



# ***TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr SR King MP—Chair  
Mr CE Boyce MP  
Mr JR Martin MP  
Mr LL Millar MP  
Mr LA Walker MP  
Mr TJ Watts MP

**Staff present:**

Ms D Jeffrey—Committee Secretary  
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF DEPARTMENTAL ANNUAL REPORTS**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**MONDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2022**

**Brisbane**

## MONDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2022

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**The committee met at 10.45 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public briefing for the committee's consideration of departmental annual reports. 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 Miller MP, member for Gregory and deputy chair; Colin Boyce MP, member for Callide; Les Walker MP, member for Mundingburra; James Martin MP, member for Stretton; and Trevor Watts MP, member for Toowoomba North.

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. You have previously been provided with a copy of instructions to witnesses, so we will take those as 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.

**BRADY, Ms Tanya, Acting Chief Finance Officer and Acting Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Operations, Business and Corporate Partnership, Department of Resources**

**KAISER, Mr Mike, Director-General, Department of Resources**

**KEARNAN, Mr Wally, Deputy Director-General, Lands, Valuer-General and Registrar of Titles, Department of Resources**

**SHAW, Mr Chris, Acting Deputy Director-General, Georesources, Department of Resources**

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

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make a short opening statement, after which committee members may have some questions for you.

**Mr Kaiser:** I would also like on behalf of the department to start by respectfully acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather and pay due respects to elders past, present and emerging. As I reported at the last hearing, COVID-19 has required the department and its staff and the industries we work with to adapt and work differently. This past year the department has continued to work closely with the resources industry to ensure their critical operations have been able to continue safely and at the same time protect the health of the workforce and the regional communities they operate within.

On average over the year to November 2021, the industry has been able to directly support around 80,000 jobs across the state, particularly in the regions. The department's cooperative effort with Queensland Health and the industry peak bodies, as well as the direct communication we established with over 250 industry representatives, has been critical in maintaining the sector's economic contribution throughout the pandemic.

Without exploration, there can be no mining. That is why the department continues to support junior explorers who undertake this high-risk but essential activity. For example, just last week we provided 13 companies with grants for 16 projects to continue to search for new-economy minerals in the state's north. It is very encouraging for the departmental staff who put so much work into this long-running program to hear the feedback we have received from explorers about the difference these grants make. A great feature of this grants program is that all of the data collected becomes available publicly to all throughout our open data portal after six months.

The department has also been fully focused on the future of the industry through the development of the Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan. The QRIDP, when finalised, will provide a vision for the industry over the next 30 years and a plan for more immediate tangible goals and actions. Key among these is how the industry continues to innovate to maintain its global competitiveness and its social licence while fuelling our economy and jobs. The government has been consulting widely on the global megatrends—in particular, climate change, automation and increased demand for ethically sourced products. All of these influence the industry's future. Consultation has been both physical and online and has been a mammoth effort, including two rounds of statewide consultation and more than 700 submissions. Consultation has now closed and feedback is being considered ahead of converting the draft plan to a final midyear.

Global demand for our new-economy minerals, like vanadium, will only continue to grow. That is why last year we approved Saint Elmo's mining lease for vanadium in the North West Minerals Province. It is also why my department worked hard to champion a Queensland government commitment to design and build a new vanadium processing plant in Townsville. Work is underway on finding a location for that plant and getting procurement and construction underway. This has been welcomed by industry, particularly given the fact it will be common user infrastructure accessible by all.

While we are confident that the resources industry has a strong future in Queensland, it also has a long history—a history that has left the department with a legacy of abandoned mines we manage on behalf of Queenslanders. We have delivered \$11 million of works variously making old and abandoned mines safe, cleaning them up and remediating them. However, we know that some of our old mine sites could potentially produce minerals again from their tailings, their waste rock dumps or their remaining in-ground resources. The department is exploring this potential, and we have recently completed the first stage of piloting recommercialisation of an old mining area in Far North Queensland.

While we focus on realising these future opportunities for the industry, our core services are never missed. For example, last year we delivered critical mining lease decisions for the state, including granting four new mining leases and one mining lease transfer. We granted 29 production leases as part of APLNG's project based development plan and approved five new production leases, and we processed 119 mineral mining lease applications and 616 mineral exploration permit decisions.

In terms of the Lands division of the department, the department is the landlord and manager of large areas of the state. We have continued to respond to our tenants' hardship caused by Queensland's wild weather. We have provided more than a million dollars worth of land rent relief to landholders affected by flooding in the Wide Bay-Burnett and Goondiwindi areas. We are also working closely with other agencies and Hancock Prospecting around a potential lease transfer and redevelopment of the Great Keppel Island resort. The former resort has not operated since 2008, and it is in all parties' interests to see the island fulfilling its potential as a successful tourist destination and employer.

My department also recognises the important role land plays in connecting First Nations people with their country and heritage. In 2021 my department facilitated eight native title determinations with exclusive native title land totalling over 4,367 square kilometres. We also granted 118 Aboriginal land grants which allow entities to hold the land for the benefit of Aboriginal people.

Importantly, for the Lands side of the department, last year was the year we started to define how we would deliver on our objective to optimise the use of land resources across the state. To ensure whatever we do in this space is founded on a solid platform of evidence, we held over 53 engagement sessions for both internal and external stakeholders to drive future reform.

In conclusion, I want to pay tribute to the hardworking and dedicated public servants in the department. They are of course too many to mention by name, but I am inspired daily by their commitment to the people of Queensland. We welcome questions on the annual report.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We will go to questions.

**Mr WATTS:** I thank you all for being here. In December last year, the Queensland Land Court approved conditionally the go-ahead for Acland stage 3. As you know, this has been a very long, drawn-out process over decades. Could you give us an update on what follow-up has happened, where the department is at and what the prospects are in the short, medium and long term for that mining lease?

**Mr Kaiser:** The Land Court handed down its recommendation on 17 December 2021. It recommended that the environmental authority be issued and mining lease may be granted, subject to changes required to the Coordinator-General's environmental conditions. It currently sits with the Coordinator-General to make a decision on the change request before the environmental authority can be considered by the Department of Environment and Science. I understand that New Acland coal lodged their change request application last Friday. It now sits with the Coordinator-General.

**Mr WATTS:** Can you tell us the normal length of time the Coordinator-General would take over an issue such as this?

**Mr Kaiser:** The Coordinator-General has until 31 May. Is that right, Chris?

**Mr Shaw:** That is correct. The Land Court recommended that the Coordinator-General change request be approved by 31 May, so we would imagine they will be working toward that time.

**Mr WATTS:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Government figures as of 1 August 2021 said 64.7 per cent of the land area of Queensland was drought-declared. What types of assistance is the department providing to those affected where necessary?

**Mr Kearnan:** There is a range of rent relief and provisions available to those who will be affected by drought. For our category 11 primary producers, there is a range of measures. One is through the drought relief system managed by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, which provides a rebate. There are also deferral opportunities for people who are subject to drought. That is without penalty interest.

**Mr BOYCE:** The annual report notes that early detection systems detected change in 840 properties with assessable vegetation. What details can the department provide about the levels of change detected on these properties and the consequences for the responsible property owners? My understanding is that there has been some change in data collection technology; is that correct?

**Mr Kaiser:** In relation to SLATS, there has been a change in the methodology, following AgForce's suggestion that we also consider, detect, monitor and report on regrowth. In the SLATS report there has been a change in methodology, driven I suspect by technology, although that is in the environment department's remit. The SLATS that was released just prior to Christmas included that new methodology. I think it detected only one per cent of clearing had occurred in environmentally sensitive areas. The EDS, the early detection system, is a method used by this department on a fortnightly basis, I think, to monitor changes in vegetation on the ground. We use detection of those changes to contact landholders to see if there is an explanation or to work with them around what has occurred. Do you have anything to add?

**Mr Kearnan:** I do. For the committee's benefit, in the financial year of 2020-21 there were 1,084 EDS detections, and 42 audits were undertaken as well as 56 workshops or field days by staff to provide landholders with information on how to better comply with the VMA. Out of the 1,084 detections, there were 255 advisory letters, 15 warning notices and three penalty infringement notices for breaches.

**Mr Kaiser:** That speaks to the fact that for some time now the department has been trying to take a very proactive approach with landholders around education and workshops and seminars to which people are invited to try to improve people's understanding of how they can achieve what they need to achieve on their property without being in breach of the vegetation regulations.

**Mr BOYCE:** Are those detections occurring in specific areas—the Brigalow Belt, coastal areas et cetera? Is there one particular area more so than others?

**Mr Kearnan:** No, not really. Because the sensitivity of the satellite imagery is so great, most of those detections are very minor. They are spread throughout Queensland. One of the benefits of the early detection system is that we can compare any changes to vegetation to notifications that we have on our databases that people are lawfully doing work. When people are undertaking activities in category X and things like that, we can quickly identify that through the process that that is explained activity so there is no action required there.

Obviously with the major changes from a vegetation cover point of view, you have two major areas in Queensland that are not directly attributed to compliance or EDS. You have numerous changes detected in the mulga lands during drought and obviously you also have changes identified in the brigalow bioregion where people actively manage brigalow regrowth.

**CHAIR:** During our briefing on the 2019-20 annual report, we asked about data security within the department. Without jeopardising any security measures, can you provide an update on any activities that have occurred since then?

**Ms Venables:** Yes, I can. Since we were last in front of the committee we have stood up a number of governance and program initiatives to address information security and make sure that we are not only responsive in our management of it but also proactive. We have established what I think we are calling the Information Security Committee, which actually sits at board level in our department. I am also the information security executive for the department and I work very closely with our ITP provider who has established a chief information security officer. There are a number of proactive roles that we have established in that time to make sure that we are looking at this issue in depth.

We have been establishing a program of work that is responsive, so we do testing and make sure that we are looking into our various potential threats and see how we respond through exercises, as I said, through a testing regime and a maintenance regime. We have also proactively really looked at the education and capability development of our staff. We recognise there are still some gaps and there is a piece to do to continue work in that space. We are only as secure as our people's understanding of how to respond and identify those issues. Essentially, we have been setting up mandatory training annually but also running a series of education and awareness pieces throughout the year so that if we do identify anything then we do have staff who can respond and know where to go for that.

As well as our governance mechanisms and our proactive program, we are also making sure that we report and connect in with our ITP partners, both across our cluster—because we do provide corporate services as a cluster agency—and also we feed into the whole-of-government community of practice. We are really proactive in building not only our department's response to this but also feeding into government's response or the whole-of-department/whole-of-government response to this.

That is the piece of work that has happened over the past 12 months and will continue. I think we recognise it is one of our really important pieces and we have acknowledged that in our enterprise risk register so that we are constantly monitoring and looking at that at a board level as well.

**Mr WALKER:** Can the department provide an update on how the changing trade policies of the Chinese government in regards to Australian resources over the past year have impacted the Queensland economy? What role has the department played in assisting the industry, particularly in finding new markets for Queensland's resources?

**Mr Kaiser:** I can address that in general terms. Obviously some of China's trade activities have impacted pretty dramatically, especially initially, on exports of coal out of Queensland and into China. The industry responded very quickly to that in terms of its search for new markets. South Korea, Vietnam and India, in particular, I think, are all markets where we have seen growth. The industry itself, obviously in its own commercial interests, has been very proactive since the time of that original Chinese action in terms of finding new markets.

The department has not necessarily been directly involved in assisting the industry with the discovery of new markets. That has been largely a Trade and Investment Queensland led activity. Our Queensland industry is incredibly sophisticated and obviously is able, in its own commercial interests, to do a lot of that for itself. It has been remarkably successful, and my understanding—Chris may have some figures—is that they are basically back to or beyond the original levels of traded product prior to those actions from the Chinese. Is that right, Chris?

**Mr Shaw:** Looking at the statistics, effectively what Mike says is right. We work closely with individual proponents, helping them with transfers or anything that may be required from a statutory perspective to respond quickly to sales opportunities. We are also working closely with TIQ, as the director-general said. Prices are effectively ahead of where they were before the trade tensions at this point.

**Mr BOYCE:** My understanding is that China is not accepting Australian coal; is that correct?

**Mr Kaiser:** I do not know the details. Trade policy is not really the responsibility of the department. However, generally speaking, there are restrictions in place. I do not know if there are some volumes in some circumstances getting through the wharves. There may be; I am really not  
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certain. Without a doubt, generally speaking, that action by the Chinese government has resulted in substantially lower exports of coal into China, but the industry has responded really magnificently. As I say, you would expect them to; they are sophisticated players in the international markets and in their own commercial interests they have, I think, now more than made up for those volumes by exporting into other countries.

**Mr MILLAR:** Director-General, this question is not about the process or why you are doing this; it is about timing. I refer to small-scale mining, the mining claim freeze that took effect on 25 November and the draft Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan, which was released that week or the week prior to that following three months consultation. Why would the department think it is appropriate to run a consultation period over a national holiday period? Given that it was December and January, when basically everything shuts down, do you think it was appropriate to run the consultation process when it was going to be hard for people to participate?

**Mr Kaiser:** I do not think it is reasonable to say that people have found it hard to participate. In fact, we have been overwhelmed with feedback and responses to that particular initiative that we took. I think we are in possession of a really clear understanding of people's attitudes to the issues. We received many submissions within that time frame. We have proactively held discussions with affected mining claim holders. We have proactively held discussions with councils in the areas where the moratorium has some effect. I think despite the time frame we are in strong possession of very clear views and understandings of how people have reacted to that.

In reality, even though the deadline has passed, we are still engaging with people. We are still in discussions with people. That will continue. We are pretty flexible on the deadline. If people still have an opinion that they think they have not heard yet and they want to make that opinion known to us, of course we will listen.

**CHAIR:** Last year the Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill came before the committee and the parliament. It noted certain historical errors and issues that had occurred with lease approvals under the Mineral Resources Act. Can we have a status update on how those issues are being addressed?

**Mr Kaiser:** You can, but probably from Chris rather than me.

**Mr Shaw:** Effectively, what the Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill did was to clarify that any deficiencies in the administrative process did not affect the validity of the mining lease so there was no retrospective reissue required. We have worked with our stakeholders to make sure we are all in consistent understanding of what mining leases they have and effective dates and conditions. It really was not about knowing the conditions or the dates—there was paperwork transacted; it was just some parts of it. Again, through the Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan we are looking at ways to streamline those administrative processes further and enhance our online systems to make sure as much as possible it is automated and, beyond any doubt, it makes sure that all the right boxes are ticked administratively.

**CHAIR:** No worries. I remember we were in this room.

**Mr Shaw:** I remember it, too.

**Mr MARTIN:** My question is about the new-economy minerals. Director-General, you mentioned that briefly in your statement. Is the department able to elaborate on the importance of those minerals to the Queensland economy and the global economy?

**Mr Kaiser:** New-economy minerals represent enormous opportunity for Queensland, its economy and its regional communities in particular. If you look at the International Energy Agency reports around critical minerals—and they have reported in a couple of different ways around this issue—those minerals are needed to make electrical equipment, to make renewable equipment and to make batteries in particular. The availability of those materials might actually be the thing that stops the world from reaching its climate change targets. If you cannot build that kind of equipment then you cannot decarbonise the economy; if you cannot decarbonise the economy then you cannot meet your targets. Building that equipment is absolutely critically dependent upon the discovery, mining, processing and manufacturing of things like copper, vanadium, cobalt and a whole range of other things.

When we say new-economy minerals, the 'new' refers to the new economy; it does not necessarily refer to new minerals. Copper is a new-economy mineral because you need an awful lot of copper to make electrical equipment to help decarbonise the globe. We are blessed with huge deposits of this stuff, throughout Northern Queensland in particular but also in the north-west and the north-east. That is why it represents such an opportunity for Queensland. It is not just an economic

opportunity for us. Some might even call it our obligation to find, mine and process that stuff and get it to the world so that that equipment can be built so that climate change can be dealt with it. It represents a huge opportunity. We are very focused on it.

As the nature of the industry changes in Queensland, it will be increasingly the future of the industry. That is why, for example, we took the initiative to recommend to the government that it approve the vanadium processing plant in Queensland, because vanadium is a battery material. I am sure you have heard my minister describe it. It is a battery material. Even locally demand for vanadium based batteries throughout our electricity system, let alone the rest of the world's, is likely to increase. We are starting to approve vanadium mines on the one hand. There is likely to be strong demand for vanadium based batteries. What we have to do is close that supply chain and provide the processing and battery manufacturing opportunities so that we can capture more of the value here in Queensland. That is one commodity supply chain of very many that we are focused on.

If I can take another minute, Queensland can have confidence that we will be good at this, that we will be able to develop these new-economy minerals, because we already mine, process and manufacture aluminium, copper and zinc. There are many long supply chains within Queensland where we add an awful lot to what we mine. We sometimes do not give ourselves credit for the fact that we actually do a lot of minerals processing and manufacturing here in Queensland. We are not just a quarry. We already have the smarts to do that. Now we are just applying those smarts—what is in our DNA already—to new minerals.

**Mr WATTS:** I want to follow up on two questions in a little more detail. When the Coordinator-General report comes back, what is the process that goes forward and what are the expected time lines? In relation to trade with China but Queensland's exports more broadly, I would be interested to talk about both the dollar value and the volume of thermal coal and metallurgical coal out of Queensland—whether or not that is growing and whether or not you as a department see that growing into the future.

**Mr Kaiser:** I might let Chris start preparing on the volumes front. The change request that the Land Court gave New Acland the opportunity to lodge was only lodged last Friday. We should be clear about that. The process that the Land Court recommended needed to be kicked off by the company itself and they kicked it off just last Friday. That change request goes to the Coordinator-General. Now the Coordinator-General has to consider that change request and any other recommendations before making a recommendation to the department of environment. That then needs to be considered by the department of environment. They cannot change the Coordinator-General's recommendations but the department of environment can add to them or it can still refuse the environmental authority or approve it with the changes that have been recommended to it. As my colleague Chris said recently, they have to have that approved by 31 May.

Once that environmental authority is in place, our minister is then able to receive a recommendation from us, this department, about the mining lease. Once he receives that recommendation from us, he is able to readily do with that recommendation what he wants to do with it. That should all proceed quite quickly after 31 May. It can occur sooner than that; 31 May is the latest that can happen.

**Mr Shaw:** I can quickly add a few dates past the Coordinator-General's decision, bearing in mind these are Environment and Science dates so they will know the detail more than we will. The information I have is that there are 10 business days after receiving the Coordinator-General's report to advice being sought from our minister and the Minister for State Development. Once that advice is received, there are another 10 business days for Environment and Science to consider that. Then they make their decision on the environmental authority. As Mike said, if and when that environmental authority is approved, at that point we make a recommendation to our minister as to what to do with the mining lease applications.

On your question about coal statistics, I have managed to dig up a few. In the period in question that I have statistics for, we do have separate metallurgical and thermal coal figures. For metallurgical coal, I am advised that we exported \$31.2 billion worth in the calendar year to December 2021. That represents a 31.6 per cent increase on the previous calendar year.

**Mr WATTS:** Just to clarify: I am after both the dollars, which are obviously crucially important, and I am also interested in the volume.

**Mr Shaw:** I will give you the dollars on thermal because I have them in front of me and then I will quickly grab the others. In terms of thermal, it was \$6.6 billion for that same period, which is a 57.5 per cent increase on the previous period.

**Mr Kaiser:** So they are percentage increases in terms of dollar value?

**Mr Shaw:** That is correct, in terms of export value for those statistics.

**CHAIR:** Was the metallurgical figure million or billion?

**Mr Shaw:** It was billion.

**Mr Kaiser:** If the volumes are not readily available, that is something that we can get back to you on.

**Mr WATTS:** I am trying to understand where the industry is at, where the global market is at and how Queensland is responding to that, particularly with China withdrawing some of our trading opportunities.

**Mr Kaiser:** I will certainly want to confirm this, and we will, but my recollection when I last looked at figures was that even by volume—not just dollar value—exports are recovered to levels beyond what they were when China took the action it took. My understanding is that volumes have recovered, but let us confirm that for you.

**Mr WATTS:** While you are hunting down those statistics, not necessarily for now but potentially on notice, I am interested to understand exactly the revenue that the Queensland government gets in terms of its royalty base from both thermal coal and metallurgical coal.

**Mr Kaiser:** We do not collect the revenue, of course; Treasury does that.

**Mr Shaw:** I have combined coal royalties for the period 2020-21, which was \$1.7 billion.

**Mr Kaiser:** For both metallurgical and thermal?

**Mr Shaw:** Yes. I am sure people will be beaver away, working on your request as we speak so that hopefully we will get some more details.

**CHAIR:** Can you take that question on notice, please: the volumes of metallurgical versus thermal coals during the 2020-21 period.

**Mr Kaiser:** Yes, and what they have been historically, prior to the Chinese withdrawal.

**Mr WATTS:** I want to get an understanding of where the industry is at, where it is heading and how we are managing with a potential trade barrier being put up by what was one of our biggest customers.

**CHAIR:** We heard during the opening statement that you said it had recovered and the effects of the new markets. That is still valuable to the member for Toowoomba North so it is relevant.

**Mr Kaiser:** Yes, we will get some numbers around that.

**Mr Shaw:** In general terms, so not specific to New Acland, I draw the committee's attention to the initiative that was announced at the time of the Queensland Resource Industry Development Plan that the government intends to refer the question of mining appeals to the approvals process to the Law Reform Commission later this year. We have already been in discussions with the Law Reform Commission to have a good look at this process because it certainly does seem like projects can get themselves into quite a bind of tit-for-tat legal action that can sometimes delay projects considerably.

Without referring necessarily specifically to New Acland, that is an issue that the industry has raised with us. It is also, incidentally, an issue that environmentalists are not particularly satisfied with either, because if they ever get a legal win they find that the company comes and appeals that decision. Mining companies can get themselves into this seemingly endless process where the substance of the objection is long forgotten and both sides get bogged down in legal tactics. That whole issue, having been identified during the Resource Industry Development Plan process, has now been referred to the Law Reform Commission. In discussions with the Law Reform Commission, they say they will take some considerable time, perhaps 12 months, to work through that. We are determined to try to use that mechanism to find a solution to that problem.

**Mr WATTS:** Certainly from a sovereign risk point of view, we would rather be one of the top performers globally when it comes to resource extraction rather than slipping down the ladder. Obviously our legislative framework is affecting that at the moment because we are slipping down. I think it would be interesting to see what the Law Reform Commission comes back with.

**Mr Kaiser:** Yes. It is a tricky area, of course, because human rights should not be impinged lightly and the ability to appeal legal decisions is a right. We certainly felt like it was a valid thing for the Law Reform Commission to look at. We look forward to working with them to come up with improvements to the process.

**Mr MILLAR:** I want to go back to small-scale mining. Director-General, this could be a question on notice: are you able to tell us who you have met with, what mayors you have met with over that three-month period and what type of consultation took place?



**Mr Kaiser:** If I try to name them all I will be sure to miss someone.

**Mr MILLAR:** I am happy for you to take it as a question on notice.

**Mr Kaiser:** Sure, I am happy to take the detail as a question on notice. The Local Government Association of Queensland was good enough to convene for us a meeting of the mayors of all impacted areas. We had four or so mayors on the line with us with the LGAQ for a considerable session prior to the end of last year. Do you have the numbers of submissions that we have received from that issue, Chris?

**Mr Shaw:** As of 2 February, before the submissions had actually closed—about a week before—we had over 100 submissions. We had dedicated sessions with a wide range of the small-scale mining associations. We can definitely get the details of each of those. We also had a number of online sessions with individual small miners, as well as two four-day-long facilitated Facebook engagement Q-and-A style sessions. We can definitely get the detail. I should point out that there will be more consultation with all of those groups as we firm up our policy solutions following the feedback.

**Mr WALKER:** In the opening statement you touched on COVID-19. I want to tease that out a little more. From listening to the figures on the money that has been generated, can you elaborate on how your department has responded to the ongoing economic impacts of COVID-19?

**Mr Kaiser:** Our very clear focus has been to work with the industry to keep the industry going. That has been our focus, particularly early on in COVID but for the entirety of the two-year period of the pandemic. There are various concerns about the industry's ability to operate. There are particular risks also in fly-in fly-out operations. Obviously with people coming from around the state into particular communities, there is a lot of concern on the part of the communities but also on the part of the companies because the last thing that the companies want to do is be responsible for introducing COVID into a host community. For those operations, but also non-fly-in fly-out operations, where there are large workforces working in close quarters, this issue has been top of the pops for them in terms of their operational risks. They have understood that cases of COVID-19 in their operations have the potential to shut their operations down.

The department has worked very hard with the industry to mitigate those risks and also, I would say, to play a bit of an advocacy role for the industry within government and with Queensland Health, and with the Chief Health Officer in particular, to bring Queensland Health's and the CHO's understanding of the criticality of this industry to the Queensland economy—to bring that understanding up so that decisions are made in a balanced way. Most of the focus of our work has been in that regard.

I have to say that the industry has responded magnificently. They have been very quick and very professional in terms of the way they have responded to the pandemic and to their constantly changing requirements. Many of the CHO decisions have big operational implications for mining organisations and they have been very nimble and very quick to respond in a very responsible way.

Most recently the department worked with the industry and with Queensland Health and the CHO to ensure that the essential critical worker exemptions were put in place so that even during the Omicron wave the industry was able to draw on a pool of workers to keep operations going. That has been our focus. Our single-minded focus has been to make sure that the pandemic does not shut the industry down, because we all understand the extent to which the Queensland economy, and regional workforces in particular, rely on the industry.

**CHAIR:** I was fortunate a while ago to visit Rio Tinto's mining operation in Weipa. There is the added complexity of ships coming in and out, the people onboard the ships, the international quarantine laws and managing COVID with that. It was really good to see how advanced that all was. It is something that you just do not think of.

**Mr Kaiser:** Mines are very challenging operational environments and a pandemic makes that even more challenging.

**Mr Shaw:** I think that is exactly right, Director-General. The No. 1 value-add was working with industry, meeting with them on a weekly basis, at least as things as are changing, and getting a consolidated industry view. We were working also with Health. When we had individual specific applications for mine sites, we were also helping to coordinate and prioritise them. Earlier in the pandemic, when we had an inability for people to move to exploration sites, we quickly stood up exploration rent relief and work program deferrals as well to make sure they were not having to spend their capital resources on fees, effectively, at times when they could not progress their projects.

**Mr BOYCE:** Is there any current data on full-time-equivalent jobs in the mining and resource sector?

**Mr Kaiser:** Eighty thousand springs to mind, but that is obviously a very round number. Do you mean total employment in the resources sector?

**Mr BOYCE:** Correct, yes.

**Mr Shaw:** It is about 80,000. For the 2020-21 calendar year, on average there were 77,800 people employed in Queensland mining. I actually checked a jobs website this morning. In resources in Queensland there were over 1,400; some of them had a \$10,000 sign-up bonus. There are pretty positive signs.

**Mr WATTS:** I am interested in rehabilitation. Obviously mines have to lodge when they are approved and everything else. What audit process is there? How is Queensland going in managing that rehabilitation? Is the industry doing a good job of following the guidelines that are in their approvals?

**Mr Kaiser:** That is actually a question for our colleagues in Environment.

**Mr Shaw:** That is correct, Director-General. They are rolling out their progressive rehabilitation and closure plan framework, which was part of the government financial assurance reforms. I think most of the mines will be in that framework by the end of this year. Obviously they also have the Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner on board now whose job is to oversee the success of the rehabilitation framework. I am sure James will be actively looking at those things.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the briefing. I thank you all for your participation and attendance. We appreciate it. Thanks to our Hansard reporters. Some questions were taken on notice. One was about the metallurgical versus thermal coal volumes.

**Mr Shaw:** Chair, I have numbers on that for the 2020-21 financial year. For thermal coal it was 48.8 million tonnes and for metallurgical coal it was 150 million tonnes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. The other question on notice was about the percentage change historically.

**Mr Shaw:** We can come back to you on that.

**CHAIR:** You will take that on notice. The other was the question from the member for Gregory about small-scale mining and consultation with local government.

**Mr Kaiser:** So which local governments we have consulted with?

**Mr MILLAR:** Who was consulted.

**Mr Kaiser:** We will get that to you.

**CHAIR:** Can we get that information back by 4 pm on Wednesday, 2 March 2021?

**Mr Kaiser:** You will.

**CHAIR:** We will write to you about that. Thank you very much.

**The committee adjourned at 11.30 am.**