

TUESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2020

ESTIMATES—STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE—STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PLANNING

Estimate Committee Members

Mr CG Whiting (Chair)
Mr JJ McDonald
Mr MJ Hart
Mr RI Katter
Mr JE Madden
Mr TJ Smith

Members in Attendance

Ms FS Simpson
Ms A Leahy
Dr A MacMahon
Mr MC Berkman
Mrs DK Frecklington
Mr SSJ Andrew
Mr AJ Perrett
Mr DR Last

In Attendance

Hon. Dr SJ Miles, Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning

Ms K Wright, Acting Chief of Staff

Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning

Mr D Walker, Director-General

Ms T Power, Coordinator-General

Mr K Doss, State Planner, Planning Group


Queensland Reconstruction Authority

Mr B Moon, Chief Executive Officer

Office of the Independent Assessor

Ms K Florian, The Independent Assessor

The committee met at 9.30 am

 **CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare this hearing of estimates for the State Development and Regional Industries Committee open. I begin today's proceedings by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Chris Whiting. I am the member for Bancroft and the chair of the committee. Mr Jim McDonald, the member for Lockyer, is the deputy chair. Other committee members are Mr Michael Hart, the member for Burleigh; Mr Robbie Katter, the member for Traeger; Mr Jim Madden, the member for

Ipswich West; and Mr Tom Smith, the member for Bundaberg. The committee has granted leave for non-committee members to attend and ask questions at the hearing today, so other members may be present over the course of the proceedings.

Today the committee will consider the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 and the estimates for the committee's area of responsibility. I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at my discretion as the chair of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearings to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of the proceedings are available from the secretariat. I ask all present to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent, if not turned off. I also remind you that food and drink are not permitted in this chamber.

This year the committee has determined the program for the committee's estimates hearing. The committee will examine the portfolio areas in the following order: state development from 9.30 am to 10.30 am; infrastructure and planning from 10.30 am to 11.45 am; local government from 12 pm to 1 pm; water from 1.45 pm to 3.15 pm; regional development and manufacturing from 3.30pm to 4.30 pm; agricultural industry development and rural communities from 4.45 pm to 6.15 pm; and fisheries from 6.30 pm to 8 pm. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the appropriation bill for the portfolio areas of the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning.

Visiting committee members are the member for Maroochydore, Ms Fiona Simpson; the member for Warrego, Ms Ann Leahy; the member for South Brisbane, Amy MacMahon; and the member for Maiwar, Mr Michael Berkman. Other members who have leave to appear are Mr David Crisafulli, the Leader of the Opposition and member for Broadwater; Mr David Janetzki, the member for Toowoomba South; Mr Jarrod Bleijie, the member for Kawana; Mrs Deb Frecklington, the member for Nanango; Mr Tony Perrett, the member for Gympie; Mr Dale Last, the member for Burdekin; Mr Stephen Andrew, the member for Mirani; and Ms Sandy Bolton, the member for Noosa.

The committee will examine the Deputy Premier's portfolio until 1 pm, starting with the area of state development. The committee will suspend proceedings during this time for a break between 11.45 am and 12 noon. I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Legislative Assembly. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament also apply in this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, argument or opinion. I intend to guide proceedings today so that the relevant issues can be explored fully and to ensure that there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, the director-general, officials and departmental officers, and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials and departmental officers to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the Deputy Premier or the director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Deputy Premier's portfolio areas of state development, infrastructure, local government and planning open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Deputy Premier, if you wish, you may make an opening statement of no more than three minutes.

Dr MILES: Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today on the budget as it relates to my portfolio. I, too, acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and thank yourself and committee members and other members who have joined us for today. As members will be aware, I spent most of 2020 helping lead the health response to COVID-19. After the election the Premier asked me to shift focus to the economic response, working to get more Queenslanders back to work. I am very proud of what we achieved in health—one of the best and most successful pandemic responses in the world—and I am excited to turn my attention now to leveraging that response to create good, secure jobs.

We took our economic recovery plan to the election and it was endorsed by Queenslanders. The budget we are scrutinising today delivers on those promises. It is a budget focused on one thing: creating jobs through economic recovery. I want to first and foremost say thank you to the workers who have kept our state moving throughout this year. From our health staff, the truckies, police officers, researchers and supermarket staff to all Queenslanders who listened to the health advice, thank you.

Now we have the opportunity to unite and recover together. When times are tough, it is critical that governments invest. Programs like COVID Works for Queensland have done just that—investing in regional communities. In July we announced that the \$200 million program would support 520 projects which councils report will support more than 4,600 local jobs. The south-east's councils are also benefiting through the \$50 million Unite and Recover Community Stimulus Package, \$45 million of which is expected to be paid out during 2020-21. This program is supporting the fast-tracking of shovel-ready projects that create jobs in South-East Queensland. Combined, more than 1,565 jobs are expected to be created or supported by this program across 12 councils.

These programs are building on the success of the Works for Queensland program. Over the first three rounds of this \$600 million initiative, 1,862 local projects are underway or completed. Councils are reporting that Works for Queensland projects have created or supported more than 20,600 local jobs so far. From Mount Isa to Moranbah, from Thursday Island to Thuringowa, that is a fantastic result. Our government is backing job-creating projects right across the state.

Through the \$50 million Essential Goods and Supply Chain Program, Brisbane based biotech company Ellume will introduce advanced manufacturing processes to speed up and enhance production capability of a rapid COVID-19 test which is currently going through US regulatory approval and will deliver a result in 15 minutes. That is just one of the new investments I will be announcing today. Funding will allow Ellume to ramp up production of the COVID-19 rapid tests from 60,000 a day to more than 200,000 and to also bring back manufacturing jobs of critical component parts to Queensland, including electronics. The project is expected to support over 500 jobs when fully operational, with up to an additional 200 jobs created during construction.

We will also invest through this budget \$7.5 million this year alone to build the Haughton pipeline stage 2 for Townsville, delivering the first of more than 500 jobs. We have made a \$30 million investment towards upgrading the Cairns Marine Precinct, reeling in 150 new jobs during construction. In Toowoomba we are delivering new jobs in emerging sectors and partnering with Wellcamp to deliver the Wellcamp Entertainment Precinct that will transform Toowoomba's tourism offerings. Today as we meet earthworks are underway for a new export centre at Wellcamp.

Here in Brisbane we have partnered with medical technology startup Vaxxas to help them design and manufacture a needle-free vaccine in Queensland. Our investments will help to deliver up to 39 jobs and an innovative new way to deliver health care. Queensland has world-class research and researchers. They are the researchers who are delivering us a shot at another COVID-19 vaccine.

This budget delivers exactly what we promised Queenslanders: a budget that gets the Queensland economy back on track, to get people back into jobs, to keep businesses open and to allow businesses to create jobs. May I introduce Mr Damien Walker, the director-general of the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. Mr Walker has overseen, since the election, a very substantial machinery of government change. I note for the record at the start that while we have done our very best to be prepared to answer questions across the changes that that machinery of government change has delivered, there may be some questions we are simply unable to answer because it is a new department.

CHAIR: Thank you. I will now go to the first questions, which will come from the non-government members.

Ms SIMPSON: Good morning, Minister and everyone. My question is to the Coordinator-General. I will perhaps call the Coordinator-General and I will go on to another question before I address it to the Coordinator-General. To the Deputy Premier, do you have a private email account that you have used for government business?

Dr MILES: No. I do have a private email account though.

Ms SIMPSON: Have you used it for government business since the Premier changed the ministerial code of conduct in 2018?

Mr MADDEN: Excuse me, Chair.

CHAIR: You have a point of order, member for Ipswich West?

Mr MADDEN: Yes. I would be grateful if my colleague could address where this appears in the Service Delivery Statements. We are here today to discuss the budget and I would be grateful if my friend could direct me as to how this particular issue she is beginning a line of questioning with refers to the Service Delivery Statement.

CHAIR: I know this will be a theme throughout estimates. On the issue of private emails and what was sent previously, can I point out to the opposition members that you have to connect this to the expenditure of the budget this current year and for the rest of this financial year. You can dip into what has been done in previous budgets to discover a pattern of expenditure, but I am not going to have much patience for going down this line of looking at what is in private emails. Member for Maroochydore, are you going to make this relevant?

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, there are actually precedents in previous estimates during your time in government where it does not have to be connected to an SDS. This actually goes to a pattern of integrity and accountability. The minister, the Deputy Premier, has received a charter letter from the Premier about integrity and accountability. My question to the Deputy Premier is: have you used your private email account for government business since the Premier changed the ministerial code of conduct in 2018?

CHAIR: Before we answer that, I understand your point of view on that and I understand how it relates to the minister's area of administration. I am going to let you rephrase it otherwise I will be tempted to rule that out of order.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, have you received a charter letter from the Premier that requires you to address issues of integrity and accountability in performing your duties?

Dr MILES: Yes.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, have you ever sent an email to stacia1 @ bigpond.com?

Dr MILES: No.

Ms SIMPSON: My next question is to the Coordinator-General. Good morning. I refer to the ninth request for change application to the EIS for the Cross River Rail project, which is set to cause serious disruption. At what date was the Coordinator-General aware that this ninth application was pending?

Ms Power: I thank the honourable member for the question. I have regular meetings with the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority to discuss potential changes to their project so I have been in conversation with them about what could be imminent changes. Change request No. 8 was lodged in August and they applied for an evaluation for the offsets. In relation to change request No. 9, I will have to get the detail for you on the date when this request was put to us, but it is very recent.

Ms SIMPSON: I would appreciate it if you could come back to us on that. The application does propose substantial additional impacts on the local community. Is it common practice for there to be so many requests for change in an EIS?

CHAIR: Before we get into that, we are talking about Cross River Rail. Are these questions that would be better put to the minister responsible or are you specifically looking at what the Coordinator-General's role is in this particular project?

Ms SIMPSON: Correct. The Coordinator-General is responsible for the EIS process and there is a ninth request for amendment currently pending before the Coordinator-General pertaining to the southern portal where there is going to be a cut and fill and substantial disruption to the local community. Could I put that question to the Coordinator-General?

Ms Power: Thank you for the question. It is quite usual for such mega projects that are so long in their design and planning and construction phase to have a number of changes. Given the scale and complexity of the Cross River Rail project it would be quite usual for major project changes as the delivery authority or any proponent refines their design and moves into construction. I clarify that it was November 2020 that they lodged change request No. 9.

Ms SIMPSON: Can I clarify the date in November 2020? It was after 31 October. If the Coordinator-General could come back to me with a specific date. That was after the 31 October election. The changes in the No. 9 application for variation to the EIS were mooted, I take it, some time prior to the formal application being put forward. Would the Coordinator-General be able to advise when those proposed changes, such as the cut and fill and major disruption to the community, were first raised with the Coordinator-General?

Ms Power: I can confirm it was 20 November that the change request was lodged with me.

Ms SIMPSON: Once again, well after the election. With the elements of that change request No. 9 having substantial impacts on the local area, when were those issues of a cut and fill and haulage of trucks in and out of this community first mooted with the Coordinator-General?

Ms Power: While I might have conversations with members and my staff have conversations with members of the delivery authority, it is not until we actually receive the official change request that I will consider what may be asked for. That change request lodged on 20 November is the official request for that change and that is the change that is now publicly notified. We will be considering that after Christmas. It is open for consultation until 24 December.

Ms SIMPSON: I note the Coordinator-General's response and note the submissions close on Christmas Eve, but I will go back to that issue again as to when was the issue of a variation with cut and fill, with major disruption to the community, first raised with the Coordinator-General in conversations with your staff and yourself and the Cross River Rail authority?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I think you have asked the question three times now. I think you have got an answer. Does the Coordinator-General want to furnish any more information on that?

Ms Power: I would prefer to simply say that when we get a formal application, that is when we consider those changes. Prior to that anything is fundamentally a conceptual conversation.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

Ms SIMPSON: I do, more specifically to the Coordinator-General. Did those conversations occur within or prior to the government being in caretaker mode?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, that is the fourth time you have asked the same question. I do not know if the Coordinator-General is going to furnish any more information. I am concerned that we do not repeat our questions and take up time. Did the Coordinator-General want to furnish any more information on that?

Ms Power: I am quite comfortable to say I have regular meetings with the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority and that many of the decisions that the Coordinator-General takes are taken independent of the government so we were able to continue those conversations during caretaker mode. We would have briefed any government following the election outcome.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, why have you had the Cross River Rail project as a whole taken out of your portfolio of state development and infrastructure when your predecessors previously undertook that role?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, you are straying into government policy. The allocation of portfolios does not come under the Deputy Premier's powers or responsibilities. Do you want to rephrase that question?

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, the Coordinator-General is certainly under the infrastructure portfolio, which is within your domain. Did your government have in anyway an influence on ensuring that the issue of the cut-and-fill and major disruption to the critical seat of South Brisbane, with the community being impacted by a new means of constructing this controversial element of Cross River Rail, did not come forward prior to the election?

Mr SMITH: Chair, I have a point of order.

CHAIR: One moment. We have a point of order from the member for Bundaberg.

Mr SMITH: My point of order is around the word 'controversial'. I would argue that there is imputation in that question.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, you might want to rephrase the question to make it straightforward and avoid imputations, hypotheticals or arguments. That would be useful.

Ms SIMPSON: Was the Deputy Premier or his predecessors in the department aware that this major impact was looming with Cross River Rail upon the South Brisbane community because of this new method of construction, with the major haulage, the noise, the dust and the impact on small businesses and residents?

Dr MILES: The member will be aware that before the election I was the health minister and I cannot speak to what people were and were not aware of in this portfolio prior to that. I would emphasise, though, that change requests are made to the Coordinator-General and not to the minister. They are not cabinet decisions; they are Coordinator-General decisions.

Now that I get the chance to respond I will say that the imputation that this was carried over in some way until after the election I think the Coordinator-General has addressed. It is clearly contradicted by the fact that, while you might be focused on change request 9, change request 8 was

made in August 2020. It is not unusual in projects of this scale that, as the more detailed design and construction commences, they find new and different ways to deliver the project and that they ask the Coordinator-General if they can make small variations in order to accommodate those. They requested one in August, which you have chosen to ignore, and another in November, which you have chosen to focus on. I do not think there is any substance to the line of inquiry.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, I am happy to reference some of the other applications for change that have occurred this year. I think there have been four in total, including the current one, but the current one is quite substantial. My question is to the Coordinator-General. Within these variations in the EIS, are there updates to the projected overall cost of Cross River Rail?

Ms Power: As I am aware, the delivery authority has said that the project is on time and on budget, but the cost of the project would need to be directed to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads or the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a further question to the Coordinator-General. Does the EIS cover elements of the project's cost benefit and update that as there are variations in the project progressing?

Ms Power: No. The EIS is about change requests and the environmental or social impacts of those requests on the community.

Ms SIMPSON: Coordinator-General, as application No. 9 for change in the EIS does have a substantial impact on the community, with submissions due to close on Christmas Eve, can you advise what range of mitigations are within the scope of consideration to try to lessen the impact on businesses and residents with a cut-and-fill method of construction through that southern portal area?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I would question whether these would be better directed at the minister responsible for the project. These are quite specific. Obviously the Coordinator-General can answer what is in the Coordinator-General's powers. You may want to think about where the questions are directed. I will let the Coordinator-General respond.

Ms Power: It would be premature for me to forecast what the mitigation measures might be, but certainly the purpose of community consultation is to understand the community's concerns. Then the proponent is always asked to consider those impacts and how they would intend to avoid them, minimise them, mitigate them or manage them. That will actually inform the final report.

CHAIR: Member for Traeger, do you have any questions?

Mr KATTER: Yes, I do. My first question refers to the Service Delivery Statements No. 1, page 52. I refer to the recent announcements of the government's intention for the South-East Queensland Olympics bid. To attract the Olympics will retard public investment in regional and North Queensland, as obviously there will be a need to increase the spend in the south-east. Any visitor benefit received by NQ will be offset by the long-term reduction in public investment. How does the minister reconcile this intent by the government with the future development of North Queensland as outlined in the budget?

Dr MILES: The member for Traeger will have seen the Premier's announcement yesterday that, after suspending efforts towards winning the 2032 Olympics, we are re-engaging with those. She met with Australian representatives of the Olympics yesterday to indicate that. Obviously the various cost benefits for the state and what infrastructure and other facilities need to be invested in will be a matter that they will work on throughout that. I have no doubt, member for Traeger, that there will be a significant focus on making sure that all of the state benefits from that opportunity. I am sure that will be a key focus of the Premier and the relevant ministers.

Mr KATTER: Let me single out particular developments, for instance, Cross River Rail, which I think would fit the category of required infrastructure that would be seen as a benefit to facilitate an Olympics bid. Would the minister see that as impacting on developments such as Ootah Road, which requires 90 kilometres of bitumen seal to open up the Cape to triple road trains, which CSIRO has nominated as one of the highest value beef roads that could be built in Queensland?

Dr MILES: I do not think the Cross River Rail project would impact or preclude the opportunity to invest in other projects such as that one. Clearly we have already made the commitment to Cross River Rail. That predates any Olympics bid. I am broadly aware of the project that the member refers to and I do not think the two are related.

CHAIR: We will move to a block of questions from government members and I will lead off. With reference to SDS volume 1, page 51, can the Deputy Premier update the committee on the progress of the Queen's Wharf development, including the current local content on that \$3.6 billion project?

Dr MILES: I am really pleased to. For the first time since construction commenced, I had the chance to visit the Queen's Wharf development site this morning and it looks amazing. I was joined by Star Entertainment Group and Destination Brisbane Consortium executives to check out the progress on that amazing tourism development. The countdown is 100 weeks until we open the \$3.6 billion Queen's Wharf integrated resort, with its 50 bars and restaurants.

Queen's Wharf Brisbane, an integrated resort, is Queensland's largest private construction project. It will deliver some 12 football fields of high-quality public space, with multiple connections to the CBD as well as a pedestrian bridge to South Bank and the cultural precinct. The restoration of nine heritage buildings will be underway soon, with the first tender for this work currently in progress. It is employing locals and contributing to our economic recovery. There are more than 500 workers currently on site daily, and that number will increase to 2,000 next year. I want to congratulate them for not having missed a beat during this year. In fact, I was advised this morning that they are about to hire an additional 50 staff here in Queensland. There are not many other places in the world that are creating jobs like that in this pandemic. From my previous role as health minister I can say that I know how closely our Chief Health Officer worked with the construction industry to ensure they could keep operating safely throughout the lockdown periods, and the Queen's Wharf project was no different.

Over 380 different work packages have been awarded to contractors so far. I am pleased to detail that, at present, this exciting project is sourcing more than 85 per cent of its material from Queensland. This includes hundreds of tonnes of precast concrete from Toowoomba and steel fabricated at Beenleigh. More than 200 tonnes of steel is being delivered weekly to the site. By the time the podium levels are complete, a massive 4,000 tonnes of Queensland fabricated steel will have been delivered and installed.

The size and location of the development also necessitates innovative construction techniques. Using precast structural products enables the installation of the locally fabricated steel to be raised in a single crane lift. This enables a safer and faster installation sequencing of a stronger product.

As well as the incredible site progress, Brisbane's first river bridge in more than 10 years is underway, connecting our iconic South Bank to Queen's Wharf's restaurants and retail levels and to the CBD beyond. Named in honour of our first Indigenous parliamentarian, the late senator Neville Bonner, the striking Neville Bonner Bridge will be used by an estimated 9,000 people each day.

In another vote of confidence, more than 90 per cent of the residential apartments in the 64-storey tower have been sold, bringing forward the possibility to fast-track the second residential tower within the development. With construction of the podium levels continuing through to mid-2021 and the facade elements being installed towards the middle of next year, Queen's Wharf is on track to be one of Australia's most sought after destinations. It is a signature product and playing a lead role in helping to keep the economy moving during our recovery from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

All going well, the plan remains for this to start opening in late 2022. In the meantime, hundreds and thousands of jobs will be needed to make it happen. Nearly a quarter of a million training hours have been provided to workers to date. All of the workers—not just those on site but also those involved across the south-east—deserve thanks for their efforts. Post COVID, this magnificent resort will be a magnet for an estimated 1.4 million international, interstate and local visitors annually.

Star Entertainment Group was very proud to inform that, upon completion, Queen's Wharf will have four hotels, over 50 restaurants and bars, retail areas and the Treasury Casino replacement, but I was more excited to hear of the more than 8,000 ongoing jobs it is expected to support—a real boon for Queensland's economic recovery. Queen's Wharf Brisbane is providing significant economic stimulus now and will contribute to Queensland's tourism economic recovery when the main areas of it open in late 2022 by luring large numbers of visitors to the state.

Mr MADDEN: With reference to page 50 of Service Delivery Statements volume 1, can the Deputy Premier update the committee on Economic Development Queensland's record capital investment planned for South-East Queensland over the next 12 to 24 months?

Dr MILES: Thank you, member for Ipswich West, for your question. Queensland's economic recovery is well and truly underway. Our plan for economic recovery is protecting Queenslanders' jobs and creating new ones every day. I am pleased to inform the committee that Economic Development Queensland—the state's specialist land use planning and property development unit—is entering an unprecedented level of capital investment in the Queensland economy to deliver construction projects and jobs across the state. EDQ is working with the private sector to inject record-breaking levels of investment into projects across Queensland.

Over the next two years, Economic Development Queensland will invest over \$200 million in South-East Queensland alone. This investment will help build Queensland's infrastructure of the future and enable works to begin on complex building projects. This capital works program is about building industry confidence, generating jobs and economic growth, innovation and maximising our potential across civil and construction sectors. There are over 20 projects in the pipeline including roadworks, services and civil construction, building and refurbishment contracts. The investment in this state ranges from half a million dollars to \$20 million. These projects will support over 650 construction jobs and enable more than \$1 billion in private sector investment.

Queenslanders know that when their government works with businesses it is everyday Queenslanders who benefit with better and more secure jobs. It is not just our economy that will benefit from these investments. Recently our government announced the delivery of a new research and manufacturing facility at North Shore for Vaxxas. Vaxxas will produce over 300 million needle-free vaccines a year at this facility. This is just one example of an innovative project that EDQ will be seeking open-market expressions of interest for this year.

EDQ is currently fast-tracking delivery of \$66 million in capital works, facilitating \$330 million in private sector investment and supporting 975 jobs in the next 12 months. Work is either underway or due to the start in the next four months at Carseldine Village, Oxley, Yeronga, North Shore Hamilton, the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct, Sunshine Coast Industrial Precinct, Roma Hospital student accommodation and Yeppoon Station Quarter precinct. These levels of investment are unprecedented as Queenslanders unite to deliver our economic recovery.

In 2019-20, EDQ facilitated \$237.4 million in private sector investment, supporting 783 jobs. Projects included King Truss's new factory on the Sunshine Coast, Cassowary Coast Cartons' expansion of their manufacturing facility in Innisfail, and Rheinmetall NIOA starting construction of their forging and manufacturing plant in Maryborough. There are many other projects that recently completed construction, including the \$6.5 million sport and recreation precinct and the \$1 million pedestrian bridge within Carseldine Village. The sport precinct and pedestrian bridge supported up to 25 jobs.

The first stage of the state-of-the-art \$53.7 million wastewater treatment plant to service the Greater Flagstone Priority Development Area has also completed construction. The Palaszczuk government invested \$40 million in that project. In total, we have invested over \$73.6 million in catalyst infrastructure in the Greater Flagstone PDA. Construction is underway at Binnies Road West in the Ripley Valley Priority Development Area. This project is supporting around 36 jobs and providing infrastructure for up to 3,300 new homes which could be built once the road is completed. We have invested more than \$36.6 million in infrastructure in the Ripley Valley PDA.

Economic Development Queensland is currently assessing over 100 development applications across a number of priority development areas which will help enable \$520 million in investment supporting up to 1,170 jobs. Priority development area declarations and development assessments help stimulate investment by reducing holding costs to developers by releasing land more quickly to market and providing certainty for long-term investment through coordinated state interests and streamlined planning and development assessments.

The Palaszczuk government has a plan to rebuild the economy and stimulate investment in our great state and create more jobs for Queenslanders.

Mr SMITH: Deputy Premier, with reference to page 51 of SDS volume 1, as a former health minister and now Minister for State Development, how important do you believe it is to support local manufacturers of innovative vaccines and vaccine delivery systems?

Dr MILES: Thank you, member for Bundaberg, for your question. The pandemic this year caught the whole world off guard, but we have seen a concerted effort to develop a vaccine on a global scale never seen before. In under a year, we are seeing several promising vaccines that I understand could be rolled out in Australia as early as March. Australian ingenuity has been key to some of these breakthroughs, and it has shown how vital it is that we support and grow our medical research and development capabilities. COVID-19 may have been the disease that focused our attention, but we must also look to how these advances can protect us from other diseases and future pandemics.

Winter is usually the worst time of the year for a health minister because the flu has the capability to be a very serious, contagious and deadly disease, depending on how it mutates each year. It is hard for some to recall, but in 2019 Queensland suffered through its worst year for flu for nearly two decades, with an average of five people a week dying from the disease. Some 264 people died in Queensland as a direct result of contracting influenza in 2019 and we had 68,148 lab confirmed cases. So far this year there has been just 6,000 lab confirmed cases.

When international travel returns, we will face the same challenges with contagious diseases and the only way to combat them will be to continue to have a widespread take-up of vaccines. Recently we announced that the Palaszczuk will partner with Vaxxas to enable it to manufacture its high-density micro array patch vaccine delivery system in Queensland. This is very exciting not only as the former health minister but also as a father of three young children. I know how hard it can be to convince a six-year-old to get a needle.

The Vaxxas technology uses a small patch with a surface of thousands of microprojections just a quarter of a millimetre long which are dry coated in the vaccine. When applied to the skin for a few seconds, the patch directly deposits vaccine through the skin. Their research suggests that this elicits an efficient and effective immune response. Their initial focus for the patch will be on delivering an influenza vaccine, but Vaxxas will also investigate opportunities to improve the performance of other pandemic vaccines, including against COVID-19.

This is homegrown technology has the potential to play an important role in future pandemics because it allows vaccines to be quickly and easily deployed to people, even by mail. Imagine an easy-to-use patch that does not require a nurse or a doctor to administer delivered straight to your door. Some surveys suggest that up to 20 per cent of people avoid the flu vaccine due to a fear of needles. It could also eliminate the needle stick injuries and cross-contamination events that are risks. That is why I am so excited to see the outcome of their next phase of clinical trials.

Attracting and retaining high-skilled jobs in advanced manufacturing industries like medical technology is a key part of Queensland's economic recovery from COVID-19. This virus has reminded us about the importance of being adaptable, innovative and self-reliant and this deal with Vaxxas is a fine example. The company, which was spun out of the University of Queensland in 2011, will manufacture its globally renowned needle-free vaccine technology at a new facility in North Shore, Hamilton. Now as state development minister, I am pleased to say the project will create up to 139 new jobs over 10 years thanks to the Palaszczuk government. Once this new facility is up and running Vaxxas expect to initially manufacture vaccines for phase 2 and 3 clinical studies. Once these studies are successfully completed, the facility can produce commercial volumes of up to 300 million doses annually.

This is significant progress towards the Palaszczuk government's vision of making Queensland a globally competitive Asia-Pacific biomedical hub. Over the next 10 years this rate of production is expected to contribute \$497 million to the Queensland economy. Our government is 100 per cent focused on rebuilding Queensland's economy and creating local jobs. Supporting local biomedical companies to scale up and grow is good for Queensland and good for the world. This partnership will give a great boost to our economic recovery in the weeks, months and years to come.

CHAIR: I will now go to non-government members. I will give you 10 minutes. We have state development until 10.30 am. I am happy to give non-government members 10 minutes and we will take five minutes.

Ms LEAHY: My first question is to Brendan Moon of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. Did the lowering of the Paradise Dam wall by 5.8 metres increase the potential flood risk for Bundaberg and if so what decisions were taken in relation to the flood levee at Bundaberg?

Mr Moon: As this is not under the functions nor legislative functions of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority, I think that is a question best directed to the agencies responsible for the management of dams.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, certainly feel free to ask more questions, but please be mindful of where they need to go.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a question to the director-general of state development. In reference to the global tourism hub process for Cairns, before COVID what stage did this project reach and what were the outcomes that were measured as KPIs for that project?

Mr Walker: Could you just remind me of the time line you referred to?

Ms SIMPSON: Before COVID occurred.

Mr Walker: In Cairns the proposals the government received just did not stack up in terms of what was submitted to the assessment group. Some time prior to COVID we were not in a position to move forward with that particular transaction.

Ms SIMPSON: I understand—and I am happy to be corrected—the public announcement about that project not proceeding was from former minister Kate Jones in about June or July of this year or was there a previous date on which that project was publicly announced it was not proceeding?

Mr Walker: I might need to get some advice on when precisely the announcement took place. I must admit that I do not recall precisely. I do not believe there were two public announcements. I think there might have only been the one.

Ms SIMPSON: If I can get it confirmed as to when the decision was made not to proceed with the global tourism hub in Cairns that would be helpful.

Mr Walker: Do you mind if I just seek clarity? I thought the question was when it was publicly announced.

Ms SIMPSON: I understand it was publicly announced in the middle of the year, but I will stand corrected. Could you clarify when it was publicly announced but also when it was decided that it would not proceed? I thought—and, once again, please correct me if I misunderstood—the director-general was saying that the decision to not proceed because it did not stack up occurred far earlier than when the public announcement was made.

Dr MILES: I think the director-general was indicating that the proposals that were received up until that point were assessed as not able to deliver the value that would have justified proceeding. That does not mean there were not ongoing efforts. We will find that information before the end of the session.

Ms SIMPSON: If I could clarify when it was decided the process did not stack up that would be helpful. How much funding has been spent to date on both global tourism hubs?

Mr Walker: I vaguely recall that this might have been a question on notice asked and answered previously. I might need to seek clarity on that.

CHAIR: If that is the case, it has been the practice that you can refer to the answer given to questions on notice.

Dr MILES: I have that here. That was question on notice No. 866 which was asked by the Leader of the Opposition to then minister Kate Jones.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, did you want to proceed down that line given that you may have that answer in an answer to a question on notice?

Ms SIMPSON: I have further questions about the global tourism hubs because obviously a lot of time and money of government has been invested in these processes and we are all keen to see economic development, particularly in places like Cairns.

CHAIR: Can I help you there by asking you to bring that into the budget under consideration for this area. That would be great.

Ms SIMPSON: Of course. My question to the Deputy Premier is: where are things at currently with Cairns now that the global hub has been canned for Cairns in regard to trying to generate economic activity and jobs growth with tourism projects and other economic projects to fill the void of the tourism hub?

Dr MILES: The pure facts of it are that globally there is not a market right now to be investing in new products that are reliant on international tourists nor are there any international tourists. That is an existential threat to the effort to identify proponents for global tourism hubs. In fact, Star was telling me this morning that Queen's Wharf is pretty much the only global tourism hub of its kind currently under construction anywhere in the world. That is going to give it and us a great head start once international tourism does get up and running again. They anticipate it will be more than five years before any other project can get up and running and open. That is a great window for Brisbane and Queensland being the only home of an integrated resort of its kind. Clearly, as international tourism recovers, there will be opportunities for our other tourist hotspots such as Cairns. We will continue to be alert to those opportunities. It is just not the case that there is investment around at the moment for products that are reliant on international tourism.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, given that the global tourism hubs were a 2017 election commitment and there is no evidence that there had been substantive progress made on Cairns before COVID hit, how can you hide behind COVID in regard to economic development in Cairns?

Dr MILES: I reject the premise of the question from the member. The government went to market to identify proponents who could deliver sufficient benefit to Cairns, and such proposals were not forthcoming. Proposals that were forthcoming were assessed and deemed not to be suitable. That work continued. However, I think it was appropriate that, come the pandemic, come the closing of international borders, the then minister was frank with the community that it was going to be some time before that kind of market returned.

While we will maintain a capability so that if and when that changes down the track we are well placed, I would emphasise that the kinds of investment we are talking about—the dollar figure in that QON I referred to was \$2 million; Queen's Wharf is delivering \$3.6 billion—that the member is trying to imply are a waste are very, very small when compared to the potential return to the state for these kinds of projects: billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. Which site has been chosen for the proposed Gold Coast global tourism hub?

Mr Walker: There is no process for the global tourism hub on the Gold Coast. It has been ended for the time being. Again, my memory serves that that was announced some months ago.

CHAIR: Before we go to questions from government members, do you have a final brief question, member for Maroochydore?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes. I would like to follow up with the director-general. Who was consulted? Could we clarify when that process was ended—when that was publicly reported for the Gold Coast global tourism hub?

CHAIR: We will have a brief amount of time at the end to come back to any of those questions. I will start with questions from government members. Deputy Premier, with reference to SDS volume 1 page 51, can you outline the steps that have been undertaken to progress the \$1.5 billion CopperString project in the state's north-west?

Dr MILES: The Palaszczuk government is transforming regional Queensland and opening up some of our most remote and rural communities for development. By investing in massive infrastructure projects, we are improving the quality of life for thousands of regional Queenslanders and delivering jobs in every corner of our great state.

The North Queensland corridor has significant potential for demand from new economy minerals including CopperString 2.0, minerals, processing, manufacturing and hydrogen. The \$1.5 billion CopperString project will be a major boon for Queensland's north-west. It is already electrifying Queensland's imagination.

A 1,100-kilometre overhead high-voltage electricity transmission line will connect the North West Minerals Province and Mount Isa to the National Electricity Market grid south of Townsville. It will also be the nation's largest geographical expansion of the National Electricity Market. It is an absolute game changer for the entire region. It will deliver 350 full-time jobs during the construction phase alone, with CopperString supporting 30 ongoing jobs on completion.

The flow-on effect of CopperString will be even greater, connecting the North West Minerals Province to the NEM and opening the entire region up for further development. Achieving internationally competitive energy prices in the North West Minerals Province would mean jobs in North Queensland delivering the minerals needed globally for batteries, renewables and electronics.

As part of the Palaszczuk government's economic recovery plan, we are investing \$15.98 million for the potential 1,100-kilometre CopperString 2.0 high-voltage transmission line to provide cheaper power and supercharge investment. By extending the National Electricity Market grid from Townsville across the north to Mount Isa, CopperString is expected to underpin the creation of thousands of minerals, mining and industrial manufacturing jobs for generations to come and stimulate large-scale renewable energy investment.

The \$15.98 million investment is to enable the CopperString project to continue its important development activities and prepare for construction in 2021. The project will include a 720-kilometre high-voltage overhead electricity transmission line from Woodstock south of Townsville to Chumvale near Cloncurry and, subject to demand, an extension of the high-voltage overhead electricity transmission line from Chumvale west to Mount Isa and south to Phosphate Hill and Cannington, which would increase the length of the transmission line to 1,100 kilometres. It will support towers every 400 to 600 metres and optical fibre network capability. Substations will be built at Woodstock and Chumvale, with the potential to include intermediate substations for future connections plus substations at Mount Isa, Phosphate Hill and Cannington subject to demand.

It will also support a minimum of four construction camps which would operate concurrently along the transmission line. That will mean hundreds of jobs in construction. Importantly, however, it means lowering energy costs for the North West Minerals Province where we have half a trillion dollars in the new economy minerals needed for batteries and renewables.

The potential wider economic benefits from unlocked private investment are modelled at over 3,500 jobs in North Queensland and \$79 billion of economic uplift over 30 years. It is not only job creation for North Queensland's resource and manufacturing sectors; it will ensure regional

Queensland has the right infrastructure to maximise its opportunities from one of the largest and most valuable mineral deposits in the world. It is great news for the business and service providers in Townsville and communities along the corridor to Mount Isa. The CopperString team is getting on with the job of getting this nation-building project ready for construction in the first half of 2021.

CHAIR: I believe the member for Maiwar or the member for South Brisbane has a question.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is to the director-general. The development scheme for the Woolloongabba Cross River Rail Priority Development Area is being prepared and is due to be advertised in early 2021. Can the department confirm that public land will not be privatised, sold or leased to private developers, with at least 50 per cent of the PDA area allocated to public parkland?

Mr Walker: I will seek some advice from my team around that matter, whether it is one that is being worked through as part of the PDA or something to do with the commitments by the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority itself. With your permission, Deputy Premier, I will chase down that information from the team.

Dr MILES: If the chair is happy, maybe we can do that in the break and report back after the break. Would that be okay?


CHAIR: Yes. We will have to come back with that information for you. We have come to the close of the portfolio area. There is some information that we were chasing. Did anyone want to give any information about some of those questions that were asked at some time this morning?

Dr MILES: No. We have taken a note of those, Chair. With the committee's indulgence, we will chase them down during the break and report back at the next session.

CHAIR: You can report back at the end of the next session on infrastructure and planning. Mr Walker, did you have any information on that last question asked by the member for South Brisbane?

Mr Walker: No. I will follow that up, if you do not mind, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: We are pretty much smack bang on 10.30 am. We have confirmed that we will have information come back at the end of the next session at 11.45 am. The time allocated for the consideration of estimates of expenditure for the Deputy Premier's portfolio area of State Development has expired. I will ask witnesses to kindly vacate the chamber quickly to facilitate a quick changeover before we start Infrastructure and Planning.

 The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure for the Deputy Premier's portfolio area of Infrastructure and Planning. Deputy Premier, if you wish, you can make an opening statement of no more than three minutes.

Dr MILES: I am happy to go straight into questions.

CHAIR: We will go to the non-government members.

Ms LEAHY: I have a further question for Mr Moon of the QRA. Mr Moon, in September 2019 the worst bushfire season the nation has ever seen hit Queensland, with 23 local government areas activated for disaster assistance through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement; however, I note that as of August 2020 only 35 per cent of the 12 2019 events have been completed, even though 46 per cent of the time had elapsed. With the deadline for delivery in six months at June 2021, are you confident that 100 per cent of the events will be completed by this deadline in June next year?

Mr Moon: We currently have over 70 of our local government areas throughout Queensland responding or reconstructing their infrastructure networks and recovering their communities after 23 events that have occurred since 2018. Under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement, local government and state agencies and other community groups have two years in which to deliver their reconstruction and recovery programs, at the end of which the funding ceases. If, however, there are other circumstances which make it difficult for a particular delivery agency to meet those time frames, we are able to seek an extension of time from the Commonwealth for that, as we have done earlier this year when we recognised the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of local councils throughout Queensland to access contractors for delivery of those works, and we have been granted those from the Commonwealth.

As part of our process also we do have regional liaison officers who work very, very closely with those councils—technical specialists—to ensure they are on track and that works will be delivered on time. Where we do get early information that would suggest there will be difficulty in delivering to a time line, we have in the past gone to the Commonwealth.

I am advised that, in relation to the 2020 program, we had four requests for extensions of time which have been approved and no others at this particular point that are pending.

Ms LEAHY: Have all of the 2018 events been completed?

Mr Moon: My apologies.

CHAIR: This obviously goes back to a time before the budget we are currently examining, so it may take a moment to find the figures the member is searching for.

Mr Moon: We currently are on track to deliver all of those that are scheduled to be delivered in the allotted time frame. We presently have had 42 submissions requesting an extension of time for their program for that particular program, which have been approved by the Commonwealth. That totals some \$23 million of delivery works.

Ms LEAHY: Are there any particular reasons for those requests for extensions?

Mr Moon: If we look at the number of councils that have been impacted, of the 70 throughout Queensland what we have seen is that over 50 of those have had multiple activations, so they have been hit by multiple events in the last three years. This impacts their ability to deliver their works. Also, as I said, we monitor that very, very closely, and we have a process by which we can request extensions of time from the Commonwealth.

Ms LEAHY: I just have one other very quick question. How many times has the Queensland Reconstruction Authority board met this year?

Mr Moon: I will have to take some advice on that. We are currently required to meet eight times per year, but I will take some advice and come back to the committee, if I may, in terms of how many we have had thus far.

Dr MILES: The QRA's annual report will have outlined in it how many times they met in the 2019-20 financial year. We are happy to find out how many times they have met so far in the 2020-21 financial year.

CHAIR: We will come back to that at the end of this session.

Mr HART: I would like to clarify something the director-general said in an answer before. I think the director-general said the search for a global tourism hub had been stopped temporarily, or something along those lines. Can the director-general please tell us whether the search for a global tourism hub on the Gold Coast has been terminated or just stopped for the time being?

CHAIR: Before we go into that, this was something we talked about in our last session. Can I suggest that is something you may want to follow up—

Mr HART: It is a planning issue.

CHAIR: It is the same issue that we talked about in the state development session. Which part of it intersects on planning?

Mr HART: It is planning for a global tourism hub.

CHAIR: I am not sure if that is strictly under the—

Mr HART: It is a simple question, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: I know it is a simple question. We want to make sure we are asking them in the order they are meant to be. Bearing in mind we can come back to that, does the director-general want to provide any information on that where he can?

Mr Walker: Essentially, it is the same as I advised previously. I am just seeking some advice from my team around the public announcement by government, and in that it should spell out precisely what the announcement was at the time.

Mr HART: Deputy Premier, in my electorate on the Gold Coast we are seeing an increased approval of developments that have increased density, increased site cover, increased height and reduced setbacks when these things are compared to the outcomes under the local town plans, but council is allowed to do this under state planning laws as far as performance outcomes go. Can the minister tell us if the government has done any modelling to see if this is a growing trend in Queensland and whether it is an acceptable trend to the government?

CHAIR: Just to clarify, that question is about modelling done on population density; is that correct, member for Burleigh?

Mr HART: No, performance outcomes under the planning scheme.

CHAIR: Modelling done on performance outcomes under the planning scheme. I am going to allow some latitude in addressing that particular question.

Dr MILES: In a moment I might call forward Kerry Doss, the state planner, who will be much more knowledgeable than I am about how those things interrelate, how the planning scheme interacts with council decision making-making. I will just emphasise that the decision-maker in most cases on those development applications is the council—in that case, the Gold Coast council—but I am very happy for Kerry to address the member's question in terms of compliance and that kind of thing.

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh, did you want to do that now or have you got another question?

Mr HART: Yes, please.

Dr MILES: Whilst Mr Doss comes forward, I understand that Mr Moon has the answer to the number of times they have met.

Mr Moon: In relation to the number of times the QRA board has met, it has been eight times this year.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, we will come back to your question in a moment. We will go to Mr Doss.

Mr Doss: I thank the honourable member for his question. In terms of monitoring of performance based planning in Queensland, I can advise that there are currently no programs under way that are looking at performance based planning and how that is occurring. I would say, however, that in cases where there are proposals that exceed some of the code assessable requirements in planning schemes, in the majority of cases those applications are required to be publicly notified and that allows for the public to have scrutiny of those proposals.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Doss.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the director-general. Did the department recommend that Building Queensland be taken in-house as a government savings measure?

Mr Walker: I thank the member for the question. I must admit that Building Queensland and the infrastructure group are only recent additions to my departmental responsibilities. I am not aware of the advice that was put forward to government at that point in time.

Ms SIMPSON: I wish to ask a question of the Deputy Premier. What advice has been given to government for Building Queensland to be taken in-house, and what are the reasons for that?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. I understand the Treasurer outlined in the COVID Fiscal and Economic Review a range of initiatives designed to increase efficiency of government's effort. Two of those were to absorb Building Queensland and the Queensland Productivity Commission into the then Treasury department. With the machinery of government changes, the most suitable home for the Building Queensland functions is my agency, the Department of state Development, Infrastructure, Planning and Local Government.

It is very much our view that the functions delivered by Building Queensland can continue to be delivered from within the department without some of the overheads associated with a separate statutory body, and that was the rationale for that decision. We are in the process, from a mechanical point of view, of determining how precisely that will work. Clearly, the parliament will also need to consider the legislative arrangements in place that were put there to create Building Queensland.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, the Auditor-General's report tabled in May this year titled *Evaluating major infrastructure projects* made six recommendations, including improving transparency. How does bringing Building Queensland being in-house improve transparency of the delivery and planning for major infrastructure in Queensland?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question. I understand Building Queensland have been working to implement the six recommendations made by the QAO and that they are well progressed in that regard. I would argue that the organisational structure of Building Queensland need not affect the transparency of their efforts and that we can continue to ensure that their work is efficient and useful in government decision-making while housing them within a more traditional government structure.

CHAIR: Before I go to the member for Traeger, member for Maroochydore, have you got a quick final question?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes. Deputy Premier, there was supposed to be a pipeline of infrastructure projects reported as part of Building Queensland. One of the criticisms of your government has been the lack of transparency of pipeline of infrastructure at a time of great economic need. What is going to happen to this publishing of the infrastructure pipeline? Will it be brought forward to six monthly rather than 12 monthly as currently required?

CHAIR: We have a point of order here.

Mr SMITH: Under standing order 115 and suggestion that there has been criticism.

CHAIR: And obviously the preamble. Member for Maroochydore, do you want to ask that question again and bring it down to the crux without the preamble?

Ms SIMPSON: What is going to happen to the pipeline of works that was published by Building Queensland?

Dr MILES: I am happy to take the question, Chair. The intention is that, moving forward, once Building Queensland has transitioned to the department, the *Infrastructure Pipeline Report* will be reported from within the State Infrastructure Plan, which is sensible. That report was delayed this year as efforts were redirected to the COVID response, but it is very much our intention to continue to report on the infrastructure pipeline.

CHAIR: I will ask the member for Traeger if he has a question.

Mr KATTER: I certainly do. This question relates to the portfolio in the last session but also this one directly. There were statements made under the previous portfolio about biofuels and maintaining crucial momentum, but in this one it also says redraw recovery and facilitating strategic cross-government economic social infrastructure. I ask the minister how that reconciles with the inaction by the government that led to the closure of the Dalby ethanol plant. There were some 100 jobs there that required assistance from the government in terms of storage so that they could produce hand sanitiser in COVID. There was no significant assistance so one of the two major ethanol plants in Queensland is now closed due to assistance in that field of infrastructure.

CHAIR: There is a point of order from the member for Ipswich West.

Mr MADDEN: I am just concerned about the length of the preamble and ask my friend to come straight to the question.

Mr KATTER: I can cut that down.

CHAIR: That should be fine. I was about to add on to that, member for Traeger, that this was also covered in a question on notice. You are asking about the Dalby project. I ask if the Deputy Premier has anything to add in addition to what was in the question on notice.

Dr MILES: I am happy to because I know the member for Traeger is really interested in this. He has asked questions here and elsewhere about it. I think the precursor events are clear to everybody. The market conditions, record low oil and fuel prices, and drought affected grain prices all impacted on the business viability of the biorefinery. State Development worked very closely with them to try to avoid a closure. That included assisting them to access products that they needed in order to rekit and produce hand sanitiser. They were also encouraged to submit an application for the Essential Goods and Supply Chain Program. It is not clear to me but, for whatever reason, they chose not to proceed with that grant application and that is what led in June to their standing down of 50 staff. Our officers have made themselves available to assist those workers to identify other roles.

I understand that since then the owners have said that the plant is closed indefinitely—that was in August—and that it has recently been put on the market for sale. While it is clearly disappointing—I share your disappointment—I think from what I have seen, and again this predates my time in the role, State Development did their best to help the biorefinery find a product with a viable market. Failing that, they did their best to also assist the workers who had to be stood down.

Mr KATTER: I have one more question.

CHAIR: Just very briefly.

Mr KATTER: I want to follow up on that CopperString statement, Minister. In 2010 Glencore—or Xstrata, as it was then—pulled out and determined the future of the north-west at that point. What is the government doing this time to ensure that a global mining company does not determine the future prosperity of the north-west, rather than the government making sure that we benefit from the CopperString project?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. Obviously, his history with the project predates mine. I think from my interactions—and I am sure the member has his own insights—the team behind this CopperString 2.0 appear to have a much more advanced sense of how they can make it work and how they can make it stack up.

I am pleased to advise the member that they submitted their draft EIS to the Coordinator-General on 20 November. We anticipate that that will be released for public comment late this year, early next year, so certainly in terms of our processes and approval processes it continues to move on. I am happy

to take on board the question as effectively a piece of advice for us to keep in mind that we should make sure that the project is not reliant on a single partner who might make a commercial decision at a point in time where the state's interests might extend well beyond that point in time. I take on board what the member says.

CHAIR: We will go to government questions now and I will lead off with that Deputy Premier. With reference to SDS volume 1, page 51, how is the Queensland government keeping the regional economy moving without privatisation?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question. I am delighted to advise the committee that in the 2020-21 budget the Palaszczuk government will invest \$14.8 billion on capital projects across the state with more than 58 per cent of that investment being delivered outside the state's south-east. This investment is a critical component of Queensland's plan for economic recovery which has already begun thanks to our strong health response.

Over this financial year that investment will deliver 28,700 jobs outside of Greater Brisbane and 46,000 jobs right across the state. We are pro jobs and we will not apologise for the investment we are making in Queensland. For example, the member for Bundaberg is well aware of the impact those investments are making for people in his community. Across the Wide Bay region we have invested \$948 million this financial year which is a massive 61 per cent increase in capital expenditure on the previous year, supporting 3,400 jobs in regional centres like Bundaberg. The monies supporting infrastructure at the Port of Bundaberg and upgrading roads across Wide Bay are all delivering jobs.

Chair, I work very closely with you in the Moreton Bay region where we are seeing our investments pay off there every single day, too. In 2020-21 we will inject \$1.6 billion into our local economy, supporting 5,200 jobs as part of Queensland's plan for economic recovery.

For the member for Ipswich West's benefit, Ipswich is not missing out either with \$802 million in capital investment in Ipswich supporting 2,600 jobs for locals there. In the Darling Downs region we are supporting 2,400 jobs by investing in infrastructure projects including building the Carrara wind farm and the Wellcamp entertainment precinct. Both projects will deliver good local construction jobs in the near future as well as sustainable jobs well into the future. I point out that this capital investment by the Palaszczuk government has increased every single year since 2015-16 without the need to sell any of our state's revenue generating assets.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, with reference to SDS volume 1, page 54, can you provide a brief overview of how infrastructure will help to lead Queensland's plan for economic recovery?

Dr MILES: I can, member for Ipswich West. Last week our government was proud to hand down its 2020-21 budget which continues the implementation of Queensland's economic recovery plan by creating economic development opportunities and jobs across the state. This government knows that investment in vital infrastructure will drive our state's recovery, resilience and confidence. Equally importantly, major infrastructure projects create thousands of jobs which is exactly what will get our economy back up and running.

Infrastructure has been a core focus of the Palaszczuk government's staged approach to managing the economic impacts of the pandemic and it will continue to be as we execute our economic recovery plan. We are delivering on our infrastructure guarantee. This budget sees the value of the government's capital works and infrastructure program increased to \$56 billion over the next four years, the highest spend over the past decade. This will directly support diverse employment and economic activity across all regions, with \$14.8 billion worth of infrastructure investment in 2020-21 estimated to support 46,000 jobs. Around 28,700 of these jobs will be outside the Greater Brisbane area. Over 58 per cent of the total jobs supported are in regional Queensland.

The Palaszczuk government knows that economic recovery needs to take place in all corners of our state. Almost half of the state's population lives outside of Greater Brisbane, and these communities deserve support to recover and grow as we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis. The Building our Regions program has approved over \$348.3 million in grants to councils for delivery of regional infrastructure projects with expected expenditure of more than \$62 million included in this year's budget.

The Palaszczuk government is also investing \$42.5 million to help build the East Bundaberg flood levee to protect the people of Bundaberg who have suffered enough through devastating floods in the recent past. Construction of the levee is expected to support 679 jobs over three years of construction.

The government will also continue its local government grant programs which have provided targeted support to communities for vital infrastructure projects during the pandemic. This includes an investment of \$200 million in the COVID Works for Queensland program which is providing funding to

77 local governments for 520 projects to build productive infrastructure. Some \$180 million of this funding is budgeted to be provided during 2020-21, and councils have until 30 June 2021 to deliver these projects.

We also announced a further commitment, during the election, of \$400 million over six years for future rounds of the Works for Queensland program and \$200 million over six years for the South-East Queensland Communities Stimulus Package to fast-track investment in new infrastructure and community assets. This builds on the \$50 million delivered to 12 SEQ councils through the Unite and Recover community stimulus package program of which \$45 million is being provided in the current financial year 2020-21.

Finally, the Palaszczuk government will continue its signature Works for Queensland program, investing \$34 million in 2020-21. These programs are supporting jobs and providing economic stimulus to local economies right across the state. Thanks to the Palaszczuk government's strong health response, we are able to get on with the job of rebuilding our state and getting our economy moving again.

The 2020-21 budget includes \$110.2 million for the \$654 million expansion of the Southern Queensland Correctional Precinct near Gatton. The new 1,000-bed correctional centre will deliver over 400 jobs in the Lockyer Valley region with up to 900 jobs supported during peak periods of construction. The design will enable Queensland Corrective Services and Queensland Health to provide rehabilitation and treatment to help address substance addiction and mental health issues among prisoners. It will also be safer for staff.

Throughout the pandemic we continue to invest in roads and transport. In 2020-21 the government will deliver a \$6.3 billion investment in transformative transport infrastructure. A highlight is our \$1.5 billion investment to continue construction of the Cross River Rail, which is Queensland's biggest rail project.

We are also delivering \$3.4 billion of works on the M1, jointly funded by the Australian and Queensland governments, for our state's busiest major highway. Major projects include: the Varsity Lakes to Tugun upgrade, Eight Mile Plains to Daisy Hill upgrade, and the Yatala South exit 41 and Pimpama exit 49 interchange upgrades. We are delivering the jointly funded \$1.5 billion Coomera Connector stage one project between Nerang and Coomera to provide for a second M1.

The Palaszczuk government is also providing a boost to the Bruce. We will continue to work with the Australian government to deliver the Bruce Highway Upgrade program aimed at improving safety, flood resilience and capacity along its length.

The government has also committed to funding new stadiums across the state to improve facilities and support local jobs. This includes redevelopments and upgrades at Harrup Park in Mackay, Browne Park in Rockhampton, Ballymore, the Gabba and Sunshine Coast Stadium. We remain committed to creating opportunities and fast-tracking vital infrastructure projects to further stimulate economic recovery and sustain construction sector activity across Queensland.

Mr SMITH: With reference to SDS volume 1 page 54, will the Deputy Premier advise the committee what the government has done to make it easier for businesses to operate during COVID-19?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. During the COVID-19 pandemic we saw unprecedented demand for groceries like non-perishable food, toilet paper and other essentials. While our mighty Queensland manufacturers and food processors were able to keep many of those supplies flowing, the government needed to make urgent changes to get products on the shelves as quickly as possible. Our government worked closely with industry to identify problems and to take actions to ensure supply chains remained strong.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Queensland government led the nation with emergency amendments to Queensland's planning framework in March 2020. The amendments to the Planning Act 2016 and the Economic Development Act 2012 ensured important services could continue to be provided to the community throughout the pandemic. The urgent reforms which the government was able to swiftly bring into effect when they were needed most were targeted to help ensure supermarkets stayed well stocked, to deal with that unprecedented demand for groceries which we experienced during the first few months of the pandemic.

There is now a new emergency provision, known as an applicable event, that I as the planning minister can declare in the event of a similar emergency. When an applicable event is declared, business and industry can apply for temporary changes to operating hours, pivoting to new or changed

modes of operation and to produce new products. The new laws also enable the government to address planning conditions that otherwise restricted the operating hours of loading docks and distribution centres supplying supermarkets. One of the key outcomes of these changes was the ability of supermarkets to resupply around the clock when there were shortages of essential supplies such as cleaning products and food. This included exemptions from delivery curfews to allow trucks to deliver and shelves to be stacked 24 hours a day. Supermarkets were then able to restock around the clock. When announced, the changes were met with significant third-party support. Chris Peters, the general manager of Queensland Woolworths Supermarkets, said—

We're grateful that the Queensland Government has acted in support of community need at this time. The short-term exemption from delivery curfews will allow our teams more flexibility and additional delivery windows to respond to consumer demand.

Similarly, Jerry Farrell, the Coles Queensland state general manager, also welcomed the changes. He said—

We welcome the support of the Queensland government in working with Coles to ensure we can get more deliveries into our stores and customers can buy the things they need.

Between March 2020 and 31 October 2020, 43 temporary use licences were issued. This helped keep Queensland moving during the pandemic. Queensland is no stranger to natural disasters and the supply chain challenges that often follow. These changes can also be quickly stood up in the event of cyclones, floods, bushfires and other natural disasters.

The former department of state development, manufacturing, infrastructure and planning also established a new Essential Goods Supply Committee during the pandemic. The committee worked with retailers, manufacturers, meat and food processors, essential goods manufacturers, transport and logistics companies, wholesalers and unions to ensure essential supply chains kept flowing during an emergency event.

Our government also made changes to support the construction industry. While the majority of Queenslanders were following the health advice, staying home and working from home, the traffic in the CBD during peak hours was almost non-existent. The government temporarily relaxed the heavy vehicle lockout period during morning and afternoon peak hours for the Queen's Wharf project. This allowed for extra truck movements and helped keep the project on track during the pandemic.

The Palaszczuk government also made changes to planning regulations that can be opted in to by local governments. These amendments allow councils to effectively manage development applications across priority development areas. The changes ensure that if there are delays due to staff shortages in considering development applications for new buildings, they will not be approved by default due to the automatic operation of the law. Local governments have now begun to opt in to these provisions.

The Palaszczuk government's strong health response has placed our state in an enviable position of recovery and stability, but earlier this year this was not the case. Queensland and Australia faced down the significant challenge of controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus while keeping our businesses afloat. Our nation-leading planning law changes helped support businesses during the pandemic. We are proud that businesses affected by production, supply, import or manufacturing issues could rely on us to respond quickly during this time. We are proud that Queenslanders and businesses alike could rely on our government to help as best we could in that time of crisis.

CHAIR: I will now go to 15 minutes of questions from non-government members and 15 minutes from government members. Then we will go to crossbenchers before we wrap up this session.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the Deputy Premier regarding Building Queensland and the government's decision to close it down. How much will the government save by closing down Building Queensland?

Mr MADDEN: Chair, is this a hypothetical?

CHAIR: I might ask the member for Maroochydore to rephrase that without offending standing orders regarding hypotheticals, imputations et cetera.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, Mr Chair, it has been announced that the government is taking Building Queensland apart—closing it down and incorporating their functions into other government departments.

CHAIR: 'Incorporation' is probably the operative word here. Would you like to rephrase your question?

Ms SIMPSON: Building Queensland is a statutory authority and it is under legislation, so I think the mooted point that it is going to be legislated out of existence means it is being closed down.

CHAIR: Be that as it may, please come straight to your question.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, how much is the government saving by closing down Building Queensland?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question. I correct the claim that it is being closed down. As I have indicated, it is being absorbed into the department. The efficiencies that we anticipate gaining are less about direct savings and more about integration with the other functions of the department. We have not put a specific cost on it. There will be a saving in overheads and that kind of thing, but the focus is on delivering greater efficiency of the important work that Building Queensland does. All of the staff will transfer into the department. Their existing employment arrangements will continue—all, as you would expect, in line with government policy. There will be no forced redundancies. We are very much intending for this to be a continuation of the important and valuable work of Building Queensland. As always, we are focused on continually improving how we do this work. It is the government's view that we can do better, be more efficient, by delivering these services from within a more traditional government agency.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, with regard to industry concerns about the need for pipeline visibility of infrastructure—I quote the Infrastructure Association of Queensland investor survey as well as the 2020 IAQ survey about the importance of a clear pipeline of work—can you advise whether the pipeline report of Building Queensland in its new form will still come out every 12 months with that level of detail?

Dr MILES: As I indicated to the member earlier, the intention is for that pipeline to be included in the State Infrastructure Plan. We will continue to do that. As I indicated, the delay this year was related to the redirection of resources during the pandemic, but it is very much our intention to continue to do that. I look forward to engaging with stakeholders like the Infrastructure Association to see how they think we can improve that.

We do have the infrastructure guarantee—that floor on the amount of infrastructure we intend to deliver—and the budget through the forward estimates delivers significantly greater than that infrastructure guarantee. The guarantee is just under \$52 billion and we have budgeted for \$56 billion worth. I know agencies themselves have very significant published pipelines of planned infrastructure. I know that transport, for instance, and health and education have significant work there too.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, I seek your assistance: how much is the incorporation of Building Queensland and the removal of this entity from the statutes and putting the functions into other areas of government going to save government? There must have been analysis done as to what you believe the savings will be.

Dr MILES: Let me first of all correct your question. We are not putting the functions in different parts of government; we are putting the functions in one part of government. The intention is very much that this will allow us to better integrate those functions with our infrastructure and planning work as well as bring together the planning of infrastructure right across government. There is not a very significant dollar saving to be made there. There will be some, but given that it is the intention for all of the staff to continue to be engaged and for them to come across at their current level it is not a dollar-saving initiative. I have indicated there will be a small saving, but it is more about how we think we can better harness those very talented people to assist us better both within the department and across government.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, I understand that it has been put into the government savings plan. However, you do not seem to be able to tell us how much it is going to save.

Mr SMITH: Chair, I raise a point of order. Under standing order 236, this is tedious repetition. The question has been asked time and time again and the Deputy Premier has provided an answer.

CHAIR: I take your point of order. I note that the question has been put three times now. There has been some—

Ms SIMPSON: Well, we have not had an answer. That is why.

CHAIR: You have had an answer. It may not be the one you like, but I will ask in terms—

Ms SIMPSON: But the Deputy Premier is not answering it. There is nothing wrong with trying to get an answer to something that is in the government savings plan.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I am still speaking. The question has been asked three times. You have had an answer. You may be looking for some more. I am going to ask that perhaps if the Deputy Premier can furnish a bit more information and then we will go on to the next question.

Mr McDONALD: Chair, I raise a point of order. With respect to the question that was asked, the third question was with reference to the savings plan. The Deputy Premier outlined that there was not a saving and the shadow minister has correctly pointed out that it was recorded in the government's savings plan and we are seeking clarification around that point.

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Lockyer. I am sure that has been heard by the director-general and the Deputy Premier. As I said, there is maybe some more information that can be furnished, but the question has been answered, maybe not the way you wanted. I am asking—I take on board what you are saying—for the Deputy Premier to perhaps furnish some more information.

Dr MILES: Thank you, Chair. Clearly as we finalise the plans for the transition and the precise arrangements that will be put in place, we will be able to quantify it at that point in time, but it is not currently included as a dollar figure.

Mr HART: So you are just making it up as you go?

Ms SIMPSON: So, Deputy Premier—

CHAIR: One moment, please.

Ms SIMPSON:—why was it put in the savings plan when the government does not know—

CHAIR: One moment, please.

Ms SIMPSON:—how much you are going to save?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore! I have just called you to order. Member for Lockyer, I appreciate what you are doing, but please do not do it again. Deputy Premier, did you want to add anything before we go to the next question?

Dr MILES: No, Chair.

CHAIR: Okay. Next question.

Mr HART: I raise a point of order, Mr Chair. That was actually me, not the member for Lockyer.

CHAIR: Okay. Member for Lockyer, take that as a compliment.

Dr MILES: The member for Lockyer is well above that kind of thing.

Mr HART: It was a question.

CHAIR: Well done to the member for Burleigh for owning up to that one. Do you have another question?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes, Mr Chair. The government has published a savings plan when the government does not know how much it is going to save with this item, so I think it is relevant to ask the Deputy Premier why this item was put into the savings plan.

Mr MADDEN: Surely this is repetition, Chair.

CHAIR: It is. Member for Maroochydore, I have asked you to go on to another question. That is the fourth time in the various forms you have asked this one. Do you have a question in another area, or do you want to give it to someone else?

Ms SIMPSON: I note that it is not going to be answered, so we will note for the record that it is not going to get answered.

CHAIR: Once again I will point out that you have got an answer for that, maybe not the one you are searching for. Do you have another question that does not touch on what we have just talked about?

Mr McDONALD: I have a question. Will the minister advise whether he or his department have had any discussions with the CFMEU in relation to the recent acquisition of seven lots of land in Campbell Street, Edgar Street and Hazelmount Street in Bowen Hills?

Dr MILES: I have not and—

CHAIR: One moment, Deputy Premier. I just put on the record that, as the member well knows, I am a member of the CFMEU, so I will declare an interest in that. Deputy Premier, I am not sure how we will deal with that one, but as the chair I have noted a conflict of interest on that. We might need to come back to that particular question because I do not want to vacate the chair at this point.

Mr HART: I raise a point of order, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: I have declared that interest, Deputy Premier, but I ask you to proceed with caution on that one.

Dr MILES: Certainly, Chair. I thank the member for his question. My only awareness of that transaction is through media reports. I have not discussed it with anyone from the CFMEU and I am not aware of any contact between them and any of the agencies that I am responsible for.

Ms SIMPSON: Deputy Premier, the population projections in the budget outlook predict a lower population growth for Queensland predicated, I understand, on the loss of overseas migration at this time. However, in South-East Queensland there are predictions also of a population boom and a very tight rental market. My question is: has the government revised its forecasts of SEQ population growth in light of COVID and these demands and, if so, what is the modelling showing?

Mr SMITH: Mr Chair, I raise a point of order. While I do note that there was a question at the end there, the preamble was quite long and I feel that the first half of that could have disappeared to just get to a direct question.

CHAIR: Yes, I understand. Member for Maroochydore, do you want to quickly repeat the question part of that?

Ms SIMPSON: Predictions are that Queensland's population is going to go down relative to what had originally been forecast. However, South-East Queensland is still under a lot of population pressure. Has the government revised its modelling in respect of South-East Queensland with regard to population increases?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. Yes, that work is ongoing and we take into account projections provided to us. The impact of, effectively, zero net overseas migration will have an impact on Queensland's population growth. Overseas migration usually accounts for just under 40 per cent of our migration, but you will have seen in the budget we are anticipated to receive a disproportionate number of interstate migrants—people moving from other states to Queensland—and so that is being taken into account in both the population growth figures projected in the budget but also the input data into our land supply modelling and that information will be released, as we regularly do.

I understand there is a new report due towards the end of this year after it has been consulted on with stakeholders and we will have more information about that available then. Domestic migration will need to overcome both the collapse in overseas migration and a projected reduction in the natural increase in population. Apparently there is a phenomena of people delaying having children due to COVID, so that is having an effect as well.

Ms SIMPSON: A follow-up question to the Deputy Premier: the Property Council has said the lack of action on a Build-to-Rent program is a missed opportunity in this budget to attract job generation investment in Queensland. What is the Deputy Premier and his department doing to incentivise or propose incentives for the rental market to take the pressure off rental prices and help people get into homes?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. I will ask Kerry if he has some further information on this, but I understand we are progressing with two Build-to-Rent schemes. They are already underway. The lead agency for those is Housing in conjunction with Queensland Treasury, but I am aware of those two projects. I think they will be important contributors to housing affordability. I will ask if Kerry has any further information.

Mr Doss: I thank the honourable member for her question. I can say that through the work of the department there are a range of activities going on which are looking at land supply which have subsequent positive impacts on the provision of housing in South-East Queensland. We have a number of benchmarks under the South East Queensland Regional Plan which we track to ensure adequate land supply. One of those is having at least a 15-year supply of land that is zoned and able to be serviced for residential development. I can say, looking at the preliminary figures which will come out in our Land Supply and Development Monitoring Report, we have at least 15 years of zoned land supply throughout every local government in South-East Queensland. We have a second benchmark, which is looking at the number of years of approvals in the system. That is to have at least four years of approvals in place throughout South-East Queensland. We have that at the present point in time.

As the Deputy Premier pointed out, in South-East Queensland and in Queensland in general we have three components of population growth. One of those is net overseas migration, which has been the largest proportion of our population growth. Obviously with COVID-19 that has fallen away markedly. The next largest component is natural increase and the third component is net interstate migration. We have seen effectively more than a third of our population growth fall away and that means that the supply we have in the pipeline will actually last a bit longer. From what we have seen from population modelling which came out in the federal budget, we will not see that catch up for some time. There is a bit of a buffer in the system, but nonetheless we see it as very important to get on with and assist both local governments and the development industry with getting projects to go forward. One of those is the \$200 million Building Acceleration Fund which allows for local governments, developers

and utility providers to seek funding towards catalyst infrastructure which opens up new growth areas which, in turn, allows for additional housing. We also have a number of other measures where we are working with local governments to help them bring forward land supply in those areas.

Dr MILES: In response to the member's question, I did not have in my head more detail about the two build-to-rent schemes, but I have them to hand now. Under the Build-to-Rent program the Queensland government secured agreement with two of the nation's leading builders, Frasers Property Australia and Mirvac, and they will develop two affordable housing projects under the Build-to-Rent program. Construction on those will start mid 2021. It will help to stimulate the construction industry, support more than 440 full-time jobs over two years and ensure Queenslanders have access to affordable housing. That is our progress on Build-to-Rent.

I might go back briefly to the member's questioning regarding anticipated savings with the absorption of Building Queensland into the department. I have advice from Queensland Treasury that in the savings and debt plan there is an anticipated saving of \$1 million each year which is from both the absorption of the Productivity Commission into Treasury and Building Queensland into my department. Those costs are largely the costs of the board as well as accommodation for those organisations.

CHAIR: I note that five minutes before the end of the session we will address any other issues. We will now have 10 minutes of government questions and then go to the member for Traeger and crossbenchers. With reference to SDS volume 1 page 57, what tools has the government created to improve local government planning and planning transparency specifically?

Dr MILES: Thank you, member for Bancroft, for your question. The Palaszczuk government is committed to improving transparency in all levels of government decision-making, including local governments. We know that many members of the community are often overwhelmed by the complexity of local government planning decisions, including development application decisions and plan making. We are committed to making sure all Queenslanders can understand and navigate this system. We know that local residents are the experts in their own communities and we want them to be able to actively contribute to shaping how their communities grow and change. That is why we have developed a new online dashboard to improve local government planning transparency. This dashboard will provide the latest information about local government plan making taking place under the Queensland Planning Act. We want to put more planning information in the hands of Queenslanders. This plan-making dashboard will give communities a greater understanding of what planning changes are being considered or progressed at a local level. This includes changes to planning schemes that affect neighbourhood design which we know can have a significant impact on quality of life. It will also keep industry and small business informed about the area of future development, bringing new infrastructure and new jobs, both so crucial to our COVID economic fightback.

This builds on our previous work where local governments were required to publish the amount of infrastructure charges being collected and where that money is being spent. Infrastructure charges are money that councils collect from developers, be they large-scale development companies or everyday Queenslanders building new buildings, which help to fund the infrastructure that our growing communities rely on such as roads and utilities. But we know that some communities have borne the brunt of new development and yet do not necessarily see where infrastructure upgrades have occurred to cope with this growth. These changes mean that Queenslanders can have a better understanding of how development activity benefits the broader community through improved infrastructure and services such as stormwater, transport, public parks and land for community facilities.

It will also highlight the considerable infrastructure being delivered by local councils to support regional growth. Developers pay significant amounts to local governments to build and upgrade infrastructure to support their development so it is important the community knows where councils are spending these funds. From 1 January 2020 councils have been required to publish online the value of infrastructure charges they received and how and where these funds are spent. This includes publishing information, such as infrastructure charges notices and documents used in the review, making or amendment of a local government infrastructure plan. Any member of the public can now search for their suburb and see how much in infrastructure charges have been collected and what infrastructure has been delivered. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring that all Queenslanders help to shape the future of our towns and cities, and being able to navigate the planning and development system is a crucial step in this.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Member for Ipswich West, do you have a question?

Mr MADDEN: Yes, I do, Chair. Deputy Premier, with reference to SDS volume 1 page 57, how is the Queensland government progressing effective neighbourhood design to support community health and wellbeing, which is now more important than ever?

Dr MILES: The layout of our communities—the layout of streets, the number of trees and footpaths—is something many often overlook, but the design of our suburbs, towns and communities has a fundamental impact on how we live. Hot unshaded footpaths make walking difficult, especially in summer. We have even had new suburbs built that lack footpaths altogether, meaning people are forced to drive because they have no real alternative, particularly people in wheelchairs or mobility devices and parents with prams. The Palaszczuk government is committed to changing that to ensure that Queensland communities are designed with our climate and our lifestyle in mind.

Prior to the pandemic, we undertook extensive community consultation about how effective neighbourhood design could support community health and wellbeing. Now more than ever, as we unite and recover from COVID-19, implementing those changes will mean that we design and build better communities and ensure local neighbours have the fundamentals such as footpaths, street trees, nearby parks and open space.

Many Queenslanders spent a lot of time in their local communities this year, more than they usually would, due to circumstances beyond their control. That really highlighted the differences between some communities with connected footpaths and shops and parks within walking distance compared to other communities where people must rely on their cars to travel to local parks and shops. We want to ensure that all Queenslanders live in communities that are well designed.

The mandatory provisions commenced on 28 September 2020 and require new communities to have connectivity for pedestrians through a grid-like street layout responding to the local landscape. Block lengths must be no more than 250 metres, a comfortable five-minute walk around the block. They must have footpaths on at least one side of local neighbourhood roads and both sides of main streets. They must ensure at least one street tree is provided per 15 metres on each side of all streets. These changes will implement best practice urban design and were created in partnership with the community, industry and urban designers and planners.

The Palaszczuk government has developed a range of complementary guidance documents to assist local councils to implement the mandatory provisions. The mandatory provisions and model code support the Queensland economic recovery plan's top priority to safeguard the health of Queenslanders and also deliver on Queensland's first walking strategy, released in 2019.

We also know that many established neighbourhoods are not conducive to walking and retrofitting will require an investment from councils. To help councils we have developed the Walkability Improvement Tool, which gives them a step-by-step guide to identify and prioritise walkability improvements based on the greatest return on investment: things as simple as planting street trees to create more shade, repairing footpaths to ensure smoother walking journeys and completing the gaps in the footpath network and more large-scale projects such as pedestrian crossings. The walkability tool helps councils to identify where investments will create greater return for the community.

We know that healthier communities are happier communities. The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring that all Queenslanders live in well designed and well serviced towns, suburbs and cities.

CHAIR: Deputy Premier, in relation to SDS volume 1 page 51, in this COVID-impacted world how is the state government providing more flexibility for Public Service workers and the opportunity to work closer to home?

Dr MILES: We know that there are lots of lessons to be learnt from this year. Lots of businesses and employers had to adapt to new working conditions. We also saw a need for essential businesses to quickly ramp up their production. The Palaszczuk government led the nation in taking swift action to roll out a suite of planning law changes that have and continue to benefit all Queenslanders.

As I mentioned earlier, those changes allowed essential businesses such as loading docks and distribution centres to operate 24 hours, seven days a week, to keep our supermarkets stocked and our chemists supplied. Manufacturers were also provided with temporary-use licences allowing, for example, a brewer to pivot production to hand sanitizer, to quickly set up respiratory clinics and for childcare centres to increase the numbers of children to accommodate the children of essential workers. That was fundamental to the success of our pandemic response. So far we have issued 43 temporary-use licences to support businesses and the state's health response.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 on the survival of some regional newspapers, amendments were made to the planning framework allowing online notification of development proposals where there is no local paper. Temporary amendments have also been made to statutory requirements around public availability of DA documents during public notification periods.

To support the Queensland government's economic recovery plan, planning has worked to allow businesses to trade more quickly and propel job creation. Further changes to Queensland's planning laws have allowed job-creating infrastructure projects to keep progressing across the state despite restrictions. The streamlining of those processes, although a small change, has been crucial to ensuring big projects can keep Queensland moving forward.

On top of that, many Queenslanders had to adapt their own work practices during the COVID-19 response: things like reducing staff on the floor and in the office, working remotely or changing shifts. While for many this has been extremely challenging, many workers have also experienced the benefits of more flexible working environments. By working closer to home or even at home, more Queenslanders were able to pick up their kids from school and have more time for leisure, to exercise or for any of the other things they would rather be doing than sitting in their cars commuting.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to setting the example for workplaces across our state so that we can take on board some of the positive outcomes of this year. Queensland government workers can work closer to home as part of the Palaszczuk government's plan to provide more flexibility for public servants. This plan gives up to 1,500 workers the chance to work in an office much closer to their community. The Palaszczuk government has expanded the role of our distributed work centres: government office spaces that allow workers to be based at Ipswich, Logan, Robina or Maroochydore instead of the Brisbane CBD. This keeps workers in less concentrated spaces, limiting the damage that could be caused if we were to see an outbreak.

For residents of the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich and Logan, distributed work centres provide the opportunity to do the same job but much closer to home. Less crowded offices and public transport improve community safety while increasing the amount of time Queenslanders can spend with their family. It will also provide more customers to businesses in our outer suburbs. We are determined to learn lessons from the COVID-19 response so that they can inform government decision-making into the future and provide a better quality of life for all Queenslanders.

CHAIR: We will go to the crossbenches and the member for Traeger.

Mr KATTER: Deputy Premier, the current GOC model on asset pricing that we have now was developed around the time that government embarked on an asset sales program, and there was some public commentary that it was being fattened up for sale. Regardless of the impetus, a different price structure was established for new and existing infrastructure. Some of those costs, such as borrowing costs, are a constraint on new business or new infrastructure. If the government is not intent on selling any of those assets, will you commit to or look into reducing or amending those price models given that you have committed to not selling those assets?

Dr MILES: I think I can see what the member is—

Mr KATTER: I can be more specific, if you like.

Dr MILES: I think the matter of how these things are valued is probably one more for Treasury and the Treasurer. This afternoon when we talk about water there will be the chance to talk about the water GOCs. I am happy for you to provide more detail.

Mr KATTER: Can I be more specific?

Dr MILES: Please do.

Mr KATTER: As a follow-on question, when you talk about Hells Gates Dam they will say it needs to pay itself off. You have the DORC valuations, all the different types of Treasury instruments and borrowings are at an agreed rate that is below that at which you actually get money from Treasury. If that is applied back to the pricing model it will constrain development of that dam because you will say that the business case does not work, which then relates to your portfolio. How do you address that going forward to stimulate infrastructure in this COVID environment?

Dr MILES: That is probably something we would be better placed to talk about this afternoon. I am not sure whether the Coordinator-General or others would consider that. If you do not mind, I am happy to take it as a question this afternoon when I am acting minister for water. We can deal with it with the GOCs here.

CHAIR: Member for Traeger, we will make sure that you have time to ask that question this afternoon.

Mr BERKMAN: I have a question for the minister. I understand that the 10-year review of the Brisbane City Plan 2014 is due in this term of parliament and that review will likely include significant upzoning of land that will generate windfall profits for developers and speculators that own property zoned. Will the government consider introducing a value gains tax similar to the one in place in the ACT so that we as a community can capture a fair share of those profits, rather than just letting big developers keep them?

Mr MADDEN: Chair, I have two concerns with the question from my colleague from Maiwar. The first one is some sort of inference with regard to a connection between government and developers that is inappropriate. The second concern is that my friend is asking a hypothetical about something that does not exist.

Mr BERKMAN: Might I respond to the point of order? First of all, there is no inference about any connection between government and developers. It was simply an observation about changes that will happen through a review of a plan and what the consequences are for developers. Secondly, it is a question of policy and whether the government will consider a particular policy position—that is, a policy of introducing a value gains tax similar to what is in place in the ACT.

CHAIR: I understand where you are going. It would have been easier just going straight to the second half of your question without that observation. I am going to allow that question, but the Deputy Premier can respond in the manner he sees fit.

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question. I will ask the State Planner in a moment to outline what we know about the review of the city plan. While he comes forward, though, that is not something that is under active consideration. I have been in the role for three or four weeks. I am looking forward to meeting with the stakeholders and hearing their views about what the agenda should be going forward.

The only issue I would take with the member's preamble is: one way of looking at it is that it would deliver windfall profits to developers; the other way of looking at it is that it would allow us to deliver for affordable housing and if we make that housing more expensive then that will have an impact, too. Clearly, there is contention in consideration of anything like that. To your point about the process for the city plan and how we can all contribute to that, I might ask Mr Doss if he has anything to add.

Mr Doss: I thank the member for his question and thank you, Deputy Premier. At the present time, the idea of value capture through planning approvals and rezonings is not part of the Queensland planning framework. That would be a new policy direction. Of course, we would rely upon consideration of that matter by government. It would require legislative changes. Having said that, in the issue of general rates there would be increases. This is seen as a form of value capture. There are also requirements for the payment of infrastructure contributions which go towards essential infrastructure including community infrastructure.

In terms of the Brisbane City Council's 10-year review of the city plan, that is a requirement under the act. From what I have seen of the way in which Brisbane goes about its processes, we check it against the growth targets that are set in the South East Queensland Regional Plan. At the present time, Brisbane City Council has at least a 15-year supply of appropriately zoned land which is able to be serviced. In South-East Queensland we have a four-year supply of development approvals. In that case, because the current plan is in sync with the South East Queensland Regional Plan, I would not expect considerable changes. It is more an incremental change across their planning scheme.

CHAIR: The time allocated—

Mr HART: A have a very quick question for the minister.

CHAIR: Sorry, we have run out of time, member for Burleigh. The time allocated for consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the Deputy Premier's portfolio area of infrastructure and planning has expired. There are three issues we may need to address. One is the Cairns hub, the second is the Gold Coast hub and there was a question about Cross River Rail. Would someone perhaps like to give some information?

Dr MILES: If I can, please, Chair. The decision with regard to the global tourism hub in Cairns was announced on 16 July 2020. I table a copy of the former minister's press release.

CHAIR: We will need to have a look at that.

Ms SIMPSON: When was the decision actually taken?

Dr MILES: It was around then. I table for the committee the public announcement of the decision to terminate the Gold Coast Global Tourism Hub process, which was when we terminated the agreement with Star. That was announced on 11 July 2020. I table that for the committee.


With regard to the member for South Brisbane's question about the Woolloongabba site for the Cross River Rail PDA, I can confirm that the delivery authority has committed to no less than 50 per cent of the site to be public open space, to be designed following consultation with the community.

Finally, I misspoke in one of my opening statements regarding Vaxxas. I indicated that it was supporting 39 jobs. That should have been 139 jobs. I ask that the record be corrected.

CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Premier. We have here the media releases. As these are being distributed, are there any other issues to deal with? Is the committee happy to accept those press releases? They are so tabled. Thank you, Deputy Premier.

The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 12 o'clock with examination of the estimates for the Deputy Premier's portfolio area of local government.

Proceedings suspended from 11.46 am to 12.00 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing is resumed. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure for the Deputy Premier's portfolio area of local government. Deputy Premier, if you wish you may make an opening statement of no more than three minutes.

Dr MILES: Thank you, Chair. I will say a few brief things. During the global crisis this year, our communities looked to their leaders to support them. I know that many local councils played a really important role in leading their communities during this time. Now, thanks to our world-class health response, we have been able to kickstart Queensland's economic recovery in conjunction with our local governments. We know that local governments will continue to play a key role in that recovery through delivering infrastructure maintenance and upgrades at a local level, helping to support local businesses and helping get Queenslanders back into work.

Such is the importance placed on the local government sector, the Queensland government has appointed Nikki Boyd as Assistant Minister for Local Government. Can I take a moment to acknowledge Nikki and the work she has already done as the assistant minister. She has hit the ground running from day one and has already established relationships with leaders in the local government sector across Queensland. This is the kind of work which will ensure that the Palaszczuk government can continue to work productively with the sector of the over the next four years.

I can assure the committee that our government is doing much more to support our local governments and communities. I am proud to report that the government's signature Works for Queensland program is continuing to deliver new and improved infrastructure as well as jobs for locals right across regional Queensland. Over the first three rounds of that \$600 million program, 1,862 local projects have been or are in the process of being delivered, improving liveability in communities outside the south-east corner.

Most importantly, councils are reporting that these projects have created or supported more than 20,600 local jobs so far. No matter how you look at it, that is a fantastic result for communities from Mount Isa to Stanthorpe. This budget has built on our important investment in local governments and job-creating projects. We are continuing the very successful Works for Queensland program, which delivered a crucial injection of funding at the height of the pandemic, with an investment of \$400 million over six years and \$200 million over two years for a new SEQ community stimulus program. As local government minister, I am working hard to ensure that we can continue to generate jobs and economic growth and maximise the potential of our regions. I look forward to the committee's questions.

CHAIR: We will go to non-government members for questions.

Ms LEAHY: My question is to the minister. Has any local council been required or requested to make water available to fight the Fraser Island fires?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for her question. I think that is probably better directed to the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services. I am not aware of any such request.

Ms LEAHY: In relation to conflict of interest laws and the complexity of those laws, say, for instance, a council decision is required on a dog park, if the CEO has a dog, the mayor has a dog and the councillors have dogs no-one can make a decision on that. Is this a bit of a dog's breakfast?

CHAIR: Let me start with this. The question is hypothetical and contains imputation. If the member has a question about conflict of interest can she ask her question without resorting to hypotheticals and anything else that breaches standing orders. Member for Warrego, do you want to have another go at that question?

Ms LEAHY: We know that the conflict of interest laws are incredibly complex. We understand that there are situations where people are out of the room and councils cannot make a decision. In a situation like this where none of the people can make a decision is this a reasoned approach to these laws or is it again the tail wagging the dog?

Mr MADDEN: This is clearly repetition. I really do not know where my friend is going with this. It is repetition of the first question and you have already dealt with that.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, can I ask you to come to the nub of your point about conflict of interest laws and have another go.

Ms LEAHY: Obviously these laws are incredibly complex and we do find that councillors spend more time out of the room than in the room when it comes to local decisions. It is as simple as having a dog that you would be excluded from some of those decisions.

Mr SMITH: Mr Chair, I am just wondering how this relates to the budget. Is the member maybe barking up the wrong tree?

Mr HART: Chair, point of order.

CHAIR: Dog puns stop right now.

Dr MILES: It is all a bit rough!

CHAIR: Thank you very much for contributing to that, Minister. Member for Warrego, I am struggling to see how this relates to the SDS—

Mr HART: Chair, can I comment on that?

CHAIR: I will come to you, member for Burleigh, before I throw to the Deputy Premier.

Mr HART: This is an issue that my local councillors are bringing up with me as well. There are lots of times when they are forced out of the room due to changes the government has made to integrity rules. The question that the member for Warrego is asking is very valid.

CHAIR: I understand, member for Burleigh. I have been a councillor and have had to leave the room when things were discussed. Back then it was if in doubt walk out. That is not an incredibly complex way of seeing it. Putting aside that comment from me, Deputy Premier, you can deal with the question about how a conflict of interest is dealt with as you wish.

Dr MILES: The committee will be well aware of the very significant allegations of conflicts of interest that struck at the heart of the integrity of local government. Frankly, that and the response to that is no laughing matter. It should not be a source for jokes for the member for Warrego. We all—and I certainly do as a minister—manage conflicts of interest every single day. It is a responsibility of all of us as elected representatives to understand our responsibilities with regard to conflicts of interest and to manage them appropriately.

We are providing support and advice to councillors and mayors to help them better understand what truly is a conflict of interest and what level that conflict is and to what degree it impacts on their ability to contribute to a decision-making process and whether or not the conflict is such that it would raise public concerns of a conflict or perception of a conflict of interest. We will continue to do that work with councillors.

The fact remains that there needed to be a change of culture in Queensland local government. I do not think anybody here should be arguing about that. That is precisely what we have been endeavouring to do. That will take some time for people to get used to. It is a critical element of the contribution we all make to public life that we understand what our conflicts of interest are and that we manage them appropriately.

Ms LEAHY: Is the minister aware that the dog example is actually in the training manual for mayors and councillors?

Dr MILES: I am not across the detail of the training manual. You are welcome to table that for us, member for Warrego. Where there are conflicts of interest, non-conflicted councillors can decide on them in those instances. The important thing is that local governments are beginning to understand how important it is that they manage their conflicts of interest.

Ms LEAHY: Minister, what if they all have a conflict—the CEO has a conflict, the executive directors have a conflict? Can you explain the process by which council should proceed in those circumstances?

Dr MILES: Who is best placed to answer that?

Ms LEAHY: Or is this just another example that they have gone too far?

CHAIR: Hang on, member for Warrego. We are deciding if this is being referred to the director-general or any other officer.

Dr MILES: For the benefit of the committee, I might see if the Independent Assessor, Ms Florian, is able to provide advice in these circumstances.

Ms Florian: Obviously conflicts of interest are a really important part of an integrity and transparency system. The legislative regime for conflicts of interest has recently changed. A new regime took effect on 12 October. The OIA and the LGAQ have worked together to create a conflict of interest app which really assists local government councillors to navigate their way through the conflict of interest legislation and to comply with it.

There are situations where notwithstanding councillors will declare a conflict of interest, and sometimes a majority of councillors will declare a conflict of interest. That is because they have them, but the legislation provides a mechanism for those conflicts of interest to be dealt with. That mechanism is that they can delegate the matter to a committee; they can delegate the matter to a CEO; or in some circumstances they can apply to the minister and get approval to sit on the decision notwithstanding that they have a conflict of interest.

Ms LEAHY: I have a further question to the Office of the Independent Assessor, to Ms Florian. Is the dog example in the app?

Ms Florian: The dog example certainly is not in the app. An example of an exception to a conflict of interest is if the interest of a councillor is no greater than the interest of any other or a significant number of persons in the local government community. I would say that, if a councillor owns a dog in common with a large number of people in the local government community, they have no concern about having a conflict of interest in that matter.

Ms LEAHY: If they all own a dog then who makes the decision that they stay in the room to make a decision about a dog park, for instance?

CHAIR: Just bear in that mind that you have asked two questions now, member for Warrego, where you have said 'what if'. We are in hypotheticals. Do you want to rephrase the question to avoid hypotheticals?

Dr MILES: Can I ask the member for Warrego to table the document she is referring to? We are trying to locate it so that we can answer properly.

CHAIR: I think that would be useful. Can the member for Warrego or someone in the opposition table the document that is being referred to before we go much further on this?

Ms LEAHY: We do not have it here at this time.

CHAIR: We are talking about something that is hypothetical. Member for Warrego, do you want to rephrase your last question without—

Dr MILES:—reference to the made-up document?

CHAIR:—looking at what are potential hypotheticals?

Ms LEAHY: To the Office of the Independent Assessor, given that all councillors, the CEO and the mayor may have a conflict of interest, who would then make the decision about who stays in the room and what is the process where they would apply to the minister if all members of the council are conflicted?

Ms Florian: I referred to an exception where the interest is no greater than others in the local government area. If you apply within that exception, it is not a conflict of interest to start with. I am assuming that in this instance you are asking where someone actually has a conflict of interest. If the majority of councillors have a conflict of interest, there are a number of options open to them. Firstly, the decision may be delegated to a committee. Secondly, it may be delegated to the CEO. Thirdly, they may make application to the minister under the act to make the decision notwithstanding that the majority of councillors have a conflict of interest.

CHAIR: Do we have any questions on another issue?

Ms LEAHY: I will move on. My next question is to the director-general. I refer to the comments made by the member for Ipswich, Jennifer Howard, in the parliament on 17 March 2020 regarding Paul Tully where she alleged the councillor did 'doggy' planning deals, misused ratepayers' and discretionary

funds and was involved in money missing from the Ipswich mayor's community fund. Has the member for Ipswich raised these issues with the department and has the department conducted any investigation?

Mr MADDEN: Chair, I cannot see where this is dealt with in the Service Delivery Statements.

CHAIR: As we know, they do not have to be directly relevant to the SDS, but it certainly helps us to identify where this relates to current and future expenditure. Can the member tie their question to that?

Ms LEAHY: If you go to page 1-55 dot point 6, it talks about financial management, transparency and accountability within the system of local government.

CHAIR: Can you restate your question in relation to that?

Ms LEAHY: I refer to the comments made by the member for Ipswich, Jennifer Howard, in the parliament on 17 March 2020 regarding Paul Tully where she alleged the councillor did 'dodgy' planning deals, misused ratepayers' and discretionary funds—

CHAIR: Member, I did not ask you to restate the question.

Ms LEAHY: Has the member for Ipswich raised these issues with the department and has the department conducted any investigation?

Mr Walker: I will need to seek some advice on what role the department has played with regard to those comments made on 17 March 2020. With regard to me, however, I must note that the local government has only joined the department in recent times. I am unaware of the comments of 17 March 2020.

Ms LEAHY: My next question is to Kathleen Florian, from the Office of the Independent Assessor. I again refer to the comments made by the member for Ipswich, Jennifer Howard, in parliament on 17 March regarding Councillor Paul Tully. Has the member for Ipswich raised these issues with the Office of the Independent Assessor and has the Office of the Independent Assessor investigated these claims?

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, you are drawing a long bow there again. You are potentially referring to things that may or may not be being investigated or assessed. Bearing that in mind, I will allow Ms Florian to address that in a brief measure. I think after that we will move on to new questions because we have some answers coming back on that.

Ms Florian: The Office of the Independent Assessor takes a really strict position on identifying whether a person has made a complaint or is the subject of an investigation. The reason for that is that many people make complaints. Some of them are well founded; some of them are not well founded. There is an investigation process that we need to proceed through which may find that a complaint is not sustained. For that reason, we do not comment publicly either on the fact that someone has made a complaint or whether an investigation is undertaken. Knowing, however, that should it be the case that misconduct has been engaged in, that will be transparently identified and published in accordance with the Local Government Act.

CHAIR: We are going to go to government questions now.

Mr SMITH: With reference to the SDS volume 1 page 1-55, can the Deputy Premier update the committee on the election commitment to protect Bundaberg in relation to flooding?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for Bundaberg for his question and note his ongoing interest in this investment and our efforts to protect buildings and residents in Bundaberg from flooding. The safety of Queenslanders, including those in Bundaberg, is a real priority for the government. Over the last year we have demonstrated that time and time again. That commitment is reflected in everything that we do from funding frontline services to ensuring the safety of Queenslanders at work. It means that the infrastructure projects that keep Queenslanders safe are a real priority.

The Bundaberg levee is one particular project I am pleased to highlight. Bundaberg is vulnerable to flood events, as we know, with hundreds of homes and businesses at risk of flooding even in milder flood years. As we head into a La Nina event, we are expecting more rain in Queensland, making floods more likely this year and more severe.

We should all be able to agree that we should do everything we can to protect Bundaberg residents and keep their town safe. That is why I am proud to be part of a government that will invest \$42.5 million to build the East Bundaberg Flood Levee. This is a major piece of infrastructure for Bundaberg that will keep residents safe and help protect houses and businesses. Some of the key areas that will be protected included: the Bundaberg East State School, the East Bundaberg Sports Club and the Bundaberg distillery. The government has already improved evacuation routes and water

level monitoring, but the levee is the next big step. By investing that money now, we can build it as soon as possible as well as help drive the region's economic recovery with the jobs created in construction. Constructing the East Bundaberg flood levee will deliver 679 jobs for the region. By investing in projects like this one, we are delivering jobs for regional Queensland and essential infrastructure.

The member for Bundaberg has already expressed to me how important this project is. He has been a fierce advocate for delivering it, and I congratulate him for that. It will reduce risk and impact of floods for more than 600 buildings and increase flood protection, mitigate damage, protect the Bundaberg East area from a one-in-100-year flood, and of course it will offer better flood mitigation year to year and support jobs in the local community. The Bundaberg flood levee is ready to deliver jobs for the community; we just now need the Commonwealth to contribute their share. I wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister on 27 November seeking a commitment from the Commonwealth to support this project, and I table for the benefit of the committee copies of that correspondence.

The project cannot proceed without that matched funding. It is essential that all levels of government cooperate to deliver this project. We need every cent of the funding to ensure we build a levee that will serve Bundaberg for years to come. It is important that we get this right for the people of Bundaberg, who have suffered enough through the devastating floods of 2010 and 2013. It is disappointing that the federal government has continued to overlook Queensland for funding projects like this and instead is funding projects in Sydney and Melbourne. I know that the member for Bundaberg will be talking to his colleague, the member for Hinkler, and also advocating to the Morrison government, as will and has the local mayor, Jack Dempsey, who we both look forward to working with closely as we deliver this project.

CHAIR: Deputy Premier, I will ask a question now with reference to page 55, volume 1 of the SDS. Can you update the committee on the Unite and Recover Community Stimulus Package that is helping the Moreton Bay region recover from COVID-19 and creating jobs in the region?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. I know that we could talk for a long time about our efforts in the Moreton Bay region. Because Queensland's health response has been so strong, we have been able to drive our strong economic response and open up our economy. That is why investments like the community stimulus grants in South-East Queensland, Works for Queensland and regional Queensland, and COVID Works for Queensland across Queensland are so critical to our recovery.

The \$200 million COVID Works for Queensland program is having a positive impact in communities and creating jobs right across our state as we continue our recovery from COVID-19. Across the state every council area, including the Moreton Bay region, is benefiting from the COVID Works for Queensland program. This program was initiated very quickly in response to the economic impacts of COVID-19 and builds on the very successful \$600 million Works for Queensland program that has already created or supported more than 19,000 jobs throughout regional Queensland.

In total, 520 projects are being funded through this program, which the councils expect will support or create more than 4,600 jobs. We are investing in projects aimed enhancing the health and wellbeing of our communities, improving critical water, wastewater and waste infrastructure, and generally increasing liveability in every local government area. Indeed, in our region the Moreton Bay Regional Council has received more than \$7.92 million from this important program aimed at economic recovery. This funding is helping the council deliver projects that are not only improving liveability but also creating or supporting almost 189 local jobs. That is a fantastic result for local tradies and local families.

Projects such as upgrades to the Deception Bay pool will hugely benefit the community and I am sure will be very welcomed by the member for Bancroft. We are also seeing important park and playground improvements at the Leonie Street Park, the Bayview Terrace Park and the Bill Sanderson Park in Deception Bay as well as Endeavour Boulevard South Park in North Lakes, which the member and I visited with the Mayor Flannery to check out. This program is also funding footpath renewals along Buckley Road in Burpengary East. I know that people in that part of the world will be particularly pleased to see these improvements.

It was wonderful to announce some of those projects with you, Chair, together with the former minister for local government and the mayor of Moreton Bay. I know that the mayor is very supportive of this program. He said at the time—

The Works for Queensland program is specifically designed to enable councils to get their communities back on their feet as quickly as possible and minimise any long-term effects of the pandemic. This initiative helps to us fast-track essential infrastructure that's important in people's day-to-day lives.

I do not think we could have said it better ourselves.

The \$50 million Unite and Recover Community Stimulus Package is also benefiting communities in the Moreton Bay Regional Council, receiving \$5.5 million from this program to deliver projects that the council estimates will create 125 jobs. That alone will have an enormous impact on the local economy, while the projects themselves will have long-term social benefits. Stage 1 of the community facility on Joseph Crescent at Deception Bay is receiving funding. Similarly, new playground equipment and soft fall installation at the Skye Blue Park, the Tyson Street Park and the Felicity Court Park at Deception Bay will improve safety as well as increase the enjoyment of kids and their families.

Both the COVID Works for Queensland Package and the Unite and Recover Community Stimulus Package have been so successful that during the election campaign we have committed to an additional \$200 million over six years to support South-East Queensland councils through a new community stimulus program. Queenslanders are resilient. COVID-19 has shown just how resilient they are and just how well Queenslanders worked together to ensure our health response kept the virus under control. The Palaszczuk government backed Queenslanders with our strong health response in the same way we are backing Queenslanders with our investment in a strong economic response across each of these programs. I know these projects and the jobs they are creating are extremely welcome during this tough time as we continue to drive our economic recovery and get Queenslanders back to work.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, with reference to SDS volume 1, page 55, can you update the committee on the Unite and Recover Community Stimulus grants specifically in relation to my city of Ipswich?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. Similar to the Moreton Bay region, residents in Ipswich are also benefiting from our economic stimulus investments. The \$200 million COVID Works for Queensland program is creating jobs and having a positive impact in communities right across our state as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Every council area across Queensland, including the Ipswich region, is benefiting from the COVID Works for Queensland program.

Ipswich City Council has received more than \$4.4 million from this program aimed squarely at local job creation and economic recovery. This funding is helping the council deliver 12 projects that will not only improve liveability but also create or support 36 local jobs. These 12 projects will be delivered across Ipswich, including: a new water treatment plant for the Orion Lagoon; investment in water quality improvements to the drainage reserve at Moodai Reserve; rehabilitation of the existing gravel pathway for Clancy's Reserve; replacing the floor, ceiling and internal walls at Richardson Park; improvements to the creek filtration system for Fail Park; upgrading the croquet green irrigation at Queen's Park; a new amenities building for the SES depot; new concrete pathways in the Ipswich CBD; we will fund the replacement of the car park at the North Ipswich Corporate Centre; water quality improvements to the drainage reserve at Sarah Drive, Yamanto; improvements to the creek filtration system at the Walter Zimmerman Park, Pine Mountain; as well as a new playground at Redbank Plains. It is a great result for Ipswich workers, business and Ipswich families.

The mayor of Ipswich is also a strong supporter of the program. She said—

The new council is committed to improving trust and developing productive partnerships with the State Government for the long-term benefit of the community and we very much welcome this and further investment by all levels of government.

In the member for Ipswich West's electorate, projects such as improving the stormwater quality in the drainage channel on Sarah Drive, replacing the carpet at the corporate centre and improving the creek filtration system will have a direct benefit for your community. These projects alone have had more than \$900,000 allocated to them to see them delivered.

Ipswich is also benefitting from the \$50 million Unite and Recover Community Stimulus Package, aimed at helping councils in the south-east give their communities a lift. This program is estimated to support or create more than 1,500 jobs. The Ipswich City Council has received \$3.87 million from this initiative to deliver projects the council estimates will support or create 24 jobs. In fact \$1.23 million has been allocated to a project in Ipswich West which will see the refurbishment and upgrades to the skate park at Sutton Park in Brassall. I am advised that the skate park is a very well used piece of community infrastructure in the member's electorate and that the council has already produced a general concept of the upgrade works, including new pathways, shelter, seating and associated infrastructure. The new skate park will have a total skateable area of up to 750 square metres. It will include five to nine obstacles and be suitable for use by beginner and intermediate level users. I hope that is the case, member for Ipswich West, because when I head out there to open it with you, I suggest the two of us should demonstrate our very beginner skateboarding skills.

Ipswich City Council are also currently seeking community feedback on the council's initial concept design, which includes the overall design of the space, the skate obstacles and any other elements that should be included. Across each of these programs, I know these projects and the jobs they are creating are extremely welcome during a tough time as we continue to drive our economic recovery and get Queenslanders back on track.

CHAIR: Can I also advise the member for Ipswich West that adult skateboarding invariably leads to broken wrists and arms so please treat with caution.

Dr MILES: I can attest though to the Ipswich Hospital's emergency department. Their fracture clinic is second to none.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will go to an opposition question

Dr MILES: Just before you do, do you mind if I clarify some things for the benefit of the committee?

CHAIR: Certainly.

Dr MILES: I have been provided some advice with regards to the dog example that the member for Warrego referred to. I note that she declined or was unable to table that reference but we think we have identified the reference. It is included in the department website. However, it is listed on that website as an example of an ordinary business matter, meaning that councillors can stay and vote as their interest is no greater than others, which was the point the Independent Assessor was endeavouring to make. In short, Chair, I think the member for Warrego has explicitly and intentionally misled the committee about the contents of that, and I think the committee should consider what action is appropriate.

CHAIR: We will consider that in due course. Thank you for that information. Do we have a question from the opposition?

Ms LEAHY: Thank you, Minister, for that clarification. My question is to the director-general. I refer to the continuing review of local government legislation outlined in the SDS. Given that last week we had changes to the runner-up laws and we also had a local government voting system which was removed from legislation and proposed changes, can the director-general outline to the committee what will be the process of engagement with elected members prior to the future local government legislative changes?

Mr Walker: I thank the member for the question. In terms of any changes to legislation, they are clearly matters of policy for government. In terms of general consultation, we will certainly endeavour to engage with parties, such as the LGAQ and councils generally, about changes as we move forward following government consideration of policy matters.

Ms LEAHY: My question is to the minister. I refer to the abolition of the Smaller Communities Assistance Program, which was called SCAP, by Andrew Fraser. That took away a billion dollars from councils' essential water and sewerage infrastructure programs. Minister, a pipe bursts every 80 minutes in rural and remote Queensland. This budget does not address the financial and health risks of this deteriorating infrastructure. How can Queenslanders be assured their drinking water will be safe and sewage will not contaminate the reef in the future?

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, you are referring to a budget that is probably from about 10 years ago. From what I can understand of your question, you are asking about local government programs for the replacement of pipes and water. Seeing that these water entities are now not under local government, is that question perhaps better put in a later session of estimates today?

Ms LEAHY: I am sorry, Mr Chair, but it actually is in the SDS. There is only \$26 million for local government grants and subsidies, and there is no specific program to address assistance for these smaller communities, which are those outside South-East Queensland.

CHAIR: So you are talking about smaller community infrastructure. Perhaps water and sewerage is not the most relevant for that there. What we have here is a question, I understand, about grants programs for smaller communities. Would someone on the panel be able to provide some clarification or an answer for the member in this case?

Dr MILES: I can. The Queensland government is committed to assisting councils to meet the cost of upgrading or replacing critical infrastructure, including the kind of ageing water and wastewater infrastructure the member refers to. We have a range of financial assistance programs to support Queensland local governments and assist them to deliver maintenance of critical infrastructure.

In the period of 2019 to 2021, local government grants and subsidies will, for example, provide \$1.35 million to the Banana Shire Council to support the delivery of an upgraded sewage plant for Taroom, as well as \$1.26 million to the Douglas Shire Council to complete the Craiglie Reservoir refurbishment project. Similarly, councils can draw on Works for Queensland to fund projects like this.

In the budget years, the program includes upgrades for a range of critical infrastructure projects, such as \$130,000 for the Murweh Shire Council to replace the cover of Charleville's main town reservoir, as well as a range of funding provided through previous funding models, such as the major infrastructure program, COVID Works for Queensland, or the \$120 million Indigenous Councils Critical Infrastructure Program. The budget delivered \$4 million for the Northern Peninsula Area to undertake a 10-year capital renewal and replacement works program on their water supply system. The budget provided \$12 million over two years for the Torres Shire Council's drinking water infrastructure on Thursday Island and Horn Island. We provided \$9.1 million of out-of-round funding to the Paroo Shire Council to undertake work on their sewage treatment plant and sewerage network. There are a range of programs and some very significant investments to support councils to do that kind of maintenance the member refers to.

Ms LEAHY: I have a further question to the director-general. The COVID Works for Queensland applications closed on 12 June 2020 and the border reopened on 1 December. Director-General, how would councils impacted by costs associated with border checkpoints—for instance, toilets and accommodation—be able to provide their full costings when this particular program closed six months earlier and the department had already approved their expenditure on the COVID Works for Queensland program? How would a council go about recouping these border checkpoint costs through COVID or a Works for Queensland program?

Mr Walker: I thank the member for the question. I might need to seek some advice on the intention of the Works for Queensland program and in particular how some of those costs that are now being incurred by councils with regard to COVID-19 are to be dealt with. I am aware that it is a concern for a number of councils. Those costs incurred by local councils along the New South Wales and Northern Territory borders associated with responding to COVID-19 are not eligible for reimbursement under the Commonwealth's terms of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, the DRFA.

At the onset of the pandemic in early February, the Premier wrote to the Prime Minister requesting that costs associated with responding to COVID be eligible under the DRFA. The Prime Minister subsequently responded on 4 February 2020 that infectious diseases are not an eligible event under the DRFA. The State Disaster Relief Arrangements, SDRA, were also unable to be activated as the reimbursement of costs associated with responding to COVID-19 does not meet the eligibility requirements of the SDRA program.

The Queensland government will support local governments impacted by COVID-19 through programs outlined in Queensland's economic recovery plan released on 20 August 2020. We are clearly keen to understand some of those costs and how best we can assist, but it is worth noting that some of the challenges posed by those federal government rulings have made it difficult for us in recent times.

Ms LEAHY: A follow-up question in relation to how a council would go about recouping these costs through a COVID or Works for Queensland program, because it has been said on *ABC Western Queensland* that the COVID Works for Queensland program is supporting jobs and providing that economic stimulus. I am happy to table that media report for the information of the committee. Given that the programs closed back in June, how would they go about that?

Mr Walker: The Works for Queensland program very much focused on councils receiving additional funding for priority projects that they otherwise would have funded from existing budgets with a focus on economic recovery. What is probably best out of this discussion today is some further discussion with those impacted councils around what they are looking to access, what mechanisms and to what extent we might be able to assist. That might be something I can take up in the new role in terms of my conversations with those impacted councils.

Dr MILES: For the committee's benefit, I can clarify that the point being made in that media report which I also saw was that, while councils have borne costs, the funds allocated to them through Works for Queensland far outweigh the costs that they have incurred. Much of that funding will have otherwise been allocated within their budget. They would have had to meet that funding anyway. By allocating them this stimulus funding we can in part recognise that they have had costs incurred. It is not just border councils who have had costs incurred during the pandemic. All councils have had various impacts, but all of them will have received more funding through our stimulus programs than the cost impact on their budget.

CHAIR: We have a printout copy of an ABC website news article. While we are here, are we all happy to table that? So tabled. We also have the correspondence from the Deputy Premier to the Deputy Prime Minister? We are all happy to table that? Thank you.

Mr HART: Deputy Premier, the federal government did not close the state borders; the state closed them. Isn't it fair that the state reimburse those councils that did have an extra cost—because not all councils did—for the funds that they spent?

Dr MILES: Is the member for Burleigh still arguing against the border closures?

Mr HART: Did I say that Deputy Premier?

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh, I am speaking at the moment for everyone's benefit. This is in relation to the previous question? It seems to be covering the same area.

Mr HART: It is seeking clarification from the Deputy Premier, because the Deputy Premier basically said the federal government would not come up with that money when it was not the federal government that closed the state borders. Some councils were impacted by extra costs. Shouldn't the state reimburse those particular councils for the extra cost?

CHAIR: I will allow the Deputy Premier a bit of latitude in answering that one. I think it covers part of the previous question, but I will allow the Deputy Premier to furnish some more comment.

Dr MILES: The point I was making was that we asked publicly and through correspondence for the Commonwealth to apply the disaster arrangements to the pandemic. They repeatedly refused to. If they had, that would have allowed us a mechanism through which to reimburse councils for those costs. All councils bore costs of the COVID response as did state governments—all organisations. It was considered that the best mechanism—

Mr HART: The cost of your decisions.

CHAIR: Through the chair, please.

Dr MILES: Are you criticising these decisions?

Mr HART: I am saying it is the cost of your decisions.

CHAIR: Through the chair, please. It is being answered at the moment. Could the Deputy Premier continue.

Dr MILES: I am astounded that the member for Burleigh is still prosecuting this argument. It is pretty incredible.

CHAIR: Do we have any further questions? Member for Warrego.

Ms LEAHY: Thank you chair. I have a further question for the minister. If there is no path for reimbursement of these state imposed costs on local governments, does the Deputy Premier accept that the impact on these already financially stressed councils is equal to about a three to four per cent rate rise on ratepayers or some \$200 per ratepayer, for instance, in the Paroo shire?

CHAIR: I will rule that out of order. That is a big hypothetical. Does the member want to rephrase that?

Ms LEAHY: Yes. In relation to these costs imposed upon councils and the cost shift, why doesn't the state just pay and help these councils?

Dr MILES: Because what we did is provide to those councils a far greater quantum of funds in stimulus. Many of the projects funded by that stimulus would have otherwise been borne from within their budget. For example, the Paroo Shire Council has received \$1.14 million in additional state funding that it would not have received otherwise. The Bulloo Shire Council has received \$1,030,000 in additional funding. The Goondiwindi Regional Council has received \$1.35 million in additional funding. If the member wants to work her arithmetic, she should offset that purported rate increase by the amount that the state has delivered in additional funds to those councils.

CHAIR: Do we have any further questions, perhaps in another area, briefly?

Ms LEAHY: Yes. I have a further question to the Office of the Independent Assessor, Ms Florian. My question relates to the time frames for complaints to be finalised. What is the time frame for the longest running investigation that your office has undertaken in relation to a complaint?

Ms Florian: Thank you member for Warrego for the question. I can indicate that in the 2019-20 financial year 38 per cent of investigations were finalised in less than three months, 24 per cent were completed in three to six months, 22.5 per cent took between six and nine months, eight per cent were finalised in nine to 12 months, and 7.5 per cent of investigations took more than 12 months.

There are a number of variables that play into the time that it takes to complete an investigation. They include: the complexity of the allegation, the number of the allegations, and where that investigation has taken place. For example, in the time of COVID investigations in Indigenous and remote communities have been made more difficult due to our inability to be able to travel to those communities and/or to gather electronic evidence from there. So there are a number of variables that play into the time that can be taken.

I cannot advise of the longest investigation that we have, but I can indicate that all our resources are bent to dealing with matters as efficiently as we possibly can. We have received and assessed 1,030 complaints containing 1,097 separate allegations. Some 75 per cent of complaints were assessed within 21 working days. We have completed 408 misconduct investigations in one year and we are undertaking another 132 investigations as at 30 June. We have completed 50 investigations involving 32 councillors; 87 allegations were assigned to the OIA legal team for possible referral to the Councillor Conduct Tribunal; and 50 matters involving 37 councillors and 69 allegations were referred to the Councillor Conduct Tribunal.

In addition to that, we have been engaged in a broad range of prevention measures aimed at reducing the number of complaints that the OIA receives, and we have worked with various stakeholders across the local government sector to leverage our communal resources to be able to not only get those messages out as far as possible but also have the greatest impact with the least amount of resource.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, with regard to Service Delivery Statements volume 1 page 55, can you update the committee on the W4Q projects supporting jobs in the north-west?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. Queenslanders know that we are a big state, spanning over 1.8 million square kilometres. We are also home to over five million people, who live across 77 local council areas. Ensuring that every one of these communities, from the north-west to the south-east, is supported is a top priority. We know that the global pandemic has hit our country hard, and the north-west region is no exception. Over the next four years the Palaszczuk government will work hard every day to ensure that each one of our 77 communities emerges from the pandemic stronger.

Through Works for Queensland we are delivering to councils in the north-west, including the Moondarra Drive combined cycling and walking track, which was supported by Works for Queensland. It connects the community to the beautiful Lake Moondarra and is promoting physical exercise. It also promotes cyclist safety by giving cyclists an alternative location to the road. We are funding a multisports complex in Georgetown which includes a community gym.

I am pleased to report that the funding has secured the stabilisation of the Flinders River, ensuring greater resilience to flooding in the area. That project addressed the lack of drainage and overland flow on the riverbank. In the Etheridge Shire Council area Works for Queensland has secured an upgrade to the Terrestrial visitor information centre. In the Carpentaria shire it is funding infrastructure improvements at the Les Wilson Barramundi Discovery Centre and hatchery. That will attract more visitors there. It is through programs like Works for Queensland that the Palaszczuk government is achieving economic recovery for Queensland.

CHAIR: Earlier we touched on the Office of the Independent Assessor. Can you update the committee on resourcing for that office?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. This also goes to some of the matters raised by the member for Warrego. Our government is committed to ensuring transparency and accountability in the decision-making of Queensland councils. It is on the foundation of transparency and accountability that all good government at all levels of government is built. The reforms we have implemented in relation to the Office of the Independent Assessor are extremely important, and I commend Ms Florian as Queensland's Independent Assessor. She has extensive experience and is doing a very good job.

The OIA is committed to the efficient, effective and transparent management of complaints about the conduct of Queensland councillors. It provides information on its website clearly setting out the OIA's jurisdiction, how people can lodge complaints and how complaints can be managed. Thanks to these reforms we can continue to expect councillors to be strong and fair representatives of their communities.

The continuing high number of complaints received is likely due to this heightened focus on integrity, previous under-reporting and increased confidence in raising issues with an independent body in the knowledge they will be properly considered. Particularly encouraging is the increased number of

complaints being received directly from the local government sector. The higher number of matters coming from the sector indicates a strengthening culture of integrity in response to local government reforms.

We also know that not all complaints are substantiated, and the OIA has used a three-step escalation process to effectively deal with vexatious and improper complainant behaviours. Proactive steps have also been taken to reduce complaint volumes through targeted training and interventions for councils where a pattern of complaints identifies recurring themes or capacity issues. From 30 October 2019 to 3 March 2020, 100 per cent of the 1,574 candidates who nominated in the local government elections completed that new training.

Prior to the establishment of the OIA, councillor complaint matters were handled by the then department of local government, racing and multicultural affairs. We anticipated when we created the OIA that they would receive approximately 160 complaints a year, that being the highest number of complaints received in a single year in all of the previous seven years. As Ms Florian outlined, in the 2019-20 financial year the OIA received 1,030 complaints, compared to the 160 we anticipated. Despite that, 75 per cent were assessed within 21 days. This is a credit to the fantastic team there. As at 31 October there were just 34 complaints pending assessment. I would like to commend the Independent Assessor and her team given that workload.

Given that workload, the importance of the office and the importance of these matters being dealt with in a timely way, I am pleased to advise the committee and announce today that we will provide additional funding for the remainder of the financial year—around \$250,000, which will see an additional three positions for that period of time to assist them to clear that increased workload and ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently, effectively and transparently.

Mr KATTER: There is a statement in the departmental overview of the SDS talking about capacity building and sustainability with regard to the waste levy that was imposed on local governments, predicated on the fact that local industries in recycling would evolve. How does the minister reconcile that statement with the events on the ground in my electorate of Traeger? I table a document that shows that one prominent local business has just shelved its plans for tyre recycling. That is the only business that has come about from that period of the waste levy and trying to incentivise that. Minister, can you reconcile the statement that we are trying to build capacity and sustainability in those councils with the reality on the ground? The one business that tried to get going, despite my deputations, has folded.

Dr MILES: I am not aware of the specifics of that business, member for Traeger. There are officers in State Development who work on industry development in the waste recovery industry. It might be that they can assist that proponent with getting that project off the ground. We are happy to organise that for you. Without fully understanding the business model and whatever else, it is hard to comment with regard to that specific matter. We are seeing increased investment and jobs in waste recycling and recovery as a result of the waste levy. There are obviously other factors at play with that particular project.

CHAIR: I note that we have here an article from the *Townsville Bulletin* on that issue. Is the committee happy to have that tabled? It is so tabled. We will go to some clarifications. I understand we are seeking director-general advice regarding comments on 17 March. Have we dealt with that one?

Mr Walker: The department is not aware of any such complaint into the department. It is worth noting that I think Ms Florian drew out that she and her independent assessment group would be the right party to provide such a matter.

CHAIR: The other matter was clarification on the cost to local government regarding COVID works. Have we dealt with that one?

Mr Walker: I thought we had.

CHAIR: Okay. To wrap this up, I go to the Deputy Premier.

Dr MILES: Thank you, Mr Chair, committee members and visiting MPs for the interest you have shown today in my portfolio areas. Preparing for the annual estimates hearing is an extensive undertaking and there are many people in the newly formed Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning who have contributed to today's proceedings. Delivering a budget and preparing for estimates is no easy feat while going through machinery-of-government changes. The departmental team who worked on estimates have put in significant work in much shorter time frames than usual. I want to thank Director-General Damien Walker and his team, the deputy

directors-general and their staff, the Coordinator-General, the chief executives and the other witnesses here today, particularly the CEO of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority and the Independent Assessor.

I also want to thank Assistant Minister Nikki Boyd for her support; my acting Chief of Staff, Katherine Wright; and advisers Benton Wecker, Rebecca Fanning, Rachel Gallagher, Amy Hunter, Maddie Cunnington, Riley Lange, Larin Bligh and all of my ministerial office staff for the work they have put in preparing for today. They all worked through the weekend and late into the night to ensure that we were able to answer as many of the committee's questions as possible.

Today's estimates would have been very different had Queensland still been in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, so I want to say thank you to all Queenslanders. Thanks for staying home when it was needed, for listening to the health advice, for holidaying at home and for supporting local businesses. We would not be where we are today without your hard work.

Thanks to you, Mr Chair, and members of the committee as well as the other parliamentary staff who have supported our hearings today. I look forward to seeing you in the next session as the acting Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Deputy Premier. Thank you to our officials and departmental officers today as well. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 1.45 pm with the examination of estimates for the portfolio areas of the acting Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water.

Proceedings suspended from 1.01 pm to 1.45 pm.

ESTIMATES—STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE—REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MANUFACTURING AND WATER

In Attendance

Hon. Dr SJ Miles, Acting Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing, Minister for Water

Mr I Hutcheon, Chief of Staff

Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water

Mr F Carroll, Director-General


Ms L Dobe, Deputy Director-General

Seqwater

Mr N Brennan, Chief Executive Officer

Sunwater

Mr G Stockton AM, Chief Executive Officer

 **CHAIR:** Good afternoon. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water. The committee will examine the minister's portfolio until 4.30 pm, starting with the area of water. The committee will adjourn for a short break at 3.15. Visiting members here today are the member for Nanango, Mrs Deb Frecklington. I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. We also have the member for Mirani, Mr Stephen Andrew. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament also apply in this hearing.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, the director-general, officials, departmental officers and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental officers to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or the director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water portfolio areas open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Dr MILES: Thank you, Chair, and welcome back to members of the committee and also welcome to the members for Mirani, Nanango and Maiwar. I appear before you this afternoon as the Acting Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water. The Hon. Glenn Butcher is currently on leave. Water security in Queensland is a high priority for the Palaszczuk government. Queenslanders understand more than most the importance of a secure water supply, particularly those regional areas that are still dealing with record-breaking drought conditions. Water will always be the lifeblood of any community and water infrastructure and water security provide economic opportunities to communities throughout Queensland, particularly regional Queensland.

At the heart of it, water represents jobs and, most importantly, jobs for our regional communities. As we move from a health response to an economic response in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, these jobs and opportunities are more important than ever as we build a better Queensland. That is why the Palaszczuk government is investing in our regions to make sure water is available where and when we need it. It is why our water planning system is built on a strong foundation of science and consultation so we can continue to deliver fair, transparent and accountable allocation of water based on the best available advice and evidence.

We are proud that Queensland was the first state to have all of its water resource plans for Murray-Darling Basin catchments accredited by the Australian government as being compliant with the basin plan. The Rural Water Futures program will also bring innovative new approaches to transparency and accountability for rural water use and management. While effective management of our existing water resources is important, we know that our regions also need new sources of water as well. That

is why the Palaszczuk government has committed \$1.2 billion to water infrastructure since 2017, providing water security and growth opportunities for our farmers and communities. This investment has supported around 2,300 jobs, many in regional areas across the state.

We continue to invest in new bulk water supply infrastructure across the state, including \$176 million for Rookwood Weir near Rockhampton, \$30 million towards Big Rocks Weir near Charters Towers and \$13.7 million towards the Granite Belt Irrigation Project near Stanthorpe, and we are working in partnership with the federal government and proponents across regional Queensland to progress multiple other potential projects including Urannah Dam and the North and South Burnett water options assessment. As the Premier said, this investment in water is vital to the economic prosperity of Queensland's communities, both now and into the future.

We are also committing more than \$81 million over three years to reduce water costs to irrigators, allowing them to grow more crops and employ more people. We are continuing to build on our proud record of water infrastructure investment. Whether that is the \$420 million we are investing to secure Townsville's water supply, the \$15 million for emergency water carting for Stanthorpe or the \$4.2 million to assist Goondiwindi Regional Council to manage water supply risks, we are building infrastructure and providing the necessary support to communities across the state.

Public safety is the No. 1 priority for the Palaszczuk government, and it should be for any government. That is why our government owned corporations Sunwater and Seqwater will provide \$329 million on capital expenditure, including dam improvements, in the next financial year. We continue to take urgent action to ensure the safety of Paradise Dam and the people of Bundaberg while making sure local irrigators continue to have the water they need. As I have said, water is a critical social and economic resource in our state, especially for our regions. The plans we have in place, whether that is building water infrastructure, undertaking dam improvement work or continuing to make water cheaper for irrigators, continue our plan for growth and prosperity for all Queensland's communities. Thank you and I look forward to the committee's questions.

I introduce to you Director-General Frankie Carroll. Also at the front table is Deputy Director-General for Water, Linda Dobe, who we may call upon to answer water related questions.

CHAIR: We will now open the questioning.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you very much, Deputy Premier, for acting. I would like to ask a question of the CEO of Seqwater, please, Mr Brennan. Given the SEQ water grid now sits, as at 12.20 today, at 54.9 per cent, can you confirm that the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme recommissioning program has commenced?

Mr Brennan: Thank you very much for your question. In line with our drought response plan, the Gold Coast desal plant has been fully operationalised. In relation to the western corridor scheme, we are currently supplying Swanbank and Tarong power stations and we have advised the government that, in line with the predicted weather conditions, we have commenced initial further restarting of the western corridor scheme. We have organised expenditure to ensure that we do the initial startup with the Bureau of Meteorology's predictions of a wet summer in December and January. We have ensured that our expenditure is such that we do not overspend and we have until February/March before we need to go into full restart on the western corridor scheme.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have a follow-up to Mr Brennan. You are suggesting in February or March of next year you will be commencing introducing recycled water into the drinking water of South-East Queensland?

Mr Brennan: No, the western corridor scheme will take two years to recommission. We have two years to work through. There are two wet seasons to come through. It will be two years before we look to put recycled water into Wivenhoe.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: You are looking to do that. You have commenced it.

Mr Brennan: Yes.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Is that in relation to a prolonged dry season or two failed wet seasons and then we will be having recycled water in South-East Queensland's water supply?

Mr Brennan: I suppose to clarify that, yes, we have two wet seasons to come through so we monitor and work in with the bureau in relation to their modelling at this stage. We will get through this wet season. The bureau is predicting December and January potentially as being fairly wet so we will monitor that. The outcomes of that will furnish how we then look at the further restart of the recycled scheme which will go through until next year. So, it is a two-year program that we gradually crank up.

CHAIR: For clarification, is it the recommissioning of the plant or talking about where the supply is going?

Mr Brennan: It is recommissioning. There are three plants so it is the recommissioning of three plants.

CHAIR: Sorry, member for Nanango.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you. That helped a lot. The recommissioning has commenced. The anticipation is that in two years there is a high possibility, depending on the seasons, that Brisbane and the south-east corner will be having recycled water in their drinking supply at Wivenhoe. What percentage does the SEQ grid have to get to before you actually turn that on?

CHAIR: Before we get to that, there are certainly some hypotheticals in the first part of that question.

Dr MILES: It was more like verballing.

CHAIR: It could well be.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy to rephrase.

CHAIR: Can I emphasise that certainly the second part was probably more relevant and conforming to standing orders.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you, Mr Chair, and I note your interest in this matter, as well as that of many Queenslanders—South-East Queenslanders in particular—would be because it is a real issue given that the government has now recommenced the recycled water program into Wivenhoe which is well known as SEQ's drinking supply.

Dr MILES: Just to clarify, no decision with regard to that has been made.

CHAIR: I think the Deputy Premier will be able to furnish some more information on that. I think we are talking about recommissioning and not direction of where that water is going.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy to move on. Mr Brennan, if I can then get a direct answer in relation to what is the percentage that the grid has to get to before the recycled water from the recommissioned plant is turned on? Is there a trigger point?

Mr Brennan: Mandatory restrictions would come in at 50 per cent. At 50 per cent we get down to a target of 140 litres per person. At 50 per cent, moving to 25 per cent we would be looking at recycled water, given government approval.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Again my question is to the CEO. Is the 50 per cent trigger point and the decision to put recycled water into South-East Queensland's drinking supply a decision made by the trigger point and yourself as CEO of Seqwater or is it a ministerial direction?

CHAIR: I did not hear that properly. Was it 50 per cent or 25 per cent?

Mr Brennan: At 50 per cent we bring in the voluntary restrictions¹, then when we get to 40 per cent we would be looking at instigating recycled water. That decision would be made in consultation with the shareholding ministers. It is not a Seqwater decision.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Is that a recommendation that you are in the process of making to the Deputy Premier, given that fact that we are sitting at 54.9 per cent and the trigger is less than five per cent away?

Mr Brennan: In relation to where we are at the moment, we have advised the shareholding ministers that we are recommissioning. We have also advised them, given the probability of weather conditions, that we will hold off on some of that expenditure until probably February, March or April depending on the wet season. Then we will continue recommissioning. Depending on what happens the following year, and as we drop and the 50 per cent level brings in the mandatory restrictions, 40 per cent would then be the trigger point to bring in recycled water, which we would then recommend to the shareholding ministers in line with our drought response plan.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I now turn to the Deputy Premier, the acting water minister. Given the answers that we have just heard—and it is clear that the government has been notified that recycled water coming into our drinking supply will be a possibility of and that is a decision you as a shareholding minister would make—what future planning has the Palaszczuk government done in relation to the desperate need in the future for a reliable water source for SEQ?

¹ In correspondence received 10 December 2020, the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water clarified that the transcript should read 'mandatory' restrictions instead of 'voluntary' restrictions as stated during the hearing.

Mr MADDEN: Point of order, Chair.

CHAIR: A point of order has been raised by the member for Ipswich West.

Mr MADDEN: I am concerned that this is drifting into a hypothetical, which is excluded by standing order 115(b).

Dr MILES: Frankly, it is a series of hypotheticals.

CHAIR: I understand what the member is saying about a series of hypotheticals, but I will give the minister some latitude to answer that question.

Dr MILES: To clarify, the series of hypotheticals that the member for Nanango is relying on is that we have another dry wet season, which is contrary to the predictions that have been provided by the Bureau of Meteorology; that we then have a subsequent dry wet season—and it is even less likely that we would have that in consecutive terms; and that those conditions would need to be met before we would even reach the point where that would have to be considered.

What Seqwater has outlined is that they are taking the very reasonable step, given the significant lead time, of commissioning equipment. They are delaying those elements of that commissioning that would require significant investment until the first of those hypotheticals is satisfied, which, again, is unlikely given the advice of the bureau. I also understand that the focus of effort is on identifying other current customers who could use the purified water, just as Swanbank Power Station does, so that they can be provided with the water in the first instance, therefore reducing the drawdown on the drinking water supply. All of that work is underway and all of that is prudent.

Clearly we will continue to monitor it. It is not unusual for dam levels to fluctuate throughout the year, based on usage and on rainfall. The bureau advises that, given the La Nina weather pattern, we should expect rainfall this season. That is why, very prudently, they have put off those investments until March/April next year.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have another question to the acting minister. According to the QCA, the Eton Haughton irrigation scheme south of Mackay is set for double-digit percentage water price increases in 2021. After factoring in the government's election commitment to a 15 per cent decrease, what will be the total water price increase that the farmers on that scheme will expect to pay from 2021?

CHAIR: Minister, that relates directly through to the expenditure in the coming year, so I will allow that.

Dr MILES: Thank you, Chair. Given that that is a very specific question—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Dr MILES: We will try to get some information to the committee before the end of the session.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I would like the minister to inform the committee of this: is the discount that the Palaszczuk government took to the election as an election commitment from the current frozen water price or is it based on the proposed QCA price increases whereby our irrigators will actually end up paying more for water, rather than less?

Dr MILES: My understanding is that our proposal is that those discounts would apply from 1 July next year on the price that applies from 1 July next year, but that comes on top of other relief measures that have included the freezing of water prices and absorbing dam safety costs. Those measures themselves are saving the average irrigator around \$2½ thousand at this stage.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: As a follow-on, to clarify, the discount is based, from your answer—so I am not verballing—on the price increase that will be set down from the QCA on 1 July 2021? Therefore, you are clarifying for the committee that irrigators will, in fact, be paying above what they are actually paying now irrespective of the 15 per cent discount?

Dr MILES: Just to be sure that I am providing the committee with the most accurate information, I will ask the deputy director-general to address the specifics of that, if she is able.

Ms Dobe: For three years from 2021-22 the government will invest \$81 million to support irrigators where the government sets the prices for water by Sunwater and Seqwater. This provides a 50 per cent discount on irrigation prices for fruit and vegetable growers and a 15 per cent discount for all other irrigators. Already thousands of Queensland farmers see their water prices remain the same or fall for 2021 as part of the government's response to COVID-19. There is a reconfirmation of the commitment to exclude the irrigators' share of dam safety upgrade costs and irrigation prices for the duration of the government. For 2021 the government will pay Sunwater and Seqwater a community service obligation payment of \$14.7 million to cover the gap between prices in irrigation water supply costs.

CHAIR: We are coming to the end of that block of questions. I will allow the member for Nanango to come back to that. Does the member for Traeger have a question?

Mr KATTER: I do, thank you, Mr Chair. One moment.

CHAIR: Shall we come back to you?

Mr KATTER: Yes please, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: We will go to government questions and the member for Ipswich West.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, I refer to volume 3, page 37, of the Service Delivery Statements. Will you advise the committee how the government is reducing water charges for the agricultural sector and how this supports job growth?

Dr MILES: It is always a pleasure to talk about how the Palaszczuk government continues to support our agricultural industry as part of Queensland's economic plan to back Queensland jobs and grow our economy. As the member has quite rightly pointed out, our government is delivering on our commitment to reduce water charges for farmers right across Queensland. For the 2020-21 financial year, thousands of Queensland farmers will see their water prices remain the same or decrease compared to 2019-20. We will pay Seqwater and Sunwater up to \$14.7 million in community service obligations to cover the gap between prices and supply costs to make this happen. In effect, the government's decision means that irrigators will, on average, be roughly \$400 a year better off in 2020-21 than in 2019-20. We have also committed to not include the irrigators' share of dam safety upgrade costs in irrigation prices. The Palaszczuk government will continue to fund the irrigators' share of the costs of upgrading dams to keep them safe. This is part of ongoing measures to keep water prices down for irrigators and enable this important sector to grow and create more jobs.

Agriculture is one of Queensland's traditional economic strengths, a major pillar of our economy and a sector that employs many people across Queensland. That is why we have allocated \$81.6 million over the next three years to lower irrigation prices to help protect and grow jobs in this important sector. From 1 July 2021, where the government sets prices for water for irrigators from Sunwater and Seqwater the irrigators will see their prices drop by a minimum of 15 per cent. Irrigators who use this water for growing fruit and vegetables will see those discounts increase to 50 per cent. Our fruit and vegetable growers support thousands of harvesting, picking and processing jobs across the state. That is why we have targeted the 50 per cent discount at this labour-intensive sector. Our farmers are doing it tough as they deal with the fallout of long-running drought, bushfires, severe weather events, volatile markets and the impacts of COVID-19. These measures will help our farmers to keep operating, creating jobs and underpinning our state's economic recovery.

We have the ability to make those decisions and provide that support for the benefit of the agricultural sector because we have also guaranteed that water assets remain in the hands of the people of Queensland. This gives us the flexibility to keep downward pressure on prices, which is an opportunity we would not have if the LNP had been able to execute their plan to sell those assets. It also means that the government owned water entities have the ability to make decisions that benefit the whole of Queensland and not just private shareholders.

Mr SMITH: I refer to volume 3, page 37 of the SDS. Can the Deputy Premier please advise how the government is supporting households, particularly given the impact of COVID-19, with paying their water bills?

Dr MILES: The Palaszczuk Labor government knows this pandemic has been tough on Queenslanders, as with people all over the world. The efforts of Queenslanders allowed us to roll out Queensland's strategy for economic recovery. As part of that strategy, we acted quickly to provide immediate relief for households. More than two million Queenslanders have received \$200 off their utility bill as part of our \$300 million household package. The \$100 discount on water alone represents a 20 per cent saving on the average water bill for a household in South-East Queensland. This relief was applied directly to power bills because it was the fastest way to get it to Queenslanders to give them some relief. The utility payment provided immediate, effective and important relief to all Queensland households in response to the pandemic.

While the discount to utility bills is a one-off that all Queenslanders can benefit from, the Queensland government has already been providing ongoing support for water bills to those more vulnerable in our community. The Palaszczuk government helps pensioners with meeting the costs of essential services by providing the statewide pensioner rates subsidy and the South-East Queensland pensioner water subsidy. The government will deliver \$56.3 million towards the pensioner rates subsidy in 2020-21. The initiative provides up to \$200 each financial year to eligible pensioner home owners statewide.

Furthermore, the government has committed \$19.3 million this financial year to the South-East Queensland pensioner water subsidy, supporting pensioners living in the regions with meeting the costs involved with higher levels of infrastructure and water security. Each eligible South-East Queensland pensioner will benefit by up to \$120 per annum. The South-East Queensland pensioner water subsidy was introduced in 2008 following the impact of the millennium drought. South-East Queensland now has one of the most reliable water supplies in the country, thanks to the foresight of previous Labor governments. The South-East Queensland bulk water charges reflect a significant investment in water infrastructure.

To be eligible to receive either subsidy, a person must hold a Queensland pensioner concession card or a Department of Veterans' Affairs health card Gold Card, be the owner or life tenant of a property which is their principal place of residence and be legally responsible for the payment of local council rates and charges levied on that property.

Furthermore, Queensland water entities also have existing measures in place to assist at-risk customers facing financial hardship. This can include the introduction of payment plans or negotiating short-term extensions to payment plans. Customers should contact their water service provider for assistance.

The next review of South-East Queensland bulk water prices proposed to commence in mid-2020 was deferred as a result of COVID-19. This decision was made after careful consideration to allow Seqwater and its customers to focus resources and attention on responding to COVID-19.

CHAIR: Deputy Premier, I refer to page 37 of the SDS. In relation to the department's responsibility to ensure regional economic development and the critical role water security plays in Queensland communities, can you provide an update on what the government is doing to assess water security needs and economic opportunities for regional Queensland?

Dr MILES: The Palaszczuk government is committed to providing reliable water supplies for regional Queensland. To do this, we need to understand the unique challenges and opportunities that exist in each regional area. That is why I am pleased to confirm that the Palaszczuk government has committed \$9 million in new funding towards regional water assessments in the wider Tablelands area; the Burnett and Bundaberg area; and the Darling Downs, Southern Downs and surrounding areas. Under the program, we will commit \$3 million each for each regional water assessment. These areas were identified as key regions where, if additional water could be allocated, we could help to generate positive economic development outcomes for the local economics. This is part of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to deliver on Queensland's economic plan to recover from the global COVID-19 pandemic and build back stronger than before.

We understand the importance of water supply to communities and the opportunities that it provides to drive regional economic growth. To do that, a robust assessment of all the benefits and costs is required before the Queensland government can consider investing in new bulk water supply infrastructure. These regional water assessments will vary in their nature and objectives, given there are differing levels of knowledge about water projects and differences in available water in each region. The outcomes of the Bradfield panel will also be considered. The wider Tablelands assessment will build upon previous recent assessments and look at the financial, economic and social viability of a range of options. This includes ideas such as the North Johnstone diversion concept, diverting water from the upper reaches of the Johnstone River to the immediate local areas and into the Barron River catchment into Tinaroo Dam.

To achieve greater water security in the face of drought in the Burnett and Bundaberg region, it is proposed that all current activities such as the Paradise Dam detailed business case and the North and South Burnett investigations under the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund be rolled into one roadmap for the available water resources in the area so we can focus on the optimal infrastructure solution. Noting the unprecedented drought conditions in the Darling Downs and Southern Downs region, this assessment will focus on regional long-term water supply options to provide additional water to the area. Recommendations for further work arising from these regional water assessments will fully reflect the principles of the Queensland Bulk Water Opportunities Statement. Meritorious projects will progress to more detailed assessments and business cases as well construction where there is a high likelihood of positive net economic benefits for Queensland.

The four-year assessment program will be undertaken by the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water in close collaboration with Sunwater and engaging with key regional stakeholders, local governments and water users. The Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water will begin scoping these assessments and engaging with key stakeholders.

It is envisaged that they will be undertaken in a staged and staggered approach over the next four years. The investment in the right water infrastructure is a high priority for the Palaszczuk government. By building water infrastructure, bringing water security and jobs, this will help Queensland rebuild its economy from the pandemic impacts and thrive.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, I refer to volume 3, page 37 of the Service Delivery Statement. Following on from my previous question, can you advise the committee how the government is investing in water infrastructure and the jobs that go with it?

Dr MILES: Since 2017, the Palaszczuk government, as I mentioned before, has committed \$1.2 billion in water infrastructure, supporting around 2,300 jobs. This investment has—and will continue to do so—provided water security and growth opportunities for farmers, industry and urban communities. The Palaszczuk government understands the importance of water to communities and how crucial it is for driving regional economic growth. That is why we are fast-tracking feasibility assessments for additional water supplies and investing in the construction of new bulk water supply infrastructure.

Our investments include \$176 million for Rookwood Weir, which includes 286 jobs during construction and includes new road and bridge construction. There is \$13.6 million to kickstart the new Emu Swamp Dam near Stanthorpe, which includes \$6 million in early money for pre-construction works; \$29.5 million for advancing the combined assessment of Burdekin Falls supply, raising and dam improvement project, considering enhancements to meet future extreme weather events and investigating the potential for raising the dam which could potentially provide 150,000 megalitres to the Townsville region; \$215 million for the Houghton pipeline project stage 1 in Townsville and \$195 million towards stage 2 of the pipeline after the Queensland government decided to fully fund the second stage of the pipeline; sealing a \$24 million deal for the next stage of assessment of the proposed Hells Gates Dam; the declaration of the \$2.9 billion Urannah Dam project as a coordinated project; \$30 million towards the construction of the Big Rocks Weir; \$16.5 million towards the \$28.1 million project for channel modernisation for the Mareeba-Dimbulah Water Supply Scheme including 18 jobs; and \$34 million for the Gladstone area water board's offline water storage facility. All of these projects have either commenced planning or construction processes. The financial and technical support provided by the Palaszczuk government is critical to the future of these projects and the regions they support.

When it comes to water infrastructure, community safety is paramount. Sunwater and Seqwater will spend \$329 million on capital expenditure, including dam improvement projects in this financial year alone.

The Palaszczuk government has committed \$15 million to maintain the Stanthorpe community's water supply during the ongoing drought and \$4.2 million to assist Goondiwindi Regional Council to manage their water supply risks. This will assist the council with managing water supply risks for several communities. The Queensland Bulk Water Opportunities Statement provides a statement of the Queensland government's objectives for bulk water supply and context for considering bulk water infrastructure proposals.

In water supply sources across Queensland there are significant quantities of water allocations available today that can support economic development without the need for significant new bulk water supply infrastructure. The Queensland government is continuing to assess how that water can be used beneficially, working with stakeholders to identify how to overcome any barriers to its use. The Queensland government wants to make sure that all the economic benefits and costs, technical feasibility and environmental implications are assessed before considering new bulk water supply infrastructure to ensure the projects do not impose ongoing liabilities on future generations. Feasibility studies and business cases are undertaken in accordance with the project assessment framework.

CHAIR: We will go to non-government questions.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have a question for the CEO of Seqwater. In January 2020 the Premier announced that a pipeline would be delivering water to the Southern Downs and Granite Belt by the end of this year. Could you please provide the committee with an update as to when Seqwater's feasibility study will be completed and whether we can expect to be cutting the ribbon on this pipeline before Christmas?

Mr Brennan: Just to clarify, is this the investigation from Toowoomba to Warwick?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It was the pipeline the Premier announced would be open by the end of this year.

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, would you have a copy of that announcement or the media release for that?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am pretty sure you can find it. It was said in parliament as well.

CHAIR: It would be helpful if we had the document to which you refer and the date. I will let the CEO answer that how he sees fit.

Mr Brennan: Seqwater was requested by the Queensland government to complete a feasibility study of options to improve town water supply security for Warwick and surrounding communities. Our preliminary report was submitted to government in January 2020. A feasibility report in June 2020 confirmed that a Toowoomba to Warwick pipeline remained the preferred solution. It is our understanding that the government is considering the reports. On further direction, we will continue to work with the government stakeholders, including the Toowoomba City Council and Southern Downs Regional Council, on the pipelines projects.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have a follow-up question for the minister. Can you point out to the committee exactly where in the capital measures the funding for this pipeline is, how much the project will cost and when it will be completed given the Premier's announcement in parliament when you were sitting right beside her?

Dr MILES: The member has been unable to point the committee to that statement. What I understood—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Can I clarify that the Deputy Premier is denying that they were going to supply water to the Granite Belt?

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, as I said in the previous question—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have the statement here. I am happy to table it.

CHAIR: It would be useful for us to have a look at that.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I cannot believe you cannot remember this one. There was so much fanfare, Deputy Premier.

Mr SMITH: There is a media report—

CHAIR: One moment—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Another committee member has found the media release as well. Thank you, member for Bundaberg.

CHAIR: This is one where the Premier announced a pipeline could be delivering water to the Southern Downs?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Could. So there is no pipeline.

Dr MILES: You have been caught out misleading the committee today.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It could also rain as well.

Dr MILES: It did rain in February which extended the—

CHAIR: Thank you everyone. This is what the question is being based on. Can we get copies so we can distribute that?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: There is no plan from the Palaszczuk government to actually build a pipeline. It is just a feasibility study and it is obviously just a pipedream.

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, you know the last part of your question contains arguments and imputations. I will allow the Deputy Premier to answer that in the way—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The Deputy Premier could not even remember the announcement.

CHAIR: I have not finished talking, member for Nanango.

Dr MILES: The announcement that you made up. If anyone knows about pipedreams it is the member for Nanango.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: And there he is.

CHAIR: Let us go through the chair. There is going to be no cross-chamber argument. I was about to finish saying that the Deputy Premier can answer that question in the way he sees fit.

Dr MILES: I note that the member for Nanango has acknowledged that she misled the committee in verballing the Premier.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Excuse me. Point of order, Mr Chair. I have not misled the committee. I was referring to the Premier's statement in the Queensland parliament and the media release which I have now tabled.

Dr MILES: There is a very clear difference between—

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, I understand your point of order.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Talk about verballing.

CHAIR: I have given the Deputy Premier some latitude to answer that in the way he sees fit.

Dr MILES: As the chief executive officer just outlined, the consideration has been provided to the government and it will make a decision. The rainfall that the member for Nanango has insisted on denying in February that extended Warwick's water supply to late 2022 obviously provided some flexibility in time frame there. That will be taken into account.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I will move on. Given it appears there is no pipeline and no water—

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, please make no comment just stick to your questions.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I note that Deputy Premier would be able to answer this question irrespective of fact that he is the acting minister. Could the Deputy Premier provide assurances to the committee, but also to the farmers and the businesses around Bundaberg, that there will be no decline in the total available water from that which was originally available through the Paradise Dam for that region?

Dr MILES: I can reiterate the assurance that we have provided which is that the changes we have made to our water sharing rules mean that water users will receive at least the amount of their allocation for 2020-21 even with the water levels kept at 42 per cent.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: My question related specifically to the total available water that Paradise Dam held—the amount of water not the allocation.

Dr MILES: They will receive at least their current allocation.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: To clarify my question—and I appreciate that the minister is acting in this capacity—for an irrigator there is available water for an allocation. What I refer to is the available water that was held in the original dam before the government tore it down?

Dr MILES: We have indicated consistently—

Mr SMITH: Point of order, Mr Chair. I refer to standing order 115 relating to imputations. To suggest that the government tore down the dam suggests that there was some sort of malicious intent. I feel as though that word should not be used in the question.

CHAIR: The member for Bundaberg has a point. You can rephrase that question. Do you want to address that point of order?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I will. I thought the member for Bundaberg would stand up for the locals there, but I will say—

Dr MILES: It is his community and he is wanting to keep them safe.

Mr SMITH: I take offence.

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, I appreciate you have a line of questioning here. We have had a lot of additional comments—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I will rephrase.

CHAIR:—scattered through the questions. I am requesting you to ask those questions without any comments, imputations or arguments. As you were saying.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy to rephrase the question. What I am seeking an answer to, Deputy Premier, is: will there be no decline in the total available water from what was available prior to the government ripping down the dam wall?

Mr SMITH: I raise a point of order.

CHAIR: I am going to rule that question out of order. I gave specific direction about using that kind of language. Do you have another question?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Yes, I do. So I am not able to say 'tear down'. I am not able to say 'rip down'. Should I say 'got the dozers in and reduced the dam wall'? Is that allowed?

CHAIR: I assume that is a question to me as the chair.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Chair, through you to the Deputy Premier, I will ask again: will the Deputy Premier confirm for local landholders, for local farmers, for local irrigators, for local businesses, for people of the Wide Bay—the people who rely on the water from Paradise Dam—will the government commit to maintaining the full amount of available water that was in Paradise Dam before the dam wall was reduced?

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, that is the third time you have asked that question. You already have an answer. Minister, do you want to add anything to what you have already said in answer to that question?

Dr MILES: I do, Chair, because this line of questioning from the member for Nanango is quite extraordinary. She is continuing this claim by the LNP against all of the expert advice, against all of the engineering advice. In her language about our efforts to make Paradise Dam safe, she is implying, bizarrely, that we would have done that without regard to the safety of the people who could have been affected by safety issues at the dam. No-one here knows better than the member for Bundaberg what those safety issues could have meant for that community. It is nothing short of reckless to come in here and suggest anything otherwise. I have repeatedly, in answer to the member's questions, said that we will ensure that all water users receive at least the amount of their allocation, but we will not shy away from having taken the advice and done the right thing.

Mr HART: I have a question for the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, you read two answers to government questions before outlining the 'Rockwood Weir' that you are building. Could you tell us where you are building that dam because I have never heard of it?

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh, you wasted that question.

Mr HART: What is wrong with that question, Chair?

CHAIR: I think we all understand what you are getting at with that question. I think the Deputy Premier is about to clarify. He was saying Rookwood, not 'Rockwood'.

Mr HART: I will ask another question. Deputy Premier, your government is pulling down the wall at Paradise Dam. You are building the Rookwood Weir—

Mr SMITH: I raise a point of order.

Mr HART:—but you have decreased the height of the dam so instead of being a pool, it is now a puddle.

CHAIR: Stop there.

Mr HART: Can you name another dam that your government will commence in this term of government?

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh, the member for Bundaberg is jumping up and down with a point of order.

Mr SMITH: Chair, under standing order 115 re imputations, can we please refer to the essential works on Paradise Dam as essential works to maintain the safety of the people of Bundaberg—all close to 9,000 of them?

CHAIR: I understand your point of order.

Mr HART: I raise a point of order.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. The point of order is about avoiding argumentative, hypothetical language. It is all set out in standing order 115.

Mr HART: Chair, this is budget estimates.

CHAIR: I know, member for Burleigh. I am coming back to you. I am giving you another chance to ask your question without offending the standing orders.

Mr HART: Given what is happening with Paradise Dam and what is happening with Rookwood Weir, can the minister name another dam that his government will commence, and that has not already commenced, in the next four years?

Dr MILES: I have already outlined in some detail our \$1.2 billion capital program for water, infrastructure and planning.

Mr HART: So that would be no.

CHAIR: Order, members! The Deputy Premier is responding.

Dr MILES: As the member referenced, we have made a \$176 million investment in Rookwood Weir. I apologise to the committee for mispronouncing it earlier. We have committed \$13.6 million to Emu Swamp Dam near Stanthorpe; \$16 million to the Burdekin Falls Dam detailed business case into the potential raising of the dam wall; and \$215 million and \$195 million for the Haughton pipeline. We have committed \$24 million to the proposed Hells Gates Dam. We are investing \$28 million to modernise the open channel irrigation scheme on the Atherton Tablelands. We have a whole series of

projects underway. We have committed \$27 million for the construction of Big Rocks Weir, on top of the \$3 million for preconstruction activities. That is on top of the \$30 million matching commitment from the Commonwealth. There are plenty of projects underway, member, right across Queensland.

CHAIR: I will go to the member for Traeger for his question.

Mr KATTER: Will the minister advise what proportion of revenue was returned as financial dividends to the state government through the Mount Isa Water Board to the people of Mount Isa in recent years and further explain why the state government continues to exploit the situation extracting this revenue from the region?

Dr MILES: I have some of that data to hand which I will point to. Then I am happy for the deputy director-general to add more detail as it becomes available. I understand that, at least according to the material I have, the figure for 2019-20 is not yet available, although Ms Dobe might be able to correct me there. In 2018-19, that figure was \$1,478,000. I will ask Ms Dobe if she can go into more detail.

Ms Dobe: Under the state government's dividend-sharing policy, 50 per cent of any dividend and the tax equivalent payments returned to government by the Mount Isa Water Board is remitted to the Mount Isa City Council. The amount payable for 2019-20 is still to be determined. However, since 2010-11 the council has received over \$19 million as a result of this policy.

The Mount Isa Water Board provides safe and secure bulk supply to Mount Isa City Council. The Mount Isa City Council then distributes the water it receives from the board via its local distribution network to the residents of Mount Isa. The board's total water charges in the last financial year averaged around \$1.50 per 1,000 litres of water supplied. This is significantly lower than most other bulk water supplies in the state.

Mount Isa Water Board's charges are agreed with customers in long-term contracts and are based on the widely adopted building block model applied by economic regulators across Australia to estimate the total economic cost of providing the water supply. They do not include any costs associated with local distribution charges by the Mount Isa City Council. The Mount Isa Water Board is not a water retailer and does not set the end-user pricing for Mount Isa residents. Those charges are a matter for the Mount Isa City Council.

Mr KATTER: I have a supplementary question. That is a good segue to my last question. I do not know whether the minister wants me to verbalise the ditto marks, but we spoke about infrastructure charges which relate to new projects. What is the strategy for the government moving forward given their constraints on all utilities?

Dr MILES: I took the opportunity in the break to alert the water officials to your interest in this question. If you are happy, I will get Deputy Director-General Linda Dobe to answer that question.

Ms Dobe: There are a range of drivers for building, upgrading and improving bulk water infrastructure across the state including meeting the demands of a growing population, continuing to meet regulatory requirements and compliance obligations, increasing climate variability, using the state's existing and extensive bulk water supply infrastructure more efficiently and promoting regional economic development. A key objective of the state is to support infrastructure development that provides a commercial return to the state owned water providers which are required by legislation to act commercially. As proponents, the likes of Sunwater and Seqwater aim to advance particular infrastructure projects that provide a commercial return. Much of the recent bulk water infrastructure development in the state, particularly during the resources boon, readily demonstrated a commercial return, like Sunwater's industrial pipelines.

However, with those supply sources now developed, the long-term economic and social benefits of new water infrastructure are receiving broader consideration, particularly as the increasing demand for water necessitates investigation of less commercially effective supply options.

Government funding is often required to make water affordable. Without government funding there is either no new bulk water infrastructure or the price of the additional water supplied is in excess of what consumers can pay. If the price of water is too high, community and economic benefits cannot be realised. The key challenge for the state is ensuring that when subsidies are provided they are to the right projects in the right circumstances and are transparent. This is in line with the objectives of the National Water Initiative. Consequently, the state reviews project delivery to evaluate the benefits gained for the broader community. This is reflected in recent business case proposals undertaken for water infrastructure.

While the most obvious beneficiaries of subsidies are the supplier through cheaper infrastructure and the consumer through cheaper prices, there are potential benefits to the broader community. These economic benefits are realised when additional bulk water supply leads to economic development,

more jobs, improved community resilience and greater demand for other services. Examples of where the government has already adopted less-than-commercial pricing include the construction of Rookwood Weir, which is currently being constructed, and the government's policy on pricing irrigation relief for irrigators, which was announced during the election.

The government's key policy is generally for prices to move towards recovering the irrigation share of the scheme's operating, maintenance and refurbishment costs, but not any share of the initial cost of building any assets constructed before 2000. For 2020-21 this government will pay Sunwater and Seqwater community service obligation payments of up to \$14.7 million to cover the gap between the prices and their irrigation water supply costs. There is an election commitment for significant pricing discounts for irrigators in direct response to pricing concerns raised by irrigators and to create more jobs by supporting the agriculture sector.

CHAIR: Deputy Director-General, I think we have the complete answer. We will go on to government questions.

Mr SMITH: Deputy Premier, will you update the committee on the status of dam safety improvement projects currently underway?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. As we know, dams are long-life assets and require ongoing monitoring and maintenance to ensure modern safety standards are met. In Queensland, dam owners are responsible for the safety of their dams under the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008. Both Seqwater and Sunwater work to meet the Queensland dam safety guidelines and those set by the Australian National Committee on Large Dams.

Dams in Queensland are built to very high safety standards; however, over the last 50 years a number of changes have occurred. In particular, our understanding of extreme weather events and earthquakes has increased, as has our understanding of the condition of existing dams and appropriate dam design and engineering. Another change has been increasing downstream populations at a number of dams, which raises the risk if a dam failure event occurs. Public safety is the No. 1 priority for the Palaszczuk government.

Both Sunwater and Seqwater are delivering dam improvement programs to ensure the safety of Queensland communities. Sunwater and Seqwater's dam improved programs will extend into the late 2020s and mid-2030s respectively. Each entity has a large number of individual projects being progressed through their development phases. Dam upgrades are prioritised by owners using a portfolio risk assessment that considers all dam safety risks, including dam condition data and performance data. This also considers risks associated with growing downstream populations.

In 2019-20 Sunwater and Seqwater delivered \$54 million of investment into dam improvement projects across Queensland. For Sunwater, this included progressing six dam improvement projects; for Seqwater, this included progressing three dam improvement projects. Construction work on the Ewen Maddock Dam upgrade project commenced and Paradise Dam essential works are progressing on schedule. The Ewen Maddock Dam upgrade will support up to 70 local jobs and also include significant improvements to the recreation area. Early works on the Lake MacDonald improvement project have now commenced. Additionally, Toowoomba Regional Council has commenced preliminary investigations to support upgrades to Cressbrook and Cooby dams, which are expected to be completed by 2025. Similarly, the Gladstone Area Water Board is conducting preliminary analysis to support an upgrade to the spillway of Awoonga Dam. For 2020-21 Sunwater and Seqwater are budgeting \$152 million for dam improvement projects. This includes work that ensures the safety of Queenslanders, protects our assets into the future and creates local jobs.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, I refer to volume 3, page 37 of the Service Delivery Statement. Will you update the committee on the work of the expert panel appointed to take a 21st century look at the Bradfield scheme?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for Ipswich West for his question. It is a good question. Since 2017 the Queensland government has committed \$1.2 billion to water infrastructure statewide, supporting almost 2,300 jobs in regional Queensland. We know that unlocking more water in northern and Western Queensland will help drive the economic growth and development that is needed to secure a prosperous future for those regions, and we will consider all options that help us achieve that goal.

In keeping with the Palaszczuk government's continuing commitment to our regions, we have instigated the first comprehensive investigation of the proposed Bradfield inland irrigation scheme in more than 15 years. It is this government that is putting money behind it and funding a 21st century expert re-examination. The Bradfield Regional Assessment and Development Panel has been

established to undertake this work, and they are assessing the financial, economic, environmental, social and technical viability of the Bradfield scheme and Bradfield-like concepts. This expert panel has the knowledge and critical thinking skills that are needed to make sure any projects that make up a Bradfield scheme are not only planned, funded and delivered properly but that they will ultimately grow our economy.

Together, the expertise of the panel members—Professor Ross Garnaut, Dr Georgina Davis and Professor Allan Dale—will give this government clear direction on how to deliver water security and economic opportunities for regional Queensland. In conducting this assessment the panel are focusing on the geographic areas that allow water diversions from the Wet Tropics to the Burdekin and the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin. As part of the assessment the panel is looking at, and making recommendations on, six key themes.

Under theme 1 the panel is considering any Bradfield assessments that have been completed to date, their limitations at the time, and the growth in infrastructure since the original scheme was proposed. Under the second theme, the panel is considering the economic benefits to regional communities and agricultural production, especially through the lens of re-energising the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic recession. Under the third theme, the panel is scanning and analysing existing bulk water infrastructure, the current water demand and identifying whether the supply is meeting the demand.

The fourth theme identifies opportunities that are available to leverage off current infrastructure. Under this theme, the panel is assessing and providing recommendations on where existing bulk water infrastructure can be expanded and connected to support drought-prone regions. Theme 5 focuses on new opportunities. The panel is making recommendations on new opportunities, advising on appropriate staging to maximise return on investment to the Queensland community, considering opportunities to leverage complementary infrastructure, and looking at opportunities associated with renewable energy generation, hydrogen production and resource sector development. Under theme 6 the panel is identifying potential bulk water supply infrastructure opportunities that neighbour the project area.

When undertaking this work the panel is also considering climate change, the impact on the Great Barrier Reef, native title and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural connections. The work that the panel is doing cannot be done in isolation. The panel will be consulting with key stakeholders, including regional councils, to understand their needs and potential benefits to their local communities. Since their establishment the panel has been meeting monthly and has already received multiple briefings from state government agencies and bulk water operators on the key themes of their assessment. Nationally, they have initiated contact with the Centre of Policy Studies and the National Water Grid Authority. The panel is well on its way to developing a concept paper outlining their initial thoughts, which will be shared with my department in January next year.

Finally, by taking a 21st century look at the Bradfield Scheme, the Palaszczuk government is continuing to meet its commitment to prudently act on expert advice and deliver on our pledge to progress water infrastructure that delivers for irrigators, delivers for our regions and delivers for Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Briefly, member for Bundaberg, you have another question.

Mr SMITH: Can the Deputy Premier advise of the importance of prioritising community safety when it comes to dam infrastructure in this state?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question and note how relevant and important this question is to the community he now represents. Dams are essential components of our water supply and irrigation infrastructure and underpin Queensland's economy. Dam failure can cause loss of life and major damage to property and infrastructure. If failure of one of our major dams did occur, the impacts could be catastrophic.

While responsibility for dam safety lies with the dam owner, safety will always be the No. 1 priority for the Palaszczuk government. The Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water regulates safety of water dams to minimise risks to the community and avoid the realisation of impacts. The department's regulatory approach covers water dams whose failure would put personal safety at risk. These are called referable dams. There are 107 referable dams in Queensland. These include major dams such as Wivenhoe and Burdekin Falls Dam and also smaller dams such as detention basins and off-stream storages. Seqwater and Sunwater own two-thirds of Queensland's referable dams. Both organisations have dedicated teams to manage dams and are available to respond to questions specific to their dams.

The risks of dam related incidents and failures are very low, which reflects an active and effective regulator and responsible and diligent dam owners who manage dams through an appropriate program of upgrades, inspections, maintenance and record keeping under state and national dam safety standards. Compliance with regulatory requirements in the dam industry in Queensland is very high and we have an excellent dam safety record, but we know we can never be complacent. We continue to identify emerging risks and avoid the realisation of impacts through regular review, taking on lessons learnt during wet weather events, engaging with experts and maintaining good practice standards. This includes the Palaszczuk government's response to safety concerns raised at Paradise Dam, taking steps to protect the people of Bundaberg by lowering the water level in the dam and reducing the dam wall by approximately 5.8 metres. This has made the dam safer in the event of a flood greater than those which occurred in 2011 and 2013.

As I said, there can be no compromise when it comes to safety. Safety must always come first. Dam upgrade programs ensure safety risks remain at the lowest possible levels. These upgrades may include spillway capacity increases, storage capacity increases, structural modifications or operational and maintenance modifications. They are implemented according to a considered time frame and align with the latest dam safety standards.

Major dam improvement projects currently underway include Paradise Dam, Burdekin Dam, Somerset Dam and Lake Macdonald. Flood events that exceed the design capacity of a dam, while extremely rare, are possible and there may be a short time frame between warning and occurrence of incidents or failure. All referable dams in Queensland have an emergency action plan that describes the response to all potential dam safety hazards. These emergency action plans are published on the department's website and include flood inundation maps. The Palaszczuk government will continue to prioritise dam safety and preparedness, including working with dam owners to achieve our No. 1 goal of keeping Queenslanders safe.

CHAIR: We will now go to the opposition for 10 minutes worth of questions then we will go to the crossbenchers. I call the member for Lockyer.

Mr McDONALD: Deputy Premier, in the minister's response to pre-hearing question No. 1, you outlined 10 irrigation schemes where 1,125 customers were paying more than \$6 million in part A charges where no water was available. Given the historical poor performance of these schemes, the ongoing drought and the effects of COVID, will the government consider waiving these fees as it has done under previous administrations?

CHAIR: On that comment of 'historical poor performance', there is an imputation and an argument in there. I do not know exactly what you are referring to and none of us really do, and I will not ask about it. I am going to ask the Deputy Premier to address the gist of that question, ignoring that particular interpretation.

Mr McDONALD: For clarification, Chair, it is the 'historical poor performance' of the irrigation schemes, some as low as 10 per cent.

CHAIR: Ten per cent in terms of return—

Mr McDONALD:—of the availability of water. One year in 10.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is a technical term that irrigators use.

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Nanango. I understand that but my point is that it is very subjective or you need more information. Be that as it may, let us not argue about this. I am asking the Deputy Premier to answer the question

Dr MILES: Only to note what the answer says—which is the only way we could avoid these maintenance costs would be to close the schemes permanently and decommission the infrastructure. I guess it underlines how important it is for future infrastructure that informed decisions are made on the basis of expert advice so that we do not find ourselves with more situations like this.

Mr McDONALD: I have a follow-up question. Minister Lynham wrote to me in June 2020—and I will provide to you that email—stating he was open to engaging further with relevant constituents, letting us know he would like to hear about constructive, alternative proposals around irrigation pricing for irrigation areas, particularly in those underperforming schemes where it is under 40 per cent across the state. Will the minister undertake to work with growers in my region to be able to get a fairer deal for part A charges?

Dr MILES: I am very happy to commit the minister to—

Mr McDONALD: I should say the region of Queensland, right across the state

Dr MILES: No doubt Minister Butcher, once he is back on deck, will reach out to you, member for Lockyer, and discuss the best way to engage with those communities. It may well be some of them do want to head down those paths. I am sure in the new year he will be happy and available to do that.

Mr McDONALD: Thank you, Deputy Premier.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Can I quickly follow up on my colleague's question there so I can clarify it. We have 1,125 water users who are getting zero water supply and are paying to the Palaszczuk government \$6 million through the GOC. I think my colleague's question was quite clear. Will the Palaszczuk government commit to considering relief, like previous administrations have done, for those part A water charges?

Dr MILES: As I said in response to the member for Lockyer, they are the costs incurred in maintaining those schemes. Equally, I am happy to indicate that the minister, when he gets a chance to engage with those communities, will consider what options are available.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you. I have a question if I may to the CEO of Sunwater. Mr Stockton, congratulations on your appointment. In 2017 the Palaszczuk government promised \$100 million of Stanwell dividends to help fund the proposed hydro-electric power station at Burdekin Falls Dam. The project was slated for commencement in 2020. Can you please provide the committee with an update on this project and whether that \$100 million in funding remains available to Sunwater and whether you can expect construction to commence before the end of 2020?

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, you have clearly got the media releases there to which you are referring.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have it here because I thought you may ask so I am happy to table it.

CHAIR: Indeed, and I thought you would be prepared for that. We will distribute that for us to have a look at.

Mr Stockton: Thank you very much for the question. Unfortunately, I do not have any detail to hand in relation to that commitment made previously. To my understanding at present, Sunwater is not in receipt of any funds associated with hydro work for Burdekin Falls Dam.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you very much, Mr Stockton. You have answered my question very well. Deputy Premier, given the CEO's response, where do you stand in relation to the 2017 commitment of your government to take \$100 million from Stanwell dividends to fund this hydro power at the Burdekin Falls Dam? Obviously, we are nearly at the end of 2020 and once again this is another project not started, not commenced, a fake promise. I ask the Deputy Premier to please comment on the commitment of his government from 2017.

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, you are doing pretty well there. You got to the end there.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you.

CHAIR: Obviously there were some parts of that question which offended standing orders. I think it will be useful at this stage, seeing that we have these statements from the cabinet—can we move that these be tabled? Okay. Can these be distributed? I think it would be useful—because the member is referring to this—for the Deputy Premier to be able to look at this.

Dr MILES: My understanding is that hydro projects as well as the Stanwell dividends sit in the energy minister's portfolio, but I am happy—perhaps in the break—to see what information I can find for the member and report back to the committee.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you. I will follow on with another question. My question is to the Director-General. In early 2019 the federal coalition government announced \$18 million funding for an off-stream water storage project at Glendorf near Maryborough. Would the director-general please provide a timeline as to when the Glendorf off-stream water storage will commence? When is construction expected to begin? I am more than happy for the Deputy Director-General to answer Mr Carroll if you want to pass it on. I do not mind.

CHAIR: I know that we do not have to refer to SDS, but it is useful for the members to my right to get an indication of where in SDS they may find that.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Sorry.

Mr Carroll: I thank the member for the question. My understanding from the department is that the funding was given to MSF Sugar and not the government.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: To be clear, the funding does not sit with Sunwater; it sits with MSF?

Mr Carroll: That is the information I have been provided.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I would like to clarify a question that I asked earlier in relation to irrigation prices and the reduction supposed thereof, because unfortunately I am not satisfied with the answer. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can I clarify the discount that has been proposed, given the fact that the Palaszczuk government has proposed a discount for irrigators? This is not an imputation, but by picking winners in terms of whether it is a fruit grower—not a cane grower or other productive crops—how does the Deputy Premier intend to utilise the discount process to work out which water is being used for horticulture and which water is being used for other uses?

Dr MILES: I might ask the deputy director-general to answer how that differential discount can be applied. With regards to the question the member was asking earlier in terms of what the base price of the discount will be applied to, I am keen to get some advice and return to that later with the indulgence of the committee. I might ask Ms Dobe about how we would classify irrigators and apply the discount.

CHAIR: Just before we go onto that, we will be coming back—

Dr MILES: I am separately happy to have the argument about—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: What is that? The Deputy Premier wants to have an argument? I missed it.

Dr MILES: I am separately happy to take a question about the differential discount and the rationale behind that.

CHAIR: We will be able to clarify that. I am aware of time constraints. Can I ask the deputy director-general to give a really brief reply of, say, about a minute?

Ms Dobe: It will be less than a minute. The election commitment has just been received and we still are working through the policy on how that will be implemented.

CHAIR: I am going to go to the crossbenchers. Who would like to go first? Member for Mirani.

Mr ANDREW: I refer to page 3-37 of volume 3, 'create competitive regional economies'. Given the situation of the discounts and how they have been structured to be allocated on 1 June, has the government looked into the fact that the stimulus packages from the federal government are finishing in March and there are issues now surrounding crops due to the fact that our royalties have dropped? Has the government looked at implementing these reductions in prices and discounts on 1 January to capture the cotton and the cane industries? As we know, for every megalitre of water we get five tonnes of cane. The economy needs every bit we can get.

CHAIR: It is a similar question to what has been asked but it is talking about the dates of starting for cane and cotton, correct?

Mr ANDREW: That is correct.

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. I am not across the changes that the Commonwealth has made that you are referring to. Our commitment was that these discounts would apply from 1 July.

Mr ANDREW: Sorry. The changes I was talking about involve the stimulus package—JobKeeper, JobSeeker. I am asking about the overall economy and whether, if we kick this in earlier, we would soften the blow to the economy by taking this back?

Dr MILES: I certainly understand the sentiment. What is included in the budget applies from 1 July next year. That is the commitment we gave and the announcement we made. I certainly understand where the member for Mirani is coming from, though. What you can tell from the deputy director-general's last answer is that it will take us some time to get the systems in place to implement these discounts. I think it is unlikely that that could be done much sooner—certainly not on the time frames that you suggest.

Mr BERKMAN: I have a question in relation to the proposed Emu Swamp Dam for private irrigation on the Granite Belt. I direct the question to the director-general first. I understand that the proponents need 3,900 megalitres of water allocations under the Border Rivers Water Plan to be viable and that they seek over 1,350 megalitres from the urban water reserve even though the current iteration of the proposed dam will not be at the required standard for holding town water. Is the department considering allocating part of the urban water reserve to the Emu Swamp Dam?

Mr Carroll: I thank the member for the question. I might ask the deputy director-general to answer the question.

Ms Dobe: Thank you for the question. We are considering and working with the proponent of the dam on all the different allocations that might be able to go towards the allocations in that dam. That includes water that is held in reserve and water that they will have to purchase from the market. The urban reserve is a lease arrangement. We are working through that at the moment. We are working very closely with the Southern Downs Regional Council on that as well.

Mr BERKMAN: The urban water reserve is in play as a potential component of the allocations that they will require?

Ms Dobe: All of the reserves are currently being looked at, but we are very conscious of the importance of urban water supply, particularly as we are currently carting water to the community of Stanthorpe. We are looking at what are the long-term water supply options for the urban community and how those town water reserves would fit into that mix.

Mr ANDREW: Deputy Premier, the water supply at Mount Morgan No. 7 Dam is drastically low and there is no way that we have a pipeline or can get a pipeline. What is the government's answer to fix the supply for No. 7 dam for the people of Mount Morgan?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for that question. I might refer that question to the Deputy Director-General to answer.

Ms Dobe: The community of Mount Morgan is currently on level 5 water restrictions. The council is responsible for making sure that Mount Morgan continues to have supplies. Supplies in Mount Morgan are available for at least six months, if not longer. Their contingency response is to cart water to Mount Morgan from Gracemere. They have a contingency response in place if it is needed. If council wants to look at alternative water supply options for the community of Mount Morgan, it can go ahead and do that. If they need the state's assistance, we are happy to help them at any time.

CHAIR: Do we have any information to answer those questions or will they be taken on notice?

Dr MILES: I just might clarify the two matters I will try to explore in the break. One is the \$100 million that was committed to Burdekin Falls Dam and what the status of that is. The other is the base price that the discount for irrigators will be applied to. I undertake to come back in the next session, if that is okay.

CHAIR: That would be at the end of the next session, which is for the regional development and manufacturing portfolio. There is a document to be tabled—an article from *Southern Free Times*. Are committee members happy with that one? It is so tabled.

We have a couple of minutes remaining. I am feeling generous and we have enjoyed having the member for Nanango here, so I ask if she has a brief question.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I do have a question. I remind the Deputy Premier that he was also going to come back with specifics about the Eton Haughton irrigation scheme.

Dr MILES: What was the question?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It was in relation to the double-digit percentage water price increases in 2021. It goes to the base price as well.

Dr MILES: Okay.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: In the very short period of time left, I would like to ask the Deputy Premier a question in relation to the reduction in size for the planning of Rookwood Weir just near Rockhampton. I understand that the government originally committed in 2018 to a 76,000-megalitre capacity. Previous iterations of the Palaszczuk government have blamed the cost of concrete for the reduction in the size of this dam. Would the Deputy Premier draw a line in the sand in relation to this? What will be Rookwood Weir's final capacity and could you confirm why that capacity has been reduced, given the previous commitment?

CHAIR: There are two questions there.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: He can answer one at least, hopefully.

CHAIR: The first one was about capacity; correct?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Yes.

Dr MILES: Rookwood Weir will provide up to 76,000 megalitres of additional water. The project was rescope from the initial design as they went to detailed design including geotechnical assessment, which identified design challenges which would have increased it above the initial envelope available. The Premier requested further assistance from the Prime Minister on 12 July 2019 in order to be able

to meet the original specifications. That was further confirmed in correspondence. The Commonwealth declined to contribute any further funds. This made it necessary to rescope the project to fit within the funding envelope demanded by the Prime Minister.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The Deputy Premier is clearly just blaming the federal government for the fact that his government was unable to deliver the dam within the original scope.

CHAIR: Member for Nanango—

Mr MADDEN: Commentary?

CHAIR: It is commentary, thank you member for Ipswich West. Can you rephrase that into a question that does not offend standing orders?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The people of Rockhampton and the future irrigators who would benefit from Rookwood Weir have the right to know why the Palaszczuk Labor government was unable to build the original sized dam within the scope. It is not the federal government's fault.

Dr MILES: It is the federal government that declined to provide any further funding. The—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Because the Palaszczuk government was—

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, do not interrupt the Deputy Premier.

Dr MILES: It is not unusual, as you go from design to detailed design, to identify those kinds of challenges. We took those to the Commonwealth and said that it was going to cost more than the original cost estimate to provide the original scope. The Prime Minister rejected that request for additional funding, so we developed a project that we could deliver within the envelope available.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The Deputy Premier is confirming that it was an overrun of costs that has reduced the size of Rookwood. Irrespective of the amount of money that the Deputy Premier keeps talking about today that is going to dam construction, they could not find an extra funding envelope within their own budget to real-size the Rookwood Weir.

Dr MILES: It is always the case that when you go from design to detailed design challenges arise.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is not always the case to blame the federal government, though.


Dr MILES: This is a jointly funded project and the federal government refused to add additional funds.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: And so did the state government refuse, so the outcome was for you to reduce the size of the dam.

Dr MILES: It is a matched funded project.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I am going to rule that last question out of order. That takes us to 3.15 pm, so the time allocated for the consideration of estimates of expenditure for the minister's portfolio area of water has expired. We will be getting some answers to some questions at the end of the next portfolio area. The committee will now adjourn for a short break. The hearing will resume at 3.30 pm with an examination of the estimates of expenditure for the minister's portfolio areas of regional development and manufacturing.

Proceedings suspended from 3.15 pm to 3.30 pm.

 **CHAIR:** The hearing will resume. Welcome back, Minister, and officials. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio area of regional development and manufacturing. Minister, if you wish, you can make an opening statement of no more than three minutes.

Dr MILES: Thank you, Chair. The global COVID-19 pandemic has underlined what the Palaszczuk government has always known—a strong manufacturing sector and strong regional economies mean a stronger, more resilient Queensland. The pandemic shut down economies around the world and, while Queensland has weathered the health and economic storm better than most, parts of our manufacturing sector were impacted by supply chain disruptions. Through the pandemic the strength of our manufacturing sector has been highlighted. It is strong and resilient and has consistently contributed more than \$20 billion per annum to the state economy over the last decade.

The Palaszczuk government has always had a clear and strong vision for the state's manufacturing sector. We are fully committed to transforming our manufacturing industry as it adopts Industry 4.0 technologies and advanced manufacturing practices, enabling it to tap into more domestic

and international markets and create more manufacturing jobs right across the state. As we know, Queensland's health response and the hard work of all Queenslanders has kept us safe, but it is manufacturing that will help us build back even stronger than we were before.

The Palaszczuk government is putting Queensland's plan for economic recovery into operation. We will continue to invest in local manufacturers to help them overcome economic challenges, streamline their operations, lift productivity, improve international competitiveness and create more jobs. Our Advanced Manufacturing 10-Year Road Map and Action Plan provides the framework and strategies for government and industry to work collaboratively to achieve this, and implementation of all road map actions is well underway. Our Made in Queensland grants program is expected to create over 1,100 jobs, protect more than 4,600 jobs and generate millions of dollars in private sector investment.

Our regional manufacturing hubs in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and Gladstone are supporting regional manufacturers to build manufacturing capability, expand their operations and create more jobs in regional Queensland. We have released the Directions Statement: Personal and Protective Equipment and Other Essential Products which provides a whole-of-government approach to grow and support Queensland's PPE manufacturing sector to protect against future supply chain interruptions. In May this year we announced we would be establishing a \$50 million Essential Goods and Supply Chain Program to bolster PPE manufacturing in the state and further support our local manufacturers and address potential gaps in the supply chain of essential products.

For the beer lovers out there, we opened Australia's first BrewLab in Queensland, a state-of-the-art facility to support our growing craft brewing sector. The Palaszczuk government is committed to working with manufacturers across Queensland to further grow this critical industry. Our determination in this regard has only grown as a consequence of the pandemic. That is why we are continuing to increase our support for the sector. We are contributing a further \$15.5 million to bolster the Made in Queensland grants program with a particular focus on reshoring of manufacturing to Queensland.

There can be no doubt that the global COVID-19 pandemic has been tough on Queensland and tough on our manufacturers, but out of adversity comes opportunity and, building on our strong record of support for our manufacturing sector, it is imperative that we focus on what we can learn from this period. That is why we are steadfast in our commitment to grow manufacturing in this state by investing more in the programs, businesses and sectors that will help create a stronger, more prosperous Queensland economy and secure manufacturing jobs into the future. I look forward to the committee's questions.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Deputy Premier. Over to the opposition side.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier explain how, after committing more than \$26 million in two lots of funding to United Petroleum's biorefinery in Dalby, taxpayers have gotten value for their money after this refinery has closed its doors which cost around 100 direct and indirect jobs?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for the question, and I addressed this question in part earlier today. Obviously we are very disappointed to see the biorefinery close. As the member rightly points out, we supported it very substantially. However, it has been affected by particularly the decline in petroleum prices as well as the high cost of grain which impacted on their business model.

The department of state development—this is what I was referencing this morning—worked with them to try to pivot to producing hand sanitiser. They were directed to express an interest in a grants program that would have supported them to do that. They opted not to. I understand that it was in August that they closed, laying off those staff—I think it was 40 staff at that stage—and that it is now on the market. The point I made in my state development session was that we guided them towards grants programs that might have assisted them further. For whatever reason, they opted not to apply for them, which is disappointing. I should also say that I noted at that time too that state development had deployed staff to support the workers in identifying other opportunities.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Deputy Premier, the chief operating officer of United Petroleum is on record as stating that the reason for the closure was due to the government sourcing low-cost ethanol options offshore. Can the Deputy Premier commit to fixing those issues so United Petroleum can reopen its doors and reinvigorate manufacturing on the Darling Downs?

Dr MILES: That is not the advice that was provided to me. I am happy to look at those comments. I am happy to have staff recontact the COO if the member thinks that would be useful. What I have to hand is the information that was provided to me which was that state development had worked very

closely with them to try to provide funds through that essential supply strategy that I talked about earlier—that \$50 million fund. The impression I got from the brief was that they were a bit perplexed that they did not apply for that in the end, so obviously all of that is disappointing.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: So \$26 million; thank you. My next question is to the Deputy Premier as a follow-up to government money—taxpayers' money—going out the door. Other organisations such as Leaf Resources were given \$20 million under the Biofutures Acceleration Program in 2018 and to date Leaf Resources has only done a prefeasibility study which has been undertaken in Queensland. Can the Deputy Premier guarantee that this \$20 million of our taxpayers' funds will go back into rebuilding the Queensland economy and that it is not being used to offset Leaf Resources expenses in developing overseas?

CHAIR: On that question, member for Nanango, I am obviously just clarifying that that money has gone out to this particular recipient. Is that money that has already left the budget process; is that correct?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: That is correct.

CHAIR: Okay. We are talking about future expenditure and current expenditure. It may be difficult—with no pun intended—to link that to the current budget, so with that in mind I will request the Deputy Premier to perhaps furnish some more information.

Dr MILES: I understand that that funding was from a program that is not administered by the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water so it is not relevant to the department's budget that we are currently considering.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is certainly relevant to manufacturing in Queensland.

Dr MILES: It is a question about a grant program administered by another department.

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, I understand your opinion, but the Deputy Premier was supplying the answer and I will ask him to continue. Did you have anything further to add to that?

Dr MILES: No. I have some more information about the Dalby biofuels if the committee wants it.

CHAIR: We might come back to that. You have given your answer to that last question from the member for Nanango.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I ask a question of the director-general. I am referring to page 37 of SDS3 and your objective to attract private sector investment and create jobs by supporting priority industries. Has your department done any modelling or analysis on where the 18,000 jobs that have been lost out of the Queensland manufacturing sector over the past two years came from?

Mr Carroll: I thank the member for the question. Bear with me a second.

CHAIR: In the meantime, Minister, did you want to supply that information about Dalby?

Dr MILES: I just had a bit more information about the assistance that we provided to them from April. The Queensland government does not purchase raw ethanol, but through the department of state development we provided leads to hand sanitiser manufacturers in Queensland and interstate. We identified a supplier for Dalby biorefinery of the rare tert-butanol. Dalby Bio-Refinery had been unable to find it, either nationally or internationally, until that point. We pursued a number of leads to identify buyers of technical ethanol for large-scale disinfecting. While technical ethanol is normally regarded as a waste product, it is still over 80 per cent ethanol and an effective disinfectant. We had the technical ethanol tested at the Queensland University of Technology so potential buyers could have independent verification of the properties of the technical ethanol. It just goes to the lengths that the department went to in order to try to support them. With regard to the member's question about jobs lost, can I ask what the source for that specific statistic point is?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: The source was repeated almost every day during the last parliament, but I also have a source here from a *Courier-Mail* article which was pre COVID, dated 20 April 2019.

Dr MILES: I understand that since 2015 there has been an increase of 3,400 full-time equivalent jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am referring to the Deputy Premier's time where there has been an 18,000-person loss in the manufacturing sector.

Dr MILES: In my time?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Sorry, in the Palaszczuk government's time. It has not quite got to the Miles time yet.

Mr HART: He is acting now.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: He is acting, and I do appreciate that, which is why I asked the director-general.

Mr Carroll: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government through the department is delivering a number of Industry 4.0 initiatives, including awareness raising seminars and practical examples of Industry 4.0, to support manufacturers in transitioning to becoming advanced manufacturers. The Queensland Advanced Manufacturing 10-year Roadmap and Action Plan provides the framework for government and industry to continue to increase productivity, competitiveness and generate highly skilled manufacturing jobs. The serious disruption of personal protective equipment supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of local capabilities. To help rejuvenate the state's manufacturing industry to ensure that Queensland has access to the PPE needed to deal with COVID-19 and any future pandemics, the Queensland government released its directions statement for PPE. The modelling which you are referring to is normally done by Treasury.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Thank you.

CHAIR: Do you have a point of order?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: No, I was just waiting for the director-general to get to the question.

CHAIR: That is fine. We have only just started. Please continue, Mr Carroll.

Mr Carroll: I think I have answered the question.

CHAIR: We have the *Courier-Mail* article here. I can see it is quoted in the article. I think columnist Gene Tunny may be the source for that.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: That is correct.

CHAIR: Are we happy to table that? We will get a copy and pass it on to the Deputy Premier. Mr Carroll, you have finished your answer?

Mr Carroll: Thank you.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: My question, again as a follow-up to the director-general, is a specific question around modelling or analysis on the jobs lost. Does the department have any modelling that shows that the manufacturing jobs are being lost overseas because of the high cost of electricity?

Mr Carroll: I thank the member for the question. The department focuses on strategies for the future, not in relation to the past jobs lost in relation to transitioning to Industry 4.0 and advanced manufacturing strategies.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: In relation to a manufacturing strategy going forward, and I refer to SDS3 on page 37, what plans does the government have to reduce the cost of electricity to ensure manufacturers continue to develop in this state?

CHAIR: Member for Nanango, the price of electricity as connected to employment—is that the thrust of your question?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Connected to the manufacturing sector—being the highest cost to manufacturers.

CHAIR: That was not in the article that we just looked at.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have moved on to the cost of manufacturing and the cost of electricity being a prohibitor.

CHAIR: Without a document to back that up that could be hypothetical.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Hypothetical that electricity is the highest cost to manufacturing?

CHAIR: You have directed this at the director-general looking at potential job losses. All I am going to say is that it is a potential hypothetical. I am going to allow the director-general to answer that in the way that he sees fit.

Mr Carroll: In relation to the advanced manufacturing strategy and 10-year road map as looked at in relation to electricity prices, the Queensland government manufacturing division and the Australian Industry Group conducted a trial project on sustaining manufacturing through better energy productivity to better understand how manufacturing businesses currently consume energy, identify where the best opportunities are to improve energy productivity within the sample businesses and what barriers currently exist, and identify the potential opportunity for broader Queensland and the manufacturing sector. That program is ongoing at the moment and has been delayed due to COVID-19.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Can I ask you to clarify does the director-general have any modelling in relation to the employee losses that you are able to provide to the committee?

Mr Carroll: I thank the member for the question. I think I have answered that before. The modelling is normally done by Queensland Treasury.

CHAIR: I am going to go to the member for Traeger.

Mr KATTER: Minister, referring back to the biofuels industry, because it is a strong potential source for manufacturing, since the introduction of mandates, as I understand it, no fines have been issued and the biggest constraint is oil companies' stronghold and manipulation of the market. I ask: what strategies does the government have in place to strengthen the enforcement of that mandate to stimulate projects like the Pentland biofuels development or the NQBE development in Ingham?

Dr MILES: I thank the member for his question. I note the member asked a question similar to this in the sitting last week. The responsibility for the enforcement of the mandate rests with the department of energy and I am really happy to get the energy minister to respond to that for you.

Mr KATTER: Would the minister care to comment on what strategies your department would have to deal with the fact that there has been no movement in that space and it is constraining the development of those two that I have identified?

Dr MILES: I do not think this department has any active work in terms of enforcement, but I might ask the director-general if he has any comments to make about industry development and what lengths we have gone to to work with manufacturers.

Mr Carroll: In relation to the follow-on from the Deputy Premier, for the lengths we have gone to with manufacturers I will give you an example. All Industries Group in Yeppoon looked at their production process and manufacture in Queensland. We introduced lean principles to their workshop after meeting with them in Yeppoon. They have seen a reduction in the wastage of time through simple things like having the forklift in a designated area to improve productivity, cost effectiveness and the profit of that business going forward.

Mr KATTER: The price of gas is estimated to have gone from about \$3 or \$4 a gigajoule to, I think, hovering at about \$11, after skyrocketing to over \$20 a gigajoule in some cases. The price of gas has been a massive constraint on manufacturing since the rollout of the LNG plants. What strategies does the government have to address the fact that the royalties have been well overestimated and the impacts have been severe from the rollout of the LNG industry without a gas reserve policy?

Dr MILES: I am happy for the director-general respond to that.

Mr Carroll: On the gas policy and royalties in relation to that, member for Traeger, it is Treasury that deals with that. As I said in relation to energy pricing, we are working with the AIG Group and the manufacturers in looking at how we can be more efficient at manufacturing in electricity and usage. One of the companies we are looking at is Dobinsons in Rockhampton, which manufactures springs for four-wheel drives. We are looking at how we can use those programs to help companies like Dobinsons, which is a huge consumer of electricity.

CHAIR: We will go to government questions. I refer to volume 3, page 38, of the SDS. Can the minister advise how the government plans to continue the Made in Queensland program? Is he aware of anything else that might risk further implementation of that program?

Dr MILES: The Made in Queensland program has already successfully supported 85 projects across the state. Those businesses are located all around the state and have benefitted from program funding to assist in procuring advanced manufacturing technologies and implementing processes and practices of Industry 4.0. As I mentioned earlier, we have seen 67 Made in Queensland projects completed since 2017. The funding provided has enabled those small to medium sized manufacturers to implement leading-edge technologies, processes and systems to improve their productivity and boost their international competitiveness. This investment is helping manufacturers to create new jobs and employ new people, while also upskilling existing workers to make the most out of new technologies.

Made in Queensland has been so successful that I am pleased to confirm we will be extending this program with a fourth round in 2021. We will bolster the program with \$15.5 million of additional funding across Queensland to keep our manufacturers innovative and competitive on the world stage. In speaking with manufacturers across the state, it is clear that programs like Made in Queensland are making a difference and this program is welcomed by industry.

Regional manufacturers are especially interested in the program. It is highly competitive and regional manufacturers can and do compete for those grants. To date 40 per cent of grants awarded under the Made in Queensland program have been awarded to businesses outside of South-East

Queensland. Wagners CFT Manufacturing at Wellcamp received a grant to custom build equipment for the cross-arm manufacturing line that is leading edge within the composite fibre industry. This resulted in a direct job increase of 47 at Wagners.

Thanks to the funding they have received, many of those businesses are now able to bring many aspects of their manufacturing businesses back onshore and remain globally competitive. Now more than ever this is critical for the Queensland economy. Over the past nine months we have seen how manufacturers and businesses across Queensland have been impacted by supply chain disruptions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. Those disruptions have revealed weaknesses in the way that global supply chains function under stress. Manufacturers and other businesses around the state have spoken clearly on this.

As a nation and as a state, we have learnt a hard lesson about the importance of making things locally wherever possible to ensure continuity of critical supply during times of crisis. We want to take those lessons forward into the next round of the Made in Queensland program. The focus of the next round of Made in Queensland funding will be on reshoring production, that is, bringing back to Queensland the type of work that used to be done here but in more recent decades has been done overseas. We will be looking at grants that will return that work and jobs to Queensland, to a global leading standard for our critical and key industries. This is not just about bringing jobs back today; it is about keeping them here for the future. With Made for Queensland round 4 set to launch in 2021, the manufacturers of Queensland can feel confident about the Palaszczuk government's continued support.

Mr MADDEN: I refer to volume 3, page 38, of the Service Delivery Statements. Will the Deputy Premier advise how the Made in Queensland program is supporting small to medium manufacturers?

Dr MILES: The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to have a strong and agile local manufacturing industry. As the world came to a standstill and international supply chains ground to a halt, Queensland manufacturers stepped up to fill the void with the assistance of the Palaszczuk government. While the need for a strong local manufacturing industry was news for some people, our government has always understood the importance of the manufacturing sector to our state's economy. In particular, we understand the positive impacts a small manufacturer can make to their local community when they have support to grow their business and create secure local jobs. That is why we delivered a 10-year advanced manufacturing road map and action plan that has a suite of programs to support Queensland manufacturers to take their businesses to the next level.

One of the key programs under the road map is the hugely successful Made in Queensland grant program. The program provides grants to small to medium manufacturers to put new technology into their businesses and move into advanced manufacturing. These new technologies help them to increase their international competitiveness, lift productivity and innovation, reduce waste and, most importantly, generate secure high-skilled jobs for the future.

Since 2017, Made in Queensland has undertaken three rounds, supporting 85 projects. To date the program has provided \$31 million in funding to support the completion of those projects. In return, the program has leveraged more than \$70 million of private sector co-investment across 67 completed projects. That co-investment has created real and lasting outcomes for manufacturing businesses, many of them in regional Queensland.

Manufacturers that have completed the program have reported greater productivity and competitiveness, increased sales and a significantly improved ability to quickly respond to the needs of their customers. More than half of the businesses that have completed the program have reported either new export sales or the on-shoring of work previously done overseas or interstate. This program is not just creating new manufacturing jobs; it is also bringing manufacturing back to Queensland. Completed projects have so far created 385 jobs, with more jobs forecast over the next five years as those businesses continue to grow. Over five years the Made in Queensland program is expected to support more than 1,100 jobs and protect over 4,600 existing jobs.

PWR Performance Products at Ormeau received a Made in Queensland grant to customise a computable tomography scanner that enables PWR to scan products to American Welding Society standards, which are regarded as the benchmark for new non-destructive testing for quality purposes. The grant has directly created 46 jobs at PWR.

Many projects involve upskilling existing positions to ensure staff have the skills to keep working as the sector embraces new technologies. We have already allocated nearly \$46 million from the program, which will in turn leverage over \$100 million in private sector investment. The Palaszczuk

government will continue to support Queensland manufacturers to implement new technologies, systems and processes that will protect the jobs of their staff, create new jobs and lead to sustainable advanced manufacturing in Queensland.

Mr SMITH: I refer to volume 3, page 38, of the SDS. Can the Deputy Premier provide further details on plans the government has to expand the number of regional manufacturing hubs beyond the existing four?

Dr MILES: Supporting regional manufacturers is critical to keeping the regional economy vibrant. That is why the Palaszczuk Labor government has focussed on providing more than just a grants program. It is why we have created a network of regional manufacturing hubs in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton and Gladstone to provide business support for regional manufacturers. Each hub is providing assistance to regional manufacturers, including the delivery of business development programs, skills development and training programs, and awareness of advanced manufacturing technologies.

The current hubs are also working closely with universities, vocational education and training and schools to develop a workforce with strong skills in science, technology, engineering and maths. As part of the network, we are also providing access to the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Hub for regional manufacturers to ensure that manufacturers in regional Queensland have access to advanced manufacturing technologies.

The hubs have undertaken more than 30 training and seminar sessions aligned to the strategic goals of the Queensland Advanced Manufacturing 10-Year Roadmap and Action Plan and the Manufacturing Hub Delivery Model. These sessions have been attended by over 1,000 participants. Each of the hubs has delivered events direct to manufacturers including lean manufacturing seminars that have proven incredibly popular and successful. These seminars are delivering results.

For example, Yeppoon manufacturer All Industries Group reported saving \$50,000 in business costs in the first three months after implementing lean technologies they learnt during a program delivered out of the Rockhampton hub. Today I am pleased to confirm we will be expanding these hubs into two new regions. Our election commitment to invest \$40.5 million to further strengthen and grow Queensland's manufacturing industry includes \$8.5 million to create new manufacturing hubs in Mackay and the Gold Coast.

The new hub in Mackay will focus on supporting manufacturers that supply into the mining equipment, technology and services industries, food manufacturing and bioproducts made from crops grown in the region. Already a hub for manufacturing, there is huge potential to further develop the region's businesses to grow and create jobs.

The new Gold Coast hub will have a strong focus on transport equipment and vehicles, marine manufacturing, food processing and metal products. Planning for the new manufacturing hubs in Mackay and the Gold Coast is already underway and we expect them to open in 2021. Once they are open, the Palaszczuk government will have established six regional manufacturing hubs. This highlights our government's ongoing commitment to regional manufacturers. I look forward to continuing this successful program, expanding it across the state and supporting more of our regional manufacturers.

CHAIR: Deputy Premier, referring to volume 3, page 38 of the SDS, could you advise how the government plans to bring stakeholders together in the manufacturing industry to bolster manufacturing skills in Queensland?

Dr MILES: The Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring Queensland's manufacturing industry has the skilled workers it needs to meet the jobs market of the future. The Skills Implementation Plan for Advanced Manufacturing was released in December 2019 and is a key action of the Queensland Advanced Manufacturing 10-Year Roadmap and Action Plan. The Skills Implementation Plan for Advanced Manufacturing has been developed by the Manufacturing Skills Working Group, a partnership between government, industry and education and training stakeholders. To support the delivery of the Skills Implementation Plan for Advanced Manufacturing and to strengthen and grow Queensland's manufacturing sector and create secure local jobs, the government will invest \$16.5 million to create Manufacturing Skills Queensland. Manufacturing Skills Queensland will identify the key requirements in the manufacturing sector, including leadership management, technical task related and developmental skills. They will work with employers, workers, their unions and educational institutions to develop and deliver workforce development and training programs to prepare Queenslanders for technology-rich manufacturing careers.

The organisation will provide the essential coordination for industry skills development and training issues. This will be achieved through linkage and collaboration with the regional manufacturing hubs, the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Hub and other manufacturing industry ecosystems and networks.

The Manufacturing Skills Queensland scope will extend to the delivery of vocational education and training and knowledge and skills development in schools and TAFE. This will require strategic direction and operations to include input and collaboration from the Department of Education and the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training. Manufacturing Skills Queensland will engage with government to assist in economic recovery planning and develop an annual training plan for the manufacturing industry to ensure visibility and the delivery requirements of industry skills needs are met.

In April 2020, Queensland was designated an advanced manufacturing hub by the World Economic Forum, a designation that will connect the state's manufacturing sector with a global network of advanced manufacturers, including the forum's Global Lighthouse Network. Being part of the World Economic Forum network will strengthen our government's work in transitioning more of our manufacturing firms to advanced manufacturing through the adoption of industry 4.0 technologies and practices, and the development of a highly skilled workforce.

CHAIR: We will have 10 minutes of questions from the non-government members and 10 minutes from the government members and then we will go to the member for South Brisbane for a question.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Director-General, I refer to the rolling stock expansion project that is referred to on page 12 of the capital statement. How many six-car trains in Queensland on average will be produced per year?

Mr Carroll: Sorry, Chair, can I just—

CHAIR: Yes, that is a tough one. That may be more appropriate for the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, but I will ask the director-general if he can provide that information.

Mr Carroll: That is the Department of Transport and Main Roads who are responsible for that.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Through you, Mr Chair, to the Deputy Premier as the acting Minister for Manufacturing, what modelling has been done around the time frame to manufacture the six-car trains in Maryborough?

Dr MILES: As the director-general outlined, train manufacturing rests with the transport and main roads portfolio. We are very proud to be returning rail manufacture to Queensland. We know that it will create a substantial number of jobs in the Wide Bay region, no doubt welcomed by the member for Bundaberg. Industry estimates are that there is a \$115 billion pipeline of rail infrastructure projects across Australia. If we can leverage the trains that Queensland needs to buy into an industry that can deliver for other states, I think that is a very worthwhile outcome.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Can I clarify with the Deputy Premier? The department of manufacturing has no oversight of the manufacturing of trains through your department?

Dr MILES: No, it has an industry development and support role. It does not oversee the manufacturing of products by other departments.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am now understanding why Minister Bailey called it 'lightweight'.

CHAIR: We will ignore that last statement. Do you have a question and not comment, member for Nanango?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: In relation to the minister's portfolio that he is currently acting in, given that the acting minister would be the champion of manufacturing in Queensland, what percentage of the train parts are going to be manufactured in Queensland, or are they just going to be assembled here?

Dr MILES: Again, the detail is best directed to Minister Bailey, but there are very significant efforts underway to make sure that as many of the parts as possible can be sourced local. That is very much the objective. The outcome ultimately will be the subject of a tender process, and one of the elements that will be considered in that tender process is how much of the source products can be sourced from Queensland and Australian suppliers and appropriate weighting will be given accordingly.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Through you, Mr Chair, as the champion for manufacturing in Queensland, can the Deputy Premier please advise the committee of the discussions in and around the manufacturing of the trains and how soon will Queenslanders see those trains being actually manufactured here in Queensland?

Mr MADDEN: Point of order, Mr Chair. It is repetition.

CHAIR: There is an element of repetition, but my concern is more about reporting conversations or perhaps information that is passed out. Can I ask the member for Nanango to rephrase the question and connect it, as close as she can, to the budget being considered?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I refer to the rolling stock expansion project on page 12 of the Capital Statement. As the minister responsible for championing manufacturing in Queensland, how many trains will be manufactured in Maryborough in a 12-month period?

Dr MILES: The initial funding we announced was for 20 new passenger trains. The time line for their delivery needs to be addressed to the relevant minister.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: What is the department of manufacturing and regional development going to assist manufacturers—and I allude to the manufacturer that is tasked with making the trains—in relation to the cost of gas and electricity and their availability into Maryborough?

Mr SMITH: Point of order, Mr Chair. I ask if this is tedious repetition. We constantly talk about the same subject that is constantly being referred back to the department of transport or the transport minister. I ask for your ruling on that.

CHAIR: I am looking at the page of the Capital Statement that was nominated. I cannot see that allocated to the department we are questioning at the moment. I understand that the member for Nanango is interested in this but it may well be more applicable to the transport portfolio.

Mr HART: I have a point of order. The acting minister is responsible for manufacturing. If you are going to manufacture something you have to have the infrastructure—the power and the gas—and that is what the member for Nanango is asking about. We want to know whether this is going to be feasible and what the government is doing to assist.

CHAIR: I understand that. I was addressing the point of order that was previously raised. We have talked about the costs of electricity in this particular sector. Once again, it would be good to have a document or a source that refers to that.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy to move on.

CHAIR: If you want to move on that would be good.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am happy to move on. Hopefully the department does oversee beef processing which is a major manufacturing input into the Queensland economy. Based on that, I ask the Acting Minister for Manufacturing what actions out of the *Queensland Beef Processing Strategy 2019-2022*, which was released in August 2019, have resulted in a reduction in energy costs?

Dr MILES: The department of manufacturing does not oversee the beef processing industry.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I am referring to the strategy—the Queensland Beef Processing Strategy released by your government in August 2019.

Dr MILES: By the department of state development?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is part of the manufacturing department. The point I am trying to get to is: what has the department of manufacturing done to alleviate the costs resulting from the processing strategy that comes under the department of manufacturing which you are the acting minister for? It is becoming increasingly clear that the department obviously oversees, what?

CHAIR: Do not go into that one there—

Dr MILES: Clearly the department does not oversee energy pricing. The department for energy oversees energy pricing.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: But it is manufacturing—

CHAIR: I have not finished. Member for Nanango, you are obviously going down the path of questioning about power pricing and its effect on manufacturing. I am going to give the minister broad range to address this particular question otherwise we can move onto the next question.

Dr MILES: I would recommend that the opposition direct their questions to the appropriate ministers. In the case of energy pricing, that is the energy minister. They will get a chance to talk with him later in the week.

CHAIR: I understand the beef processing issue is under the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. That is probably where the confusion is. That could have been asked earlier this morning. Member for Nanango, did you want to move onto another question?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I refer to page 38 of the SDS volume 3 under the heading 'Develop the economy' and the reference to the Queensland Craft Brewing Strategy. I am assuming the acting minister will admit that this is actually part of the manufacturing department. Action 1 from the department's Craft Brewing Strategy released in 2018 was to investigate establishing a new brew lab facility. I note that the acting minister did mention that in his opening statement. How many Queensland brewers and brewing hopefuls have been able to use this facility to date?

Dr MILES: The BrewLab was launched in July 2020 with funding from the government of \$1.1 million over five years. It is at Coopers Plains. I know that 12 students have completed their certificate 3 in food processing for craft brewers since July 2020. Those students use the BrewLab equipment for practical training. A number of others have used the facility to test their recipes without having to interrupt their own production lines.

CHAIR: We will go onto questions from government members.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Point of order, Mr Chair. Will the minister be following up that answer, which was quite specific: how many brewers and brewing hopefuls have been able to use that facility?

Dr MILES: As I said, 12 students have completed their program. I am happy to get for you the number of brewers who have used it.

CHAIR: Just clarifying that—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Twelve is fine.

CHAIR: You are after a list of people who have essentially visited or gone there. That is fairly broad. We will get back to that. I will note that that is a pretty onerous request.

CHAIR: We will go to government questions.

Mr SMITH: I refer to page 38 at volume 3 of the SDS. In relation to the role of the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water in promoting regional economic development, will the Deputy Premier outline the success of the Building our Regions program?

Dr MILES: The Palaszczuk government understands that strong regional economies mean a prosperous Queensland. That is why we have continued to deliver on our highly successful Building our Regions program to assist regional councils to deliver important infrastructure projects for their local communities. With a funding commitment of up to \$365 million, the program has a strengthened focus on delivering positive, long-term economic outcomes for regional communities, targeting funding towards job-creating infrastructure that will improve economic conditions and liveability.

Building our Regions funding is available to local governments located in regional Queensland. This includes areas of the state outside of South-East Queensland as well as the Toowoomba urban area and the local governments of Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim and Somerset. To date, the five rounds of Building our Regions has allocated funding towards 271 construction projects and seven planning projects across 67 local government areas in regional Queensland. This funding has supported an estimated 2,767 jobs and attracted additional investment of over \$538 million from councils and other organisations.

Significantly, the program has provided important support to remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The program has supported 52 projects in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, providing funding of \$29.4 million to deliver needed community and economic development infrastructure. These projects attracted financial co-contributions of \$12 million and are supporting around 131 jobs during construction. For example, in round 2 of the program, Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council was provided \$342,000 for water upgrades, significantly improving water quality and security for the community.

Under the most recent round of the program, 41 construction and seven infrastructure planning projects from 39 local governments were successful in gaining funding, supporting an estimated 347 jobs during construction. Round 5 differed from previous rounds in that local governments could apply for infrastructure planning projects as well as construction projects. Almost \$55.7 million of the \$70 million has been allocated. For example, the Bundaberg Regional Council was provided support of \$120,000 to deliver a business case for the redevelopment of the Bundaberg Regional Art Gallery—a project I am sure the member for Bundaberg will be very interested in following. Mount Isa City Council was provided more than \$3.7 million in funding to deliver stage 2 of the Mount Isa Family Fun Precinct upgrade that will deliver significant improvements to this recreation area. The project will also support 17 local jobs.

In further round 5 funding, the Lockyer Valley Regional Council was provided \$886,000 for upgrades to improve the functionality and commercial use of the Gatton Shire Hall. These are just a small sample of the kinds of projects that Building our Region's funding is delivering for regional Queenslanders. The program is an important collaboration with regional Queensland councils. The Palaszczuk government is committed to working with councils to deliver positive outcomes for regional Queensland communities while delivering important local jobs.

Mr MADDEN: Deputy Premier, I refer to volume 3 page 38 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can you advise the committee how the PPE directions statement will bolster PPE manufacturing in Queensland?

Dr MILES: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of global supply chains for personal protective equipment and other essential products. To protect Queensland against future supply chain disruptions, it is important that Queensland's PPE and other essential products manufacturing industry continues to grow and is supported through local procurement.

On 14 September 2020, the Palaszczuk government released the *Directions statement: personal protective equipment and other essential products* in response to COVID-19. The directions statement provides a whole-of-government approach to support a sustainable and internationally competitive local PPE and other essential products manufacturing sector in Queensland to protect against future supply chain disruptions.

The directions statement focuses on four strategic areas. Firstly, it focuses on supporting a local approach to procurement—something our government has worked hard on including by setting procurement targets. Secondly, the statement contains a focus on driving skills and capability development. Thirdly, it contains measures which seek to increase productivity and improve international competitiveness. Finally, it has a strong focus on assisting the onshoring and reshoring of manufacturing activities to create more manufacturing and manufacturing jobs in Queensland.

The measures in the statement will be achieved by leveraging off the state's advanced manufacturing capabilities, our excellence in world-leading translational biomedical research facilities and access to a highly skilled professional workforce to develop, manufacture and supply PPE and other essential products.

The directions statement is supported by other key actions like supporting Queensland manufacturers to increase their PPE manufacturing capability through the \$50 million Essential Goods and Supply Chain Program. Importantly, it focuses on assisting to establish PPE testing facilities in Queensland which will see more Queensland manufacturers able to have their products tested and approved.

The statement also supports Queensland PPE manufacturers to investigate export opportunities and assist them in relation to onshoring and reshoring their operations to Queensland. PPE manufacturers will also have access to the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Hub because we know the importance of advanced manufacturing in assisting Queensland manufacturers to increase their productivity and become more globally competitive.

Procurement of locally manufactured PPE and other essential products will be critical to ensure the sustainability of supply chains for local manufacturers. That is why we have established a target for the Queensland government to procure 25 per cent of the value of PPE and other essential products from Queensland's small and medium enterprises within the next 12 months in order to develop and maintain a sustainable PPE industry in Queensland.

This target will align with and be supported by Queensland Health's strategic medical stockpile of PPE announced on 27 June. We are already seeing results. Crestmead company Evolve Group has received accreditation to produce six million face shields and face masks following receipt of assistance through the EGSC. They have already sent 760 face shields and 2,000 face masks to the youth detention centre at Wacol and provided 200,000 face masks to the Electoral Commission for the state election. In addition, they will be supplying Queensland Health with one million P2 medical grade face masks per month for six months and 106,000 P2 face masks per month for six months. Evolve Group is just one example of how responsive and innovative Queensland businesses can be when responding to a crisis.

CHAIR: We will go to questions from the crossbench.

Dr MacMAHON: My question is to the director-general. Has the government investigated or costed a publicly owned flagship green steel plant in Queensland given our skilled workforce, abundant clean energy and the projected decline in metallurgical coal exports with green steel industries emerging globally?

Mr Carroll: I have no knowledge of such a proposal at the moment.

Mr ANDREW: Deputy Premier, with reference to the SDS page 3-38, according to a biopharmaceutical manufacturing website, Australia is offering generous tax incentives and government funding to biotech companies who want to manufacture bioproducts and genetically modified food. Are these bioproducts and genetically modified food in direct opposition to traditional agriculture?

Dr MILES: We are working in Mackay on a hub for those products. They are not always substitutions for traditional products. There are people who cannot consume traditional products for a range of different reasons. There are significant emerging markets for them. We are supporting manufacturers in tooling up and delivering those products.

CHAIR: Member for Mirani, did you need that tabled document?

Mr ANDREW: No. It was just in case you needed it.

CHAIR: We have a number of questions or clarifications that we need to get to. Did someone want to provide some clarifications?

Dr MILES: I understand that, in addition to the students who have graduated from the BrewLab, seven brewers have sent staff to training and recipe development at the BrewLab. With regard to funds committed to the Burdekin hydro, that money sits with CleanCo but the energy minister is prepared and looking forward to answering questions about that in his session. It rests with his portfolio.

On the question of water price discounts, I am advised that the irrigation water price commitment we made at the election, including a 15 per cent decrease in irrigation charges for 6,400 farmers and a 50 per cent decrease in water charges for fruit and vegetable growers, was to be made on the proposed QCA price path which takes effect from 1 July next year. Our \$81.6 million package will provide real pricing relief to farmers.

With regard to the Eton Houghton water scheme prices, as part of the government's response to COVID-19 earlier this year, the irrigation price for the Eton water supply scheme remained frozen for 2020-21. As a result of the government's irrigation pricing election commitment to reduce all irrigation by at least 15 per cent, irrigation prices in the Eton water supply scheme will be lower next year than in 2020-21. The fixed part A price for 2021-22 will be around \$2.80 per megalitre less than current prices. The variable part B price for 2021-22 will be around 60 cents per megalitre less than current prices. I think that addresses the outstanding questions from the committee. Are you comfortable with that, Chair?

CHAIR: There was one issue to do with the \$100 million investment—

Dr MILES: That was the Burdekin one.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It sits with CleanCo.

CHAIR: Regarding the information just given, do you want any clarification?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have a different question that I am happy to ask. It is a quick one.

CHAIR: I fell for that one last time, member for Nanango.

Dr MILES: I am happy to make the director-general available to the member for Nanango to ask her quick question after the session!

CHAIR: No.

Dr MILES: He is available all night!

CHAIR: It is 4.30 pm, and I do believe we have answered all of those outstanding questions. Thank you, Minister, officials and departmental officers for your attendance today. Thank you, Minister, for going on this journey all day with us.

Dr MILES: Thank you to the committee and the other members who joined this afternoon. Thank you for bearing with me as an acting minister. I would like to thank the following people for their hard work. As I said in the earlier session, it is no small feat for bureaucrats to manage a machinery-of-government change, deliver a budget based on the new machinery of government and then go straight into estimates. I want to thank Frankie Carroll, the director-general of the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water; the deputy director-general, Linda Dobe, who I am sure you will all agree made a very valuable contribution; the other deputy director-general, Michael Glover; Bernadette Zerba, Rob Hillier, Glenn Stockton, John Jones, Sanjeev Pandey and the whole department for their efforts and their preparation. I would like to thank Ian Hutcheon, the chief of staff

to Minister Butcher and all of Minister Butcher's staff, who did a fantastic job getting me up to speed over the last little while. Just as it was an effort for my team, it was an effort for them. In some ways it was made even more difficult in the circumstances, so I would like to thank them all.

CHAIR: The hearing will resume at 4.45 pm with the examination of the estimates for the portfolio area of the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities.

Proceedings suspended from 4.32 pm to 4.45 pm.

**ESTIMATES—STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES
COMMITTEE—AGRICULTURAL, INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT, FISHERIES AND
RURAL COMMUNITIES****In Attendance**

Hon. ML Furner, Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities

Mr D McIntyre, Chief of Staff

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Dr E Woods, Director-General


Ms B Ditchfield, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture

Ms S McCarthy, Deputy Director-General, Corporate

Ms J Clarke, Chief Finance Officer, Finance and Asset Management

Mr M Letts, Deputy Director-General, Biosecurity Queensland

Mr G Bolton, Deputy Director-General, Fisheries and Forestry

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities. The committee will examine the minister's portfolio until 8 pm, starting with agricultural industry development and rural communities, followed by the fisheries portfolio. We will suspend proceedings during this time for a break between 6.15 pm to 6.30 pm.

The visiting member here today is Mr Tony Perrett, the member for Gympie and the shadow member. I remind those present today that the committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. It is important that questions and answers remain relevant and succinct. The same rules for questions that apply in parliament also apply to this hearing. I refer to standing orders 112 and 115 in this regard. Questions should be brief and relate to one issue and should not contain lengthy or subjective preambles, argument or opinion. I intend to guide proceedings today so that the relevant issues can be explored fully and to ensure there is adequate opportunity to address questions from government and non-government members of the committee.

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

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio areas of agricultural industry development, rural communities and fisheries open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Mr FURNER: I want to thank the committee for this opportunity to appear before you and I welcome the chance to answer your questions today. I would also like to thank the committee for allowing me to answer questions and brief you on this important portfolio with an opening statement.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather here today and their elders past, present and emerging. Today I am joined by my director-general, Dr Beth Woods, and my chief of staff, Dan McIntyre. I am also joined by senior officers within the department, my office and statutory bodies. I would also like to thank the tireless staff of the department, who have no doubt been working extremely hard right throughout this pandemic but also leading up to these estimate hearings.

Not least amongst them is my retiring director-general, Dr Beth Woods. Dr Woods has been a fine example of the Public Service. She has always been dedicated, passionate and focussed on the end goal of getting better outcomes for Queensland and Queenslanders. I take this opportunity to place on record both my and the Queensland government's appreciation for her contribution and her service.

The Palaszczuk government has always achieved much in this portfolio, not least by the work done to ensure the smooth continuance of industries and businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to COVID we moved quickly to have agriculture declared an essential industry. We engaged with industry at unprecedented levels. This has been a remarkable partnership, with government and industry pulling together through the Agriculture Coordination Group to ensure the smooth movement of freight and goods to keep the nation fed and industries moving. We delivered coordinated grants to help create 1,800 regional jobs throughout Queensland, mapped out our path to support the sustainability of our timber industry and began to deliver on making Queensland the aquaculture capital of the world.

I am very pleased to see the latest Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey picking up a surge in confidence in rural Queensland. More than 67 per cent of the state remains in drought, so we are not taking anything for granted. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Queensland farmers as they do it tough.

In biosecurity, despite the pandemic we have remained strong in defending Queensland from the highest level of invasive pest threats faced by a state in the nation. That includes investments to prepare for the possible incursion of African swine fever, which has caused significant impacts in many parts of the world. We have maintained our status as the Australian jurisdiction with the most robust animal welfare regime in the nation, and we have taken important steps to manage the ongoing response to Panama TR4 disease.

In summary, Labor went to the recent election with a plan for economic recovery, and the people of Queensland endorsed that plan. Now is the time for delivering on what has been promised: jobs for Queenslanders right across our state and economic expansion and innovation. This year's budget includes the significant delivery of our promises in this portfolio. It delivers on our commitments in the agriculture sector and invests in our biosecurity. I look forward to providing you with more detail in answers to your questions today.

Chair, for the committee's benefit I would like to provide an update to the information tabled yesterday in response to question on notice No. 6 relating to DAF personnel and staffing arrangements. I can confirm that: Agriculture's 2019-20 actual FTEs were 838 with a corporate allocation of 86, totalling 924; Biosecurity Queensland's 2019-20 actual FTEs were 562 with a corporate allocation of 59, totalling 621; Fisheries' actual FTEs were 225 with a corporate allocation of 23, totalling 248; and Forestry's actual FTEs were 97 with a corporation allocation of 11, totalling 108. The actual FTEs for DAF in 2019-20 were 2,124 and the budgeted FTEs for 2020-21 are 2,115. In comparison, at the end of the Newman LNP government in 2015 the FTEs were 1,970.

CHAIR: We will now commence questioning. I will hand over to the member for Gympie.

Mr PERRETT: Just before I proceed to questioning, in accordance with my register of interests, I advise the committee that I own rural land which received a state drought declaration in 2019. I want to make that abundantly clear before we commence.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr PERRETT: My first question is to the minister. Minister, do you have a personal email account and have you ever emailed or received an email from stacia1 @ bigpond.com?

Mr FURNER: I do and no.

CHAIR: I was about to jump in and reiterate some of the comments I made at the very start of the day but I think that has dealt with that issue. Please ask your next question.

Mr PERRETT: My question is to the minister. On page 12 of SDS volume 2 it shows that the 2020-21 total budget will be \$556 million, which is \$44 million less than the 2019-20 actual income. This is despite the budget being a record \$56 billion in expenditure. Minister, where is the \$44 million in savings on last year going to come from?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for his question. Once again, at every estimates hearing we seem to go through this process of explaining to the opposition the way estimates are managed and budget requirements. I will just give a little bit of history on this. In 2014, Lachlan Millar, as the media advisor to the then agricultural minister, John McVeigh, highlighted the \$408 million investment in primary industries in the 2014-15 budget. In the 2020-21 budget it is estimated to be \$556.5 million. It is little wonder that we were returned as a Labor government when we understand the processes working through budget requirements and estimates.

If we reflect back on last year's budget, it was a budget estimated at \$525 million. All the consolidated payment in terms of where drought comes from is held centrally, and that has been the process even when the LNP was in government. We will, as we have committed always, make sure

that our primary producers are shielded from this insidious drought. As I said in my opening statement, more than two-thirds of the state is in drought. We cannot budget for what the drought measures will be through an Estimates process but we will, as we have done always, ensure we cover the interests of our primary producers while this drought continues.

Mr PERRETT: Just a follow-up, page 10 of SDS volume 2 notes there will be 2,115 full-time equivalent staff budgeted for in DAF in the 2020-21 year, which is nine less than the actuals of 2,124 in 2019-20. This is despite the fact that there has been an increase of 27,000 full-time equivalent public servants employed since 2015. Minister, where are the nine staff being cut from?

CHAIR: Before you start on that, Minister, that may relate directly to the information you started this session with. Actually, I will just let you deal with that. I think it also deals with some of the questions on notice. I will let you answer that in the way you see fit

Mr FURNER: Thank you. I thank the member for his question. There is a reduction of nine FTEs between 2019-20—the actual is 2,124—and the 2020-21 budget of 2,115. It is a net result of: the one program reaching finalisation; recommendations pursuant to an independent inquiry and interdepartmental transfers, including a planned reduction of FTEs allocated in the four-year program to implement priority recommendations from the Biosecurity Capability Review and the four-year program is now complete; an increase of FTEs in response to the recommendations from the Martin inquiry, which was an independent inquiry into the management of retired racehorses; and an interdepartmental transfer from DAF to the former Department of State Development, Tourism and Innovation for the business and corporate partnership financial function and a transfer from DNRME to DAF as well.

Mr PERRETT: I have a follow-up question and this is to the director-general. In answer to the pre estimates question on notice No. 6, it states that there will be a net decrease of 12 full-time equivalent Biosecurity Queensland staff, all from the frontline division and not from the corporate division. Director-General, will you clarify exactly which Biosecurity staff will be cut in the 2020-21 budget and what roles will be lost?

CHAIR: Obviously, there are some specifics there. I am just going to ask the director-general to talk about that broadly. She may or may not be able to talk about people in particular.

Dr Woods: Thank you. As you have noted correctly, there is a reduction of staff in the Biosecurity area from 2019-20 to 2020-21. As the minister just indicated, the reduction in staff is actually a planned reduction. It is not in fact anybody losing their job or being cut. It is the conclusion of term appointments that were funded from the Biosecurity Capability Review as part of the implementation of the outcomes of that review.

There were some time-limited jobs that were part of the review. That included things like, for example, development of a strategic workforce plan and some training modules for specific roles in Biosecurity. Those were one-off tasks. The roles were appointed for a term. That program has now completed and the people who were put on temporary appointments to do specific jobs have finished. Nobody who was expecting to be employed in 2020-21 has lost their job. There were some temporary appointments whose terms have completed. That is a normal process in this department. We respond to seasonal matters. We put on specialist staff when we need specialist skills because we are not a big enough department to be able to have all of those specialist roles on hand all of the time. This happens as a routine process across all parts of the department.

Mr PERRETT: The next question is to the minister and it relates to programs within the department. Will the minister explain why there will be no new graduates through the department's Greater Graduate Program for 2020-21?

Mr FURNER: I will refer that question to my director-general, Dr Beth Woods.

Dr Woods: I will request that our deputy director-general, corporate, come to provide some detail on that question, but it is worthwhile just noting that there are two graduate programs through which DAF has routinely employed people: one is the greater graduate program, which I believe is orchestrated by DPC—and it focuses on people who will go into policy roles. The second is a graduate program which historically has been managed by the Department of Environment and Science and has provided graduate orientation and training for graduates coming into the former department of environment and science, department of natural resources, mines and energy and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The second is the one which has had the majority use by our department because it relates to people in a whole range of operational roles, whereas the previous one to which I referred is specifically around policy and strategic policy work. From year to year, we have varied the intake depending again

on what are our requirements. As I noted previously, we are not a large department by general standards across government; we recruit to specialist positions. I can simply comment that I know off the top of my head that we will be taking some graduates in the coming 12 months. They will go into roles in our agri-science Queensland area and into specific science specialities, but they will not formally be part of the program. I call on my deputy director-general, corporate, Sinead McCarthy to provide some more detail.

Ms McCarthy: Good evening.

CHAIR: If the DDG can briefly add to that?

Ms McCarthy: With your leave, I would like to seek definitive advice on those figures. I do know that fisheries and forestry have put on two graduates in the policy area. I am aware that the department is about to take on graduates through a separate ICT graduate program, but with your leave I would like to come back with definitive advice on that.

CHAIR: Thank you. We can address that at the end of the session.

Ms McCarthy: Thank you.

CHAIR: The member for Gympie?

Mr PERRETT: I have a follow-up question to the minister: if the graduate program is not operating in 2021, what will you do to ensure that DAF is attracting new talent into the department so farmers and Queensland can continue to be properly served?

CHAIR: I thought we dealt with that one there, but I will leave it to the minister to answer that in the way that he wants.

Mr FURNER: Chair, I think the response will be forthcoming in terms of the previous question from the member for Gympie. Once again, we demonstrated our commitment as a government to providing adequate funding through this budget and other measures. We will continue doing that throughout this period of government and following on.

CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Gympie?

Mr PERRETT: Minister, I will move on now. I refer to page 4 of the SDS which refers to the service area highlight 'Assessed impact of completed agricultural research, development and extension projects and/or programs.' Can the minister explain why there is a \$6.35 million decline in the RD and E funding in the 2020-21 budget in comparison to 2019-20 and explain what particular projects have been cut or have seen a decline in funding as a result?

CHAIR: For clarification, member for Gympie, was this also covered by a question on notice? I remember—

Mr PERRETT: It was identified in a question on notice, chair—

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr PERRETT: I am asking why.

CHAIR: Okay. The member is asking for some further clarification on that. Sorry, that was directed to the minister?

Mr PERRETT: It was directed to the minister.

Mr FURNER: Thank you, chair, and I thank the member for his question. Certainly the agriculture and food research development extension, RD and E, for the 10-year road map action plan is a whole-of-government plan. That provides a comprehensive overview of Queensland's agriculture and food sector R and D priorities. The road map was launched on 24 May 2018 with a comprehensive consultation with the industry and research sector and with other government agencies and the community. The agriculture and food sector is a key pillar for Queensland's economy, contributing over \$17 billion and employing more than 300,000 people, as the member for Gympie would know. The road map identifies 14 sets of actions including: increasing innovation, commercialisation, identification, identifying and promoting agriculture and food RD and E opportunities, and supporting the sector to grow and develop new businesses.

The implementation of the road map has been ongoing and carried out under the guidance of an interdepartmental committee. The IDC endorsed 23 key actions that would achieve the 14 actions in April 2019.

I am happy to advise that 67 per cent of the actions have been completed and that a further 16 are near completion. By way of example, the program activities under the road map include implementation of the biofutures 10-year road map action plan, including four key funding programs:

the \$4 million Biofutures Acceleration Program, the \$5 million Biofutures Industry Development Fund, the \$5 million Biofutures Commercialisation Program and the \$5 million Waste to Biofutures Fund. It delivers on numerous RD and E supporting programs such as the Advance Queensland Industry Research Fellowships, Engaging Science Grants, Ignite Ideas funds, industry tech funds, Women's Research Assistance Program and Advancing Regional Innovation Program. It does promote future career opportunities in the agriculture and food sectors through schools of the future.

Strategies for science, technology, engineering and mathematics and the Agribusiness Gateway to Industry Schools Program, a program with which I am quite familiar. Certainly, some of my students who attend a school in my area are the recipients of that excellent program. It provides information on promoting Queensland's key research capabilities and on the Queensland science capability director—

Mr HART: A point of order, chair.

CHAIR: One moment there, minister. A point of order?

Mr HART: It was a pretty specific question the member for Gympie asked. The minister is dancing all around the place, but has not answered the question.

CHAIR: The minister is providing that answer there in the detail we do need, but I am sure that the minister is coming to a conclusion.

Mr FURNER: On the specifics of the question, I am happy to defer to my director-general, Dr Beth Woods.

CHAIR: Probably just briefly, Dr Woods.

Dr Woods: Thank you, minister. Thank you for the question. In relation to the detail provided in response to question on notice No. 5, the first line of figures, which represent the actuals, or the budget, we are talking about a combination of base funding that is Queensland government consolidated revenue royalty income which comes from royalties on the outputs of DAF's R and D, full-fee paid services. This includes things like rent and our food lab fees. It goes up and down much the same—again, as other answers that I have already given—depending on the funding available in the particular year because projects start and finish. If a large project finishes and that is not immediately taken up before the year starts, it is not reflected in the budget. What you really need to compare is the budget figures—not the actual figures—in previous years against this year's budget, because we would normally expect that a number of millions of dollars of additional R and D projects will come in.

There are, however, some important areas where we would expect this figure to go down this year. For example, this group would normally have a rent income of in excess of \$1 million. I do not have the precise figure but, if you wish to find out what it is, I will certainly track it down. We have foregone rent, as has the Queensland government, across the board for external bodies that are taking up space in our business. We expect to have some reduction in the available research dollars for research in agricultural industries, because they are based on 0.5 of the gross value of product of our major industries. The result of a succession of droughts—and we see that in terms of the total value in the agricultural sector in Queensland—means that that figure of 0.5 per cent of GVP has dropped. The funds available for us to be able to compete for from external funding fluctuate both with the market value and the seasonal conditions.

Mr KATTER: Minister, one of the largest constraints facing rural communities is the availability of finance. The government has no first-mortgage products in housing and businesses in those towns and there is strong evidence of postcode discrimination being demonstrated by the major banks. Will the minister consider the development of a government loan product to help stimulate those communities?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for Traeger for his question. I know of the excellent work done through the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, QRIDA, particularly during the pandemic, assisting communities not only in this part of Queensland but also right across the state with regard to stimulating the economy. In many cases it has shielded businesses from closure and supported over 87,000 employees. Notwithstanding those sorts of results, QRIDA also supplies assistance through the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme, First Start loans of up to \$2 million to support new entrants in establishing their first viable primary production or wildcatch fishing enterprise, and sustainability loans of up to \$1.3 million to assist existing primary producers and wildcatch fishers to increase their productivity and the viability of their enterprises.

With the work they do in rural communities, QRIDA has an excellent network of offices. Some time ago I opened an office in Townsville. When the member for Gympie and I travelled to Western Queensland after that monsoonal event we saw the excellent work of collaboration in supporting

primary producers right throughout the state with respect to recovery measures as well. There is an excellent service provided by QRIDA. There are many examples. I could spend more time, but I will finish on that.

Mr KATTER: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the QRIDA products, which I am aware of. My question referred to first mortgages. I think you will find that most of the QRIDA loans are second mortgages. If the government provided its own development institute or development bank and had the capacity to provide first mortgages, that would fill that massive gap that is there at the moment in terms of lending for houses in Richmond and Normanton, where people cannot get loans to buy houses or businesses. I am referring to first mortgages, not the loans that tack onto other primary loans.

Mr FURNER: Banking is a federally regulated responsibility. It is extremely hard to create such a bank under federal legislation. A state agriculture bank would have to have higher levels of capital and take on higher risks and would struggle to be viable in a market that offers producers lots of options. I might call to the table the chief executive officer from QRIDA, Mr Cameron MacMillan, to respond to your specific question.

Mr MacMillan: I thank the member for the question. As you would be aware, QRIDA is a statutory authority that is focused very much on rural communities. Its core products are around lending to agricultural families. For your information, it has been a very busy year. The organisation approved something like 11,557 applications in the past 12 months, totalling \$1.2 billion. A lot of that was obviously to do with the COVID loans, which were Jobs Support Loans. In terms of the PIPES loans, in 2019-20 QRIDA approved a total of 230 applications for First Start and Sustainability loans worth \$117 million.

Member, our focus is on family farms. You will be very pleased to hear that even this morning we approved a \$2 million loan down in your part of the world, which we are very pleased about. That was all about getting the next generation into farming. It would be a complete policy shift, which would be out of my remit, for us to start lending for in-town family businesses or for homes. That would be a policy shift from our perspective.

Mr MADDEN: I refer to SDS volume 2, page 11. Minister, will you outline for the committee what the state government is doing to reinvigorate trade relationships in a post-COVID world?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for Ipswich West for that very important question. No doubt, trade relationships are very topical in the media these days for a variety of different reasons, but I will not go there at present.

In 2019-20 Queensland exported approximately \$10.5 billion worth of agriculture products around the world. It is clear that the world loves Queensland beef, fresh Queensland seafood, our amazing mangoes, citrus and broccoli, just to name a few of those commodities. The closure of Australia's borders and other international borders has been deepening the difficulty of our trade relationships. That is why the Palaszczuk government invested \$5 million as part of our economic recovery plan to reinvigorate relationships with key partners.

During the pandemic I had briefings with Trade and Investment Queensland and also Australian Foreign Affairs and Trade officials based in Korea, China and Japan. What I have learned from this—I knew part of this before, given I have been fortunate enough to be involved in a couple of trade missions—is that the demand for the clean, green produce we provide is second to none and is currently stronger than ever. The people in Korea, Japan and China and our other trading partners explored e-commerce and other online platforms to get their fill of Queensland produce. The \$5 million investment I mentioned will go to looking at ways to help Queensland agribusinesses harness the power of e-commerce and assist with the coordination of additional regular airfreight services.

The Palaszczuk government is also using that funding to continue the vital work of trade missions. In September this year I hosted our very first—I understand it could very well be the first in Australia—virtual trade mission with Japan, our second largest agriculture trading partner. My guest of honour here in Brisbane was Japanese Consul-General Tanaka-san. Together we hosted a lunch at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre with key Queensland exporters and Japanese business leaders. The lunch was due to be simultaneously held in Japan with some of our local trading partners there but, due to increased COVID restrictions there, that had to be cancelled at their end. However, I was lucky enough to take part in a cooking challenge with Tanaka-san. It featured great Queensland produce and was judged by none other than Iron Chef Hiroyuki Sakai. Tanaka-san and I also travelled to Ayr to launch a new specially designed greenhouse. The greenhouse will support DAF's innovative research work in protected cropping systems, and in the long term Queensland growers will learn how to produce export quality counterseasonal crops including melons and eggplants specifically tailored to Japanese and Asian consumer preferences. I look forward to officially opening the new facility in 2021.

This virtual trade mission was a success because it proved that, despite international borders being closed, we can continue to build strong relationships with our closest trading partners.

It is not clear when international travel can resume, so in the meantime I see no reasons why we should not continue these virtual trade missions. In fact, it is my priority and that of the department that in the new term of the Palaszczuk government we host further trade missions to many of our other key trading partners including South Korea, Indonesia and markets where Australia has strong free-trade agreements in place. There is no reason why we cannot export Queensland food and fibre around the world in this COVID environment. As the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, I will work hard to achieve this over the next four years.

Mr SMITH: With reference to the SDS volume 2 at page 2 with regard to DAF's objective to build capacity of agribusiness and communities to meet sector challenges, will the minister outline the government's response to protecting Queensland's agricultural sector during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr FURNER: I thank the honourable member for Bundaberg and congratulate him on his achievements and his interest in agriculture in that community. This year has been like no other. The Palaszczuk government was the first jurisdiction in the nation to declare a public health emergency in response to the COVID-19 virus outbreak. As the outbreak reached our shores, the national cabinet introduced tighter restrictions on international borders and public movements to contain the spread of this disease, but the Palaszczuk government also understood the need for major industries to continue to operate in these unprecedented times. That is why we declared agriculture an essential industry, giving farmers and their workers along with the supply chain reassurances that the Queensland government would stand by them. My department convened the Agriculture Coordination Group made up of more than 70 industry representatives and other government representatives. During the height of the pandemic shutdown the ACG met weekly to identify and find solutions to those problems, and I included myself in those engagements by teleconference.

I also held regular meetings with key industry groups like Growcom, the Queensland Farmers' Federation and AgForce because this government believes strongly in working with industry to protect and grow the sector and the thousands of jobs it supports, and that is what we did during the pandemic response. That is why Growcom described the support of our agriculture sector as the best in the nation. I also took part in AGMIN, the meeting of all agricultural ministers from around the country, both states and territories. The cooperation between all states, territories and the Commonwealth during the early stage of the pandemic was exceptional, but I am really disappointed that at a time when those regular meetings needed to continue the Commonwealth decided to suspend them and since May we have only met a handful of times. We should meet more frequently to discuss pressing issues like coordination and national approaches to labour shortages.

Nevertheless, the Palaszczuk government is committed to working with the agriculture industry to grow even bigger in the wake of this pandemic. For instance, I convened a meeting of all major beef processors to discuss the learnings of the second lockdown in Victoria which affected abattoirs across that state. I know that Nolans in Gympie, for example, trialled the use of internet enabled glasses so that inspectors could virtually inspect that facility, and this has helped to reduce travel times but more importantly protected workers and improved biosecurity measures at their facility. Because of our work with AgForce, Growcom, QFF and other industry groups, the Palaszczuk government has kept the agriculture sector safe so it can continue to feed and clothe Australia and the rest of the world. I look forward to working with them as Queensland's economic recovery continues.

CHAIR: With reference to the SDS volume 2 at page 11, can you outline what the government is doing to fill the labour shortages on farms that have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr FURNER: Once again that is a very important question and something that we need to work together on at all levels of government to get solutions to this important issue. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused worker shortages on farms right across Australia and the Palaszczuk government identified this right at the very start of this pandemic. I can remember very well raising this with the federal agriculture minister, and my other colleagues in the states and territories concurred with my view. We worked with industry groups and labour hire companies to identify where and when these shortages would occur in Queensland. Unfortunately, this work was hampered by the fact that the Commonwealth government was unable to provide figures of the number of working holiday visa holders still in the country after international borders were shut.

Our modelling showed that—and I want to put on the record my appreciation to Growcom for assisting in identifying this—there were enough workers in Queensland to help with the 2020 winter harvest. Working with industry through the agriculture working group, the Palaszczuk government

announced a five-step framework to help keep farmers and their workers safe during COVID-19. This included mandatory health and biosecurity management plans, but we knew there were going to be challenges to meet the demand of workers for this summer's harvest going into the medium to long term.

In September the Palaszczuk government announced \$1.1 million towards the agriculture sector seasonal labour initiative to get more seasonal workers on to farms. We know that there are Queenslanders out there looking for work and we want to connect them to farmers looking to pick crops like mangoes, citrus and tomatoes and the #pickqld campaign is a targeted marketing campaign to connect seasonal workers, displaced Queensland workers and working holiday-makers to employment opportunities in key agriculture regions when demand for workers is high.

The Back to Work in Agriculture Incentive Scheme is also underway which initially focused on the Wide Bay, Burnett and Darling Downs but has now been extended to include the entire state. This offers payments of up to \$1,500 to assist eligible Queenslanders wanting to work in those regions with the costs associated with locating to regional areas. We have provided additional resources to the Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network to deliver local solutions to worker shortages. Last month 151 workers from Tonga arrived in Queensland as part of our trial resumption of the Pacific labour and seasonal workers scheme. Under the direction and advice of the Chief Health Officer, those workers are quarantining on farm, and that followed strict protocols. This is a first. A further 135 Tongans and 172 Solomon Island workers are now in quarantine to support agriculture industries.

I know that growing regions in Queensland are watching this with interest and are hoping to take advantage of the Queensland trial. I want to stress that this trial was agreed to by the Palaszczuk government after a request from the Commonwealth, so comments that I have seen in the media from the federal agriculture minister suggesting that this trial is taking jobs away from Queenslanders and other Australians are disingenuous. All of the farms in the trial have had to demonstrate that they could not or were unable to find Australians to fill these vacancies under guidelines agreed to by the Commonwealth. The latest border restrictions follow the free movement of workers from all parts of Australia, except declared hotspots, and I encourage any Queensland or any Australian looking for work to come up to regional Queensland and help with the summer harvest and beyond. The Palaszczuk government will continue to work closely with the industry to ensure quality Queensland produce continues to be harvested.

Mr MADDEN: I refer to SDS volume 2 at page 6. Minister, will you report to the committee on the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative and in particular cluster fencing in south-western regions of Queensland?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for Ipswich West for his question. The Queensland Feral Pest Initiative has been so successful that in the previous term of government as minister for agriculture I announced a fifth round of grants for funding. I am proud to say that as I remain the Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities in this new term I am really excited to see the continuance of work to maintain our world-class reputation of excellent Queensland produce in our first-class agriculture industry.

The success of the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative is highlighted in the figures. The total distance to be covered by cluster fencing as part of the initiative so far will be almost 9,000 kilometres. That is more than the distance between Brisbane and Kolkata. That is quite a lot of fencing. Proudly, the Palaszczuk government has committed \$19.8 million to assist regional communities with the construction of cluster fencing in order to tackle wild dogs. The result of this initiative to date is the protection of more than 400 sheep-producing properties from these wild dogs.

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board, or RAPAD as people would know it by, reports that in direct thanks to cluster fencing projects lambing rates have increased from 40 per cent up beyond 80 per cent and sheep numbers have almost doubled in the south-west, with numbers increasing from 269,000 to nearly 497,000 head.

The rejuvenation of the Queensland sheep industry is something to be very proud of. It creates and shores up local jobs and supports local regional communities and families. The Palaszczuk government understands that it is not just wild dogs that can have a devastating impact on agriculture. This initiative also addresses on-ground management of feral pigs, feral cats, harrisia cactus, parkinsonia and also prickly acacia. COVID-19 has delayed many projects across the government and the community, including the rollout of round 4. However, my department is already finalising funding and I look forward to announcing the successful applicants shortly.

We as a government understand the devastating effect that drought can have on our local communities. That is why we have targeted this initiative towards drought affected sheep- and wool-producing areas with the ultimate goal of growing flocks and bringing industry and jobs back into those regions. The total value of investments made by the Queensland government through the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative and by supporting cluster fencing loan schemes, including the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, is approximately \$64.74 million. This equates to a serious commitment and financial support for Queenslanders who are having a go. This highlights once again that this is a government that cares about jobs, cares about regional communities and it proves that we are able and are willing to front up so that together with Queenslanders we keep this great state working.

CHAIR: We will now go to questions from non-government members.

Mr PERRETT: I have just one follow-up question in the research and development area that I did not get to before. Minister, what has been the uptake of the new sugarcane varieties in the past five years and does the state consider these a commercial success given its sizeable investment?

Mr FURNER: Can I get some clarity on that question? I assume this is obviously relevant to RD&E in terms of Queensland government investment in that area?

Mr PERRETT: Correct.

Mr FURNER: No doubt the member would be aware that sugarcane is a significant contributor to our economy and also the rest of the state. Queensland's sugarcane production accounts for close to 95 per cent of the total of Australia's raw production. It is challenging times for the sugarcane industry. Over 80 per cent of Queensland sugar production is exported. In the 2019 season Queensland sugar mills received approximately 28.4 million tonnes of sugarcane. That is a reduction of 6.7 per cent from 2018. It is largely due to devastating drought that impacted a significant portion of the state last year. Unfortunately this has also led to a notable reduction in farm income for some growers. As a result the overall contribution of the sugarcane industry in Australia's gross value of production for 2019-20 is estimated to be 1.02 billion², a six per cent reduction from the previous year. If we look at 2019-20, the Palaszczuk government continues its annual commitment of \$2.85 million to sugarcane research development and extension projects and this investment was made—

Mr HART: Point of order, Mr Chair. Again the minister is dancing all around the place. It was a very specific question about new sugarcane varieties.

CHAIR: I know the minister does understand that. We have been going for less than two minutes on this. I know the minister will be coming to that, so let us not just jump in too quickly.

Mr FURNER: It is a broad area about our investment in RD&E in terms of sugarcane, like many of our investments, so I will prevail in providing an understanding to the member for Burleigh in regards to his recent role on this particular committee.

Mr HART: I understand, Minister. Please move on. Answer the question.

Mr FURNER: It might assist him to listen to the answer so he can further his understanding on the importance of cane. This investment was made through the research funding agreement between DAF and Sugar Research Australia.

Mr HART: Point of order, Mr Chair. I find the minister's comments to be offensive and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr FURNER: I withdraw. These funds are used in preventing and preparing for biosecurity incursions such as moth borers from South-East Australia using novel technologies to improve and enhance farm systems and practices and improving productivity through energy innovation, input management and practice change adaptation. SRA is currently reviewing its business model and developing new strategic investment processes, and SRA is continuing with DAF as it undergoes that change.

Mr HART: Anything at all about the question, Minister?

Mr FURNER: I will refer to my director-general and hopefully that will satisfy the interjections of the member for Burleigh.

Mr McDONALD: Particularly around sugarcane varieties. That will be helpful.

CHAIR: I think the message has gotten through clearly on that.

Mr HART: I hope so.

² In correspondence received 10 December 2020, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries clarified that Australia's gross value of production for 2019-20 is estimated to be 1.02 billion, not 1.02 million as stated during the hearing.

Dr Woods: I draw the attention of members of the committee to the fact that our funding arrangements for R&D in the sugar industry relate to a \$2.85 million grant which we provide per year to Sugar Research Australia which is, in fact, an industry led and controlled organisation which delivers research and development as well as research funding decisions for the sugar industry. Our funds are directed towards 15 RD&E programs. At the moment DAF funds are not used to support SRA breeding programs. They are used, as the minister mentioned, for preparation for biosecurity issues, for novel technologies for improving productivity in various ways and for looking at new and novel uses of sugar, sugarcane and sugarcane by-products.

However, we are certainly very interested in the question of variety improvement. It is a central question to the current review by Sugar Research Australia, SRA, of its business model and of its strategic investments. That review is being conducted in partnership with Canegrowers and with ASMC, the Australian Sugar Milling Council, who are also looking at the strategic directions for the sugar industry given its current difficulties with very low world prices.

Mr HART: There is no new sugarcane; that is what you are saying?

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh, you have the answer. It may not be the answer you are expecting but that answer has been provided. Do you have another question?

Mr PERRETT: I will move on. The next question is to the minister. It relates to page 3 of the SDS and drought support. Minister, in May 2020 you delayed the implementation of the drought reforms from the 2018 drought review, including cuts to drought fodder subsidies that were meant to commence on 1 July 2020 to 1 July 2021. Will you confirm that the drought fodder subsidies will be removed from 1 July 2021?

CHAIR: Minister—

Mr FURNER: I am more than happy to respond.

CHAIR: I was about to say that there are some inferences, arguments and imputations there, but I am letting you answer that. I think you have the gist of the question.

Mr FURNER: There was a multitude of questions directed to drought but also the drought review so I will respond accordingly to those. I thought I made it clear in my opening statement that there are no cuts to drought funding. The funding provided has always been adequate. It is held in central reserve in terms of beyond estimates. Once again I do not want to be too critical of the member, but surely someone at some stage would understand the difference between an estimate and an actual.

When we did the drought review, it certainly was a process where we gained expert advice through previous CEOs of both AgForce and QFF, put them together and engaged with industry about the future of drought in this state and this country. What we found with their recommendations and their engagement was that it was quite similar and in parallel, in fact, with the National Drought Agreement. Certainly those who have been privy to the National Drought Agreement understand the importance not just of agriculture but of being drought prepared. There have been no cuts to drought funding. Once again, the same process that applies throughout budget estimates in terms of the delivery of the actuals is the same process that was in place when the LNP were in government for that short period of two and a bit years.

There will be funding for DRAS to meet producer needs. The budgeted estimate is just that—an estimate—and more and more will be funded. We cannot predict what the weather will be, whether it will be 100 per cent accurate or what the case might be. Once again, we have always been there for the farmers—the Labor government understands that—and we always will be. We have given an undertaking time and time again that we will provide DRAS funding as long as this drought prevails.

Mr PERRETT: Minister, how many times have you or your department met with industry groups such as AgForce and QFF on the implementation of the drought reforms?

Mr FURNER: Primarily, as the member might be aware, it was industry calling us to suspend the review. It was to be implemented this year but, as a result of COVID-19, we gave a commitment to suspend it until the end of June this year. We have kept that promise. I will hand over to my deputy director-general, Bernadette Ditchfield, to explain the engagements with industry and how many times those engagements have occurred since the suspension took place.

Ms Ditchfield: Can I clarify if you are looking for an actual number, because I do not have the number of times we met with industry? Certainly we formed a working group with QFF and AgForce because we found very clearly that we needed to co-design the reforms and the changes together, so there was a commitment to do that.

Mr PERRETT: My question related to how many times. As I understood it, the commitment was given by the minister that you would meet with those industry groups with respect to the implementation of the drought reforms. My question was quite specific: how many times has the minister and the department met with those groups to discuss this—both the minister and the department? If you do not have it I am happy for you to take that on notice and receive that advice later.

Ms Ditchfield: There were more than several. We will have to take that on notice from a departmental point of view to give you a number, so that we can look through our diaries. The commitment was ongoing and we met numerous times before COVID on this issue.

CHAIR: Certainly we may get some more information about the graduate question. At the end of the session we will come back for the information that you may be able to provide. If it cannot be done then the minister decides whether to take that on notice.

Mr HART: Chair, including how many times the minister met as well.

Mr FURNER: That is easily available. All my ministerial diary appointments are readily available to anyone. That is a transparent process. Naturally, last week or when I met with AgForce that will be part of my diary. When the opportunity comes around to provide that, that is part of my responsibility as a minister. No doubt the contents of the meeting are not necessarily a matter that is diarised, but certainly on all occasions meetings—whether with AgForce, QFF or any other stakeholders—are diarised and readily accessible to the member for Gympie or any other member of this committee.

CHAIR: To clarify, did you want to come back with that information or do you feel that you have given your answer?

Mr FURNER: I have given my answer, Chair. Thank you.

Mr McDONALD: Minister, in regards to the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program, last year an independent consultant and former head of the national Productivity Commission, Bernard Wonder, handed down his review into the program and concluded that the fire ant footprint had grown, not shrunk, since the program began. What is your department doing to reverse and rectify those findings?

CHAIR: I am sorry; I missed where that information came from?

Mr McDONALD: It was an independent consultant and former head of the Productivity Commission, Bernard Wonder. It was a review into the program.

Mr PERRETT: It is published on the department's website.

CHAIR: We have a report published on the department's website from a former head of the national Productivity Commission. The question relates to fire ants. Minister, would you like to answer that question?

Mr FURNER: It is a great question and I thank the member for Lockyer for it. I know that from his electorate he is uniquely aware of the impact of red imported fire ants. This is another great example of what we as a government do in terms of biosecurity. It is a 10-year eradication program. It is a national jointly funded program with the Commonwealth. Every other state and territory is in that arrangement of funding.

The member is quite right that the review was done by Mr Wonder. It concluded in December 2019. They made 37 recommendations. We are working through those recommendations to improve the efficiency, delivery and effectiveness of that. Out of those 37 recommendations, 14 recommendations are considered high priority and we are focusing on business improvement practices. Once again, it is a work in progress in how we deal with the recommendations of the Wonder review.

There are new and exciting measures that are coming out of that review in how we deal with this particular pest. In particular, if you look at how Queensland has dealt with RIFA, red imported fire ants, it is a glowing example of how we have been able to contain it. If we had not done the measures in terms of starting from the west and working to the east, this pest would have been far reaching outside the boundaries of our state. In fact, when there have been outbreaks and incursions in other areas—I will use the examples of Botany in New South Wales and, I understand, in WA—we have sent our processes and our facilities over there to eliminate and eradicate those areas.

We will continue working through the Wonder report and working through the measures that they have put in place to be very successful in containment and eradication. We are doing things such as trialling new helicopter-mounted remote sensing equipment, which will better identify an infestation and allow for more targeted treatment activities. We are introducing self-management initiatives to provide

greater efficiencies with the concept of shared responsibility with fire ant management between government, industry and the community. We are educating local governments as well. There is a renewed interest, which I am very pleased to see, from local governments and also people in general. It is a GBO, a general biosecurity obligation, that people understand the importance of how we deal with this particular pest. I am very encouraged with people in general who are out there taking on that responsibility. When they go to the markets, for example, they can inspect pot plants and those sorts of things before they purchase them, so they do not spread the pest.

The developing and implementing of the three-year strategy plans to address all the implications of decisions and key issues identified in the review. We modified the fire ant biosecurity zones in May 2020 to minimise the likelihood of human assisted movement. I will call to the table the chief biosecurity officer, Malcolm Letts, to speak further on the matters that I have raised in respect to the honourable member's question.

Mr Letts: Specifically, the minister mentioned the new three-year strategy that has been developed and approved by the independent steering committee, which is made up of all of the funding jurisdictions. That three-year strategy was off the back of the Wonder review that, as you said, identified a further spread and specifically deals with that. We are implementing a new treatment regime in the coming year that looks at the area to the east of the area 1 treatment zone, which you would be familiar with. In that area we are trialling some different treatments. In addition to that, the promising results from the surveillance from last year's treatment round was that we have actually identified a few areas where we will be increasing our surveillance in relation to the sentinel sites on the extreme boundary of the area, to make sure there is not any further spread.

Mr KATTER: Minister, the motion agreed to before the House in Townsville was that the government work to implement a system whereby 10 cents a litre of every litre of milk sold goes directly to the farmer. Most people would accept that it is an industry heading for oblivion at the moment without some sort of assistance. In acknowledgement of that, has the government followed through with that direction of parliament?

Mr FURNER: I remember quite well that motion in the House when we held a regional sitting of this parliament. We always encourage Queenslanders to enjoy their produce, and this is just one example of that. Prior to my privilege of holding the portfolio of agriculture, industry development and fisheries, the previous ministers were engaged in assisting the industry with a logo. I understand that is a work in progress and hopefully we will get to see that soon.

The member for Traeger quite rightly points out that this is a very important industry. I had the privilege of being in the member for Hill's electorate last year. I want to put on the record my appreciation of Shane for his involvement and engagement with dairy in that area. It is an area that is close to my heart. My father was a dairy farmer, not far from the member for Gympie's area—at the back of Gympie, a little place called Ridgewood—so I do understand the importance.

We have been fortunate enough in developing and assisting dairies where practical. Our Rural Economic Development Grants assisted Kenilworth Dairies. They were one of those 15 businesses that benefited from those RED grants. I also welcomed the Dairy Code of Conduct which came into effect on 1 January 2020. I reflect also on the engagements that we organised for the member for Hill to meet with representatives from Woolworths and Coles in regards to those increases in branded milk.

We will continue working with industry. We will continue working with the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation to make sure we can, as far as practicable, address some of those concerns that the member for Traeger has raised. Once again, to a great extent, this is an area that is totally outside our hands as the Queensland government. We need to make sure we engage with industry and also the federal government to look at measures that impact on that government as well.

Next week I will be expecting to meet with QDO about these measures as well. I would continue to encourage their engagement, whether it be with the member for Hill, the member for Traeger or anyone else in the member's area of interest; I would welcome that opportunity.

CHAIR: We will go to a block of government questions.

Mr SMITH: With reference to SDS, volume 2, page 2, will the minister outline what financial support has been offered to the farming sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr FURNER: When COVID-19 first hit our shores, the Palaszczuk government's first response was to keep Queenslanders safe and healthy, based on the directives and advice of the Chief Health Officer. Queenslanders listened. We also listened to the health responses to the pandemic; they have been very successful. Because we have managed the health response, we have been able to deliver

on a plan for Queensland's economic recovery. The government announced the first industry assistance package in February and a month later announced \$1 billion in funding for the COVID-19 Jobs Support Loans scheme. That was the first loan assistance scheme of its type anywhere in this country—before JobKeeper and before JobSeeker came on the horizon.

Then in June the Premier announced phase 2 of the economic recovery plan. That included a \$12.5 million funding injection to support the agribusiness sector. Of that \$12.5 million, \$5.5 million was earmarked for digital, and transformed the agribusiness sector by developing integrated supply chains that improved traceability, biosecurity and food safety; \$5 million for reinvigorating trade relationships, which I referred to earlier in answer to previous questions; and \$2 million to help agribusinesses diversify, including for tourism. Following the release of a further \$5 million, a round of the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative was released to construct cluster fencing to boost the sheep and wool industry and support jobs in Western Queensland. Applications have now closed and are being assessed.

In September, as part of the \$5.5 million digital transformation in agribusiness initiative, my department launched the \$1.2 million Agribusiness Digital Solutions Grant program. Up to \$200,000 will be provided to industry organisations to develop, trial and promote digital solutions in agriculture, and also food supply chains. Submissions have closed and the department is currently assessing those applications. I look forward to announcing the successful recipients of the first round very shortly. The funding component to reinvigorate trade relationships is already being put in place and is in use, as I have indicated.

In September, as I said earlier, the virtual trade mission was quite a success. The department is continuing to work closely with other industries on other aspects of the funding package I have outlined. Before the election, the Palaszczuk government built on this platform by committing \$250,000 to develop a sheepmeat value chain investment strategy. That builds on almost \$20 million of direct investment and almost \$40 million in loan schemes that this government has provided for cluster fencing across Western and South-Western Queensland since 2015. Lambing rates, as I have indicated, have climbed and we are helping to rebuild the Queensland sheep industry.

The combination of previous investments and further industry development work and investment attraction will help drive growth and jobs in rural communities for years to come. We are also investing \$250,000 to identify opportunities for cropping ventures in North-West Queensland and we have also helped local governments to boost their pest and invasive plant management capabilities, especially in the far north, to the tune of \$450,000.

The pandemic has given our farmers an opportunity to reinvigorate their businesses, diversify into new products and markets and, importantly, capitalise on the demand for clean, green produce right around the world. The funding that the Palaszczuk government is injecting into the sector will help our producers to realise this potential.

CHAIR: With reference to the SDS, volume 2, page 2, can the minister outline what action the Palaszczuk government is taking to ensure that animals in Queensland are kept safe at least to a level of community expectation?

Mr FURNER: Our community has come a really long way in regards to looking after animals—a long way since the development of the Animals Protection Act of 1925. In 2001, the then minister for primary industries and rural communities, the Hon. Henry Palaszczuk, knew instinctively that animal protection laws needed toughening up. He took action. In his second reading speech of the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001, then minister Palaszczuk proudly said that that bill was 'the most forward-looking piece of legislation in this field in Australia'. We still have the toughest animal welfare laws in the nation, but community expectations evolve. This issue is way too important to just sit back and think that the job is done. That is why I take this opportunity to announce that this re-elected Palaszczuk government will undertake a full review of the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001. As this act is 19 years old, it is timely to ensure it reflects the level of decency that this government and the community expects in relation to the treatment of animals. We need to continue to improve on the good work already achieved.

Since we were first elected in 2015, the Palaszczuk Labor government has, time and time again, pledged our commitment to providing legislation and standards that protect the welfare of all animals in Queensland. As minister, I commissioned the Animal Welfare Advisory Board to conduct a companion animal welfare review; we banned the use of electronic prodders on horses; I initiated the drafting of new standards and guidelines for rodeos to ensure the welfare standards of animals used in rodeos are appropriate; and I am proud to say that during this tough and unusual time, my department administered the Emergency Animal Welfare—COVID-19 Exhibited Animal Assistance Program to help

operators care for their animals and meet their animal welfare obligations. In our previous term, the Palaszczuk government identified issues associated with puppy farming and swiftly passed legislation to ensure dog breeders comply with Queensland animal welfare standards.

RSPCA Queensland provides an essential service to the Queensland community. To support this good work, an annual grant of \$500,000 is provided by the Queensland government to the RSPCA. In 2019 Premier Palaszczuk committed to an independent inquiry into animal cruelty and management of retired racehorses. On receipt of that report, the Queensland government supported all of the 55 recommendations, 37 in full, 17 in principle and one in part. This government is committed to meeting national standards for livestock welfare. It is leading the development of both the Australian animal welfare standards and guidelines for livestock at processing establishments and the Australian animal welfare standards and guidelines for the land transport of livestock.

We know Queenslanders love their animals. We know our farmers too care deeply about the animals in their care. I will work with the agricultural industry to make sure this important voice is heard in this process. A well-earned reputation for caring for our farm animals can only enhance our ability to grow the export markets for our world-class produce. The review of the Animal Care and Protection Act will include a review of penalties to ensure enforcement options are fit for purpose, investigation of the infringement notice scheme in response to animal welfare offences, oversight and governance of internally appointed inspectors and options to facilitate the reporting of animal cruelty by animal welfare professionals, including veterinary surgeons. The Palaszczuk government remains committed to a high bar when it comes to animal welfare.

CHAIR: That is welcome news.

Mr MADDEN: My question relates to SDS volume 2 at page 2. Minister, will you outline what action the Palaszczuk government is taking to ensure the welfare of Queensland's animals?

Mr McDONALD: Point of order, Chair. I ask whether that is repetition of the last question.

CHAIR: Member for Ipswich West, is this related to dogs?

Mr MADDEN: This question relates to the welfare of dogs.

Mr FURNER: The RSPCA has had a presence in Queensland since 1883—nearly 140 years of serving the people of this state and helping to keep animals safe. Sadly, there is a need for organisations such as the RSPCA in our communities. I am grateful that there are good people in our communities who do not sit back and allow the unfair and poor treatment of any animal. My department works very closely with the RSPCA. The Palaszczuk government vows to continue its support for this essential community service.

This year has been a tough one. Many people have found themselves at home isolated from their families, work colleagues and social outings. Early in the COVID pandemic, the RSPCA was inundated with homes seeking new four-legged family members. Adoptions went through the roof, which is a truly terrific bonus coming out of the mayhem of 2020.

That brings me to puppies and dogs as gifts. Dogs, puppies and kittens are not the ideal present. Dogs are not toys to be propped in the corner after the initial joy of receiving them wears off. They need company, they need feeding, they need walking, they need watering and they need to be cared for forever. Puppies grow up and not all households are set up for the lifelong commitment of welcoming a surprise animal from a well-intentioned family member or friend. I implore everyone this Christmas to not give an animal as a surprise gift. It is a lovely thought, but it is important to discuss it with the intended new owner and their household first. Let them choose an animal that would best suit their household. Do not be offended if the animal is not right for their way of life.

I also take the opportunity to remind people that our furry friends do not eat what we do. Do not share your Christmas ham nor your lovely rich chocolates with the animals in the household. The last thing we want anyone to do over the Christmas period is to end up with a trip to the vet with a sick puppy.

Mr SMITH: With reference to the SDS at page 2-3, in regard to DAF promoting Queensland's agricultural products and innovations internationally to grow exports and attract investment, will the minister outline how the government is supporting Beef Australia in 2021—the biggest event of its type in the Southern Hemisphere?

Mr FURNER: Beef is at the heart of our great state. It is our largest agricultural commodity. Beef processing directly employs 10,000 people and supports a further 8,000. Beef exports are worth \$5.37 billion to the economy.

The Beef Australia expo is held every three years. It has proven success as a platform for business engagement and investment in the beef and cattle industry. At Beef Australia 2018 there were over 1,200 registered international delegates from 43 countries who participated in the Handshakes program. This was supported by staff from DAF and Trade & Investment Queensland. There were more than 100,000 visitors at the event, delivering substantial economic benefits to the Rockhampton region.

The Palaszczuk government has committed \$1 million to next year's event. We are 100 per cent focused on our COVID-19 economic recovery and to get the state moving again so events like this in Australia's beef capital will help. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Beef Australia 2021 will be bigger and better than ever before. The Beef Australia committee made the important announcement on 26 November this year that beef is on.

Organisers still expect international visitors to attend the event, albeit virtually, and interact with a virtual event platform, seminars and presentations. DAF is coordinating the whole-of-government engagement with Beef Australia Ltd and regional staff are contributing to ensure the event is another success. DAF is also participating in a new dedicated agtech innovation hub at the Ken Coombe Tech Yards. The tech yards will showcase existing and world-class emerging technologies that impact the beef industry supply chain from conception through to consumption.

DAF staff will also be working with organisers to prepare a detailed biosecurity plan to ensure no unwanted pests make it to next year's event. More than 5,000 head of cattle will be on display. To make sure there are no disease issues there will be a range of preventative actions for event organisers and exhibitors to undertake. The health of livestock will be monitored through the event. If a disease is detected at the event there are biosecurity plans in place to isolate any affected stock to stop any spread of infection. Good stock biosecurity is everyone's responsibility. I encourage all livestock owners and members of the general public intending to observe to respect any biosecurity plans in place.

Other Palaszczuk government agencies delivering key services around trade and investment, business development, tourism and events, health, natural resources management, workplace safety, transport and road infrastructure, emergency services, food safety, environmental protection, animal biosecurity will also have a hands-on presence at Beef Australia 2021. Australia produces the best beef in the world and Beef Australia 2021 is a wonderful opportunity to show the rest of Australia and the world what we produce from paddock to plate.

CHAIR: Certainly those of us who eat the steaks at Parliament House know that Queensland beef is outstanding. We will go to a question from the member for Mirani.

Mr ANDREW: I refer to the page 6 of the SDS volume 2 at dot point 5. My question is to the minister. What is the current percentage of feral animal spend against the amount of actual feral animal damage in Queensland and how does that stack up against the crown of thorns starfish which is not a land based pest?

CHAIR: I am going to help you out, member for Mirani. You are talking about numbers of feral pests caught?

Mr ANDREW: The percentage of feral pest actual spend compared to the cost of the damage due to feral pests in Queensland.

CHAIR: What you are probably asking for is information on modelling on feral pests.

Mr ANDREW: I would like to see how much we spend on it compared to the cost of the damage and how that stacks up against a marine based species like the crown of thorns.

CHAIR: I am not sure whether we can do the crown of thorns bit, but can we get the information the member has requested on feral pest damage?

Mr FURNER: Chair, you are quite correct. At this particular stage we would not be in a position at this portfolio estimates to give figures on the crown of thorns or any marine based pest. There might be capacity for some feedback in terms of what we spend, whether it be on the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative, if that is what the member is seeking. In terms of feral animals overall, I am happy to call to the table—

Mr ANDREW: The damage that they do in Queensland agriculture right across the board.

Mr FURNER: I will refer to my Director-General, Beth Woods, for an initial response in respect of your question.

Dr Woods: I think I need to reflect that that is a really complicated question that you have just asked. There are many reasons why it is complicated, but it relates to the challenge of trying to put a dollar value on the damage that feral pests cause and also on which feral pests you want to include in that discussion.

Mr ANDREW: I would be happy for you to include pigs, if that is okay.

Dr Woods: If your focus is on pigs, we can look to provide you with some information on pigs, noting that of course they are just one of many feral pests. In relation to feral pig management—

Mr McDONALD: Chair, I have a question.

CHAIR: Is it a point of order?

Mr McDONALD: The director-general said it is a complicated matter. I am thinking of the time. I am wondering whether the director-general could take it on notice.

Mr ANDREW: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

CHAIR: If you have the information there, Director-General, and you can provide it within the time constraints, that would be great.

Dr Woods: We will need to look at whether we have an estimate of the value of the damage caused by feral pests. I can advise that we have current expenditure in relation to feral pig control which is a project that commenced in 2018 and is funded till 2021. A total of \$921,000 is allocated to fund coordination, aerial control activity, capacity building and equipment costs. I note that that is a research development type of project.

The responsibility for feral pig control activities runs not just across the state government but across local government and across landholders and, in fact, also other major land managers. If I use a specific case in relation to our work on feral pigs on the wet tropical coast where they are particularly important because of their role as a potential spreader of Panama disease, we have other major landholders like National Parks and the military who also expend on feral pest control. That is why I commented that it is not a simple answer. For us to estimate the size of the damage, I think we can probably find a figure, but I have to comment that it will be an estimate and not one that you could bring to any level of precision.

CHAIR: Bear in mind those limitations, let us see whether we can get that information at the end of the portfolio session before we finish tonight. I know, member for Burleigh, you are bursting to ask a question.

Mr HART: Minister, in March this year the *Gold Coast Bulletin* reported fire ant infestations had appeared in the northern suburbs of the Gold Coast. In July the Gold Coast council said there were 41 instances of fire ants on the Gold Coast. Can the minister advise whether fire ants have reached the southern Gold Coast yet and what the department is doing specifically to stop them crossing the border?

CHAIR: I ask the minister to address that in a brief manner before we move on to summing up.

Mr FURNER: Following on from the question from the member for Lockyer, we provided an answer in respect of the treatment area. In respect of the area of Lockyer, that is area 1, the western boundary. That has been quite a significant milestone in terms of treating that infestation. Clearance surveillance in that area has demonstrated a residual infestation of ants now—

Mr HART: Sorry, Minister—the Gold Coast.

Mr FURNER:—in progress only at two per cent of those sites surveyed. We are moving from the west to the east and looking at areas beyond the boundaries as well. It was good to have a briefing last week from the RIFA team in respect of this subject.

Mr HART: Anything on the Gold Coast, Minister?

Mr FURNER: Once again, it is certainly an area about which I have always offered opportunities for briefings for members. The member for Coomera has probably been the only opposition member who has taken up that opportunity for briefings. I am happy to extend that to the—

Mr HART: That is why we have estimates, Minister—Gold Coast.

Mr FURNER: Chair, I would like to answer—

CHAIR: Please continue.

Mr HART: Please do.

Mr FURNER:—without being rudely interrupted by the member for Burleigh.

Mr HART: It is about the Gold Coast.

Mr FURNER: If he wants to carry on the way he does in the House, this is not the time to do that. I thought he would operate in a more professional manner.

CHAIR: I understand. I certainly caution the member for Burleigh that we are only prolonging the process. The minister is giving an answer, so please let him finish.

Mr FURNER: We have moved out of area 1. We have moved into area 2 now. In response to that, we will focus on those other areas outside the boundaries as well. I did indicate earlier to the member for Lockyer that we are getting some successes in terms of matters that have come out of the Wonder report. We are seeing some outcomes as a result of that.

To be more specific about the areas on the Gold Coast, I have seen those media reports. As I said earlier, it is pleasing to see some of the local council areas now working collaboratively in terms of wanting to be engaged. I will ask the Deputy Director-General and Chief Biosecurity Officer, Mr Malcolm Letts, to explain the specifics of those 41 areas that were reported in the media and referred to in the member for Burleigh's question and explain the specifics around whether that is the case of any actual infestations in that particular area.

Mr Letts: The member is correct. There has been an increase in numbers in recent years in relation to the northern Gold Coast with detections. The media report that the minister referred to was incorrect. There have been no nests found in the southern Gold Coast region. However, the three-year strategy has identified, and the steering committee is discussing at the moment the importance of containment of the pests and preventing them from moving further south into the Gold Coast. We are currently looking at our options in relation to increasing some effort in that containment area to the north of the Gold Coast.

In fact, we have had a very successful trial of self-treatment with canegrowers in that northern Gold Coast area which has been very promising. We are looking to do more self-treatment. We are looking at a couple of the urban development zones, talking to the property developers about the potential for them to undertake some treatment themselves. It is of obvious interest to them. They do not want to be stalled in their operations by having infestations of ants in their property development zones. We are doing some constructive and positive work with the property development sector as well in relation to treatment and surveillance of ants.

Mr HART: Thank you. That is an answer.

CHAIR: Thank you for those comments. Minister, we are running a little bit over time. I am quite happy to give you the five minutes you need to sum up and provide any answers you may have to any of those issues.

Mr FURNER: I do not have anything to add. I will compliment Mr Malcolm Letts on his delivery. The RIFA program—the Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program—is a national program. The oversight is done nationally. Once again, it is a program that is not purely run out of Queensland or decided upon Queensland's measures. Yes, the bulk of the infestations are in Queensland, but we will continue that engagement as we are locked into an oversight arrangement nationally. We will make sure that we do our very best, as we have done and demonstrated in Biosecurity Queensland, in terms of containment and, where we can, eradication. We will continue doing that, as we have demonstrated in a variety of different incursions right throughout our state. That is why we lead the nation. We are world leaders when it comes to many of our incursions such as Panama TR4 or whatever the case may be. I am very proud and happy to have Biosecurity Queensland do the excellent work they do.

Mr HART: I raise a point of order. There is nothing in the standing orders that prevents the opposition from continuing to ask questions in this area in the next section, so we would like to do that.

CHAIR: We have fisheries.

Mr HART: We would like to continue on agriculture and fisheries in the next section.

CHAIR: No, we are doing fisheries.


Mr HART: There is nothing in the standing orders, Chair, so I dispute that. We would like to continue—

CHAIR: We need to do that in a private meeting. I point out that the schedule has been agreed to by the House as well.

Mr HART: There is nothing preventing us from doing that, Chair. We will have a discussion during the break.

CHAIR: We will have that discussion. Far be it from me to see a motion passed that contradicts the will of the House.

Proceedings suspended from 6.20 pm to 6.36 pm.

 **CHAIR:** During the break the committee held a brief meeting and the motion was defeated. Further advice was sought from the Clerk. The Clerk's advice was on the primacy of the motion of the House, but he also confirmed that questions can be asked of the minister and the minister can deal with it as he sees fit.

Welcome back, Minister and officials. The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure for the minister's portfolio area of fisheries. Minister, if you wish you can make an opening statement of no more than three minutes.

Mr FURNER: I thank you and the rest of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you this evening in relation to my portfolio responsibilities of fisheries and forestry. I once again acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Once again I am joined by my director-general, Dr Beth Woods, and Dan McIntyre, my chief of staff.

I can indicate that 2020 has been a challenging year for our fishing industry. We have definitely moved quickly to ensure assistance in the early stages of the pandemic. After listening carefully to feedback from the industry we have made adjustments to the assistance available. While business was disrupted, in particular export—especially live exports—our work to implement our sustainable fisheries policy continued despite the efforts of some to derail these important reforms. This culminated in the passing of the second tranche of regulations under the strategy, putting in place important measures to ensure that we can leave a legacy for our children and grandchildren into the future. We will continue to take a hard line on those who believe that the laws protecting our fisheries do not apply to them. The fish stocks we are protecting are too important to Queensland's economy and way of life to let a few bad apples destroy them for illegal profit.

With respect to forestry, the Palaszczuk government will continue to support our timber and forestry industry. The industry has faced challenges that we were all aware of, but we have created a path whereby key stakeholders and exports will identify a sustainable way forward for the industry into the future. The Palaszczuk government is getting on with the job on those important areas of policy and delivering what we promised the people of Queensland. I welcome questions from the committee.

CHAIR: We will go straight over to the opposition. Do you have a question?

Mr McDONALD: I will hand over to the member for Gympie.

Mr PERRETT: My question is for the minister. I refer to page 8 of SDS No. 2 and to 'Fisheries and Forestry 2020-21 service area highlights'. In 2019 the department commenced the implementation of vessel monitoring, which resulted in considerable frustration and angst throughout the commercial fishing industry due to the poor quality and service provided by Option Audio. In September 2020 the Queensland Ombudsman finalised its investigation into the saga and found that the department had not demonstrated it had sufficiently considered the safety risks associated with the implementation of vessel tracking and had failed in its responsibility to ensure the vessel tracking units were fit and proper.

Minister, will you now apologise to the commercial fishers adversely impacted by your department's failings, and what is being done to compensate them?

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Gympie. It is a very similar question to one of the ones asked last year. Clearly, you have inferences, imputations and arguments in there. Can you rephrase your question and come straight to the nub?

Mr PERRETT: The commercial fishing industry suffered during this period, particularly with the service provided by Option Audio. Minister, will you now apologise to the commercial fishers adversely impacted by your department's failing? What is being done to compensate them?

CHAIR: The member for Bundaberg has a point of order.

Mr SMITH: I have a point of order in terms of requesting an apology. I wonder if that is asking the minister to express an opinion and if there are inferences and imputations in there as well.

CHAIR: It does. You cannot connect that to the SDS. You can probably attempt another version of this question, member for Gympie. You have requested an apology. Perhaps there is another question specifically you want to ask about this issue.

Mr PERRETT: In September 2020 the Ombudsman finalised his investigations into the saga and found that the department had not demonstrated it had sufficiently considered the safety risks associated with the implementation of vessel tracking and had failed in its responsibility to ensure that vessel tracking units were fit for purpose. What is being done to rectify this problem?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for his question. No doubt the member would be able to possibly reflect on where sustainable fisheries all came about. The nexus of that was essentially the start of the MRAG report that the then LNP government lacked the intestinal fortitude to table. However, on that basis, when we came into government in 2015 we tabled the MRAG report and then proceeded with a green paper on sustainable fisheries. Part of the MRAG report no doubt focused on vessel monitoring. No doubt there are various fisheries right throughout this nation that do have a variety of different vessel monitoring processes, but I will go directly to in particular some of the point of the question that the member made.

It is important, however, to note that there are fisheries within our waters—like the east coast trawl fisheries—that has had vessel tracking for more than 15 years. Certainly, many of the commercial fishers praise the use of vessel tracking, stating that the technology helps demonstrate their sustainability of their fisheries, particularly when operating in the World Heritage areas. We led with a program assisted by QRIDA in the implementation of that—\$3 million in fact—to assist industry with the implementation and purchase of those vessel tracking units. The scheme has been extended until 30 June 2022.

Fisheries Queensland respects the privacy of commercial fishers' data as well and treats that with respect and confidentiality. Individual information that is collected is used for internal fisheries management purposes and is shared only with compliance and search and rescue partners under strict conditions. To give confidence that data will be protected, Fisheries Queensland has engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers to audit those safeguards that are in place and recommend any necessary improvements. PwC completed that assurance report and found that the control measures in place were suitably designed and operating effectively. Throughout that implementation phase of the vessel tracking, the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol did not immediately issue fines if fishers did not have a working vessel tracking unit in the first instance. The focus was on education and awareness of them to assist them in their fisheries sector.

Fishers have been able to continue to operate if they have taken reasonable steps and allowed reasonable time to order, receive and install a vessel tracking unit. Approximately 1,700 vessel tracking units are now in operation on commercial fishing boats in Queensland, making this the largest commercial fishing fleet utilising this technology in Australia.

A number of issues raised by industry in 2019 related to delays with the delivery of the tracking units, refunds and warranty claims, as well as concerns about installation costs and suitability in installation of the units and throughout implementation. These issues have been investigated and progressed and have been addressed. These complaints have also been raised with the Queensland Ombudsman, who has suggested these issues be considered as part of a planned post implementation review. I am pleased to indicate to the committee that in December of this year the post implementation review of Fisheries Queensland vessel tracking implementation and administration will commence. The review will address the issues raised by industry and provided to the Queensland Ombudsman.

This has already been debated in the House and should not be politicised with any pointscore. I might ask the Deputy Director-General of Fisheries and Forestry, Mr Graeme Bolton, to add anything I have left out in my answer to that question.

Mr Bolton: In addition to what the minister was saying, we have been working very closely with the Ombudsman about the issues and concerns raised, and we have also been working very closely with the fishers to help case manage any concerns they have. On 16 September 2020, the Assistant Ombudsman wrote to the complainants and advised that the Ombudsman was discontinuing the investigation. That was on the undertaking that we were going to address the concerns raised through the post implementation review. We will commence that review this month.

Mr PERRETT: I have a follow-up question to that. What is the time frame for that review? Have there been some parameters set around that, Deputy Director-General?

CHAIR: Hang on. That has to go through the DG or the minister.

Mr PERRETT: Well, it is relevant to this portfolio.

CHAIR: I know but you cannot ask him directly.

Dr Woods: I am happy to refer that question to the deputy DG.

Mr Bolton: A high-level project plan has been provided through to the Ombudsman's office and we are working through the finalisation of that. That will be announced and put on the department's website early in the new year. It sets out the project plan, including time frames for that review.

CHAIR: Before we go on, I notice that the member for Burdekin, Mr Dale Last, has joined us. I ask the member for Gympie to continue.

Mr PERRETT: In the interests of time, Chair, I am going to move onto another subject in the short term dealing with forestry and that part of the minister's portfolio. My question is to the minister. With reference to page 8 of volume 2 of the SDS and the fisheries and forestry 2020-21 service area highlights, in November 2019 it was announced by the Premier that DAF would establish a native timber advisory panel. Will the minister advise why this panel has not been selected after more than a year? When exactly will the state's \$3.8 billion forestry industry be able to get on with the long-term certainty it deserves?

CHAIR: Member for Gympie, I would usually say it obviously needs to be connected to the SDS but there have been a number of questions about meetings of advisory groups. I will let the minister answer that in the way that he sees fit.

Mr FURNER: I do acknowledge the member for Gympie's interest in this particular area, and it is a very important area. I note his shared-chairing and involvement in friendship of forestry along with the member for Maryborough but, as the member would realise, that native timber industry supports employment and investment throughout regional and rural Queensland and in particular areas around the member's electorate of Gympie. We did indicate that there will be development of a native timber action plan, and that has been developed to support these industry jobs. The plan will deliver some immediate decisions; however, there is still work to be done to achieve a long-term, sustainable future for the native timber industry that balances those jobs and the environment.

Certainly, without labouring the response, once again here is a demonstration of how COVID-19 has affected the process in having this group come together. Notwithstanding that, we will bring key stakeholders together through a native timber advisory panel and we will be responsible in overseeing and making plans for the future of this particularly important industry. That panel will provide advice to the government on policy options and also on the implications of moving forward to a sustainable future. It will consider native forestry on state owned and privately owned land, conservation outcomes, economic impacts and on opportunities for regional communities. As people would realise, views about native forestry are wideranging. The panel will include representations from a cross-section of stakeholders to ensure these views are heard, fully ventilated and understood. The approach allows for open engagement and provides real opportunities for input in the policy development process.

Those initial steps are the foundations of a long-term commitment to deliver a native forest and timber industry that balances commitments to the environment and jobs. As I indicated, the establishment of the native timber advisory panel was delayed as a result of COVID-19 but we will get on the job and form that group very soon.

CHAIR: Does the member have a brief question before I go to the member for Traeger?

Mr PERRETT: Just a follow-up, yes. I am pleased to hear that that panel will be established. Will the minister provide a date when that native timber advisory panel will be established so it can get to work, given some pressing issues in the industry?

Mr FURNER: Obviously, chair—and I thank the member for the question—that is a government decision. The date I will provide will be 2021.

CHAIR: Okay, all right. Member for Traeger?

Mr KATTER: Thank you, chair. Minister, Queensland has a strong commercial seafood sector but the majority of produce consumed is imported from overseas. Will the minister advise his intentions with regard to making this requirement mandatory, or will he support a push for dining venues to declare their product's origin—including barramundi, prawns and calamari—to help stimulate the domestic seafood industry in Queensland?

Mr FURNER: Thank you, chair, and I thank the member for Traeger for his question. I am sure I am like him. I love my seafood. It is a great question. When it comes to country of origin labelling of seafood sold in restaurants and cafes, it has been the subject of several reviews and parliamentary inquiries across Australia in recent years. Most food sold in retail, including seafood, is required to be labelled with its country of origin under the Australian consumer law; however, this requirement does not extend to labelling for ready-to-eat food sold at food service venues.

The Palaszczuk government is not at this time considering a mandatory seafood labelling scheme for the food service sector, but food service businesses can already choose to identify the origin of seafood on their menus. Under Australian consumer law, claims about the origin of food sold must not be false or misleading. We see that quite often these days not just in seafood but in other types of food which Queensland loves to promote.

I know that the Queensland Seafood Marketers Association is a strong supporter in promoting Queensland seafood. The government assists it in that process on a regular basis. One of the areas where we can promote not only seafood is through our online promotion through #eatqld. We have definitely recognised many people in the seafood industry and in other areas of food service and agriculture right across the board in calling them as #eatqld champions. There are plenty of examples where we have done that. Obviously we work with industry as well, like Woolworths, the RNA and the Brisbane Convention Centre, to promote that through that process. There are other ways of doing that, but I would be happy to have further discussions with the member for Traeger about this particular subject as well.

Mr KATTER: I have one last question, chair, that relates to the previous portfolio but probably just as much to seafood. There was an undertaking some years ago by the state government to progress multi-peril insurance following the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce. Can the minister update the committee on how that is progressing?

Mr FURNER: Once again, this is outside the portfolio measures we are examining in this part of the consideration of fisheries and forestries, but I am happy to give some basic summary.

Mr KATTER: I felt it could still apply to fisheries, so I thought I would still ask. Sorry, minister.

Mr FURNER: No, you are right. Once again, yes, that was an election commitment in 2017 by the Palaszczuk government to consider the feasibility of removing stamp duty—insurance duty—on agriculture insurance products and reducing that reliance of primary producers on government assistance for climate risks such as drought and natural disasters. Obviously, if asked, it can still apply to fisheries. I am responding to the member for Traeger on that basis.

To meet that understanding, DAF engaged consultants through KPMG to conduct an analysis. That report is available. It definitely involved close consultation with industry and has been delivered to the government and industry. We have been briefed on its contents. The insurance duty is currently set at nine per cent of the cost of the policy. Industry groups have repeatedly called for the abolition of this insurance duty as has occurred in New South Wales as well as Victoria and recently in South Australia.

To repeal the insurance duty requires legislative amendments in Queensland. The current uptake of that insurance on agriculture production risks through products such as multi-peril crop insurance is very low both in Queensland and the rest of Australia, including those states with a stamp duty exemption. The draft report concludes that the removal of stamp duty is feasible. The report also states that its removal is unlikely to make such difference in the uptake of agriculture insurance. The report also notes that other factors act as a disincentive for farmers to adopt products such as multi-peril crop insurance, including the higher risk of premiums and the higher risk of insurers offering such products. By contrast, the insurance products covering specific risks such as hail and frost are well-established, because the probability of such events occurring is reasonably foreseeable and therefore a lower risk than multi-risk products. This government is considering its response to that KPMG report. Once again, this is still under consultation, but we will avail it in the near future.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I understood that that question was in relation to fisheries. We will go over to government questions now.

Mr PERRETT: It was crop insurance.

CHAIR: Thank you, member.

Mr PERRETT: Could you admit your mistake?

CHAIR: I do not need comments or impressions from those on my left, thank you. Minister, with reference to volume 2, page 8, of the SDS, can you update the committee on how the government is supporting the aquaculture industry in Queensland?

Mr FURNER: Thank you, chair. I thank you for that question. Aquaculture is one of my passions. We have seen a substantive growth in Queensland through the Palaszczuk government's involvement with a variety of areas. Certainly, as the minister for fisheries, I have continually shared my vision for Queensland to be the aquaculture capital of the world, a vision to which I and this government remain fully committed.

As aquaculture is the fastest growing food industry globally, it is as important as ever that we do anything and everything we can as a government to tap into this potential. When we support the aquaculture industry in Queensland, we support local jobs and the opportunity for Queenslanders to enjoy more quality Queensland seafood. I have often articulated my vision for Queensland to become the aquaculture capital and to drive private sector aquaculture investment in our state. I am so proud to say that we have delivered continually on this. Aquaculture is a multimillion dollar industry providing jobs for over 600 Queenslanders and a lot more on the way.

I know that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it tough for a lot of businesses and communities. That is why we have assisted them through government support measures such as Rural Economic Development Grants of up to \$250,000 to fund the expansion of their businesses. MainStream Aquaculture at Mourilyan Harbour is one of the 14 businesses to receive this grant. It has subsequently expanded to produce 3,000 tonnes of four-kilogram barramundi fish a year, grow its workforce and develop a hub of production and processing to create maximum value in the Cassowary Coast region. MainStream Aquaculture will use this funding for a project to design, construct and commission an intensive barramundi nursery system to provide a million high-quality juvenile barramundi to support the expansion of land based pond grow-out farms threefold. For this project eight new construction jobs and another six indirect jobs will be supported. These are direct jobs that ensure long-term employment in the local area.

We are also seeing well-established companies moving into the Sunshine State to seize the opportunity and take up positions as leaders in our brilliant regional economies by investing and opening new markets that grow hundreds of jobs. One such company is Tassal, which continues to show its confidence in investing in our state through an \$85 million expansion program.

The Palaszczuk government remains as committed as ever to working with the private sector to grow industries that will create jobs for Queenslanders. As we continue with our economic recovery we are well placed to drive a global boom in aquaculture and attract millions of dollars worth of investment and jobs for hundreds of Queenslanders. I encourage all members to support this growing industry and the hundreds of jobs and the boost to exports and local supply that come with it.

Mr SMITH: With reference to page 2-8 of the SDS, will the minister outline how the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy will assist the economic recovery of the commercial fishery sector in Queensland?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for Bundaberg for his question. As Minister for Fisheries I have always been clear about my goal: to leave a legacy of sustainable fisheries for our children and our grandchildren. Queenslanders have called for what the Palaszczuk government is delivering. That is articulated in great detail in the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027, our 10-year road map to delivering a world-class fisheries management system for Queensland.

The major fisheries regulation changes delivered under the strategy are an important measure to support the industry through economic recovery while protecting the state's export approvals under the federal government's sustainability requirements. The coronavirus pandemic health restrictions earlier this year impacted seafood markets for the fishing industry and significant economic hardships continue to face the industry.

Through meeting the conditions of Commonwealth government environmental and trade approvals, exports will continue for nearly a dozen of our key fisheries, supporting nearly 1,400 businesses and more than 4,000 regional jobs. Further discussions are underway with the federal government and industry to reinstate approvals in respect of the components of the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery that are reliant on export markets. These reforms commence in September 2021 and have been welcomed by key industry stakeholders such as the Queensland Seafood Marketers Association, which has long been calling for strategy reforms that define the future.

As a result of the completion of these reforms, investment warnings that have been in place since 2011 will be able to be removed for fisheries with a harvest strategy, and a more positive investment environment for economic recovery, business resilience and diversification will be created. Harvest strategies outline pre-agreed rules for managing the harvest of all sectors and adjusting catch limits to ensure sustainable harvests over time.

Industry has told me time and time again that Queensland needs more responsive decision-making while providing certainty about what would happen under different fishery performance conditions. Commercial fishers want to continue to provide seafood to local and international markets, and recreational fishers want to be able to catch fish when they drop a line in the water. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders want to maintain traditional customs through fishing and have a strong interest in stocks being healthy, resilient and abundant in the future.

These goals are achievable. You only need to look at the LNP's record on this matter as a reminder of just how far we have come. The LNP cut 28 per cent of fisheries staff and in doing so drove our fisheries management back a generation. They undid the good work of public servants, industry members and recreational fishers who made genuine contributions to fisheries management. They buried their own independent expert report into fisheries management which recommended these significant reforms back in 2014. It is the Palaszczuk government that walks the walk on delivering meaningful reforms, and our 10-year strategy is showing significant progress.

Mr MADDEN: My question to the minister relates to page 8 of volume 2 of the Service Delivery Statements. Will the minister update the committee on how the government is promoting recreational fishing in regional Queensland?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for Ipswich West for his question. The Palaszczuk government knows that Queenslanders love to go out fishing when the opportunity presents itself. That is very rare for most of us in this room. About 940,000 Queenslanders recalled going fishing during the 2018 year. I am so proud that the Palaszczuk government recognises and supports our love for the great outdoors, enjoying our state's natural beauty. We have seen the implementation of net-free zones and the promotion of recreational fishing tourism throughout regional Queensland.

The Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme is another way we provide recreational fishing opportunities in areas that would otherwise be lacking, supporting regional communities and related jobs. In recent years SIPS permits have generated approximately \$1 million in revenue, with at least 75 per cent of all revenue going directly to community based volunteer stocking groups for maintaining and improving freshwater fisheries. The government expanded this program to include an extra 31 dams and weirs across the state in 2016, bringing the total number to 63 impoundments. Fees were simplified and fixed for a five-year period, until 30 June 2021. These fees remain at \$10 for a weekly permit, \$50 for a yearly permit and \$36 for a concessional permit.

The year 2019-20 was a challenging year for SIPS and freshwater fish stocking more generally, with low rainfall and reduced dam levels affecting stocking across much of the state. COVID-19 also impacted on fishing tourism and recreational activities, resulting in a further decrease in revenue and stocking activities. Despite these challenges, several important steps were completed during 2019-20 including production of a fish stocking action plan, development of and consultation on a draft policy for fish stocking in Queensland, promotion of SIPS through social media challenges and increased compliance activities by the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. Thankfully, conditions are expected to improve in 2020-21, with a favourable weather outlook and strong participation in SIPS following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

I take this time to thank all volunteer stocking group members who make the Queensland stock program and SIPS the success they are. There are currently 67 active stocking groups releasing more than three million juvenile fish or fingerlings annually into waterways across Queensland. It would not be possible to deliver the program without our volunteer stocking champions.

Mr SMITH: With reference to page 2-2 of the SDS, will the minister outline the government's response to protecting Queensland's fisheries industry during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for Bundaberg for his question. This year has been like no other. As was the case for other economies around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Queensland businesses hard. As we continue to manage the health response well, we continue to deliver Queensland's plan for economic recovery. Commercial fishers and aquaculture businesses lost significant markets both here in Australia and overseas, while charter operations were forced to close due to social distancing measures.

The Palaszczuk government understands the need to work with these businesses to increase their resilience by diversifying into new markets and, in turn, contributing to regional economic growth and jobs. That is why I was proud to rollout grants of up to \$7,500 for things like equipment purchases, staff training, marketing and promotion, with the successful applications contributing at least 25 per cent of the project's total cost. Some 108 applications for market diversification and resilience grants were received from Queensland. Competition for the funding was very strong and many deserving applications were received.

The grants assessment panel processed applications and approved funding of \$306,968 to 49 aquaculture or fisheries based businesses—businesses like Mackay's Ultra Coral Australia located in the heart of the Great Barrier Reef. Before the pandemic struck, they collected and supplied premium live coral to countries all over the world. While international wholesale trade closed, domestic retail orders opened dealing directly with retailers, meaning an increase in the number of orders processed and shipped. The MDRG meant that they were able to spend up the packaging chain by purchasing a new clipping machine to automate the packaging of water-filled bags of live coral.

Another successful business was Product North Pty Ltd, a small family-run fishing operation with 11 employees that exported most of its annual catch of up to 45,000 kilograms of live coral trout before the coronavirus pandemic. With a \$44,000 project grant for vessel modifications, Product North installed a dual purpose storage tank which allowed them to easily change from live export product to fresh or frozen, depending on what the market is doing.

These are just two examples of how the Palaszczuk government worked closely with industry on the economic recovery of the agriculture and fisheries sector, including agribusiness exporters who support thousands of jobs. The Palaszczuk government is a government that always listens. As minister I listened to the feedback about the eligibility criteria and the government responded by providing a second round of MDRG grants especially for fishers who were not previously eligible as they did not export their products. The Palaszczuk government remains committed to working with commercial charter and aquaculture fishing businesses from Cape York to the Gold Coast to grow even bigger long after we recover.

CHAIR: We will now go to some opposition questions. I believe the member for Burdekin has a question.

Mr LAST: Minister, having regard to the budget documents, can you point me to the line item outlining the budget and staff allocated to your portfolio of rural affairs?

CHAIR: Member for Burdekin, it is a question on expenditure on—sorry, what did you say, rural affairs?

Mr LAST: It forms part of the minister's portfolio and responsibility. He is the Minister for Rural Communities.

CHAIR: Rural communities; okay. I think the best way to approach it, Minister, is outlining your duties and what you are doing as Minister for Rural Communities.

Mr LAST: Mr Chair, I raise a point of order. It was a very specific question. I am asking the minister to outline to me in the budget documents where the line item is regarding a budget and staff allocated to that portfolio.

CHAIR: Member for Burdekin, we understood your question. I am helping you here. I am helping craft your question so that the minister can answer it. I understand that you want him to point to the exact line, which he may or may not do, but I am asking the minister to answer that question.

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for his question. Chair, you quite rightly point out that it is not 'community affairs'; it is 'rural communities'. I once again refer the member and anyone else to my charter letter which lists my responsibilities as the Minister for Rural Communities which includes working with the health, regional development, manufacturing and water ministers and also delivering for rural Queensland, which comes under the portfolio of Minister Butcher, and also to assist in the facilitation of the regional community forums so that our rural communities have a direct line of engagement with government.

I want to put on record that the Palaszczuk government will continue to deliver for rural communities through my portfolio with our one-stop shop. That is continuing to assist the facilitation of new developments. I used the example earlier this evening about Tassal. That is a great example of how the one-stop shop complements those arrangements of new development and new businesses coming to Queensland whilst also supporting rural communities throughout this drought as well as ensuring our on-farm sustainability with QRIDA loans for new and existing farmers. Those opposite should remember that Labor was born out of rural Queensland through those days in Barcaldine, so we will continue supporting rural Queensland and rural communities under my title under the portfolio.

CHAIR: I point out to the member for Burdekin that we dealt with agricultural industry development and rural communities in the last session, which, if he had been here, would have been a better time for him to ask these questions then. Do you have any questions regarding fisheries and forestry?

Mr LAST: I have a follow-up question, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: No. You can ask it, but the minister may or may not choose to answer that.

Mr LAST: Thank you, Mr Chair. Minister, since 2015 there has been a combined 7.4 per cent decline of population in Queensland's 22 local government areas defined as outback Queensland. All but one, that being Doomadgee, of the 22 local government areas have suffered considerable population declines under this Labor government. There have also been considerable increases in rural unemployment from 2015 to 2020 including—and I will give you three examples—Carpentaria from 8.4 per cent to 22.4 per cent, Mornington from 8.5 per cent to 22.3 per cent and Mount Isa from two per cent to 6.9 per cent. Minister, where in this budget are these issues being addressed and what are you doing as Minister for Rural Communities to address these issues?

CHAIR: Member for Burdekin, I am going to rule that out of order. That is way out of line for this particular session. Do you have another question?

Mr LAST: No, it is up to the minister to—

Mr HART: I raise a point of order, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Who wants a point of order first?

Mr McDONALD: Thanks, Chair.

CHAIR: Member for Lockyer.

Mr McDONALD: Chair, as we have just been given guidance after our discussion in private about this issue, it is a matter for the committee to ask questions of the minister and it is up to the minister to be able to respond. He does not need your protection.

CHAIR: The minister has never needed my protection, that is absolutely for sure. I point out that we have a resolution of the House that was very specific in what we do in which sessions. That particular question went across a range of areas that were pertinent to the first session for the minister, so I have ruled that question out of order.

Mr HART: I raise a point of order, Mr Chair.

Mr LAST: So, Mr Chair, can I just clarify: you are not permitting any questions regarding rural communities in this session; is that the case?

CHAIR: I permitted questions on agricultural industry development and rural communities in the first session.

Mr HART: I raise a point of order, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Yes, member for Burleigh.

Mr HART: Mr Chair, the member for Traeger asked about stock insurance. The member for Gympie asked about the timber industry. They received answers. Are we now saying that the opposition questions are out of order completely, or leaving it to the minister?

CHAIR: I will come back to that, but first the member for Bundaberg has a point of order.

Mr SMITH: Thank you, Chair. The minister did take the member for Traeger's question in relation to fisheries. He did make that very clear that he brought it back to fisheries.

Mr HART: What does that have to do with stock insurance?

CHAIR: We have a point of order here.

Mr SMITH: I would suggest, as was the ruling by the Clerk, that if any questions with regard to agriculture are put forward in this session it is with the knowledge that the minister may not have the relevant staff here to answer the question and therefore does not have to answer it and I feel as though we should move to another question.

Opposition members interjected.

CHAIR: No comments please. I am dealing with this point of order.

Opposition members interjected.

CHAIR: Order on my left!

Mr SMITH: I raise another point of order. Under standing order 251, a member speaking shall not be interrupted.

CHAIR: That is one of my favourite standing orders. I point out that we have a unique situation this time as the House has passed a motion outlining what we are to deal with and it is very specific. If the member for Burdekin did not read that and did not turn up when he could have asked that question specifically, that cannot be blamed on this committee. However, bearing in mind the direction that we have had that the questions can come forward, the minister can see fit to not answer that because it should have been dealt with at a previous session. I am going to allow the question, but I am going to counsel the minister on whether he actually answers it.

Mr HART: A further point of order, before you move on? This is a different subject.

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh?

Mr HART: Mr Chair, I give notice that I shall be writing to the Speaker about the member for Bundaberg just revealing a private conversation of the committee and seeking that he be referred to the Ethics Committee.

CHAIR: Member for Burleigh, it has always been the practice of this committee, once we do come back from a meeting, to detail what happened in that meeting. If you write to them you are going to have to complain about me, too, because I reported to everyone what we had actually decided.

Mr HART: I shall do, Mr Chair.

Mr McDONALD: I have a comment that might help the committee. The question that the shadow minister is referring to is actually content of a pre hearing question on notice 8 that the minister answered.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that, member for Lockyer. What we have arrived at is that that question can be asked but the minister can answer that as he sees fit, bearing in mind the motion of the House and what we have previously decided. Minister?

Mr FURNER: Thank you, Chair. Obviously it was far-reaching in terms of the question that the member sought, but I want to refer to something in particular that certainly under this portfolio has demonstrated a proud record of delivering to rural communities right across Queensland, and that is the Rural Economic Development Grants. That is administered by QRIDA and provides grants of up to \$250,000 per recipient. We have seen the expansion of employment—up to 1,800 jobs created—right across Queensland as a result of those Rural Economic Development Grants, providing employment in many places throughout Queensland as a result of that funding.

That is \$10 million over the past period of three years, strengthening agriculture in those rural communities and also those eligible activities that complement and are included in new investments such as new markets, establishing training facilities and developing the agriculture supply chain or other measures that value-add to transform primary production. Those eligible entities included medium sized businesses, fewer than 200 employees; primary producers; higher education institutions; local governments; associations incorporated under the Queensland Associations Incorporations Act 1981; corporations registered under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006, a Commonwealth act; cooperatives registered under the Cooperatives Act 1997; and entities established to represent primary producers and primary production enterprises.

Once again, that was three rounds of RED grants which were offered and there were 15 projects successful in receiving further funding in round 3 who were notified in September of this year prior to us going into caretaker mode. It is estimated 90 direct jobs were created in the short term as a result of that funding. There were 251 jobs created after project completion and 346 indirect jobs created from a total of 687 jobs. Across the three rounds, as I indicated, more than 1,800—in fact 1,897—jobs have been created or will be created. I have been fortunate enough to attend some of those businesses and one can see the growth and the explosion of those jobs in those regional communities right across Queensland. It is another example—and there are plenty of them in this portfolio—of the Palaszczuk government delivering in terms of growing regional Queensland.

CHAIR: Next question. Please make it about fisheries and forestry.

Mr LAST: How many regional community forums has your department organised to date and what is the target number you intend on delivering over this term?

CHAIR: Member for Burdekin, we do not want to rehash the same argument, but can I point out once again we are in fisheries and forestry. You can ask the question. The minister is not obliged to answer that or he can answer that in whichever way he sees fit.

Mr FURNER: I thank the member for his question. Once again this is an area that fits within my charter letter of making sure that great program of regional forums continues. The member to your right is a fantastic chair of the western regional forum and certainly there have been at least two if not three community forums that we have been involved in. We are seeing the fruits of those engagements with rural Queensland and those rural communities.

I once again refer the member to my charter letter and I will continue the facilitation of those arrangements through rural communities. Once again I remind the member of their cuts to agriculture—more than 600 jobs right across the breadth of this wonderful portfolio.

Mr LAST: How many have you delivered?

Mr FURNER: This is certainly something they should not be proud of in respect to that legacy.

Mr LAST: How many?

Mr PERRETT: He hasn't delivered many.

CHAIR: Order, members to my left!

Mr FURNER: Not a proud legacy to come to this estimates hearing and start quoting—

Mr PERRETT: He has not caught up.

CHAIR: Order, members to my left. Order! I have called for order three times. Usually what would happen if we were in the House is you would be warned under standing orders. I will not do that this time. If I call for order I need order. Sorry, Minister, back to you.

Mr FURNER: The member would have been best served had he been here yesterday asking questions of the Premier. Maybe the Department of the Premier and Cabinet would have been the best place to have that question directed in terms of the operations of regional forums. My role under the charter letter is to merely facilitate the operations for the continuance of that. That is a commitment that is provided in our charter letter and, as clearly demonstrated by the Palaszczuk government in our last term, we have been rolling those forums out and getting traction; we have been getting involvement and consultation through our engagement right throughout Queensland.

CHAIR: Member for Traeger, do you have a question?

Mr KATTER: I am all done.

CHAIR: We will go back to government questions.

Mr ANDREW: Chair?

CHAIR: Thank you, member for Mirani. We will come to you. I have not forgotten. I will throw first to the member for Ipswich West.

Mr MADDEN: Thank you, Chair. I refer to pages 2 to 15 of the Service Delivery Statements. Will the minister outline any financial assistance available to commercial fishers to help improve the viability of their business?

Mr FURNER: Thank you, member for Ipswich West, and a great question, because as Minister for Fisheries I am passionate about creating sustainable fisheries for our children and grandchildren. Crucial to that is having a sustainable commercial fishing sector. One way commercial fishers can create a sustainable business is through the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme, PIPES. I have talked about the PIPES program before this committee and in parliament previously. For the benefit of the members, PIPES is administered by QRIDA, the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, and there have been two components of concessional interest-first start loans available to those wanting to get into the agriculture sector. Sustainable loans are available to those already in the industry but wanting to make improvements to their enterprise so that it is more sustainable.

Not many are aware, but sustainability loans are actually also available to commercial fishers, not just farmers. Finance of up to \$1.3 million is on offer to help enhance sustainability and minimise the impact of fishing activities on the environment, improve systems and practices to mitigate against things like climate and market risk but also biosecurity and the long-term viability of commercial wildcatch fishing.

Under the previous LNP government the PIPES program was set at a maximum of \$60 million annually. Farmers and fishers told us that was not enough. It was the Palaszczuk government that actually listened and decided; that is why we needed to increase the annual cap to \$100 million. We recognised the importance of the role that PIPES played in giving producers and fishers a helping hand in the industry. The Palaszczuk government will back fishers who want to secure the long-term future of their businesses.

If fishers look after their business and make it more sustainable, it means fish for the future for all Queenslanders. I encourage any commercial fisher who is looking for assistance to make their business more sustainable and profitable to contact QRIDA. They are a great organisation and they deliver. There is \$100 million worth of loans available through this financial year and 2021-22. That cap will increase yet again to \$120 million as part of our election commitment to agriculture and fisheries.

Mr SMITH: With reference to page 2-8 of the SDS, will the minister please update the committee on fish attracting devices and how they are supporting regional economies?

Mr FURNER: This is a great question and a great initiative that we implemented in the budget of our last term. The Palaszczuk government believes that sustainable fisheries are about thinking smarter about fishing and looking at new ways to manage our resources and pressure on stocks. That is why the government continues to invest in fish aggregating devices across Queensland, in conjunction with the other reforms we are rolling out.

Last year I said that we would be developing a design and installation plan for fish aggregating devices, in consultation with stakeholders. That is exactly what we have done. Since November last year we have deployed 25 fish aggregating devices in the south-east, from Fraser Island to the Gold Coast, to improve fishing experiences and reduce fishing impacts on low stocks of snapper and pearl

perch, which are currently heavily targeted and in some cases overfished or are very low in stock. The FADs are proving popular with charter and recreational fishers who have reported good catches of mahi-mahi, while some commercial line fishers have also used the devices for fishing during COVID-19. In September the Palaszczuk government installed four new FADs off Weipa in the far north. That has the potential to create jobs through local fishing and tourism.

The Palaszczuk government's ongoing investment in the FADs program is timely for businesses affected by COVID-19. Our economic recovery plan recognises the importance of growing our regions, starting with a strong base in traditional sectors, and attracting new and exciting opportunities. Thanks to our strong health response, we are now able to support and foster local tourism destinations and encourage tourists to visit areas throughout Queensland that have been impacted by the pandemic.

The FADs program is about building a long-lasting legacy of sustainable fisheries for our children and our grandchildren. Planning is well underway for the next stage of the FADs program, which will also provide a sustainable fishing option and help secure jobs in the fishing industry across the charter sector, tackle providers, boat builders and marine service centres. This plan ensures our reputation as a great place to drop in a line, which means more jobs for regional economies throughout our great state.

Since coming into government in 2015, the Palaszczuk government has continued to strengthen world-class recreational fishing in Queensland while providing species under threat, such as snapper and pearl perch, an opportunity to rebuild stocks. It is very clear that fish aggregating devices are not a passing fad. I look forward to keeping the committee informed of future developments.

CHAIR: With reference to pages 6 and 7 of the SDS, will the minister advise the committee on the role that forestry has played in supporting regional and rural Queensland?

Mr FURNER: The Palaszczuk government acknowledges the important contribution that the forest and timber industry makes to jobs in rural and regional Queensland. The industry has an annual turnover of around \$3.8 billion and includes the growing and processing of timber products, including the manufacture of pulp and paper. It directly employs 8,800 employees and provides significant employment in the Gympie region, on the Fraser Coast, and in the South Burnett, North Burnett and Maranoa regions. In those regions Queenslanders are employed in timber harvesting as well as secondary processing, including the manufacture of products such as trusses and frames.

Our forestry estate in Queensland is characterised by large highly productive softwood plantations and extensive areas of relatively slow growing native forests, comprising both hardwoods and cypress pine. In fact, the softwood plantation sector makes the biggest contribution to the Queensland economy, accounting for 80 per cent of the locally grown timber processed by the industry. HQPlantations continues to manage, harvest and regrow most of our plantation timber under the 99-year plantation licence issued by government in 2010. These plantations primarily consist of southern pine, which is used for structural timber in building and construction, and native hoop pine, which is used for appearance-grade products such as lining boards, finishing mouldings and joinery.

Further, our native forestries supply about 18 per cent of Queensland's domestic sourced timber, of which around one-third is cypress pine and two-thirds is native hardwood. As the largest producer of native cypress pine in Australia, accounting for around three-quarters of the national production of native cypress, Queensland also produces a range of appearance-grade native hardwood products, with flooring and decking being significant. We can be proud of our spotted gum, which is the nation's largest supply and dominates the quality timber flooring and decking market. Cypress pine structural timber contributes to the framing market, offering natural termite resistance. It is also used for a range of flooring and panelling applications.

With strong supporting research and technical capabilities, we are very well positioned to meet the growing demand for innovation in engineering wood products, creating circular economies and also carbon sequestration to deliver structural, environmental and performance benefits. You only need to visit UQ's Future Timber Hub and 25 King Street, to see a local example of the international resurgence of timber for use in large-scale commercial buildings. Timber sourced from Queensland is the building block of the future and that future is very bright indeed, providing the jobs of tomorrow today.

Mr SMITH: With reference to page 2-8 of the SDS, will the minister update the committee on how the government is ensuring fisheries compliance?

Mr FURNER: Certainly since becoming minister for fisheries in 2017, I have had the privilege of working alongside our proud and professional women and men of the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol who ensure compliance. Together we have made this a key priority, particularly in

regional, offshore and isolated fishing grounds. We have been able to do this through making sure our officers have the training, the support and the technology they need to target individuals and organised groups that cause the most harm, as well as promoting overall compliance with fisheries laws. As a key action of the sustainable fisheries strategy, the Palaszczuk Labor government has invested and improved every part of our fisheries system. We have provided the support that our front-line officers need, as well as providing them with the data they need to do their jobs well.

Fishers who do the wrong thing will be caught and face severe penalties. In September this year a fisher who concealed illegal mud crabs in a wheelie bin to avoid inspection by Fisheries officers on the Gold Coast was fined \$9,000 and the man's nephew was fined \$6,000 under the Fisheries Act. What we saw in that instance was a recreational crabber showing complete disregard for Queensland's fisheries laws by obstructing Fisheries officers, failing to sort or measure his catch and using excess and unmarked apparatus. The rules and regulations for recreational fishing in Queensland include crabbing to protect and conserve stocks. All fishers need to know the rules and follow them to ensure that our valuable fisheries resources are sustainable for future generations to enjoy. A further two fishers from Brisbane were charged with a total of 10 offences under the Fisheries Act, both pleading guilty to charges in court.

While crabbing is one of Queensland's most popular forms of fishing, the problem of unmarked, abandoned and lost crab pots continues to occur across the state. In Far North Queensland 70 unmarked crab pots were pulled from Dicksons Inlet, Mowbray River and Mossman River across two days. Crab pots left in the water and not being used can often become lost and may continue to ghost fish, catching crabs, fish and other non-target marine animals including turtles, which become trapped and die.

When the fish and crab stocks are depleted by illegal fishing equipment, it is bad for local fishing jobs. We continue to provide our plan for economic recovery. We need to protect Queensland jobs, and processes like crab pot clean-ups help us to do that by providing our officers with the tools, technology and information they need to drive intelligence based compliance. They are well positioned to work in conjunction with other compliance agencies and marine conservation groups. While the LNP has continually opposed these measures that provide our officers with efficiency to do their jobs well, the Palaszczuk government has stood up for them time and time again.

Our government bolstered compliance by recruiting officers to coastal inland areas across Queensland when the LNP wanted to make their jobs more difficult by giving black marketers a five-day head start by requiring a warrant for a simple inspection. They continue to compromise our officers and get in their way. Thankfully, in this government, they have the support they need to carry out their jobs well. It is only the Palaszczuk government that understands the importance of a sustainable fishery for all of Queensland.

Mr MADDEN: Through you, Chair, my question relates to volume 2, page 8 of the Service Delivery Statement. Will the minister update the committee on how the government is supporting economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

Mr FURNER: The Palaszczuk government understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Queensland want more economic opportunities around fishing, particularly in their own sea country. The Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027 supports these opportunities by providing more flexible pathways for communities to enter or take part in fishing related businesses through an Indigenous fishing permit. It also clarifies that harvest strategies will set aside a sustainable allocation based on each species' status to ensure access and provide opportunities for economic development. For example, the draft mud crab harvest strategy provides that up to 10 tonnes can be sustainably harvested under Indigenous fishing permits each year. These opportunities could include permitting the catch and sale of fish to local communities or initiatives that support training to participate in commercial fisheries.

Since this policy was finalised in July of this year, three Indigenous fishing permits have been issued to three Indigenous families to trial commercial fishing. This is separate to traditional fishing and native title fishing rights. It is preserved under state and federal legislation which allows for fish to be taken for traditional use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, but it cannot be sold.

The Palaszczuk government recognises the rights and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in relation to fishery sources in Queensland. That is why we continue to invest in cultural liaison officers within the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol to work with Aboriginal communities and traditional owners to understand and address issues around traditional fishing. This includes three Indigenous identified field officer positions based in Weipa, Townsville and Hervey Bay.

We have already seen efforts of at least one MP to paint our support as secret plans for a fishing tax, in a cynical and diverse attempt to thwart this opportunity for Indigenous industry development. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr McDONALD: Point of order.

Mr FURNER: I am proud to say that the Palaszczuk government remains committed to improving engagement with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders.

CHAIR: One moment, minister. Relevance?

Mr McDONALD: Point of order—relevance.

CHAIR: I am finding it is relevant. He has only been a minute or two into this one as well. The minister will finish as he sees fit.

Mr FURNER: Once again, I am very proud to say the Palaszczuk government remains committed to improving engagement with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders to raise awareness and understanding of different types of fishing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. Furthermore, recreational fishing grants this year have been extended to include traditional fishing projects such as signs explaining sea country or education on traditional fishing activities.

I am proud to be the Minister for Fisheries in a government that supports the deep culture of spiritual connection that many First Peoples have with their waters and marine resources, whether it be salt or fresh water.

Mr ANDREW: Chair, through you, in relation to SDS, volume 2, page 8, dot point 3, currently in Queensland, Minister, there is a 200-tonne coral take for fishers. Has the department ever given any permits to corporations, universities or research organisations, and how many tonne has that increased that effort?

Mr FURNER: Through you, Chair, can I get some clarity around the initial part of the question? Was it coral trout?

Mr ANDREW: Coral fishery. Currently there is a 200-tonne take, and I was asking if there were any additional permits given for corporations, universities and research organisations to take extra tonnage.

Mr FURNER: I will refer that question to my Deputy Director-General of Fisheries and Forestry, Graeme Bolton.

Mr Bolton: That is correct. There is a 200-tonne take for the harvest fishery for corals and there are additional general fisheries permits issued for research purposes, but that is in addition to the 200 tonne of commercial take, and it is very low volume. The research permits are quite low in terms of the volume. We do not have an exact tonnage that they would take.

Mr ANDREW: Are they specifically targeted at a certain coral group?

Mr Bolton: It would be limited to specific species.

Mr ANDREW: I have one follow-up question. I refer to volume No. 2, page 8, dot point 6, the establishment of Native Timber Advisory Panel. I would like to know the percentage of actual stakeholders in the industry that will be part of that panel, and will that cross over into the harvesters of hardwoods and forestry softwoods as well—will they be part of that panel?

Mr FURNER: Once again, that is a matter that I responded to earlier in answer to a previous question with regards to getting that panel together. We will be broad in our consultation of appropriate stakeholders on that panel. It will obviously pick up people that are relevant to the interests of that panel. I am more than happy at any stage leading up to the discussions around the formation of that panel to share and also have discussions with you. If you have people in mind, I would be more than pleased to take any reference from you on the appropriateness of those panel members. It does not include softwood.

Mr PERRETT: My question is to the minister, and it relates to page 8 of SDS, volume 2. Minister, Timber Queensland has publicly raised concerns around the increase in the amount of native timber logs that are exported, resulting in the erosion of local milling and manufacturing jobs. One of the reasons given for this is the insufficient enforcement of the forestry code by the department and, in doing so, not properly monitoring what is being sent out. What is the combined volume of whole timber logs exported last financial year and what percentage of these were from state forests?

CHAIR: Just before we take an answer, member, you said ‘one of the reasons given’ and you detailed that. Is that in the SDS or is there another source of information for that?

Mr PERRETT: It is in the SDS.

CHAIR: You are saying the reasons why this has not happened?

Mr PERRETT: I was quoting Timber Queensland relating to that particular page of the SDS.

CHAIR: Can you rephrase that with leaving that bit of information out?

Mr PERRETT: Minister, Timber Queensland has publicly raised concerns around the amount of native timber logs that are exported, resulting in the erosion of local milling and manufacturing jobs. What is the combined volume of whole timber logs exported last financial year and what percentage of that was from state owned forest?

Mr FURNER: Once again, similar to previous answers I have provided today in respect of trade, there is an overarching issue here as well in respect of what is happening with these alleged trade barriers that have been put in place. I am familiar with some decisions that were made in October of this year to suspend the receipt of logged timber exported from Queensland. There was certainly that ban in place in Victoria in early November 2020 as well, so these decisions have reportedly been due to detection of certain untreated pests, noting that Chinese trade restrictions are currently being experienced across many parts of Australia’s agriculture sector.

The issue at hand here is unprocessed native log exporting that has been raised numerous times by industry members. I was in discussions with Mick Stevens concerning this matter last week. The federal government is responsible for authorising those exports, which takes into account other relevant considerations such as the federal government’s competition and trade legislation and various free trade agreements. I will defer to my Deputy Director-General for Fisheries and Forestry, Graeme Bolton, to elaborate on the specifics of your question.

Mr Bolton: We do not capture or record any volumes of market. We capture the volumes that are harvested from state forests or leasehold land. Once it leaves the estate and goes to the millers we do not track the logs thereafter. That information would be available through the federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The other part of the question you raised was around compliance. I can confirm that we do undertake compliance. Compliance matters are quite complex and we do have a number of activities ongoing. As at 30 November 2020, we have six matters under active investigation relating to the alleged unauthorised interference or removal of state owned forest products or quarry material. We still have a further seven matters that are not finalised due to court action. We also have a number of staged payments of moneys owed to the state.

Mr PERRETT: You have no ability to track whole logs that come off state land and go into export markets?

CHAIR: There is an imputation and argument in that question. If you have a question about compliance, I think it has already been answered. Did you want to rephrase the question about tracking?

Mr PERRETT: I would like to know the volumes that go from state land into whole log export?

Mr Bolton: We do not record that information. We know the approximate value, based on export figures, is about \$160 million, but we do not know, record or capture the volumes.

Mr PERRETT: I have a follow-up question to the minister.

CHAIR: Bear in mind these are going through the director-general and not to the DDG.

Mr PERRETT: I am going back to the minister. What countries was the timber exported to? Can you provide a country by country breakdown including the percentage?

Mr FURNER: Like many aspects of our trade exports, that would be a question that the federal government would be best placed to answer. I am happy to assist the member in facilitating, if possible, inquiries like that through the measures that are possible. My deputy director-general may be able to inform you of anything that otherwise might be relevant to your question on that subject.

Mr Bolton: Unfortunately, that is all federal government data. You would need to get that information from them. Once it leaves the estate it is private choice based on market forces and market demand. The harvesters and millers will then make decisions based on where they believe they can get the best value for that.

CHAIR: This will be the last question.

Mr PERRETT: I will go back to a previous area of questioning. Once again it relates to timber, but it refers to the advisory panel. Will the minister provide the timber industry with an assurance that when the native timber advisory panel is established it will include regional forest agreements as a matter of priority of government to resolve?

CHAIR: It is hard to see how giving assurances is connected to the SDS.

Mr PERRETT: I can give you a reference, Chair.

CHAIR: Wait until I finish.

Mr PERRETT: You are questioning the relevance of my question.

CHAIR: Clearly RFAs are in the SDS. The minister will answer that in the way he sees fit.

Mr FURNER: Once again, it is a process we will work through in terms of the persons on that panel. We will make decisions based on appropriate criteria for those people who will form the basis of that panel.

CHAIR: We will do some quick wrapping up. There are a couple of outstanding issues. One was regarding the number of graduates. That question was asked by the member for Gympie.

Mr FURNER: I will refer to my director-general to respond to what is required.

Dr Woods: In relation to the graduate program, I need to correct my answer. It is the Department of Environment and Science that runs the greater graduate program which is not running this year due to COVID-19. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet's program is called the Policy Futures Graduate Program. We have nominated two graduates to that program—one in fisheries and one in forestry. In addition, the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy runs the Digital and ICT Graduate Program and we have nominated to take four graduates from that program. I have answers for a number of other questions we took on notice. Would you like me to proceed?

CHAIR: Yes, please.

Dr Woods: In relation to the question in reference to page 4 of the SDS related to RD&E projects, I provided a figure off the top of my head for rent income. I can now advise a more precise figure. The research infrastructure rent relief in 2019-20 was \$171,000 and in 2020-21 for the first quarter, which is the only one we have finalised figures for, it was \$218,000.

In relation to the question of the numbers of meetings where the minister or the department met with AgForce and QFF and industry groups on the implementation of drought reforms, you will remember that the minister answered his part of that question, but I took on notice to check how many times the department had met. We have had 10 industry working group meetings specifically concerning drought reform after the release of the review and an extensive consultation process that followed that discussion. Most recently, the group met on 2 September 2020. Invitations for the next industry working group to meet prior to Christmas will be issued shortly. It is expected the group will meet again in the new year as often as required prior to the implementation of the reforms.

In relation to the question on notice about the estimated cost of damage caused by feral pigs, the only figure that we have been able to find on that is an estimate that feral pigs cause approximately \$106.5 million worth of direct economic cost to the agriculture sector in Australia each year. Estimates of feral pig damage in Queensland alone range considerably. A natural resource management group in North Queensland estimated back in 2013 that feral pigs at that stage cost North Queensland more than \$80 million in the previous financial year. The actual figure is difficult to estimate as feral pig numbers fluctuate depending on the season, availability of food sources and because they have wide-ranging impacts, including damage to almost all crops—sugar cane, grain crops and vegetable crops.

Finally, there is clarification in relation to the DRAS allocation and the fact that the funds are held centrally. The funds have been held centrally now for a number of seasons because the demand for DRAS is highly variable due to the variability of the seasons and that makes it difficult to budget properly. In recent years, centrally holding the funds has proved more efficient, drawing funds quarterly as expended. I can report that in the last financial year we needed to draw more funds than had been budgeted because that was what the demand was as the drought conditions escalated through the latter part of the last financial year. The government has committed to maintaining drought assistance as required while this drought lasts.

CHAIR: We are approaching the end of the time allocated for the consideration of estimates of expenditure for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities. Minister, do you want to sum up before we finish?

Mr FURNER: Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for their broad-ranging questions right across the portfolio. It is a great portfolio which I thoroughly enjoy. I am sure all of the members on the committee thoroughly enjoy it as well. I have held a long-lasting view that areas of policy in agriculture and fisheries should be beyond politics, and I will maintain that view. The stakeholders in these industries—from the growers and the fishers through to the processors, the supply chain workers and the business operators—have a special significance in this state. As we get on with the job of implementing Queensland's economic recovery plan, they will be critical to our success. I and the government look forward to being part of that and celebrating that success.

I would like to put on record my strong appreciation of all of my departmental staff and also my ministerial staff who played a significant role in this important process of preparing for today's hearing. They have been through a tough year, as all public servants have in this time of the pandemic. It has been a remarkable effort seeing all of this come together with these unusual time constraints. I am very grateful to each and every one of them. They are the salt of the earth.

I also put on record once again my thanks to my Director-General, Dr Beth Woods, for her outstanding public service over the many years. I do not know whether she will miss estimates, but I am sure she will enjoy her activities in retirement.

Lastly, I want to put on record my appreciation and thanks for the women and men, our primary producers, who work in our agriculture and fisheries sector. They do an outstanding job. They produce the best produce in the world. I am sure that each and every one of us, including both government and opposition members of the committee, enjoy the produce they supply the world and this nation. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Thank you also to departmental officers who are here with us today. Thank you, Minister, for your staff as well. Thanks to the members of the committee and visiting members participating in the hearing. Thanks to Hansard and to our parliamentary and secretariat staff. Well done, Stephanie. I now declare the hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 8.01 pm.