day-to-day travels I have come across many outstanding small and family business operators. I put to the committee: the benefit of the minister getting out and about and covering the state cannot be understated. In my opening statement I outlined just some of the small businesses I have met in my first nine months, or thereabouts. It was quite a varied group—

Ms PEASE: Thank you very much, Minister. I think you have answered that question.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: there is no provision under the standing orders for a member of the committee to truncate the minister's answer. I was listening to it. I suggest to you that if the minister has something further to add he should be allowed to continue.

Ms PEASE: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: my question was specifically with regard to the new body and whether the minister made the appointments.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is your point of order relevance?

Ms PEASE: Relevance.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I feel that the minister is being relevant to the question asked.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. I hear your point of order. Minister, I was listening very carefully and heard that you were taking advice from the department and also having your own input. I also then heard that you were thinking about future matters. If you have something brief to add about the appointment in the past, you may; otherwise, we might move to the next question.

Mr MINNIKIN: I will quickly end by saying that we have about nine at the moment but I reserve the right to add other people to the committee and, in fact, I will be doing that in the coming months.

Ms PEASE: Minister, last week Minister Bates said ‘the jobs-for-mates era is over’. I would like to table a copy of the Electoral Commission of Queensland’s disclosure log, which outlines that Mr Phillip Di Bella—who is a member of the small business ministerial reference group that you have just advised you appointed—has made donations to the LNP to the sum of \$34,500.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member. We might just get this document circulated across the table.

Ms PEASE: Minister, were you aware of these donations when you appointed Mr Di Bella?

Mr MINNIKIN: In relation to any donations that Mr Di Bella may or may not have made, certainly from my perspective I was not aware of any donations that not only he may have made to any political party but in relation to other members as well. The direct answer to the question is: I absolutely reaffirm that Mr Di Bella is, in fact, on the committee. I also confirm that I attended—and I believe that the member herself was in attendance—a Coffee Commune breakfast several months ago. I absolutely reaffirm that I believe the gentleman mentioned is held in the highest regard by the business community of South-East Queensland. I was not personally aware of what he may or may not have done by way of donations.

Ms PEASE: Minister, would it be fair to say that Phillip Di Bella is your mate?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: there is clearly an imputation and inference in that. My second point of order relates to this line of questioning and its relevance to the appropriation bills for this budget.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, there is some validity to that point of order. I would ask that you perhaps ask your next question.

Ms PEASE: Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker. With reference to page 1 of the SDS, I would like to table a media article in which small business reference group member Phillip Di Bella argues against penalty rates.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has tabled that article.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: could I get some clarification about how this relates to the question and the appropriation before us? Industrial relations is clearly outside the remit of the minister’s portfolios. It seems to me that this is a tendentious, argumentative and irrelevant course of action.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: perhaps the member for Lytton could ask the question before there is point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, indeed. Member for Southern Downs, the member is entitled to table the document. Regardless of the content of the document, she, as a member of the committee, is entitled to table that. The member for Lytton has the call to ask a question.

Ms PEASE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Again I refer to page 1 of the SDS. Minister, has Mr Di Bella provided any advice to you in relation to the removal of penalty rates or advocated for their removal?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: again, I am struggling to understand how this relates to the appropriation bills with respect to the portfolio matters. Asking about someone who may or may not have asked or provided information—those things are really not relevant to the appropriation bills that we are trying to question the minister on in relation to his portfolio matters.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, I am going to allow the question, noting that the matter of industrial relations is not part of the minister’s portfolio; however, the small business reference group is part of his portfolio and the minister—

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I am seeking clarification when it comes to this question. Would this actually fall under federal legislation to do with industrial relations?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I have just stated that, member for Theodore. However, Mr Di Bella is a member of the small business reference group. I give the minister the call for him to advise in relation to Mr Di Bella's advice—whatever it may have been—from the small business reference group.

Mr MINNIKIN: I thank the member for the question. The thing that I am probably most proud of is the fact that coming from the LNP, I believe in robust decision and policy formulation. The fact of the matter is this. I was not aware firsthand that that was a document that I had not seen before. The only thing I have actually received from Mr Di Bella was a document that the member who asked the question may have herself possibly received. He is part of what is known as the Coffee Commune and as, I said earlier, I attended a breakfast as a guest speaker a few months ago. The member who asked the question was also present, as should be the case being the relevant shadow minister. They produced a six-page document outlining the Coffee Commune's policy wish list whether it be local, state or federal. I acknowledge I have received a copy of that. I do not know whether the member asking the question has received a hard copy of that document.

That should be what stakeholders do; they should be presenting what they think is in their best interests. Equally, as the minister, I have responsibility for a range of things. That does not mean that everything will be accepted *carte blanche*, but under no circumstance being a member of the Liberal National Party would I ever want to stifle people from putting forward their viewpoint. I may agree with them; I may disagree with them, but I would always want them to have their right to have their meaningful say in areas of public policy. Like I said, sometimes I might agree with them; sometimes I might not.

I have only just seen the tabled document. I have not seen that particular thing before. The only thing I mentioned earlier is that to the best of my recall I have only received in hard copy format a Coffee Commune newsletter or manifesto that the key stakeholders put together. I end on this note: there are a lot of things on which I probably would agree with key stakeholders. There would be other things I would vehemently disagree with. However, under no circumstance would I want anyone I ask to appear on a committee or an advisory group to be of the same blinkered mindset and collective decision-making because I actually pride myself in diversity of policy responses.

Ms PEASE: Minister, your charter letter states that appointments 'should be made without regard to personal, political or other immaterial considerations'. Is Mr Di Bella's appointment consistent with your charter letter?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just one moment, Minister. Member for Lytton, I think you are seeking an opinion there, but I am going to give the call to the minister.

Mr MINNIKIN: I thank the member for the question. At the end of the day I wanted to make sure that in relation to this ministerial reference group I searched far and wide for what I believe were competent and capable people. The reality is that I believe that the gentleman referred to is eminently qualified to have a place at the table with other representatives given his particular knowledge of running a very successful small and family business. The reality is—and I have said already—I wanted to make sure that I had a diverse range of views when it came to the composition. I have said I wanted to make sure that I not only had small and family business reps from a particular retail industry in Brisbane; I wanted to make sure I cast the net far and wide. I have already furnished to the committee that from memory there are about nine people formally on that ministerial reference group, but I reserve the right to add others as I see fit.

What I am looking for is simply this. Do they have the ability to work collectively as a ministerial reference group to provide me with good, cutting-edge advice that I may accept or may reject but at least be representative of the nearly half a million small and family businesses throughout this state? I absolutely have to say—and I have said already—that the first meeting I have had with this reference group was certainly high calibre and had high input. You could actually see a burning, passionate desire for all of the members thus far to really give something back. It goes without saying that they have all been successful men and women in their own right, but from my gathering they are now at that point in their life where they also want to give something back. I have to say I am looking forward to the next meeting, which will be held in a few months time.

Ms PEASE: My question is to the director-general. Approximately 54 per cent of small businesses are in regional Queensland. I refer to the membership of the new small business ministerial reference group. Tanya Goodwin from Cairns was on the previous body. Can you advise the over 14,000 small businesses in Cairns why they no longer have a representative on the new small business advisory body?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr MINNIKIN: Point—

Mr LISTER: Shall I defer to the minister or are you happy to hear my point of order?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, I will hear yours, member for Southern Downs.

Mr LISTER: I take it there is an inference that this board has to have a regional composition. Is this relevant to the purpose of that board? I think there is an imputation there and I ask that it be rephrased.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Did you want to make a point of order, Minister?

Mr MINNIKIN: I do, if I may. My point of order is that was simply seeking an opinion and I have made very clear my ability to choose the composition.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Springwood, do you have a point of order?

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, the question the member for Lytton asked was why is there no longer a representative from Cairns and Far North Queensland on the board. I do not think it is an opinion; it is a matter of fact. I think the director-general is quite capable of responding to that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Springwood. In your statement just then you mentioned it is a question of why. That is in and of itself seeking an opinion. I also received advice that it may be a question of policy more than anything else to be directed towards the minister.

Mr de BRENNI: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I can address the matter of policy. I do not think the question asked the director-general to opine on the merits of the policy. It was simply to ask him the reason behind the policy. That is in the director-general's obligations.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Springwood, in your point of order previously you mentioned the question was why. That is in and of itself seeking an opinion. However, if the question could be rephrased along different lines I think you would also be able to seek the same information.

Mr de BRENNI: With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, the question is if the director-general knows why. If he does not know why, he can say that he does not know or provide another reason.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are you asking that question now, member for Springwood?

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, I was simply seeking to assist you.

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, before you go, my understanding is that the question was why. That is asking for an opinion. It is a different question to whether the director-general has knowledge of a particular thing. Member for Lytton, maybe you could ask that question again.

Ms PEASE: Certainly. Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. Director-General, can you advise why over—sorry, may I redirect that? Can you advise the other 14,000 small businesses how they will be represented on the small business advisory body?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: To assist the committee, Director-General, I think the question was regarding 14,000 small businesses in Cairns.

Ms PEASE: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would they be represented on the committee?

Mr Lamont: I think there are two issues here. The first one is that the minister mentioned there are nine members on the small business reference group at this point and that group may well be extended in the weeks and months ahead. The other thing I would comment on is that there are indeed four members of the small business reference group that come from regional Queensland. It is always important in establishing representative groups and bodies to ensure there is a mix that accounts for both regional and metro centres, but also the population and cluster groups of small businesses. This is always a really difficult task to do given that there are so many and they are dispersed right across the state.

I would refer again to the minister's opening comments on this particular topic in that there are nine at this point. That may well change in the weeks and months coming, but there are indeed four regional members already. The other thing to note is that certainly the department and I understand the minister receives representations from a range of industry groups. Local chambers play a very important role in representing the issues of small business right across the state including the good small businesses in Cairns and surrounds.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, there are no representatives from Townsville on the new ministerial advisory group, so no Townsville representative on the body. Can your department provide recommendations to the minister on appointing a representative from Townsville to the body?

Mr Lamont: I probably have to refer to my last answer principally. I would also note that Townsville is fortunate to have two very active local business groups, in Townsville Enterprise and the chamber of commerce, which we have regular engagement with. Indeed, the \$40 million secure communities program referred to before was launched in partnership with both Townsville Enterprise and the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, so they do have really good liaison with this department—and I understand that the minister has regular contact with them as well.

Ms PEASE: I table an extract of an article from the Clean Energy Council.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will just wait for that to be distributed, particularly across the table. Who is your question to, member?

Ms PEASE: My question is to the director-general.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. We will let the director-general have a look at it first.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, there is a particular paragraph highlighted in that document. Can you read it out to us, please?

Mr LISTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: I would suggest that it is not the role of committee members to task the director-general with reading this out. It is before the committee, we can read it ourselves and the member should have a question without an instruction.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, I have sought advice about this in terms of practice and it would help the committee if you yourself could read that out, please.

Ms PEASE: Certainly; thank you. It reads—

Local businesses across the supply chain from building supplies, transport and manufacturing to cleaning and catering service providers can benefit from clean energy projects. Hospitality and accommodation providers will see increased traffic as workers spend earnings in local cafes and pubs.

With reference to the SDS at page 1, many regional small businesses and peak bodies have raised concerns with me about the cancellation of major projects. Has your department consulted with or advised the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Queensland Treasury on the economic impact to regional small businesses due to the cancellation of these large-scale projects?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: the premise of the question is asking for an opinion as she has read out the statement.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: as I heard it, the question was whether the department had consulted with or had provided advice to other agencies.

Mr BAILLIE: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: there is an imputation and an inference that there are large-scale projects that are being cancelled. It is not specific.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes. Member for Lytton, that last point of order in particular has validity. Could you just put your question? I will allow the question to the director-general. Could you just put the last bit of your question, please, about consultation or advice?

Ms PEASE: Director-General, has your department consulted with or advised the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Queensland Treasury with regard to any economic impact to regional and small businesses?

Dr ROWAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: again, the question is seeking an opinion and information which is not under the remit of this portfolio area—in other words, the economic modelling—and the question that is being asked around that is not appropriate for this estimates hearing as it relates to the appropriation under the control of the minister who is currently appearing before the committee today.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: again, the question, as I heard it, was around whether or not this agency—the agency for small business—had provided advice to other agencies. It is a simple question where the director-general can indicate yes or no.

Mr LISTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: I think this question goes to government decision-making and advice thrown around. Ultimately, we are talking about what the minister is accountable for in terms of decisions of the government.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Southern Downs. I am going to seek some advice. Director-General, there was context around the question. It was in relation to any advice that your department has provided in relation to particular matters. I will allow you to answer the question given the portfolio responsibilities of the minister and the department you are the head of.

Mr Lamont: The primary responsibility of this department is to assist the government in both delivering programs related to small business and improving customer service delivery across the Queensland government. With respect to a significant major project, the department is routinely consulted through the cabinet process. We provide comments on a range of issues. There has not been a specific project that has been mentioned in the question so it is difficult for me to answer, but if there was a significant project that the government was considering or not considering that would be, in terms of our liaison, in-principle advice through the cabinet process.

Ms PEASE: Thank you, Director-General. Minister, were you asked by the Deputy Premier or the Treasurer about the impact on regional small businesses from the cancellation of large-scale renewable energy projects?

Mr MINNIKIN: There seems to be a bit of a continuation of a theme here. I am here absolutely willing and able to answer any questions that anyone from the committee may have in relation to the SDS and the budget that was handed down in relation to my portfolio. It is obvious that, when it comes to small and family business, specifically small business, that captures a lot of different angles, but the whole reason—raison d'être—for this department is very simply to make sure that for small and family business we do all that we can to make them not just survive but thrive when it comes to the impact of capital projects that may proceed, may not proceed or whatever—a highway or a byway that may or may not affect small and family business. I would submit this to you, Mr Deputy Speaker: this is the last day of a two-week estimates process. There was ample opportunity for opposition members to put those questions to the relevant minister, but I guess this probably to me, from what I have heard thus far, speaks to the fact that it is almost a scattergory approach to the way they are asking their questions.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order.

Mr MINNIKIN: I believe and submit to you—

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr MINNIKIN:—that this question is not—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause, please. Yes, what is your point of order?

Mr de BRENNI: We are straying into debating the question now, and I am sure the minister knows that that is out of order.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: I would submit to you in relation to the point of order raised by the Manager of Opposition Business that the minister is being responsive to the question as asked. There was a broad nature to the question and he is providing important contextual background and information, outlining what he is responsible for under his portfolio area and what we are supposed to be doing this morning in relation to his estimates process as opposed to other matters.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I actually had the distinct impression that the minister was about to finish but was interrupted by a point of order. Minister, did you want to finish?

Mr MINNIKIN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. We have a range of things that we can discuss in this committee, but I absolutely bring to your attention that by presenting hypotheticals bordering on opinions with what may or may not have impacted on small and family business from a range of other ministerial portfolios is not probably in the best interests of the time of this committee. I would put to you that that was a question that should have been put to the Deputy Premier from state development.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are going to move to government questions now and I will call the member for Townsville.

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, the budget provides \$16.8 million in funding for the Small Business Support Network over three years. That is on page 2 of the SDS. Can you outline why this funding was required?

Mr MINNIKIN: Again I want to thank the member for the question. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that the member was in small business partnership with his father for around about 10 years in the electrical trade. I absolutely commend him for that, particularly the ability to successfully work with

a member of the family. Well done to the member. The Small Business Support Network currently includes 20 small business financial counsellors—that is, 14 state-funded and six funded from disaster recovery funding; and 10 small business wellness coaches made up of six state-funded and four funded from the DRFA across Queensland. Up to \$5,000 per client is available to help owners with challenges by connecting them with professional external support such as skills development and training, psychological advice, marketing support and advice and business and strategic planning support. The network also includes the Rural Financial Counselling Service administered by the Department of Primary Industries.

In this budget—and it is good to be talking about this budget—the Crisafulli government has allocated \$16.8 million to ensure the program continued beyond 30 June this year when, incredibly, Labor chose to end the funding. Let me repeat: the Crisafulli government has reversed Labor's decision to axe the Queensland Small Business Support Network. How can the Labor Party say they back small and family business while at the same time axing vital financial and mental health support for small and family businesses? Then again, given the opposition leader did not once mention small and family businesses in his budget reply speech, it is sadly clear that this opposition does not support small and family business. They are not walking the talk.

Let us take a closer look at the Small Business Support Network, because it is an incredibly important program; that is why I thank the member for the question. This is a group of qualified people who provide a wraparound support service with free and confidential access to financial counsellors to overcome business challenges, including natural disasters, of which the member asking the question is all too familiar with. They were one of the early stakeholder groups I met with when I became a minister and I have since met with their staff in Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton and at a Small Business Month event here in Brisbane. I truly understand the vital service they provide.

Let me repeat, for the benefit of the committee, that these are qualified people who provide support for Queensland's small and family businesses facing difficult times, including during natural disasters. Incredibly, Labor were going to axe them. We have reversed Labor's decision and committed funding, I am proud to say, for a further three years, giving certainty to this vital program and support to small and family businesses. I thank the member for the question.

Mr BAILLIE: As a follow-up on the Small Business Support Network, can you outline how the network has provided support for businesses in North and Far North Queensland in the wake of the recent natural disasters?

Mr MINNIKIN: Again I thank the member for the question. I acknowledge the great work that you did early this year during the disaster season. As I said earlier, I acknowledge the more than 10 years in business with your dad. I earlier made reference to the fact that the Small Business Support Network provides wraparound support for small and family businesses with free and confidential access to financial counselling for small and family business owners experiencing or at risk of experiencing hardship. These people also provide coaches to provide support and address business-related mental health challenges.

In the 12 months to 31 May this year the Small Business Support Network provided intensive support to small businesses across regional Queensland. To give the committee an insight into the work they have conducted, let me provide some further information. The network provided intensive support—in other words, ongoing financial or wellness support—to 88 small businesses across the Gold Coast, 46 across the Sunshine Coast, 38 across Townsville, 41 in Mackay and Rockhampton and 90 across the Cairns region.

Labor, as I have said, were going to cut support in areas where small and family businesses often need support to recover from natural disasters and seasonal fluctuations. I thank the North Queensland MPs, the member for Mulgrave, Terry James, Barron River MP, Bree James, and Cook MP, David Kempton, for being fierce advocates for their local small businesses and for this particular service to continue. I pay credit to them for that. The people of Far North Queensland are lucky to have such strong advocates in these LNP MPs who will knock down doors to ensure small businesses in their region are getting the support they deserve—and the people of Townsville, I might add, as well.

During a recent trip to Cairns, Barron River MP, Ms Bree James, and I had the chance to meet five members of the Small Business Support Network. Local business wellness coach Susan Yeeles told the media on that day—

We are really pleased that this funding is being continued because we see on a daily basis the impact this has on supporting our small business community. They come to us when they are struggling with their business, whether it is financial or whether it is mental health and wellbeing, and we are able to make real change because we can meet them where they are.

Not only were they excited that the funding for the service was ongoing, they were especially grateful for what the ongoing support meant for small and family businesses across Far North Queensland.

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, in relation to question on notice No. 7, what steps are being taken by your department to cater for this small business growth projection over the next seven years?

Mr MINNIKIN: The Crisafulli government is dedicated to fostering an environment where small and family businesses can grow, thrive and encourage new ventures to open their doors. By 2032 it is estimated that Queensland will have over 615,000 small businesses operating across the state. The Small and Family Business First Action Statement outlines initiatives designed to support small and family businesses by creating the right operating conditions for growth and, importantly, success. With a strong focus on reducing costly red tape, which I went through earlier today for the benefit of the committee, streamlining government services and making it easier to do business, the action statement aims to help establish more than 120,000 new Queensland businesses over the next seven years.

The Crisafulli government is backing small business through the Small and Family Business First Action Statement and recognising their role in creating jobs and driving local economies across every industry and every region. We are focused on measures to reduce costly red tape, streamline government services and make it easier for small and family business to do just that: business which is supported by the delivery of a dozen or so key election commitments. The action statement incorporates the Crisafulli government's 'small business first' approach: putting in place the right operating environment for small businesses to not just survive, but to thrive. By putting small and family businesses first we are tackling the economic and broader challenges they face head on.

Released back on 6 May this year during Queensland's Small Business Month, the action statement is underpinned by over \$130 million in new investment over four years and focuses on creating the right environment for growth and success. This is about, as I have said, reducing red tape, improving access to services and driving productivity and innovation. They are key to Queensland's future prosperity. As part of our first 100-day plan we have refocused the Queensland Small Business Commissioner on cutting red tape and managing disputes.

On 26 May this year we delivered another election commitment to small and family businesses with the launch of the \$40 million Secure Communities Partnership Program I spoke of earlier with the member for Townsville and his colleagues the member for Thuringowa, Natalie Marr, and member for Mundingburra, Janelle Poole. This initiative aims to deter crime by funding those essential safety and security infrastructure measures I talked about earlier.

Work is progressing to deliver on our broader commitments to small and family business, including delivering the five business days on-time every-time payment guarantee for small business, making it easier for small businesses to tender for government work with simplified procurement processes—as I stated earlier—standardised contracts and smaller tenders for small business. That is incredibly important.

We are also developing a \$1 million new Small and Family Business Innovation Pathway; establishing a \$16 million Regional Business Gateways grant program to support chambers of commerce, trade organisations and local councils to operate business hubs in regional areas; providing two new grant programs to support small and family construction businesses and professional care providers to purchase business management software and training; importantly, providing micro-credentials to support small business owners to improve their business planning and processes; and supporting small and family businesses with the cost of apprenticeship wages through a \$19 million pilot program.

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, my community has been suffering through a youth crime crisis that, in addition to members of the public, has been impacting small and family businesses and their staff. In relation to question on notice No. 6, can you provide an update on the outcomes of round 1 of the Secure Communities Partnership Program?

Mr MINNIKIN: I thank the member for Townsville as, sadly, his community has been quoted as being pretty much the epicentre of the youth crime crisis. I thank him and the other Townsville-based LNP members for the work they are doing in advocating for their communities.

To answer the question specifically for the benefit of the whole committee, the Crisafulli government has allocated \$40 million to the Secure Communities Partnership Program. As I said earlier, it is aimed at funding safety and security infrastructure to protect not just small business owners but also, and just as importantly, their staff. I will give examples of eligible measures under this program.

I did say this earlier but I re-emphasise it because it is an important program. Myriad things can be purchased under the program including the installation of CCTV, bollards, lockable fencing and enhanced perimeter security.

As I said earlier, this program will be delivered in multiple rounds, with additional funding rounds to be announced over the next two years. In round 1, the first \$10 million tranche has been budgeted for. Local councils will be able to apply for up to two grants of \$400,000 each. I was pleased to join the member, along with his fellow North Queensland members of parliament, and pretty much most of the members of the Crisafulli government cabinet, in addition to 200 small and family business representatives, to launch the program. We opened round 1 back in May and it was a fantastic event. As I said, there were over 200 small and family business representatives there. We were in a coffee arcade. It was truly a great morning for the launch of that particular program.

The Crisafulli government is committed to strengthening Queensland's laws, and that is including the Adult Crime, Adult Time policy. In the interests of time, I will focus specifically on this program for small and family business. We have made it very clear that small and family businesses have been calling out—and practically everyone I meet continues to amplify this—for us to continue to get tougher on crime, and we are doing just that. For example, on the cost of a break-in to a small business, it is important for the committee to note that it is not just the value of what has been stolen; it is also the repairs, insurance cost rises and the lost turnover from being closed for business, sometimes for days on end.

As I informed the committee earlier, applications for this round closed recently and many applications were received. In fact, it was oversubscribed—I believe to the tune of about \$10.3 million. Being transparent about things, that does not mean every single person will be eligible once the department goes through that, which, of course, as I have reiterated, is at arm's length from me. To maximise benefits to small business, the program requires applicants to demonstrate that project costs will be sourced through local small businesses during delivery. That was done deliberately to try to ensure that local small and family businesses have an opportunity to get involved in the programs. Additionally, as I said earlier, applications have to include an endorsement from the local officer in charge of the Queensland Police Service. We are working hand in glove with the local police as well as the chambers of commerce in those particular areas.

I am very excited about and proud of the Secure Communities Partnership Program because it really does represent a significant investment in creating a safer environment for small and family businesses and, importantly—I keep mentioning this—their staff across Queensland. By fostering that collaboration between councils, small business chambers and law enforcement, the program's aim is to reduce crime and strengthen local communities.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I refer to page 1 of the SDS, specifically the \$130 million in the Small and Family Business First Action Statement. Minister, can you advise what activities have been held during Queensland Small Business Month? To further highlight wonderful North Queensland, what were some of the key activities in North Queensland and Far North Queensland?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Theodore, you asked two questions. I will allow the minister to answer them in turn.

Mr MINNIKIN: I mentioned earlier but I want to repeat that I was privileged to come into the parliament with the member for Theodore in 2012. I know that he has long been an advocate for small and family businesses in the state. I thank him for that.

In May, Queensland Small Business Month celebrated the vital role of our 495,000 small and family businesses, driving our economy and strengthening communities statewide. In 2025, my department partnered with stakeholders to deliver meaningful events and activities, helping small businesses recharge, renew and rebuild. Across the month of May, 162 events attracted over 6,000 attendees including 26 financial literacy, disaster recovery and major project supplier events led by my department and 48 funded through the Better Local Business Grant Program.

During Queensland Small Business Month, the Queensland Small Business Commissioner and I had the pleasure of attending 33 events across the state, ensuring strong carriage across the whole of Queensland. In addition, the department led events. My department's regional business teams attended 43 events across Queensland, connecting with small and family business communities and showcasing the available support provided by the Crisafulli government.

I am proud that my department engaged over 1,000 small businesses and stakeholders via targeted events. This included eight business recovery clinics, held in Cardwell, Hervey Bay, Townsville, Gold Coast, Ingham, Giru, Logan and Capalaba. These clinics provided tailored financial and business wellbeing support and advice about managing a small business after a natural disaster. For the committee's benefit I point out there were 11 financial literacy workshops held—in Emerald, Toowoomba, Goondiwindi, Brisbane, Longreach, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Mount Isa and Charters Towers as well as online. These workshops provided general information and guidance as well as the opportunity to chat one-on-one with business experts for personalised support. There was a combined financial literacy and business recovery clinic in Winton.

There were four Big Partners for Small Business events to connect small businesses with major projects and larger enterprises that then led to potential procurement opportunities. I had the chance to join almost 100 business representatives, along with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, at a major public transport projects event held on the Sunshine Coast. We committed to ensuring that small and family businesses are gearing up to support our major projects such as the Wave on the Sunshine Coast.

There were two stakeholder engagement events including the 'coffee with cabinet' event held with the Townsville Chamber of Commerce that I alluded to earlier. We received feedback on the events held throughout the month. Danielle, a financial literacy workshop attendee, said—

I just wanted to send a huge thank you to you and the entire team for the session this morning in Maroochydore. I found it incredibly valuable and felt so supported throughout. I was genuinely surprised by the extent of wonderful support available.

I will quote two other comments to round out the response to the honourable member's question. Colleen, a Meet the Buyer Cairns participant, said—

This is our third time attending this event and we always find it fun, useful and an excellent opportunity to make connections.

Finally, Marty, who attended the Ipswich Grazing Table event, said—

I think it is extremely valuable for the local business community to receive this grant support to facilitate these events to be able to showcase other small businesses.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, the session has expired.

Mr Lamont: Deputy Speaker, I promised during this session I would provide a response to the member.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The discretion to take questions on notice rests with the minister. Are you okay with that, Minister?

Mr MINNIKIN: Deputy Speaker, I am.

Mr Lamont: The member inquired as to whether the department had received any feedback or correspondence on the energy rebate. I can confirm that the department has not received any correspondence from small business on the energy rebate. I wanted to close that out.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Director-General, for closing out that point. We appreciate it. Thank you, Minister. The committee will now adjourn for a short break and resume at 11.15 am. I acknowledge the schoolchildren in the gallery.

Proceedings suspended from 11.00 am to 11.15 am.



Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Welcome back, Minister and officials, to the LCC. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio area of customer services and open data open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I invite the minister to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Mr MINNIKIN: Having a minister responsible for customer services is a first for Queensland. It is part of the Crisafulli government's plan to have a people-first framework to improve the interactions that Queenslanders—our customers—have with the services government offers. Creating Queensland's first ever department focused on customer service has required a lot of work in a short space of time. This work is ongoing, with the customer service functions of transport and main roads transferring to the department responsible for customer services just over five weeks ago. The objective is simple: better aligned customer service functions and improved customer experience.

Over 90 customer service centres, online services, call centres and digital identity services have transferred to my department. While this all sounds straightforward and sensible, it is actually a first for Queensland. We now are starting down the path to deliver on our commitment to become Australia's most customer service focused government. In the past few weeks, I have visited several customer service centres and Queensland Government Agent Program outlets, referred to as QGAPs, from Cairns to Rockhampton. The staff have a lot of ideas, a lot of enthusiasm and a genuine anticipation of what can be achieved for Queenslanders.

The Crisafulli government's vision will see us tackle some of those longstanding frustrations experienced by Queenslanders. We all know them: red tape, merry-go-round calls, overly complicated forms or websites, jargon-rich communication and siloed services. The journey is well and truly underway. We have delivered an improved customer experience in our phone contact centres by implementing real-time queue position updates as well as increasing specialist staff numbers for the Homeless Hotline. We have made online services easier and more secure for customers by partnering with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to replace at-risk identity management systems with a new, secure Queensland Digital Identity system. We delivered round-the-clock customer support during recent weather events earlier this year—managing over 145,000 community recovery and SES interactions over the phone—and introduced LiveChat support for the first time, assisting community recovery customers with over 9,400 chat interactions.

In addition to these achievements in customer service, the Crisafulli government will also end the piecemeal, short-term thinking that is Labor's legacy of the past decade when it comes to delivering and upgrading digital systems. We will deliver a Queensland-first, \$1 billion government digital fund to coordinate a whole-of-government investment in ICT systems over the next four years. We will take a calm, methodical approach to tackling the number of internal and customer-facing ICT systems that need to be renewed, upgraded or replaced.

We understand the importance of driving value for money and innovation. The era of artificial intelligence is already here, and the Crisafulli government is well positioned to take advantage. For example, we are already exploring the benefits of AI to support systems to continue delivering the services that Queenslanders expect. We are also supporting the award-winning AI assistant known as Corella, which was developed by my department's AI unit in collaboration with the Department of Education. Additionally, the expansion of QChat, the Queensland government's AI assistant, is ongoing, and it has now expanded to 20 agencies. A review of the open data policy is underway, with targeted consultation being held with external stakeholders.

Another first for Queensland will be implementing data-sharing systems, leading to the establishment of real-time metrics. This will lead to better and more accurate information for policy decision-making, better services and better outcomes for Queenslanders. It is already underway in different forms in other states, and Queensland under Labor failed to get on board. We have established a strategic partnership with SAP to ensure that our investments in enterprise resource management systems, ERM, enable agency modernisation and enable us to fully leverage for maximum benefit. To support our future goals, we have also successfully delivered a relocation of our data centre, modernising ICT infrastructure and reducing fixed costs.

This budget continues to position Queensland to meet growing local and international cybersecurity threats and be ready for upcoming high-profile events including the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Queensland government's cybersecurity unit engages and collaborates with all levels of government across the state and with our national counterparts. That is to uplift capability and provide advice and coordination for cybersecurity incidents. The Crisafulli government's first budget is what a real plan looks like. The budget is a fresh start for Queensland. It is a budget that delivers for Queenslanders. I look forward to answering the questions of the committee.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will go to non-government questions.

Ms PEASE: My question is to the director-general. Could you provide a breakdown of the capital expenditure for the digital fund outlined on page 98 of Budget Paper 4?

Mr Lamont: I just want to see the page of the budget paper. Was it page 98?

Ms PEASE: Yes, page 98.

Mr Lamont: Of which budget paper?

Ms PEASE: Budget Paper 4.

Mr Lamont: This is the allocation that has been assigned to the QGDF. The actual specifics of the programs that it will fund have not yet been determined. There is a committee that I sit on with the director-general of DPC and the Under Treasurer. We will consider proposals referred from CBRC and provide recommendations back to CBRC for consideration. The numbers that are contained in Budget Paper 4 are the proposed allocations for future recommendations that are approved by CBRC.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise the timelines for implementation and completion of all measures related to the digital fund, and will they be completed by the end of the forward estimates?

Mr Lamont: The intention is that the QGDF will be fully expended over the forwards. In terms of specific projects, as I referred to in my previous answers, some of them have different timelines, but the intention is that QGDF will be fully expended over the forwards.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise the projected number of FTE staff within the department who will have specific responsibility for the implementation of the digital fund?

Mr Lamont: It is essentially about 10 FTE in my department who are working with both Treasury and DPC in reviewing those proposals. That is the number of staff working on that at this point in time.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise whether the department has engaged or will engage external contractors for the implementation of the digital fund and, if so, how many?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, could you repeat that question, please?

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise whether the department has engaged or will engage external contractors for the implementation of the digital fund and, if so, how many?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: would this not be hypothetical?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There are two parts to the question—whether they have or will. Director-General, I am certain you could answer the ‘have’. The second part around ‘will’ one could argue is hypothetical. I will give the director-general the call to answer the question.

Mr Lamont: There is one consultant who is assisting with the financials of each of the proposals at this point in time. As for future requirements for external assistance, I cannot confirm that at this stage.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise how much of the \$1 billion digital fund is specifically allocated or anticipated to be allocated for the hiring of contractors for the project?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, in relation to the ‘anticipated’ part of the question, which is hypothetical. I would ask for that to be rephrased.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could you please rephrase the question.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise how much of the \$1 billion digital fund is specifically allocated to the hiring of contractors for the project?

Mr Lamont: At this stage, I could not do that. The intention is that the fund be split in the form of capex and opex—capex being 35 per cent and opex being 65 per cent. The intention is that the fund prioritise software as a service under common platform requirements. Generally speaking, the intention is, and we hope, that 65 per cent will basically be off-the-shelf software. It may not require as many consultants as previous programs have.

Ms PEASE: Minister, where the services are to be contracted out, are you able to guarantee that the government will prioritise the contracting of small businesses for the delivery of the government’s digital program?

Mr MINNIKIN: As has been outlined to the committee, the Queensland Government Digital Fund is \$1 billion over four years. We have also made reference to the fact that, wherever we can, we have a small business procurement target as well. It needs to be looked at in isolation. What I mean by that is that we will have a need for some large programs. They will be looked at from the perspective of best value for Queensland taxpayers’ money. Nothing will change in terms of us looking for expertise wherever we can find it. If we find that with local suppliers, I would assume there will be some kind of weighting accordingly.

I will give an example of something purchased when I first came into this role. It was a capital project of around \$41 million including some recurrent funding. The scale of that project, given that it was a major piece of payroll software, was probably beyond the scope of any small or family business to realistically provide a bid on. The fact of the matter is that it is horses for courses.

When we are talking about \$1 billion, that will be spent as wisely as possible. I agree with the sentiment and where the member is coming from in asking the question. We will always try to look at around 30 per cent local small business content procurement. I reiterate that when we are talking about very complex software applications—and given that they are part of a \$1 billion digital fund—they will probably be beyond the scope of many SMEs. That is not to say that every project that the digital fund will be procuring will be in that position. If there is something we can do then we will do it. Without being too repetitive, I do think, given that a lot of these programs and project costs are in the tens of millions of dollars, that may limit the scope for some small and family businesses to even be eligible to tender for them.

Ms PEASE: I would like to ask the director-general a question. In response to your earlier answer, can you advise what the value is of the contract for the consultant currently engaged by the department for the QGDF?

Mr Lamont: If I can get that during this session, I will.

Ms PEASE: I think it is coming. We are happy to wait. With the minister's permission, you can invite the officer to the table.

Mr Lamont: There is one contractor—\$824,000 over the period of the actual contract.

Ms PEASE: Have they started contracting already?

Mr Lamont: Yes.

Ms PEASE: How much money has been outlaid from the date that they have started and can you provide that commencement date?

Mr Lamont: Mr Deputy Speaker, I can get that for the member during the session.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, are you okay if the director-general seeks that information?

Mr MINNIKIN: I have no problem with that.

Ms PEASE: Can you also provide the name of that contractor, if I may? Moving on now, Director-General, can you advise the total dollar amount of invoices paid late to small businesses by the Queensland government for the third and fourth quarters of the 2024-25 financial year?

Mr Lamont: I could not for Q3 and Q4 because a number of the agencies have not submitted their Q4 return at this point.

Ms PEASE: Can you do it for quarter 3?

Mr Lamont: I will check my information.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: I suggest that the question pertains explicitly to a period that is not the subject of the appropriation question before us.

Mr MINNIKIN: We have done small business.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, repeat your point of order, member.

Mr LISTER: My point of order is on relevance. The question related specifically to a time period which is outside the estimates appropriation that we are dealing with now. It was last financial year.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: it is clear from the director-general's obligations and the role of the department around on-time payments, the assessment and monitoring of those, that this is an ongoing process for them during this period given that he is still assessing the data from earlier quarters. It is entirely relevant.

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: the subject matter in question would have been more pertinent to raise in the morning stanza because that is actually outlined in this particular document. The question really should have been raised this morning in the first session, in the small and family business section, in that stanza.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think you should move on to the next question.

Ms PEASE: My question relates to on-time payments and the small business requirements regarding the customer service and Open Data Portal. Can you please advise why the on-time payment reports for the fourth quarter of 2024-25 are still not available on the Open Data Portal for the Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support and the Department of Transport and Main Roads?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Director-General, you may answer the question. I understand it is within your remit.

Mr Lamont: I can confirm that this department's reports have been furnished. I am also aware that the minister has written to other ministerial colleagues of the importance of this information. I cannot give you a fulsome response in terms of why that information has not been provided to date.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, between quarters 3 and 4 of the 2024-25 financial year, 11 departments or agencies had an increase in the number of eligible invoices that were paid late. That is correct?

Mr Lamont: I would need to check the information that you are referring to, member.

Ms PEASE: I can provide you with documentation with regard to that. I would like to table a spreadsheet which outlines that information from the Open Data Portal.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, thank you for tabling that. I just caution you. That last question did contain an argument in its preamble. Perhaps if you ask questions without arguments that would be preferred for everyone. We have a tabled document being distributed.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, your department was constituted as a new department by *Government Gazette* on 1 November 2024. In the third quarter of the 2024-25 financial year, your department paid 20 invoices to small businesses late which totalled \$585,288. Can you advise if that information is accurate?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker: in relation to this session, the previous session was in relation to small business. When I heard the question as put then, it related to the small business aspect of the portfolio. Perhaps that should have been provided earlier. There is a lot of detailed information here and I accept that it is the right of members to ask questions, but some of this information should probably have gone through questions on notice as well.

Ms PEASE: Thank you very much. This is about customer service, which is part of this section of the estimates hearing.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am going to ask the director-general whether it is his view if this question relates to the customer service section or the small business section because the minister and director-general are best placed to understand what falls where.

Mr Lamont: Mr Deputy Speaker, with the minister's approval, I can answer the question. For the two full quarters that the department has been tracking and processing payments, remembering that all of the machinery-of-government administrative requirements have not yet come across for payment, despite that, the department has been achieving 88 per cent payment within the timeframe that the member refers to. That is aligned with previous financial year history going back to 2020-21. In respect of the Q4 results, I think 88.23 per cent was the department's response to achieving the payment of small businesses on time. I take the theme of the member's question. I do not actually think that that is good enough for the department, and I gave a direction last Friday to my department in writing that we were to aim for 100 per cent. I also instructed the department to phone individual small business vendors to apologise for any delay that occurred in making that payment.

Ms PEASE: Thank you very much. I would like to continue that line of questioning. I acknowledge that you acknowledge there is a failure. Minister, given the failure of your own brand new department already to fulfil promises of on-time payments, how can you guarantee your guarantee is not another broken promise to the small businesses of Queensland?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: there is a clear imputation in the question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is an imputation at the end of that question, member for Lytton. I would ask you to ask the question without an imputation.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, I have a question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: A question to the minister or director-general?

Mr de BRENNI: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Lytton is not proceeding?

Ms PEASE: Thank you, no.

Mr de BRENNI: Director-General, can I take you back to the QGDF matters we were discussing before. To clarify it for me, could you restate the value of the contract or consultants that are currently engaged?

Mr Lamont: \$824,000.

Mr de BRENNI: \$824,000 exactly?

Mr Lamont: Sorry, it was not exactly. It was \$824,725.

Mr de BRENNI: Could you please outline for the benefit of the committee the period for which that contract relates?

Mr Lamont: I am coming back during this session. My team is just assembling that information now.

Mr de BRENNI: Is it available now? Deputy Speaker, the reason I would like to see if it is available now is that we have seen throughout these hearings that the information has arrived too late to interrogate those figures, so if it is available now—and it seems to be available—I am happy to wait a moment.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, you may ask questions. The director-general has given an assurance that he is seeking the information. We will come back when it is available. That is where it is at.

Mr de BRENNI: Director-General, will you provide the name of the contract or consultant to which that contract for the \$824,725 relates?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Springwood, that was already taken as a question they are coming back on.

Ms PEASE: Deputy Speaker, my question is to the minister. Given the advice we have received from the director-general, did the director-general make you aware of outstanding payments through your department, and what action did you take when he spoke with you?

Mr MINNIKIN: I reiterate that we had a two-hour block for small and family business questions. This was the pertinent block to have asked any of this series of questions. We are now on the customer services and open data portfolio.

Ms PEASE: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: this relates to customer service, which is the section we are now in. Minister, could you please advise whether your director-general advised you of significant late payments through your department?

Mr BAILLIE: Mr Deputy Speaker, point of order: the minister just started his answer to the question. I would be interested in the outcome.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, you may answer the question, provided you are relevant to the question.

Mr MINNIKIN: If anything, this probably indicates a scattergory approach to the line of questioning the opposition has embarked upon. My assessment is that there was a break taken approximately 20 minutes ago and they are trying to scramble and look for missed opportunities. To reiterate, the fact of the matter is that this was a detailed area of policy that should have been raised in the small business stanza earlier today. Again I would urge those opposition members on the committee to make sure they are completely aware of the fact we have moved into a different stanza.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are going to move to government members' questions now.

Mr LISTER: Minister, referring to page 3 of the Service Delivery Statements, how will transferring over 90 TMR customer service centres under your department help deliver better customer service outcomes for Queenslanders?

Mr MINNIKIN: The Crisafulli government was elected to deliver a fresh start for Queenslanders, and that included a renewed focus on customer services. This included delivering accessible, secure and convenient services across multiple channels, whether that be online, in person or over the phone. While online services are increasingly preferred, face-to-face and phone support remains vital for a lot of Queenslanders. The Crisafulli government is committed to giving Queenslanders a more seamless experience when dealing across all government departments.

On 1 July this year customer service centres, contact centres, online services and digital identity services transitioned from the Department of Transport and Main Roads to my department. This alignment brings together key functions, delivering the majority of day-to-day government transactions into just one department. This is just one key step. The Crisafulli government has already delivered a number of key initiatives to improve the customer experience. These include assisting 235,000 customers online via messaging. We have expanded appointment-based services such as deceased estates and heavy vehicle appointments, giving Queenslanders the flexibility to engage with government at a time of their choosing. We have introduced concierge and express counters at larger service centres in response to one of the biggest issues Queenslanders raised with me: they do not know whom to ask or where to get the right information.

We are cross-skilling staff to manage peak demand, a vital capability during peak demand times such as responding to the natural disasters that Queensland experienced earlier this year. We are delivering Saturday driving tests in South-East Queensland to give parents and young Queenslanders greater choice. Finally, we are expanding Indigenous driver licensing services in remote communities because as an LNP government we are committed to ensuring all Queenslanders, especially those in rural and remote communities, get the same opportunities as those in other parts of the state.

In terms of future initiatives this budget will support, I look forward to updating the committee in coming months, but there is one initiative I want to flag here today for the benefit of the committee. My department is developing whole-of-government standards for customer service performance metrics, driving consistent, high-quality service delivery across all channels. These performance metrics will be used to baseline service performance. We are doing this because we are a government that will be responsive to what Queenslanders are telling us. We recognise this is a transformative move. It is a move that the previous Labor government was unwilling to make, but we are determined to give Queenslanders the customer services they not only expect but, more importantly, deserve.

Mr LISTER: Minister, you mentioned rural and remote communities. I note there is increased funding for important QGAP services in Queensland, including Stanthorpe in my electorate. Can you please outline how the government will continue to support Queenslanders living in remote areas to access government services?

Mr MINNIKIN: The member is absolutely a champion of not only his particular part of rural Queensland but also rural Queensland in general, and I thank him very much for the question. My department delivers services directly to Queenslanders through a network of customer service centres and the Queensland Government Agent Program—QGAPs, as the member for Southern Downs correctly referred to them—and other stations as well.

Face-to-face services are delivered through Queensland at 242 face-to-face points of contact. I will repeat that number: 242. There are QGAP offices run by organisations external to my department, including QGAPs run by non-government organisations. My department works with partner agencies to regularly review how face-to-face services are delivered. QGAP is an important service which plays an integral role in ensuring rural and remote communities have access to essential government services including driver licensing, vehicle registration and other services through a network of face-to-face counters. The Crisafulli government has provided additional funding of \$873,000 in this year's state budget to provide increased funding support to non-government QGAPs.

Mr LISTER: Hear, hear!

Mr MINNIKIN: I take that interjection—'Hear, hear!' indeed. Letters advising of the increase in funding, along with updated agent agreements, have been sent to all QGAPs. I had the chance recently to join the member for Mirani and the member for Keppel in visiting two QGAP agencies in Sarina and Yeppoon. I want to compliment the staff I met who are simply outstanding. In fact, all of the staff I have had the privilege of meeting have shown great enthusiasm for providing excellence in customer service across the state.

We discussed the continuing evolution of the technology required to deliver these services, particularly to remote communities. This is a particularly important point, given that the remote delivery of transport related services ensures regional and remote Queensland communities can access registration and licensing services. Remote service delivery is part of my department's customer service strategy particularly in regional Queensland, including as I have said practical driving tests and heavy vehicle testing in rural and remote areas. It goes without saying that this is of crucial importance, particularly for the transport and freight industries.

My department aims to provide all services, including practical driving tests, within tolerable travel distances by offering alternative locations, mobile driving examiners and programs like the Indigenous Driver Licensing Program. The Stanthorpe QGAP, to be very specific to the member's question, was formerly led by the Department of Transport and Main Roads and has recently transitioned into my department, and I am sure the member would concur that it is a valued service in the community.

Dr ROWAN: I note that the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government is delivering a Complaints Clearing House management office. Can you outline how this will benefit Queenslanders and how this approach differs from that of the previous government?

Mr MINNIKIN: I want to thank the member for Moggill for the question. Having served in this parliament with the member for Moggill for many years, I know that he has always been super supportive of customer service standards.

The Crisafulli government has committed \$2.3 million over two years in the 2025-26 budget to establish a permanent Complaints Clearing House management office within my department. This commitment will boost transparency and customer service for all Queenslanders. The Queensland Small Business Commissioner has reported many complaints about the timeliness of complaints being dealt with by government, and this commitment addresses these concerns from a small business angle. I reiterate: when it comes to things I talked about earlier—the red tape, et cetera—we believe this measure will help to drive improvements in timeliness and getting a response from government.

It also delivers on a key Crisafulli government election commitment to deliver the final recommendation of Professor Peter Coaldrake's *Let the sunshine in* report. It has been more than three years since that damning report was handed to the former failed Labor government. In three years the former Labor government failed to deliver on this key recommendation, despite the integrity review recommending a Complaints Clearing House as a way to restore integrity following Labor's integrity inferno. The delivery of the Complaints Clearing House continues the Crisafulli government's commitment to build a world-class Public Service empowered to implement the programs, services and infrastructure needed for Queensland's future.

A dedicated team of five full-time staff will operate a centralised one-stop shop to manage whole-of-government complaints, triaging them to the appropriate departments. It enhances the current role of my department, which is managing whole-of-government complaints through existing entry points, such as 13QGOV, an online form at qld.gov.au, at in-person counters and through the post. The new complaints clearing house commitment formalises the function with a dedicated management office. This includes enhanced oversight, strengthened accountability mechanisms and a renewed focus on consistent complaint management processes across all government departments.

The Complaints Clearing House management office focuses on leveraging my department's existing capabilities to establish a strong foundation for the future. It will make sure that we deliver a reliable customer-focused service. I say to the member that my department will also continue to explore opportunities to improve the customer service experience and customer complaints management.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, my question relates to pages 1 and 2 of the SDS. Can you please update the committee about the S/4HANA rollout across the Queensland government? How will this improve outcomes for Queenslanders?

Mr MINNIKIN: I want to acknowledge the member for Theodore who is very much into his technology and IT, and I thank him for this question because this is IT at a particularly high level. Queenslanders want a government that operates efficiently and delivers quality services; we all know that. In order to do this, you need services to be enabled by cutting-edge technology. Unfortunately, the previous government failed to properly invest in ICT systems which has led to several key systems moving closer to the end of their life without a strategy going forward. This is something I am committed to rectifying.

My department includes Queensland Shared Services, which deliver financial shared services to 20 different agencies across the public sector using a single finance ICT system. However, this system is approaching the end of its operational life and a solution needed to be implemented and implemented quickly. Commencing in January this year, Queensland Shared Services began delivering an upgrade of this shared system under existing whole-of-government contract arrangements. The upgrade to SAP S/4HANA provides a significant capability uplift to Queensland Shared Services. The upgrade of the shared services finance IT system will be delivered by December 2026 and will be funded by cash reserves held by Queensland Shared Services for the specific purpose of IT asset replacement. For the benefit of the committee, the total cost of the project is \$41.2 million with financial outlays for the 2025-26 financial year expected to be \$26.4 million.

This upgrade is underpinned by the principle of adopting standard business processes across the 20 agencies to reduce complexity, mitigate risk and increase efficiency. This will be achieved by moving away from 4,500 customisations in the current IT system—I repeat, 4,500 customisations currently. Over the first five years of operation, this approach will result in savings of approximately \$9.3 million compared to current operating costs.

Savings of \$4.7 million per annum will be realised each year after the initial five-year contract period due to lower resourcing costs. This is another example of the Crisafulli government, as I have repeatedly said in these proceedings, showing respect for Queenslanders' money. This important finance IT system upgrade is operating both on time and within budget. Its progress is available for

viewing on the government's digital dashboard. This upgrade also lays the foundation for the consolidation of other IT systems used by participating agencies to further reduce technical risk, complexity and cost.

Adopting standard processes and sharing IT capability across multiple agencies enables the sector to focus their effort on delivering services to Queenslanders. I am pleased to inform the committee that stringent governance arrangements are in place. This includes a steering committee chaired by deputy directors-general with representation from Queensland Shared Services, SAP and three agencies that use the shared IT system. This steering committee also includes external representation from outside the sector with relevant system modernisation experience. Lastly, an independent project assurance partner is undertaking assurance of the project through a formal project gate review and health checks, providing independent advice to the steering committee.

Finally, whenever a new capability comes online, there are always questions about staffing levels so I want to be very clear from the outset. There will be no staffing cuts because of the introduction of S/4HANA. We value the hardworking public servants who ensure the payroll systems work effectively and efficiently, just as we value the public servants who work with us all to serve Queenslanders.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will go to non-government questions now.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise the total number of staff within your department who are responsible for the administration of or assigned to administer the Open Hospitals website?

Mr Lamont: I would need to get advice from my department on that. That was a project we worked on at the start of the year. I would need to check how many staff are still working on that project. My understanding is that the primary basis of our work has completed.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise how many technical incidents staff have responded to since the Open Hospitals website went live in February this year?

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Deputy Speaker: the relevance of the question. We provide the Open Data Portal. How that data is used and how it affects policy is a question that, in my opinion, should have been directed to the health minister in the earlier stages of these proceedings last week.

Ms PEASE: Point of order, Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, thank you for your point of order. Member, could you explain the relevance of your question to the portfolio, especially in relation to technical incidents?

Ms PEASE: Given that it is within the remit of your department to manage those platforms, can you advise how many technical incidents your staff have had to respond to on the website?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Technical incidents in relation to the functioning of the website?

Ms PEASE: That is correct.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Director-General, if that is in your portfolio responsibility—it does not seem to relate to a health matter.

Mr Lamont: In reference to my previous response, I want to add further information. We do not administer the Open Hospitals data site. We were involved in advising and working with the Department of Health at the commencement. As mentioned, we have done our bit on that now, so that has been handed over and that resides with the Department of Health. We only support the open data site.

Ms PEASE: That is the question that I am asking: with regard to the Open Data Portal, have there been technical issues associated with the information that has come to you from Queensland Health?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Deputy Speaker: the director-general clearly outlined that the information is coming from a different department, which is the Department of Health. Therefore, it is just repetitive.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, I think the director-general has answered your previous question.

Ms PEASE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I table an extract from an RTI from Queensland Health.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Could we have that circulated, please.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, point 9 states—

Hypercare arrangements are in place from 2 to 17 February 2025, to support any technical or user-related issues following launch.

Director-General, could you advise whether your department was involved in the hypercare arrangements between those dates related to technical issues?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Repeat the question again, please, member?

Ms PEASE: Could the director-general advise whether the department was involved in the hypercare arrangements between those dates related to technical issues?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Deputy Speaker: this appears to be a Department of Health document that has been tabled, and it is dealing with descriptions in terminology which belong to Health. It does not seem to be relevant to the appropriate—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You think it is outside of the portfolio?

Mr LISTER: I suggest that it is.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Deputy Speaker: to assist you in your consideration of that matter, I draw your attention and the minister's and director-general's attention to a previous question on notice, No. 315, where the minister confirmed that a Department of Customer Services, Open Data and Small and Family Business service management representative continues to be available for technical assistance in relation to the Open Hospitals website. Therefore, I think the question is relevant.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question, however, member for Springwood, is whether this department was involved in any hypercare arrangements, not technical incidents.

Mr de BRENNI: Deputy Speaker—

Ms PEASE: I am happy to rephrase.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please do.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you advise whether your department was involved in any technical issues between 2 to 17 February regarding the health open data portal?

Mr Lamont: The department provided assurances to the Department of Health that we would be available were there to be any issues associated with the launch of the portal. The primary concern was the bandwidth of the system, so we wanted to make sure the Open Data Portal could support requests for information. The department was on standby to provide the Department of Health any assistance that was necessary during that period.

Ms PEASE: Did you provide any technical assistance?

Mr Lamont: I do not believe it was necessary. I think all the arrangements that the department put in place with the Department of Health prior to the launch were sufficient for the launch of that particular portal.

Ms PEASE: Director-General, could you provide the quantum and a description of the issues identified during that period?

Mr MINNIKIN: Point of order, Deputy Speaker: so we are crystal clear, Queensland Health use the open portal to host the data. Queensland Health remains the owner of the website. We have to be very clear here. This is beyond the director-general's remit.

Ms PEASE: I am going to move on. I table an extract of an RTI from Queensland Health. I will wait for that to be tabled.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member. We will send it to the director-general, the minister and officers, too, please.

Mr MINNIKIN: Could I have time to read this, please?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr MINNIKIN: I have a point of order. Straight off the cuff, it was said when it was tabled that this is an RTI document from Queensland Health. It is a Queensland Health ministerial briefing note. I keep repeating myself that we need to be crystal clear here. This particular question should have been asked to the health minister, who, I stand to be corrected, I do not think was actually asked a question.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister, for your point of order. Member, I am yet to hear your question; however, it is a Queensland Health briefing. I give you guidance that your question needs to relate. We have had solid advice from the director-general as to this department's role—and a limited role, perhaps—so, please, could you make your question relevant to this department.

Ms PEASE: I will hand over to my colleague.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have not heard the question yet, member, so I cannot rule anything in or out of order.

Ms PEASE: I will hand over to my colleague the member for Springwood.

Mr de BRENNI: Deputy Speaker, I have some questions of the director-general, but I acknowledge we are nearly out of time. With respect and your indulgence, perhaps we could receive that information and if there is any time remaining after that I could go to those questions? I am happy to take your instruction, though, Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: What are you referring to, member for Springwood?

Mr de BRENNI: This is the information that the director-general committed to come back to in relation to the value, period and the name of the firm providing the contracts for the QGDF, if he had that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, are you asking if that information is to hand?

Mr de BRENNI: Yes, and then I can come back if there is time.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Director-General, do you have that information?

Mr Lamont: As mentioned in the previous response, \$824,725, inclusive of GST, is the contracted amount. That is a capped amount. The company in question is Solute Consulting. It is a Queensland SME. The contract commenced on 22 July and it goes for a period of 12 months—from July 2025 to June 2026.

Mr de BRENNI: I would now like to refer you to page 21 of the Service Delivery Statements and ask that you provide some advice to the committee in relation to the statement 'discontinuation of services provided to the Department of Transport and Main Roads'. Could you advise the committee what those services were?

Mr Lamont: I understand that was services provided by QSS in respect to payroll and accounts processing. The Department of Transport and Main Roads are embarking on an update of their enterprise risk and associated support software. The staff who were transferred as a mob to this department had previously worked in that area and it was determined that those staff should return to complete that particular activity.

Mr de BRENNI: Director-General, in relation to the Corporate Administration Agency, could you inform the committee of how many new customers have been onboarded for the 2025-26 financial year?

Mr Lamont: I thank the member for the question. I would need to check that. I should be able to get a response very quickly. I just want to be 100 per cent sure we are getting the right number.

Mr de BRENNI: Thank you, Director-General. Whilst we are waiting for that—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, I am going to go to government members questions now. I am looking for the member for Townsville.

Mr MINNIKIN: Mr Deputy Speaker, with your indulgence, before we take the question from the member from Townsville—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: What would you like to be indulged upon Minister?

Mr MINNIKIN: I would like to add some information to an item in a question that was raised earlier today in relation to a particular program.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: In terms of clarification you are quite entitled to do that.

Mr MINNIKIN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, I appreciate that. I confirmed in my earlier statement that round 1 of the \$40 million Secure Communities Partnership Program targeting Labor's crime crisis was distributed through local government applications in conjunction, as I said, with business chambers and police. We are continuing to engage with the small business community on the final eligibility criteria—

Ms PEASE: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr MINNIKIN:—for over rounds 2, 3 and 4 to be distributed.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, could you pause, please? What was your point of order?

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Deputy Speaker, you have given clear instruction to the committee and to the minister in relation to the particular content of each session.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes.

Mr de BRENNI: I understand the minister wants to make comment about this but his opportunity—as he has chastised committee members—was in other sessions so the same rules should apply to him.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, thank you for your question. We are rapidly approaching the close of the session and, as is customary, the minister will have the opportunity to thank his staff and officials. Minister, I am going to go to government member questions.

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, can you update the committee on what work is being done to address the digital divide across Queensland, particularly for Indigenous communities like Palm Island in my electorate?

Mr MINNIKIN: As I have said, every Queenslanders deserves access to the internet and the opportunity to be digitally connected. My department's First Nations digital service centres program is a nation-leading initiative which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to establish community owned and run digital service centres. The program delivers against the Queensland government's objective for a better lifestyle through a stronger economy by bringing digital training and employment opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regional and remote Queensland.

In November last year, my department supported the establishment of Queensland's first First Nations digital service centre in Yarrabah which delivers digital customer services to both industry and government and clients. I had the privilege as minister to visit and formally open the Yarrabah Digital Service Centre and it was a great event. As at 30 June, the digital service centre has employed over 50 local staff and provided services to a range of industry and government clients. I would also like to add that I recently had the privilege of visiting the Kowanyama Digital Indigenous Knowledge Centre, a Crisafulli government program that is providing access to the internet, digital devices, support and innovative programs, and that was another wonderful day.

Mr LISTER: Minister, I am mindful of the fact that we are approaching the end of the session; is there anything you would like to say to wrap up or in response to questions that you have taken on notice?

Mr MINNIKIN: I thank the member for the question. As we are coming to the end of proceedings for this particular session on customer services, open data and small and family business I want to, through you, express my appreciation of the way this hearing has been conducted.

I want to thank, of course, my ministerial staff who have actually helped to make this what it is today. For the benefit of opposition members I will let them know: in relation to the Secure Communities Partnership Program we are continuing to engage with the small business community on the final eligibility criteria for a further \$30 million in grant rounds 2, 3 and 4 over the next two years. We will be ensuring, of course, that local, small and family businesses can access the scheme as was promised.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. This session has expired.

Ms PEASE: Deputy Speaker, a point of order before we close up—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: This session has expired.

Ms PEASE:—I just actually want to say thank you to the director-general, all of his staff and department for the great work they have done. To Hansard: thank you for the great work you have done—also to the ministerial officers, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Lytton.

Mr MINNIKIN: With your indulgence, may I suggest something? Did you want to get that information through to the member for Springwood before it is finally closed off?

Ms PEASE: It has already been given.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Already done. Thank you, Minister. Members, the session has expired for the examination of the estimates for the customer services and open data section of estimates today. I want to thank the minister and all the attending officials, Hansard, parliamentary staff and members of the committee.

With everyone's indulgence I want to say something, if I may. Members, this is likely to be my last session in the chair for estimates 2025. It has been an honour to chair. For about 30 hours as the Deputy Speaker I have sought to ensure compliance with standing orders and also an open, flowing process that enables scrutiny of the budget. I thank all members for their work in estimates.

Member for Chatsworth and Minister, if there was any further clarification you wanted to provide to the committee you can write to the committee. With that said, the committee will now be suspended until 1 pm when the Minister for Local Government and various other things will be here for the examination of her estimates.

Proceedings suspended from 12.17 pm to 1.00 pm.

ESTIMATES—LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE—LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND WATER; FIRE, DISASTER RECOVERY AND VOLUNTEERS

In Attendance

Hon. A Leahy, Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers

Mr Angus McCaffrey, Chief of Staff

Queensland Fire Department

Mr Stephen Smith AFSM, Commissioner

Mr Kevin Walsh AFSM, Deputy Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue

Dr Rebecca Denning, Acting Chief Operating Officer, Strategy and Corporate Services

Ms Kaylene Jones, Chief Officer, Rural Fire Service Queensland

Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

Mr Joshua Hannan, Acting Director-General

Mr Stephen Robbins, Acting Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services

Ms Bernadette Zerba, Deputy Director-General, Water Infrastructure Policy and Partnerships

Queensland Reconstruction Authority

Major General Jake Ellwood (Retd), Chief Executive Officer

Mr Andrew Nehill, Chief Finance Officer

Sunwater

Mr Glen Stockton AM, Chief Executive Officer



Mr SPEAKER: Good afternoon. We will now resume proceedings. For the benefit of those who have just joined us, I am Pat Weir, the member for Condamine and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Under the provisions of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001, I will preside over today's hearing. The members of the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee are: Mr James Lister MP, the member for Southern Downs, who is the chair; Ms Margie Nightingale MP, the member for Inala, who is the deputy chair; Mr Adam Baillie MP, the member for Townsville; Mr Mark Boothman MP, the member for Theodore; Ms Joan Pease MP, the member for Lytton; and Ms Nikki Boyd MP, the member for Pine Rivers, who is substituting for the member for Cairns. The committee is joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today.

I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the Speaker's discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting our witnesses here today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. However, I ask all present to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. Please note that the first three rows of the gallery are reserved for departmental and ministerial staff supporting the minister. Members and others who are attending to observe are welcome to sit in the remaining rows or in the gallery upstairs. I also remind everyone that food and drink are not permitted in this chamber.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2025 for the Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers. The committee will first examine the proposed expenditure in the minister's portfolio area of fire until 2 pm. The committee will then examine the proposed expenditure in the minister's portfolio area of disaster recovery and volunteers from 2 pm to 3 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the time specified for the area, as was agreed to by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House, available throughout the chamber and on the committee's webpage. I also remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly.

In respect of government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides that a member may ask any question that the committee determines will assist it in its examination of the relevant appropriation bill or otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials and departmental officers and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of fire open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish, you may make an opening statement of no more than five minutes. It has come to my attention—I am reliably informed—that it is the minister's birthday today, so happy birthday.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, thank you very much for your kind wishes. I thank the committee for the opportunity to provide this opening address. As the Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers, I have been able to work with some outstanding Queenslanders. From the amazing efforts of Queensland's councils in times of disaster to their role in the water industry or our volunteer fires keeping us safe, my ministerial portfolios are well placed to deliver a fresh start that Queenslanders deserve.

As we begin today's estimates hearing, I would like to express my gratitude to all of the outstanding staff who made this all possible. To the staff in the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers, the Queensland Fire Department and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority, I say thank you. Though I will say it throughout the afternoon, I want to make it clear that your work does not go unnoticed and I appreciate everything you do for this great state. Thank you.

This brings me to the Queensland Fire Department and the privilege I have had to work alongside them. I have seen firsthand the work they do and I cannot thank them enough. It is in this spirit that the Crisafulli government are proud to correct a decade of Labor mismanagement and neglect and to empower our frontline firefighters.

It was Labor that failed to provide any additional funding to cover the increased associated costs of the presumptive legislation workers compensation scheme. The parliament expanded the types of cancers covered by legislation but Labor failed to provide funding for it. I am proud to say that the Crisafulli government are now providing certainty for both paid and volunteer firefighters when Labor left them in the lurch. This commitment includes \$15.7 million in 2025-26 to support both paid and volunteer firefighters to access fully funded comprehensive workers compensation. The scheme provides critical financial support for injured firefighters, including for serious cancers, when they need it the most, and it was left unfunded by the previous Labor government.

Queensland now has the most comprehensive workers compensation for firefighters in Australia. This additional funding will ensure that Queensland firefighters receive the support they need for a wide range of illnesses, including women's reproductive cancers as more women choose careers in firefighting. The Crisafulli government recognises the incredible work our fires do and the risks they take each and every day. I want to make it clear that we will always support the safety and wellbeing of our fires, both paid and volunteer. Further, by actually engaging with the frontline firefighters, we can provide them with fit-for-purpose tools and resources, enabling them to get on with their important jobs in keeping Queenslanders safe.

The Crisafulli government's first budget delivers all of this and more, providing the foundations for a fresh start that Queenslanders deserve. In practical terms, this looks like over \$134 million for modernised facilities and vehicles for the Queensland Fire Department of which over \$25 million ensures that Queensland Fire and Rescue firefighters are equipped with new and replacement trucks, bolstering operational capabilities in our urban centres. Further, more than \$23 million will secure new and replacement trucks for rural fire brigades across the state. Altogether, this equates to 123 new vehicles across the Queensland Fire Department to be delivered with the sole purpose of helping to keep Queenslanders safe where they live. Funding provided for in the budget will also see new and replacement Queensland Fire and Rescue stations delivered where they are needed, in places such as Beerwah, Greater Springfield, Gympie South, Caloundra and Boonah, as well as new Rural Fire Service stations at Abbot Point, Bell Town and Mount Ossa.

As a government for all Queenslanders, the Crisafulli government is listening to the needs of rural and regional Queensland. We are doing what we promised and delivering for Queenslanders. As we conduct these estimates hearings today, I again thank the departmental officers for their work in delivering for Queensland's future.

Mr SPEAKER: We will now go to opposition members to begin the questioning.

Ms BOYD: My question is to the commissioner. Commissioner, was the Queensland Fire Department called to respond to, or advised of, an incident at the Callide Power Station on 4 April this year?

Commissioner Smith: Can I just confirm that date, member?

Ms BOYD: 4 April 2025.

Commissioner Smith: 4 April this year; thank you. I will need to—

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: sorry to interrupt you, Commissioner, but this appears to pertain to a date which predates the appropriation and the question before the committee today. I just seek your ruling on relevance.

Mr SPEAKER: It comes underneath the portfolio. So you will come back with that a bit later, will you, Commissioner?

Commissioner Smith: Yes, Mr Speaker. I will come back with some more detail through the course of this session.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Pine Rivers, you have another question?

Ms BOYD: I do; thank you, Mr Speaker. I table an article from the 1 August 2025 edition of the *Bundaberg Today* newspaper. Commissioner, firefighters in Bundaberg have stated—

We're not just disappointed by this budget. We're alarmed.

In what year will Bundaberg's second fire station be operational?

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: the question contains an imputation and it was concerning policy, which obviously is a taboo when asking an official for a response. Can I suggest that the member be asked to rephrase that question.

Mr SPEAKER: I think the commissioner is fine. He should be across this detail. I call the commissioner.

Commissioner Smith: What you are speaking to, member, is a purchase of land in Bundaberg East—a strategic land purchase—the department has made for a future Fire and Rescue station. There is no commitment for the delivery of that in the forward timetable. However, Queensland Fire and Rescue are always looking at their build programs for ensuring that there is appropriate response and the development of those locations occurs when that is in place. Currently that location is serviced by the Bundaberg station itself and a number of surrounding stations.

Ms BOYD: Commissioner, on 17 June this year in a social media reel the minister asserted that the Greater Springfield Fire and Rescue Station was delayed because of Labor. Was this your advice to the minister?

Commissioner Smith: I am not familiar with the commentary referred to, member, but Springfield has had a range of delays but now the tender is out and construction has commenced, as is my understanding.

Mr de BRENNI: I have some questions I would like to ask of the commissioner. Commissioner, I want to ask you about the Drayton Fire and Rescue Station. To assist you in answering this question and the committee, I table an RTI document. In this RTI regarding the Drayton Fire and Rescue Station and the plaque that is applied to new stations that are opened, in an email from an individual holding the title of 'ministerial liaison officer' to an Angus and an Ian in the minister's office, I draw your attention to the sentence that says—

Note with respect to the Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, QFD have included the non-specific acknowledgement as the area is undetermined at this time.

Commissioner, can you confirm for the committee that historically your department does have a non-specific acknowledgement of traditional owners for new fire stations in cases where areas are undetermined?

Commissioner Smith: Member, plaques are developed and prepared for a variety of reasons for new station openings or redevelopment of stations. In this instance for Drayton, the location you are referring to, our standard approach in our process involved recognition of generic recognition and

determination where a determination had been made. There were some concerns flagged with that. We had a conversation with the minister's office in relation to that and, based on that conversation, we have adjusted our process in order to formally recognise where determination has been made in order to avoid creating any concern amongst First Nations people.

Mr de BRENNI: Commissioner, that sounds eminently sensible to have a generic acknowledgement in those cases. I want to take you to those tabled documents before you, Commissioner, which state, particularly the email, which is on page 2, from an Angus in the minister's office—

Could you please remove the acknowledgement—I don't think it's appropriate where areas are undetermined.

There is another internal departmental email on the next page which says—

Verified with the Minister's Chief of Staff, who confirmed to not acknowledge the traditional owners.

Commissioner, can you confirm then that there was no acknowledgement of traditional owners on the plaque at this fire station?

Dr ROWAN: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. My point of order relates to the fact that some of the questioning potentially relates to policy matters which would be under the remit of the minister. I would submit to you that perhaps the question should be directed to the minister as opposed to the commissioner.

Mr SPEAKER: I think the commissioner will know about this subject. I will allow the commissioner to respond.

Commissioner Smith: Thanks, Mr Speaker. In relation to that location, yes, that plaque did not include recognition or a general recognition given determination was not established in that location.

Mr de BRENNI: I understand. Minister, another internal department email that was also revealed in a right-to-information request—and I will have that document tabled by the member for Pine Rivers as well and whilst it is coming around I will help the committee—states—

I have spoken with Angus and advised of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Action Plan 2023-25. He was aware of the policy and has reaffirmed the Minister's position to remove the Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners in locations where the traditional owners are undetermined.

Minister, why did you decide to remove the acknowledgement of country on the plaque for the new Drayton Fire and Rescue Station?

Mr SPEAKER: You have that document, Minister?

Ms LEAHY: The Queensland Fire Department has detailed branding, including service crests for the Queensland Fire Department, Queensland Fire and Rescue and the Rural Fire Service Queensland. The department works very closely with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to ensure that its internal style guides align with the government style guide. In May this year the department sought to apply the Delivering for Queensland style guide templates and applied the signature block, which is entirely without additional—

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Speaker, point of order: I have a further question in relation to signature blocks later. This was specifically around the acknowledgement of country on a plaque, so I just want the minister to come back to relevance to that question.

Mr SPEAKER: Okay and, while we are on relevance, I have allowed a bit of latitude here, but, member, could you explain to me how this reflects on the budget that we are holding this hearing into?

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Speaker, I think it is reasonable to assert that the acknowledgement of country on a plaque and signage on government buildings are matters of the expenditure of the department's portfolio.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to let the minister answer this as she will. I am saying it is probably tenuous, but I will allow the minister to answer this and then we might move on.

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Springwood for the question in relation to the plaque. What is on those plaques is part of a wider style guide. The approval process applies to Queensland Fire and Rescue and Rural Fire Service Queensland plaques. That plaque approval process has been updated.

The plaque includes specific reference to the department's Reframing the Relationship Plan, which outlines the Queensland Fire Department's commitment to building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Objective 1 of the plan is to recognise and honour and outlines the Queensland Fire Department's measures of success, which include—

New and replacement Queensland Fire and Rescue Service stations and/or composite facilities and signage in existing stations is replaced with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names through the engagement with relevant advisory bodies to ensure accurate and respectful signage.

There have been other updates to the plaque approval process included in the expansion of the department's use of plaques. There is a very wide policy in relation to this. By acknowledging traditional owners where native title determination has been made, the department endeavours to avoid unintentionally overlooking or misrepresenting other traditional owner groups—

Mr de BRENNI: Thank you.

Mr SPEAKER: Let the minister finish. I think this is important to note. Minister, if you could round out your answer.

Ms LEAHY: By acknowledging traditional owner groups where native title determination has been made, the department endeavours to avoid unintentionally overlooking or misrepresenting other traditional owner groups whose rights might still be being resolved. The Asset Services directorate validates the existence of traditional owners by research and consultation with independent external parties such as Queensland Native Title Services, the relevant Queensland Fire Department regional office and the nominated traditional owners themselves.

Mr de BRENNI: Commissioner, I am going to table another document for your benefit which indicates that in relation to the opening of the fire station an Aboriginal elder was engaged to perform a welcome or acknowledgement ceremony, as the case may be, but was then cancelled. The question is: do you know whose decision it was to cancel this welcome to or acknowledgement of country ceremony?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: can I suggest that the question before us pertains to the decisions and expenditure of government and that this is beneath the consideration.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Speaker: the minister has given a fulsome description of a policy that is administered by her department that is funded under the appropriations that we are examining. She herself just gave the exact reason this is relevant to this examination. I would ask that the commissioner answer the question.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: it is also potentially seeking an opinion and so I ask you to consider that matter as well.

Mr de BRENNI: The question was: do you know?

Mr SPEAKER: No, that is not a point of order. Commissioner, you heard the question. I will let you handle it.

Commissioner Smith: Thank you for the question.

Ms LEAHY: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek your advice in relation to how there is a relationship here between a welcome to country and plaques and also where this might be in the SDS.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Springwood, can you explain how this fits in with the proposed expenditure of the portfolio area?

Mr de BRENNI: The Fire Department is funded from these appropriations we are examining today. The minister has just outlined at length, ad nauseam, policies they administer in relation to new capital projects, including the appointment of signage and the conducting of openings, including acknowledgements of country. She herself explained to the committee why this is appropriate to consider. I restate my request that the commissioner advise us if he knows whose decision it was to cancel the welcome to or acknowledgement of country.

Mr SPEAKER: I suppose plaques do fit into expenditure. Commissioner, if you could answer the question, please.

Commissioner Smith: In the first instance, I am not aware of this decision and, to that point, I do not know who made the decision.

Mr de BRENNI: Noting that under our system of government, our democratic Westminster system, the buck stops with the minister, did you decide to remove any acknowledgement of traditional owners from this plaque and did you decide to cancel the welcome to or acknowledgement of country?

Ms LEAHY: Like the commissioner, I am not aware that there was a cancelling of the welcome to country at this particular event.

Mr de BRENNI: I ask the member for Pine Rivers to table a document which was released under right to information which indicates that an elder was engaged to perform the welcome to country which then was later cancelled. It includes a request to provide an apology to this elder. The department wanted to apologise to this elder for the decision. On the basis and in light of this information you have now been furnished with, do you know whose decision it was to cancel the welcome to country or acknowledgement? Was it your decision?

Mr SPEAKER: Member, I cannot see that on this document. Where are you referring to on this document?

Mr de BRENNI: It is an email. It was one of the earlier tabled documents. There was a jump of the gun there. It is an email addressed to AC Stuart dated 8 January 2025.

Mr SPEAKER: That was the previous document, was it?

Mr de BRENNI: Yes. My apologies, Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: And the question was to?

Mr de BRENNI: To the minister. In light of reading this material that indicates that the department, in fact, sought approval for an apology to the elder for cancelling the welcome to country, can the minister tell us if it was her decision to cancel this welcome to or acknowledgement of country or remove the acknowledgement of traditional owners from the plaque?

Mr BAILLIE: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister was asked that question one question ago and I thought she answered that question.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, I will let you answer.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, we want to take a little minute to read this information.

Mr SPEAKER: It is on the second page of the previous tabling.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order—

Ms LEAHY: Can I confirm the RTI number to confirm this document?

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Springwood, do you have that at all? I believe it is at the bottom of the page in red.

Mr de BRENNI: RTI/21562.

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for the question. As I said previously, I was not aware of any cancelling of any welcome to country event.

Mr SPEAKER: We will now go to government members for questions.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, can you advise why Queenslanders received a letter about an increase to their emergency management levy?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Theodore for the concern he shows for his constituents. The Crisafulli government promised to respect taxpayers' money. In relation to the letters that were sent to people in his electorate and many areas across the state, my understanding is that people did not know about this particular increase in the emergency management levy prior to the election. Some 30,000 people—mums and dads—were to be impacted by that increase in their emergency management levy. I will point out some of the affected areas around the state. In the Rockhampton Regional Council district, people were not informed that their emergency management levy was to increase by \$124 per annum. They were not advised of that prior to the election by the previous government. In the Livingstone Shire Council, another 260 property owners were to see an increase of \$124 per annum. In the Bundaberg regional district, in the Elliott Heads area, some 750 property owners were not informed by the previous Labor government of the increase in their emergency management levy of \$124 per annum.

In the South Burnett and Kingaroy area, some 5,000 property owners were not advised of an increase of \$50 per annum in their emergency services levy. In the Sunshine Coast area, some 5,000 property owners were not advised by the previous Labor government of an increase of \$124 per annum

in their emergency services levy. In the Maroochydore-Coolum area, some 13,000 property owners were not advised prior to the election by the Labor Party government of an increase in their levy. In the Gold Coast city council area, where the member for Theodore is from, some 5,490 property owners were not advised prior to the state election by the Labor government of the increase of \$124 in their levy. In the Douglas Shire Council area, people were not advised of an increase of \$74 in their emergency services levy. In the Whitsunday-Airlie Beach area, some 620 property owners were not advised that their emergency services levy would increase by \$74 per annum. It is very disappointing that there was no transparency under the previous government in relation to those particular increases. That is very disappointing for those people.

The Crisafulli LNP government respects taxpayers' money. We have made sure that those 30,000 Queenslanders will not have those huge increases in their emergency management levy. Sunshine Coast's Mayor Natoli said—

This is a great example of advocacy in action, fighting for our residents when costs cannot be justified.

The mayor thanked us for listening to their concerns and reversing the decision. It is very disappointing that there was no transparency from the previous government in a cost-of-living crisis. Those increases were hidden prior to the election. We did not see any transparency from the previous Labor government with regard to those increases. We have stopped those increases which would have impacted hardworking mums and dads.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I refer to page 2 of the SDS and the minister's opening statement. The government is working to provide \$15.7 million to support firefighters to access the presumptive legislation workers compensation scheme. Can you give further context to this?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Theodore for his compassion for people who are impacted by the need for presumptive legislation for workers compensation. Studies have continuously shown that firefighters are at a higher risk of developing cancer than individuals in the general population. I recognise that the member for Theodore is a volunteer for some of the rural fire brigades in his area. We need to ensure that if those who look after our communities are struck by insidious diseases as a result of their service then we look after them. The presumptive legislation workers compensation scheme is an incredibly important scheme that provides both our paid and volunteer firefighters with critical financial support when they need it most. I want to emphasise that it also applies to our volunteer firefighters. It is particularly important that we emphasise that.

The previous parliament broadened the insurances, including the presumptive legislation workers compensation scheme. As of today, up to 23 types of cancer are listed in this legislation including mesothelioma, brain cancer, breast cancer, leukaemia, lung cancer and thyroid cancer. However, the former Labor government failed to provide any additional funding to cover the increased associated costs. They failed to provide funding for this important scheme when in government, once again leaving those who keep our state safe high and dry. It is very disappointing.

Despite Labor's failures, Queensland firefighters can rest assured that they will have continued access to comprehensive workers compensation with \$15.7 million in funding allocated by the Crisafulli government in the 2025-26 budget, forming part of additional funding of over \$73 million over five years from 2024-25. We recognise the crucial role that firefighters play in our communities. The Crisafulli government have their back. We will always support the safety and wellbeing of paid and volunteer firefighters because they are the people who turn up in times of disaster and they are the people who are there to help Queenslanders who are most in need and call triple 0.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, can you please give an update on how the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government is delivering for the electorate of Moggill, specifically with reference to the Queensland Fire Department?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Moggill for his interest in firefighting, particularly in his area of Moggill. The Queensland Fire Department provides fire and rescue services to communities across Queensland. Its priority is to respond to fires and emergencies that threaten life, property or the environment by providing support to communities before and after their times of need. The Queensland Fire Department is also a key partner agency under Queensland's disaster management arrangements across a range of hazards and the Fire Department have been particularly busy this year with the number of disasters that we have had across the state. Currently, 73 of 77 councils are disaster declared. The Fire Department provide a multi-hazard response including to structure fires, road crash

rescues, bushfires and hazardous materials; technical rescues including vertical, swiftwater and floodwater rescues; and disaster assistance responses and they have been very busy in the area of disaster assistance response. They provide a number of functions supporting community safety outcomes.

There are two fire and rescue stations located within the Moggill electorate. The Pullenvale Fire and Rescue Station, in the greater Brisbane region, has a staffing establishment of five station officers and 18 firefighters. The station has a type 3 appliance. From 1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024, the Pullenvale Fire and Rescue Station responded to some 222 incidents. They have been very busy in the electorate of the member for Moggill.

The Karana Downs Fire and Rescue Station in the southern region has a staffing establishment of four station officers and 14 firefighters. The station has a type 3 appliance. From 1 July 2024 to 30 December 2024, the Karana Downs Fire and Rescue Station responded to 178 incidents. The Rural Fire Service is a community-based volunteer emergency service and a lead service in the control and prevention of bush and grass fires in Queensland. I have travelled a number of times through your electorate of Moggill, and I can see how critically important it is to have that Rural Fire Service in your area.

In the Moggill electorate there is one rural fire brigade and, as at 31 December 2024, the Brookfield Rural Fire Brigade has 70 volunteer members and one station. It actively engages with partners throughout the network of area fire management groups in identifying areas of high risk and planning mitigation activities such as hazard reduction burns when the conditions allow. With the introduction of the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System, the old fire danger rating signs located around Queensland, which required manual adjustment, are to be removed and replaced with modern, digital signs.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, in recognition of Rural Fire Service Queensland Week last week, will you update the committee on how the Queensland Fire Department is recognising the efforts of our volunteers, please?

Ms LEAHY: Thank you for this question in relation to Rural Fire Service Queensland Week. We in the Crisafulli government are very proud to recognise the dedicated Queensland volunteer heroes. Rural Fire Service Queensland Week provided us with an important opportunity to recognise the staff and volunteer efforts of the Rural Fire Service Queensland and to extend our gratitude for their unwavering commitment to protecting communities.

I was very pleased to join the Orange Hill Rural Fire Brigade to launch Rural Fire Service Queensland Week. There are over 27,000 volunteers and over 1,400 brigades in the Rural Fire Service, and they go over, above and beyond to keep Queenslanders safe. During Rural Fire Service Queensland Week, a number of activities were held throughout the state to thank our volunteers for their efforts, including award ceremonies, barbecues and shed open days. One of the best parts of Rural Fire Service Queensland Week is recognising those Rural Fire Service volunteers who go above and beyond. We have awards for the Volunteer of the Year, the Young Volunteer of the Year and the Brigade of the Year.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally put on the record this year's winners from across Queensland. For Volunteer of the Year, we had: David Beil from the Doomadgee Rural Fire Brigade in the northern region—he was also a state winner; Carey Mitchell from the Burnett Heads Rural Fire Brigade in the central region; John Archer from the Cambooya Rural Fire Brigade in the south-west region, which I believe might be in Mr Speaker's electorate or the electorate of Southern Downs; and Jesse Radatti from the Birnam Rural Fire Brigade in the south-east region.

The Young Volunteer of the Year award went to: Andrew Hepburn from the Belmont Rural Fire Brigade in the central region; Haylee Haynes from the Tumoulin Rural Fire Brigade in the northern region; and Isaac Brailsford from the North Stradbroke Island Rural Fire Brigade in the south-east region, who was also a state winner.

The Brigade of the Year—and I am exceptionally proud to put this one on the record—was the Thargomindah Rural Fire Brigade in the south-west region. They were the State Brigade of the Year and they did a tremendous job during the floods in the town of Thargomindah. The other brigades of the year were: the Hatton Vale Summerholm Rural Fire Brigade in the south-eastern region; the Childers Rural Fire Brigade in the central region; and the Tinaroo Rural Fire Brigade in the northern region.

The citations of our state winners are particularly inspiring. With the committee's indulgence, I would like to reflect on each of them briefly. Volunteer of the Year David Beil, who is from the Doomadgee Rural Fire Brigade, has an unwavering dedication to support the needs of the Doomadgee community whilst navigating the complexities of rural and remote boundaries. David displayed resilience and integrity through maintaining an innovative spirit and forward-thinking approach, which has helped initiate a positive change and contributions within the Doomadgee community.

Young Volunteer of the Year Isaac Brailsford, who is from the North Stradbroke Island Rural Fire Brigade, had the initiative to take on a communications role in developing strategies for effective community engagement. Isaac's commitment and diligence to commute across to the island for fire brigade responsibilities without hesitation or complaint displayed a very strong team attitude. Isaac supports the brigade through being a leader and embodying the Queensland Fire Department's shared values, contributing not just operationally but strategically as well.

In Thargomindah, the rural fire brigade continually demonstrate their dedication in responding to incidents and protecting their community, which was particularly highlighted during their recent heightened operations. Their efforts in maintaining community spirit and providing support through challenging periods reflect the true values of the Rural Fire Service Queensland and the resilience of the brigade members in supporting their communities during times of need, particularly during that disaster period.

Mr SPEAKER: I will go to non-government members for the next question.

Mr de BRENNI: I will ask a couple more quick ones, and then I will hand back to the member for Inala. Minister, you have now had time to confer with the author of those emails—and I believe Angus is sitting next to you. The documents I have circulated show he confirmed it was your decision to remove the acknowledgement from the plaque. Can you now confirm who made the decision to cancel the elders for their acknowledgement of country?

Ms LEAHY: I have not had the opportunity to confer with the people you have mentioned. I am not aware who made the decision. I am not aware of that.

Mr de BRENNI: That is fine. Minister, the right-to-information documents I circulated show your office discussed the removal of the recognition of Aboriginal people from the plaque against departmental policy. We have established that someone decided to cancel the elder doing the acknowledgement, but you have said you do not know who. I have also circulated an email which states that departments are no longer permitted to add additional departmental branding elements such as a First Nations acknowledgement. Minister, do you have a problem with First Nations people?

Mr SPEAKER: No. That had a clear imputation at the end of it. Either you rephrase the question or I will rule it out of order, member for Springwood.

Mr de BRENNI: I do not think there is a way I can rephrase that.

Mr SPEAKER: In that case, I rule it out of order.

Ms LEAHY: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I take personal offence at the comments made by the member for Springwood and I ask that he withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: The member has taken personal offence and asks that you withdraw.

Mr de BRENNI: I withdraw.

Ms BOYD: It has now been some 40 minutes since I asked the commissioner whether the Fire Department was called to respond to or was advised of an incident at the Callide Power Station on or around 4 April this year. Does the commissioner now have a response?

Commissioner Smith: Yes, I do have a response. The question was whether QFD responded to or was advised of an incident at the Callide Power Station on 4 April 2025. QFD has no record of being notified nor of responding to an incident at the Callide Power Station on that date.

Ms BOYD: Sorry, Commissioner, just to be clear: you were advised of the incident but there was no response to the incident?

Commissioner Smith: No, that is not correct. We have no record of being notified or of responding.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Commissioner, is the implementation of the accepted recommendations of the Prominence report still being overseen by Kristen Hilton?

Commissioner Smith: The independent review by Prominence Consulting into the complaints management system and the series of recommendations provided is subject to independent assurance. We have engaged Kristen Hilton and she continues to provide that advice to the department in order for us to ensure that we meet the intention of those recommendations and attain best practice in our complaints management process.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Minister, how many times have you met with Kristen Hilton to discuss the important cultural reform work?

Ms LEAHY: We will have to go back and check our diary records. We will come back at the end of the session with regard to that.

Mr SPEAKER: It is not long until to end of this session.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Minister, those records do not show a meeting. Are you able to explain that?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: there is an imputation in there because we know the minister is obliged to diarise all of her meetings. If it is not there then the meeting did not occur and I think the member has conceded that in her question.

Ms BOYD: Commissioner, how many medium attack appliances does RFSQ currently have in the fleet?

Commissioner Smith: In terms of medium attack appliances, I will look to get those figures for you very shortly. Currently in the RFSQ fleet there are 1,030 vehicles. That includes 699 medium attack appliances.

Ms BOYD: Commissioner, is it correct that 200 of these are fitted with deluge systems?

Commissioner Smith: A retrofit of deluge systems was applied to some of our existing fleet and our new appliances are coming out of production with a deluge system attached. I would have to seek some specific advice on your question if the question relates to the total number in our fleet now given the combination of those things.

Ms BOYD: Of retrofits?

Commissioner Smith: I will have to come back before the end of session with some more detail.

Ms BOYD: What is the current status of the contract to retrofit 210 more deluge systems to the medium attack appliances in the fleet—a project for which tenders closed in late 2024?

Commissioner Smith: In terms of the second tranche of our retrofitting of appliances, that approach to market proved to be unable to meet our requirements at that point in time. Funding remains committed and the department remains committed to achieving that second tranche of work. We are currently working our way through improving our understanding of the technical requirements for each of those trucks in order to be able to reapproach the market to get a better response to achieve that outcome.

Ms BOYD: Commissioner, in relation to this program of retrofitting deluge systems on medium attack appliances, can you provide the committee with how many medium attack appliances are currently in the RFSQ fleet that do not have a deluge system?

Commissioner Smith: That will be a question we will have to seek some specifics on given the nature of the programs that are underway.

Mr SPEAKER: Will you come back to the committee on that?

Commissioner Smith: Yes, in this session we will endeavour to come back to you. Member, so you are specifically after the number of medium attack appliances that are not equipped with a deluge system?

Ms BOYD: Correct. Commissioner, an uplift of 114 FTEs for RFSQ was budgeted, with 67 FTEs in 2023-24 and 47 FTEs in 2024-25. How many of these are substantively filled and how many are substantively vacant as of today?

Commissioner Smith: The recruitment of 114 FTE into Rural Fire Service Queensland is ongoing. In terms of the figures as of today, I will have to come back to you by the end of the session with some more detail.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Pine Rivers, this will be the last question before I give the member for Townsville a question.

Ms BOYD: Commissioner, how many station officer positions are there substantively filled now and how many are substantively vacant?

Commissioner Smith: In terms of our station officer numbers, I will have to seek some further information for you before the end of the session. You are asking for current FTE station officers and current vacant station officer positions?

Ms BOYD: Substantively filled and substantively vacant across the state?

Mr SPEAKER: We will move to government questions.

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, I understand there were a number of members of the public who assisted in the recent Torrens Creek fire and they are rightfully seeking reimbursement for some of their expenses in assisting in that incident. How is the government assisting them?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Townsville for his advocacy for our fires. I understand the Queensland Fire Department has engaged with stakeholders involved in the Torrens Creek and Pentland fire and is finalising the reimbursement for their contributions during that particular incident. To this end, the department has recently provided reimbursement to two commercial operators and four private landowners who engaged a commercial operator to assist. As of 5 August these six reimbursements amounted to nearly \$130,000 including GST. I am advised by the department that two additional invoices are anticipated from landowners. It was an exceptionally large fire at Torrens Creek. Landowners engaged commercial operators to assist in the firefighting effort and these invoices will be paid promptly by the department.

The Queensland Fire Department is also actively engaging with rural fire brigades across the state, including the Torrens Creek Rural Fire Brigade, to ensure that they are supported in their operational response to incidents such as the fire that we saw at Torrens Creek. The department is currently investigating ways to enable reimbursement to alternatively engaged commercial operators through policy revision. I am sure that members of the committee will appreciate the varying complexities involved with such matters. There are considerable complexities with regard to the regulatory operating environment.

Mr SPEAKER: Commissioner, do you have any of the responses that you can share?

Commissioner Smith: Not at this point, Mr Speaker.

Mr LISTER: Minister, noting that we are very close to the end of this session, could I suggest that you might wish to sum up or provide any other things you would like to say.

Ms LEAHY: I would like table this document from the *Gympie News* today.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I did not hear the member for Southern Downs ask the minister a question. Is there a question?

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Southern Downs, is there a question?

Mr LISTER: Minister, do you have anything to say before this session ends?

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: that is not a question examining the appropriations.

Mr SPEAKER: Do you have a question? We have less than one minute left.

Mr de BRENNI: Yes. Commissioner, how many rural fire trucks are there due for delivery in 2025-26 and how many rural fire trucks will the 2025-26 budget allocation purchase?

Mr SPEAKER: Commissioner, you have 20 seconds.

Commissioner Smith: To ensure the accuracy of that answer in the timeframe, member, I will come back to you with the detail by the end of this session.

Mr SPEAKER: The time allocated for consideration of the proposed expenditure for the minister's area of fire has now concluded. It is now time for consideration of the proposed expenditure for the minister's area of disaster recovery and volunteers. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of disaster recovery and volunteers open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you may, if you wish, make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, while we are changing personnel, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. Queensland is the most disaster-prone state in the country—73 of 77 councils have been disaster declared this year, with 17 disaster events throughout the 2024-25 season. We also began this year with three major disasters in quick succession. The North and Far North tropical low, ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred and the Western Queensland floods rocked the state one after another.

I cannot thank enough the efforts of everyone involved with both the disaster response and the recovery. I especially note the efforts of our emergency services and volunteers keeping Queenslanders safe and rebuilding our communities in need. Hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders were impacted. The Crisafulli government were there in these communities in the north, the south-east and the west of the state.

I saw firsthand the devastation. When we talk about these disasters, we are talking about Queenslanders—mums and dads and children—who have experienced these events. Homes, businesses, farms, roads and councils were all impacted. Hundreds of thousands of livestock were also washed away in the Western Queensland event. That is why this work is so important to me and the outstanding staff at the Queensland Reconstruction Authority.

I have said many times that, when it comes to disaster recovery, the Crisafulli government are there for the long haul. These events have a long tail of recovery and it requires dedicated support. To date we have delivered almost \$1.2 billion in joint state and Commonwealth funded extraordinary assistance packages—from grants supporting our primary producers, small businesses and not-for-profits to historic environmental recovery packages and exclusion fencing support. We have been there for Queenslanders every step of the way and we will continue to do so as we deliver further disaster recovery and support.

I would like to turn to my volunteering portfolio. Our state thrives because of our volunteers. Every hour they give freely and without expectation to make someone's life a little easier and a little brighter. In times of crisis they are there. In times of need they step up. In everyday moments they make community life better, and their efforts to keep Queensland moving forward are greatly appreciated. Quite simply, volunteers keep our great state running.

When natural disasters strike—whether it is floods, bushfires or cyclones—often volunteers are first on the ground and the last to leave. Whether it is the Red Cross volunteers I met in Townsville who flew in for the floods or the Lifeline volunteers lending a hand for Queenslanders without power in the wake of Alfred, thank you. To our SES and our rural fires keeping communities safe in our times of need and in the aftermath, thank you. To our volunteers who keep running the Ekka and our agricultural shows, which are the heartbeats of our rural and regional communities, thank you.

It is this very committee that has heard their stories through the parliamentary inquiry. I look forward to receiving the committee report next month. For nearly a decade volunteers' voices were not heard. We are changing that by removing the barriers to volunteering and hearing those voices. I look forward to continuing in this space, meeting and engaging with those selfless Queenslanders who give their time and efforts for our communities.

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I look forward to engaging with the committee on these portfolios.

Mr SPEAKER: We will go to opposition members for the first question.

Ms BOYD: My first question is to the CEO of the QRA. I table a media release which states that Mr Andrew Cripps was the Premier's pick for the State Recovery Coordinator role in the recent North Queensland flood event. In fact, Mr Cripps is quoted as saying, 'I had no hesitation in accepting the Premier's request to serve in this role.' CEO, how many times during the period of your tenure have appointments to state recovery coordinator positions been made to people not on the state recovery coordinator register?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker. My point of order in relation to the question as asked by the member for Pine Rivers, under standing order 115, is that there was a lengthy preamble. I ask you to consider that matter with respect to the question as asked.

Mr SPEAKER: It was a long question. It probably put a bit of context around the question. CEO, could you respond to that?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I question the relevance to the appropriation that we are considering here in the question before us. These are matters for the Premier's decision. It is a question of policy rather than operations. I suggest that the question should be ruled out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: No. I am not accepting that as a point of order. The question is to the CEO. He can answer it as he sees fit.

Mr Ellwood: We do have a state recovery coordinator register. Firstly, I would note that there is no legislative requirement for it to be used to progress an appointment. I would also say that it has not been uncommon to select state recovery coordinators who are not on that list. I would cite Paul de Jersey, a former governor, as being one, and I myself, as a state recovery coordinator for the 2021-22 floods, was not on the list. There is no requirement. We currently have 24 people on the state recovery coordinator register. Of those, 16 are former state recovery coordinators and deputy state recovery coordinators and eight are potential state recovery coordinators and deputy state recovery coordinators.

Ms BOYD: CEO, the question was specific to your tenure. How many appointments to the state recovery coordinator positions during your tenure have been made to people not on the register? Would you be able to look into that and get back to us?

Mr Ellwood: Absolutely.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I again refer to the question before us—that the proposed expenditure be agreed to—and the appropriation before us. The question significantly predates the appropriation because Major General Ellwood's tenure extends well beyond the commencement of this budget. I suggest that you rule in those terms, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Member, could you explain to the committee how this relates to the expenditure of disaster recovery and volunteers?

Ms BOYD: I would be delighted to, Mr Speaker. Page 13 of the SDS speaks to the key deliverables, one of which is to 'continue to coordinate and deliver responsive recovery activities'. The people who do that are the very people we are talking about today.

Mr SPEAKER: CEO, I will allow the question.

Mr Ellwood: I will take that on notice and we will get back to you in this session.

Ms BOYD: I table the minister's May diary. I will wait for you to get a copy. CEO, I will take you to 13 May, if I may. Apologies, the pages are not numbered. The minister's diary shows that on 13 May she met with Colonel Justin O'Connor and Peter Matic in their capacity as state recovery coordinators. You attended that meeting as CEO; is that correct?

Mr Ellwood: According to this, yes, but I could not give you assurance of that because I do not have my diary with me.

Ms BOYD: On the same day, as per the minister's diary, CEO, there was a meeting that occurred with Stuart Mackenzie and Troy Pukallus in their roles as Western Queensland Surface Trough and Associated Flooding state recovery coordinators. You attended that meeting, CEO; correct?

Mr Ellwood: Again I will provide the same answer. On this paper it would suggest I was, but I cannot give you confirmation personally because I do not have my diary with me.

Ms BOYD: I will take you to 16 May and the same tabled documents. The minister's diary indicates there was a disaster recovery meeting with Mr Andrew Cripps, the North and Far North Tropical Low State Recovery Coordinator and Mr Drew Alexion, principal adviser to Mr Cripps and formerly an adviser in the Newman government. CEO, you were not in attendance at that meeting; is that correct?

Dr ROWAN: Mr Speaker, point of order: the questioning has become repetitive. The chief executive officer has already said, in answer to the previous two questions, that he does not have his diary available to furnish, so I would suggest to you this is becoming a repetitive line of questioning.

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: the government is accountable to parliament and this committee for its actions, its expenditure under the appropriation we are considering. Questions of who was where when, particularly concerning the CEO himself, appear to be irrelevant to the proceedings and I suggest, Mr Speaker, that you rule it as such.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Speaker, point of order: all of the individuals on that side of the table take a salary funded by taxpayers through the appropriations we are examining today. I think Queenslanders would think a line of questioning about what they do with their time is entirely relevant.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to allow the question but, member for Pine Rivers, I will need some clarity about where this is going after this. I call the CEO to respond to this question.

Mr Ellwood: My response would be the same. I do not have my diary. According to this, I was not.

Ms BOYD: My next question is to the minister. Minister, why was the CEO not part of that conversation? Is it because you had a party political conversation about—

Dr ROWAN: Mr Speaker, point of order.

Ms BOYD:—disaster recovery with these two political appointees?

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Moggill, what is your point of order?

Dr ROWAN: In relation to the question as asked by the member for Pine Rivers, there is clearly an imputation and inferences contained within the question and I would ask that it be ruled out of order.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mr Speaker, point of order: the member is being argumentative.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Speaker, point of order: I would simply ask that the members asking questions be allowed to complete their questions before interjections on points of order. That is something you have ruled on many times throughout these hearings.

Mr SPEAKER: It is. I will remind all members that I will hear the question before I take any points of.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Speaker, point of order: in relation to my point of order, I would submit to you that, in relation to your previous rulings about statements and commentary, there was a clear intent by the member for Pine Rivers to have that statement and commentary on the record with respect to the question as put, and that is in breach of your previous rulings with respect to those matters which have been canvassed a number of times this week.

Mr SPEAKER: There have been some good points in the points of order. Member for Pine Rivers, I have been clear that I will not accept any commentary. We have will have questions only. If I think there is a deliberate flouting of that ruling, then I will take action. I am going to ask you to rephrase your question because there was a clear imputation in that question. If you want to ask that question without the imputation, ask again.

Ms BOYD: My question is to the minister. Minister, why was the CEO of the QRA in attendance at meetings on 13 May with state disaster recovery coordinators and not the meeting on 16 May?

Ms LEAHY: We have had a number of different meetings with state recovery coordinators, some when the CEO of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority would have been available and some when he may not have been available. We would have to go back through the diaries to have a look at all of the different meetings we have had, because we have had numerous meetings with our state recovery coordinators. It is part of the normal course to keep in touch with them on a very regular basis.

Ms BOYD: I table a media report. Within this media report it says that the minister was 'stripped' of community recovery responsibilities. The article states that decision was made on Tuesday, 1 April.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Mr Speaker, point of order: from my understanding, that is a matter that falls within the prerogative of the Premier and cabinet.

Ms BOYD: I have not asked a question yet.

Mr SPEAKER: We will wait for the question. Member for Pine Rivers, what is your question?

Ms BOYD: Minister, during the sitting week commencing 1 April 2025 you made a number of contributions on disaster recovery and your ministerial responsibilities here in the House. Why did you not update the House about you being 'stripped' of community recovery responsibilities?

Mr SPEAKER: I will allow the minister to answer this.

Ms LEAHY: I think what the member is trying to get at here is people being sacked from their positions. I might just make the point that it is the members opposite who have been sacked by Queenslanders from their positions, and that is the reason they are sitting on the other side of the table here.

Mr de BRENNI: Mr Speaker, point of order: the member is debating the question. The question was specifically about her actions in the House. I ask you to bring her back to a relevant answer to that question.

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: if we are to accept what the member for Springwood said, I would suggest this is a matter about accountability to the House. It is not pertinent to the question before us about whether the expenditure be agreed to and the appropriations we are considering.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Speaker, point of order: in relation to the point of order from the Manager of Opposition Business, the minister was barely into her response to the question as asked. She was being responsive to the question as asked. The committee will be interested in that response, and I submit to you she should be allowed to finish her response.

Mr SPEAKER: Coming back to the member for Southern Downs' point of order, we are considering the expenditure for this portfolio area. Member for Pine Rivers, I am struggling to get the connection so far. If you cannot specifically explain how this relates to the portfolio of expenditure we will move on.

Ms BOYD: I am happy to move to another question. My next question is to the acting director-general, Mr Hannan. Acting Director-General, has there been any money set aside from this budget to respond to recommendations from the volunteering inquiry?

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: I respectfully suggest that question effectively pre-empts the work of the committee and that inquiry.

Mr SPEAKER: Are you saying it is not one for these estimates hearings?

Mr LISTER: The committee has not reported yet, Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: We have had this issue a couple of times.

Mr LISTER: Therefore, the question is entirely hypothetical if there is nothing to provide for.

Mr SPEAKER: The question was around funds set aside in the budget, as I heard it. He can certainly answer the question. The question is in order.

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: the question, as I recall, specifically asked about recommendations of the committee to do with the volunteering inquiry. As such, since there are none, the question is entirely hypothetical and should be ruled out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Pine Rivers, could you ask the question again so we are clear?

Ms BOYD: Acting Director-General, has any money been set aside from the budget to respond to recommendations from the volunteering inquiry?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: again, following on from the point of order from the member for Southern Downs, this is completely hypothetical. The acting director-general is not Nostradamus. He cannot predict what the committee is going to put.

Mr SPEAKER: The question is asking if there are any funds set aside in this budget.

Mr LISTER: To the recommendations of the committee, and there are none.

Mr SPEAKER: There are no recommendations from the committee. Could you rephrase the question?

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Speaker: could I perhaps assist? Just to set aside the argument of the question being hypothetical, we are not asking what the recommendations will be. We are asking the assistant director-general a matter of fact—that is, whether or not any funds have been set aside for that purpose, whatever the purpose might be. That is a matter of fact. It is quite simple. It is not hypothetical whatsoever.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: can I respectfully suggest that the fundamental question as it was put twice refers to the recommendations of the committee. There are no such recommendations, and I know that because I am the chair of the committee. We are the committee. As such, it is impossible to contend otherwise than that the question is hypothetical.

Mr SPEAKER: Acting Director-General, you have heard all of these points of order. I am going to allow you to answer as you will.

Mr Hannan: In relation to the question, it would be inappropriate for me to make a comment on recommendations of the committee. I note that the estimated timeline for the committee in relation to the presentation of their report is September this year, so it would be inappropriate for me to make a comment on those recommendations. What I can say, though, is that the department has a dedicated team for volunteering so we would have within our budget the staffing costs associated with that dedicated team. I am advised it is the first time in recent times that there has been a dedicated team set aside for work on volunteering. In relation to the specific question, I cannot make a comment on the costings related to potential recommendations. I expect that they would be subject then to cabinet consideration in terms of budget appropriation.

Ms BOYD: Thank you. Minister, whistleblowers have told the opposition that in conversations you say that you want the inquiry into volunteering in Queensland to deliver three to four recommendations with no cost to government. Minister, have you said words to that effect?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: can we have a verification of these comments?

Mr SPEAKER: I was just about to ask that. Member for Pine Rivers, can you authenticate what you have just said? Do you have any documentation?

Ms BOYD: Yes, I can. It was through whistleblowers.

Mr SPEAKER: But you cannot present that to the committee?

Ms BOYD: It was under whistleblower protections, Mr Speaker.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: can the member refer to exactly what protection she is speaking of and how they are relevant to our activities in the Queensland parliament considering the appropriation before us? Otherwise, she should disclose.

Mr SPEAKER: Member, if you do not have anything to authenticate that, could you rephrase the question, perhaps.

Ms BOYD: I would love to. Minister, is it correct that you have told stakeholders that you want the volunteering in Queensland inquiry to deliver three to four recommendations with no cost to government?

Ms LEAHY: I might note that the previous Labor government did not have a minister for volunteering. This is a considerable difference between the previous Labor government and the Crisafulli government, where we actually do have a minister dedicated to volunteering. Also, on 11 December 2024 we established the parliamentary inquiry into volunteering in Queensland which has been referred to this parliamentary committee, the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee. The inquiry delivers on a key commitment of the Queensland government's 100-day plan.

The committee has received over 560 submissions, and I am delighted with the number of volunteers who have come forward to make those submissions. The committee has heard directly from volunteers and organisations using volunteers in 13 different public hearings held to date, and I believe there are some more public hearings in the future. We have had peak bodies, large and small organisations involving volunteers, councils, academics and individual volunteers from across the state participate in the public inquiry consultation process.

The committee is due to report to parliament in September 2025, and the Queensland government will respond to the committee's recommendations within a number of months after that. We are really looking forward to a wide range of recommendations from the committee. A Volunteering Policy and Engagement unit has been established within the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers to support the development of the government's response to the committee's report, without pre-empting what the committee's recommendations might be.

The Volunteering Queensland *State of volunteering in Queensland 2024 report* identifies that the number of Queenslanders who volunteer has fallen by more than 10 per cent, and I note that that happened under the previous government at the height of the pandemic. Issues that the volunteer sector faces include: difficulty attracting and retaining volunteers, an increasingly complex operating environment, cost pressures and barriers to emergency response in volunteering. It was the right time to dig deeper into these issues and others that have come forward through the committee's inquiry process to see what we can do to turn the trend of the decline in volunteer numbers that we saw under the previous Labor government.

My department has also established a Volunteering Advisory Forum to engage with key representative stakeholders to help shape the Queensland government's response to the committee's inquiry. On the forum we have representatives of the Australian Red Cross, the Community First Development, the Local Government Association of Queensland, QSport, the Queensland Resources Council, the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland, Volunteering Queensland, Queenslanders with Disability Network and the Queensland Youth Volunteer of the Year. I addressed the forum at the inaugural meeting, held on 7 July 2025. Establishing the stakeholder forum signals a key step forward to getting ourselves ready to respond to the committee's findings in a practical and positive way for the sector.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to go to government members now for questions.

Mr LISTER: Minister, can you outline to the committee the disaster recovery support that the Crisafulli government has delivered throughout Queensland?

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt, but it is very difficult to hear the member. Could the microphone be moved closer so we can hear the question?

Mr SPEAKER: It is usually not very hard to hear the member for Southern Downs. I am surprised by that, member for Springwood.

Mr LISTER: I will summon my inner 'Emu Swamp Dam'.

Mr de BRENNI: I am sorry to interrupt you.

Mr LISTER: Not at all. Minister, would you please outline for the committee the disaster recovery assistance that the Crisafulli government has delivered to Queenslanders?

Ms LEAHY: The member for Southern Downs will have to wait until the next session in relation to Emu Swamp Dam because this is our disaster and recovery and volunteers section. The member knows all too well how important it is to deliver support throughout all corners of the state. That includes our rural and regional communities who, for the better part of a decade, were neglected by previous Labor governments and thought that Queensland's borders stopped at the outskirts of Brisbane, somewhere along the Bremer River. Now, for the first time in a long time, rural and regional Queenslanders are having their voices heard. The Crisafulli government appreciates these communities and is proud to be a government delivering for all Queenslanders. This includes disaster support which is quite extensive, given the disaster impacts that we have seen earlier this year.

We have braced for 17 disaster events throughout the 2024-25 season which has seen 73 of 77 councils disaster declared. When you look at the map, practically the entire state has faced disaster this year. At every opportunity, the Crisafulli government has committed to its continued support for these Queenslanders in need. We promised we would be there every step of the way and we are doing exactly what we promised. The Crisafulli government is in it for the long haul because we know that Queenslanders will take their time and need that support for their recovery.

It is the most disaster-prone state and we sometimes take for granted how impactful these events are on our communities which is why it is important that we deliver effective support. This looks like immediate short and medium-term responses, in conjunction with long-term support that looks to rebuilding and then strengthening these communities well into the future. My role looks primarily to the infrastructure support, but it also includes providing councils and communities with the tools they need to not only recover and survive but also thrive after a disaster is over—things like mental health, social, sporting, tourism, environmental and legal assistance support that look to the life of these communities.

From the member's electorate in Southern Downs on the New South Wales border, the southern part of our state, right up to the Far North in the Cape York, we have delivered almost \$1.2 billion in disaster support—\$1.2 billion towards Queenslanders in need. This is a joint Commonwealth/state initiative under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. This has seen us work with all levels of government to deliver support—with the Commonwealth government and also our local governments. I want to thank the Commonwealth government and also NEMA for their continued support and collaboration when we have asked them for assistance for people in Queensland. I also thank the councils, some members of which have been personally impacted—some mayors have been personally impacted and also their council chambers and their staff have been personally impacted. I want to thank the councils for their efforts on the ground, for getting the support where it is needed most and leading the recovery efforts in their local communities.

Disaster goes beyond the immediate response and support. Disaster recovery is a marathon, not a sprint, and it can be a long road getting communities back on their feet. That is why we will continue to deliver recovery support. The Queensland Reconstruction Authority is continuously monitoring and evaluating recovery efforts.

I know that in June of this year, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority doorknocked some 3,500 disaster impacted homes and businesses. From following up on the disaster recovery for ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper in the Douglas Shire to the initial monitoring of ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred on the Gold Coast, the Crisafulli government is ensuring that Queenslanders get every amount of support they need. I thank the Queensland Reconstruction Authority and the state bodies who are administering this support and working around the clock to ensure we can support Queenslanders every step of the way.

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, the 2025 North Queensland tropical low saw the North and Far North swamped with historic rain and flooding earlier this year. Minister, how is the Crisafulli government continuing to support the North's recovery efforts?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Townsville for his dedication. It is very difficult when you are a new member and you are faced with disasters and the difficulties your communities go through at that time. I want to thank him very much for the work he has done on the ground.

Earlier this year, the North and Far North were swamped by historic rain and flooding. At the outset, I wish to acknowledge that the flooding tragically saw two people lose their lives, and my thoughts remain with their loved ones and their families. That particular tropical low tested our state's resolve. Even for communities in North and Far North Queensland, with their experience in extreme weather events, homes were destroyed, businesses were devastated and lives were uprooted. Queenslanders in the North and Far North were increasingly isolated as supply chains were disrupted and businesses came to a halt. The community of Ingham was cut off from the Bruce Highway and stranded from the rest of the country.

The scale of the disaster required a response and recovery effort of which the North has not seen for a long time. To everyone involved in the disaster recovery efforts, I wish to place on record here my great appreciation and thanks. The first responders, the emergency services, the Defence Force personnel, the local councils and our volunteers all put in a massive effort for North Queensland.

I note the member for Townsville's fierce advocacy for Queenslanders caught in the midst of the disaster, many of whom are his local constituents. As both the local member and a local himself with a young family, the member's efforts on behalf of the people of Townsville meant that more support could get to more people as soon as possible, and I sincerely want to thank him very much for the work he did.

I also saw work firsthand on the ground during the floods, as did the members for Mundingburra and Thuringowa. The people of Townsville and North Queensland can rest assured that their state MPs and the Crisafulli government worked around the clock in their time of need. Their local knowledge and representation was on full display, and I thank them for their support. We saw this near Ingham at Ollera Creek Bridge. The bridge was destroyed in floodwater and Ingham was left isolated from the rest of the country. The Australian Defence Force and the Department of Transport and Main Roads worked around the clock to rebuild the bridge to reconnect that community. I was there with the Premier and the Minister for Transport when the first temporary bridge was completed by the army, much to the relief of Hinchinbrook's Mayor Raymond Jayo. It is stories like this that encapsulate the Crisafulli government's disaster recovery efforts in North Queensland. There was no daylight between our response and recovery, and that meant working around the clock to get things and places like Ollera Creek Bridge restored for the community of Ingham and also further to the north.

To date, the Crisafulli government has worked with the Commonwealth to deliver more than \$500 million in DRFA support to the North and Far North across 40 local government areas. This includes over \$200 million in betterment to repair and build more resilience into the Bruce Highway and other key state owned connection roads and assets, including the crucial Ollera Creek Bridge.

Our support also included delivering immediate relief for small businesses and not-for-profits in \$25,000 grants, increasing them to \$50,000s as the nature of the disaster unfolded. It included \$75,000 grants for the primary producers and we also expanded the definition of 'primary producer' to include more of Queensland's farmers and irrigators. That was particularly important to enable replanting of cane up in that area. We will continue with these recovery efforts, and we will be there every step of the way for North Queensland.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, Tropical Cyclone Alfred was the first cyclone we have seen in South-East Queensland for over 50 years. Minister, how is the Crisafulli government supporting South-East Queensland in the wake of Alfred?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Theodore for his advocacy during that period. The floodwaters were still receding from North Queensland and the full devastation of the event was being uncovered with ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred as it approached the Queensland coastline. I must admit that the pirouettes that cyclone did as it headed towards the coastline were quite frustrating.

As this was the second major disaster for the state in quick succession, I take this opportunity to again thank everybody involved with the response and recovery efforts, from the swiftwater rescue crews who travelled south to be pre-positioned, their wetsuits still dripping, to the locals who helped shore up the small businesses. Thank you. People literally moved from North Queensland down to the south-east because of how quickly those two events actually followed each other.

As the region's first cyclone in over 50 years, Cyclone Alfred presented historic challenges for the south-east. From the member's electorate on the Gold Coast right up to Hervey Bay, Queenslanders prepared for the cyclonic gusts, storm surge and flooding. The flooding and storm surge was particularly concerning. There was a lot of work done in that particular area. It was their preparedness in the days leading up to the cyclone that ensured as much of the south-east was kept as safe as possible.

To enable this, the Crisafulli government worked with all levels of government—our councils and the Commonwealth—to deliver disaster support funding as swiftly as possible. From Livingstone down to the Gold Coast, 18 councils received support through DRFA to cover eligible costs relating to their counter-disaster operations, emergency road repairs and reconstruction and clean-up works. This support meant that councils could address immediate emergency needs and ensure public safety. In practical terms, this looked like over a million sandbags up against Queenslanders' homes and businesses before the cyclone made landfall. It was an incredible effort from councils and council workers to move a million sandbags and make sure they were available. I know that the member was on the ground in his electorate doing just that—supporting his constituents whenever he could. The beautiful area of the Gold Coast experienced some of the most intense weather. Across the south-east the system caused widespread disruption, with over 450,000 customers losing electricity—the largest number of power outages in the state's history.

From working with Queenslanders on the ground I got to see the destruction firsthand. I walked on the hallowed turf at the Wynnum Wolves Football Club with Rabieh, the club's president, and I got to see how the disaster had affected the heart of local communities. It was quite incredible to stand out there at Wynnum and see how much water had pummelled that incredibly great football club. I acknowledge the work that they do. Getting these local hubs back on their feet was key. The south-east came to a standstill and it required historic disaster support to get Queenslanders back on their feet.

To date, the Crisafulli government has worked with the Commonwealth government to deliver more than \$256 million in DRFA extraordinary assistance packages. We delivered \$25,000 grants for small businesses, for primary producers and for not-for-profits as well as \$250,000 loans to get them back on their feet as quickly as possible. In addition, we have delivered support packages for the recovery of community and recreational assets—particularly important for routine sport to be able to continue; community health and wellbeing; mental health recovery; primary production and industry assistance; and legal assistance. As well there was over \$70 million for environmental recovery. Most importantly, this included beach replenishment and national park recovery. As I said earlier, Alfred represented unique challenges for the south-east, but Queenslanders are tough. The Crisafulli government is continuing to support South-East Queenslanders on the long road to recovery and will continue to be there every step of the way.

Mr LISTER: Minister, I bring you to the recent disastrous flooding event in Western Queensland. Reports put the loss of livestock in the hundreds of thousands and communities—including your electorate—have been absolutely devastated. Could you outline how the Crisafulli government is supporting Western Queensland in their time of need?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Southern Downs for the question. I know that his electorate also would have been watching very closely what transpired in that Western Queensland flooding event. Earlier this year Western Queensland suffered the worst flood in recorded history. Over 40 councils were disaster declared and a third of the state was swamped by record-breaking floods, with highways cut and an area twice the size of Victoria impacted. Communities were left isolated, primary producers were devastated and there was a catastrophic loss of livestock, with reports of stock losses of up to 20 per cent in the region.

The member for Southern Downs will know what it is like for rural and regional Queenslanders. Some people are still very distressed about the loss of their livestock. For nearly 10 years their voices were marginalised by the previous Labor government, so as the west and south-west called for help the Crisafulli government were there for Queenslanders. From Longreach to Thargomindah, I was joined by the Premier, the Minister for Primary Industries, the Minister for Communities and the member for Gregory. I advocated for rural Queensland—not just as the Minister for Disaster Recovery or as the member for Warrego but as a local. It is via this advocacy that I got to engage with Queenslanders who worked to support the west during this disaster. I thank each and every one of them for their efforts. This includes our rural fires in Thargomindah who made a massive effort. The floods saw them awarded the Brigade of the Year. I put on the record my thanks to Danielle Tuite for her incredible work. I want to thank everyone involved.

I empathise with the pain Western Queenslanders feel because I feel it as well, when I see beautiful country devastated and a life's work destroyed. We saw a lot of the sporting fields around Thargomindah completely washed away. That is why the Crisafulli government worked with the Commonwealth to swiftly deliver support for Western Queensland. We have delivered over \$420 million in DRFA support including tailored support packages for the unique needs of rural communities. This includes \$500,000 grants to rebuild crucial exclusion fencing for primary producers—the first time a package has been delivered for repairs of exclusion fencing; \$75,000 grants for disaster relief; \$5,000 freight subsidies; and \$250,000 loans—we have seen this increased up to \$5 million loans. This recognises the size and the scale of a number of the properties out there—they are very large properties—and the devastating flood impacts to the region's primary producers and the number of livestock that have been lost. We have also extended support for the west's small businesses and not-for-profit agencies and have doubled their \$25,000 grants, taking them to \$50,000. The \$105 million exclusion fencing package is the first time an exclusion fencing package has been delivered in Queensland.

There is also \$155 million for a betterment program to improve access to Western and Central Queensland by upgrading essential state owned roads to a more resilient standard; funding for environmental recovery; sport and recreational activity support; and emergency fodder support. We were very quick in the way that we delivered that emergency fodder support, and I want to thank the officers of the QRA for their assistance in that regard. That was very welcomed because there was no other way to get that fodder. We would have faced serious issues in relation to livestock deaths if we had not been able to provide that emergency fodder support. There was also mental health support, community health and wellbeing support, and tourism support. Tourism is, as you would know, member, a major industry out in these rural and regional communities.

This recovery will take years and the Crisafulli government will be there every step of the way. We are a government that does not just back our rural communities; we believe in them and we support them. Although their populations are small compared to urban hubs, their contribution to Queensland simply cannot be quantified. The country is quintessentially Australian and they are everything that Queensland represents. We will continue to deliver support for the people of Western Queensland to ensure these communities can recover effectively.

Mr SPEAKER: We will now go to opposition questions.

Ms BOYD: Minister, on 6 February this year in Townsville, your staff member took photos in the Qantas club and on a flight that were later used by the Deputy Premier to slander the opposition leader. Minister, what actions have you taken with your ministerial staff member around this inappropriate behaviour?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: it is in relation to the question as asked by the member for Pine Rivers. I would ask her to authenticate the information with respect to how she has framed that question to the minister. There is clearly not only that aspect to the question as asked but also an inference or imputation.

Ms BOYD: Mr Speaker, I was sitting there; I watched it happen.

Mr SPEAKER: Now explain to me what it has to do with the budget for disaster recovery and volunteers.

Ms BOYD: Absolutely. This is expenditure of the minister's office. It was a complimentary Qantas Club membership that the minister had granted that she used for herself and her staff to access the Qantas Club. This goes directly to ministerial allocation of funds, which the budget outlines.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: if we allow that what the member has said is correct, strictly speaking, it pertains to a period that does not apply to the question before us, which is that this expenditure be agreed to. I suggest that, quite apart from the fact that it is completely irrelevant to what Queenslanders expect us to be talking about, it is irrelevant to the question before us. I respectfully ask that you rule it so, Sir.

Mr SPEAKER: Honestly, member, I cannot connect this to the budget. It was tenuous at best. I would ask that you move to your next question.

Ms BOYD: I am happy to go to my next question. Minister, when will you hold your first EVAF meeting?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Pine Rivers for the question. She is referring to—and I will spell out what EVAF means for the benefit of Hansard—the Emergency Volunteers Advisory Forum, which is a stakeholder round table aimed at strengthening and supporting Queensland's volunteer

emergency services network. The membership includes the Australian Red Cross, the State Emergency Service, Surf Life Saving Queensland, the Queensland Fire Department and other organisations. At its heart, EVAF helps connect government organisations with emergency service volunteer organisations, particularly in times of natural disaster and subsequent recovery.

I am advised that it has been a good forum for organisations to collaborate, share insights and coordinate efforts to support communities during times of natural disasters. EVAF actually falls under the responsibility of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I am advised that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the acting commissioner responded to questions on EVAF during their estimates hearing on 5 August 2025.

Ms BOYD: Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, member. Is there anything else you wanted to add to that before we go—

Ms LEAHY: I have more to add, Mr Speaker.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: if the minister is asserting it is not in her portfolio, I would assume she should not continue to talk about it. She has made that call.

Mr BAILLIE: Point of order, Mr Speaker: you earlier ruled that we are to listen to the questions in full before evaluating their relevance and I would submit to you that the minister had not finished her answer.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, I would ask you to round out your answer. If there is anything relevant to that, finish your answer and then we will move on.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, I am getting to the relevant matter. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the acting commissioner advised that EVAF is currently under review. On 30 July 2025 the minister wrote to me seeking my thoughts on part of this review. I have advised that EVAF is a valuable forum that should continue. I have also requested an observer presence on EVAF by the volunteers within the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers in addition to the existing Queensland Fire Department representation. This will help connect the work of EVAF with other volunteering initiatives across Queensland so we can all best support our volunteers in the important roles they play.

Ms BOYD: I table a *Record of Proceedings* of the estimates hearing of the Minister for Emergency Services' earlier this week.

Mr SPEAKER: Who is your question to?

Ms BOYD: My question is to the minister. When the Minister for Emergency Services was asked about the Emergency Volunteers Advisory Forum earlier this week, he said it was 'coming under' you. I will quote from the Minister for Emergency Services. He said—

Mr PURDIE: In terms of the volunteer group that you spoke about before coming under Ann Leahy and the work that we are doing in relation to those volunteers moving forward and the volunteer parliamentary inquiry in relation to people on the board and who the current chair is, I am happy to throw to the State Disaster Coordinator to give you that information.

Minister, are you saying that the statement that the Minister for Emergency Services gave around this forum coming under you is incorrect?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: that is seeking an opinion.

Ms BOYD: It is a matter of fact.

Mr SPEAKER: I am taking a point of order.

Mr LISTER: Quite apart from the fact that it is clearly seeking an opinion, it is explicitly not relevant to the question before us that the expenditure that this committee is considering be approved. Therefore, I would argue it is irrelevant, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: It is seeking an opinion; there is no doubt about that. Can you rephrase the question, particularly that last part of it?

Ms BOYD: Is it factually correct to say, Minister, that the EVAF is coming under you?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Pine Rivers. EVAF is a stakeholder round table that looks at strengthening and supporting the Queensland volunteer emergency services network. It is a good forum. The Minister for Police and Corrective Services did write to me seeking my thoughts on the review they are conducting and I have advised that it is a valuable forum that should continue. I have

requested an observer presence on EVAF from within the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers in addition to the existing Queensland Fire Department representation so we can make sure these committees are cross-represented and also that they are working well together.

Ms BOYD: I table a government joint media statement dated 26 February, Minister, in which you are included. I have highlighted two quotes, one from the Insurance Council and the other from the housing minister. Minister, I am just after a number here. How many Queenslanders have you met who have saved on their home insurance premiums as a result of a Stronger Homes modification?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek some clarification as to whether this relates to the portfolio responsibilities of the minister and pertains to the estimates process under consideration at this hearing this afternoon.

Mr SPEAKER: Can you provide any clarity around that, member for Pine Rivers?

Ms BOYD: Absolutely, under the SDS it is on page 13 in terms of insurance being a form of resilience for the community. That is the connection.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I put to you that that is an unsatisfactory attempt to link the question to the appropriation before us. It comes nowhere near that. The question is irrelevant.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, obviously home insurance is something that you have a lot to do with. I will let you deal with this. You have one minute. I cannot even read it, to be honest.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, I am struggling to read it as well. A larger print copy would be particularly helpful. From what I can see on that, my understanding in relation to the Stronger Homes Grant is to build back—I am reading the bits that I can actually see—resilience in North and Far North Queensland. The delivery agency is the Department of Housing and Public Works and I think that questions with regard to this particular Stronger Homes Grant to build back resilience would have been by far better directed to the minister responsible for public works and housing.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you. CEO, did you have an answer back to that question that was asked earlier about appointments?

Mr Ellwood: I do. To provide a fulsome answer, in 2022-23, as the CEO of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority—given the disasters in that season—I fulfilled the duties of the default State Recovery Coordinator. In 2023-24 I again fulfilled the role of the default State Recovery Coordinator but I employed two deputies who were not on the list—that is, Assistant Commissioner Ben Marcus and Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing—who supported me and then in 2024-25 I can confirm also that Mr Cripps, Mr O'Connor and Mr Mackenzie, who were the State Recovery Coordinators for this season, were not on the list. I would also like to state on the record that, given the work that Ben Marcus, Mike Wassing and Messrs Cripps, O'Connor and Mackenzie performed, we could not have done it without them. As default State Recovery Coordinator you cannot be in every place at every time and I will be eternally grateful to have had them there working with the community.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you very much for that. We have reached the end of the time allocated to examine the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio areas of fire and disaster recovery and volunteers. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 3.15 pm with the examination of estimates for the minister's portfolio area of local government.

Proceedings suspended from 3.01 pm to 3.14 pm.



Mr SPEAKER: Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2025 for the minister's portfolio area of local government until 4.15 pm. The committee will then examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2025 for the minister's portfolio area of water from 4.15 to 5.15 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the time specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of local government open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you can make a short opening statement of no more than five minutes, if you so wish.

Ms LEAHY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Just before I move to my opening statement, I want to wish Steve Robbins a happy birthday. It is his birthday as well.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and thank members of the committee for their attendance as well. This is a very important process—a process which examines the expenditure of taxpayers' money, which we respect. As we promised Queenslanders, the Crisafulli government is delivering a fresh start and I look forward to the deliberations of the committee.

This budget reaffirms the Crisafulli government's unwavering commitment to empowering elected representation in local government. This enables them to provide the services and infrastructure their communities need. We were elected on a promise to deliver real infrastructure where it is needed most and return decision-making closer to the people it impacts. That means more, stronger partnerships with councils right across the state—rural, regional and metropolitan alike. This budget begins to deliver on those promises with targeted investments that strengthen local services, boost regional economies and ensure councils have the tools that they need to serve their communities with accountability and vision. This budget invests in empowering our councils to plan, build and grow with confidence, because we know effective councils mean more resilient communities.

I look forward to continuing the equal, respectful and empowering relationship the Crisafulli government has with our local councils. Labor's decade of disrespect left councils struggling to deliver the infrastructure and the services they needed to keep their communities thriving. After 10 years of neglect, the Crisafulli government is finally delivering certainty and support for local government with a permanent Works for Queensland program and a boost to betterment which will help communities build back better after natural disasters. We are doing what we said we would do. Local government will receive a major boost in this budget, with more than \$18 billion over four years to fund local government priority projects including \$3.9 million for improvements to playgrounds, toilet blocks and car-parking facilities; \$5.7 million to improve infrastructure for local communities including upgrades to town halls and other community infrastructure; and \$3 million for CCTV and security cameras in local communities.

At the 2024 state election the Crisafulli government committed to making Works for Queensland a permanent program, funded at \$100 million per year ongoing. We have delivered on this commitment. The 2025-26 budget makes it clear that our Works for Queensland funding commitment is permanent. This is the first time this has been the case. It is a great outcome for councils right across regional Queensland. Our commitment to ongoing funding for Works for Queensland provides certainty to councils to plan for and deliver the projects that make local communities great places to live and work. That certainty means councils can plan for the short and the long term. They are no longer subject to the ad hoc funding decisions we saw under the previous Labor government and it enables strategic infrastructure decisions, not just reactive fixes, because councils should have the support they need to ensure they can create livable and thriving communities. Finally, it reinforces the Crisafulli government's promise to empowering local communities, because the Crisafulli government is a government for all Queenslanders.

Before I hand back to you, Mr Speaker, and to the committee for their questions, I would like to thank the hardworking public servants from the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers for their work in preparing for these hearings and I thank them for their efforts as we work together to deliver for Queenslanders.

Mr SPEAKER: I will go to opposition members for the first question. I will go to the member for Pine Rivers.

Ms BOYD: Acting Director-General, what advice did your department provide around the remuneration of Troy Thompson during his 12-month suspension?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the question before us is whether the expenditure be agreed to. The advice that the department may or may not give to government is immaterial. It is what the government does which is subject to consideration. Can I suggest that that question should be rephrased.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: clearly, the role of the director-general is to provide advice to the minister and the director-general would be remunerated from the appropriations we are examining. It is clearly well within the purview of this committee to examine what he does with his time and what advice he provides to the government. It is outlined in the code of conduct.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to allow the question. It does concern remuneration.

Mr Hannan: I thank the honourable member for the question and I thank the honourable member for the supplementary clarification. Due to the nature of the circumstances relating to the investigations and the legal and professional privileges of all stakeholders involved in this matter I would put to the committee it is inappropriate for me to comment any further on this matter.

Mr de BRENNI: Acting Director-General, have you provided the minister or her office with advice on next steps following Troy Thompson's 12-month suspension?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: if I could respectfully suggest that it is important that parliament not become an alternative forum to the workings of the CCC and that we ought to be cautious not to do so. If I could put that to you, sir.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Speaker: I understand the acting director-general is a consummate professional. I think he understands where his boundaries are and is well capable of answering that question.

Mr BAILLIE: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I think the question as asked was a hypothetical.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to allow the question because I agree that Mr Hannan is quite capable of knowing where his boundaries lie and where they do not.

Mr Hannan: I thank the honourable member for the question and the feedback. As I stated in my first answer, however, my view is due to the nature of the circumstances relating to the investigations and the legal and professional privileges of all stakeholders involved it would be inappropriate for me to comment in this committee on this matter.

Mr de BRENNI: I understand it is a very serious matter. Minister, is it correct that your office is in possession of the CCC investigation report into Troy Thompson?

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: I want to stress again that this is making assumptions about what the CCC may or may not have done. It is entirely unwise that we in any way trespass upon their activities or prejudice what they are doing in their investigation. I respectfully put to you that we should steer clear of questions of this nature.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister and member for Springwood, this is a pretty sensitive and delicate area so I would exercise caution. Minister, I am sure you are aware of the sensitive issue here, but I will allow you to answer it as you can.

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Springwood for the question. I might note that under the previous government Mr Troy Thompson was in the chamber for some 200 days before they took any action and I might just—

Mr de BRENNI: I have a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: The minister has only just started.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister was barely into her response and I would submit to you that she be allowed to finish her response giving important information given the complexity and the sensitive nature. She was barely into her response so I would submit to you that it would be appropriate that she be allowed to continue. She is being relevant.

Mr SPEAKER: That is a fair point of order. As the member for Springwood knows, I cannot instruct the minister on how to answer the question. It is up to her how she answers the question. Minister, you have the call.

Ms LEAHY: I might just go back to the point I was making. The former government took some 200 days, when Mr Troy Thompson was in the chamber. I might just provide some information to the committee from the former minister. The former minister said that in the show cause they had 'considered the following public interest considerations weigh in favour of recommending that you be suspended'—referring to Mr Thompson. Further, 'Given the above, I have decided the best course to remedy these issues is to now consider a suspension period for 12 months'—

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

Ms LEAHY: I need to put this in some context, Mr Speaker.

Mr de BRENNI: You just remarked to the minister that she ought to be careful about traversing the substance of the issue which is why the question did not go to the substance of the issue, the question went to whether or not her office was in possession of the CCC investigation report into Mr Troy Thompson. She is way off track. I ask you to bring her back to the relevant answer to that question.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I stress again that my concern here is that, by invoking the original question, the member for Springwood is again enlivening speculation about activities which may or may not have occurred by the CCC and that to do so directly tramples upon their independence and involves the parliament in sensitive matters that are rightly the purview of the CCC alone. Can I suggest therefore that we proceed to another question.

Mr SPEAKER: I will decide whether we proceed to another question, but thank you for your point of order. I am deeply uncomfortable with where this is going. We are here for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the minister's area of water. I am going to encourage questions to be on that. I am very uncomfortable with where we sit right now. I am going to call for the next question from opposition members.

Mr de BRENNI: There is a longstanding view that has been ruled on, on two previous occasions, in relation to questions on CCC matters at previous estimates hearings. In light of those rulings and the investigation or examination of the portfolio of local government, I assert that the question is in order and ask again: is the minister in possession, or is her office in possession, of the CCC investigation report into Mr Troy Thompson?

Mr SPEAKER: I will take some advice. Minister, it is up to you whether or not you choose to answer a question. I remind you of that. I put it back to you.

Ms LEAHY: Perhaps the member for Springwood should have asked the CCC in earlier hearings and then he would have been able to get the information he is seeking. Given the confidentiality requirements that are around the CCC, I think that question would be best directed to the CCC.

I might make a few points in relation to Mr Troy Thompson. It took 200 days for the former government to take any action in relation to Mr Troy Thompson. Under the Crisafulli government he was suspended on 22 November, so within 22 days our government took action to remove him and get him out of the chamber in Townsville. We promised to deliver for the people of Townsville. We promised them a fresh start, and that has been achieved with the mayor's suspension.

The Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers have had a statutory adviser in the Townsville City Council. That has been successful during this period. That adviser has provided support and guidance to assist the council to work together. They were only able to do that with Mr Thompson out of the chamber, which is what we achieved in 22 days. I think it is important to also understand that there has been a substantial reduction in the number of complaints made to the department.

Mr de BRENNI: Thank you, Minister, but that is exactly what the answer was to the previous question.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, have you finished?

Ms LEAHY: I have more to add, Mr Speaker.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: relevance. This is the second time that the minister has traversed the exact same content and we agreed that it was not relevant before. I have another question for the minister. Minister, will you now release the investigation report from the CCC into Mr Troy Thompson?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the question asked by the member for Springwood appears to again enliven speculation about the position, the activities and the status of an investigation with the CCC. I maintain that it is unwise for us to trample upon that ground, the independence of the CCC and the persons who are involved in the matter.

Mr SPEAKER: I will take advice. Member for Springwood, can you explain to me how this fits into the expenditure?

Mr de BRENNI: The minister oversees responsibility for local government. The SDS specifically outlines responsibilities around an accountable and sustainable local government sector. I invite the minister to indicate whether or not she will release the CCC investigation report into Mr Troy Thompson.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, I will allow you to answer that as you will.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Troy Thompson was suspended as the Townsville City Council mayor on 22 November 2024 to enable those particular investigations to occur. I think if we are going to start talking about CCC matters, perhaps it might be time to start to reflect on the CCC matters from the member for Pine Rivers as well. There are some matters there that might be—

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, we are not doing that.

Ms BOYD: Acting Director-General, is it correct that, as it currently stands, Mr Troy Thompson will be reinstated as mayor in November?

Mr Hannan: I apologise to the committee for sounding a little like a broken record, but on these matters, due to the nature of the circumstances relating to investigations and the legal and professional privilege of all stakeholders involved, it would be inappropriate for me to comment any further on the matter.

Ms BOYD: Director-General, last week during estimates we heard that the department of tourism received representation from as many as eight councils on the commencement of a visitor levy, or bed tax, within their communities. Has your department received those same representations?

Mr Hannan: I believe the visitor levy matters are matters for the department of environment or the relevant department—I do not want to get the wrong acronym. I am not aware of the comments that were made in the estimates committee nor the stakeholders that you are referring to. I would have to probably receive a list of those stakeholders to be able to comment on whether we have received representations from those stakeholders specifically. It is hard for me to comment without knowing the exact comments made in that committee meeting, I am sorry.

Ms BOYD: More broadly, Director-General, has your department received representations around the commencement of a visitor levy or bed tax?

Mr Hannan: Can I seek clarification: who are you suggesting we received representations from?

Ms BOYD: Any local government in Queensland.

Mr Hannan: As I said, I only commenced in the role as acting director-general on 31 March 2025. In my time within that role I do not believe I have had any representations directly from anyone. If it is okay, I seek the permission of the committee to ask my office to confirm that position. I will come back to you before the end of today's session to confirm if I have had any meetings with relevant council stakeholders on that.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister?

Ms LEAHY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We will come back at the end of the session with some information on whether there have been any representations to the department from councils specifically. I ask the member to repeat the question. Is it specifically from councils?

Ms BOYD: There were two questions, Mr Speaker. One was about the eight councils that were discussed during the tourism portfolio estimates hearing earlier this week, and a subsequent question was if any council in Queensland had made representation to the department on the topic of the commencement of a visitor levy or bed tax across Queensland.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, for clarification: could we get the names of those councils from the member for Pine Rivers? It will aid the department in getting that information quicker.

Ms BOYD: It is in the *Record of Proceedings* of the parliament.

Mr SPEAKER: I think the member for Pine Rivers said 'any council'.

Ms LEAHY: I am just seeking clarification: is it any council or is it just the eight councils?

Ms BOYD: You can answer it as any council. There were two questions. If you want to answer it most fulsomely, you can do that as any council. I think that would be the most appropriate course.

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, just for your clarification—and I just want to get the clarification from the member for Pine Rivers—the question was if any council has made representation to the department with regard to a visitor levy.

Mr SPEAKER: That is what I understand.

Ms BOYD: I can confirm it for the third or fourth time, if you like, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Let's move on now. What is your next question?

Ms BOYD: Minister, is it correct that your position is councils should go it alone if they want to introduce their own bed tax?

Ms LEAHY: The member is talking about a tourism levy, which is sometimes described as a bed tax. Councils have good options available to them to raise funds for tourism purposes through rates or other charges under the Local Government Act 2009. The Local Government Regulation 2012 currently allows councils to levy special rates and charges on the owners or occupiers of land. Funds raised in this way can be allocated for tourism purposes. For example, special rates and charges could be levied on land that is used only by businesses which generate revenue from visitors which would benefit from local tourism promotion, such as accommodation providers. Councils across Queensland have used this approach to fund tourism marketing and infrastructure and to generate funds for tourism-specific needs.

Questions relating to tourism industry funding, including tourism marketing infrastructure, are matters for the tourism portfolio. I just want to reiterate that councils do have options under the Local Government Act 2009. They currently have options under the act and also under the regulation to levy

special rates and charges to owner-occupiers. They have the opportunity to impose differential rates, and both the act and the regulation allow councils to make their own decisions in relation to how they wish to raise funds allocated for tourism purposes.

Mr SPEAKER: I will go now to government members for questions, starting with the member for Townsville?

Mr BAILLIE: Minister, my community is frustrated and Townsville is at breaking point. What is happening with the council, and can you outline for the benefit of my community what is happening with Troy Thompson?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Townsville for the question and for his advocacy in relation to making sure that he has a local government that can deliver for the people of Townsville. I know he takes a great interest in this particular area for the benefit of his constituents.

The Crisafulli government promised to deliver for the people of Townsville a fresh start, and that has been achieved with the mayor's suspension. The situation is that Mr Thompson has been suspended at present. He is a private citizen, with no authority over the running of the Townsville City Council. The Premier has made it clear that Mr Thompson's position was untenable, and we acted swiftly to suspend Mr Thompson to enable council to get on with the job of delivering for the people of Townsville. I am pleased to say that the Townsville City Council are getting on with the job. They are back to work, and they are working for the people of Townsville.

Mr Thompson's suspension demonstrates how the Crisafulli government is enabling councils to deliver for their communities. The approach is a far cry from how Labor dealt with councils. The previous Labor government sat on their hands and did nothing about Mr Thompson for more than 200 days. It was only when the election rolled around that they started to realise there was a significant problem. We acted within 22 days. We will act in whatever capacity necessary to ensure the people of Townsville have the representation they deserve, and we are working to ensure the region can thrive after years of Labor's neglect.

Mr LISTER: Minister, on page 1 of the SDS under the key deliverables, reference is made to the impact of depreciation on local governments. Can the minister inform the committee, please, as to what the Crisafulli government is doing to review depreciation and ensure councils across Queensland can remain viable and deliver critical infrastructure services?

Ms LEAHY: This is a particularly important question for all Queensland councils. I thank the honourable member for the question, and I am very pleased to provide a response on the depreciation issue and its impact on local councils. I know this issue is raised very regularly with all members of parliament, and it is because it is very important to councils.

Depreciation expense is an accounting standard that measures the estimated economic value of an asset as it is consumed during the financial year. Councils are impacted by depreciation due to several factors. Firstly, they are the owners of a large amount of depreciable infrastructure and assets—roads, sewage treatment plants, swimming pools, water treatment plants and the reticulation for those services. As we know, these depreciating assets have a limited effective life. Queensland local governments have responsibility for managing and depreciating large infrastructure assets.

This depreciation is undertaken in accordance with the Australian and international accounting standards. The council's operating results, and even their overall financial sustainability, are impacted by the expense of depreciation. I just want to highlight that their overall financial sustainability is particularly important. In fact, it can represent a significant portion of the operating expenses for councils. By way of example, depreciation can often be as high as one-third of their expenses. You can see why councils are particularly concerned about depreciation.

Many councils have assets that are funded through capital grants, so the up-front cost of the assets is not reflected in the council's operating income, yet the depreciation for those assets is classified as an operating expense. As you can imagine, this often creates a financial quandary for councils. As indicated earlier, these assets will gradually decrease in value over time.

As asset management capability remains a challenge for many local governments, particularly in the areas of asset valuations and asset management planning, the Crisafulli government is committed to working in partnership with Queensland councils to deliver an empowered, strong and sustainable local government sector. Unlike previous governments, we have listened to the concerns expressed by councils about the impact that depreciation has on their sustainability. We have committed to partnering with stakeholders to form a taskforce to review depreciation for councils in

Queensland. As such, I am pleased to announce today the establishment of the Local Government Depreciation Taskforce to provide advice to government on the challenges faced by local governments in effectively managing depreciation.

It is also pleasing that I can announce that the taskforce will be headed by Mr Neil Castles, someone who is eminently qualified for this key role. The taskforce will be supported by a secretariat and project team provided by the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers. The taskforce's main objective is to identify the challenges for local government in managing depreciation. It will recommend opportunities designed to reduce the impacts of depreciation on councils' sustainability. It will enhance stakeholder awareness of the implications of depreciation on investment decisions. The taskforce should achieve this by providing advice, including making recommendations, affecting local governments addressing depreciation for consideration by the Crisafulli government. The taskforce will commence its work immediately and will deliver a final report for the Crisafulli government's consideration by the end of December 2025.

Dr ROWAN: With reference to page 1 of the SDS where it identifies key deliverables, can the minister please outline how the Crisafulli state government is delivering certainty for councils in delivering critical infrastructure for their communities?

Ms LEAHY: I am delighted to speak on how the Crisafulli government is delivering a fresh start for Queensland's 77 councils. The Crisafulli government is rebuilding the fractured state-council relationship that was destroyed by 10 years of previous Labor governments. We know that an empowered, strong and sustainable local government sector is key to delivering the fresh start that Queenslanders deserve.

The Crisafulli government appreciates that councils know their communities best and works in an equal and respectful partnership with local governments to deliver for all Queenslanders. This means kickstarting infrastructure and service projects with an equal collaboration of councils to improve livability across Queensland.

As part of the Crisafulli government's first budget we have made Works for Queensland a permanent program, with \$100 million allocated annually. That is the first time that Works for Queensland has been made a permanent program. Works for Queensland empowers councils to assess and address the needs of their communities. It delivers priority infrastructure aimed at supporting sustainable local governments and helps Queensland councils maintain progress towards planned infrastructure and services. It has proven to be an effective tool in delivering real outcomes for regional and remote communities across Queensland. It has funded footpaths, parks, water treatment upgrades, local roads and, in some communities, housing—projects that make a difference in communities in which they are delivered.

The program is designed in such a way that communities across the state will benefit from greater employment opportunities by promoting and encouraging job creation that will deliver the infrastructure and services needed. Our councils can now look forward to Works for Queensland being a permanent program going forward. By making Works for Queensland permanent, the Crisafulli government is providing certainty to councils, certainty to workers and certainty to those very communities whose elected representatives serve in our 77 councils.

Local governments can now plan with confidence and certainty—no election cycles and short-term announcements like we saw under Labor that made it very difficult for councils to manage. Under the Crisafulli government, councils can finally take a long-term view, knowing that the funding will be there year after year to support the essential infrastructure their communities rely on. We are fast-tracking vital infrastructure and service delivery for Queenslanders and are committed to working in partnership with councils to deliver this.

By providing this certainty to councils we can provide certainty for regional jobs, with the potential to create thousands of job opportunities across the state, especially in towns where every job counts. From apprentices to local contractors, Works for Queensland keeps the money flowing through those local economies and food on the table for working families. By delivering Works for Queensland permanently, the Crisafulli government is enabling councils to identify their own priority programs, not those imposed from Brisbane. That is the difference between Labor and the Crisafulli government: we understand that councils know their communities best and they can prioritise projects in their communities because they are the closest to their people. The Crisafulli government is dedicated to ensuring Queensland councils receive the necessary funding to meet community needs as well as providing continued support for the successful implementation of these projects.

Works for Queensland is no longer an ad hoc program that is promised and stretched and promised and stretched, which is what we saw under previous Labor governments. Under this government it will continue to deliver permanent, practical results where they are needed most, helping deliver a fresh start for Queenslanders.

Mr LISTER: Minister, last night I hosted a dinner for the state finalists in the Queensland Rural Ambassador Awards. I was talking to the president of Queensland Ag Shows and he mentioned that the Crisafulli government has been providing support. Could you please provide an outline of what the Crisafulli government is doing to strengthen ag shows?

Ms LEAHY: The member for Southern Downs has been supporting the Ag Shows' ambassador program for quite some time now. I thank you for the support that you have provided to them. That is important to young people in rural and regional communities particularly. I thank you very much for what you do in hosting those people at Queensland parliament during Ekka week.

This is a pertinent and timely question. When we talk about our agricultural shows, we are not talking merely about events on the calendar but about events that the whole community participates in. It is pertinent given that the Ekka is kicking into full swing this weekend and next week. We are talking about the cornerstones, the institutions and the foundational pillars of Queensland's rural and regional identity. Ag shows are not just gatherings; they are annual pilgrimages for local communities. We will see a few of those pilgrimages happening this week and next week. They are the beating heart of our towns, our farmers, our families, our producers and, mostly importantly, our volunteers. Even the tourists get together in a celebration of everything that makes Queensland agriculture proud and enduring.

Let us not underestimate the significance of these ag shows. When we speak of them we speak of tradition, history, multigenerational engagement and also the economic benefit they bring to many of those towns. We speak of the tractor pulls, the woodchop competitions, the baking contests, the cattle judging and the co-existence of a joyful and chaotic celebration of rural life. Behind each one of these shows are thousands of volunteers—people who, without any expectation of reward or compensation, dedicate countless hours to plan, organise, execute and maintain these shows year after year. Rain, hail or shine, drought or flood, these volunteers step up because they know that ag shows are more than entertainment; they are an expression of identity, pride and shared struggle and triumph. Often they are the showcase of the local community.

With that said, it is clear why the Crisafulli government has acted with both wisdom and foresight. We have the first permanent funding increase for these treasured events in nearly two decades. That is 20 years without a boost to their financial underpinning. I am proud to note the commitment of an additional \$500,000 in 2025-26 for the Show Societies Grants Program. This is a permanent increase to signal a long-term intent and respect for these communities and these volunteers. Bringing the total annual commitment to \$2.5 million, this investment will provide critical support for 129 show societies and affiliated organisations across our great state.

Why is this important? In the face of Labor's cost-of-living crisis, which has placed enormous pressure on local event organisers, small towns and families, this funding is not just helpful; it is actually essential. We are talking about increased insurance costs, rising utility bills, the challenge of maintaining showgrounds that are often aging and that need for regular upkeep. We are talking about staging live entertainment, particularly entertainment for children who do not have a lot of opportunities to see some of that entertainment. This funding will certainly help those ag shows and volunteers to be able to put on that entertainment in their communities. They are not luxuries; they are necessities. They are once-a-year opportunities for many of those communities to keep their shows alive and thriving.

Without this kind of support many shows may have struggled or even folded, but under this government we will not let that happen. It does not stop there. The Queensland Chamber of Agricultural Societies, our partners and collaborators and our frontline coordinators, will also receive an increase to their grant because we recognise that the Chamber of Agricultural Societies is more than just an administrative body; they are the compass and guiding hand, the support network for many smaller societies.

In recognition of this strategic role that they play, they will also receive a one-off payment of \$100,000 to explore innovative revenue streams, because in this modern era the financial resilience means thinking outside the box—and I commend them for the work that they do—diversifying income and engaging with technology and also looking at drawing younger generations into the Queensland ag shows. They are the heart of Queensland's regions. Through this funding this government is saying we will back them and we will support them to thrive.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, can you provide an update on the progress of the Red Tape Reduction Task Force and how it will improve the way that the Queensland government works with councils?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Theodore for his interest in red-tape reduction. He is always very keen to make sure that there is not overbearing red tape not only for communities but also for local councils. It is an opportunity to speak on a key election commitment of the Crisafulli government they delivered within their first 100 days of government. We delivered the Red Tape Reduction Task Force.

The Crisafulli government knows just how important that partnership with local governments is to delivering a fresh start for Queensland. We are delivering meaningful reform where it matters at the local level. Our Red Tape Reduction Task Force is designed to cut through the bureaucratic clutter after a decade where Labor pushed much of this on to local councils. It will help councils cut red tape where costs then become an impost on ratepayers' time and money. We are delivering lasting benefits to the communities that our local councils serve and trying to make their job a bit easier.

For too long, local governments across Queensland have been weighed down by red tape—layers of outdated regulations, duplicative reporting requirements and rigid state imposed processes that make it harder for councils to do their job. I might add that this is the first time councils have actually been asked what red tape is important to them. Unfortunately, it is the ratepayers, small businesses and local community groups who pay the price for these inefficiencies. Everyday Queenslanders rely on local government to be agile, responsive and focused on the solutions.

The Red Tape Reduction Task Force is practical and action focused and is engaging directly with councils, community stakeholders and state departments to identify and eliminate the barriers that get in the way of effective local government governance. It is about restoring respect and trust in the role of local government and empowering our councils to make timely decisions locally without having to wade through unnecessary approvals or seek permission from Brisbane for matters that they are more than capable of handling on their own. In real terms this means streamlining planning and development approvals so projects that create jobs and housing are not stalled in endless paperwork.

I know that all of the members here would be acutely aware of the housing crisis across the state and that we need to have local governments that are able to be agile in relation to housing approvals. This means simplifying some of the procurement rules so that councils can invest more easily in local businesses, keeping jobs and growth in their own backyard. It means reducing duplication in compliance and reporting so that council staff can spend less time on red tape and more time on the front line serving their communities, delivering parks, roads and essential community services. It means making governance more transparent and less burdensome so that councils are accountable without being tangled up in the processes for process sake. It is not about cutting corners; it is about cutting the waste and removing the unnecessary delays and giving local governments the tools, the flexibility, the respect and the confidence that they deserve.

We know that a one-size-fits-all policy from William Street does not work in regional Queensland, in our outer suburbs or in rural and remote communities. That is why the taskforce, led by Andrew Chesterman, is engaging directly with councils of all sizes from the Torres Strait to the Gold Coast to hear firsthand where the bottlenecks are and how we can remove them. When we cut red tape, we do not just want to make life easier for councils; we actually want to make life better for communities—when we unlock faster housing approvals so young families can find homes that they can afford enable or enable local businesses to bid for and win council work, creating jobs and growing local communities. It will give community organisations faster access to permits and funding so they can get on with delivering the grassroots programs and make our local community stronger.

At the end of the day, the Crisafulli government's mission is very simple: we believe in local solutions to local issues and we believe councils are best placed to know what their communities need. We believe that when local governments succeed their communities can thrive. The Crisafulli government is committed to clearing that path of red tape, unleashing the full potential of Queensland's councils to deliver the critical infrastructure and services their communities need and deserve because less red tape does not mean less accountability. It means more action and more trust in the people elected to serve our communities.

I am pleased to say we have received the report from the taskforce lead, Andrew Chesterman. We are now considering the recommendations. They will proceed to cabinet. Then we will plan for the implementation schedule to ensure we deliver a fresh start for Queenslanders.

Mr SPEAKER: I will go to non-government members.

Mr de BRENNI: Minister, on 1 August 2023 the Clerk of the Parliament advised that matters that pertain to the CCC were not prohibited by the sub judice rule. Given that advice—that CCC reports are not prohibited here at estimates—again, Minister, do you have the CCC report into Troy Thompson and will you release it?

Ms LEAHY: Could the member for Springwood perhaps give us a title of that particular report he is referring to?

Mr de BRENNI: There would only be one report the CCC will have provided into Troy Thompson to the minister. If she has it, she knows what it is called. I am asking will she release it.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: terms like ‘would’ and ‘if’ point directly to the hypothetical nature of this question. Even if we allow it—and we have not seen evidence of the exact content of the material that the member for Springwood has referred to—I still maintain that this question is hypothetical and it deals with matters that are properly left with the CCC. The very contention that there may or may not be a report is speculation which is unhelpful and a discourtesy to the CCC.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Southern Downs, the member for Springwood did not ask about the contents of the report. He just asked whether the minister has seen the report or is in receipt of the report. Minister, I will leave it to you.

Ms LEAHY: The member for Springwood might be seeking a yes-or-no answer, but we will answer as we see fit. There are particular legal and professional privilege matters that we need to consider here. There was an opportunity for the member for Springwood to ask that question during the hearings in relation to the Attorney-General, where I understand the CCC were available. We might take that question and come back at the end of the session.

Mr de BRENNI: Minister, you answered a question just a moment ago and provided advice to the committee. I think the question was from the member for Townsville seeking certainty for his constituents. Can you rule out reinstating Troy Thompson?

Ms LEAHY: Can the member repeat the question, please?

Mr SPEAKER: It is the last part of the question that is probably the relevant part.

Mr de BRENNI: It is a serious matter for people living in Townsville. Can you provide them with certainty and rule out reinstating Troy Thompson?

Ms LEAHY: As I indicated earlier, it took some 200 days for the previous Labor government to do anything in relation to the former mayor of Townsville; it took 22 days for the Crisafulli government to take action. In relation to that, we know there are investigations underway. It is a matter for the CCC as to when they release their information.

Ms BOYD: Director-General, can you confirm that the Local Government Red Tape Reduction Taskforce operated independently and that its recommendations were developed without direction or interference from the minister or the minister’s staff?

Mr BAILLIE: Mr Speaker, point of order: just the way that question was asked, I feel it had some imputations in it.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to allow it. The director-general is ready to answer.

Mr Hannan: The red-tape reduction taskforce was chaired by independent—Mr Andrew Chesterman. The resourcing to support Mr Chesterman was provided in the department to assist on undertaking really comprehensive consultation with, I believe, every local council across Queensland, either in person or via a variety of different forums. As the minister highlighted in her previous response, the minister is now in receipt of that report and it will be considered later this year.

I am not in a position to comment on the engagement of the minister or their office. It would be inappropriate for me to do so. What I can say—it was part of the terms of reference, which I believe were well known to all stakeholders—is that the committee did report to an executive steering committee. That was chaired by me, as acting director-general of the department, with representatives of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Queensland Treasury. The role of that executive steering committee was to ensure that Mr Chesterman got great traction across the whole of state government.

The purpose of the report was to ensure that each agency had a good—let’s face it, we all had a good look at ourselves in ensuring that the way we engage with councils was not burdening councils with unnecessary administrative processes, so a large part of the role of central agencies and me, as

part of that executive steering committee, was to assist Mr Chesterman in traversing and engaging with each of our state agencies. I believe that governance process was very successful and I believe it was welcomed by LGAQ and stakeholders. I should mention there was also—I will get the term wrong—a stakeholder advisory forum, where we had various other stakeholders involved to be kept up to date with the progress of the project.

Mr SPEAKER: You were going to come back to the committee in relation to a question about any representations from council on a proposed visitor levy. Do you have that as a response?

Mr Hannan: I thank the committee for permitting us the opportunity to double-check that matter. In relation to the policy initiative raised by the honourable member, I can confirm that, both in my role from 1 November as deputy director-general of the local government division within the department and within my role as acting director-general from 31 March 2025, I have had no meetings with any councils regarding the policy issue the member was referring to.

 **Mr SPEAKER:** I think that was the only one outstanding. I think the minister answered the other one before. The time allocated for consideration of the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio area of local government has now concluded. It is now time for consideration of the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio area of water.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of water open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, you can make a short opening statement of no more than five minutes if you so wish.

Ms LEAHY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Once again I want to acknowledge the committee and you for being in attendance today and thank my staff and the department for their preparation for these estimates hearings. As I said earlier today, this is an important process, one that the Crisafulli government takes very seriously, and we will work to continue to deliver for Queenslanders.

Water drives our communities and supports our economy. Queenslanders deserve to know that their water sources are secure and drought resilient and that there is capacity for economic growth. That is why the Crisafulli government is taking decisive action to guarantee that every Queensland, no matter where they live, can rely on an affordable and sustainable water supply. We are not just talking about pipelines and dams; we are talking about families, farmers, small businesses and communities who deserve certainty that water will be there when they need it at a price they can afford.

Labor's mismanagement left Queenslanders with little new water infrastructure for nearly a decade. Councils struggled to deliver the infrastructure and services they needed to keep their communities thriving. It meant that South-East Queenslanders have had to pay the most expensive water bills in the country. To unpick a decade of Labor's failure and inaction, we need a new approach.

The Crisafulli government is developing a water security plan for the entire state. This includes an analysis of all 23 regional water plans in this term of government, with a central focus on boosting supply and affordability. Affordable water for agriculture will be a key focus area and part of our government's drive to help make primary industries a \$30 billion industry by 2030. This will require input from key stakeholders, and I look forward to working closely with the people in this room to deliver this whole-of-state plan.

This body of work is a 400 per cent increase on the work the previous government delivered. In practical terms, our plan means building new weirs, increasing the capacity of existing dams and reviewing supply options across Queensland. For nearly 10 years Queenslanders had a government where water infrastructure development stagnated. No new dams were built, and when infrastructure was delivered it was over time and over budget.

Recently the Deputy Premier and I, along with the members for Burnett and Callide, announced this government had given the green light for the early works package for the Paradise Dam Improvement Project. The Crisafulli government has directed the Coordinator-General to work with Sunwater to get on with the Paradise Dam early works. I am pleased to report that those works have commenced. We stand committed to fixing up the mess Labor left Queenslanders.

We are also delivering on our election commitment to provide water security across the state, with almost \$38 million to deliver the business case for the Water for Warrill project, to build new weirs at Barlil and Cooranga, and for five new or upgraded weirs on the Thomson River near Longreach. Almost \$51 million over two years will deliver a 15 per cent discount for eligible irrigators to help make essential water resources more affordable for Queensland's primary producers.

More than \$41 million over five years will deliver vital upgrades to critical water and sewerage infrastructure in remote First Nations communities across the Torres Strait to improve health outcomes. We will invest \$34 million to deliver water supply improvements and infrastructure upgrades for the communities of Aurukun, Kowanyama and Woorabinda—because all Queenslanders, no matter where they live, should have access to clean drinking water. This is the message to all Queenslanders: we will deliver the infrastructure needed to provide water security and affordability well into the future. With new weirs, water infrastructure and cost relief for irrigators, the Crisafulli government is ensuring every drop of water will be put to good use, growing our local communities. It is all part of the fresh start that we promised.

Mr SPEAKER: I go to opposition members for the first question.

Ms BOYD: Minister, earlier this week the finance minister, Ros Bates, said ‘the jobs-for-mates era is over’. Minister, is it correct that Gladstone local Tina Zawila was replaced by the former Liberal National Party MP for Gregory, Lachlan Millar, on the Gladstone Area Water Board in the past few weeks?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I think the preamble to that question contained a political connotation. I ask that the member rephrase, please.

Mr SPEAKER: I will caution the member for Pine Rivers to make your question specific without too much of a preamble, but the question itself was quite fine so I am going to allow it.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: thank you for your ruling. I do not know what it was ruled on because I could not hear the member for Southern Downs. I am sure it was rather eloquent and we support your ruling to proceed, but could you remind him to drag that microphone closer, please?

Mr SPEAKER: I am reluctant to tell the member for Southern Downs to speak louder because I had to sit beside him in parliament at one stage! Minister, you have the call.

Ms LEAHY: Appointing directors to boards of government owned entities is an important process and is carried out within the existing guidelines. It includes thorough due diligence checks. The Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers administers board appointments for category 1 water boards—that is, the Gladstone Area Water Board and the Mount Isa Water Board—as well as category 2 water boards and river improvement trusts. Queensland Treasury administers the board appointments for Sunwater and Seqwater.

The process for appointing directors to boards of water and local government entities varies depending on the type of the entity. Appointments of Sunwater, Seqwater, the Gladstone Area Water Board and the Mount Isa Water Board are significant appointments that require cabinet endorsement. Nominees to category 2 water boards and river improvement trusts are appointed by the Minister for Water following endorsement by the Premier.

In relation to appointments to the Gladstone Area Water Board, I can confirm that Lachlan Millar is actually an irrigator and I would have thought that would have made him eminently qualified to be on a water board. I think that is relatively reasonable. His experience and knowledge of that Central Queensland area is particularly valuable. The Gladstone Area Water Board deals with the Rookwood Weir and I know that Mr Millar has been a great champion for that particular project. He has a long history of being an irrigator so he is eminently qualified to be in the water space.

Ms BOYD: Minister, I table an excerpt from *Hansard* during your speech on the condolence motion for Vaughan Johnson in 2023 when Mr Millar was still the member for Gregory. Minister, I take you to the second page. Can you please read out your words from your speech in the highlighted section?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I suggest that it is disorderly for the member to ask the minister to read a document that has been tabled and is before us all on the committee. I suggest that it would be appropriate if that question were rephrased.

Mr SPEAKER: If it would make it easier, could the member for Pine Rivers read it out?

Ms BOYD: Certainly. I am happy to read it out. In it you said, ‘I had to promise him that I would look after Lachie Millar, the member for Gregory.’ Minister, did you declare this conflict of interest before placing Mr Millar on the Gladstone Area Water Board?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the comments that the member is making are completely hypothetical. It is in the past and therefore you cannot suggest that she would know the future of what his appointment would be.

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: with respect to the question as asked, whilst I would query the dubious and unethical nature of raising something from a condolence motion, I would submit to you that the question as asked is a characterisation and misrepresentation of the official parliamentary record with respect to the condolence motion. I would ask you to consider that in relation to the line of questioning.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Mr Speaker: that is in fact why the member for Pine Rivers invited the minister to recite her words—to make sure they were faithfully reflected. The question goes to a matter of integrity and whether or not the conflict has been declared. I think the question is well within the scope of examination today.

Mr SPEAKER: I am going to allow the question because the member for Warrego knows more than anybody else what she meant when she said it. It has been awhile since the question was asked. Minister, are you clear with the question? I think the question was more around a conflict.

Ms BOYD: Would you like me to repeat it?

Mr SPEAKER: Yes, please.

Ms BOYD: Minister, did you declare this conflict of interest before placing Mr Millar on the Gladstone Area Water Board?

Dr ROWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: in relation to the question as rephrased by the member for Pine Rivers, there is a clear imputation in relation to some conduct matters. There is an imputation and that is my point of order in relation to the question as asked.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I call the minister.

Ms LEAHY: In relation to the context in this condolence motion—and I think that should be something we look at very carefully—the promise was actually a promise made to the deceased member, Vaughan Johnson, not a promise to Lachlan Millar. I think we should certainly reflect on that. It is a promise to the deceased member, not to Mr Millar, and I think that is important. The context where that is made is simply a request in a conversation that was had with Vaughan Johnson. I might ask if there is a reference in the SDS with regard to these questions, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: You do not have to reference a particular part of the SDS to ask a question. Minister, do you have anything more to add in response?

Ms LEAHY: Yes, I do. I find it extremely disappointing from the member's office that they would use a statement made in a condolence motion to try to make these inferences of somebody who is well respected on both sides of the House. I find the use of a condolence motion extremely disappointing. They are a record for the future as a mark of respect. I find it quite disrespectful that members opposite are choosing to use that.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Minister, after persistent lobbying from my committee colleague the member for Southern Downs, where is the funding for Emu Swamp Dam in the Crisafulli government's first budget?

Ms LEAHY: You would want to be very careful there: the member for Southern Downs will be fighting you for that particular question. We have certainly heard plenty from the member for Southern Downs with regard to that particular proposed water facility. I do find it very interesting that I am getting questions from members opposite in relation to particularly water development, because that is a space that previous governments have not wished to engage in. In fact, we saw a dodgy dam built at Paradise by the Peter Beattie Labor government and then it had to be torn down by the previous government. That is their legacy in relation to dams: they actually tore down a dam. It is surprising to get a question like this from members opposite because they had been very anti water development and very anti dams.

Mr de BRENNI: Point of order, Speaker: unparliamentary language. I will not repeat the word, but I understand the minister did use unparliamentary language and perhaps she should be asked to withdraw.

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: I actually can aver that I have used that word in parliament and had a ruling by the Deputy Speaker at the time that that word was not unparliamentary—an explicit ruling.

Mr SPEAKER: The word was used generally and was not directed at anybody. I remind everyone to show a bit of decorum in these hearings, please.

Ms LEAHY: What I can say is that the Crisafulli government is focused on delivering future water infrastructure for population growth across Queensland. We are advancing the Barlil Weir near Murgon and also the Cooranga Weir near Mundubbera. These commitments are supported by \$29.7 million of investment in the 2025-26 state budget—a total commitment of \$118 million.

We are also committed to rebuilding the Paradise Dam, the dam that previous Labor governments actually tore down. They built a dam that was not up to standard and they had to tear that down, so we are now in the process of rebuilding that dam. We have been up there with the Deputy Premier, getting information on the early works and with instructions from the Coordinator-General in relation to commencing those early works so we can get that project back on track, because it was not progressing at the speed that it needs to progress at for the Bundaberg region. We are also—

Ms BOYD: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the question from the member for Inala was very direct in relation to funding for Emu Swamp Dam. The minister is talking a lot but not actually about Emu Swamp Dam.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, the question was around Emu Swamp Dam.

Ms LEAHY: I find it particularly ironic that we have a question from members opposite who actually—

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, I ask that you stop debating or being argumentative.

Ms LEAHY: Water security for our regions is a priority for the Queensland government and we will ensure that the Southern Downs region has the water security it needs and will be well prepared for the next drought. Preconstruction activities for the Toowoomba to Warwick Pipeline are progressing. That will provide drought contingency for people in the Southern Downs region. We will also look to reduce—

Ms BOYD: Point of order, Mr Speaker: relevance. The question was not in relation to the region; it was in relation to where the funding was for Emu Swamp Dam in the Crisafulli government's first budget.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, if you could round out your answer, please.

Ms LEAHY: The Granite Belt Irrigation Project, including Emu Swamp Dam, is identified as a potential future source of agriculture and urban water supply for the Granite Belt region. However, the Southern and Darling Downs Regional Water Assessment recommended further project investigations and design work to be undertaken to provide more certainty of the project's viability prior to seeking any further investment decision. I might note that that regional water assessment was initiated by the previous government and that is a recommendation of the previous government.

Ms BOYD: Acting Director-General, I table a copy of a *Queensland Country Life* article, dated 30 January 2025, which references correspondence between six regional mayors and the minister regarding the urgent need for \$380 million in dam safety upgrades. Acting Director-General, can you point to where in the budget papers the \$270 million required for the Cressbrook Dam safety upgrades has been allocated?

Mr LISTER: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the question seeks to involve the director-general in policy matters and comments on political comments. I would suggest that that is not appropriate and that questions such as that would be better rephrased or put to the minister to answer.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Southern Downs. I find it goes to the budget. The question is where that item is, and I am sure the director-general is able to answer this.

Mr Hannan: Just bear with me 30 seconds while I skim through what is in the *Queensland Country Life* article from January. I note for the committee, and in the interests of time, that it is a six-page article. I can provide my brief understanding of what it is covering. Once again I thank the honourable member for raising the issue. Dams in Queensland are built to extremely high, internationally accepted safety standards. However, dam infrastructure has a long service life, and the methods used to estimate extreme weather and flood risks have changed significantly since some Queensland dams were built and our understanding of engineering standards has improved, as it has

for all infrastructure classes across the state. This means that some of Queensland's dams need investment to ensure they continue to operate as safely as possible, particularly during extreme and rare weather events. This is why the dam owners who are responsible for dam safety such as Seqwater, Sunwater, the Gladstone Area Water Board as well as other dam owners such as local councils are delivering dam improvement projects to ensure their dams comply with the latest dam safety standards.

At its core, the article it is calling for funding investment. I can confirm the state budget provides \$346.2 million of investment across dam improvement projects for 2025-26; I think the number that is quoted is \$270 but it is \$346.2 million. These investments in 2025-26 include investments in the Paradise Dam improvement project; investments in the Lake MacDonald improvement project; investments in the North Pine Dam; investments in the Somerset Dam and a number of others. These projects are at various stages. To give a little bit more detail: Paradise remains a government priority; North Pine Dam is \$29.2 million of investment; and Wivenhoe and Somerset dams also have investment through Seqwater—both are being upgraded to comply with safety standards. I think that covers it, Mr Speaker. My interpretation of the six-page note that was tabled was around the government's commitment to investment in dam safety and the call from stakeholders for an investment in dam safety. I have provided the headlines from the 2025-26 budget of the government's investment in dam safety.

Ms BOYD: Acting Director-General, is Cressbrook Dam's current risk profile above the relevant safety standard requiring an upgrade to reduce the risk to the community from extreme but rare rainfall events?

Ms LEAHY: Point of order, Mr Speaker: this particular dam that the member for Pine Rivers is referring to is owned by the council. The council would have that detailed information. Unless the council have provided that information to the department, it is unlikely that the department would have that information.

Mr SPEAKER: That is a valid point of order. It is 100 per cent council-owned so I do not think it comes under the minister; did you have another question?

Ms BOYD: Yes, I do. Minister, is it the Crisafulli government's position that the development of a business case for Cressbrook Dam should take precedence over meeting safety deadlines set by the dam safety regulator?

Ms LEAHY: I know it has been a long afternoon, and I thank the member for Pine Rivers for the question in relation to the Cressbrook Dam. My understanding is that the council have known about the need to do the upgrades for the Cressbrook Dam for the last 10 years and we did not see any funding whatsoever allocated by previous Labor governments in the last 10 years. I think that is very important to note. We do know that the upgrades to Cressbrook have been on the books there for 10 years. We saw no investment whatsoever over the last 10 years from the previous Labor governments with regard to assisting the council with those upgrades.

Ms BOYD: Point of order, Mr Speaker: relevance. I was specifically asking around the Crisafulli government's position on the development of a business case and if that should take precedence over meeting the safety deadline set by the regulator?

Mr BOOTHMAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister is being very thorough with her answer and response. The member is also seeking an opinion so I ask that you let the minister complete her contribution.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, do you have anything more to add before we finish on this issue?

Ms LEAHY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do have more to add in relation to the Cressbrook Dam. The responsible owner of significant dam infrastructure is actually the Toowoomba Regional Council and it has determined that it is appropriate to undertake improvement works on the Cressbrook Dam. These works will ensure the Cressbrook Dam is able to continue to meet council's operational requirements as well as to protect the safety of downstream people and communities. I am advised the Toowoomba Regional Council has commenced the dam upgrade works which are currently expected to be completed by December 2026.

While the 2025-26 state budget does not allocate specific funding towards the council's Cressbrook Dam upgrade project, the Queensland government is looking to assist the council in other ways; for example to facilitate the upgrade works at Cressbrook Dam I understand that the water level will need to be temporarily lowered to ensure safe construction activities on the site. During this period Seqwater will store the water released from Cressbrook Dam in Wivenhoe Dam and it will cover all of the associated storage and supply charges that would normally apply.

Further, the Queensland government is committed to assisting the council with water treatment plant and pump station upgrades associated with the Toowoomba to Warwick pipeline. We certainly are assisting the council when it comes to the works that need to happen there at Cressbrook Dam but the works are the responsibility of the council. The council had that and were aware of that for the last 10 years. We saw no investment whatsoever from the previous Labor government to assist the council with the works that they need to undertake at the Cressbrook Dam.

Mr SPEAKER: We will go to government member questions now. We will go to the member for Townsville.

Mr BAILLIE: My question is for the minister: will the minister outline how the Crisafulli government is cleaning up the mess Labor left with Paradise Dam?

Ms LEAHY: I want to thank the member for Townsville for his question in relation to the mess that Labor left at the Paradise Dam. It has been an ongoing mess, too, I might add. For a decade Queenslanders had a Labor government that just sat on their hands at a time when Queenslanders most needed water security and water affordability, infrastructure stagnated and not one new dam was built in Queensland under Labor. They left mums and dads with some of the highest water bills in the country at a time when we had a cost-of-living crisis.

To add to Labor's lack of action on water security, they left Queenslanders with water infrastructure blowouts in the billions. I will list these because there is a reference to Paradise Dam. Paradise Dam costs blew out by \$3.2 billion; Lake MacDonald costs blew out by \$138 million; the Burdekin Falls Dam costs blew out by \$623 million; Somerset Dam costs blew out by \$950 million—it is a damn disgrace. But let's talk about Paradise Dam, since those members opposite seem to like to avoid the question. Labor did actually build a defective dam and then, they had to tear it down. They failed the people of the Wide Bay and the Burnett region.

The Crisafulli government is committed to cleaning up the monumental mess Labor left and finally giving the people of the Burnett region the water security that they have so desperately needed for so long. They need to have security and confidence going forward. I am pleased to say that the Coordinator-General has today declared the project as a coordinated project. This declaration ensures a streamlined approval and consultation process as we aim to deliver water security, flood resilience and economic growth for the Bundaberg region, for which they were crying out for years under Labor. This will enable Sunwater to progress critical works faster and ensure the community and stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in public notification processes and have their say. With the early works already underway and now the coordinated project declaration, the LNP have done more in 10 months to fix the Paradise Dam than Labor did in a decade.

The Crisafulli government will continue to deliver water security and affordability for Queenslanders well into the future. We are delivering on our election commitment to restore Paradise Dam, which will support jobs and safeguard Bundaberg's \$2 billion agricultural industry. By rebuilding the dam that Labor so badly managed, we are not just building infrastructure; we are building job-creating economic growth that will be there for generations to come. For the first time in nearly a decade, the water infrastructure that Queensland needs to prosper is finally being delivered.

Dr ROWAN: Minister, recently I visited the electorate of Pine Rivers. Can the minister please advise on water security for the community of Dayboro, and is the minister aware of any advocacy by the current local state member on water security for Dayboro?

Ms LEAHY: I want to thank the member for Moggill for his interest in the community of Dayboro. The Crisafulli government is committed to water security throughout Queensland. For nearly 10 years the previous Labor government let Queensland's water infrastructure stagnate, with projects that either were not delivered or were over time and over budget. In response, we are delivering generational infrastructure and programs throughout Queensland. We are boosting security, supply and affordability. However, this assurance to water security goes well beyond Labor's failures.

Tropical Cyclone Alfred presented new challenges for the south-east and this includes water security. For the community of Dayboro, the disaster meant water needed to be carted to Dayboro in April 2025 due to the highly turbid water from the aquifer not being able to be treated. Further to this, ongoing business-as-usual monitoring of the aquifer by Seqwater has recently indicated that the aquifer levels have unexpectedly reduced following this event. Seqwater are continuing to investigate the potential causes of the decline in the aquifer levels.

Seqwater are continuing to liaise with Unitywater on the management of water supplies within the Dayboro area to ensure reliable water supplies. For long-term security, Seqwater are completing a strategic options assessment for future water supply for Dayboro. It is expected the assessment will be completed in 2026 and the preferred option identified. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure water security and supply for this community with both the short-term and long-term options.

Mr LISTER: Minister, will you please advise how the Crisafulli government is supporting regional communities through better water affordability, and is it the case that about \$200 million was withdrawn from Emu Swamp Dam on the advice of the Queensland Labor government to the federal government?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Southern Downs for the question. I do understand his comment in that question that previous Labor governments did actually withdraw funding from the Emu Swamp Dam. That was particularly difficult for that community because they had worked so very hard through those approvals to make sure they had approvals from both the state government and the federal government. That was a really hard blow for that community when they learned Labor had withdrawn that funding from them.

In relation to the government's priorities for water infrastructure in the regions, the Crisafulli government is focused on following through on our commitments in addressing future water requirements for further population growth and delivering generational water infrastructure across Queensland that will secure supply and foster economic growth. We are advancing the Barlil weir near Murgon and the Cooranga weir near Mundubbera. These commitments are supported by \$29.7 million of investment in the 2025-26 state budget and a total commitment of \$118 million.

We are committed to rebuilding the Paradise Dam, with \$96.9 million allocated for 2025-26 to deliver the detailed business case as well as the early and enabling works. This brings us a lot closer to restoring that region's water supply and providing certainty to the growers, and the Deputy Premier and I have been there to meet some of those growers. They were particularly excited to get those early works underway. It just gives them confidence to go forward to grow their businesses.

We are progressing funding associated with the \$18.6 million project for five new or raised weirs on the Thomson River at Longreach. That will help ensure there is domestic water supply for Longreach during prolonged drought periods, with \$5 million allocated in 2025-26 from the \$7 million commitment from the Crisafulli government, in partnership with the Australian government's \$5 million commitment and the Longreach Regional Council's contribution of \$6.6 million. We know that Labor ignored the regions and ignored those regional requirements, particularly for droughtproofing. However, the Crisafulli government is focused on delivering the bulk water security projects across Queensland. We will deliver the highest priority projects effectively and efficiently. Our government is investing in and fast-tracking priority projects across the state. The 2025-26 budget details some \$346.2 million for dam improvement projects, which includes planning and construction works.

The Crisafulli government is further supporting regional and remote communities and the state's economy by making funding commitments for water supply projects: \$3 million at Wujal Wujal, \$5 million for Bamaga, \$4.5 million at Doomadgee, \$630,000 at Dajarra, \$12.8 million at Cherbourg and \$3 million at Mornington Island. In total, the Queensland government has committed over \$28 million for these critical projects as well as having secured matching funding from the Australian government which will be rolled out over 2025-26 and in subsequent years.

We will also continue to support projects like the Toowoomba to Warwick Pipeline, some \$142.7 million in 2025-26; \$15.25 million in this budget from the total state government commitment of \$26 million to supply water to the Lansdown Eco-Industrial Precinct, which I understand the member for Townsville will be quite interested in; and \$116 million in this year's budget towards the Cairns Water Security program from a total commitment of \$195 million from the Queensland government, in partnership with a \$195 million commitment from the Australian government. That is a significant investment for Cairns and it will certainly assist them into the future when they have disaster impacts in Cairns. This work will all contribute to the Crisafulli government's strategic vision for water security and will be brought together by a water security plan for Queensland. The water security plan will set the road map, providing safe, secure and affordable water supplies across Queensland.

Mr LISTER: Minister, would you please explain why a certification process is required for eligibility for the 15 per cent irrigation discount?

Ms LEAHY: I want to thank the member for Southern Downs. I know that he has numerous irrigators across his electorate, all the way from Goondiwindi to around Warwick and Stanthorpe, who will be very interested in this. The discount will be applied to validated owner-operator businesses that rely on primary production for income. Most irrigators will be eligible for the discount but, unlike Labor,

and out of respect for taxpayers' money, there are a few large multinational and global businesses which account for most of the water consumption; they will not be receiving that discount because we respect taxpayers' money. Unlike Labor, the Crisafulli government directs money to where it is needed most.

The Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority will validate the eligible businesses for the discount following a simple—and I put the emphasis on 'simple'—application process. The government is providing increased funding of \$50.9 million over two years to subsidise and smooth out the irrigation prices for eligible irrigators, including funding for the 15 per cent discount. Our government is ensuring that financial assistance is targeted to customers who are confirmed as an irrigator and a primary producer and will help to move underutilised water to more productive uses. That is the other thing that we wish to do—that is, if there is water out there that is not being used that it is utilised to ensure that it is in productive use.

Over the next few months the framework for eligibility for the 15 per cent discount via the one-off validation application to QRIDA will be developed in close consultation with peak bodies. I want to thank the QFF, Cotton Australia and Canegrowers for their input in relation to this 15 per cent discount. I want to thank them greatly for their advocacy and for working so closely with the government. They have provided us with great input so that we can make sure that we deliver this in a very targeted manner but doing that in a manner that is particularly simple because we know that farmers do not like paperwork, so it is particularly important that we are able to make sure that they can access this in a very effective manner. Details will be provided very soon in relation to how that will be delivered through QRIDA. We are setting prices for just two years to allow time for the Queensland Competition Authority, the QCA, to provide us with further advice on potentially using a regulated asset base—what is called a RAB—approach to pricing. The RAB approach is used in all other jurisdictions and is widely considered the best practice and provides for less forecasting risk, but we want to make sure that we consult with irrigators across Queensland in relation to that and we will be doing that in due course.

The government will consider the recommendations of the Queensland Competition Authority based on the RAB approach before setting prices for 2027-28 and 2028-29, taking into account stakeholder views and bill impacts. We want to work very closely with our irrigators and also our peak bodies in doing that body of work. The Crisafulli government wants to allow ample time for customers to understand the technical differences and the implications of transitioning to the RAB approach in pricing. The government does not expect material changes in prices for 2027-28 and 2028-29.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Minister, could you please outline how the Crisafulli government is committed to improving water security in South-East Queensland?

Ms LEAHY: I thank the member for Theodore for the question and I note his passion to make sure that his region, which is around the Gold Coast—and a growing region at that—has adequate water supply going into the future. South-East Queensland supports the majority of Queensland's population and economy and is likely to require an additional 50 to 60 gigalitres of water by the mid-2030s to meet the growing demands and ensure the region's continued prosperity. Unsurprisingly, we found that the Labor Party had no plan for this—absolutely zilch, no plan at all.

To ensure that we have the best options to support South-East Queensland's continued growth, we have committed \$4 million to undertake an urgent review of the water sources across the South-East Queensland region. Aligned with the Crisafulli government's commitment of no new desalination, my department has focused its attention on potential sites where we may have raising of weirs, raising of dams and potential opportunities, so the department has reviewed a number of in-depth assessments of potential dam sites that were undertaken over the last 30 years. The results of the department's assessment and recommendation options for a business case development will be brought through to the government by the end of the year. Alongside this review is also the review of the 23 water plans. The review of the water plans in the South-East Queensland catchments will be considered alongside this project to identify any additional water that could be made available. It is likely that we will find additional water in some of those plans, because we have certainly found some additional water in other plans around the state.

Some of these plans have not yet been reviewed for many years. They were just ignored by Labor. They were left on the shelf and, basically, they just kicked the can down the road. My department is working to implement the South-East Queensland water security framework next year. The work could include new projects like the northern interconnector pipeline to provide security to the northern suburbs, connecting a new treatment plant at Wyaralong to the grid to strengthen water supply and

security around Logan—we know that Logan is a fast growing area—and ongoing investment in dam improvements into storages and in supply like the North Pine Dam in the electorate of the member for Pine Rivers. Unlike Labor, the Crisafulli government will improve water security in South-East Queensland and we will do that to make sure that there is improved water security into the future to make sure that we can ensure the population has the water security that it needs.

Mr SPEAKER: We will go to opposition members. I call the member for Pine Rivers.

Ms BOYD: Minister, does the Crisafulli government support a moratorium on carbon capture, use and storage activities in the non-Great Artesian Basin aquifers?

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: this question pertains exclusively to portfolios other than those under consideration today and I respectfully suggest that the question is out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Pine Rivers, can you explain how it relates here, because it is probably for Environment?

Ms BOYD: There is water in the aquifers, Mr Speaker, and that is the concern—that water quality is at risk.

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: that response failed, I suggest, to address the fundamental issue here that that question goes to portfolios not under the administration of this minister and certainly not under the appropriation that we are considering now.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, I will let you answer that question.

Ms LEAHY: As I understand it, those matters do actually sit under the Minister for Natural Resources and I believe that it would be much more appropriate had the member asked those questions to the Minister for Natural Resources because carbon capture and storage does sit firmly under natural resources and mines.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Pine Rivers, do you have another question?

Ms BOYD: I table an ABC article and ask the acting director-general—

Mr LISTER: Mr Speaker, point of order: could the committee have some time to consider this before we proceed with any further questions because it is, again, a large document, unless the member could draw us particularly to the passages that—

Mr SPEAKER: I have not heard the question yet, member for Southern Downs. Member for Pine Rivers, what is your question?

Ms BOYD: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Acting Director-General, according to the ABC, the detailed business case for Paradise Dam is expected to be completed by the end of next year. What was the original date for the business case?

Ms LEAHY: Mr Speaker, this is quite a lengthy article. Can we just have a minute to peruse it, please?

Ms BOYD: Mr Speaker, I am sure the acting director-general may well be able to answer the question with the absence of the article.

Mr SPEAKER: I have already said that I am going to allow the question, so the acting director-general is having a look at the document now.

Mr Hannan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If you could allow me just 10 seconds to have a quick read—as the minister said, it is a multipage article. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to review the article as presented. As the minister highlighted in her speech earlier, approximately—and I would have to get the exact number—\$96 million has been committed this year for early works, including the preparation of the detailed business case for the Paradise Dam project. I was very fortunate last week to be at Paradise Dam to inspect those early works, including the works relating to foundations and the trenching, identification of suitable materials for the dam wall and a range of other aspects of the project that were picked up in the review of the issues with the existing structure. In relation to timeframes for the projects and the preparation of the detailed business case, I think it is most appropriate if I call on the CEO of Sunwater, Glen Stockton—as Sunwater are delivering that piece of work—to provide an update on where the business case is at.

Ms LEAHY: I need to make a quick correction to the record with regard to the Cairns Water Security program. I believe I may have said \$116 million. It should have been \$166 million. For the benefit of the CEO, could the question be repeated?

Ms BOYD: To clarify the record, the delay is now until early 2026. I misspoke when I was asking the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Do you understand the question or would you like it repeated?

Mr Stockton: I do not understand directly the question—if I could ask the member to repeat the direct question?

Ms BOYD: What was the original due date for the detailed business case for Paradise Dam and when do you anticipate its completion?

Mr Stockton: In relation to the timing of the detailed business case, following the announcement of the project change to build the new wall the information has been consistent that the detailed business case was expected in early 2026. Previous information would have been related to the previous project and would no longer be relevant.

Mr SPEAKER: I will ask the minister to go through the questions on notice so we can get them concluded.

Ms LEAHY: The question was how many station officer positions are substantively filled and how many are substantively vacant as of today. I am advised by the Queensland Fire Department that, as of the pay period ending 10 August 2025, there were 196 budgeted full-time-equivalent station officer positions substantively vacant and 511 budgeted full-time-equivalent station officer positions substantively filled.

Ms BOYD: Is that 196 vacant, Mr Speaker?

Ms LEAHY: I think we will take questions at the end.

Mr SPEAKER: I think it was clarification.

Ms LEAHY: I will read it again: I am advised by the Queensland Fire Department that, as of the pay period ending 10 August 2025, there were 196 budgeted full-time-equivalent station officer positions substantively vacant and 511 budgeted full-time station officer positions substantively filled.

The next question was in relation to how many times I have met with Kristen Hilton to discuss the important cultural reform work. I have not met with Ms Kristen Hilton. Ms Hilton is independently monitoring the implementation. Ms Hilton will ensure the proper implementation of the Queensland Fire Department's plan and consider any related matters that arise during the implementation to ensure the complaints management system is fit for purpose.

In relation to how many medium attack appliances in the Rural Fire Service Queensland fleet do not have a deluge system, all new-build appliances are being fitted with deluge and modern safety systems. The Queensland Fire Department does not currently have the data of all the medium attack appliances in the Rural Fire Service Queensland fleet which have deluge systems. A lot of them were built under the previous Labor government.

The next question is in relation to how many of the 114 new Rural Fire Service Queensland positions announced in October 2022 have not been filled as of today. I am advised by the Queensland Fire Department that, out of 114 new Rural Fire Service Queensland positions, 90 have been filled as of 18 July 2025. There are 24 positions yet to be filled.

A further question was in relation to how many Rural Fire Service Queensland trucks are due for delivery in 2025-26. I am advised by the Queensland Fire Department there are 101 Rural Fire Service Queensland appliances scheduled for delivery in 2025-26. In answer to a further question in relation to how many Rural Fire Service Queensland trucks the 2025-26 budget will purchase, I am advised by the Queensland Fire Department that this is yet to be determined and will be subject to market response.

Mr SPEAKER: We have now reached the end of the time allocated to examine the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers. Thank you, Minister, Acting Director-General, officials and departmental officers for your attendance. That concludes this hearing of estimates for the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee for 2025. I would like to thank the committee members and visiting members who participated in the hearing.

Mr de BRENNI: Speaker, I have a point of order in relation to the questions that were due for return. My recollection was that the minister indicated they would come back to us in relation to a question in relation to the CCC and Troy Thompson. I did not hear that response.

Mr SPEAKER: I thought the minister addressed that in her response during the hearing.

Ms LEAHY: We addressed those questions in the hearing.

Mr SPEAKER: I would like to thank the committee members and visiting members who participated in the hearings across the past two weeks. I would like to particularly thank all members of the parliamentary staff for two huge weeks. We have had a bit of a flu season happening and we have lost a few clerks along the way, but we have managed to hold all positions. It has been a mighty effort by all involved. I would like to give a special thank you to Jon Krause, the Deputy Speaker, for helping me with this workload. I welcome feedback on how people thought it went. Hansard always do a wonderful job. It has been a long, long two weeks for them so a special thank you to them and the broadcast staff and all who have helped for the two weeks. The member for Springwood has asked for leave to say a couple of words.

Mr de BRENNI: On behalf of the Labor opposition, we wish to extend our thanks as well to the parliamentary staff and the staff of the Speaker's office. I want to extend our gratitude to all of the public servants and employees of statutory authorities and GOCs. I want to acknowledge all of the MPs who have given up their time. Thank you, Speaker. I particularly want to acknowledge the Leader of the House. In our estimations he has probably set a record for the most time in attendance at estimates hearings by any MP; probably set a record for the most questions about the electorate of Moggill in any estimates in history; and likely set a new record for the most points of order by a MP ever in an estimates. Thank you very much.

Mr SPEAKER: I must give the member for Moggill a right of reply.

Dr ROWAN: On behalf of the government, I acknowledge you, Mr Speaker, and also the Deputy Speaker, for your diligence with respect to chairing these estimates processes over the last two weeks and giving effect to the government's commitment to reform the estimates process in relation to openness, transparency and accountability. I would also like to acknowledge the public servants who have appeared at the estimates hearings over the last two weeks and the various ministers and committee members and also the parliamentary staff here at the parliament. They have done an amazing job over the two weeks and we would like to acknowledge and congratulate them for all of that hard work. I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his words and also acknowledge the opposition's participation in this process, which is very important for democracy here in Queensland.

Mr SPEAKER: On that note, I declare the hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 5.20 pm.