



PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SA Bennett MP—Chair
Mr NJ Dalton MP
Mr RI Katter MP
Mr GR Kelly MP
Mr JR Martin MP
Mr LP Power MP

Staff present:

Ms L Manderson—Committee Secretary
Mr R Pelenyi—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT 14: 2023-24— *QUEENSLAND'S REGIONS 2023*

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 11 June 2025

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 11 JUNE 2025

The committee met at 9.30 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing. My name is Steve Bennett, member for Burnett and chair of the committee. With me today we have: James Martin MP, member for Stretton and deputy chair; Mr Nigel Dalton, member for Mackay; Mr Robbie Katter, member for Traeger; Mr Glen Kelly, member for Mirani; and Mr Linus Power, member for Logan, substituting for Mr Smith. Today we will receive a briefing on the status of the Auditor-General's Report 14: 2023-24—*Queensland's regions 2023*. These briefings aim to deepen the committee's understanding of this portfolio's key initiatives in the sector. I would like to begin by thanking the Auditor-General and the Deputy Auditor-General for making themselves and their teams available today. We will receive briefings today from the Audit Office, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing, Regional and Rural Development—to be abbreviated for the rest of the day.

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 today to provide factual and technical information. Any questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the minister or left for 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 the chair's discretion at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during these proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or on social media. I remind those present about the protocol for phones: turn them off.

CLAYDON, Mr Michael, Director, Queensland Audit Office

FLEMMING, Mr Patrick, Deputy Auditor-General, Queensland Audit Office

VAGG, Ms Rachel, Auditor-General, Queensland Audit Office

CHAIR: I welcome representatives from the Audit Office and the Auditor-General. I invite you to brief the committee after which our committee members would love to ask you some questions.

Ms Vagg: I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land throughout Queensland. Thank you for the opportunity to brief the committee on the QAO's report, *Queensland's Regions 2023*, which was tabled in June 2024. With me today is my Deputy Auditor-General, Patrick Flemming, and Michael Claydon, the director responsible for the preparation of this report.

This report brought together regional insights from our financial audits across government entities. When preparing this report it was helpful for us to define what Queensland's regions are. In our report Queensland's regions refer to all geographical areas outside of Greater Brisbane. The regions in our report range from coastal cities like the Gold Coast, through to the Far North, to more remote outback areas. This is different from what many people think of as regional Queensland. Three quarters of all Queenslanders live in the regions. The demographic profile between each region varies. There is stagnant or forecast population decline in some rural areas and regions are experiencing a shift to a larger proportion of their population aging. A changing population can affect the types of government services needed. For example, an aging population may need fewer schools but require more aged-care services and health services. Queensland's industries vary across the state to reflect the natural resources that are available. Collectively, the mining and energy sector, major cattle, agriculture, aquaculture and manufacturing producers and tourism provide around 30 per cent of the total gross state product. Health care, construction and retail are the most significant employers in Queensland's regions.

As part of the Queensland government's approach to procurement, agencies are required to apply a local benefits approach when purchasing goods and services. The Queensland government publishes an annual procurement statement. However, the statement does not include the proportion

of all Queensland government procurement that has occurred with a local supplier—that is, within 125 kilometres of where the goods or services are to be supplied. Individual entities report contracts awarded over \$10,000 on the open data website but this also does not indicate whether the contract was awarded to a local supplier. This could make it difficult for Queenslanders to know how much is being spent with local suppliers.

Responsibility for growing Queensland's regions is shared across government. In our report we focused on the four then government departments with responsibility for functions that directly target regional economic growth. At the time of our report, economic development functions were split across three of those four departments. Achieving objectives can be challenging if entities do not have effective arrangements for working together. Government departments need to focus the coordination of regional growth activities both within their own departments and across the Queensland government. The success of any regional governance model will depend on how effectively agencies can overcome regional boundaries, disperse government functions and the coordination of challenges of delivering services across Queensland's diverse regions.

I have decided that I will no longer publish an annual insights report on Queensland's regions. I will instead ensure that our forward work plan includes sufficient focus on regional service delivery through our range of planned audit topics. For example, I have recently tabled a report on managing Queensland's regional water quality and we are currently completing an audit on attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland. QAO also audits government grants through our annual financial audit program such as grants provided to local governments as well as audits on specific programs such as our current audit on supporting industry development. This greater flexibility will ensure that we can focus our audit topics on the right areas at the right times to better meet the interests of parliament, stakeholders and the public. I am happy to take any questions the committee has on this report.

Mr MARTIN: You mentioned that you have made the decision not to continue with the yearly report on regional growth. Can you expand on your reasons why?

Ms Vagg: I can. This was the first time we prepared this report. It gave some good insights in terms of what is happening in the regions, where population sits and where economic activity is. I felt that I could focus that into other reports and make recommendations which are actually more deeply connected with subject matter that we think is of risk. In terms of regional activity generally, the state entities reports and local government reports, which are both annual reports that I prepare, do cover regional activities as well so I have those two sector-based reports as well as specific regionally focused activity in the forward work plan so I do feel that we have adequate coverage from those other reports.

Mr DALTON: I was very keen to hear that you see the demographic difference in regional areas maybe needing fewer schools and more aged care. Could you go into some more specifics about maybe where those areas are most diverse?

Ms Vagg: I can. Regional population demographics should be driving, and in fact we do see them driving, infrastructure and service delivery of governments. You did highlight there that in some instances there is a lower need for schools but there is a greater demand for health care. It is ensuring that with health care, in particular, those service needs are identified and at the hospital and health service board level that the demographics of population are brought into consideration when deciding on the service levels and the funding required for health in particular. Is there anything else you wanted to add there, Michael?

Mr Claydon: In our report we did highlight some of the regions which were experiencing a faster rate of growth for people over 65 compared to others which had a much lower rate of growth, as an indicator, perhaps, of those that might need those kinds of services. The ones we identified in the report were the Moreton Bay north area, Cairns, Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday and Central Queensland based on the statistics from 2018 to 2022. By using that kind of information, which I know that the health services do, that can help them to identify where those services might be needed more greatly compared to other regions.

Mr POWER: In terms of population growth, there are challenges in measuring that. For example, Mount Isa and other regional areas have large employers that can have a dramatic effect on the future of employment, both positively and negatively. How did you try to account for those sorts of unknowns in terms of what government does about services in the regions?

Ms Vagg: I will start more broadly by just talking about local government services and the challenges that are faced there. When we look at sustainability of local governments we actually look at the services they provide and the revenue sources that they have access to to deliver the services.

In some cases, the service demand is greatly affected by a specific industry that might be in place at a certain point in time. Fly-in fly-out workers can significantly affect that demand. When we look at sustainability we take that into consideration in that overall assessment, but it does need to be called out and clarified in those assessments at a local government level. In terms of population for this report, I might actually refer to Michael to respond to that question.

Mr Claydon: Our report was looking at both population growth historically as well as forecast population changes on a long-term basis. I can appreciate though that in the short-term if you have a significant employer such as in the Mount Isa region—and I am aware of the challenges in that region; I have some audit clients in that area—that can obviously have a profound impact on those projections. Whilst in the long-term there might have been a forecast growth in that area, if you do have a significant event that is unexpected, or it is brought forward compared to what was previously expected, that would obviously have a significant impact on those particular regions. There needs to be some agility in being able to respond to those challenges, that is for sure.

Mr POWER: We talked about the demographic nature of a region such as aging. We also heard about people moving to regional areas for work and employment and then as families reach a certain age they find that it is more difficult for them to stay there. There are also temporary workers, those on various visa classes from overseas and fly-in fly-out workers. Government workers also sometimes go to regional areas but only for a very limited amount of time. Does that make the nature of demographic changes different? In the south-east we see people settling for a long time, whereas in regional areas there is a lot more moving in, moving out in those populations. How does government respond to that? Should we be doing things to try to incentivise people to stay for a longer time rather than having a temporary connection to an area?

Ms Vagg: It is a challenge and we highlight in this report the need for government agencies to coordinate their activities with each other in terms of directing grants and other programs, as well as investment in infrastructure, with a link to what the demographics look like in a particular region. We have highlighted the need for coordination. We are currently undertaking an audit about attracting and retaining teachers in regional Queensland and it highlights many of the things that you have just spoken to about the attraction of skilled workers in a particular group of need in the community and then actually incentivising those skilled workers to stay in the regions. That takes incentive programs, but also they need to be able to access community services and have somewhere to live. Those challenges are identified in those styles of audits. That particular audit is underway now and we are expecting to table it in the next few months for that particular one.

Mr G KELLY: I am all about the next generation, and that is probably why I am sitting here in parliament. They come first. It has been touched on a couple of times now, but education and health are the big ones in regional and remote Queensland. You half answered the question from the member for Logan. Attracting teachers and health workers to regional and remote areas is tough. I know this firsthand because I live in regional Queensland. I have three state high schools in my electorate of Mirani and their biggest problem is getting teachers in and then getting them to stay. Life is easier in the cities.

Moving forward, what are your thoughts on getting those people to stay? There are a lot of children in the bush and they do not want to go to school in town. They like to be on their farms and go to school down the road. We have to work out how to keep the teachers there. What are your thoughts on how we can do this moving forward? It is a big issue in my electorate.

Ms Vagg: It is probably a question best asked of the departments responsible for attracting and recruiting workers into the regions, which would include many government services as well as Health and Education. In terms of the effectiveness of the Department of Education's programs for attracting and retaining teachers in regional areas, that is something we are working on right now. That particular report will give insights into our audit on the effectiveness of that particular department's approach, and that will be done in the next few months. Patrick is actually coordinating that report. Is there something you want to add, Pat?

Mr Flemming: Not specifically on the report as we are still working through that. We will look at teachers in remote and regional areas in this report. We will make recommendations. While those recommendations will be for the Department of Education, because that is what we have looked at, there might be some recommendations that are relevant for other government bodies that employ similar schemes or try to attract and retain employees in regional areas as well. There might be learnings from others that come through that.

Ms Vagg: I would say that we have found through many of our reports, including our local government report and the regional drinking water quality report, which we have just tabled, that accessing capable resources in regional locations is a challenge for many service delivery elements

of government. If we go back to this report, many of them talk about the coordination of government activities, and accessing capabilities is one area where coordination of government activities is really important.

Mr KATTER: Housing has always interested me, and that is probably because I have a background in valuations. One of the defining characteristics of housing west of the Great Divide is the amount of underutilised housing and the small number of modern, new housing there is. Most of our policies are developed around housing estates, the first home buyers grant and new homes. In your data collection, did you make any observations about underutilised housing?

Ms Vagg: I will turn to Michael specifically on that.

Mr Claydon: No, that was not something that we specifically looked at in this report. I am trying to recall—

Mr KATTER: I know it is a bit peripheral but it is significant, as I see it.

Ms Vagg: I am happy to talk to it generally. In this report we did not specifically call it out. We have done work in the social housing space but not necessarily in access to affordable housing in the regions, which is what I think you are talking about. When there are issues relating to access to a capable workforce, one of the reasons provided is there may not be sufficient housing to accommodate the workforce in the region. It is definitely provided as a reason for agencies not being able to access a capable workforce.

Mr KATTER: I understand.

Ms Vagg: Every year, across all of the financial statements of government, we audit the value of assets. The value of assets is very dependent on the supply chain and cost of materials. In recent years we have seen an escalation in those costs. We have observed through that valuation process and then anecdotally through our audits that there are challenges to accessing a supply chain in building materials which would enable the building of houses. The challenges have been identified through our audits. We just have not had a specific audit on this particular issue.

Mr KATTER: I want to tap in to something mentioned by the member for Logan. Moranbah did a bit of work on workforce composition. This is an acute problem in Mount Isa, and everyone has always picked on the mining industry and FIFO and rightly so. All the government services use FIFO now, and the health system is probably the biggest user, which impacts on the delivery of services, the census and all sorts of things. It seems the more remote you go now the larger the FIFO composition. Did that stand out in the data collection? To me, that is becoming an acute issue, and I feel like it must have some impact on the way we are delivering government services and funding.

Ms Vagg: The population information in this report is based on census information, so it would not include those temporary-style workers. We have made some observations across various reports. For example, in the health sector report last year we highlighted the increased cost of the health workforce. One of the reasons provided was locum workers. There was another example, I think, in a report where temporary workers had been provided. I go back to the previous point I made. The coordination of government and the coordination of access to capability is really important when you have a shortage of workers and a shortage of places for them to live. Good coordination across government is important.

Mr KATTER: Census data was solely relied upon?

Ms Vagg: Just in case I have that wrong, the information—

Mr KATTER: I assume it probably is. I do not think there is anything else available.

Mr Claydon: No. We wanted to make sure that we were using something reliable and a reliable temporary count of people across the state was not something that we could find.

Mr KATTER: This may be more of a comment, but the deputy mayor of Cloncurry did a ring around the other day to 20 or 30 of the bigger businesses in town and asked, 'How many of your staff have kept their interstate postcode?' There were 300 to 400 people, and that is in a population of 3,000 people in Cloncurry. That 300 to 400 people—an estimate—would still report on the census that they are not living in the district. For that population size, that is a pretty big portion. I think there are big flaws in that census data, particularly for Mount Isa with the itinerants coming from the Northern Territory and the gulf et cetera. That is probably more of a comment but it shows some of the shortcomings.

CHAIR: I am interested in the conversation around regional planning. I am a big believer that it is the real driver of so many things in our regions. I note that you stated the regional planning responsibilities changed between 2011 and 2023 between five different agencies and the effect that had. Would you be able to talk a bit more about that and what you think the future drivers for regional planning may look like?

Ms Vagg: I will refer to Michael to start the response.

Mr Claydon: One of the aspects we looked at was where the statutory regional planning function was sitting within the four departments the Auditor-General mentioned in her opening. It was the one function that stood out to us amongst those four that had changed the most times. In speaking to that function as part of our report, we noted in some cases that does not have a significant impact on their work, but there were some benefits being within the department and working on the economic development areas rather than being siloed into another area.

One of the aspects that we talked to them about, which we mentioned in our report, was the age of those current plans. Many of those were more than five years old, and a number of them were more than 10 years old. The department was working to improve those plans by reviewing them. They were doing that for 10 of the 13 that were more than five years old.

CHAIR: There is a statutory obligation for regional planning to be reviewed. That is a 10-year timeline, as I understand it.

Mr Claydon: I would have to check that.

CHAIR: Do not check. That is fine. It was just me.

Mr MARTIN: Following on a little bit from the chair's question, I wanted to ask about of government. After looking at what your report said and listening to what you were saying about the effect of machinery-of-government changes on departments, is the Audit Office recommending that ministers or the Premier try to avoid MoGs in the future? My second question is: has the Audit Office actually done a report on machinery-of-government changes and how that affects departments?

Ms Vagg: No, we are not making a recommendation to suggest that machinery-of-government changes should not happen. That is a decision of government, and they are entitled to make those decisions. We prepared a specific report on machinery-of-government changes a couple of years ago, and we talk about it in our state entities report just to show where the shifts of functions are across government.

In terms of the specific report that was prepared on machinery of government, it was actually about the process to effect the change within government and about practices that can be undertaken by government departments to minimise the effect of machinery-of-government changes. They are things like the alignment of systems, the quick agreement about where employees should sit and establishing a singular culture and control environment within a new department to allow it to focus on what it needs to focus on. The ability to manage the machinery-of-government changes is really important to ensure an effective and an efficient government.

That particular report focused on those aspects. It had numerous checklists and support materials in place for government departments to implement. We do talk about the effects of machinery-of-government changes on service delivery where we observe it. It often may be given as a reason something may not be up to date or why something may not be functioning in the way it was established to function.

Mr DALTON: In your report you mentioned that the income is 23 per cent less in the regions than in Greater Brisbane. In relation to the cost of travel from the regions to the cities, have you looked at the time, cost and availability compared with the cost of living? There is such a reduction in capacity within the regions. How much more does it cost and how much more time does it take to get people around the state? If someone living in Brisbane wants to go to a particular event, they do not have to spend \$400 or \$500 on an airfare. Did you examine that at all?

Ms Vagg: I do not think we specifically looked at travel costs within the report. We just looked at income within the regions. We also looked at grants provided, so funding into the region. No, we did not specifically look at travel costs.

Mr DALTON: It would be quite significant, wouldn't it, on a family budget?

Ms Vagg: I think there are many impacts on family budgets—cost of supply of materials and food into the regions. There is some standardised electricity pricing, so that would not have such an effect. I could not actually comment on transport costs specifically.

Mr POWER: Looking in your report at the average annual population change in the various regions from 2019 to 2023 and the projected annual population change from 2021 to 2046, the graph seems to indicate that every single region except Townsville will see less annualised growth. The projection is to 2046 but we have already seen what has happened from 2021 to now. Every single region will have less growth than that experienced in the period 2019 to 2023. In the regions listed to the right of the graph—Darling Downs, Far North, Outback—North, and Outback—South—having such low growth and an aging society, we are probably going to see reduced workforce populations in all of those regions. Is that correct—that we are going to see less growth in every region of Queensland, except Townsville?

Ms Vagg: Apart from Townsville and the Far North, yes. They are the projections based on census data. That is right. Yes, that is one of the reasons we have highlighted this in the report—the connection of what the expected population growth will look like, and that is reduced population growth in many of the regions, and for the consideration of government what that means in terms of service delivery at both a state and local government level.

Mr POWER: Places like Logan, Beaudesert and Wide Bay in the first three years of that sample have seen really significant growth. Admittedly, 2021 to 2046 is a long time. That would mean on the back end of those years we are going to see significantly lower growth than even at the midpoint. We are likely to see strong growth in Logan, Beaudesert, Gympie and parts of the Wide Bay for some years to come. In the 10 years afterwards, we are going to see very weak growth. That is the suggestion.

Ms Vagg: This is not data that we have collected. It is data that is made available from the Government Statistician's Office and census data. I will get Michael to check.

Mr POWER: The ABS and the Queensland Government Statistician's Office.

Ms Vagg: Yes. It is their projections that we have published in this report. Is there anything you wanted to add, Michael?

Mr Claydon: Probably the point I would add is that the rate of population growth particularly in the last two financial years of 2019 to 2023 was substantially higher than some of the longer term averages. When you are comparing them to a 25-year projection on a long-term basis, it is not really going to take into account some of those short-term fluctuations like we have seen in the last couple of years. What I would be expecting to occur is these projections will be updated next year, I believe, because they get updated on a five-yearly basis. That may then show a change to reflect some of what we have seen recently. I think your reflection on it being a potentially lower rate of population increase in the future would reflect the aging out, if I can put it that way, of some of that population compared to birth rates and replacement in that way.

Mr POWER: In 2045-46, we will have a significantly larger population such that the rate still represents a larger individual number of people and the services that need to be provided.

Ms Vagg: Yes, that is right.

Mr G KELLY: My question is to the Auditor-General. In this report you mentioned that about 46 per cent of infrastructure spending is in regional Queensland. Looking at gross regional product and gross value added totals from the Queensland Government Statistician's Office, about 68 per cent of our GRP and GVA comes from regional Queensland. With more economic activity coming out of regional Queensland, can you explain the difference in infrastructure spending between Brisbane and regional Queensland?

Ms Vagg: Infrastructure decisions are made for many reasons. Some of it is where population is located and expected population growth, and it is also related to industry growth. There is not always a direct correlation between infrastructure spending and contribution to GSP. It could just be where population is. You may have greater contribution to GSP in low populace areas, which is not necessarily where you would need infrastructure spending. Some of that relates, as I highlighted earlier, to mining, agriculture and aquaculture. Those industries do not always need significant infrastructure contribution from government. Having said that, in our *Major projects 2024* report we did highlight the significant investment in regional Queensland for some pieces of infrastructure including projects like CopperString, which is significant in regional Queensland. There is not always a direct correlation I think is my answer between direct population and infrastructure decisions.

CHAIR: CopperString is a nice segue to the member for Traeger.

Mr KATTER: Some of the suggested questions here are quite good and highly relevant. You alluded to this before, but you have net increases and decreases but then you talk about the churn and the impact on services that that would have. I can think of some real examples, but what were your observations there?

Ms Vagg: In terms of increase and decrease of population?

Mr KATTER: Yes, but then overlaying that. You see more incomings than outgoings and then what they refer to as 'churn'—people staying for two years and heading out, so you are not getting permanency in a place.

Ms Vagg: I might talk a bit about that from the local government perspective as well, because we have done some very specific work in this area in identifying service needs of local government—that is wastewater and roads, so some of those fundamentals of delivery. It is identifying what those service needs of the community are. That should include turning population and temporary population needs within the community and then stepping back and actually matching revenue sources to it which are often based on our permanent ratepayers in a community, so there is some disconnect that we see in a local government space from a sustainability perspective and then a turning workforce or changeover workforce in terms of health delivery and education delivery. Some aspects of Main Roads as well have significant regional delivery models there. Those changing populations and attraction of people definitely have some connection to the services delivered by those agencies.

Mr KATTER: Also, the responsibility for regional planning has moved between departments five times between 2015 and 2023. What are some examples of the impact that has had?

Ms Vagg: Michael, did you want to talk to the plans and the timing of them?

Mr Claydon: It is difficult to identify a direct impact from that change. An outcome perhaps that we saw was the aging of those regional plans in terms of them not being reviewed on a regular basis. We do not have direct evidence that the machinery-of-government changes caused that to occur. If there is perhaps a need for that agency to be focused on their moving between agencies, the ability for them to get traction on that piece of work could have been hampered. We do not have evidence for that. It was something that we considered, but we do not mention that directly in the report.

Mr KATTER: To pick up on some of the specifics—the member for Logan was talking about population decline; I think the projection in my electorate was minus 0.9 per cent going forward. Most of the growth there is in the Indigenous communities. When you say 'Far North', that is a heavy part of the cape as well. They can be very different animals talking about some of those Aboriginal communities compared to Mossman, Port Douglas, Mareeba and Cairns, which are all thrown into the Far North category. Does that come through in the report, do you think, or is that addressed?

Ms Vagg: Probably not specifically in this report.

Mr KATTER: Just to be clear, that is very much the case in my electorate of Traeger too. If you pull out the Indigenous communities, the numbers get a lot worse in terms of decline.

Ms Vagg: You are talking about non-Indigenous communities and population decline and services provided to them?

Mr KATTER: My question is: have you made reference to that in the report? Have you addressed that adequately in the report in terms of feeding that back to the government? They read your report. If you just looked at the Far North and say, 'Oh, well, it is in decline,' it is actually a lot worse if you break it up into demographics, and I think that is important to do.

Ms Vagg: Demographics give such important information about decision-making. For this particular report, we kept our analysis at the statistical regional level. So, no, we did not break that down in this report. In terms of actuals of spending at a local government level, we do break that down in our report to parliament on local governments and also our data products associated with local governments. That will show in greater detail the level of actual spending at a community level, which would provide that more helpful information. In some of our data products and presentations, we overlay that with populations at that local government level which gives more detail than this particular report.

Mr KATTER: I am just wondering if this fits within the scope of your report. It has been well documented before. With the modelling the LGIQ have now for the rates base to cover roads and rubbish in some of these smaller councils, the model does not work. The government does its bit in terms of road funding to try to help everyone survive. Does anything like that come out in the report—the ability to service these fundamental services? You alluded to water and sewerage in terms of labour, but I am talking about how it is managed financially. The number of ratepayers is diminishing, yet they still have to carry out these services with costs increasing.

Ms Vagg: This report covers where grants are provided to local governments in particular for things like infrastructure and services. That is covered in this report. In terms of the work we do in the local government space, it is very focused on sustainability and those very points that you are making

about level of services that are provided and how revenue sources are calculated, including rates and other sources of revenue. Long-term asset management is also really important for sustainability, and there is also long-term financial forecasting. All of those aspects come together in terms of assessing sustainability at a local government level. I realise that it is not part of this report, but it is a really big part of the work that we do in that space about highlighting those challenges of sustainability.

CHAIR: We will close proceedings at this point. Thank you once again for your time this morning. I welcome deliberations further into the future once we get to go through some more reports. It is been a pleasure having you here today. Thanks, everyone.

Ms Vagg: Thank you for the opportunity.

COOPER, Ms Claire, Executive Director, Georesources Policy, Georesources Division, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development

HARRIS, Mr Daniel, Executive Director, Regional and Rural Development, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development Division, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development

HINRICHSSEN, Mr Lyall, Executive Director, Lands Policy and Support, Lands Division, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development

KIDD, Mr Jason, Deputy Director-General, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development Division, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development

CHAIR: I now welcome representatives of the department. We are just debating whether there is an easy acronym for the title of the department, but can we agree that 'the department' is satisfactory for this morning. It is lovely that you could make it; I appreciate it is a busy time. I invite you to brief the committee after which committee members will have some questions.

Mr Kidd: I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands that we are meeting on today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Jason Kidd. I am the Deputy Director-General for the Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development Division in our department. As you can see, I welcome colleagues from across the Lands Division, Georesources Division and my division as well. I will make a short statement and then we are happy to take some questions from the committee.

Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to represent our department and my director-general Graeme Fraine this morning regarding the value of, in particular, developing our rural and regional communities in Queensland and how we have continued to deliver for these communities since the 2023 Queensland audit report that you are examining this morning. I would like to reiterate some comments from our director-general and provide an update on the information that he gave departmental briefing earlier in the year, particularly in relation to regional and rural development.

We are an economic development agency, as the director-general outlined. We are overseeing growth and expansion in two of Queensland's biggest industries—resources and manufacturing. We have 1,500 experts in 48 offices across Queensland. We are embedded across the state, in the heart of the state, and that gives us a unique opportunity to understand local needs and develop strategies that keep jobs while also meeting community expectations around social and environmental outcomes. That is why regional and rural development is such a critical part of our department's overall remit.

The objective of the regional and rural development branch is to drive investment, economic growth and create jobs in Queensland's regional communities and to enable them to meet their aspirations and goals. We see regional and rural development across the whole of government as being about bringing local voices and outcomes to growing the economy, building better infrastructure and supporting communities to thrive. It is about investing in the people and leadership, improving access to services and planning in a way that suits each region's individual needs.

As noted in the Audit Office report that you are examining, a key initiative that we lead in our branch is the implementation of the Regional Collaborative Governance Model. I know that was described in the report as being in the early stages at that point. That is fully implemented now with the leadership of our branch. We work closely with the Public Service Commission in delivering that model. The model seeks to resolve some of the regional challenges that require a multiagency response. It provides a formal governance structure, improved communication channels and a more innovative way of working together; essentially breaking down the silos of government at the place-based regional level. There are three key goals to that program of work. One is understanding the unique issues, challenges and opportunities of that particular region. Two is promoting better collaboration. Three is cultivating regional leadership through the public sector in those regions.

We support the work of six regional leadership networks as part of that model. All agencies are represented on those regional leadership networks and the chairs come from different departments. We provide the support, but it is a whole-of-government initiative. They are based in Far North Brisbane

Queensland, North and North-West Queensland, Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday, Central Queensland, Wide Bay Burnett and Darling Downs-south-west. Those six regions are the way we structure our work through that program. The priorities of those RLNs are aligned in annual work plans and they have been going through a process of revising them given the change of government. It's been a good process for them to revise and reset their annual work plans. They are addressing a whole range of issues that are critical to that particular region, be it youth crime, relieving housing pressures, managing workforce challenges and the competition for workers in the regions and accommodation for those workers. There are a range of things that we can go into more detail on if the committee wishes.

We also brought together specialist engagement officers in our branch. Those roles leave us well placed to be a voice for community in government policy and program decision-making. We have officers around the state who are experts in engaging and understanding their communities. In the last 12 months we have engaged with over 4,000 stakeholders through meetings, forums, workshops, one-on-one meetings and site visits. Earlier this month, we supported our minister in hosting a regional forum in Roma. That was another opportunity in recent times for 65 people from local business, industry groups, local government and community leaders to come together and talk directly to the minister and senior government officials. It was very successful. We have another forum coming up in Emerald on 18 June and then we are scheduling a series of regional forums across the remainder of the year.

We also support the government's community cabinet program to make sure there is good understanding and engagement with community stakeholders when cabinet comes to town and we hold issue specific forums. We have done one in Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday around housing for the workforce which was a key pressure that they were experiencing. That is a critical role for us in our branch to help government listen to community needs and to be more responsive to those needs. These engagements provide input to government strategies, policies and programs; they help lead engagement and strengthen relationships with the regions and government; and they maintain better cross-agency networks so that departments are working together collaboratively.

Our department is fulfilling its role of working across agencies to deliver on regional Queensland—for example, by partnering with other departments such as Transport and Main Roads and collaborating with them on the Country Roads Connect initiative. That is a demonstration of how we can work with other agencies and portfolios to address critical infrastructure needs in regional areas and ensure broader alignment with government policy whilst being responsive to, again, individual community issues and needs. In this case, with the focus on sealing unsealed roads in rural and regional Queensland, Country Roads Connect directly supports the government's commitment to improving safety, accessibility and resilience in those communities. It aligns with our mandate to prioritise the unique needs of Queensland areas, particularly those that are more prone to flooding and natural disasters. The program's design made 66 regional councils outside South-East Queensland as a key criteria eligible for that funding. It highlights an example of our collaboration across government. The deadline for the application was extended due to the recent flooding. This shows that the government is responsive to feedback to community issues and needs as they emerge. It is also a clear example of how our agency works effectively across government—in this case with TMR—to deliver on government priorities for regional development.

The department now has an oversight role through our minister for the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, as the committee will be aware. So having QRIDA come in under the umbrella of our portfolio has been a key reform as part of the MoG changes. They are obviously a very well-respected, longstanding support for regional and rural Queensland. That provides a range of opportunities for our staff to leverage and collaborate with QRIDA in the delivery of their programs. They have provided over \$6 billion since their existence to Queensland primary producers and businesses. In the 2023-24 financial year, QRIDA approved 126 applications for just under \$90 million in First Start and Sustainability Loans under PIPES. As the committee will be aware, QRIDA plays a critical role, and we work very closely with them in the delivery of Commonwealth-state disaster recovery arrangements. Most recently, we assisted QRIDA in the delivery of more than \$230 million in disaster assistance recovery grants to primary producers, not-for-profits, small businesses and small rural landholders who are recovering from the North and Far North Queensland floods, Tropical Cyclone Alfred and the Western Queensland floods.

Another key component of my division—with our regional and rural development staff—is the manufacturing branch. Obviously, that is a key support for industry development and jobs in regional Queensland. We have six regional manufacturing hubs which play a key role in providing boots-on-the-ground support to connect regional manufacturers with grants and other investment opportunities.

We also provide a range of programs, workshops and education processes to support capability uplift and embrace new technologies and new opportunities for Queensland manufacturers. The Queensland manufacturing sector employs around 180,000 people and 48,000 of those are in regional Queensland. There is 4,600 regional manufacturers, so that is about 25 per cent of the overall manufacturing capability in this state. It is a significant contributor to regional economies.

CHAIR: Mr Kidd, I might pull you up there.

Mr Kidd: Sorry, have I gone too long?

CHAIR: Yes, you have, but it was very comprehensive. I would like the committee to have an opportunity for questions. Sorry to be rude, but we have a tight timeline.

Mr MARTIN: I have a question about machinery-of-government changes. The Auditor-General's report noted the high number of machinery-of-government changes impacting the department. I was wondering what work the department has undertaken to minimise this risk into the future?

Mr Kidd: We noted that analysis in the audit report. That program area has moved around a bit over time in government under past governments. Obviously, we do not have control of those prior moves, but I can talk to the most recent MoG outcome of moving all of those regional and rural development functions that I was describing earlier into this key economic portfolio under a senior minister, joining with our lands and our georesources colleagues. Pulling together manufacturing, regional and rural development and that QRIDA function together in this last MoG I think, for us, has made a lot of sense. It enables us to connect with colleagues in our department and across government to drive regional economic development and to have some key levers to promote that through, as I mentioned, some of the largest economic drivers for the state—georesources, manufacturing and having control over 60 per cent of the state's land mass.

Whilst there have been some changes in the past, I think this most recent MoG consolidated some of those key functions—regional engagement staff coming together with the staff who support the Regional Collaborative Governance Model that we provide, which is a whole-of-government function, has set us up well to play a whole-of-government role. We work very closely with the other departments because obviously we cannot do this alone but we take a whole-of-government perspective. Does that answer the question?

Mr MARTIN: Sort of. It is not really under your control whether there is machinery-of-government change in the future. My question is: you have said it is good they have all been brought together. If there is some change based on community need, or whatever it might be, has the department looked at what you are going to do in that situation to make sure you are not slowed down in providing the services you need to provide?

Mr Kidd: To add to my answer and provide a better response, in terms of the regional collaborative governance model we have established, we provide central support for the staff who support that governance process but it is a whole-of-government mechanism. If this portfolio were to move as part of MoGS, that will be ongoing. It was ongoing before this MoG; it will be ongoing after. It is helping to drive a new way of working for government to take a regional perspective and a place-based approach. If there were to be MoG changes in the future, I would be confident—and our partnership with the PSC supports that from a whole-of-government perspective and we have strong support from DPC linking into the community cabinet process—that process would continue. It is in full implementation now after a number of years of development, so it is a well-evolved model and starting to get some good outcomes. As I mentioned, we think we are in a good place now to take advantage of great opportunities, but consolidating those regional and rural development functions together into one branch—if there were to be future changes—I think could be managed well.

CHAIR: In the previous session I was talking to the Auditor-General about regional planning, one of my areas of interest. Further to the member for Stretton's conversation about what material change-of-government issues might mean, what part do you play in regional planning and regional plans with the department? I understand it is a State Development remit, but obviously you are talking about a lot of whole-of-government issues here this morning.

Mr Kidd: As you say, State Development has the lead for the regional planning process. Dan Harris, my colleague to my right, was introduced as the executive director for regional and rural development. He looks after that particular branch for us and has been working closely with State Development to ensure that, as they go into that process of engagement with the community, we are playing a role to support them to understand individual community needs and have that fed into the process. That is our role in that process. They have the lead, but we have the expertise and boots on

the ground in terms of our community engagement officers to help them make those connections. We would draw parallels between the work they are planning in that regard to the regional leadership networks that I mentioned. They have an automatic forum they can engage with that already brings together whole-of-government officers, including not only State Development but also Transport and Main Roads, Housing and other key officers who would need to have input into that planning process. We have process expertise there that we would help bring to support State Development in that process.

Mr POWER: In relation to the impacts of grant funding, I have previously asked whether, if we are creating jobs, we are creating them for people to live in regional areas for the long term. We see people either working fly-in fly-out, working temporarily or young couples working for the early part of their careers and then moving back. Is there a way to measure the impact of grant funding on job creation for someone who is part of that community already and wants to have a sustainable job and work in that community for the long term?

Mr Kidd: Yes. Using the manufacturing grants program that we deliver, one of the key measurables there is both job sustaining, so keeping people who are currently working for that manufacturer in jobs in that community, and also jobs growth, so how many jobs are created through the provision of that grant. Yes, we do measure the programs that have been seen to have a positive impact in terms of both sustaining jobs and the creation of jobs. As I said, that provides a key growth area in terms of economic development in the regions already. If we can support the uplift of those manufacturers accessing other markets, that will only grow those opportunities for jobs. That will help keep people in those communities. For communities with mining changes or movements out of communities, our mining colleagues and government departments are planning not only what can be the key replacement mechanisms such as manufacturing but also what are the other industries that will support ongoing jobs creation. There is a lot of work happening with us and our colleagues across government to try to ensure continuity of employment. Does that answer your question?

Mr POWER: It does. I recognise that, especially with manufacturing jobs, if there is long-term, stable employment that is going to be a by-product, but is it something we are measuring? We tend to do big capital projects. I am thinking of CopperString. We know there is a big camp for workers and there is a lot of benefit from that, but some of those jobs are effectively plonked into place and are good for a time but do not provide long-term, sustainable—'careers' is not the right word—living in a community and being part of a community rather than just a temporary capital influx of very welcome workers for that period but who do not necessarily live for a lifetime in that regional community. Do we measure it as an outcome? That is the question.

Mr Kidd: As I say, I think we do from the point of view of the programs we control. I could ask Claire to contribute in terms of the work that is happening around some of the mining transactions around Mount Isa and otherwise.

Ms Cooper: Our department, and of course our Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, has been doing a lot of work and collaboration with Mount Isa and their council as well as Glencore in making sure that, after the announcement of the closure of Mount Isa Mines, there are opportunities that continue in Mount Isa. There was a package announced by the Queensland government of an approved \$50 million for workers and communities impacted. In that, \$30 million was committed to accelerate resources projects. There were three that were identified: Harmony Gold's Eva Copper Mine project; North West Phosphate's Paradise South project; and Vecco Group's Critical Minerals project. There has been a recent announcement from our minister about the Resources Cabinet Committee being able to step in and accelerate and help facilitate the delivery of outstanding approvals that may be required or information required to move Harmony Gold's Eva Copper Project towards construction. That is an example within the georesources part of our department where we are working towards ensuring there is a future for workers and the community of Mount Isa.

Mr DALTON: Can you pass on thanks to all of your staff for contributing to a very important part of our economy. It is very noticeable that Queensland does rely on natural resources, mines and manufacturing in a big way. The report highlights that Outback South and Outback North are likely to face pronounced depopulation in the future. What is the department doing to address this?

Mr Kidd: Taking a broader perspective, Queensland is a heavily decentralised state. We are one of the states where there is still good population growth in certain areas of regional Queensland, so that is a strength. It is not necessarily the case across the whole of the country. Yes, of course there are areas where there are pressures on population and people moving out of the areas. From a broader population perspective, what we can do is offer opportunities for economic growth in those areas. I would probably go back to some of the examples I gave earlier around our georesources work, our manufacturing work. We have not touched on the lands portfolio yet, but there is a lot of

good work happening with our tourism colleagues across government with the new plan. We work closely with them in terms of things like the Whitsunday islands—not that area, obviously, but just as an example—generating new industry opportunities and new job opportunities that will help promote long-term sustainability in the regions and maintain strong population growth.

I also go back to the service delivery needs of those communities. Obviously there are pressure points with people moving out of certain areas in terms of having enough doctors, teachers, nurses and otherwise. Those regional leadership networks that we spoke about have those as key priority areas in terms of workforce management and attracting the right workers and competing for the right workers to sustain their populations, teachers and otherwise. That has come up as a key priority in those Regional Leadership Network annual work plans. I think that is just an example of where we bring all of the different government parties to the table to try to focus on that issue.

Mr KATTER: I do not mean this as criticism, but as someone who lives out there it is hard to see what you are talking about. How much impact will \$50 million have and how far will it go to replace 1,200 mining jobs? To put it in the context of a specific policy, housing is a big thing. Even if you can get someone to work, you have to get housing. I mentioned before underutilised housing. I think there are opportunities. People in Brisbane would see the economic benefit in doing up an old house that is reaching functional obsolescence, but in Hughenden you do not because if you look at the population it is dying. Policy-wise, I think there is an opportunity to utilise underutilised housing, but there is no talk. I do not see where the pick-up is with those real issues. Banking is another thing. Try to get a loan. Even if you want to buy a house to help address this problem for the private sector, there is no policy addressing that. Oh, there actually is. There is a low-cost loan that exists out there for low-income people but, weirdly, no-one knows about it. I think these are roles for your department. As someone on the ground, I just do not see any traction with that sort of thing or any effort there.

Mr Kidd: Just to touch on your second point around banking and loans—it certainly does not answer your questions in the commercial space—QRIDA has an extensive loan book in terms of very low interest loans to—

Mr KATTER: I am talking about rural.

Mr Kidd: Yes. We are working with QRIDA at the moment to explore new opportunities with them as well, further opportunities to support the communities that support the rural sector, if you like, so the small towns that support the—

Mr KATTER: They need their first mortgages.

Mr Kidd: In terms of the housing shortfall, whilst it is not our primary responsibility, we do help facilitate that process of bringing Housing to the table from a regional perspective through that regional collaborative governance model process to discuss those sorts of issues. I think in recent discussions that has been taken up as a specific project in terms of the housing needs for workforce requirements, which I think is what you are going to.

Mr KATTER: Would you mind if I cut in there. If I went to the department of housing and talked about private investment and the first home buyers grant policy, to me that falls back to you guys more than it does the department of housing or anyone else. I do not know who would be better suited to address that policy area.

Mr Kidd: When it comes to a specific policy area like housing policy that sits with them, without wanting to try to divert from that. Our role is to look at those issues that have that kind of cross-cutting issue in a region—the combination of the demographic changes together with the housing changes together with the economic challenges—and how that is brought together for a coordinated approach. We need that expert input from those departments that lead those particular policy areas.

Mr KATTER: Do you see any innovative policy there to address these things?

CHAIR: We have to be careful about policy discussions. It is an issue for the minister, Rob.

Mr KATTER: I think it is a technical question.

CHAIR: It is at the discretion of the panel so over to you guys.

Mr Kidd: I note the chair's comment that the broader policy settings are not in our control.

Mr KATTER: I am not talking about pursuing that individual policy. I am just talking about innovative policy in general.

Mr Kidd: Again, I go back to that Regional Leadership Network process.

Mr KATTER: Can you explain the Regional Leadership Network process?

Mr Kidd: That is the model that I was talking about—the regional leadership governance model. There are six Regional Leadership Networks chaired by a local senior departmental officer—not our department but from any department. We provide the support for that program. Those Regional Leadership Networks meet with their community and, understanding the local issues, they come together with all of the other government departments. They do an annual work plan around what the priority issues are for those six regions. Our role is to support the issues that they flag to be either referred to the relevant department—be it Housing, Health or otherwise—or, in some instances, if a whole-of-government project is needed, we will take the lead on that. We are doing some work at the moment around the cumulative impacts of infrastructure investment in different regions and how we do coordinated planning in that regard and give them a tool to help do that. There is some work around the Weipa transition. On that sort of whole-of-government project, we will take the lead, but on other matters we will look for the channels that we can advocate for the regions to the relevant department.

Mr KATTER: I think this is a really important point. I think it is great that you have that at the grassroots. I know what you are talking about now. Whether or not we have competent MPs—whether I am a competent MP or the mayors are competent—often we are the repository of policy ideas. We get to do it full time over a number of years. I know that a lot of those people are part-timers. A fitter and welder from town may not really be focused on policy. I think there is a place for the elected representatives to be in that space as well, to try to put something on the table—not necessarily to drive it but to offer things because I do not have any interface with that.

Mr Kidd: I take that point.

Mr KATTER: I have been there for 13 years collecting ideas so I really could have something to offer.

Mr Kidd: I acknowledge that point. In fact, one of the areas of development now that model is up and running properly is that we are looking at what is our interface with local, state and federal governments. We are meeting with the RDAs and we want to see how we can involve the ROCs in those discussions as well so there is a process of getting better engagement into that state government forum at the three levels of government. Obviously, we are very open to intel that we get from community leaders such as yourself and other MPs.

Mr G KELLY: Regional and rural development are important words as far as I am concerned. There is something that I have come across a lot lately. As far as the mining sector goes, it is very important when it comes to jobs, jobs and more jobs and safe jobs at that. It is the hi-vis brigade and it is about local jobs. Something that comes across my table a lot at the moment is local jobs in the renewables sector. Are you guys losing workers from the mining industry to the renewables sector or are you holding your own and the renewables sector has to rely on fly-in, fly-out from other states, which is going on at the moment? Are you happy with your workers staying with what they know best?

Mr Kidd: I might make some introductory comments and then Claire will have some value to add here for sure. As a general principle, there is competition for good workers in the regions. I absolutely acknowledge that. That is just one example between different sectors. In our manufacturing sector, for example, we have to compete with the jobs that are provided through the mines. There is that competitive process for getting the right people in the right jobs. It is a challenge. I think it is not particular to that issue, I suppose, is my response. It is a challenge the regional areas are identifying. It has come up in most of the regional plans as a priority. Claire, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms Cooper: It is very important. We do hear from our resources industry that there is a lot of difficulty in being able to attract and maintain a very skilled workforce where you have a lot of the similar skills that might be needed in different industries and a lot of it is happening all at once. One of the actions that was included in the Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan was around a training and development plan specifically to deal with that type of issue so work has been done there. Again, it was cross-agency collaboration where we are dealing with the areas of the department that deal with skills and education and training.

We also had set up a renewed or expanded remit for the old GasFields Commission, which is now Coexistence Queensland, specifically bringing in renewables and that new emerging industry, in recognition that there are a lot of industries that are competing for the same areas of land. There is competition for land issues, which comes into those areas around planning and also brings in issues around infrastructure, common-user facilities and also workers. They are in a unique position with their renewed remit to be out there in the community. There are real opportunities.

We are very happy within the department to have welcomed manufacturing and regional and rural development because there is lots of crossover and there is lots of collaboration that we are able to do internally in the department. We were doing it anyway, but it is kind of nice to just walk down the hallway and have a conversation. With that in mind, they are able also to be out on the ground. They have community leaders' forums to gather information. At the moment, an emerging issue is around renewables and competition for land when it comes to exploration, but there are lots of other things. Having that expanded remit allows them to be able to have those conversations and bring that information back to the department for us to do some policy thinking.

CHAIR: Before passing to the member for Stretton, I welcome the students in the gallery to the Primary Industries and Resources Committee.

Mr MARTIN: I have a question about regional versus rural. What direction, if any, has the minister given the department to define a regional community versus a rural community? What matrix is there to determine spending between regional and rural?

Mr Kidd: There is no specific direction in terms of separating the two except to say that the MoG change that we were discussing earlier clearly brought together regional with rural in our division. That was one of the significant changes, to bring those two functions together and to bring QRIDA in under our space so we have that expertise in an agency that is experienced in providing support to regional and rural Queenslanders. We are doing some work at the moment around how, over time, this MoG change will create an opportunity to better define regional Queensland and better define how we understand regional and rural Queensland and the different issues facing both sections of the community. We are doing some work at the moment and we will obviously take the opportunity to have those engagements with the minister in the near future around how we best understand that and prioritise our work, if you like, to best support that. That also goes to the engagement we are doing with QRIDA to do some strategic planning around opportunities there. Without speaking for them, as a statutory body they are interested in exploring their role in the regional space in addition to the rural space. We are keen to work with them on that.

Mr POWER: We have talked about Mount Isa and the transition with the job losses which had a significant effect on that community. Given the government's decision to allow the loss of 122 manufacturing jobs at Maryborough's Downer train manufacturing plant, is there a similar response from the government given the impact on that community and if not, why not?

CHAIR: I might jump in there. I think there is an inference about the government. I will pull you up on a point of order as you are asking for a policy position. If you could rephrase that question, that would be helpful.

Mr POWER: I do not think I asked anything that referred to policy.

CHAIR: If you ask the question again, that would be helpful.

Mr POWER: Given we are seeing the end of contracts that included the loss of 122 jobs at Maryborough's Downer plant, is there a similar response from the government for that community, especially given it is a vital manufacturing sector in a regional area?

Mr Kidd: I cannot comment on the specifics of the assumptions in the question around job losses or otherwise. I can confirm for the committee that our role is to work with TMR, Queensland Rail and the industry providers to ensure there is a really strong future for manufacturing in that area. The skills development, economic development and otherwise that have come out of the Train Manufacturing Program are standing the local workforce in really good stead. Our regional hubs staff are working closely with that community to ensure that those workers can continue to use those skills in that industry. There is a long pipeline of opportunities in the train manufacturing, repair and maintenance space for Queensland. We have a very bright future in that regard.

We are not the lead for policy in the Train Manufacturing Program but we certainly support it actively in terms of making sure that Queensland manufacturers have a key role to play in the supply chains for the building and maintenance of the trains. There is a positive outcome there for regional Queensland in terms of the train manufacturing space.

Mr POWER: My question was more about allowing the loss of 122 jobs. We have talked about people moving away from regional communities and those skills, especially manufacturing and engineering skills, being lost. Is there a response to keep those workers in the short term so we do not have that churn in a regional community?

Mr Kidd: If I understand your question correctly, there is ongoing work, again supported through our regional Manufacturing Hubs Grant Program and our colleagues in TMR and others, to provide good job opportunities in the manufacturing space and in train manufacturing. That is for the short, medium and long term.

CHAIR: That concludes this briefing. I thank the department for taking time from your busy schedule to come along and give us your contribution today. It is very welcomed. I thank Hansard and everyone who participated.

The committee adjourned at 10.58 am.