



LOCAL GOVERNMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SM Dillon MP—Acting Chair
Mr AJ Baillie MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr MPT Healy MP
Mrs ME Nightingale MP
Ms JE Pease MP

Staff present:

Ms M Westcott—Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—BRIEFING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, WATER AND VOLUNTEERS

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 11 June 2025

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 11 JUNE 2025

The committee met at 9.15 am.

ACTING CHAIR: I declare open this public briefing with the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers. My name is Sean Dillon. I am the member for Gregory and I am chairing the committee today as a substitute for the member for Southern Downs, so please bear with me as I learn the ropes. I respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay respects to elders past and present. With me here are today are Margie Nightingale, the deputy chair and member for Inala; Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville; Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Joan Pease, the member for Lytton; and Michael Healy, the member for Cairns.

This briefing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee. I remind committee members that officers are here to provide factual or technical information. Any questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the minister or left to debate on the floor of the House.

These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

CARRIGAN, Ms Emily, Acting Deputy Director-General, Local Government, Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

COWLEY-GRIMMOND, Mr Jarrod, Deputy Director-General, Water Resource Management, Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

HANNAN, Mr Joshua, Acting Director-General, Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

ROBBINS, Mr Stephen, Acting Deputy Director-General, Corporate, Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

ZERBA, Ms Bernadette, Deputy Director-General, Water Infrastructure Policy and Partnerships, Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

ACTING CHAIR: I now welcome representatives from the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers who have been invited to brief the committee on the work of the department. Have you appeared before this committee?

Mr Hannan: No, we have not.

ACTING CHAIR: Out of courtesy, starting with you, Michael, please introduce yourselves to the department representatives.

Mr HEALY: I am Michael Healy, the member for Cairns. It is very nice to be in Brisbane. What you do is vitally important. We are a very inquisitive mob, so if this is the first time you have appeared then relax and enjoy. It will be fun. We are looking forward to extrapolating a bit of data, which will help us formulate policy. Thanks for your time today. Remember: Cairns is a lovely place to have a holiday.

Ms PEASE: I am Joan Pease, the member for Lytton. Whilst Cairns is lovely, I think the Wynnum Manly area is equally so. You are very welcome to come and experience the beautiful bayside, do some sailing and experience our lovely restaurants. Thank you for the great work that you do. I look forward to hearing from you today.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I am Margie Nightingale, the member for Inala. Thank you for appearing before us today. I am keen to learn more about what you do, how the department operates and how that can inform our decisions.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I am Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore, the home of the theme parks and Australia's playground, the Gold Coast.

Mr BAILLIE: I am Adam Baillie, the member for Townsville. There are over 300 days of sunshine a year in Townsville. We have defence, we have industry, we have the port, we have minerals, we have manufacturing and we have a growing tourism industry.

ACTING CHAIR: Director-General, I invite you to brief the committee after which time the committee members may have some questions for you.

Mr Hannan: Thank you, Chair and committee members. It is a privilege to be able to brief you today. To get some guidance, in terms of process I propose that we make a brief opening statement and discussion in which each of our deputy directors-general will provide an overview of their area and their priorities and, at the end, open for questions. Is that okay in terms of process, Chair?

ACTING CHAIR: Yes, I am comfortable with that.

Mr Hannan: I will start with a brief opening statement. The department was established in November 2024 as part of the machinery-of-government changes following the 2024 state election. The department has responsibility for supporting an empowered and sustainable local government sector for Queensland; managing Queensland's water resources to ensure a safe, reliable and affordable water supply; and delivering a strengthened volunteer sector in Queensland—and I thank the committee for your work on the recent volunteering inquiry.

I have some brief statistics about our department. Our department comprises more than 800 employees in locations right across Queensland, as we have spoken about with the committee before. We support 77 councils and 578 councillors across Queensland including through the provision of formal training and advice. This has been most relevant since the 2024 local government elections, where there was a significant turnover and changeover in our councillor cohort across Queensland. We have been established to support a volunteering sector that contributes over 700 million volunteer hours per year in Queensland, with an economic value in excess of \$30 billion annually. Along with many of the committee members, I had the pleasure of attending the recent Queensland Volunteering Awards, which from my perspective was the best event I have ever been to. I could not help but walk out of there feeling very lazy. There are some really amazing people. The department administers approximately 26,000 water entitlements across Queensland. That is to name just a few statistics.

We deliver on these functions by working with a network of stakeholders. We can only achieve what we do by working with those stakeholders in partnership across Queensland. Those stakeholders include, just to name a few, AgForce, the Australian Energy Producers, the Gladstone Area Water Board, Irrigation Australia, the Queensland Resources Council, mayors and councillors as I said before, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Local Government Managers Australia Queensland, the Mount Isa Water Board, the Queensland Farmers' Federation, Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers, Unitywater, Urban Utilities, Volunteering Queensland, Seqwater—you get the picture. We have a significant stakeholder base, and a large part of what we do is delivered through those stakeholders and delivered in partnership with them.

In addition to stakeholders, our state government colleagues are absolutely vital in what we do. A large part of my role is to ensure we are working in partnership with key agencies such as the planning division, our state development department, Housing, the department of environment that was mentioned before, our Natural Resources colleagues and the department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, all of which have a direct relationship, whether it be through grants or the work that we are aiming to achieve across the sector.

To support the delivery of our role and functions, the department is comprised of three divisions: Water Infrastructure Policy and Partnerships, Water Resource Management, and Local Government. These business units are supported by a corporate services division.

The Water Infrastructure Policy and Partnerships division leads the department's water infrastructure and policy functions. This includes collaborating with stakeholders about water and bulk water supply infrastructure proposals, undertaking regional water assessments and supporting councils with water security planning. The Water Infrastructure Policy and Partnerships division also provides the department's volunteering function and is leading our support for the parliamentary volunteering inquiry through the development of policy and stakeholder engagement.

Our Water Resource Management division is responsible for managing water access and monitoring Queensland's groundwater and surface water resources. This includes having oversight of Queensland's 84 water service providers and supporting economic activity by securing water for development projects.

Our Local Government division is focused on supporting Queensland's 77 local councils to deliver services for their local communities and empowering those councils to deliver those services. This includes managing the Local Government Act 2009, the City of Brisbane Act 2010 and a range of other local government supporting legislation and regulation. The Local Government division provides advice and support to councils across a wide variety of areas including governance and capability building, financial management and sustainability, engineering and project management. The Local Government division also has a significant grants management function that includes administering the Works for Queensland program, the Local Government Grants and Subsidies Program and the federal government's financial assistance grants for councils.

I will now ask each of the deputy directors-general to speak briefly to their areas of responsibility and highlight their core priorities.

Mr Cowley-Grimmond: I am Jarrod Cowley-Grimmond, the deputy director-general of Water Resource Management. My team looks after the water planning process. We also manage entitlement dealings and, as the director-general said, we look after finding water for major projects. The regulatory functions also sit with me, so that is oversight of dam safety on the 120 referable dams in Queensland; oversight of the 84 drinking water service providers, most of which are local councils; and regulation of rural water take, riverine quarrying, riverine protection and water bore drilling. I also represent Queensland on a number of national forums—the National Water Committee and the Murray-Darling Basin Officials Committee—plus we administer in my team the Lake Eyre Basin and the Great Artesian Basin capping and piping programs. That is a very brief overview of the functions, but there is a lot more to a lot of those things.

I also have teams that monitor water resources—hydrographers, aquatic ecologists and scientists—and help us with our catchment-based water plans. The key priorities to deliver in my team presently, on top of those statutory functions, are the government's commitments around bringing forward the review of the Mitchell water plan and the review of the 23 water plans to unlock water for economic development. We are working with industries to create more opportunities for water trading. Those are the key government election commitments that my team is delivering.

Ms Zerba: My name is Bernadette Zerba and I am the deputy director-general for Water Infrastructure Policy and Partnerships. At a high level, my teams look after strategic policy and legislation reform as well as bulk water infrastructure. The key functions, in detail, include assessing bulk water supply infrastructure proposals and supporting key project delivery such as Rookwood Weir outside of Rockhampton, the Toowoomba to Warwick pipeline and the Fitzroy to Gladstone pipeline. We oversee state bulk water entities and lead water pricing regulation, so this includes Sunwater, Seqwater, the Mount Isa Water Board and the Gladstone Area Water Board. We undertake regional water assessments, and this includes working with community to identify what the current and future water needs are, to work through a process and a long list of water supply solutions to come up with recommended priority projects.

We provide economic advice on the water sector issues such as the QCA reviews, working through what the direction notices will be to the QCA. We support councils with water security planning across Queensland. Whilst councils have primary responsibility for servicing their community's drinking water, the state government provides both funding and technical advice to councils in need. We negotiate funding and support the delivery of critical drinking water projects. The department is currently working with councils to deliver water infrastructure projects across 16 communities including eight First Nations communities: Cherbourg, Wujal Wujal, Northern Peninsula Area, Mornington, Doomadgee, Aurukun, Kowanyama and Dajarra. There are eight other communities: Cairns, Rockhampton, Douglas, Longreach, Cassowary Coast, Mareeba, the Central Highlands and Diamantina. We support industry-led business cases, usually where these are associated with national water grid funding. We have to administer any funding that comes through the federal government.

We also support the parliamentary inquiry into volunteering, as you know. We will be responsible for preparing the government's response to the inquiry.

Particular priorities that my team is responsible for delivering for the government include rebuilding Paradise Dam; delivering Cooranga and Barlil weirs; immediately reviewing the pipeline of water security projects; urgently reviewing water sources for SEQ with a comprehensive review of

dam options; undertaking a feasibility study for remediation at Leslie Harrison Dam; funding to support consultation on the Palmer River dam detailed business case; delivering a water security plan that will outline the government's objectives, principles and priorities; supporting the Water for Warrill board to advance a detailed business case—this project aims to deliver more secure and reliable water for Warrill, particularly during drought; delivering clean drinking water to Indigenous communities through infrastructure upgrades across Indigenous communities; supporting the Longreach Regional Council to deliver five new upgraded weirs on the Thomson River; and also leading the state's response to the parliamentary inquiry into volunteering in Queensland.

Ms Carrigan: My name is Emily Carrigan. I am the acting deputy director-general for the Local Government division. As the name suggests, we provide a range of supports to local government across the state. We have 77 councils and 578 councillors, as the director-general mentioned. We provide a range of services including guidance on governance and financial management matters; expert engineering and project management advice; and policy and legislation advice for local government regulation and capital and operating grants to support priority infrastructure projects and services. Most importantly to those councils, we administer the Financial Assistance Grant, which delivers over \$650 million in 2024-25. We also administer over \$635 million in current capital grants programs to support councils to deliver the infrastructure that supports their communities. We administer three pieces of legislation: the City of Brisbane Act 2010, the Local Government Act 2009 and the Local Government Electoral Act 2011. Each of those acts has a piece of subordinate legislation that we also administer.

We have a couple of upcoming priorities for this year. Our key pieces of work are: the Local Government Red Tape Reduction Taskforce, which is currently on foot, with a report expected to come towards the end of this month; a review of the Local Government Act, which is a key government election commitment, and we expect to see a number of tranches of legislation coming out of that process; a review of local government depreciation, which is a key issue for a number of our councils; establishing a Queensland Indigenous Council Leaders Accord to sit underneath our Equal Partners in Government Agreement between the state and local government; the parliamentary review of the Local Government (Councillor Conduct) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, a review of the OIA and councillor conduct process; and continuing to administer that important grant funding to councils.

Mr Hannan: That is the end of the opening statement and overview. Subject to your direction, we are happy to take questions or provide further information.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much, Director-General.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I am keen to get an understanding of how the division of labour is worked out between all of the different areas within the departments—so volunteers compared to water, compared to local government.

Mr Hannan: I will let Steve Robbins, our acting deputy director-general of corporate, provide an overview of where we sit.

Mr Robbins: At a top-line level, as the director-general mentioned, there are over 800 people in the department. It was about 837 as at the end of May this year. A rough breakdown of that would see approximately 600 people in the water part of the department; about 107 in local government—that includes some staff supporting the Office of the Independent Assessor; and about 125 people in corporate services. That is how the divisional structure at our top-line level sits for the allocation of resources.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You mentioned grants funding for councils. When we went out to Roma we saw the water-processing systems they have out there. It was very interesting to see how it all works. These systems obviously cost a lot of money and take up a lot of resources. The state contributes; it is a massive impost. What types of federal contributions are made to these types of projects to ensure we have good quality water for regional and remote Queensland?

Mr Hannan: I will speak briefly to the general grants and then I will hand over in terms of specifics on that. As Emily mentioned earlier, we administer Financial Assistance Grant funding on behalf of the Australian government. That is in the order of over \$600 million per year. That goes to councils and it is discretionary, their decision. They can obviously allocate that wherever they wish, whether it be to water projects or other aspects of council operations or infrastructure. Specifically in terms of water infrastructure, I might ask Bernadette to provide additional information.

Ms Zerba: When it comes to water infrastructure projects, we apply to the federal government on a case-by-case basis, normally through the National Water Grid Authority and their funding arrangements. We have recently received quite a significant amount of funding from them for a range

of Indigenous council water infrastructure projects, including water treatment facilities and (inaudible) facilities. I do not have the numbers at hand, but it is quite significant. Normally, it is matching funds with the state's contribution.

Ms PEASE: I want to talk further about the number of staff allocations. You said that you have about 600 staff members who are allocated to water. How many staff are there in the department who are allocated to the volunteering sector?

Ms Zerba: There are seven staff at the moment. This is a brand new area that did not exist within government, really, before becoming a portfolio under our minister. We had to stand up the team to help do the response to the parliamentary inquiry, so that team has just been stood up. They recently did a major review of all of the submissions to the inquiry to provide a summary to the committee, as you would know. We will just have to see what is required in that space. Because it is a new space we did not want to recruit too many staff, but we knew we would need policy people, engagement people, to work across government, to understand what the issues are in this space and to work with external stakeholders so we can be ready to do the government response when it is required.

Ms PEASE: Currently what level of staff are they?

Ms Zerba: We have a director, we have two 8s, a 7, a 6 and a 4.

Mr Hannan: An executive, two senior managers and then senior policy advisers down to a 4, in non-Public Service speak.

Mr BAILLIE: I come back to grants. I apologise if I am using the wrong terminology, but there are Works for Queensland grants. Are they the same grants you are talking about when you say Financial Assistance Grant payments for council?

Mr Hannan: No. The Australian government administers Financial Assistance Grant payments, which are annual payments delivered through the Grants Commission, an independent commission that administers those funds to councils. That is councils right across Australia. In Queensland the money is split. Stephen could tell me the exact number, but for the purposes of the committee approximately \$640 million to \$650 million is split across councils.

In the Queensland context we have a number of funding programs that are out and live presently. The 2024 to 2027 package of the \$100 million per annum Works for Queensland program was released in 2024, so \$300 million was allocated to councils to deliver. That funding is open to councils to decide where to invest, with a focus on infrastructure provision rather than necessarily their operational funding. In terms of decisions on the projects, they are decisions for councils. We obviously try and encourage them to focus on critical assets such as water infrastructure or others.

Other programs that exist include the South East Queensland Community Stimulus Program. That is \$100 million over a three-year program for the 12 SEQ councils. It has very similar funding guidelines to the Works for Queensland program. A small proportion of that is a competitive, allocation-based program. I think it is about \$30 million for that allocation. For our Indigenous councils we have the Indigenous Councils Funding Program, which is an operational support program provided to our 16 Indigenous councils. That is another grant program and it is discretionary as to where councils invest.

Mr BAILLIE: What was that one worth?

Mr Hannan: The quantum for the Indigenous Councils Funding Program for the last two financial years is approximately \$70 million per year. The last is the Local Government Grants and Subsidies Program, which was \$100 million over four years. It is a competitive allocation program that was released in 2024 with a focus on, once again, delivering critical infrastructure for our councils.

Mr HEALY: You all have fantastic jobs and big responsibilities. Emily, I want to focus on your area of responsibility in relation to councillors. I understand there is mandatory training. How is that enforced from your perspective?

Ms Carrigan: We have a system that tracks in the background every time somebody does the course and completes it. You are correct: we have one module out of our local government leaders program which focuses on conflicts of interest, registers of interest and code of conduct. Every councillor is required to complete that module within the first six months of being elected.

Mr HEALY: If it is not completed in that time, what options do you have available as a department to ensure that commitment is fulfilled?

Ms Carrigan: As I said, we do monitor completion rates. We communicate with both the CEO and the relevant councillor as they approach that six-month deadline. We have not had any issues with any councillors not completing the work. We have a hotline and a support team that works with

councillors just to ensure there are no technical issues. We have worked with some councils where connectivity is an issue to deliver that face to face. We have sent staff out to each council area as requested.

Mr HEALY: Corporate governance is a big component. A lot of people who get elected do not necessarily have that. I know it is seeking an opinion here, but, in your professional capacity, is what is being asked sufficient or should we do more? It is only because I know that in my area our mayor recently did the company directors course because she felt that she needed to do more. I know from a legality perspective it probably just covers off. Do you think that could potentially be expanded?

Ms Carrigan: Obviously, we are always open to feedback from councillors, mayors, CEOs or staff around whether we are hitting the target for balancing prior knowledge. Every councillor has a huge degree of prior knowledge when they come into the role, so it is about trying to meet that balance between their prior knowledge and what is required to understand the operation of the act. We did offer AICD training for all mayors post the election in 2024.

Mr HEALY: I was not aware of that.

Ms Carrigan: We had a range of mayors attend in Brisbane to do that course and we did get some really positive feedback. That was a hybrid course delivered through AICD but with content that was related to the Local Government Act as well.

ACTING CHAIR: I thank the officer for the way she handled that question. As members, we will be careful not to delve into asking officers of the department to comment on policy. I have a question that is a little broad in terms of who may answer it. My question is aimed at opportunities for the departments of water and local government operating under the one portfolio, especially as we are going to have some work later today around the quality of drinking water. What strategies are being implemented or have arisen as a result of the combination of the two departments around support for regional councils or low-population councils around their water and wastewater management, given that has obviously been an issue historically? What opportunities have arisen and what strategies are being employed?

Mr Hannan: I might lead off and then hand to colleagues in water in particular to talk about some of the opportunities that we are capitalising, with both our Indigenous and our rural and remote councils, as well as our engagement in particular with councils around standards. The coming together of those two departments was obviously not a decision of ours but—expressing a personal view, if I can—is a really fantastic opportunity in particular for our Indigenous, rural and remote councils. The provision of water is a significant part of council business. It is a significant investment and has a significant impact on their sustainability in terms of financial depreciation and the community services they provide.

Bringing together both departments—and prior to this we did work closely together; my previous role is what Emily is in at the moment. There was a lot of work that was done together, but now we are very much entrenched. As a start, there is a consistent conversation with mayors and CEOs in particular around a focus on resources and a focus on investment. In terms of the grants programs that I spoke about earlier, we do considerable work with them on understanding investment priorities for them and work collaboratively—especially across the ROCs and other organisations there—to look at opportunities for those councils to do things as efficiently as possible.

The other major opportunity lies in the fact that there are synergies between the teams. Within our previous local government division we had a team that was focused on providing engineering and technical support for the delivery of our water infrastructure projects in Indigenous councils. That has become essentially part of a broader team that sits across our water provision and that looks at national opportunities for funding to deliver a far broader range of advice and services for not just our Indigenous councils but also our rural and remote councils. Needless to say, it is early days in terms of opportunities—and our focus is on delivering on our election commitments and our priorities—but as we progress forward I think there is a significant number of opportunities with these two departments being together, in particular as it relates to the sustainability of our councils. I might pass to Bernadette.

Ms Zerba: I think there is an enormous opportunity for the two portfolios to work well together. We were really pleased when they came together. As Josh was saying, already the local government division and the water division are working very closely on the delivery of a lot of regional and remote water projects. The water team got the funding through the National Water Grid Authority and is working very closely with the engineering team to actually deliver those projects with community. We have an internal governance arrangement that sits over the top of that to monitor progress.

There are certainly lots of opportunities around capability and capacity with those more regional and remote communities. We would like to really work in that space between the two parts of the department to really help build capability and capacity, particularly when it comes to tendering for projects and getting the right solution for the right community, because that is often one of the major issues that we find. There are plenty of opportunities. Do you want to add anything?

Mr Cowley-Grimmond: I would only add that we have always worked really closely with the local government division and Queensland Health. We have often worked collaboratively on drinking water incidents and on infrastructure charges. In many respects, bringing the two functions together into the one department is an opportunity to embed that a bit more deeply, because we are all with the one director-general and the one minister. That is probably helpful, to make sure we are aligned. We have always done that very closely.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: I note in the media some concern about the process around complaints about council candidates and that there are some issues with that. Perhaps you could speak to that and provide a breakdown of the complaints. I am interested in the data around open and resolved complaints. How many are deemed to be a waste of time through that process? Perhaps you could take that on notice. Could you speak to your understanding of the issues and the implications of those?

Mr Hannan: Emily spoke earlier to one of our commitments—I believe it was an election commitment—to review the complaints framework and, indeed, the operations of the Office of the Independent Assessor and the Councillor Conduct Tribunal. That is a piece of work that is a commitment to be undertaken in this term. I think that is possibly one of the references you are talking to in terms of seeing recent reports. In terms of numbers of complaints, they are handled through the Office of the Independent Assessor and I do not think we would even have those. That would be a question for the CEO of the Office of the Independent Assessor due to the separation of them from the department. Would I be correct in saying that?

Ms Carrigan: That is correct.

Mrs NIGHTINGALE: Do you have data on the complaints that have some substance and relevance versus those that are deemed as silly?

Mr Hannan: We can check. The way the process runs, from my understanding, is that the Office of the Independent Assessor will make that initial determination. They actually decide what is deemed to be—I do not know what the word is—frivolous, or something to that effect, and actually discard them straightaway. I do not have those figures. They would be things that only the OIA would be able to provide. Numbers taken forward we probably would be able to access. OIA would have those numbers. I am sorry, I do not have them.

Mr BOOTHMAN: The Auditor-General tabled a report in December 2024 about water quality. Data showed that there were 111 incidents of 'boil water' requirements. Of them, I believe 12 were due to noncompliance. What types of processes are in place to ensure these regions are producing high-quality water for human consumption?

Mr Hannan: I might ask Jarrod to answer that question and provide an overview of our process and how we work with councils.

Mr Cowley-Grimmond: The water supply regulation team sits within my division. We co-regulate in conjunction with Queensland Health. Queensland Health is involved when there is a health risk. My team is looking at both public health and water quality. That report was tabled late last year. We are currently working through implementing the recommendations in that. The number of 'boil water' incidents—111 I think you said—we do that. A 'boil water' alert is an appropriate response to a water quality issue. That is how you deal with those sorts of things. It is done on a risk basis. It does not necessarily mean that the water is unsafe; it is just that there has been a failure somewhere in the system and as a precautionary measure we recommend that people boil water before it is consumed.

The way our regulatory framework works is: it is for councils or water service providers to formulate a drinking water quality management plan. That drinking water quality management plan is how the council decides how it is going to meet the drinking water quality standards that are set nationally, the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, and it is an approval process. They draft their plan, it comes to my team, we assess it and say, 'Yes, that's fine,' and then we hold them accountable for the implementation of their plan. That plan will need to deal with all of the relevant risks they may be faced with—things like equipment failure, or high turbidity in the water.

The number of 'boil water' alerts is not necessarily evidence of a problem; it is evidence of the system working. You may go on to a 'boil water' alert for a variety of reasons. There are some communities where if you have a significant rainfall event you get very turbid or muddy water in the river. The treatment program is not designed to cover those sorts of raw water quality issues, so you go onto a 'boil water' alert temporarily while that water clears and then you come back to normal. There are various reasons you can put in there.

We take the approach, in our regulatory regime, of educate, support and guide. When we have an incident, we partner with the council and with Queensland Health, if necessary, to work through how to resolve that incident and then afterwards we will look to see whether or not there has been a regulatory failure that needs some sort of compliance action taken. Usually what happens is that councils phone us up as soon as they know. They have done everything right. We work with them. But there have been incidents where we have needed to issue compliance notices or information requests or penalty infringement notices for those more severe cases. That is how the system works. Where we have more systemic issues I will partner with the other parts of the division around longer term strategies—equipment, infrastructure upgrades, training and those sorts of things.

Ms PEASE: Bernadette, you talked earlier about some oversight with regard to Leslie Harrison Dam. What sort of work are you doing there? Could you elaborate on that opening statement?

Ms Zerba: That was an election commitment to look at putting back the gates on Leslie Harrison Dam. Sunwater is currently doing an investigation to look at the options around that and they will be coming back to government.

Ms PEASE: What is the purpose of putting the gates on and what are the benefits of it?

Ms Zerba: Normally it would be to increase the volume of water. I cannot remember the exact reason the gates were taken off. For whatever reason, the gates were taken off a long time ago and there has been a request for them to be put back on to get an increase in volume of water in the dam.

Ms PEASE: Are you able to provide further data on that? I would like to understand that a little more. What are the benefits and what are the costs associated with that?

Ms Zerba: I will have to come back to you with that, I am afraid, particularly the costs. The costs of the investigation are around \$500,000 but the cost of replacing the gates would be significantly more.

Ms PEASE: When you talk about the gates, I assume you are talking about the floodgates?

Ms Zerba: Yes.

Ms PEASE: Not the gates to the parkland?

Ms Zerba: No, it is a gate mechanism. I think it was in relation to dam safety risks. In order to lower the risk for the dam they take those off so less water can be held in the dam. When you have a dam safety risk, if you lower the water it reduces the pressure on the dam and lowers the risk of the dam.

Ms PEASE: If that is the case, will a commitment to reinstate those impact on the safety or the integrity of the dam?

Ms Zerba: They would have to look at all of that as part of that options analysis—what they would have to do to make the dam safe to have those gates back on.

Ms PEASE: Could you provide some more details on that? I would really like to have a better understanding of that because it is in my patch.

Mr BAILLIE: Bernadette, you mentioned earlier that the volunteer work group you have is about seven staff strong. Do you have a big body of work or are they mainly at this stage to assist with the inquiry and the size of that department and the scope of work they do may be an outcome of our inquiry? Am I understanding correctly?

Ms Zerba: Yes, that is right. When we understand the findings of the inquiry, we will have a better understanding of the scope of work that is required. I guess it depends on where that work sits. Some of the work will sit across other departments. Responses relating to emergency services would be covered by that department. Insurance responses could potentially be covered by the Department of Justice. Our team might be more of a coordination team working across government to farm out what the relevant issues are and work with them to make sure they are addressed appropriately, rather than us needing to beef up our staffing to duplicate capacity in other areas. That is what we are thinking at this point in time.

At the moment they are also working on getting to know the stakeholders in the sector—Volunteering Queensland and other stakeholders—because we just stood them up. Now that we have done the review of all of the submissions to the inquiry, we are also starting to do some research into the themes and what potential solutions or remediation activities might be needed to address some of those things that have been identified. We are just starting work in that space.

Mr BAILLIE: During our inquiries so far we have heard from lots of councils that have a volunteer engagement group for something similar. I am just interested at this stage. Thank you.

Mr Hannan: Whilst they are the numbers now, it is my responsibility to ensure we prioritise our resources. We have significant resources across our department if and when we need them, and if there are priorities that come out of the inquiry we can capitalise on the synergies—the systems, the processes, the people. You mentioned local government. We have a local government division of about 120-odd people. If we need to prioritise our resourcing, we will prioritise where we need to. Whilst that is a current state, it is not a barrier to a future state in that regard. That is a decision in terms of our resourcing allocation across the department.

Ms Zerba: For example, when we did the review of the more than 500 submissions, that team could not possibly have done that in a two-week period so they reached out across the department and we got about 20 people leaning in to help review those submissions. Then the team coordinated the final version of it all. We are quite flexible and agile across the department in leaning in where we need to.

Mr HEALY: Bernadette, I love your water brooch.

Ms PEASE: I love it, too. I noticed it straightaway. It is really appropriate.

Mr HEALY: I should have mentioned it earlier. I think it is terrific. Joshua, I am wondering how your work on red-tape reduction is moving forward. Where is the bulk of that work being focused?

Mr Hannan: The commencement of the Local Government Red Tape Reduction Taskforce was a commitment of the new government to be undertaken very soon within the term. I think it was to kick off within 100 days. I am very happy to say that that kicked off and has progressed exceptionally well. For the first six months of this year we have a taskforce resourced within our local government division. The taskforce lead is Mr Andrew Chesterman, who has been leading that piece of work, supported by a number of people there.

It has concluded its stakeholder engagement phase. My understanding is that Andrew and the team have been out to every single council either through ROC or through direct engagement with council. The numbers and stats in terms of submissions and the like are quite large, as you can imagine. Our councils are very good at that sort of feedback on red tape.

More importantly, there has been significant engagement across state government and all agencies across state government. I chaired a state government senior executive reference committee with very senior representatives of all departments to ensure that our state agencies are on board—and I am using Andrew's phrase here—with a bias to yes or a bias to looking at things differently and also with a view to capitalise the opportunity internally themselves around processes and red-tape opportunities they have with the sector.

The draft report is due to be provided in the coming week to an executive steering committee that I chair. Then there is a process to provide a report to the minister by the end of June. It is on track. It has kept on track the whole way through. It has had a significantly high cadence. One of the guiding principles for it was an 80-20 rule. It is not going to capture everything, but if we made one of these things go for years you would probably have a diminishing rate of return.

It has been a really comprehensive process. It will be subject to the provision of the report to the minister and then in turn to government and the findings will come out. From my perspective, we have been really happy with the progress and really happy with the engagement right across the sector.

Mr HEALY: That review of red tape in your areas of responsibility was from people within your department?

Mr Hannan: Every agency across government, if they had feedback or an idea or suggestion, was engaged with. Every department—

Mr HEALY: Had to come back with feedback.

Mr Hannan: It is a whole-of-government review. The local government division obviously have a fair few suggestions. The act and everything that comes with it and some of the nuances of our local government act around requirements on councils came up a number of times, but there were

key themes you can predict around grants, approvals and the like. Our planning departments, our environmental departments, our infrastructure agencies, our colleagues in TMR—all agencies were consulted as part of the process. It is not narrow just on the local government division.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I have a question with regard to the Gold Coast Hinterland and water security. One of the towns in that area is Canungra, which everybody goes through. Going to Canungra is a bit of a ritual. It is a beautiful little town in the hinterland. Back in 2019, there was a water shortage in those areas and we had to truck water in. What has been looked at to potentially secure a better water source for that town, especially with the growth that has been occurring in recent years?

Mr Hannan: I will look to colleagues, but that might be one that we need take on notice.

Ms Zerba: Seqwater manage the water for Canungra. I would not be able to give you the detail of what they are working on at the moment. I could give you the wrong information.

Mr Hannan: We can come back with the detail on that one. I just do not want to misquote.

Mr BOOTHMAN: That is fine. It is a big issue. If you drive through there these days, there is development everywhere in that town.

Ms Zerba: It is a growing area.

Ms PEASE: I would like to have a better understanding of your engagement with the Open Data Portal that you would have to be reporting to. What impact is it going to have on your department? How are you working in that space? What sort of information will you be transferring over?

Mr Hannan: Steve, is that something we can answer here, generally speaking?

Mr Robbins: Generally speaking, we do publish a range of information on open data as well as through other mechanisms for sharing information. They are datasets that relate to all components of the department's business. In terms of particular impacts relating to your question, I think we would have to take that bit of it on notice in detail. I think it is around 50 sets of data that share through the Open Data Portal. As I said, other data is available through different means including on our website, depending on the issue.

Ms PEASE: What I am trying to understand is the policy with regard to all those shared services being in one place so that everyone has access to it and making it accessible and easier to update rather than everyone having to put the same information in a million times. It is all in one place at one time. Are you part of that? I am assuming there would be a lot of data coming through from your department.

Mr Robbins: Correct. There will be a component of that for us. In fact, the ability for customers to have an easy experience in terms of the way they provide data to us and the way that is divulged to them is something that we look at anyway. With the changes that were announced recently, this agency will work with the department that leads that and others right across government to make sure we are fulfilling our component of it. We obviously do not have the same level of data as some other parts of government that have really large footprints in terms of their engagement with the public. To the extent we need to comply, we will be doing that.

Ms PEASE: If you are going to provide some more information on that, will you be given extra funding to be able to produce and provide that information? Will further budgeting be given?

Mr Robbins: I could not talk to that at this point.

ACTING CHAIR: I think we have to take that as a policy question. You cannot ask the department if they are going to be funded. I am going to take the place of the member for Townsville and ask a question around workforce support. Every element of the Queensland economy is struggling for workforce but local governments in particular in regional and rural areas. Are there any dedicated strategies or collaboration opportunities currently being explored? It is not necessarily limited to water or wastewater but I am talking about in terms of project management support or delivery of a range of grant projects. Obviously there are areas like financial acquittal. To what degree are there inherent programs or collaborative work underway now within the departments to support, given the workforce capability issues that local government face?

Mr Hannan: That is a very good question and one that is very topical for the local government division. I will pass to Emily in a second to talk through our training programs. We do provide a comprehensive suite of training programs for councils across a range of different areas, and Emily will touch on those.

Also within our Works for Queensland allocation we did allow councils to dedicate funding to capacity initiatives or training initiatives or wherever they want to invest, especially for specialist skills. That is similar to a concept that I might have borrowed from our colleagues in TMR who do the same through the TIDS funding, where you can invest in capability initiatives to build capacity in certain specialist areas, particularly around investment in engineering type skills or, as we spoke about earlier, some of our financial management skills. It is hard to get good capacity across all of our 77 councils, especially in competition with other sectors. We do invest a fair bit of time in those.

We also work in partnership with the LGAQ and, in particular, the Local Government Management Association, to co-produce and co-deliver training initiatives across the state in different areas. I might hand over to Emily to talk through those.

Ms Carrigan: I did mention earlier our online portal. The LG Leaders Program currently has five modules aimed to support councils across some of those big areas of information. Finance management, in particular, is a big topic. Asset management is another big area, as is service-level planning.

We have a range of programs that are designed where there are those common elements across councils where we have a consistent set of resources that are provided to councils. Some of those programs are directed at the councillor level and some of them are in more detail directed to council staff. What we are trying to promote is mobility across the sector to enable council staff to work in multiple councils. A couple of councils at the moment have shared models, which we encourage where we know there are some capacity gaps across the sector.

As I mentioned, asset management is one of our key areas of focus for this year. We understand that that is a significant area of development opportunity across the sector. We are leaning in to really support that.

We deliver a range of training face to face with councils or we try to bring councils together in regions wherever possible to focus on allowing that sort of connectivity across the different council areas, building up networks of support. As Josh mentioned, LGMA is a really critical partner for us in that work. They do a lot of work to support councils and develop staff across the sector.

Mr HEALY: This is a very open-ended question, so feel free to take it for a ride. Are there any water regulation issues?

Mr Hannan: I thank the honourable member for the question, noting your preamble.

Mr HEALY: I think I should be saying no to your preamble. I know it is a very broad question. It is a huge topic. There is a wide range of areas. Are there any burning issues in key areas? I accept the fact that we live in a world where we are swamped with information but we are starved of intelligence. You are the experts in this space. I do not look to the media for any of the issues.

Mr Hannan: I genuinely appreciate the question. I think I might hand to Jarrod, who is never short of a view.

Mr HEALY: The tie says it, Jarrod.

Mr Cowley-Grimmond: I bought it from Harrods.

Mr HEALY: It is very nice.

ACTING CHAIR: Michael, there are only four minutes, not 45 minutes, left.

Mr Cowley-Grimmond: We have a very broad regulatory remit. We look after dam safety. We look after drinking water regulation, as I have said. We look after riverine protections, quarrying, illegal crossings, waterway barrier works. We look after the take of water from rivers, lakes, aquifers. We look after drilling for water bore drilling. It is a very broad remit. We use a risk-based approach. As you recognise, Queensland is a big place and I do not have unlimited people. We are rolling out a whole range of new remote-sensing technologies to allow us to leverage satellite imagery and things like that.

Our focus is very much on education, informing and assisting people to learn how to comply. The vast majority of people want to do the right thing. Our strapline has always been supporting people to do the right thing by addressing people who do not. That is really what we are doing. We do not see huge levels of noncompliance across the sector generally. We have a very good relationship with peak bodies who partner with us and things like that.

It is always challenging to cover a big state like this, but generally we do not see any burning issues other than the normal levels of noncompliance that you might find in pretty much any regulatory field. That is generally the approach that we take.

Mr HEALY: Thank you very much. That was a great response to a very broad question.

ACTING CHAIR: I note that there is probably very little time left for a question and answer. Unless there is a very quick question from any member—

Mr HEALY: What did you pay for the tie?

Mr Cowley-Grimmond: It was bought in the late nineties. Can you tell?

ACTING CHAIR: I genuinely thank all members and the departmental officers for their contribution and attendance here today. This concludes the public briefing. For those questions that have been taken on notice, the committee will require your responses by Wednesday, 25 June 2025. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare the public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.14 am.