



TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SR King MP—Chair
Mr LL Millar MP
Mr BW Head MP
Mr JR Martin MP
Mr LA Walker MP
Mr TJ Watts MP

Staff present:

Dr J Rutherford—Committee Secretary
Ms A Groth—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF DEPARTMENTAL ANNUAL REPORTS 2021-22

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 17 April 2023

Brisbane

MONDAY, 17 APRIL 2023

The committee met at 9.15 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this public briefing for the committee's consideration of departmental annual reports open. My name is Shane King, member for Kurwongbah and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

With me here today are: Lachlan Millar MP, member for Gregory and the deputy chair; Bryson Head MP, member for Callide; James Martin MP, member for Stretton; Les Walker MP, member for Mundingburra; and Trevor Watts MP, member for Toowoomba North.

The Department of Resources 2021-22 annual report was tabled on 21 September 2022. We thank the director-general and departmental staff for attending today to provide a briefing on the report. 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 an offence. You have previously been provided with a copy of instructions to witnesses, so we will take those as having been read. 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 departmental 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 the chair's 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. I ask everyone present to please turn mobiles phones off or to silent mode.

BARTLETT, Ms Tanya, Executive Director, Land and Surveying Services, Lands, Department of Resources

BRADY, Ms Tanya, Chief Financial Officer, Finance and Corporate Operations, Business and Corporate Partnerships, Department of Resources

CRIDLAND, Mr Mark, Director-General, Department of Resources

DIETRICH, Ms Laura, Valuer-General, Lands, Department of Resources

FERRIS, Mr Shaun, Deputy Director-General, Georesources, Department of Resources

HINRICHSEN, Mr Lyall, Executive Director, Lands Policy and Support, Lands, Department of Resources

McALLISTER, Ms Danielle, Deputy Director-General, Lands, Department of Resources

MOOR, Mr Darren, Executive Director, Minerals and Coal, Georesources, Department of Resources

**SYCZ, Ms Carlye, Executive Director, Reform, Strategy and Delivery Office,
Department of Resources**

**VENABLES, Ms Celia, Deputy Director-General, Business and Corporate
Partnerships, Department of Resources**

CHAIR: Director-General, I invite you to make a short opening statement, after which committee members will have some questions for you and your team.

Mr Cridland: I start by respectfully acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

We are grateful for the opportunity to discuss the annual report with you today. The Department of Resources continues to be a major contributor to great outcomes for Queensland communities that we live and work in. As a department we have a significant influence over two key drivers of Queensland's economic development: the use of land and our finite natural resources. Since last year's annual report, the department has made significant progress with several programs within the Lands and Georesources divisions which I will go into in more detail now.

The resources industry has long been one of the cornerstones of our economy, generating jobs and prosperity throughout the state. The industry directly supports nearly 75,000 jobs across the state, particularly in the regions—which account for almost two-thirds of all mining jobs. In 2021-22 the resources industry contributed more than \$74 billion to the Queensland economy. This represented nearly 18 per cent of total gross state product and was the most contributed by any single industry in Queensland.

Furthermore, Queensland resource exports totalled more than \$116 billion in the 12 months to January 2023. This is an increase of \$46.7 billion, or 66.9 per cent, year on year. However, it is clear that economic, environmental and social forces continue to change our world, and our department remains focused on ensuring Queensland will stay ahead of the pace.

Since the last annual report, our department released the final Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan. This plan was the result of extensive consultation with industry, peak bodies, communities, academia and the general public. We set a bold vision in the \$68.5 million Queensland Plan to develop a resilient, responsible and sustainable industry that grows as it transforms. Underpinning this 30-year vision—I have a copy if anyone wants it—is a critical minerals industry for Queensland. One of the best ways to grow our critical minerals industry is through exploration. Just last month the department provided a record \$5 million in Collaborative Exploration Initiative grants to help 25 exploration projects get underway. Each grant of up to \$250,000 will help our explorers lead us to the next generation of projects and help us find the minerals needed to meet the demand of the world's technology and renewable sectors. Furthermore, our department continues to work with existing mines in the North West Minerals Province to identify cobalt resources and tailings-based metals in many dams.

Another important milestone for our department recently and for Queensland's critical minerals sector was securing the site of Australia's first critical minerals demonstration facility in Townsville. This \$75 million facility not only will house our first vanadium processing plant but will be expanded, allowing for a range of critical minerals like cobalt and rare earth elements to be processed. By building this facility, we are supporting companies to prove commercial viability of critical minerals processing in Queensland which will generate jobs and investments for Queensland.

In terms of gas, the Queensland government continues to do the heavy lifting on domestic gas policy. Since 2015, we have released more than 80,000 square kilometres of land for gas exploration, with almost a quarter of it guaranteed for the Australian domestic market. While there are no quick fixes to the issues in the National Electricity Market, we know that unlocking more gas and supplying it to the domestic market will be critical. That is why our department is undertaking the Bowen Basin pipeline study, which investigates the opportunities for a pipeline to connect gas reserves in the Bowen Basin to the east coast gas and export markets. We are now considering the findings of that final report into the Bowen Basin pipeline.

In terms of our Lands division, the department is the landlord and manager of large areas of the state. On behalf of Queenslanders, we administer 60 per cent of land in Queensland—an area approximately four times the size of New Zealand and as large as New South Wales and Victoria combined. The land is administered through nearly 19,000 individual leases and includes everything from small pump sites to large hundred-thousand-hectare pastoral stations and 29 Great Barrier Reef island resorts.

We have continued to respond to our tenants' hardship caused by Queensland's often wild weather. We have provided more than \$3 million in land rent relief for our drought stricken food and fibre producers. We remain committed to the responsible development of our island resorts for the jobs and business opportunities this creates in regional Queensland. The vast majority of our island resorts are operational and provide a range of tourism experiences. Our department will continue to engage with lessees and key stakeholders to facilitate redevelopment and rejuvenation of tourism islands.

In terms of native title, my department recognises state land is not just about economic prosperity but also about the important role land plays in connecting First Nations people with their history. In 2022, my department contributed to 12 native title determinations, recognising the existence in native title rights and interests. Those determinations cover more than 52,000 square kilometres of lands and waters, and 11 of those were resolved by agreement between parties and only one through court processes. We also assisted in the transfer of title deeds for 112 lots under the Aboriginal Land Act, which allows entities to hold land for the benefit of historical Aboriginal people particularly concerned with land or for native title holders.

In conclusion, I am incredibly proud to be the director-general of 1,382 passionate public servants working across 40 offices. This is a workforce made up of over 58 per cent women and 63 per cent women in our senior executive roles. We have strong technical streams of valuers, surveyors, geoscientists, soil scientists, resource economists, engineers, vegetation management specialists and special information experts. Together this workforce continues to deliver milestones that realise the department's full potential to be an influential economic enabler.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredible support our department receives from our minister, the Hon. Scott Stewart, and his chief of staff, Paul Keene, and their team, and also for the support we receive from our incredibly important valued partners across the resources sectors including QRC, AMEC, APIA, AusIMM, LGAQ and the various company and natural resource groups.

Finally, for the first time in history, Australia and specifically Queensland will host the World Mining Congress in June this year. As the state host partner, we have a once-in-a-generation chance to showcase Queensland resource opportunities to the world stage, with over 3,000 international and domestic guests expected to attend. I welcome questions in relation to the annual report.

Mr HEAD: I am certainly interested in some of the figures in regard to vegetation on page 5 of your annual report. In relation to the figures under the Natural Resources Investment Program, how were all those outcome figures calculated in relation to land condition, the extent of vegetation health and wetlands?

Mr Cridland: I will pass that question to Lyall to answer that for the committee.

Mr Hinrichsen: Of course the Department of Resources works very closely with the Department of Environment and Science. In relation to vegetation management, our reporting is supported through the Queensland Herbarium. The condition assessments, the assessments around clearing rates and assessments around regrowth are provided by the science unit, which includes the Queensland Herbarium.

Mr HEAD: I am curious as to the extent of what those figures capture and do not capture. Would those figures perhaps include some land that might have invasive pests and weed and things like that? I am assuming you are using a lot of satellite technology to capture those figures.

Mr Hinrichsen: Absolutely. There are significant invasive weed issues across many parts of Queensland. Biosecurity as a portfolio responsibility, of course, rests with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. The work that the Queensland Herbarium do in supporting our vegetation management programs absolutely considers condition. Clearly, invasive weed pressures are one of the significant issues that affect the condition of native vegetation in many areas. It is one of the key reasons managing invasive weeds is, first of all, exempt from the Vegetation Management Act but also recognising that in some situations it will be necessary to disturb or clear some native vegetation as part of managing the encroachment of invasive weeds. That process is provided for as part of our accepted development or, as they are more commonly known, self-notification codes.

Mr HEAD: When it comes to those 'improvements to vegetation health across 158,166 hectares', can you guarantee that that does not include land that might be overcome by invasive pests and weeds and might actually be poorer?

Mr Hinrichsen: I cannot offer any guarantees over 158,000 hectares. I think the member would understand that. Under the Natural Resources Investment Program that the annual report is referring to, there was certainly investment in land management activities that included the control of

pest-weed species. Those particular statistics would be in relation to the investments that occurred under the Natural Resources Investment Program. That program—and my colleagues might speak to that in more detail later—has been replaced with a Natural Resources Recovery Program, which has its focus on sustainable land management.

Mr WALKER: My question is to Mr Cridland. During the committee's recent inquiry into coalmining industry safety—and I understand that the report is now closed—there was mention by the CEO of the Resources Council, Mr Ian Macfarlane, of a hotline that mineworkers could call to anonymously report safety concerns to the Resources Safety & Health Queensland. We then heard reports that there was a general lack of awareness about this number and that it was not being well displayed at mine sites. Is the department aware of this hotline? Are there any plans to increase the awareness of this hotline among mine industry employees?

Mr Cridland: Before I throw to a colleague, I would like to mention that that hotline is run by Resources Safety & Health Queensland, not by my department. I will see if Shaun Ferris would like to add anything.

Mr Ferris: The DG is correct. The responsibility for the safety and health of mineworkers or resource sector workers in Queensland sits within the portfolio responsibility of the CEO for RSHQ. Whilst our department and RSHQ both report through to Minister Stewart, our department as a portfolio does not manage or oversee the safety and health of resource sector workers in Queensland. I am not in a position to comment on the hotline number. I can say that I have seen it, but it is not within our portfolio responsibility to administer or take calls on that number.

Mr MARTIN: Page 8 of the annual report, and I think you mentioned it in your submissions, mentions the collaborative projects on cobalt extraction from copper mine waste. Could you expand on that for the benefit of the committee and share with us what the results of those projects have been so far?

Mr Cridland: Again, I will invite the Deputy Director-General of Georesources to respond.

Mr Ferris: The CEI program is one that we are very excited about. It is an opportunity for us as a department to support what we would term higher risk and innovative exploration activities across the sector, particularly as we are starting to transition or move towards a greater focus on critical minerals in Queensland. You touched on cobalt, for example. Cobalt is one of those interesting metals where it is typically co-located with other metals such as copper or zinc in ore deposits, particularly in the north-western parts of Queensland.

As part of the CEI and the broader New Economy Minerals Initiative of our GSQ which sits within our department, we have had a focus on investigating iron waste tailings to understand what minerals are there. If we look back historically, if you take any of the existing operations in the north-western parts of Queensland, metals such as cobalt 20, 30, 40 or 50 years ago may not have been economic because of the levels of the concentrations they existed in within the ore and they were difficult to process, or they may not have been economic because of the price barrier or the technology may not have existed to be able to process the ore sufficiently to extract that cobalt.

One of the focuses of the CEI program is to invest in exploration not just for the metals in mine waste material or cobalt in undiscovered ore materials up in the north-west, but across all metals. Without being able to go into specifics, we are actually seeing some fairly exciting results around cobalt being present in large quantities in mine waste tailing because it has not been processed out of that mine waste before. Our focus now is working with those companies that have cobalt present in their tailings to understand the extractability and the economics and see if we can motivate some of those mine waste tailings to be brought in production from a cobalt processing perspective.

I do not think it is lost on anybody here in the committee room today that cobalt presents a good opportunity for Queensland as we look to decarbonise the global economy. It is a metal that is used in electrification in battery technology, so our investment in those innovative higher risk exploration activities, whether they be deep undercover or in mine waste tailings, is starting to yield some benefit and increase our understanding of the mineralisation across the north-western parts of Queensland in particular.

Mr WATTS: As previously discussed, this crosses over to Resources Safety & Health, but I am interested in the development of new projects and the impact of having people with the competencies, registrations and everything else since the introduction of industrial manslaughter. I will quote from their report, which says, 'There has been a slight decline in application numbers.' Well, 85.7 per cent is the decline in applications for letters of registration by mutual recognition, so I do not know how you would describe a lot. There is also a 21 per cent reduction in applications for certificates of

competency. From a department's point of view, if we are all going to be as a mining industry dependent on having these officers, what is the reaction to these drastic reductions since this legislation was introduced? Is anybody holding these guys to account for suggesting that it is a slight decline as opposed to an 85 per cent decline?

Mr Cridland: Again, I just stress that the question relates to Resources Safety & Health Queensland which is a separate agency with a separate CEO responsible for those issues. I feel uncomfortable commenting on another agency's CEO's responsibilities, I have to say.

Mr WATTS: Sure. If I can ask though, how is the department looking to address what will become a shortfall because it will be a critical bottleneck to the development of new projects? Whilst it might not directly be in your remit, it is directly going to affect the entire department so I am interested in how the department might respond to those dropping numbers.

Mr Cridland: I might speak if I can in general terms. Certainly, we work closely with the Queensland Resources Council on the skills that they need for the industry. We have the centre of excellence in Mackay which also helps with the training needs of industry. We have 29 formal partnerships with academic institutions as well that look at some of these issues. So we are certainly in a general sense—without commenting on another portfolio—working with industry, academia and companies to make sure they have the skills supply that they need. We are in a stronger position in Queensland in the fact that we are the beneficiaries of net migration so we are attracting people to our industry in Queensland to good, secure, paying jobs in regions. From that perspective, we are there.

I think that is where I would want to leave talking about other portfolios. I would also mention that under our Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan that I highlighted earlier, one of the actions is to develop a workforce plan for the industry going forward, which the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training is currently undertaking in partnership with us and with industry. That will help address some of those issues also. I hope that answers the question as best I could.

Mr WATTS: That is very helpful. As a final point of clarification, you are confident this dramatic drop is not going to impact the industry's ability to operate as we lose people who hold these certificates?

Mr Cridland: I do not have access to those figures that you are quoting, but we certainly through our leases with the mining company—

Mr WATTS: It is a public document.

Mr Cridland: I understand. I just do not have that in front of me.

CHAIR: Member, you are asking questions and he is doing his best.

Mr Cridland: The leases that we provide to companies have requirements on them, as does the legislation administered by Resources Safety & Health Queensland. Our expectation is that they would meet it.

Mr WATTS: Thank you.

CHAIR: We have had a lot of rain in recent months, but as of 1 March over a quarter of the land area of Queensland was still drought declared. I know you mentioned assistance for drought earlier. Could you update the committee on the condition of those areas? Could you go further into what the department is doing to assist those in drought areas?

Mr Cridland: It affects both our lands and our georesources portfolios, so in the first instance I will ask if the georesources team wants to address the terrific work they did over the recent wet season to assist our industry partners from that perspective. I will then ask the DDG of the Lands division and even the Valuer-General to talk about the assistance we provide to rural properties affected by drought, or floods for that matter.

Mr Ferris: I am going to start with the opposite to drought—the wet weather preparation. As we were coming into the back end of last year, we all saw that there was a potential—as there always is during the wet season—for there to be significant rain, and that is certainly what we experienced up in the north-western part of Queensland at the beginning of this year. We work very closely with our colleagues in the Department of Environment and Science, for example, as we come into a wet season to help us to understand what sites have a high inventory of water on them. If we are moving into the back end of a drier period and into a wetter period of the year and mine sites have a higher inventory of water, then they are at potentially higher risk of some production impacts and potentially higher risk of releases of water off site either under their existing environmental authority or through other mechanisms that the Department of Environment and Science can assist with at that time.

For our abandoned mine sites, for example, which we also manage as a department, we had a very active program over the last couple of years of installation of telemetry at our sites so we could understand and monitor the water levels at those sites. We ensured that before the beginning of the wet season and the end of the dry season we had inspected and visited as many of those abandoned mine sites as possible so we could have a visual understanding and correlate that back to the telemetry data that we had.

We also manage on behalf of the state a number of non-commercial water assets—for example, dams such as Copperfield Dam and Glen Niven Dam—which are all regulated structures. We exercise internally our emergency action plans so that in the event of high levels of rain we are linking in with the local disaster management groups and we are briefing internally accordingly as rain increases and the water flows start to commence. In terms of our preparedness across our abandoned mines portfolio, our non-commercial water assets and the operating assets across the state, they are some of the actions that we undertake.

Mr Cridland: In terms of drought and land, returning to the second part of your question, the department fully defers the payment of annual rent for primary production leases in drought-declared areas of the state. It is recognised that, when drought declaration is revoked, many leaseholders will still take time to recover, even after the drought declaration is lifted. For this reason, the department offers primary production leaseholders coming out of drought the option of paying off their deferred rent over a five-year period with no penalty interest. Through the Queensland government drought assistant package, my department also provides a rent rebate of up to 15 per cent of the annual rent to eligible primary production leaseholders. Rent is also deferred for primary producers in areas impacted by other natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, as was mentioned. In March 2022 about 3,100 landholders, including primary producers, with a combined rental of approximately \$19.5 million were eligible for deferral of rent due to flooding across Southern and Central Queensland.

Mr WALKER: Can the department update the committee on progress of the vanadium common user facility in Townsville? Is there a scheduled opening or commencement date?

Mr Cridland: The department, in conjunction with Queensland Treasury and the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, is delivering on the state's commitment to build the Queensland Resources Common User Facility to foster the development of the critical minerals industry in Queensland. The purpose of the facility is to support larger scale production trials to accelerate the development of commercial critical mineral projects, promote investment in advanced mineral manufacturing opportunities and enable the development of a suitable supply chain including supporting industries in Queensland. The commitment of \$75 million for the project was announced on 7 December last year and was endorsed on 25 January 2023. The sum represents half of a total \$150 million allocated to common user facilities for critical minerals sectors in the December 2022 announcement.

In October and November 2022, a market sounding exercise was conducted with 18 organisations, including mining and exploration companies and universities. As a result of this market sounding, a range of other critical minerals including cobalt and rare earth elements were identified as suitable for inclusion as future users of the facility. In terms of the time frame, a suitable site for the project was identified at the Cleveland Bay Industrial Park in Townsville in late 2022, with settlement reached at the end of March 2023. The site is now in possession of our department and we expect operations to commence in the first half of calendar year 2025.

Mr WALKER: As a supplementary question, and you basically touched on this Mr Cridland: what are the projected benefits to the local North Queensland economy expected to be from this facility?

Mr Cridland: I might pass that to our DDG of Georesources to answer. He is on the project board of that facility.

Mr Ferris: We have not undertaken any specific detailed modelling of what the economic benefits to the local regional economy are likely to be or will be as a consequence of the development of the QRCUF. This is a really important investment through the value chain for critical minerals, firstly, targeting vanadium and then looking to flex that facility into other critical minerals. As the director-general said, it is the first of its kind in Australia. It will create that opportunity and bridge that gap between laboratory scale and bench scale processing that is available to a whole range of companies into that larger scale production. One and a half million tonnes per hour is the size of the facility that we are targeting, which will enable the half dozen or so vanadium players in the north-west to be able to generate or process their ore and to then have quantities that they can use to enter into

off-take agreements with potential customers and to utilise the material, the vanadium flake or the vanadium solution, that is produced as a consequence of the common user facility to kickstart the potential for vanadium redox and vanadium flow batteries.

When you ask about the broader benefits to the local and regional economy, we see it as an opportunity to kickstart the vanadium operations in and around Julia Creek, bridging the gap between, as I said, laboratory and bench scale into larger scale production to be able to produce larger scale quantities of vanadium processed material, whether that is in the form of flake or solution, that can then be utilised into battery manufacturing operating opportunities and also into the entry to off-take agreements that will make their operations or their production and their mines more commercial. It is that investment through the full value chain that we see that, we hope, will kickstart a vanadium industry that then reaches down into processing and battery manufacture here in Queensland.

Mr MILLAR: My question relates to natural resource management groups. The natural resource management group that I have a lot to do with is Desert Channels. Obviously weed and pest funding is critical. I am going to the expenses in the annual report for 2021-22 of \$313.7 million, consisting of employee expenses, supplier services, grants and subsidies. What has been the overall amount given to NRM groups over the last financial year and how does that compare to other financial years?

Mr Cridland: Can I clarify which year that funding was for?

Mr MILLAR: 2021-22 is what we have in front of us. How does that compare to previous financial years? You can take that on notice.

Mr Cridland: I will hand over to Lyall, but I can say that between 2018 and 2022 more than \$60 million was invested through the Natural Resource Investment Program over that time frame and going forward under the Natural Resources Recovery Program it is \$10 million per year over four years—\$10 million each year for four years. I will see if Lyall has anything to add in terms of that specific question.

Mr Hinrichsen: I think our DDG might have that information at her fingertips.

Ms McAllister: As the DG said, under the Natural Resource Investment Program there was a four-year, \$60 million program that provided funding across 59 projects, an outcome of 92 jobs under all of those deliverables and all of that funding went to natural resource management organisations. That program will be formally finalised at 30 June 2023 and, as the DG mentioned, our Natural Resources Recovery Program has commenced. The first phase of that program has been announced and that is \$40 million over four years, with \$10 million per year ongoing. That is committed funding for natural resource management organisations.

Under the 2022 funding of that first round, more than \$11 million in funding over two years has been awarded to 25 projects. That is funding to the Fitzroy Basin Association, Desert Channels Queensland, the Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association, NQ Dry Tropics, Southern Queensland Landscapes and Healthy Land and Water organisations. The program also includes ongoing annual funding of \$400,000 a year for Queensland Water and Land Carers Incorporated to cover their insurance requirements.

A second round of funding was opened in February of this year. Those applications are being assessed at the moment, with successful projects expected to be announced by 30 June 2023. Applications for the next round, round 3, will open in December 2023.

Mr MARTIN: I have a question about land valuations and how they interact with council rates. We know that for people in our communities the cost of living is a bit of an issue at the moment. Certainly it is something that is raised with me. One issue that I found in my local area is when the council increases rates and a member of the public then complains about it or disagrees with it. The Brisbane City Council will send them a letter saying, 'It's not our fault. It's the state government. The department has assessed it.' Does your department have any authority over Brisbane City Council rates? Is it a matter that is really for them?

Mr Cridland: The short answer is, no, we do not have control over the Brisbane City Council rate setting. It is important that I point out, before I invite Queensland's Valuer-General to offer any comment, that under the Land Valuation Act the Valuer-General must always exercise independent judgement and is not subject to the direction of anyone else. It is really important that we are clear about the legislative remit of the Valuer-General. I invite the Valuer-General to make any further comments.

Ms Dietrich: I would like to concur with the director-general in saying that the Valuer-General operates independently. I would also like to mention that when the valuations are done, the Valuer-General makes a decision each year to revalue local government authorities and this is based on

factors including property market surveys and timing since the last valuation. It is done in consultation with the councils and stakeholders. All of those factors are taken into account. That is how we work with the stakeholders, noting that the Valuer-General is an independent person.

Mr Cridland: I might add a couple of points that I think are important. The annual valuation program is our largest single program per year. The last year, in terms of the time we are talking about with this annual report, approximately 1.51 million properties representing 87 per cent of Queensland's valuation roll were valued and this year there were approximately 805,000 valuations in 24 local government areas.

We have around 143 valuers in the State Valuation Service who do an incredible job each and every year. They are local experts who live in their communities. They understand their communities well. I have sat with them while they talked me through their knowledge. It is impressive. I want to commend the work that the State Valuation Service does each and every year to maintain the integrity of Queensland's valuation roll.

Mr HEAD: Going back to the figures regarding vegetation health, on page 5 I think it is, it refers to 158,000 or 160,000 hectares. Does that figure include land that would be healthier if it involved tree clearing or tree thinning to make it healthier?

Mr Hinrichsen: I am trying to get my mind around a scenario where more clearing of native vegetation would make the landscape healthier. Of course, if you are talking about maintaining pasture for productivity, then vegetation management is a part of that. However, the figure that you are referring to is about investing in sustainable land management through our Natural Resource Investment Program. There no doubt would have been, for that particular year, investments that include control of pest species, but it would not have included clearing of native vegetation in those areas.

Mr HEAD: There are 13 bioregions in Queensland. Is it the department's understanding that there is no way that thinning in any of those bioregions would help the environment and make the land healthier in particular bioregions?

Mr Hinrichsen: No, that is not correct. The Vegetation Management Act recognises that thickening of native vegetation can be a process that threatens ecological condition and it provides a pathway for approvals to be granted to manage that thickened vegetation, to restore the condition. But that process is quite separate to the Natural Resource Investment Program funding that you were referring to under the previous program.

Mr HEAD: You just said that thinning could not make the land healthier and then you said that there could be ecological damage done by excessive thickening of vegetation. Could you please clarify that?

Mr Hinrichsen: Thinning is quite distinctly different to clearing. The processes that exist under the Vegetation Management Act for managing thickened vegetation are quite specific to activities that are required to restore that particular ecosystem so they are managed through a development application process. It takes into account the changes to the floristic diversity and obviously the density of the vegetation. Quite often it is a process that is able to be more readily managed by reinstating a more natural fire regime, but it can also include other types of mechanical or chemical thinning applications by the landowner.

Mr HEAD: Would you know how many inquiries and applications you would have had into thinning, at least in that reporting period but since the Vegetation Management Act has come in? If you do not have that handy, could you take it—

CHAIR: Only if it forms part of the report that we are looking at.

Mr HEAD: Yes.

Mr Hinrichsen: I do not have figures on how many inquiries might have been received particularly related to thinning. Our vegetation management hub, which is based in Charleville, in the year 2022, for example, received 3,593 inquiries from landowners seeking information on vegetation management on their properties. On average, you are talking about 10 inquiries per day so that is a service that is very extensively utilised.

We also went beyond the one-on-one engagement through the vegetation hub. Our officers, who are located across regional Queensland, participate in engagement and extension activities in 2022. There were 35 engagement workshops that our officers attended. There have been 15 since 1 January this year and we have another 29 workshops scheduled. Again, that is very much focused on landowners being able to understand the obligations and also the processes by which they can

legally manage vegetation on their properties. That includes forestry activities on freehold land. It includes managing weed encroachment. It can cover mulga harvesting. It is a whole range of activities that are recognised under the Vegetation Management Act as being appropriate vegetation management strategies by landowners.

CHAIR: We have run out of time. I will have to wait for estimates to ask about stock route management. Thank you very much for that answer. I thank everyone for participating today. We do really appreciate your time. Thanks to Hansard. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.00 am.