

## THURSDAY, 25 JULY 2024

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### ESTIMATES—HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE— HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES; WOMEN

#### Estimate Committee Members

Mr AD Harper—Chair  
Mr R Molhoek  
Mr SSJ Andrew  
Hon. CD Crawford  
Mr JR Martin  
Mr ST O'Connor

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#### Members in Attendance

Ms RM Bates  
Mr DF Crisafulli  
Dr A MacMahon  
Mr JP Bleijie  
Mr JA Sullivan  
Mr MC Berkman  
Mr AJ Perrett  
Mr DR Last  
Mr B Head  
Ms A Leahy  
Ms AJ Camm

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#### In Attendance

Hon. SM Fentiman, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women

Ms O Amsden, Chief of Staff  
Mr F Semple, Policy Adviser

#### **Queensland Health**

Mr M Walsh, Director-General  
Ms P Bryant, Executive Director, Office of the Director-General

#### **Hospital and Health Services**

Mr F Tracey, Health Service Chief Executive, Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service

Prof. J Hanson, Chief Executive, Metro North Hospital and Health Service

Ms L Blackler, Health Service Chief Executive, Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service

#### **Queensland Ambulance Service**

Mr C Emery, Commissioner

Mr D Hartley, Assistant Commissioner

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**The committee met at 8.30 am.**



**CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. I declare open this hearing of the estimates for the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee. I would like to start by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all now share.

I am Aaron Harper. I am the member for Thuringowa and chair of the committee. With me today are Mr Rob Molhoek, the member for Southport and deputy chair; Mr Sam O'Connor, the member for Bonney; Mr Stephen Andrew, the member for Mirani; the Hon. Craig Crawford, the member for Barron River; and Mr James Martin, the member for Stretton. The committee is joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today.

I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the chair's discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting and witnesses here today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. I ask all present to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. I remind everyone that food and drink is not permitted in the chamber.

This year, the House has determined the program for the committee's estimates hearing. Today, the committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the portfolios of the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women; the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities; and the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Innovation. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the time specified for the area, as was agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House, which is available throughout the chamber and on the committee's webpage.

In the first session we will examine the proposed expenditure of the Department of Health, the hospital and health services and the Health Ombudsman until 10 am. We will suspend proceedings for a short break until 10.15. I remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing orders and rules of the Legislative Assembly. I have some very clear expectations on how the day will run. I ask all members to remember that there will be no lengthy preambles. We do not need running commentary, such as I have had to deal with in previous years. I want to keep to a smooth program, members, so please respect my ruling throughout the day.

In respect to government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides—

... a member may ask any question which the committee determines will assist in its examination of the relevant Appropriation Bill or otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women, the director-general, the Health Ombudsman, officials, departmental officers and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or director-general. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of the Department of Health, hospital and health services and the Health Ombudsman open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement of no longer than five minutes?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, the Turrbal and Yagara peoples, and pay deep respects to elders past, present and emerging.

There has never been a more important time for health leaders to demonstrate the planning, the leadership, the investment, the listening, the empathy and the communication needed to help keep Queenslanders healthy. Last year I had the honour of visiting 30 hospitals in 30 days when I became

health minister. Since then, I have visited many more hospitals and health clinics and I have spoken to hundreds and hundreds of hardworking Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service staff. Those people deserve backing, not belittling; they deserve support, not scorn. They are everyday heroes caring for Queenslanders. I back them and our government backs them, just like we back those experiencing and surviving cancer.

Today I announce the Miles government's \$1.73 billion Queensland Cancer Strategy. This 10-year strategy will revolutionise and strengthen cancer care for the thousands of Queenslanders diagnosed each year—people like mother-of-two Denise, who was diagnosed with an extremely rare and aggressive cancer. She has spoken about how, despite her care being amazing, her cancer journey has been lonely and that it is difficult to coordinate appointments and treatment. Our new Cancer Strategy will allow people to take ownership of the supports they want to see. It will strengthen cancer services and provide better access to care for Queenslanders, particularly children, First Nations peoples and those living in our regional communities. This is only part of our record in health.

In 2023-24, the Queensland government invested \$764 million in our Putting Patients First strategy, and we are already seeing positive impacts on our system. Demand for health services continues to grow, and this strategy is helping us meet our targets. We are building on this investment with \$1.3 billion this financial year. This is part of our record health budget of \$28.9 billion, which is designed to direct our resources to the most critical areas of need. It includes \$129.5 million for an additional 268 new QAS staff, which is something that I think the member for Barron River and the chair might be very pleased to hear, to support our best and busiest ambulance service in the country.

As the health minister, I remain committed to easing pressure across the healthcare system and I have been a strong advocate for ensuring Queenslanders have access to the best possible health services closer to home. Our initiatives and investments are working. Today we have released data showing that ambulance ramping has had a small improvement this quarter, despite a tsunami of emergency presentations. This is despite the challenges we face because too many elderly people and those with disability are in our hospitals because there is nowhere suitable for them to go. Despite Queenslanders getting sicker and despite the onset of winter and waves of flu, COVID and RSV, patients are being moved from ambulances to emergency sooner. That is thanks to our hardworking frontline staff. I want to commend each and every one of them—the amazing paramedics and healthcare workers who make this happen. I invite the committee to offer its support to them, also.

However, we know there is more to do. It is no secret that the biggest challenges we face across the next decade are finding, attracting, training and retaining the workforce we need. Our population projections show that we need an additional 40,000 healthcare staff over the next decade. I am proud to say we are making critical progress towards this target. Since 2020, our government has hired an additional 11,180 frontline staff. We are exceeding the targets we set for the hiring of frontline staff but we are not taking our foot off the pedal. I am committed to building on this success with our Health Workforce Strategy.

Finally, as well as being health minister, I also have the honour and privilege of being the Minister for Women. We have a clear vision for women and girls and we are working hard to achieve this, particularly through the Women and Girls' Health Strategy. Chair, I could talk for hours about the investments we are making and our initiatives and I am happy to, but I imagine the committee has many questions for me and I am very pleased to take them.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister. Certainly, on behalf of the committee, I thank all health workers in Queensland. Member for Mudgeeraba, your first question please.

**Ms BATES:** With your indulgence, Chair, I would like to make a very brief comment, which is to simply express my and my colleagues' appreciation to those appearing here as witnesses today. I hope that you might pass on my sincere gratitude to your staff who collectively make our public health system tick in Queensland each and every day.

It is an important job. It is a big job. It is critically important, and I know it is not always easy. Your staff are with Queenslanders sometimes on their best days and sometimes on their worst. It can be taxing and draining, but I know from experience that it is also richly rewarding. To you and your staff, a very big thank you for your work over the past year and the work that still lies ahead.

My first question will be to the director-general. Director-General, where is the full performance data for the June quarter?

**Mr Walsh:** The full performance data for the June quarter will be released as per the normal schedule—that is, about six weeks after the end of the quarter. For this particular quarter, we

accelerated work on a small set of emergency department data so it could be released at this time. At the last estimates hearing there was a large focus on emergency department data, so the minister requested that we accelerate the work on that small section of the data.

**Ms BATES:** I notice that, as you said, the ambulance ramping data was released last night. You just clarified that that has not occurred before, with the rest of the data not made public. It was all dropped at the same time last year and the year before. Why was it not done this year?

**Mr Walsh:** I have just answered that question.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Director-General, have they ever been separated before?

**Mr Walsh:** Not to my recollection. As I have already answered, it was requested that we accelerate the work for the June quarter 2024 because there had been a significant focus on that data at previous estimates and it would be important for the committee to be able to talk about that emergency department data. It seems that that has been done properly, because that is what we are talking about in the first questions.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** What happened last year, Director-General? When was the June quarter released?

**Mr Walsh:** For the June quarter last year, I can get the exact date but it would normally be about six weeks after the end of the quarter.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** I thought we prosecuted that in estimates last year. I thought the data was all released for estimates. I think it was. What happened the year before, Director-General?

**Mr Walsh:** Estimates, I think, was later last year.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** What happened the year before?

**Mr Walsh:** I was not the director-general at that point in time but I can certainly find out the details. If the minister would like to take the question on notice, we can find out when the data was released in 2022 for the June quarter.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am very happy to give dates for the last five years as to when the data was released, if the committee would like. As the director-general has said—

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Minister, we have a series of questions. That is not what we were after.

**CHAIR:** Let's get to the question, then.

**Ms BATES:** My question is to the director-general.

**Mr Walsh:** Sorry, can I just clarify: you asked for the release date for the June quarter data in 2022. Are you saying you do not want that date?

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** No, Director-General, I was asking whether or not it had ever been separated before. I was making the observation that this would be the first estimates hearing in some time when all of the data had not been released at once. To me, for the minister to not release all of the data for scrutiny in the last year before an election is a pretty dark place for transparency in this state.

**Mr Walsh:** Chair, that is not a question that I can respond to. That is a statement.

**CHAIR:** It is a comment from the Leader of the Opposition. I am asking you to get on with asking your next question.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Sorry, Chair, I take personal offence to that comment and I ask the member to withdraw. The department has worked incredibly hard to bring forward a release of data so that this committee and the opposition can hold us to account on it. It was not possible to do the thousands of points of data well before it is due for release, and I ask him to withdraw.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, we know you are desperate, but let's not make it all about you.

**CHAIR:** Order! Let me deal with the point of order you have raised. The member finds it offensive. Please withdraw.

**Ms BATES:** The minister was not referenced.

**CHAIR:** I am asking you to please withdraw. Just follow standing orders.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Mr Chairman, I never made a personal reflection on the minister.

**CHAIR:** I do not want to hear argument. The member has found the comment offensive. Please withdraw so we can move on. We are eating into your time already.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Mr Chairman, I withdraw.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Next question, please.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, did the health minister personally request only some aspects of the data be released to try to put her in a good light for this estimates hearing?

**Mr Walsh:** Chair, that question is asking for a personal opinion. That is not my role here. My role here is to answer questions of fact and evidence.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Director-General. Member for Mudgeeraba, he has answered the question. Let's move on to your next line of questioning.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can you confirm if the elective surgery waiting list has increased this quarter from 60,038 last quarter?

**Mr Walsh:** The elective surgery waiting list data will be released with all of the remaining data for the June quarter.

**Ms BATES:** So you do not know?

**Mr Walsh:** Not until it is released. It still needs to be validated. It needs to be accurate when it is released.

**Ms BATES:** So it has to be washed before you release it?

**CHAIR:** Come on. There will be no running commentary, member for Mudgeeraba. It is nice and early. Let's get it going.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can you confirm if the number of patients receiving their elective surgery within the clinically recommended timeframe has fallen this quarter from 20.6 last quarter?

**Mr Walsh:** The quarters I can refer to are the March and December quarters. Are they the quarters that you would like me to refer to?

**Ms BATES:** From the start of the June quarter.

**Mr Walsh:** The June quarter data is not yet available, so I cannot respond to that question.

**Ms BATES:** So you do not know? As the director-general of one of the largest departments in this government, you do not know what the elective surgery waitlists are or whether people are having their surgery in clinically recommended timeframes?

**Mr Walsh:** When the waitlist numbers have been finalised and clarified, that is when the number can be discussed. You are putting me in a situation where you are asking me to discuss information that is not yet finalised.

**Ms BATES:** No, Director-General, I am putting you in a situation to do your job, which is to tell Queenslanders what the waiting times are. There are people at home watching this who are in pain, in a wheelchair, waiting to have a total hip replacement.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mudgeeraba, please!

**Ms BATES:** I will move on to my next question.

**Mr Walsh:** Can I just respond to the commentary that has been made about elective surgery? As I have explained, I cannot release data until it is available to be released. To do otherwise would be misinforming the committee because the data may not be accurate, and that is not my job. My job is to get things right and to be accurate. What I can say is that when you compare the elective surgery treated-in-time data for Queensland with every other state—New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia—we have the lowest treated-in-time data of any state in Australia.

**Ms BATES:** So how is it that you can only release some data today?

**Mr Walsh:** I have answered the question. The data is released when the data is available.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can you confirm if the specialist outpatient waiting list has increased this quarter from 289,960 last quarter? Before you go on with your previous answers for all of these questions, surely you would know, as the director-general, if it has dropped to 200,000 patients or if it has risen to 350,000 patients. As a general comment, you should be able to tell this committee whether it has gone up or gone down.

**Mr Walsh:** As I have answered all the previous questions, when the data is available I can answer that question. I cannot answer the question about data that is not yet available.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can you confirm that ambulance ramping remains virtually static, being 45.5 per cent last quarter and 44.7 per cent this quarter?

**Mr Walsh:** We do not have a measure for ramping. The patient-off-stretcher time for the June quarter is 55.3 per cent, which is up on the previous quarter, the March quarter, and is also up on the same quarter from last year.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, on 22 June last year the previous minister said that the target for ambulance ramping would be reduced to 28 per cent in 12 months. At the time the minister made this commitment, ambulance ramping was 43 per cent. Today, that figure is worse. Ramping remains at nearly 45 per cent. As the fourth health minister who has seen the health system further deteriorate, does the minister acknowledge that time is up for Labor's approach to fix the Queensland health crisis?

**CHAIR:** Before you answer that, member for Mudgeeraba, we do not need the running commentary. We just need the question put without the running commentary.

**Ms BATES:** I was just putting it into context.

**CHAIR:** I am going to pull you up on this. I have very clear expectations about how the day will run.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for Mudgeeraba for her question. She is incorrect. We have not seen a deterioration in our ED and patient off-stretcher or ambulance ramping data. In fact, despite the huge increase in presentations—we have had a record June quarter, the busiest June quarter ever in Queensland's history—on every performance measure we have seen an improvement. That does not mean that there is not more work to do.

Again, for the member for Mudgeeraba to say there has been a deterioration when our hardworking frontline staff have worked incredibly hard to get almost 6,000 more patients off the stretcher in 30 minutes than this time last year—to see an improvement in the percentage compared to the previous quarter and this time last year is a testament to how hard they are working.

Chair, I do not want to respond to some of the earlier questions about data because I think it is really important that Queenslanders know how transparent we are being. The department advised me that they would not be able to have the quarterly data ready this year for estimates because estimates is earlier than it has been.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Four days.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I asked them to put resources in to get the data ready. They have done that, as the director-general has said, but they advised me that they would not be able to have the thousands of points of data updated, but we focused on what I thought this committee would want to focus on. I thought the opposition might welcome the fact that they actually have more recent data—and they will get the rest of the data in coming weeks when it is ready. I do want to say that on every performance measure today—ED seen-in-time, ED median wait time, patient off-stretcher time, ambulance response times—we have seen an improvement, and I cannot hear from the opposition their thanks to the frontline staff for this huge improvement despite the demand.

**Ms BATES:** I actually go out with them on ridealongs.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** When it comes to median ED wait time, we have seen a two percentage point improvement. We are now at a median ED wait time of 15 minutes. That is four minutes better than it was under the LNP government when far fewer patients were presenting.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** I have a question to the minister. When the minister became the minister she committed to reducing the waitlist from 58,446 to 56,176. We do not have the figure today, but I think there is a fair chance to say it is not there—in fact, it has gone up. The minister said that the outpatient waiting list would go from 281,697 to 248,905. We do not have the data, but I would suggest to you it is not there. I would suggest to you it has gone up. The kicker is that the minister said when she became minister and ambulance ramping was at 43 per cent that today it would be 28 per cent. Instead we have had the worst two consecutive quarters for ambulance ramping in this state's history.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That's not true.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** It remains at 45 per cent. Does the minister acknowledge she has missed her targets and failed Queensland Health staff and patients during the Queensland Health crisis?

**CHAIR:** Before you answer, Minister, that was a very lengthy preamble.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have a very lengthy answer, Chair.

**Ms BATES:** Then make it relevant.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, member for Mudgeeraba. I am going to allow some latitude in your response.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** What I would say to the Leader of the Opposition—and it is lovely that he is here today. I noted that he came to our estimates committee last year. It is the only other committee he attended other than the Premier's. I am not sure what that says about the Leader of the Opposition's confidence in the member for Mudgeeraba.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** No. It shows that health is important. It shows how important the health crisis is to the opposition.

**Ms BATES:** How desperate to make it all about you!

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** And housing and crime—these are not as important? It is really interesting, isn't it?

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** It is always about the minister.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** It is really interesting.

**Ms BATES:** We know you're desperate.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Desperate.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** What I will say about elective surgery and specialist outpatients is this: we have seen, again, an enormous improvement. We lead the nation when it comes to elective surgery. Our long waits have dropped 40 per cent. I have never heard the Leader of the Opposition acknowledge our surgeons and how rapidly they are getting through the waitlists.

The Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service currently has no long waits—none at all. That is incredible, particularly coming out of COVID, where for such a long time we paused elective surgery. On elective surgery—again, the data will be ready in coming weeks—I can tell you that we have still seen a massive improvement when it comes to the amount of long waits that we are reducing because we are focused on it and we are also partnering with the private hospitals on it which is a great outcome for Queenslanders.

When it comes to ambulance ramping, I said I wanted to get our system back to prepandemic levels. When it comes to every other measure other than ambulance ramping—and I will get to why that is being persistently challenging—we are doing more elective surgeries than we did prepandemic. We are seeing more patients through the ED on time. As a system we have got back to the work we were doing prepandemic levels.

Ambulance ramping is a measure that does not deal with patients' acuity. It has been so difficult to shift for a number of reasons. One, we have more people arriving via ambulance than we ever did. They are higher acuity patients—category 1 and 2 patients arriving by ambulance—and something that we did not have prepandemic is a thousand long-stay patients in our hospitals. That is the size of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.

I have been advocating very strongly to the federal government for more assistance to get these patients into aged-care and NDIS beds. We have put in \$200 million of our own money to help free up these beds by putting patients into private aged-care beds and paying. We are doing a lot in terms of subacute facilities that are under construction. We have the biggest build in Queensland Health's history in terms of adding more beds to the system, but that is why post has not moved as quickly as I would like to see. The fact that it is improving and we have even more patients and the fact that we have almost 6,000 more patients off the stretcher within 30 minutes shows that we are turning around the system. There is more to do, but for the Leader of the Opposition to say it is the worst in Queensland's history is just wrong.

**Ms BATES:** My question is to the director-general. Did the department provide any input or advice into the targets and timeframes the minister set last year?

**Mr Walsh:** The type of advice is not something that is publicly spoken about. It is advice that is provided from the department to the minister. I do not see how I can answer that question.

**Ms BATES:** As the director-general, knowing that you oversee all of Queensland Health, surely you would have had some input into announcements that the minister made about targets that she was setting for herself?

**CHAIR:** Are you seeking an opinion here?

**Mr Walsh:** As I have indicated, the nature of advice or whether I give advice to the minister is a matter for the director-general and the minister.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, were you given the instruction to have the department meet these targets set by the minister in the set timeframes?

**Mr Walsh:** I remember answering this question last year. It was the same question and it is the same answer. The request from the minister is to improve the patient off-stretcher time and, in fact, all the performance measures to get back to prepandemic rates as soon as possible. That was my answer last year. It continues to be my answer. It continues to be, as the minister has outlined, something that every single hardworking health worker does when they turn up to hospital every single day. They arrive at work at emergency departments with the intention of ensuring they can transfer patients from the ambulance into the ED and for patients to be seen-in-time. I should point out that category 1 patients are all seen-in-time. Those are the most urgent and sick patients. That is therefore the target that we meet and we meet that target.

Then we have targets for people to flow through the emergency departments and, if they do not require to be admitted, to be able to go back and continue their lives in the community. As the minister has pointed out, we have a thousand people every night in our 13,500 Queensland Health beds who do not need to be there because they are unable to get into a residential aged-care service or to get an aged-care package or to get a National Disability Insurance Scheme package. Therefore, that has made it very challenging for our staff to flow patients through our emergency departments into the hospitals and then have them leave the hospital when they are ready. What I have said is that we are working as hard as we can. I am working, every single person in this room is working and every single employee of Queensland Health is working to improve our measures as quickly as we can exactly as the minister requested.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can I confirm with you that last year the investment as part of the Putting Patients First initiative announced by the government in the budget was to the value of \$764 million?

**Mr Walsh:** I can check the exact figure, but it is my recollection that was the figure and that is what was invested, yes.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, the purpose of that investment was action to tackle ambulance ramping; is that correct?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes, some of the investment was indeed to do that. There were a number of initiatives in the Putting Patients First initiative back in 2023-24, and those have been enhanced in 2024-25 in the Putting Patients First strategy. We continue to resource. For instance, this year we are putting in another 268 ambulance officers, but that will be something we talk about in the last session. That is not the subject of this particular part of the hearing, as I understand it.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can you confirm for me that 45.5 per cent and 44.7 per cent are the worst ever quarterly results for ambulance ramping in Queensland's history?

**Mr Walsh:** I can say that patient-off-stretcher time was 55.3 per cent in the June quarter 2024, which is higher than the March quarter 2024 and is also higher than the quarter in 2023. One of the things we need to realise is that particular number means there are thousands more Queenslanders who are being transferred off from the ambulance into the emergency department than there were last year within 30 minutes.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, can you confirm that these numbers, 45.5 and 44.7, are the worst two consecutive quarters—

**CHAIR:** You have just asked the question.

**Ms BATES:** No, I asked whether they were the worst two consecutive quarters.

**Mr Walsh:** I do not have those numbers. I have 55.3 for patient-off-stretcher time.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Director-General, the figure the shadow minister is referring to is what all of the paramedics and all of the Queensland Health staff refer to as ambulance ramping. If you deduct the figure you are using from 100, you will find that is where the figure is coming from. For what you call patient-off-stretcher times, are they the worst two consecutive quarterly performances back to back? Are they the worst two consecutive performances?

**CHAIR:** You have asked the question.

**Mr Walsh:** That will be something I will need to go and look at.



**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Minister, could you take that on notice?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Absolutely, but, as the director-general has said, there has been an improvement—

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** No, no. Minister, we are just asking if you will take it on notice; that is all.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am just responding. As the director-general—

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** No, no. It is either a yes or no, I would have thought.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, member, I will run proceedings. Go ahead, Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** What I can tell you is that it is an improvement on last year and last quarter.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** That is not the question.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have answered it.

**CHAIR:** Member!

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** No, it is not the question.

**CHAIR:** Member!

**Ms BATES:** We will move on.

**CHAIR:** Member!

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Slippery.

**CHAIR:** Member!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Oh, you want to talk about slippery?

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Yes.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Who will not tell us what their plans are for Queensland Health?

**Ms BATES:** Here comes the real health minister.

**CHAIR:** Order, everyone!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Their one plan—

**CHAIR:** Just hang on!

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** We know you are desperate. Just be up-front.

**CHAIR:** Order, member for Broadwater!

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** We know you are desperate.

**Ms BATES:** It is not about you.

**CHAIR:** Member for Broadwater! I have called order! Everyone, cool your jets. Next question, please.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, last year in the budget and when we sat here you spoke about the government's plan to tackle ambulance ramping. You said 'our \$764 million Putting Patients First plan will directly address ambulance ramping and emergency department pressures'. At the time this investment was announced, ramping was 43 per cent. How did the Labor government spend \$764 million only to achieve a worse outcome based on the very measure you promised this money would fix?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I cannot be clearer: despite the massive demand in patients, despite more serious patients arriving via ambulance than ever before, we have seen an improvement in patient-off-stretcher time and an improvement in ambulance response time. The member asked about Putting Patients First, and I do want to address that. There are a number of initiatives that have been put in place that senior emergency department doctors tell me are making a difference. We have so many thousands more people arriving to our hospitals, and if it were not for these initiatives they would be under even more pressure.

We have recently announced a new virtual hospital, which is based at Metro North, which means that patients who are not sure whether or not they need to present at an emergency department can get excellent virtual care. That is one of the initiatives. There are a range of initiatives around rapid access clinics, around putting more nurses in triage areas and in our waiting rooms. There are medical flow commanders; there are more beds. There are a range of initiatives designed to improve patient

flow. As I said, with more and more people arriving and more and more elderly patients stuck in hospital, it is a real challenge for our staff.

That money and that investment have been supercharged this year with a \$1.1 billion investment. Again, it is more staff, it is more beds and it is more innovative approaches to care. We are putting nurses in some of our GP clinics to help patient care navigation. There are a range of things we are doing to help improve patient flow. I am really confident that with the work we are doing with our senior emergency department doctors, with Queensland Health, with some of our heads of medical and surgery, we will continue to see improvements. The demand is huge. We have to remember that our clinicians are doing the very best they can, and I am proud that our resources are working.

**CHAIR:** I am trying to give you as much time as possible, but we have gone over. We are going to go to a couple of government member questions, then the crossbench and then back to you.

**Mr MARTIN:** Minister, with reference to page 1 of the SDS, can you update the committee on how the Miles government Satellite Hospitals Program is relieving pressure on busy EDs and delivering care closer to home for Queenslanders?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I can, and I thank the member for the question. He has been a huge champion for our Eight Mile Plains Satellite Hospital, which is right near his community. It is fantastic that his constituents are able to access world-class health care closer to home.

It is no secret that our public emergency departments are busier than ever before. Demand is being driven by a lack of access to primary health care, our aging and growing population, and declining private health care. Across the state, every day our emergency departments see thousands of people with important but not life-threatening conditions—things like fractures, sprains, small cuts that need some stitches or minor illnesses. That is why in the lead-up to the 2020 election we committed to delivering seven new satellite hospitals across South-East Queensland. Our satellite hospitals at Caboolture, Kallangur, Eight Mile Plains, Redlands, Ripley, Tugun and most recently Bribie Island have opened since the middle of last year. They are strategically located near some of our busiest emergency departments. Our satellite hospitals are providing urgent non-emergency care to thousands of people across the south-east, with more than 95 per cent of patients presenting treated and discharged within two hours of arriving.

We know that Queenslanders love them, because we have recently passed the 100,000th presentation to our minor injury and illness clinics. We continue to receive positive feedback, including from a Caboolture local who described the staff and service as incredible and said they are very fortunate to have the facility in their area, or a Tugun local who went in with low blood pressure, was put on a drip and has praised how efficient, knowledgeable and friendly staff were, adding that it is an asset to Tugun and it will be their preference for care in the future. I have also heard incredible life-saving stories, including about a man who presented to the Ripley Satellite Hospital not realising he was actually having a stroke. This was quickly picked up by the incredible staff, who were able to care for him and get him a CT scan—because there is a CT scanner at the satellite hospital—while he waited to be transferred. As you know, when you are treating strokes seconds matter.

Not only are they delivering the right care at the right time closer to home; they are also helping to ease pressure on our EDs. We have seen a significant decrease in non-urgent presentations at nearby hospitals since they opened. Ipswich ED has seen a massive reduction of almost 25 per cent in non-urgent presentations in the last quarter, while Caboolture emergency saw a nearly 20 per cent decrease and Redlands saw a decrease of 16 per cent. Each satellite hospital also offers a variety of outpatient services tailored to local community needs such as renal dialysis, chemotherapy, oral health, antenatal and postnatal care, as well as mental health.

These results are a testament to the 468 satellite hospital staff working across seven facilities to ensure patients receive timely and efficient care. Our satellite hospitals are a key part of our record \$28.9 billion investment in the healthcare system, which is delivering new and upgraded hospitals and health facilities and employing thousands of additional frontline healthcare workers. I am proud to witness the important role satellite hospitals are playing and I am delighted to hear the positive feedback we are receiving from the community.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** With reference to page 15 of the SDS, can the minister update the committee on the health big build and what it is delivering for Queenslanders?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. Our commitment to the health and wellbeing of every Queenslander has never been stronger. The success of Queensland Health's capital program is already being seen across the state, with projects like the Cairns Hospital emergency department

expansion delivering expanded capacity, X-ray facilities and a new procedure room as well as various refurbishments and improvements of existing spaces. We have been able to progress these improvements in stages allowing locals to reap the benefits sooner. Our \$14 billion health big build is the biggest capital investment in Queensland Health's history. There are more than 500 infrastructure and digital technology projects as part of our Big Build to deliver safe, state-of-the-art and high-quality health care to Queenslanders.

We have also been fast-tracking projects under the \$269.2 million Accelerated Infrastructure Delivery Program. By using a combination of offsite construction and standard designs, we can reduce delivery times and ensure more Queenslanders are being seen quicker. Earlier this year I was proud to open the 28-bed modular ward at Redland Hospital which was fast-tracked under this program, as well as a further 93 additional beds at Cairns, Robina and QEII. An extra 160 beds will come online in the coming months at Ripley and the Gold Coast through this program also, as well as a multistorey car park at Ripley.

Our Building Rural and Remote Health Program is ensuring aging infrastructure in regional areas is being upgraded to meet the needs of our communities. In the last month, the new Charleville and St George hospitals welcomed their first patients and the Morven Community Clinic is expected to be open later this year under the program.

I am really disappointed that the LNP have never supported our satellite hospitals, even though they have been extremely successful in reducing pressure on our busy emergency departments. Our satellite hospitals in Caboolture, Eight Mile Plains, Redlands, Kallangur, Tugun and Ripley reduce the need for people to have to travel to major hospitals for care. We have also seen a reduction in non-urgent presentations at nearby emergency departments since our satellite hospitals have opened.

The \$11.2 billion Capacity Expansion Program will continue to access world-class health care in our rapidly growing regions across the state, providing expansions to 11 existing hospitals, constructing three new hospitals and building a dedicated cancer centre. Around 2,200 additional beds will be delivered under this program and it will create more than 22,000 construction jobs.

I am proud to be part of the delivery of initiatives that will ensure Queensland remains a vibrant and sustainable place to live. Importantly, more than half of these developments are taking place in regional areas, providing essential health services closer to communities that need them. Not only does this allow people to stay closer to home, it will also generate employment opportunities and enhance economic growth across our regions. With more than one million new residents expected to call Queensland home in the next decade, it is imperative that we act to accommodate this growth.

**CHAIR:** Minister, in reference to page 22 of the SDS, can you outline the key goals and measures of the Health Workforce Strategy for Queensland?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I can, and I thank the member for the question. In eight years, Queensland is expected to have more than six million people calling our great state home. On top of this, activity in our hospitals is projected to increase by nearly five per cent. These numbers I have shared are just two of many that highlight the increasing pressure our public healthcare system is facing. Our health workers do an incredible job meeting increasing demand, working around the clock to make sure Queenslanders get the care they need when they need it most. In return we must support them. That is why our government has launched the \$1.7 billion Health Workforce Strategy for Queensland. This is our road map to training, retaining and recruiting the pipeline of health workers we need to meet the changing needs of our growing and aging population.

Our population projections show our state needs an additional 40,000 healthcare staff over the next decade to fill clinical and non-clinical roles, and I am proud to say we are making critical progress towards meeting this target. Since 2015 the Queensland government has hired over 24,000 additional frontline health staff, including more than 4,200 doctors, 14,000 nurses and midwives, almost 4,400 allied health workers and more than 1,500 ambulance operatives. I am incredibly proud of this achievement which demonstrates our government's unwavering commitment to building the frontline health workforce.

It certainly stands in stark contrast to the opposition's record of sacking 4,400 health workers, including 1,800 nurses and midwives, and we know they will cut again. The shadow health minister is a member of the fake nurses union, NPAQ, the same group that is right now running a campaign to sack 18,000 health workers—18,000. Queenslanders cannot afford to lose 18,000 health workers when we know demand on our hospital system is at an all-time high and growing. I would urge the shadow health minister to condemn this campaign from her organisation that she is a member of.

**Ms BATES:** You're making it up. You're desperate.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** To be a member of an organisation that wants to sack health workers at a time when we need them most is disgraceful.

**Ms BATES:** Let's not make it about you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Our workforce strategy is guided by three focus areas, including: supporting and retaining the current workforce; building and attracting new talent pipelines; and adapting and innovating new ways to deliver care. To attract even more talent, we are partnering with universities, colleges and health bodies to secure medical student placements, expand specialty training and develop regional medical pathways.

We recently celebrated the official re-signing of the memorandum of understanding for the Central Queensland and Wide Bay regional medical pathway. The MOU shows our shared commitment to supporting local students trained in local communities like Central Queensland and Wide Bay, and they are much more likely to stay and work there when they graduate. The Health Workforce Strategy also includes a \$24 million investment to strengthen Queensland's primary care sector by incentivising trainees to become general practitioners.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We are out of time for that session. I call the member for Mirani for non-government questions.

**Mr ANDREW:** Minister, could you please update us on the PET scanner for the Rockhampton region?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. It was a really special day when we were up in Rockhampton with patients who were undergoing cancer treatment to announce that Rockhampton would get a PET scanner. There is a lot of work that has to happen obviously to get a PET scanner installed at Rocky, with a very specialist workforce and specialist facilities. We are doing that work now. We are doing the preparation to have the specialist workforce and we are doing the work to have the infrastructure.

Infrastructure planning will need to consider whether the available space and radiation shielding is of an appropriate size for the scanner and if the appropriate surrounding infrastructure is suitable—uptake rooms, laboratory, patient waiting spaces. Initial planning has also commenced to inform a master plan and business case to ensure the hospital can accommodate this. It is a three-year timetable and that allows for detailed design, development, procurement, construction and fit-out, testing and commissioning of the PET scanner, onsite training of staff, and assessment of the available room in relation to radiation shielding and space for the scanner.

What I would also say for the member is obviously we are going to need to continue to invest in these kinds of scanners right across the state and it is a highly trained workforce. As part of our \$1.7 billion workforce strategy, there is a real focus on nuclear medicine. Currently, we do not do any training in Queensland for our nuclear medicine workforce and that is something we are working to change. We are actively working with our universities to make sure we can train up the next generation of nuclear medicine workers as well.

**Mr ANDREW:** As a follow-up question, are we seeing an increase in cancers in Queensland?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is a great question from the member. Today we announced our new 10-year cancer strategy for Queensland. We have never had a cancer strategy before and it is something I am really passionate about. Over 33,000 Queenslanders are diagnosed every year and we do have higher rates than other states. That is predominantly due to skin cancer. We are the Sunshine State and we love it, but we do need to do more, particularly around prevention of skin cancer. Queensland Health last year launched a really terrific social media campaign targeted particularly at young people about the dangers of being exposed to the sun, and we do need to do more on that.

Our new cancer strategy looks at prevention and early detection, particularly for regional and rural communities. It looks at expanding cancer services and it looks at support and care for survivors. We heard from Gary today who has been involved in the strategy with us who is a cancer survivor. You often think about going through the treatment of cancer but afterwards you still need a lot of access to counselling, psychosocial support and sometimes financial assistance, as well as access to people who have been through a similar journey. We are doing a lot to make sure that care is coordinated. There are more cancer care nurse navigators in the system. We actually have over \$4 million to have new survivorship care, which is something I am really proud of.

**Mr ANDREW:** I ask that question because the words ‘turbo cancer’ keep coming up in my electorate. People are dying in a very short space of time after cancer is found.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I think early detection and increased screening access for regional communities is really critical. That early detection is a big part of the strategy, particularly for rural and regional communities.

**Mr ANDREW:** Concerning the old Sarina Hospital site, the accommodation and what is there at the moment, will we be repurposing that to house some people? I have a real concern in that I want to try to retain teachers. We have 13-odd vacancies for teachers in the high school but no accommodation.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Again, a great question. I was really pleased to open the beautiful new Sarina Hospital, which was an election commitment. The team up there are fantastic. Queensland Health will utilise the old site for some of those older patients. We will be utilising the site ourselves as Queensland Health to house longer stay patients. The old hospital will be utilised for patients waiting for aged-care or NDIS plans. There is a bit of work happening there now to make that suitable.

**Mr ANDREW:** With regard to the nurses’ quarters up the back that are still there, probably vacant to this day, is there an opportunity to work together with the education department to get something for the time being?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am happy to get some advice on that and come back to you at the end of the session about what we are considering for the nurses’ quarters. I am very happy to work with you on that.

**Dr MacMAHON:** Minister, how many public hospital beds exist in Queensland currently as opposed to 2015 and, if you are able to, within that, the number of ICU beds?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am very happy to get that for you and come back to you as soon as we have it, but it will be in one of these briefs.

**Dr MacMAHON:** Similarly something to search for, how many nurses are employed by Queensland Health?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am very happy to get you the number. Again I would say that since 2020, in our election commitment, we have hired thousands more nurses and have met that target early, and this financial year we have funding in our workforce strategy for 2,600 more nurses and midwives. In your number, do you want midwives included?

**Dr MacMAHON:** That would be great.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am happy to get that for you.

**Dr MacMAHON:** Thank you. I similarly had a question about the number of doctors.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** We can get that for you. From 2015 to now?

**Dr MacMAHON:** Yes, thank you. I also wanted to know with respect to psychologists employed by Queensland Health, what are the salary ranges that apply to this role?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Again, I do not know that off the top of my head, but I am very happy—oh, the director-general knows.

**Mr Walsh:** Psychologists are part of the allied health profession and they are under the health practitioner award.

**Dr MacMAHON:** Aside from Queensland Health, what other Queensland government entities employ psychologists?

**Mr Walsh:** It does not relate to the health portfolio. There are lots of different types of psychologists. In fact, I am a psychologist and practised in the past myself—like some people were paramedics in the past. The thing is that you can have organisational psychologists who can be employed in human resource areas or other areas in multiple departments. You can have social psychologists who look at behaviour change and others who could be employed in transport, around road traffic incidents and how to improve driver behaviour. You can also have psychologists working in behaviour management in education across schools. They certainly employ psychologists in disability services or early childhood for behaviour and development. I would say that most government departments would have a psychologist, but not all psychologists are the same.

**Dr MacMAHON:** I would be keen to know the people who are employed as psychologists as opposed to psychologists who are working in other fields.

**Mr Walsh:** As a clinical or counselling psychologist?

**Dr MacMAHON:** Yes, what their salary range is and then what other entities the Queensland government would be employing psychologists in.

**Mr Walsh:** We cannot answer questions for other portfolios. We can certainly give you the answers for Queensland Health, and I am very happy to provide the salary scales that apply under the health practitioner award and that we employ all our psychologists under.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mirani, do you have a follow-up question?

**Mr ANDREW:** Not at this stage, Chair.

**CHAIR:** I will give the time to the opposition. Before we go to the next session, Leader of the Opposition and member for Mudgeeraba, I want to give you more time. What is unhelpful is when I have to call order and there is running commentary. In this session, it is my intention to give you more time.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Mr Chair. Director-General, were you ever made aware of plans for the dedicated 24-bed babies ward at the Queensland Children's Hospital being effectively wound up so that there will no longer be a dedicated babies ward at Queensland's only children's hospital?

**Mr Walsh:** Given that the Children's Hospital is the responsibility of the Children's Hospital and Health Service, I will call Frank Tracey to respond to the operations of the Queensland Children's Hospital. We do need to understand that that hospital is one of the top 10 children's hospitals in the world. Thousands and thousands of children and their families have benefited from the excellent, world-leading work that occurs at the Children's Hospital, but I think it is more appropriate for Mr Tracey to talk about a specific ward in the Children's Hospital.

**Mr Tracey:** May I first acknowledge the amazing work of all of our staff, who do such a fantastic job for Queensland children, young people and families, and when I mention frontline staff I am mostly acknowledging the work of our porters, our cleaners and the variety of people who make a health team work. In reference to your question, unfortunately I am not able to answer this in a lot of detail as we are going through a consultation process and working that through with our staff and with our industrial partners. The process is about increasing flow in our hospitals so that we can always attend to the most urgent cases that present through our emergency department and from other hospital and health services across this state. This process started off in February, when we included some improvements in our ED department to make life a little bit easier for families who were turning up there. We are also looking at our elective surgery and wait times. All of those, I am glad to report, have improved significantly over the past 12 months. This body of work is in consultation phase with our staff. I have met with our staff and have talked with them about it, and I really value their input into the process.

**Ms BATES:** I understand that staff have raised real concerns about safety of patients as a result of these changes. It will effectively mean an eight-week-old baby suffering with respiratory problems being placed potentially beside a 17-year-old with mental illness and eating disorders. Does that sound acceptable to you?

**Mr Tracey:** I think it is important to understand the nuance of what we are proposing here. No decisions have been made about the final configuration of our wards. We have been delighted with the investment that the government has made in expanding our services, and this is part and parcel of working to take full advantage of that investment.

**Ms BATES:** Chief Executive, documents from Children's Health Queensland obtained by the opposition indicate that the reason a dedicated ward is being wound back is simply that there are no beds available in the hospital. The document says things like, 'There has been a considerable increase in the proportion of children and young people requiring hospital admissions who stay in ED for longer than four hours before admission to an inpatient ward' and, 'QCH has experienced declining performances in the timeliness of care measured through standard state clinical indicators.' Are their sufficient resources at your hospital, because these documents would indicate otherwise?

**Mr Tracey:** As you might imagine, we take the standard of care that we provide incredibly seriously. Our ambition is always to exceed the standard of care. In terms of this business case for change, this is a very broad look at our footprint at the Queensland's Children's Hospital and we are future orientated. We are looking at the next 10 years and how best we can configure ourselves to meet the increase in demand. I think it is important for our staff, when we are going out to consult on these matters, to be aware of that broader context and what it means for children and families.

**Mr Walsh:** I understand your question related to emergency departments' seen-in-time and flow through the emergency department; is that correct?

**Ms BATES:** No, thank you. My next question is to Mr Tracey. Are there considerable bed block issues at the Children's Hospital?

**Mr Tracey:** The straightforward answer to that is no, there are not significant bed block issues; however, what we have noticed, as mentioned earlier in this hearing, is that there has been an increase in acuity. We are always looking at ways to treat what is in front of us. Our clinicians do this each and every day and make sure that we get the best utilisation out of every bed because as Queensland's tertiary and quaternary children's hospital we must always be available for any child or young person from right across this state who might need emergency access. Regrettably, that is the case more often than not.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Mr Tracey. My next question—

**Mr Walsh:** I want to supplement what Mr Tracey has said because there seems to be an implication in the question that people are not able to receive the treatment and care that they need when they arrive at the hospital and Children's Health Queensland—

**Ms BATES:** No, that is not the question. That is not what I was asking. My question was—

**Mr Walsh:**—but their performance is that so far there have been 1,948 more people this quarter able to be—

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** It is about the configuration of wards.

**Ms BATES:** Point of order. Director-General that it is not what the question was. Can I please move on?

**CHAIR:** Order! You are both talking at the same time, so I cannot hear the director-general.

**Ms BATES:** My next question is to Mr Tracey. What are the risks involved in having babies and their families placed in a ward with, for instance, a teenager and their family who might be volatile?

**Mr Tracey:** That would be a matter of conjecture on my behalf, but what I can assert is that we are working really closely with our expert clinicians around what the most appropriate and safe configuration of our wards are and our beds are.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. My next question is to the minister. This is pretty serious. The staff are livid and they are really worried about patient safety. Those patients are some of the smallest, most precious and vulnerable patients in this state. Were you aware of this?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. As the chief executive has said, it is really important that if there are to be any changes—and there have been no decisions—that they consult with staff. This is why staff have been consulted. I know the Children's Hospital. I know how much they value their staff. If the staff say they do not think that this proposal will work or result in improved safety, then I am sure the Children's Hospital will not proceed—that is the point of consulting with staff. We value staff and we consult with them. What I would say about the Children's Hospital—

**Ms BATES:** Can I ask a question?

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—if I can just finish my answer—is that they are seeing, as the chief executive has said, an increased acuity of patients. In the data that has been released today, they have seen a 3.5 per cent improvement compared to last year on ED seen-in-time and a 6.8 per cent improvement—

**Ms BATES:** The question, Minister, is about putting small babies and 17-year-olds in a ward together.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Yes, and I am getting there, member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms BATES:** When did you become aware—is it just today?

**CHAIR:** Order! I indicated at the beginning of the session that I want to give you more time. The running commentary is not helpful. I call the Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Thank you, Chair. They have seen a 6.8 per cent improvement in patient off-stretcher time at the Children's Hospital. That is a phenomenal effort. The consultation is underway with staff. As the chief executive said, we value staff. I was aware that there was consultation under way. No decision has been made and the figures at the Children's Hospital are a fantastic result for the last year. It is one of the best children's hospitals in the world.

**Ms BATES:** My next question is to the minister. When did the minister first become aware that the most vulnerable, precious patients in the state were going to be—

**CHAIR:** Before you go there—

**Ms BATES:** When did the minister become aware? That is the question.

**CHAIR:** Order! This is a repetitive question. The minister has just answered this. Do you have anything to add on this, Minister?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I was aware that consultation was undertaken. I cannot quite remember when, Chair, but I find it interesting that the LNP want to talk about vulnerable young people. They closed the Barrett Adolescent Centre.

**Ms BATES:** What will you do about this, Minister, now that you are aware—whenever you were aware?

**CHAIR:** Order, member for Mudgeeraba!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I will let the consultation happen because we listen to frontline clinicians. You say you want to put them in charge. Consulting and listening to them is what that looks like.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Where do you think the whistleblower came from? How do you think the information came to us?

**CHAIR:** Members, order!

**Ms BATES:** I will move on, Chair, thank you. Director-General, last year in this room we spent quite a bit of time talking about part 9 investigations; I would like to pick up on that again. To my knowledge, this has never been confirmed publicly before. When did you first become aware of a part 9 investigation into the management, administration and delivery of the voluntary assisted dying unit in Queensland Health?

**Mr Walsh:** In 2023.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, has it ever been made public that a part 9 investigation was being undertaken into the voluntary assisted dying unit in Queensland Health before now?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes, it has.

**Ms BATES:** Where?

**Mr Walsh:** I can find out the information.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** It was reported in the *Australian* last year. I happy to find it for you.

**Ms BATES:** My question is to the director-general. When did that investigation commence?

**Mr Walsh:** I can get you those exact details. What I can tell you is that the investigation has been completed. The coroner continues to investigate and to consider the matters. The family involved has requested privacy so we need to have this conversation recognising that the family has requested that.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, the health service chief executive or the director-general are the only two positions that can initiate the part 9 investigation. Who initiated this investigation?

**Mr Walsh:** The Director-General of Queensland Health.

**Ms BATES:** Which would be you?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. Director-General, you were asked quite extensively last year about your knowledge of any part 9 investigations that were on foot but you never mentioned this one—not once. Is there any reason?

**Mr Walsh:** I have let the committee know that the family has requested privacy, so not mentioning it is not because it was not occurring, it was out of respect.

**Ms BATES:** You do not have to identify them but I will move on. I understand that the final part 9 investigation into the Queensland Health voluntary assisted dying unit was provided to you in September last year. You have had that report for nearly a year. That report was provided to you after there were clear commitments made by the minister to release any part 9 investigation reports in estimates last year. Is there any reason that commitment has not been followed here?

**Mr Walsh:** Because the coroner is continuing to consider the matter.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** It will be released after the inquest findings are handed down.

**Ms BATES:** That was not the—

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is the question.



**Ms BATES:** No. Director-General, I understand that there has been another supplementary part 9 investigation into the voluntary assisted dying unit of Queensland Health so there have actually been two investigations of that unit; is that correct?

**Mr Walsh:** There was a supplementary to the initial investigation, yes, and both of those are with the coroner.

**Ms BATES:** The second investigation has been completed—

**Mr Walsh:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:**—and you have seen it?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, at estimates last year, the minister gave this commitment. I quote from page 18 of the transcript—

... any part 9 investigations that have been commenced while I have been the minister have been publicly announced ... I have committed publicly to releasing terms of reference ... and publicly releasing the reports.

Director-General, I have never seen terms of reference or a report for either of these investigations. Have they been released, as the minister said they were?

**Mr Walsh:** The minister's commitment is absolutely right, which is why there are many of the terms of reference, the recommendations or summary reports or full reports released of the part 9 investigations. As I have indicated, for this particular investigation it is still before the coroner.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Where are they?

**Mr Walsh:** Once the coroner has completed their work they will be released.

**Ms BATES:** Surely there must be system-wide and even cross-jurisdictional learnings and implications from reviews like this. I realise there might be some privacy concerns, but really important learnings can still be shared without breaching privacy; don't you agree?

**Mr Walsh:** The reports have been provided to the clinical people who undertake the work with requirements for confidentiality in order to be able to implement the recommendations coming out and the findings of the report, yes.

**Ms BATES:** That the public does not know.

**Mr Walsh:** I totally agree that this is about improving the system. It is very regrettable when something goes wrong in an organisation like Queensland Health. However, when you consider that more than two million people attend our emergency departments, more than 500,000 people have an outpatient appointment every year and more than 120,000 people have elective surgery, plus thousands of people have emergency surgery, most of those things go well. Unfortunately, some things do not, and it is critical that we have legislation that allows a part 9 investigation to investigate that to ensure that the information is respected and the family wishes are respected in that process and that that information is provided to the coroner if that is relevant. The learnings from that can be applied across the system, yes, and that is what happens.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, there has been a part 9 investigation document released just in the past few days in relation to dementia patient protocols on the Gold Coast after a patient was allegedly tragically killed by another patient. Were the terms of reference and report ever released for that part 9 investigation?

**Mr Walsh:** It is important to recognise that the investigation we are talking about relates to individual patients. If the terms of reference actually mention that patient's name or the patient can be easily identified, it is important that that is respected. The commitment to release is a commitment that the minister made and made in the context that the legislation requires that any information to be provided does not contradict any legal processes, any privacy information processes or any other clinical processes going on, including the Health Ombudsman and the coroner. The terms of reference in this case refer to individual patients.

**Ms BATES:** Whose names were very public on the news.

**Mr Walsh:** The recommendations have been released, yes.

**Ms BATES:** A report has been released?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** No.

**Mr Walsh:** The recommendations have been released is my understanding.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:** As I said, there have never been any terms of reference that we have been able to see. I understand what you are talking about, but the names of the patients were very public in terms of who the patients were who were involved in that; it has been reported.

**Mr Walsh:** That still does not relieve me or any other chief executive—

**Ms BATES:** Sure, but any terms of reference would have identified those patients anyway.

**Mr Walsh:**—of the requirement to comply with the legislation that has been passed by the parliament.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. In relation to the three-page document with some recommendations, how does that—

**Mr Walsh:** Chair, can I just check that when I am answering questions I should just answer the question and not—

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Director-General. We will pause there for a moment. For the benefit of Hansard, member, allow the director-general to finish. This is the third time. Running commentary during a response is unhelpful. Director-General?

**Ms BATES:** Actually, I will move on.

**Mr Walsh:** I wanted to say that whether or not it is reported in a newspaper does not relieve me or any other chief executive of the requirements under the legislation passed by the Queensland parliament to comply.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** Names could be redacted.

**Ms BATES:** Exactly.

**Mr CRISAFULLI:** You did not redact a name. Yes, I thought so.

**CHAIR:** Let's go to the next point or question, please.

**Ms BATES:** Could I please call the chief executive of Metro North. There has also been another part 9 investigation launched in relation to a series of really dreadful patient deaths at the mental health adult inpatient unit at the Prince Charles Hospital within your health service. The circumstances around those deaths are really devastating and I want to firstly express my condolences to all involved. Have the terms of reference been publicly released for that investigation?

**Prof. Hanson:** I, too, would like to offer my condolences to the families of those patients. No, the terms of reference have not been made public.

**Ms BATES:** The commitment to release the terms of reference and the reports of part 9 investigations was made by the minister here in this room last year. Were you aware of that commitment by the minister?

**Prof. Hanson:** These terms of reference also contain the names of patients and patient families. We will commit to releasing the executive summary and the recommendations when the part 9 is complete.

**Ms BATES:** So part 9 investigations are released based on—

**Prof. Hanson:** We will release the recommendations and the executive summary.

**Ms BATES:** Why has that commitment not been followed, then? We are talking about some very serious and very tragic circumstances. The excuse of not de-identifying patients does not preclude the HHS from publishing the terms of reference in relation to something as dire as this.

**Mr Walsh:** I would like to clarify that that question has been asked before. I have answered that question by saying that the commitment was made in the context of the legislation that exists and that all chief executives need to—

**Ms BATES:** That sounds like a bit of a protection racket, actually. It does not concern what you said last year in estimates.

**CHAIR:** Member, do not test me on this.

**Ms BATES:** Okay, I will move on. Professor Hanson, I understand that report is due back 'in the middle of the year'. That is quoting from your hospital's website. I think it is fair to say we are in the middle of the year right now. When is that report actually expected to be released?

**Prof. Hanson:** The second week of August.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, we have quite a list here now. There are two investigations into the voluntary assisted dying unit, one on the Gold Coast around dementia protocols after a man was allegedly killed by another patient and another at the Prince Charles Hospital following a number of suicides in the mental health unit. Are there any others missing?

**Mr Walsh:** There are six health service investigations that, where appropriate, I am happy to run through, all of which are publicly known. The first one is the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service. The terms of reference have been published because that does not contravene any legislative requirement about the release of that information. The first one is the health service investigation into the management, administration and delivery of public sector health services in the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service, and this investigation is currently in progress. As I said, there is information published on the website. There is also the health service investigation that has been covered in questions so far today about the management and administration of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act in response to a matter that arose and there was a supplementary investigation that was done, so that is counted as two investigations in relation to that.

The recommendations and the report in relation to the Metro North Prince Charles Hospital Mental Health Unit investigation, which has just been talked about, are due. The Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service commissioned an investigation, as we have also covered this morning, about dementia and behavioural and psychological issues that were occurring. As we talked about, the recommendations have been published in relation to the Gold Coast. There is also a health service investigation being undertaken by the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service which was commissioned in 2024 also related to dementia and delirium in patients and again involves individual patients.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Director-General. Minister, last year you unequivocally committed to releasing the terms of reference and reports of part 9 investigations. We have just run through at least four investigations where that clearly did not happen in each case. Do you admit you failed to meet the standard you set for yourself?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question and no. As has been clearly outlined, where it is appropriate to do so—for example, where there might be a systemic investigation like the Torres and Cape investigation—the terms of reference are published. Where there is an individual patient, the terms of reference are so closely linked with that individual patient or patients, as is the case in Metro North, and we are dealing with really tragic circumstances for families in those cases as well. Legally, it is not possible to release those terms of reference. What we have seen is that there is public knowledge about the investigation and that there are summaries of findings and recommendations published. That has never happened before in Queensland.

I have taken that extraordinary step. Given that part 9s are not something that I have power to call and really it is for the DG or the chief executives of hospital and health services, I have taken the extraordinary step of making sure that we are transparent about these patient safety investigations and that we do release findings and recommendations. I think that should give us all confidence that we are being transparent about these matters. Where there are individual patients or families involved, the legislation is quite clear that we do not have the power to override those privacy and legal issues. However, we have been very up-front about the fact that these investigations are continuing or that they have been finalised. I think Queenslanders want to know what the findings were, what the recommendations are to continue to improve and how the health service or Queensland Health is going to implement those findings, and that is exactly what we have done in each of these cases.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Minister. Is there a reason this was not done? Was it mismanagement or deliberate? Did you forget about your own commitment to release the terms of reference? Did you ever think to follow up?

**CHAIR:** This is going to be the final question, member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms BATES:** Did you specifically remind the chief executive in the department that this was something you had committed to?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am very happy to answer this question—

**Ms BATES:** To be blunt, Minister—

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—and what I would say to the member for Mudgeeraba—

**Ms BATES:**—that commitment you gave last year has proven to be totally worthless.

**CHAIR:** Order! Again, this is the fourth time, member for Mudgeeraba—and final time. Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Thank you, Chair. After I made that commitment, we have had many meetings at a ministerial and DG level and with chief executives about how we could appropriately publish some of these recommendations and reports. Clinical Excellence Queensland does a fantastic job working with all of our hospital and health services to look systematically across recommendations like this and whether or not we need to implement recommendations at one hospital or health services across the state. They do a fantastic job at that. So we do meet regularly and talk about these investigations and how we can appropriately communicate within the legal privacy bounds that we have under the legislation to make sure that Queenslanders are getting this important information.

I am really proud that we are now releasing this information. It is an extraordinary step to be very transparent about these investigations and talk about what more we can do to make sure that when unfortunately things do happen in our hospitals we learn from them and we apply those recommendations across the state. One of the areas where Clinical Excellence has done that incredibly well is around sepsis. There were some recommendations from a clinical review at one hospital and health service. It has now taken those recommendations and rolled them out across the state and there are many other examples where Clinical Excellence in Queensland Health does that work and it does a great job.

**CHAIR:** We will pause there, Minister. We have about five minutes to go. A number of questions on notice were taken. I am not going to go back to government time. Opposition members can see you have had additional time. Very quickly, member for Mirani, do you have a question?

**Mr ANDREW:** Thank you very much. I have two quick ones. One is the Australian South Sea Islander remains with the Mackay HHS and where we are at with that.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question and acknowledge the work he does with the South Sea Islander community. Some concerns were raised at the Mackay Hospital for the construction of the expansion of the hospital and we are working very closely with our South Sea Islander community. Extensive consultation is happening with the community. The community has requested that we do further testing of the site. I understand previous testing at that site did not reveal any evidence of there being a burial site there. However, we take these concerns really seriously, so we will continue to work with the community. I understand more samples are being tested. They are using ground-penetrating technology to satisfy everyone that it is safe and appropriate to move forward with the construction. I understand there are concerns and we are working through them.

**Mr ANDREW:** I have another quick question with regard to renewable sites like Marlborough. We have 1,200 people in a small town. What is Queensland Health doing to bolster the number of ambulances and emergency response in these towns that are going through these boom-and-bust situations?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question, and perhaps that is something we can also put to the commissioner later today. There has been an extraordinary increase in the number of paramedics and trucks on the road as part of our investment. If there are specific communities you would like some more information on, I am happy to sit down with the member with perhaps the ambulance commissioner and give you a briefing on some of the remote and regional towns and the processes and resources we have in place.

**Mr ANDREW:** Finally, in terms of PFAS, does your department measure the PFAS in the water? Is this correct?

**Mr Walsh:** I would need to confirm with Public Health and Scientific Services, so you can invite Nick Steele to come forward—

**Mr ANDREW:** I just wanted to find out if there is PFAS in our drinking water.

**CHAIR:** There is limited time, member.

**Mr ANDREW:** Okay. We can go—

**Ms FENTIMAN:** We are happy to take that on notice.

**Mr ANDREW:** If you could please.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have some answers for the member for South Brisbane. The member for South Brisbane asked about numbers of doctors, nurses and midwives employed since 2015 and numbers now. At March 2015 there were 7,930 doctors and 27,916 nurses and midwives. As at June 2024 there are 12,226 doctors and 41,941 nurses and midwives. Between March 2015 and June 2024 Queensland Health employed an additional 24,126 frontline staff. We will also get you under the award the pay rates for psychologists, but that is my update as of now.

**CHAIR:** Very quickly, Minister, the member for Stretton will ask a very quick question.

**Mr MARTIN:** Minister, with reference to page 11 of the SDS, can you outline how the Miles government is protecting vulnerable Queenslanders, saving families money and ensuring our health system is available for those who need it most?

**CHAIR:** Approximately two minutes, Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. We know it is harder and harder to see a GP in the community, particularly one who bulk-bills. That is why we have a number of innovative solutions. One of which I am very proud of is the pharmacy scope of practice pilot in North Queensland. I have been up to a pharmacy in Townsville with the chair and over 100 patients have had consultations with our pharmacists in the last couple of months. It is a game changer, enabling our very highly qualified pharmacists to go back to uni to do some extra training and then be able to treat and prescribe medicines for common health conditions like asthma, nausea, vomiting, mild pain, inflammation, earaches, support to quit smoking, eczema and acne. It is designed to supplement—not replace—existing services.

I met Demi in Cairns—the first pharmacist to be able to provide the service, and she was really excited about what she could help her patients with who come to the pharmacy. I met patients like Stephanie, who expressed her frustration at having to wait weeks to see a GP just to get a script. Our pharmacists are highly trained and regulated health professionals. Again, this is something that the LNP have not supported and I think it really goes to show—

**Ms BATES:** Let's make it not about you, Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—that the LNP have not put any ideas on the table about how to—

**Ms BATES:** All about the minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—help the demand for our emergency department. I know that our pharmacists love this—they tell me they do—and I know that Queenslanders love it too, so I would urge the LNP to support our pharmacy scope of practice trial.

**Ms BATES:** We always have—publicly said it—so stop lying.

**CHAIR:** Member, that is unparliamentary.

**Ms BATES:** I will withdraw.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Thank you, Minister. This concludes the committee's examination of the estimates for the Health Ombudsman portfolio area. I note, DG, that you can come back after our break if there are any other responses to questions taken on notice.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I think there are two. There is the psychologists' award and PFAS in the water.


**Mr Walsh:** Yes, and number of beds from 2015 to 2024; is that correct?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Walsh:** Yes, I have those three.

**CHAIR:** All right. The committee will take a short break and resume at 10.15. Thank you.

**Proceedings suspended from 9.59 am to 10.15 am.**

 **CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister, Director-General and officials, and welcome, Commissioner. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of the Department of Health, hospital and health services, the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, mental health, the Queensland Mental Health Commission, Health and Wellbeing Queensland and women open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, I understand you wanted to provide a response before we go to questions from the opposition?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** In relation to the question from the member for South Brisbane about beds, in 2014-15 there were 11,752 available beds in Queensland public hospitals. There are currently 13,928 available beds, which is an increase of over 2,176.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Member for Kawana?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Minister, when did you become health minister?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Last year, 18 May.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Prior to you it was Yvette D'Ath. Who was the health minister on 20 April 2021?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Yvette D'Ath.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Try again.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** 2021?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** In April 2021, who was the health minister?

**CHAIR:** What is the relevance?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Knowing who the health minister is for estimates in health is pretty important. Who was the health minister in 2021?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have answered the question.

**CHAIR:** How is this relevant to estimates, member?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I will answer it: Steven Miles was the health minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** In 2021?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** The now Premier was in fact the infrastructure minister and deputy premier, not the health minister at that time, 20 April 2021. I have the parliamentary records here, Minister, if you would like to see them. Minister, last night another cabinet leak to 9NEWS revealed the Gabba price tag was initially \$1.2 billion and the premier made up the \$1 billion figure—a figure that the current Premier defended for over a year as infrastructure minister despite knowing that, in fact, it was incorrect. Minister, how many beds could be funded with the \$200 million difference and which cabinet minister would benefit the most from the leak the night before health estimates?

**CHAIR:** That is not helpful, member. That is unhelpful running commentary.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Mr Chair, that is the question. This is a photo of Steven Miles when he was the minister for infrastructure in April 2021.

**CHAIR:** You can put that down.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** He was not the health minister and he is now denying he was the health minister. Here he is: infrastructure minister.

**CHAIR:** Member! Keep it up, member, and you will be warned. It is just like on the other side. We do not need those things produced. Minister, I will allow some latitude if you want to reply.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** The member for Kawana, like he so often does, is making absolutely no sense and I do not think it requires an answer.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I think no sense in figures for the Gabba makes no sense. Minister, my question is this—

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Member for Kawana, how can I assist you?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I doubt you can, but I want you to answer a question. The Gabba price tag was initially \$1.2 billion but a leak on Channel 9 last night said that Annastacia Palaszczuk made the figure up and it was \$1 billion that she announced. How many beds could be funded with the \$200 million difference?

**CHAIR:** I am pretty much on the verge of ruling this out of order.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** How many hospital beds could be funded for \$200 million in Queensland?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** What I can say, Chair, is that when the LNP were in government they did not open one bed.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Minister, I want to know how many beds \$200 million would provide.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** The only beds they opened were announced by the previous Labor government.

**Ms BATES:** That is not true. The LNP built SCUH.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** We have the biggest build in Queensland Health's history. We are delivering thousands more beds.

**Ms BATES:** Not true. Deliberately misleading.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** The only infrastructure project—

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Steven Miles is misleading Queenslanders. He was not the health minister; he was the infrastructure minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—that the LNP delivered when the member for Kawana was the worst attorney-general in the state was 1 William Street. No new hospitals, no new health clinics.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** The Premier has misled parliament.

**CHAIR:** Order, members!

**Mr BLEIJIE:** He has misled the media.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Mr BLEIJIE:** He has misled Queenslanders. He was the infrastructure minister; he was not the health minister.

**CHAIR:** Order! Member for Kawana, you are warned. Do not continue over the top of me when I am trying to ask you to come back to a simple question. We do not need things being thrown up like you are doing now. Ask a sensible question to get a sensible response.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I am pretty sure hospital beds in Queensland is a pretty sensible question and the minister has not answered it.

**CHAIR:** What is happening right now, member, is that your provocative questioning is not being taken.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have answered how many beds we are delivering. We have a \$14 billion big build with three new hospitals and we are expanding 11. We are delivering 2½ thousand more beds. Does the member for Kawana remember, when he was the attorney-general in the Campbell Newman government, how many beds they delivered? Zero!

**CHAIR:** Member for Kawana, I have warned you. I am asking you to ask a reasonable question that is associated with the estimates without the theatre and without the running commentary or you will be out.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Who was the health minister in April 2021?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Yvette D'Ath. I have answered this question.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** It was not Steven Miles, was it?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I do not know how many times you want me to answer the question, but I have answered the question and your theatrics are really unhelpful. Could we talk about the health budget?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I asked you a question about \$200 million wasted on the Gabba, which is now \$2.7 billion.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** And I told you how many beds we are delivering and the price tag, and I reminded you that you did not deliver any when you had the chance.

**CHAIR:** Minister, let us stop with the provocation. Member for Mudgeeraba, do you have question?

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, I do. Director-General, I refer to the part 9 investigation into the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service. It has been a year since that commenced after senior leaders in those communities raised serious concerns about healthcare delivery in the region. It has been delayed a number of times now. It that just because of the high volume of submissions received, which has been alluded to before?

**Mr Walsh:** The part 9 investigation into the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service has been the subject of many discussions. A taskforce was established which was made up of Torres and cape community members and stakeholders. They have met several times while the investigation has been proceeding. Because it is a part 9 investigation, the investigators are not able to communicate any information other than that it is progressing.

The investigators have visited Torres and cape and met with a large number of people, asking for any information that could contribute to completing the report. The report will be in two parts, as the terms of reference have identified. Part A is due in the second half of this year and part B is due towards the end of the year or early in 2025. When the report is available and considered, the intention is to provide that report publicly. I will meet with the taskforce to brief them on that as well as the staff representatives of the hospital and health service.

**Ms BATES:** So you can confirm there was a high volume of submissions?

**Mr Walsh:** I do not know. The investigators have not provided me the report or given me any information. It is not appropriate for them to provide a running update of the investigation. They do the

investigation completely independently. Once it has been completed, that is when they will provide the report and that is when I will know what it contains.

**Ms BATES:** There were originally four investigators leading this investigation. How many of the original four are still there today?

**Mr Walsh:** My understanding is that one person needed to stop being an investigator for personal reasons. There were some who completed sections of it. I know that there is definitely one, but can I come back and confirm if there is more than one?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Minister, the Premier said yesterday that he was the health minister in April 2021. You have confirmed that Yvette D'Ath was, in fact, the health minister in 2021. Has the Premier misled estimates and Queenslanders and should he apologise for the Gabba debacle?

**CHAIR:** I am going to rule that question out of order. Ask a question that is associated with the estimates and I will be happy to allow the minister to reply. If you continue down this path, you are not going to get very far, member. You are testing my patience.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, how many investigators are actually running the review today? It was originally a total of four, so how many are running it today?

**Mr Walsh:** Again, I will be able to provide that information as soon as it is available to me. It will be during the meeting.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, is it the case that two of the investigators had to step down because of a conflict of interest?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes, that is true. It is good that the processes are in place so that people can identify and respond to those issues to ensure that the investigation remains completely independent.

**Ms BATES:** Did Queensland Health have to get legal advice to determine whether the investigation could proceed, given these conflicts?

**Mr Walsh:** I am not sure whether that is a question that I can answer. Seeking legal advice is a matter of legal privilege. Therefore, I would need some time to determine whether or not I can answer that question, other than what I have already said in terms of my understanding that legal advice is a matter of legal privilege.

**Ms BATES:** Could you provide the committee with the advice given? Was any advice or consideration given to the fact that the review might have to be halted altogether because of these conflicts?

**Mr Walsh:** Whenever a conflict of interest is identified, you have to explore all the impacts of that conflict of interest and understand whether or not it can be managed, either retrospectively or prospectively. All of those things were considered at the time, yes.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, how were the conflicts uncovered? Were they self-identified by the investigators?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:** I understand that a legal team has been engaged to assist with the investigation. What is the value to date of the cost of the law firm working on this investigation?

**Mr Walsh:** That is information that I do not have to hand, but the minister may wish to take it on notice. Undertaking health service investigations always costs money because the investigators themselves need to be appointed and they often have teams to actually help them write, research and compile all the information. This investigation is being undertaken the same as every other health service investigation.

**Ms BATES:** Is the minister prepared to take that on notice?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Sure thing.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Minister. Director-General, have you seen the first part of the review report?

**Mr Walsh:** No, I have not.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, you have been asked publicly about this investigation a number of times and why it has been delayed. You never thought it was in the public interest to share any of this information about the conflicts of interest, investigators leaving and having to engage a law firm?



**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. It is an independent investigation. The experienced clinicians who are looking at these issues—and you have seen the extensive terms of reference because they are public—have had extensive consultation.

As the member would appreciate, when you are dealing with communities like the Torres Strait and the cape, sometimes consultation is delayed because there is sorry business or it is not appropriate to do that consultation. It is so important that we respect these communities, that we take the time to hear from them and listen to them about their experiences in health, and that is exactly what the reviewers have done. From time to time, if conflicts of interest emerge, I totally expect these very professional, independent clinicians to manage that, as they have. I understand that legal advice has been sought to help manage any of the findings against individuals, and that is also appropriate and very usual business.

I have taken on notice the cost of the investigation to date. I am really looking forward to seeing the recommendations. It is a privilege to be the ministerial champion for the Torres Strait. I spend a lot of time up there and am deeply connected to the communities. The Torres and cape absolutely deserve world-class health care, and this investigation, prompted by many elders, is so important.

The other thing that we have done with this investigation, which I have talked about at length, is set up a community round table. We are constantly meeting with community leaders so that some improvements can begin even before we get the recommendations. We have seen a lot of improvement. I really want to acknowledge our new chief executive Rex O'Rourke and also the new chair of the board Renee Williams. They are doing an incredible job, particularly around embedding senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare workers into leadership positions and supporting them in the work they do.

**Ms BATES:** It has been a year since this investigation was launched. I am happy to be corrected, but the whole investigation report was meant to be complete by now, yet we have not even seen the first part of the two-part report. When you were asked, why were you not up-front about what was going on with this investigation and when will these reports be released?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have been at many media conferences and have talked about this investigation. Each time I have said if independent clinical reviewers have asked for an extension of time of course I will give it to them. It is so important that we get this right. I am really looking forward to the recommendations. I understand it is nearing completion.

**Ms BATES:** My next question is to the director-general. I want to talk about the media training that was scheduled for health service chief executives especially for estimates. Can you tell me when the order was issued for that \$27,000 media training to be cancelled?

**Mr Walsh:** I think that is a matter for the public record. It was cancelled on that day. I do not have the exact day but it was reported in the media on that day.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, when was contact first made with the organisation to schedule the training?

**Mr Walsh:** Again, I do not have the exact date, but my recollection is that it was two to three months prior to that cancellation.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, who suggested the training?

**Mr Walsh:** I suggested the training. It is really important to understand that part of the role of being a senior executive in the public sector is being able to communicate very complex and difficult information to the public, being able to present in situations where there is difficult questioning from trained media personnel who are trying to identify the information that they want to receive when in fact there is an important public message that you need to communicate. Having media training is part of any senior executive role; therefore, it was a reasonable thing to organise. As the minister said at the time it was cancelled, the problem was that the training had been associated with the estimates, and that made it look like it was not something that should occur. There is nothing wrong with organising media training but the timing was problematic, yes.

**Ms BATES:** The HHSs and the CEOs do not already have inbuilt media teams anyway?

**Mr Walsh:** There are marketing, communications and education people, but this is training from independent, expert people who are skilled in undertaking adult learning training in the area of dealing with the media. That is not the skill that people are employed for in our strategic communications area. They are employed to undertake fantastic campaigns such as 'There's Nothing Sweet About Vapes', about communicating the importance of not leaving water around when you want to eradicate dengue

fever, about good sexual health messages. That is the skill base that people are employed in so the public have the opportunity to know what to do when the flu is around—to make sure you stay home if you are sick, to go to your GP if you are unwell, to sneeze into your elbow or not sneeze openly, wash your hands—all those things. That is not the skill set that is employed. The skill set is to help communicate messages to the public. The media training is about ensuring people like me or other senior executives are able to communicate in situations and openly be able to explain complex issues.

**Ms BATES:** So you just confirmed that they were employed to enable CEOs to answer difficult questions in estimates?

**Mr Walsh:** As I said, when trained media people were asking questions, if I recollect what I said. I am happy to check with *Hansard*.

**CHAIR:** No. I think you have answered the question.

**Ms BATES:** No. I am just asking.

**CHAIR:** Hang on, member for Mudgeeraba. I am just wondering: do you want the number so you can get some training?

**Ms BATES:** Sure and you can come with me. That is very disrespectful, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Come on, member. Move on.

**Ms BATES:** I will play nicely if you do.

**CHAIR:** I will run the proceedings, thanks, member.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, was the minister or her office informed at any point that these 'answering difficult questions' experts were going to help the CEOs get around questions in estimates?

**Mr Walsh:** I do not recall briefing the minister on this matter, no. The short answer is: I do not know. Certainly there was nothing that—

**Ms BATES:** Who would know?

**Mr Walsh:** I suppose the minister would know.

**Ms BATES:** So she did know that you were employing—

**Mr Walsh:** No. The minister would know whether or not the minister knew.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** He is saying that you have to ask me if you want to know whether I knew.

**Ms BATES:** Well, did you know?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** No.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, is the department out of pocket at all following the cancellation?

**Mr Walsh:** No.

**Ms BATES:** You did not pay anything to the company at all? They just did it because they were helpful?

**Mr Walsh:** It had not started. It cost nothing.

**Ms BATES:** How many people were scheduled to have the training? Was it every hospital and health service chief executive?

**Mr Walsh:** It was available for all senior executives. It was not just the health service chief executives. It was available for other members in the Department of Health who actually have to provide public communication messages and be ready to respond to media training. It is not just all of those. My recollection is that there may have been two or three booked in but none of them had occurred. No sessions occurred.

**Ms BATES:** Could we get a list of who the training was to be provided to or requested for?

**Mr Walsh:** As I have said, it was available to all of the senior executives, the executive leadership team, health service chief executives and other senior people in the department. There was not a definitive list. It was for people, for instance, like the Chief Dental Officer, who has to go and communicate, or the Chief Medical Officer or the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer. There are people who have to go and communicate. All of those people, a large number, were able to take advantage of the media training if they chose to. There was not a definitive list of people for whom it was available.

**Ms BATES:** Did the director-general brief anyone from the minister's office or did anyone he knows brief the minister's office about this training for underperformers?

**Mr Walsh:** Not that I am aware of, no.

**CHAIR:** I am going to get you to withdraw that last—

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am sorry: that is so offensive to the people and the clinicians sitting in this room and who work hard every day to make sure health care is available to Queenslanders. It is so offensive.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, I know you are desperate, but we don't want to make it all about you, Minister.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Not only is she calling them 'duds'; she is calling them 'underperformers'. That is her record.

**CHAIR:** Order, Minister!

**Ms BATES:** Oh, my goodness. You are desperate. Why don't you tell the truth to patients and staff?

**CHAIR:** Member for Mudgeeraba, we have gone back to where we were at the beginning. I am going to ask you to withdraw that comment because it was unparliamentary.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** What about the minister, Chair?

**CHAIR:** No.

**Ms BATES:** I will withdraw if the minister withdraws her unparliamentary comments.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Let's move on to the next question.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, am I right in saying this was not some idea that came from the sky because actual appointment times had already been scheduled with particular individuals?

**Mr Walsh:** Yes, that is correct.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Yes, it did not come from the sky.

**Ms BATES:** How was the training procured? Was it done through a tender process or just a direct appointment of that particular organisation?

**Mr Walsh:** The first thing I would like to say is: if there are any concerns that you have about the procurement of it, I would be happy to look into those, just like any person can have concerns. I would not normally go into the processes other than to say that we comply with all government procurement processes. In this instance, I am happy to provide more information. There were approaches to more than one organisation for quotes, and in this instance we went for the quote that we believed represented the best value and was in fact the lowest.

**Ms BATES:** When did that happen? Was it weeks or months before the training was cancelled?

**Mr Walsh:** My understanding is it was months.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, why did you decide to cancel the training? You said it was not 'appropriate or necessary', but is it really just the case it was cancelled because it was unearthed?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** No. I thank the member for the question. When it came to my attention I did not think it was appropriate. I did not think the timing was appropriate and I did not think it was necessary, so I asked the director-general to cancel it. I think it is entirely appropriate for senior executives of the Department of Health and other health leaders to receive media training from time to time. As the director-general has said, they have to communicate really complex public health messages. Most of them are clinicians, member for Mudgeeraba, so the fact you are calling them underperforming is quite offensive. They are clinicians who have worked for decades—

**Ms BATES:** Again, desperate. Let's start making it all about you.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—as a midwife, as a surgeon—

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** They are hardworking frontline clinicians—or were—who are now serving in very senior roles. I sign up to do media and answer questions, and that is fine, but these professionals have never done that before and it is appropriate they get training. The timing was not appropriate. I do not think it is necessary for staff to receive training for estimates. That is why I suggested it be cancelled, and it was.

**Ms BATES:** I do not think you need media training to tell the truth. I want to go back to RTI 5042/23. That RTI uncovered a document which said that changing the Queensland Health

performance website would seek to be 'a review of the existing narrative'. Is a review of the narrative more important to you than patient outcomes?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Absolutely not. I think we have covered this in question time before, member. It is really important that Queenslanders can understand health data. When I first became the Minister for Health and I looked at the website, a lot of it did not make sense to me. I wanted a website that was user-friendly and easy for Queenslanders to understand—

**Ms BATES:** Which crashed at estimates last year.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—and that is why, when talking about a new website, we also talk about how we can explain to Queenslanders what the data means. The fact that the department worked incredibly hard to get some data out earlier than ever before—

**Ms BATES:** Which was wrong at estimates last year.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—shows how transparent we are being. There is more data released now than ever before. I am looking forward to the new website, which will make it simpler and easier for Queenslanders to understand the pressures they were under—

**Ms BATES:** It was a new website last year.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—the huge demand we are seeing and the improved hospital performance, because I am so proud that on every performance level we are improving. Yes, there is more to do; do not get me wrong. We all know that. We are all sitting in this room, as the DG said, working hard to continue to improve. The fact we are seeing improvements across every performance level is a testament to the hard work of our frontline clinicians.

**CHAIR:** This will be the last question for this session.

**Ms BATES:** What about the media training trying to protect the image of the government? Where does that rank in your order of priorities? Why is it the case that things like media training or reviewing the narrative keep popping up when the health system itself is in crisis?

**CHAIR:** The question has been put earlier and responded to, so I am going to ask you to move on to your next question, member. This is repetitive. Do you have another question?

**Ms BATES:** I do. Director-General, were you aware of a request the Department of the Premier and Cabinet made of hospital and health services to provide a list of 'all new significant infrastructure services added in recent budgets since 2015', with each HHS to advise and outline new services added, such as those related to completed infrastructure projects and/or new models of care? Is there any particular reason for that timeline from 2015?

**Mr Walsh:** My understanding would be that it is about 10 years, so it is like a 10-year process. I do not know if there is any significance; you would have to ask them. It just seems to me it is 10 years.

**CHAIR:** I am going to pull it up for now. We have gone over time. I am going to go to government questions.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Minister, with reference to page 1 of the SDS, can you update the committee on the progress of nurse-led clinics?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is one of my new favourite innovative models of care we are introducing. I thank the member. I know how positively this will impact families. Not only will this have a positive impact for many families; it will have a great impact on the health system. As the Minister for Health, I have the honour of overseeing an infrastructure Big Build worth billions of dollars. We are building new hospitals and health facilities and expanding others, but we are also trying new, innovative models of care. We are bringing health care to where the community is.

As part of the Queensland Women and Girls' Strategy we heard from over 12,000 women and girls. They said that trying to get an appointment with kids and around work is really hard. Having something in the community close to shopping centres, close to transport where you could just walk in and get care would make a real difference, and that is exactly what we are doing. One woman shared her story of not being able to attend appointments because she could not get a babysitter, while another told us that getting access to doctors around work hours and child care was not easy. These nurse-led, free walk-in clinics will be open seven days a week from 8 am to 10 pm. They will not require an appointment or referral. They will also be free of charge for anyone over two years old. No Medicare card is needed. This is exactly what will help take pressure off our hospitals. While this initiative was formed by feedback from women, it is one that is open and available to all Queenslanders. Everyone will be able to access this.

Again, I was so disappointed when the LNP came out to oppose this service. The shadow health spokesperson Christian—I mean, Christian Rowan, the shadow education spokesperson, came out and said they did not support this model of care. What have they got against—

**Ms BATES:** That is not true. You are verballing someone who is not even here to defend himself.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—people being able to get free walk-in health care in communities?

**Ms BATES:** It's all about you. How desperate.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I am really disappointed that Christian Rowan is not here today—

**Ms BATES:** How desperate.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—the person most likely to be the health minister—

**Ms BATES:** Making it all about yourself, Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—if David Crisafulli wins the election.

**Ms BATES:** Let's not make it about you.

**CHAIR:** Order, member! Let's not make it about you.

**Ms BATES:** Tell the truth.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** It is really disappointing that the LNP—

**Ms BATES:** Yes, let's have the truth on patients and staff.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—will not support these clinics.

**Ms BATES:** Not true.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** These clinics will be in Gympie, Mount Gravatt, Brisbane CBD and Gladstone.

**Ms BATES:** Just making it up.

**CHAIR:** Order, member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Last week while announcing the clinic in Gladstone I was with mother of two Alana, who said she has had difficulty getting same-day care because of the unavailability of a GP in her community. With young kids, if one of them has an earache, a cut or a rash, knowing you are able to walk in and see a nurse free of charge at any time of day is just so important.

The clinics will be led by our highly skilled nurse practitioners and advanced practice nurses, who will provide treatment for a range of health issues such as colds and flues, cuts and burns, minor infections and wounds. Nurses can remove sutures, apply wound dressings, offer emergency contraception, carry out blood glucose tests, treat minor fractures and provide medical imaging referrals for suspected uncomplicated fractures. These clinics will be game changers. I am just so proud we are investing in these clinics, our pharmacists being able to treat people and our satellite hospitals, which are all taking pressure off our busy emergency departments.

**CHAIR:** For the benefit of the member for Mudgeeraba, the health committee made recommendations for nurse-led clinics in our primary care report based on the success of the ACT model. Thank you, Minister, and of course we will always advocate for these in North Queensland.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** With reference to page 1 of the SDS, can the minister update the committee on drug testing services?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Pill testing and drug checking can absolutely save lives. That is why I am so pleased the Miles government has opened the state's first fixed-site pill testing services. These services provide free, voluntary and confidential pill testing so people can make an informed choice about the substances they are planning on consuming.

I want to be really clear: there is no safe way to take illicit drugs, but if people are intent on taking these substances and we have the technology available to help them know what is in them, why wouldn't we offer that to people? Helping people make informed choices to ideally reduce the use of illicit substances is really important. Every year thousands of people die from drug-related deaths in this country, and one death is one too many. There is no point putting our head in the sand: we know that pill testing can save lives. Again, this is not something the LNP supports. The opposition has said they do not support pill testing—

**Ms BATES:** Do not support illegal drugs.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—and some members of the LNP have strongly criticised these lifesaving services. It is again disappointing that these critical services are at risk if the LNP wins the election.

**Ms BATES:** Desperate.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Queenslanders can be confident that our government will always follow the advice of doctors and nurses. The LNP say they want to put them in charge, but when we recommend services like drug checking and pill testing they oppose them.

I am pleased that the two fixed pill-testing sites, in Bowen Hills and Burleigh, have already seen positive results. Forty people walked through the doors in the first month of operation at Bowen Hills, with a total of 80 samples. Of those, 74 per cent were commonly recognised unregulated substances. There was also 12 per cent of novel psychoactive substances, three per cent of other less common substances and eight per cent of unknown drugs detected. It was good to see that more than half of the people who visited the site chose to discard their drugs onsite, and a further 16 per cent reported they were going to discard the substances themselves. This is informing people to make informed choices and they are choosing not to take these substances. These are actually great results for harm minimisation.

Queensland's first ever event-based pill-testing service was at the Rabbits Eat Lettuce festival in March this year. It was successful in identifying potential harmful substances which led to community notices being issued to warn people of the dangers. Without this service we would miss a unique opportunity to engage with Queenslanders about the harms of drug use. The second delivery of services was at the Earth Frequency Festival near Ipswich in May. During that multiday music festival, 61 per cent of the 152 people who accessed the service reported that this was their first conversation with a healthcare professional regarding drug use. Not only are we testing the substance but at the point in time we are actually engaging with them with a conversation from a healthcare professional about drug use.

These are incredibly positive results and we are committed to building on this crucial work. That is why I am so proud to announce today that we are investing an additional \$80,000 to expand pill testing to schoolies on the Gold Coast this year. Again, we are not condoning drug use but providing a safe way for young people to understand what they might be consuming and to make an informed choice and to have that very important conversation as a young person with a healthcare professional about taking drugs. We want everyone attending schoolies to be safe and enjoy the celebrations with their friends. Without these services, we are missing the opportunity to connect young people with healthcare professionals. These are crucial opportunities to reduce harm for Queenslanders. This is only one initiative from our mental health levy and our \$1.6 billion commitment to improve our mental health, alcohol and other drug services.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I commend the Mental Health Commissioner for his work in this space as well.

**Mr MARTIN:** Minister, with reference to page 1 of the SDS, can you update the committee on the progress made since the release of the Women and Girls' Health Strategy?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I would be delighted to. I am so pleased that as the Minister for Women as well as the Minister for Health and Minister for Mental Health I was able to launch this strategy to promote the rights, interests and wellbeing of women and girls in our state. The strategy is informed by the voices of over 12,000 women and girls who shared their stories and experiences with the healthcare system. That is the largest number of people ever to have taken part in a government survey, which just shows how important this issue is. I want to thank each and every one of the women and girls who shared their stories to help shape our strategy.

The strategy has already delivered essential initiatives for Queensland women and girls and will continue to do so for many years to come. Nearly 70 per cent of the survey respondents said they felt that they were outside of direct healthcare service delivery and that an early intervention and prevention focus would have the greatest impact on their health. In response, we have awarded two fellowships to support research into priorities for women and girl's health.

We also heard that nearly three-quarters of young respondents felt that sexual and reproductive health was important. We have recently introduced a Termination of Pregnancy Action Plan, backed by \$41 million, and we have boosted the workforce and changed the laws to allow our nurses and midwives to prescribe MS-2 Step. Access to important health services for women, like termination of pregnancy, however, remains at risk if the LNP are elected. The LNP did not support nurses and midwives being able to prescribe MS-2 Step to make it easier for regional women, and the QNMU absolutely supported this.

**Ms BATES:** Not the general nurses, they didn't.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I was pleased to address their conference this week where we got a resounding applause about enabling our nurses, nurse practitioners and midwives to work at top of scope and particularly make it easier for regional women to access lawful health care.

More than half of the respondents said that they felt they had been dismissed or discriminated against or not believed by a healthcare professional due to their gender. This dismissal was particularly experienced by women with chronic health conditions such as endometriosis and pelvic pain. Women experiencing endo and pelvic pain told us that some of the medical advice they had received included, 'Try swimming off the pain' or, 'Don't worry, the pain is in your head' or, 'There's nothing wrong with you.' My personal favourite was, 'Peppermint tea is really the only viable option at this point.' We believe that women deserve far better, and we are now working with Qendo to provide peer support to women experiencing pelvic pain and the Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia to continue delivery of the Periods, Pain and Endometriosis Program in Queensland high schools so that particularly young women can be much more informed. We have also engaged the Queensland Council for LGBTI Health to provide targeted gender-affirming support for LGBTIQ+ people.

Of the women and girls who responded to questions on the most significant enabling factors to achieve gender equitable health care, 76 per cent noted the need for extended hours for health services and 65 per cent said they needed improved accessibility. That is why our nurse clinics are such game changers. They are free, no appointment is needed and they are open until 10 pm. We are also delivering a dedicated women's health hub in Brisbane and a First Nations led hub in Cairns. I am incredibly proud of this work.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will move to the crossbench. I will go to the member for Mirani first.

**Mr ANDREW:** Thank you, Chair.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have an update for the member for Mirani on PFAS. Do you want to do that first?

**Mr ANDREW:** Yes, please.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** PFAS in drinking water may be monitored by the drinking water service providers if it is a potential issue in their region. If it is identified above the drinking water guidelines level then the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water is notified by the provider, who then notifies Queensland Health that it should be a public health issue. Queensland Health then supports the service provider to address the issue in their local community.

We note that PFAS does exist in the environment through surface and groundwater across the state, but we currently have no public health concerns notified so it has not reached the level where it has been reported to Queensland Health for PFAS levels in drinking water above the guidelines. Water service providers have been provided with funding from the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water to upgrade water infrastructure where PFAS levels above the guidelines have been detected in the water supply in the past.

**Mr ANDREW:** Thank you so much for that. It was very comprehensive. Minister, with reference to page 1 of the SDS, 'new ways of delivering care', can you provide an update on the Birth of a Child Pilot which was run as a joint initiative with the federal government back in 2021? Was the pilot a success and are there any plans to incorporate it more widely within the Queensland Health framework?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I do not have anything off the top of my head, but I am very happy to get back to the member on that pilot from 2021.

**Mr ANDREW:** Thank you. We were just speaking about the situation with your staff. Can the minister advise whether the department has any plans to incorporate social impact healthcare initiatives here in Queensland?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Again, I thank the member for the question. We do really take a social impact approach with some of our preventive health policies. Looking at the Women and Girls' Health Strategy that I just talked about, it obviously looks at the social impacts of women being dismissed and discriminated against in our health system. Through our putting kids first strategy that was led by the Premier, we have a number of initiatives to invest in early intervention and prevention in health care to really change the social determinants for young people. Again, if there is anything else, I am very happy to get back to the member.

**Mr ANDREW:** Do the department's policies and programs have the capacity to incorporate input from frontline healthcare workers and patients, or are they pretty much looked at in a top-down level situation?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Sorry, can you repeat that question, please?

**Mr ANDREW:** I basically want to know whether the frontline workers have a say in what we do here in the healthcare system about our policies and procedures.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Absolutely they do. The most recent strategy that I just announced today was the 10-year cancer strategy. So many of our clinicians were involved in the consultation for that. I personally held round tables with clinicians and patients to hear their experiences. The member might be really pleased to hear this. When I was in Townsville recently for the cancer strategy consultation, I heard from one of the cancer nurses there. She said that one of the most practical things we could do to really help cancer patients was to have cancer care nurse navigators on 24/7. They currently have a cancer care navigator. If you are undergoing cancer treatment, you can call that cancer care nurse navigator to understand where you might need to go for further follow-ups or check-ups or if you are not feeling well.

That role is not currently funded 24/7. If it is late at night and patients are going through cancer treatment and are not feeling well, often cancer patients will present at the emergency department which may or may not be the best place for them. We are now funding those positions 24/7. That was direct feedback from clinicians that is now part of our strategy. We have done that with the workforce strategy. We do that with most of our policies. We consult with our workforce, we value them and we listen to them. Most of the initiatives in Putting Patients First, which is all about improving patient flow, are ideas that have come straight from clinicians on the ground.

**Mr ANDREW:** I visited the HHS in Rockhampton and the cancer treatment ward there. It is unbelievable what the nurses are doing. I want to put on record my thanks to the Rockhampton HHS and also the Mackay HHS. We have had a lot of things go on recently and I have been told that the level of care has been great. I know my dad is still not well. It is really important, I think, that we go forward with making sure we engage with our frontline workers. I see a lot of people hoping to try to make change. We seem to have a wideranging feeling of no trust and no faith in our health system. What are we doing to try to make people understand that we are doing our best with that?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is a great question, member. One of the things that I get to do as the health minister, which I did not realise happened until I became the health minister, is that I get to read all of the responses that Queenslanders send through the Queensland Health portal about feedback for our system. Every day, Queenslanders are taking the time to write to me and Queensland Health about the wonderful care they have been provided. It is a delight, can I say, to sit down and get those letters and respond to those patients. Whether they are in Mackay, the Torres Strait, the Gold Coast, they take time out to thank the health workers for the amazing care that they have received. Thousands and thousands of people every day are treated through Queensland Health hospitals, whether it is presenting at an emergency department, whether it is having a baby, whether it is undergoing elective surgery, and they get very good care. I think the fact that so many Queenslanders take the time to provide that feedback means that most people are appreciative of the excellent care that we provide. Today I have released more recent data which shows on every performance measure, we are improving.

I think Queenslanders know COVID was a really tough time for our health workers. A lot of them worked around the clock. They did not get annual leave. They did not get time to do professional development or training. We are coming out of COVID, we are catching up on a whole lot of elective surgeries and we are doing a phenomenal job, and most Queenslanders, I think, appreciate that.

There is a survey that happens every year that gets published through the Productivity Commission, a report on government services. I think you would really like to know this. This is from people who were admitted to hospital who reported that, in regards to the doctors, specialists or nurses, 93 per cent said that those clinicians always or often listened carefully; 94.5 per cent said they always or often showed respect; and 90 per cent said they always or often spent enough time with the person. That is an incredible reflection on the work that our frontline doctors and nurses do, and that compares really well with other states.

**Dr MacMAHON:** Minister, in your capacity as Minister for Women, what advice did you and the Office for Women give the Attorney-General regarding the recent funding increase for domestic, family and sexual violence services, particularly given that the funding increase was well below the \$300 million that the sector was calling for?



**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. You will not be surprised to know that, as the previous minister for prevention of domestic and family violence, I still talk regularly to a lot of the service providers and statewide stakeholders, and I am well aware of the pressures they are facing. I was really pleased not only that they received the initial 20 per cent uplift in funding but also it is now locked in for the next four years, and I was really pleased to talk to them about that. When we made the initial announcement about a 20 per cent uplift, a lot of them did report to me that that was really welcomed, but they worried about it just being for 12 months. Having volunteered on the management committee of sexual assault services and DV services, I know how hard it is to retain staff when you only have 12 months' funding, so the fact that we then extended that over four years was really important, and we continue to work with them to make sure they have the resources they need. Also one of the things they have asked us to look at, which I know the Attorney is looking at, is funding innovative models of care, particularly for young men who are starting to exhibit aggressive behaviours. The sector does a wonderful job helping women and children escaping violence, but, like all of us, we really want to also be focused on prevention. If there are ways that our services can work with young boys and young men before their behaviour really escalates, they want to see more funding in that space and I know that is something the Attorney is looking at.

**Dr MacMAHON:** Regarding the staffing structures in the satellite hospitals, can you provide a breakdown for the Eight Mile Plains clinic of doctors, nurses, allied health workers and operational staff?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** We can. I am happy to get you the full list. They are staffed by GPs, nurse practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals. I will get you the list as soon as we can get it.

**CHAIR:** We will return to opposition questions. Member for Mudgeeraba, you have had a reset. Let's finish this session the best we can.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Mr Chair. Director-General, RTI document 5042/23 was an RTI from the opposition now publicly available, picked up this email from the Acting Director-General, Healthcare Purchasing and System Performance to one of the minister's staff. The acting director-general said, 'Today is my last day covering as ADDG, HPSP. Brenton and Danita will be able to pick this up with you on Monday at the weekly data meeting.' Director-General, what is the weekly data meeting?

**Mr Walsh:** I am not aware of any meeting called 'the weekly data meeting'. I suspect that the meeting that is being referred to is either an internal Queensland Health meeting or a briefing where we regularly provide briefings to the minister. I am not directly aware of that particular meeting.

**Ms BATES:** So there is no meeting, to your understanding, that is weekly where the data is presented at all, like for ambulance ramping or—

**Mr Walsh:** To whom or with whom?

**Ms BATES:** I am going on what the email here says that there is a weekly data meeting. You say you are not aware of it. It appears to be that it is an ongoing weekly meeting, and I want to know is there a weekly meeting, regardless of whether it is this one or another one, that discusses data like ambulance ramping, ambulance loss time or waiting list numbers?

**Mr Walsh:** There is a meeting where the department briefs the minister, it is a longstanding arrangement that usually happens weekly, and that meeting covers all the elements of the performance of the health system, as you would expect the minister to be across all of the elements, whether it is clinical issues, whether it is performance issues. I can only assume—it is not called a weekly data meeting—that that is the meeting where appropriately the minister would be briefed on the performance of the system.

**Ms BATES:** I want to get this straight. There is a weekly meeting that you have with the minister where data is presented which covers performance data on a weekly basis, and I am assuming most of the people usually in that data meeting are in this room and yet we have not been able to ask questions about it and the most recent data presented in those meetings because, as you have said this morning, you have given the ambulance data, but you cannot give us any of the others, but it appears there is a weekly meeting that the minister knows what the data is and you know what the data is and everybody in this room who provides the data knows.

**Mr Walsh:** The frequency of the meeting does not reflect the currency of the data. As you could imagine, because you would have looked at the performance website, there are millions of points of data for the performance of the health system, so at any one meeting, you can only cover small components of that. A weekly meeting does not mean that the weekly data performance data is changing; it means that the focus of the discussion would move around the system to look at different elements of the system. You cannot spend the time to look at all of them all the time, all at once.

**Ms BATES:** Surely you would provide a summary for the minister. These are issues that are in the media day in, day out. Surely you would be able to tell the minister from your weekly meetings that ambulance ramping is going up even though she wanted it to go down, like all of us want it to go down, or that the HHS at the Gold Coast, for instance, is having problems with their elective surgeries for colonoscopies or the reviewing of X-rays and MRIs. Surely that top level—without having millions of datasets underneath—is available to the minister?

**Mr Walsh:** It is really important, as I have said to the committee, that when we brief the committee, just as when I brief the minister, what I am briefing on is accurate. Therefore, when we provide data to the minister for briefing, it is data that we are confident is accurate. The quarterly performance data is the data that is publicly available. We will, week about, talk about different components of that data to look at strategies. As the minister has announced, we look at patient flow through the hospital; we look at the performance of the long-stay patients; we look at elective surgery and 'treated in time'. I could spend the rest of the time talking about all the data points, but it does not mean that the data is changing weekly.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, do you think, in the interests of transparency and accountability, the committee could request a copy of the data that is presented at the weekly briefing?

**Mr Walsh:** I believe there are appropriate mechanisms for anyone to be able to request through the right to information process, so it would be quite reasonable to request that, if you wish to request that.

**Ms BATES:** I am sure the committee, the parliament and the Queensland public should be allowed to see that so we can have some genuine oversight.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is not appropriate.

**Ms BATES:** I have a question for you, Minister. Today is 25 July and the government has proven that it can produce quarterly data within a few weeks. Will the minister commit to releasing the September quarterly figures prior to the election for Queenslanders to see the current state of the Queensland health crisis and to enable all parties a baseline to set future targets from?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** As soon as the data is ready, member for Mudgeeraba, you will have the data.

**Ms BATES:** That did not say that you would release it before the election.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** If the data is ready before the election it would be my pleasure to release it—

**Ms BATES:** Minister, you could make it ready.

**Ms FENTIMAN:**—so that we can all have a conversation. The rest of the June quarter data will be released in coming weeks. The September quarter data will be ready as quickly as it can be. I know that they will work really hard to get you and the Queensland community what they can.

**Ms BATES:** Unless they are bad. Thank you. I will move on. Director-General, I will return to my previous question where you said '10 years', where you were asking for the timeline of 2015. I will continue with that line, if you do not mind. That same email that I was talking made a request for—again, I will quote—'anything unique about the region, example if they needed a new MRI, an obstetrician and if we supplied it as well as any local issues that had been solved'. Were you aware of that ask?

**Mr Walsh:** There are lots of asks that occur like that so it is not an unusual request. I am going to say, yes, I am aware of it, because I receive lots of requests like that. I do not know the particular email. It is not tabled so I cannot respond specifically to it, but it is not an unusual request.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. It looks like that request was sent to all HHSs from estimates @ qld.gov.au on Friday, 5 July with a request for the information to be provided by the close of business on Monday, 8 July. I am assuming that request was complied with?

**Mr Walsh:** That is a good assumption.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, figures back to 2015 is something you might expect the opposition to ask for, not the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Are you concerned that there is a political undertone to that request?

**Mr Walsh:** I find the question unusual when the committee has today asked questions relating to 2015. We were asked to provide, by one of the crossbench members of the committee, the numbers of nurses and doctors since 2015. I do not see it as being anything. That is not a member of the government. I find the foundation—

**Ms BATES:** We have asked questions before about data and we have been told—I will borrow a phrase from the minister, who has used it once or twice before—that it necessitated diverting resources from supporting frontline services. I will move on to the next question.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** The data is not collected, member for Mudgeeraba. You have to read the bit that goes before that.

**Ms BATES:** The political bit that goes for it. My next question is to the director-general. Given that the department has been readily able to supply information back to 2015, as confirmed by the director-general today, could I please make the same request of you now—that is, to provide a list of part 9 investigations dating back to 2015?

**Mr Walsh:** I would need to confirm with the minister about taking that question on notice. There is no requirement in the legislation to provide the reports or any elements of part 9 investigations. The minister has made a commitment to publicly provide information about part 9 investigations that focus on clinical or systemic issues going from the middle of 2023. I am only in a position to be able to respond to the requirements that the public sector responds to. It is not my position to be able to provide information about part 9 investigations unless there is a requirement to do so, and there is no requirement in the legislation to do that.

**Ms BATES:** According to that email, evidently all it takes is an email on a Friday asking for a response on Monday. That has proven it can be done, given the email from DPC requested a far more significant amount of information. Director-General, I am not after all the details; just a simple list of the investigations will be fine. I imagine we are not talking hundreds of them, maybe a dozen or so part 9s since 2015.

**Mr Walsh:** That is a request that the minister would take on notice.

**Ms BATES:** Then I request the minister take it on notice.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I do not need to take it on notice, member for Mudgeeraba. I am the minister and I am making any part 9s that happen as minister public. The legislative regime that underpins those investigations has been in place since Lawrence Springborg was the minister so, no, but what I can do is make investigations during my time public, and that is what I have done.

**Ms BATES:** You have been here since 2015.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Not as the health minister.

**Ms BATES:** But your government has been here since 2015.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Pardon?

**Ms BATES:** Your government has been here since 2015.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Correct, but I am making a commitment to do what I can as health minister. There is no legislative requirement to release any of them. I am being transparent in my role as health minister and I will continue to do that.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. Minister, you have said in the past—in question on notice 666 of 2023—that part 9 investigations are not a readily available report, but neither are the number of MRI machines installed since 2015 or things the government has apparently solved—whatever that means—and yet the department was able to comply with this request over a weekend. My request is a simple one: a list of part 9 investigations.

**CHAIR:** This is repetitive. The minister has already answered the question. I ask the member to move on to her next question.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I also do not know how the member for Mudgeeraba would know whether Queensland Health complied with that request. She has no evidence of that. There was an email from DPC requesting information. It is not unusual. I really think the member for Mudgeeraba needs to move on.

**Ms BATES:** It is in the RTI. Were the previous health ministers not transparent? Will you release all the data from 2015?

**CHAIR:** Okay. We will pull it up there.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** What data?

**CHAIR:** Hang on, Minister.

**Ms BATES:** The part 9. I have just asked you.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have answered that question.

**Ms BATES:** You said that you were going to release it all last estimates, so release it.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have.

**CHAIR:** Minister, let me deal with the member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** I am going to rule that out of order. It is completely unwarranted. Do you have a question related to the estimates in front of us right now?

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. Could I please call the chief executive from the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service, Ms Lisa Blackler.

**Ms BATES:** Ms Blackler, I would like to ask a few questions around elective surgery in Rockhampton. Am I right in saying the full complement of FTE anaesthesia SMO positions that you are budgeted for at Rockhampton Hospital is 14?

**Ms Blackler:** That is correct.

**Ms BATES:** Am I right in saying that earlier this year the number of anaesthesia SMO positions you actually had employed was just seven against the 14 budgeted positions?

**Ms Blackler:** I would have to check that information. I was not present in this role. Currently standing, we are at 7.88 FTE.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you for answering that question for me. A simple question: are there more or less elective surgeries occurring at Rockhampton Hospital now compared to 2015?

**Ms Blackler:** I just want to acknowledge the hard work of our workforce in Central Queensland, both nursing and medical staff and our support staff. They are very committed to providing health care to Central Queenslanders. I also acknowledge the disruption to our people as we are challenged in the specialist workforce space. I can confirm that we have challenges in delivering specialist services and electives, but we are very committed to recovering this in this financial year and moving forward. It is predominantly workforce driven. We are very committed to replacing and recruiting the specialist workforce that is required to deliver elective services for great care for Central Queenslanders.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. I have been in your hospital and have seen how stressed and overworked your staff are in the ED department there with the ambulance ramping. I would like to personally thank all of those staff at the front line who are dealing with constraints in their workforce. Minister, were you aware that for the March quarter 2024 there were just 516 elective surgeries performed at the Rockhampton Hospital? I am happy to be corrected, but on review of the figures, that is the lowest number of elective surgeries performed in a quarter dating back to 2015. For example, it is a 122 per cent decrease compared to the March quarter 2018, and we are talking about elective surgery output of one of Queensland's largest regional hospitals being halved over the course of the Palaszczuk-Miles government. Do you owe Central Queenslanders waiting for surgery an apology?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. Again, I am pleased to say that long waits for surgeries continue to come down, even in those areas where we are challenged for staff. As the chief executive has said, it has been a real challenge to find anaesthetists, but they have been doing some great work. I was up there recently to meet some of the new anaesthetists and meet some of the staff that we have actually attracted to Central Queensland through our Workforce Attraction Incentive Scheme.

I am happy to get the figures for the member. I can say we also have a boosted program with the private sector. A number of our patients in Central Queensland are getting their elective surgery through the private sector as well. Even though fewer surgeries will be happening with fewer anaesthetists in the public hospital, our \$200 million Surgery Connect program means that a lot of those patients in Central Queensland are getting their surgeries done through the private hospitals, which is a great outcome for those patients in Central Queensland.

I was also really pleased to be in Gladstone just last week to talk about the enormous work they have done in maternity and paediatrics in Central Queensland and to meet the new obstetrician at Gladstone, Dr Clayton Grieve, who has come all the way from South Africa. He loves Gladstone; he is happy to be there. We continue to attract the staff we need, particularly coming out of COVID. I am really confident that Lisa and her team will continue to attract those clinicians that we need.

**Ms BATES:** Director-General, turning to maternity services, committee question on notice 8 shows that in just two months maternity services have been bypassed nine times at four hospitals:

Ingham, Mareeba, Beaudesert and Redlands. It must be a concern that you keep seeing the same hospitals bypassed with a degree of regularity now.

**Mr Walsh:** I would like to thank the staff who work in all of those hospitals and, in fact, all of the staff who work in maternity across the state. More than 120 babies are born in Queensland every day. Our hardworking obstetricians, midwives and other support staff do a great job in order to support women and their families in relation to having their babies at our hospitals.

When there are unforeseen circumstances like a medical officer who works in the maternity area is sick and there is unable to be identified someone who can backfill, the women who are likely to birth at that time are contacted. Alternative arrangements are worked out with the women, so there are strategies to make sure if the birth needs to occur while the coverage is not there at their home hospital, that can be safely organised. Some of those times may be for only a matter of hours and some may be for a day. In most situations that is simply because the staff are unable to attend because they are sick, and you cannot predict those things.

In locations like Beaudesert, for instance, they have put on an additional six medical officers who work in the obstetrics and anaesthetics area to try to reduce the number of times they go on bypass. As I said, some of the times they occur are only for a matter of hours. Women have plans put in place and are supported.

Yes, we would like to keep the services open all of the time, but we cannot control the sickness or ill health of our staff and we need to respond to that. It is important that in flu season if you are sick, you stay at home.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, the \$42 million investment that was spruiked last year is not stopping hospitals still going on bypass, is it?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I am really pleased that we have seen a huge improvement when it comes to our rural and regional hospitals on bypass. Weipa is birthing babies again for the first time in 25 years. What an amazing achievement. At Beaudesert, where there were often periods of two-hour gaps in rosters, they have now hired, as the DG has just said, an additional six doctors. That will stop those small two-hour gaps from happening, which is excellent. They are also now delivering midwifery group practice at Beaudesert because of the feedback of some of our mums.

The member mentioned Redlands. That was on bypass on just one occasion and it was due to the hospital expansion. There was an extension of the chilled water system and power switchboards where work needed to happen, so they could not safely birth there. There were no impacts to women.

Again, Gladstone is just going from strength to strength. I was there last week to announce a whole new dedicated maternity and paediatric wing. Then there is Weipa which has come off bypass. I am so excited. I stood up with mum Liz, who would be having her third child and the only one she is able to have close to home, which is fantastic. I was really pleased that Emily and Alistair did not have to travel to Cairns from the Western Cape. They welcomed baby Vin, who was the first baby born in Weipa for 25 years.

I think the lesson from Weipa is that when you have the right facilities, the right leadership and the right models of care we can attract those specialists. As part of that \$42 million—and this was feedback from RANZCOG and our clinicians—we are actually paying for GPs to undertake the advanced obstetric training through RANZCOG to become GP obstetricians as well as GPs to become GP anaesthetists, which would help us recruit more of those anaesthetists in places like Rockhampton. We are paying for those wonderful clinicians to undertake that study. I have had the pleasure of meeting many of them as I have travelled across the state.

We have upgrades underway at Cooktown and Biloela of course. I am really confident with the work we are doing with the clinicians and with the new upgrades to facilities, we will be able to get those rural facilities back up and running. The \$42 million, of course, is also supporting our Flying Obstetrics and Gynaecology Service. It is the biggest investment in midwifery group practice we have ever seen. MGP is where a woman will have the same midwife the whole way through her pregnancy; women love it. We are now at 24 per cent of women in this state who have access to MGP. That compares to 14 per cent nationally. I think the investments we are making in the models of care and the infrastructure will continue to see improvements. I am really proud of our government's work in this space.

**Ms BATES:** When asked in the parliament whether the Beaudesert bypass was happening, you said it was because of the Christmas break. May, June and July are not Christmas, but it is still happening. Are there deeper problems with the viability of the service there?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I just answered that question. They have just hired six more doctors, member for Mudgeeraba, so those very temporary two hours when there is not an obstetrician on roster will stop happening because we now have the medical workforce we need. Most of the closures were around that Christmas period due to emergent leave, but, as the director-general has said, sometimes staff are sick. With six new doctors and midwifery group practice at the hospital, I just do not think we are going to see that happening into the future.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Minister, in your workforce strategy you talked about the need to train more doctors, nurses and allied health workers. In the primary care report that this committee reviewed about two years ago, one of the priorities that was identified was housing for medical staff. How many houses or dwellings have been constructed across regional, rural and remote Queensland to meet that need in the last two years?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Thank you, member; it is a great question. I will get the number for you. We have one of the biggest investments particularly for the rural and regional Queensland staff accommodation programs. The staff accommodation program is part of the \$1 billion Building Rural and Remote Health Program. There are 14 active staff accommodation priority projects in the program. We now are building most of these modular accommodations for staff offsite. I have been down to Hutchies at Yatala, where they are building the accommodation that then gets sent up to some of these regional communities.

We have delivered 39 new staff accommodation beds in 2023-24 at Gympie, Biggenden and Sarina. Priorities that we are working on right now to be delivered in this financial year are Camooweal, Dajarra, Mount Isa, Charters Towers, Joyce Palmer on Palm Island, Longreach, Winton, Barcardine, Blackall, Charleville, Collinsville, Hope Vale, Laura and St George. Again, it is great that we can build these modular facilities here. It is safer, quicker and cheaper, and they are wonderful. I have been through them. They are beautiful accommodation for staff. You are right: one of the things that staff routinely tell me is that being able to attract clinicians depends on having purpose-built accommodation that is fit not just for the clinician but also for the clinician's family, and that is exactly what we are doing.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** So as at today we have only built or provided 39 more dwellings across Queensland so far?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Last year we delivered 39 beds, and we also rent from the private sector, so that was new builds or purpose-built beds.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Do you have a brief question, member for Mudgeeraba?

**Ms BATES:** Yes, I do. Director-General, the gender equality report card for 2023 reported that females accounted for almost nine in 10 victims of sexual offences in 2022-23. On 10 October last year the minister said that every clinician right across Queensland has now undertaken the training in rape kits or forensic medical examinations. The minister later had to clarify that this training would take many months. Are all clinicians now trained in these examinations?

**Mr Walsh:** In terms of the availability of the training, my understanding is that there are over 400 clinicians who work in the locations that need to undertake a medical assessment for a forensic medical assessment for a person who has been sexually abused in locations across the state. It is also important to know that there is a 24/7 line where any clinician who has or has not been trained can receive support. In other words, every clinician could undertake these assessments with the support of that line.

**Ms BATES:** Can we get a breakdown, Director-General, of the number of nurses and doctors trained?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Yes.

**Mr Walsh:** Yes. There are 671 doctors and nurses who have been trained, and I can get a breakdown of how many of those are doctors and how many of those are nurses, if the minister wishes to take that on notice.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is fine.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Minister.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mudgeeraba, we will pause there. We will go to a government question. We have the visiting member for Stafford.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the indulgence of the committee in granting me leave today. With reference to page 1 of the SDS, can the minister update the committee on how the Queensland government is supporting women who experience pregnancy loss?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I know that this is something he is really passionate about. He knows, like many Queenslanders know, that unfortunately not all pregnancies end in the birth of a healthy baby and pregnancy loss can have a devastating effect on women, partners, family members and friends. That is why I am really pleased that the Miles government is investing in supporting women and their families through these difficult times. We are supporting the charity Precious Wings with \$242,856 for the next year for the creation of personalised memory items that are provided free of charge to families experiencing the loss of a pregnancy or baby. The member knows this organisation very well, and I had the privilege of meeting with them and the member here at parliament recently. The boxes are hugely valued by palliative care, intensive care and social work teams who work with families. Clinicians recognise the quality of each resource and contents that introduce the idea of creating special memories that may otherwise be missed. We have heard from families how much comfort they can bring, supporting families to know they are not alone.

Queensland Health continues to progress a number of actions aimed at reducing the rates of pregnancy loss, including stillbirth, and that includes increased training in advanced neonatal resuscitation for clinicians working in birthing suites and nurseries, providing clearer advice on risks and options of induction medications and expanding postnatal support for women who experience stillbirth or neonatal death.

Importantly, we are also boosting perinatal mental health support. Mental health care in the wake of a miscarriage is as critical as physical health care. In acknowledgement of this and to further strengthen guidelines, a new perinatal mental health guideline was published on 5 April this year. These guidelines support strengthened clinical pathways to ensure a connected and supported workforce and to support seamless clinical and referral pathways for mums in need of perinatal mental health care. We are also investing \$39 million in establishing 30 new perinatal mental health beds across Queensland which can be accessed by women experiencing mental health concerns after a miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.

As part of our Women and Girls' Health Strategy, \$12.1 million has been invested to establish a virtual therapeutic mental health service which includes support for miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death. I want the women of Queensland and their families to know that this is not a topic that needs to be talked about in hushed tones or avoided in a misguided attempt to spare people's feelings. I want women and families to know they are not alone when they experience these tragic circumstances. We will continue to ensure there is always support available. I really want to thank the member for his advocacy in this space and his support for Precious Wings. I am really pleased that we are supporting them to support so many families in their time of need.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, member for Stafford. Commendable work. I see the member for Maiwar is here.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Before the member for Maiwar, I actually have an update for the member for South Brisbane about the number of psychologists employed. In 2015 there were 419.23 FTE psychologists employed in Queensland Health compared to 570.83 FTE in 2024, an increase of 36.1 per cent or 151.6 FTE. The 2024 pay rates for psychologists are between \$79,051 and \$249,935 per annum. The psychologist safety rates are outlined in the Health Practitioners and Dental Officers (Queensland Health) Certified Agreement. Psychologists are employed between levels HP3 and HP8 and it is on the website.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Member for Maiwar—a former member of the health committee—I am going to give you our question time.

**Mr BERKMAN:** That is almost too kind of you; thank you, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity. I refer to the answer to my prehearing question on notice regarding the provision of opioid substitution therapy in Queensland. The minister advised in that answer that Queensland Health does not collect data on the number of patients receiving OST in prison who are then released into the community. I will put this to the director-general at this point. Do you have data on the number of patients displaced due to private prescriber closures? If so, what are the figures for the last two financial years?

**Mr Walsh:** In terms of the notion of displacing someone, people go onto a transferred waiting list. I think in that answer to the question on notice we talked about how long appointments were made ahead of time. I would need to refresh my memory by looking at the question on notice, but I think it ranged between four and eight weeks in terms of the timeframe. I think that was in the question on notice, but I am happy to clarify that. It was in the order of that. Displacing someone is not something that happens on the program. You would not have someone on a program and then someone comes

out of a prison and a person on the program stops to take the person from the prison. That would not be something that would happen.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I think we may be talking at cross-purposes. I am not necessarily just talking about program participants leaving prison but those who lose a place because of the closure of private prescribers. I understand that that is something that has happened to a significant extent in recent times.

**Mr Walsh:** I would need to find out. My understanding would be that a person who is on opioid substitution therapy would be transferred or transitioned to another provider should a provider stop providing at some point. If you are aware of circumstances where that has occurred to a person, I would very much like to find out about that. It is not a practice that should occur. A person who is on opioid substitution therapy stopping suddenly is not something that would be advised. If it has occurred, I would like to know that. I also think that the minister would be willing to offer you a briefing specifically on the opioid substitution therapy program if that was something that you would like to take up outside of the committee.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Absolutely, we would welcome that.

**CHAIR:** I am sorry, member, but we are just about out of time. I quickly acknowledge all of the students from the Redlands electorate in the gallery. Minister, we have three minutes. A number of questions have been taken on notice. Do you want to spend any time on those?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I do not have anything yet.

**Mr Walsh:** I want to confirm that we have two outstanding. One is the breakdown of doctors and nurses around sexual assault training. The other is the Eight Miles Plains Satellite Hospital staff profile.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Also, the member for Mirani's question about the pilot from 2021 and the outcomes, and the cost of the Torres and cape part 9 to date, so that is four.

**CHAIR:** We can come back in the next session. With two minutes left, I will ask a very quick question. With reference to page 1 of the SDS, Minister, can you update the committee on how the Queensland government is ensuring women's economic security?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is one of my favourite questions, Chair. I thank the member for the question. Gender equality is a human right that benefits everyone. It is good for our economy, helps prevent violence against women and girls and makes communities safer and healthier. Through the Queensland Women's Strategy 2022-27, we are delivering on the Miles government's vision that women and girls are safe, valued and able to freely participate and succeed in the economic, social and cultural opportunities available.

The latest annual Queensland Women's Statement and gender equality report cards underscore our government's unwavering commitment to investing in a safer and more prosperous future for women and girls. The gender pay gap and gender superannuation gap continue to reduce in Queensland, which is great news. We are also accelerating efforts to reduce that gap by providing public servants with paid leave for reproductive health care and paid superannuation for parental leave. I am really proud that we are leading the nation in that. We are seeing Queensland women break down barriers in traditionally male dominated fields, including the construction industry and the judiciary. I am very pleased about that. Of course, there is more work to do. Despite these gains, women are significantly more likely to do unpaid work and continue to earn and retire with less money. Data shows that more than 30 per cent of women rely on their partner's income in retirement compared with six per cent of men.

The Miles Labor government understands that economic security is essential for women to live prosperous, safe and successful lives. We have put real solutions and money on the table, including \$16 million for women's economic security, \$645 million to provide free kindy, \$1 billion for our Women and Girls' Health Strategy and more than \$1.2 billion to end domestic and family violence. We have helped more than 28,000 women gain employment through Skilling Queenslanders for Work and over 30,000 women have commenced a free TAFE course, which is fantastic. I am really pleased with the work that we are doing to support Queensland women and girls find their economic security.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That concludes the committee's examination of estimates for the Department of Health, hospital and health services, the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, mental health, the Queensland Mental Health Commission, Health and Wellbeing Queensland and women portfolio areas. We will come back to the questions taken on notice in the next session. The committee will adjourn for a short break and resume at 12 pm.



**Proceedings suspended from 11.44 am to 12.00 pm.**

**CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister, Director-General and officials, and welcome, Commissioner. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of the Queensland Ambulance Service open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Before we start, I understand, Minister, that you have an update on two questions.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have one for the member for South Brisbane about the staffing profile of the Eight Mile Plains Satellite Hospital. The Eight Mile Plains Satellite Hospital staffing profile at a high level is as follows: 94.95 FTE, excluding cancer services, and 25.78 FTE in cancer services. The breakdown for the FTE non-cancer services is as follows: medical, 9.25 FTE; nursing, 37.86 FTE; professional and technical, 19.57 FTE; managerial and clerical, 12.4 FTE; and, operational, 15.87 FTE. The breakdown for cancer services is: medical, 2.6 FTE; nursing, 9.78 FTE; professional and technical, 5.8 FTE; managerial and clerical, 7.6 FTE; and operational, zero. It successfully opened on 27 May and commenced delivery of patient services to the community. Between 27 May 2024 and 30 June 2024, the minor injury and illness clinic had over 2,000 presentations, with an average of 59.2 presentations per day.

In relation to the member for Mirani's question about the national Birth of a Child pilot, the pilot was led by the Australian government, Services Australia and the Digital Transformation Agency, in partnership with hospitals across Australia, including Queensland HHSs. The purpose of the trial was to provide support to new parents to enrol their child into Medicare, apply for family payments and register their child with Births, Deaths and Marriages. The pilot operated in 2021. Queensland would be happy to continue exploring this but it is a matter for the Australian government. Lessons learned so far: achieving agreement to a national birth registration dataset across all states and territories is complex and it will take a strong champion to garner support and drive change. We are happy to keep that work up and advocate to the federal government.

**CHAIR:** Before we start with questioning, with the indulgence of the member for Mudgeeraba, I think it is completely appropriate—this is always my favourite part of this portfolio for the Ambulance Service—

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Why is that, Chair?

**CHAIR:** I am about to get to that. Both my wingman beside me and I are former paramedics, and, on behalf of the committee, we thank every single hardworking Queensland Ambulance Service staff member, no matter where they are in Queensland, for delivering those pre-hospital services. We are entirely grateful.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, you collect data on heart attack survival rates, and these are published in the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services. There are a few different datasets but one is paramedic witnessed cardiac survival rate. Obviously, not everybody has the good fortune of having a paramedic witness their cardiac arrest but you would agree that having a paramedic witnessed heart attack is the best-case scenario and has the best outcome for survival?

**Commissioner Emery:** Definitely in the out-of-hospital setting, yes, it is. We are very proud of the fact that Queensland has the best out-of-hospital cardiac arrest outcome for paramedic witnessed arrests. That is a testament to the hard work paramedics do, the training they have and the continuing work we do. This year we relaunched our cardiac arrest strategy, which is aimed at continuing to improve cardiac arrest outcomes for Queenslanders.

Our work is about how to get paramedics in front of cardiac arrest patients. We respond to about 6½ thousand of them a year. We continue that work, which is largely the basis of the cardiac arrest strategy that we have pulled together. It really challenges our organisation to ask itself, with each and every decision that we make, 'Are we making a difference to patients in the community?'

**Ms BATES:** In the public figures, I see that the percentage of paramedic witnessed arrests where the patient survived has improved from 46.1 per cent in 2014 to 58.6 per cent in 2022-23. That is a testament to your paramedics. You must be quite proud of that. It shows that when a paramedic is there you are more likely to survive.

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes. Thank you very much.

**Ms BATES:** Like I said, not everyone has the good fortune of a paramedic witnessing their cardiac arrest. Is it fair to say that a non-paramedic cardiac arrest would be the most life-threatening cardiac arrest you would collect data for? Is that a fair statement?

**Commissioner Emery:** A non-witnessed—is that what you mean?

**Ms BATES:** Yes.

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes, obviously the survival rate is lower if the person arrests without a paramedic or another medical professional or allied health professional present. The very best survival rate in the out-of-hospital setting is when it happens in front of a paramedic. That is not what happens each and every day, and that is why we encourage a whole range of community strategies around CPR awareness. We teach first aid across the community. We have lifted up our CPR awareness programs across Queensland that were really impactful prior to COVID. Of course, we did see a deterioration in terms of the core numbers during COVID because of isolation and the impacts of the pandemic.

We have worked really hard in the last year and a half to two years and we have started to bring those numbers back up. We are teaching people in the community about not only how to do CPR but also how to use an AED and be aware of AEDs in the community. Some of our volunteers raise funds for AEDs in communities as well. Most people have their cardiac arrest in their home, so we want family members to be comfortable and confident to do CPR until such time as the ambulance arrives. We have well-established protocols to provide advice over the telephone when people call and their loved one is in cardiac arrest, but nothing beats first aid training and hands-on CPR.

**Ms BATES:** I witnessed that myself personally last year. I think I mentioned to you that I was in the communications centre and a triple 0 operator called John talked a young 14-year-old boy through CPR on his father, whom he found blue at bottom of the stairs. I am really happy to say that John has now graduated from the operations centre and is a fully-fledged paramedic. I look forward to seeing him out on the road.

**Commissioner Emery:** That is a program that we implemented about four years ago that we think has been quite successful. We bring graduate paramedics in via the communications centre so they get to see the bigger picture of the organisation and understand how they can contribute to the 1.4 million patients we help, not just the one at a time that we dispatch them to. They are two very different roles. We particularly ask paramedics to focus on the patient who is in front of them so that the coordination staff can do the work behind the scenes to make sure we give the greatest good for the greatest number.

**Ms BATES:** I was very impressed. He took that call, had a drink of water and then took the next triple 0 call—extraordinary. Commissioner, when you look at this dataset about the non-witnessed cardiac arrest, the dataset is worsening. It has fallen to the lowest level since 2011-12 in the days of the Bligh government. Is the survival rate of 23 per cent of concern to you? I appreciate what you just said about the education in the community and the use of AEDs et cetera, but that number is obviously concerning.

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes, it is. It is specifically why, as I have mentioned, we did initiate a cardiac arrest action plan on the way out of COVID. We saw those numbers decline during the COVID pandemic. We picked that up really early and made a decision to invest more of our time, energy and resources to it. It is not just about clinical education; it is essentially about making our organisation patient-centric by focusing on the fact that every decision we make should lead to a better outcome for our patients.

Cardiac arrest is emblematic of what ambulance services do. It is an underpinning tenet of what ambulance services do. You mentioned the performance indicator. It is one of very few indicators that are internationally recognised that organisations like ours can use to compare themselves with other organisations. It is fundamental to everything that we do.

We want to improve that performance indicator, but it is not only about clinical training which I think is your point. It is about how we resource, how we dispatch, how we deploy, how we think about the decisions that we make and what we do in community, as well as provisioning and resources ourselves to improve cardiac arrests for Queenslanders.

**Ms BATES:** Aside from COVID, Commissioner, can you point to a reason that number has fallen?

**Commissioner Emery:** There could be a range of reasons. One part of the strategy is for us to try to understand that. There is no specific data, but I would suggest that there is an intrinsic link between response time performance and getting the paramedic in front of them. We know that there is a decreased survivability rate for people the longer it takes to get defibrillation and advanced life support.

**Ms BATES:** Is it quite a reasonable assumption to make that the number has fallen, as you said, because it has taken longer for paramedics to attend an unwitnessed heart attack; is it not?

**Commissioner Emery:** There is a link, for sure.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, the QAS only started to break down response times performance data into code 1A in the financial year ending June 2018. In that year the response times 50th percentile was 7.6 minutes. As at 30 June last year, they were 8.6 minutes. Is that correct?

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:** The same goes for the 90th percentile dataset for code 1A incidents. In the financial year ending June 2018, the time was 14.2 minutes. As at 30 June last year, it was 17.2 minutes. That is roughly three minutes more. Am I right in saying that?

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, would you say that the slower response times and the increase in the number of people dying of a heart attack that is not witnessed by a paramedic is coincidental?

**Commissioner Emery:** No.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, ambulance ramping in Queensland, let's be frank, is not getting any better. Are you receiving feedback or reports from your staff that this problem is going to continue to result in negative patient outcomes?

**Commissioner Emery:** No. I do not believe we get direct feedback from our staff around ambulance ramping contributing to negative patient outcomes. There is no mystery that ambulance paramedics are frustrated in terms of the role that they play in community and their ability to respond to the community. Everybody recognises that there is an ambulance ramping problem across the world including in Queensland, being defined as when an ambulance paramedic crew is unable to be released because they are completing a clinical handover to the emergency department.

We are doing a lot of work to the extent that we can to minimise the impact of that and to make sure that we can respond more quickly. Of course most of what we can do to contribute towards ambulance ramping is to make sure that only the right patients who need to go to an emergency department arrive at an emergency department and then we put our hands in the skills of the paramedic clinicians as well as the nurses and doctors to do a safe clinical handover of care.

Only about 58 per cent of patients we respond to end up in an emergency department, demonstrating that we are doing what we can to make sure that people get appropriate and equivalent level care within the community closer to home. We already triage out many patients from an emergency department. Approximately 84 per cent of the patients that we do take to an emergency department end up as a category 1, 2 or 3—you are aware of the triage categories—so they are sick and unwell patients who need to be in an emergency department.

The balance of those patients, the other 16 per cent, have an inordinately high admission rate—nine times higher than people who walk in off the street, again, acknowledging and recognising that the paramedics have done everything they can do to determine alternative care pathways for those people. I think that is a testament that we are doing what we can to make sure that we—not avoid the emergency department, albeit that is the outcome—but rather make sure that people get the care that they most appropriately need closer to home and in the community.

**Ms BATES:** I want to expand on that. Your paramedics and your staff have never raised that they are worried about patients dying because of not being able to get to them in time because they are ramped?

**Commissioner Emery:** Definitely not with me specifically. As I said, I think there is probably a link there to say that they are frustrated. They know that they want to respond to community. That is the role that they signed up to do. That is the role that they trained at university to do. That is what they are best placed to do.

The work that we do with the health and hospital services not only in that proactive work and that planning piece but when there are issues with delays at emergency departments—between the paramedics, the supervisors that we use at the ramp, medical commanders and flow nurses who are all oversighted by a bipartisan patient flow coordination centre which exists in most of the south-east corner HHSs—is designed to release paramedics to patients when they are required to do so. When we have an emergency pending in the community, we do all that we can do, presuming they are the closest and most appropriate resource to that incident, to make sure they can respond as quickly as they possibly can.

**Ms BATES:** Last year the minister said fixing ambulance ramping was her No. 1 priority. Is that the No. 1 priority of the QAS?

**Commissioner Emery:** The No. 1 priority for QAS is to deliver the very best services that we can to the community of Queensland not only in the emergency response but, as I already mentioned, taking up our role as a navigational part of the health service and ensuring that people can get care closer to home, get appropriate care that is not within the emergency department system and not necessarily resulting in hospital admission. We work very closely with the broader health system, the health and hospital services and particularly with their emergency departments about what we can do to minimise the impact of ramping. My experience is that the health and hospital services very much have a priority to minimise ambulance ramping and improve ED access block, but much of it is outside my control but rather a broader health and hospital service system.

**Ms BATES:** So ambulance ramping is the greatest impediment for an ambulance to be able to respond quickly to a triple 0 call in Queensland at the moment?

**Commissioner Emery:** No, it is not the greatest impediment. We deliver triple 0 services from the Torres Strait to the Gold Coast to Western Queensland. There are tyrannies of distance in an organisation like ours. We have response locations in Queensland that do not exist in any other state of Australia. There are 307 or 308 response locations across Queensland. No other mainland state—in fact, no other state in the country—would have that sort of penetration, but we still are challenged by the tyranny of distance. We are challenged by the road network from time to time during peak hours. There are lots of contributing factors.

**Ms BATES:** I want to confirm with you that there has been no change to the way patient off-stretcher time is measured.

**Commissioner Emery:** That is correct.

**Ms BATES:** Is it still being started at the time of arrival to hospital, not at the time of triage?

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes, arrival at hospital.

**Ms BATES:** And no changes around the clock stopping at the time of transfer?

**Commissioner Emery:** No.

**Ms BATES:** There have been no discussions like the one a few years ago uncovered through right to information with the Department of Health suggesting changes, to your knowledge?

**Commissioner Emery:** There has not been any discussion about changing the performance metric, no. There are lots of discussions around how best to measure the performance improvements. As I said, there is an inordinate amount of work happening not only within emergency departments but across the health and hospital services. I am aware that the health and hospital services are looking at many and varied ways to interpret the data, to assess the efficacy of the changes that they have made, to stop and start changes if there is not an improvement. There is a lot of discussion around how to best interpret the data. In terms of the key performance indicator being 90 per cent of patients off stretcher in 30 minutes, that has not changed, and I do not believe there is any discussion about that being changed.

**Ms BATES:** Are you able to tell the committee how many cases are pending in Queensland right now and what the wait times are?

**Commissioner Emery:** No. That is information that is available in our operational systems, but I cannot do that from here. That information is readily available to a supervisor within our system, importantly so, so that they can make deployment decisions. This is the intelligence that they need to make decisions around some of the things I have already mentioned today—which ambulances are being deployed, which ambulances are being moved from one part of the city to another, which ambulances are available at an emergency department that could be rapidly deployed if required. That is information that is critical to them.

**Ms BATES:** I think it is 95 pending with a three-hour wait. Commissioner, the circumstances around Wayne Irving's and Cath Groom's deaths late last year shocked Queenslanders and the nation. Did they shock you as well?

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes, they did. The circumstances of Ms Groom weighed very heavily upon me at the time. I can honestly say that not many days go by that I do not think about those types of patients and the circumstances with regard to it. In fact, similarly to what I have already said, it helps me focus on what we need to do as an ambulance service to ensure that circumstance does not happen again. The cardiac arrest strategy, as I said, is not code for anything other than making sure we have

a patient-centric approach to our organisation. I make conscious decisions in and of myself to think about patients like Ms Groom when we think about resourcing decisions, how we can improve models of care, what we can change in terms of how we coordinate during peak periods.

Peak periods are inevitable. We know that, in the circumstances of that patient you mentioned, we were in a very high period of demand. That is not an excuse by any stretch. We know that in Queensland our triple 0 calls can range from 2,600 one day to 4,000 the next. It is incumbent on us to manage that surge. It is difficult and challenging when we get that sort of fluctuation on a daily basis, but we do everything we can possibly do to make sure we keep those patients safe.

We have introduced clinical oversight through our Clinical Hub, a multidisciplinary team—which we have invested further in this year to over 100 FTE—and one of its focuses is keep patients safe who are waiting for an ambulance and prioritising those patients that require a rapid response from an ambulance service, those 1A patients, to get the service they need. I was pleased to see that for two years in a row we have improved our target. I acknowledge that it is not where it was pre COVID, but it is the second year in a row we have continued to improve our performance against the 1A target. In fact, this year, for the first time since 2018-19, we responded to 8,000 more code 1 patients within the 8.2-minute target. That is the first time we have improved that since 2018-19.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Hear, hear!

**CHAIR:** I will move to the government, then the crossbench and then back to you.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Before you do, Chair, I have one more update. This relates to the member for Mudgeeraba's question about the breakdown of doctors and nurses trained in forensic medical examinations. Of the 671 trained, there are 209 nurses and 462 doctors.

**CHAIR:** My question is with reference to page 32 of the SDS. Can the minister update the committee on the performance of the QAS?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I would love to. As we have just heard, we have had the best improvement since 2018-19 in code 1A responses, so I want to thank the commissioner and our hardworking paramedics. We have not only the biggest and busiest ambulance service in the country but also the best. It is the only free mainland ambulance service in the country, and that will never change under a Labor government. Despite the immense demand faced by our frontline staff, the Queensland Ambulance Service continues to prioritise its most critical patients. The first three months of this calendar year was the busiest quarter in QAS history, with the most triple 0 calls received and code 1 incidents attended. The QAS also experienced its busiest day on record, with over 4,000 calls for assistance on 26 February 2024.

Despite an almost 2½ per cent increase in the number of the most critical code 1A cases, Queensland Ambulance Service response times have improved, with half of all calls attended to within 8½ minutes. In 2023-24 our hardworking emergency medical dispatchers received on average close to 3½ thousand triple 0 calls for help every day. That is an increase of 59,143 calls compared to the same time last year. Ninety-one per cent of those calls from Queenslanders were answered within 10 seconds. In 2023-24 almost 80 per cent of calls to 13HEALTH were answered within 20 seconds.

We know that our growing and aging population is developing more complex, chronic conditions, so to help boost frontline response times and capacity we are also investing more in our staff. Since March 2015 the QAS has recruited an additional 1,570 full-time-equivalent ambulance operatives. This includes 339 ambulance operatives recruited in the last financial year. A significant number of these positions are dedicated to reinforcing our services in rural and remote Queensland. I had the pleasure of meeting some of the new recruits recently including Dylan, a graduate paramedic from Gladstone. He was inspired to join the Queensland Ambulance Service after watching the care his younger brother received, turning a tragic experience into a career to help others. He said, 'I am proud to stand on the shoulders of the paramedics who helped me and my family, and I hope to help other families in the future.'

In our record budget for this financial year the Miles government is investing \$129.5 million for an additional 268 new QAS staff to support the best and busiest ambulance service in the country. Every one of these QAS roles supports the delivery of critical life-saving emergency services across the state. I was lucky to be part of a reunite between little Arthur and the QAS staff who helped him earlier this year. Arthur's parents called triple 0 when the three-year-old developed severe vomiting and pain. First on the scene was Sarah, who quickly recognised how serious his case was and called for critical and advanced care paramedics. The crew quickly identified Arthur's symptoms as

meningococcal and were able to give him antibiotics at the scene. It was this quick response and early intervention that meant little Arthur is still with us today.

The QAS is also investing in innovation to find better ways to care for more Queenslanders. Innovative thinking saw the introduction of the Queensland Ambulance Service Adult Deterioration Detection System to identify the early deterioration of patients awaiting off-load at hospitals. This program was a finalist at this year's Queensland Health Awards for Excellence. We are supporting QAS with specialist positions such as the QAS Clinical Hub and the Falls Co-Response Program to provide support in improving patient outcomes and respond to the record demand for services our system is experiencing. We are proud to support the heroes working in critical frontline and specialist roles.

**Mr MARTIN:** Minister, with reference to page 32 of the SDS, can you update the committee on how the QAS is supporting the most vulnerable members of the community?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. We know that some of our most vulnerable Queenslanders often dial triple 0 due to their complex health conditions, even if they may be better suited to receiving care in a different setting. As we have discussed, our frontline staff are facing increasing demand across the state as our growing and aging population develops more complex medical conditions. That is why the Miles government is proud to support the Queensland Ambulance Service's innovative measures and models of care, so that Queenslanders can access the right care at the right time in the right setting.

At the forefront of QAS innovations is the Complex and Frequent Presenters Program. This program, which commenced last year, focuses on people with complex health conditions who frequently use emergency services to access care. Specialist paramedics, doctors and support staff, along with hospital and community-based care providers, identify and engage with complex and frequently presenting ambulance patients, delivering plans best suited to the patient. These patients are often more likely to experience chronic health conditions, compromised mental health, are at increased risk of falls, and face socio-economic and housing challenges and high mortality rates. During the six-month trial the QAS Complex and Frequent Presenters Program identified 80 patients who were predicted to call triple 0 more than 2,500 times and present to emergency departments more than 2,000 times. As a result of the program it is anticipated that those patients made 885 fewer calls to triple 0 and presented 894 fewer times to an emergency department. The early results of this program speak for themselves.

So far, the QAS Complex and Frequent Presenters Program has reduced preventable emergency department presentations by about six per cent. By linking high users with the appropriate community service providers, local health networks and specialist services and primary care providers, this service is reducing pressure on our busy hospitals, ensuring that emergency services are available for their next callout. The wellbeing of Queenslanders remains a top priority for the Miles government and we are proud to support the delivery of the best care in the most appropriate location to some of our state's most vulnerable people.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Good afternoon, Commissioner. It is great to see you here. Minister, in relation to infrastructure, can you update the committee on how QAS is delivering the infrastructure that our growing population needs?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I can, and I thank the member for the question. The Miles government is committed to supporting and investing in our essential frontline services, ensuring the QAS—the only free mainland ambulance service in the country—can continue to provide outstanding care for the community. That is why we are proud to have delivered the biggest investment ever over the last two years in QAS capital works. This includes almost \$100 million for capital works this year.

We know demand for health care and emergency care is increasing across the state, which is why investment in additional health infrastructure is critical. I am pleased to inform the House that the planning and construction phases for new and refurbished ambulance stations and operation centres continue. On the Gold Coast the redevelopment of the Gold Coast Operations Centre at Coomera is full steam ahead, with practical completion expected next year. The new Ripley Ambulance Station and the new Morayfield Ambulance Station have been officially opened. Construction is now complete for the new Lawnton Ambulance Station and the Caloundra South Ambulance Station, and recently the North Rockhampton Ambulance Station has reached practical completion. In addition, the Burdell Ambulance Station is in its final stages of construction and is expected to be completed by the end of July. Planning, design and early works also continue for the relocation of the Springwood Ambulance Station. The replacement Sandgate Ambulance Station construction tender has been awarded and is due for completion in the middle of next year.

Not only are we investing in critical infrastructure to support our frontline paramedics, we are also investing in state-of-the-art equipment so they can continue to provide free world-class health care to Queenslanders. This includes almost \$40 million for 155 new and replacement ambulance vehicles, including the continued rollout of power assisted stretchers which provide an enhanced work platform for paramedics and patient transport officers to improve patient and officer safety.

We are also continuing to invest in the capital program which is the cornerstone of delivering more frontline services for Queensland. That is why we are committed to making sure the needs of our frontline paramedics are met so that they can continue their crucial, life-saving work effortlessly without disruption now and into the future. Ensuring all Queenslanders continue to receive world-class care wherever they live is a priority for our government. With new, modern, state-of-the-art ambulance stations and facilities across the state, critical operational vehicles and equipment, and information and communications technology, the QAS is providing nation-leading world-class patient care that Queenslanders can count on.

**CHAIR:** We will now go to the member for Mirani.

**Mr ANDREW:** I have some questions for Commissioner Emery. Firstly, I would like to thank you and your team for your service in protecting us in the electorate of Mirani. With 72,000 square kilometres, you guys get to us in a very short time and it gives us a lot of comfort to know you are there. I have some quick questions to do with the situation surrounding wind farms and increased populations in places like Marlborough. Are there any plans to increase your numbers in places like that? Also, the electorate of Mirani is growing, so are there plans to increase the number of stations you have within Mirani for the people in my electorate?

**Commissioner Emery:** We are aware of some of those energy projects and other industrial projects that pop up in an electorate like yours. As you would appreciate, the local community and the local paramedic supervisors have very good intelligence on the ground in terms of what is happening in their local area. That is why we include them as an important part of our ongoing and continual needs analysis across the state.

In an ongoing way and also specifically annually, we do a full needs analysis of the entire requirements for the state of Queensland in terms of both people and capital. That analysis considers a range of things: local input from the local paramedics or QAS staff on the ground; ABS data; information from our health and hospital service partners; and the demographics of people within those communities. It is probably no surprise to anyone that people over the age of 65 are high end-users of ambulance services. Interestingly, industrial sites such as you described do not necessarily in and of themselves drive up demand for ambulance services. Most of the people who do fly-in fly-out work or are there as the community grows are young workers with young families. They are not high end-users of ambulance services and the industry itself has very high standards of safety and manages that very well.

We consider those things. We also look at any historical growth patterns or any changes in demand. In places like Marlborough, even though there has been an increase in the population as a result of the wind farm, we have not seen yet at least any changes in our incident count or demand in the local community. I am not sure if I have totally answered your question but I would like to reassure you that we are aware of it. We are very conscious that these things can often pop up and pop back down again, as they did in the Surat Basin a few years ago where we did exactly that. We did provision in certain circumstances for a short period of time.

There is another thing in those regional and maybe even rural and remote locations. Two years ago, we brought Retrieval Services Queensland under the umbrella of the QAS and that has further strengthened that partnership. They do 24,000 aerial retrievals across Queensland, joining up the health system of Queensland, working hand in glove with the paramedic teams on the ground to retrieve patients in a primary as well as inter-facility transport arrangement.

**Mr ANDREW:** I was going to say thank you to our rescue choppers too because they are amazing. It reduces that time between patients being addressed. I have another question to do with the trend. Sadly, we are seeing a lot more usage of your service. What is the trend? What are the health issues? Are there more heart attacks? Are we seeing more things happening? Are there trends that you are looking at?

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes, there are, and you would probably be unsurprised to hear what they are. It is mental health. It is falls patients—particularly elderly patients who fall. Chest pain or cardiac patients have always been a large proportion of what we respond to. They are the three highest usage types of patients, if you like. That is why we have invested, as the minister has already

mentioned, heavily in mental health over the last few years. We are identifying patients through our Complex and Frequent Presenters Program. There is a misnomer that these patients are a burden on the Ambulance Service. It is quite the opposite. These are people who are looking for their place within the broader health system. We see that we have a role. If somebody is calling the ambulance on a weekly basis through triple 0, clearly they have not yet been plugged into the services that they need.

When we commenced the review of that program, we did that hand in glove with the hospital and health services, and we realised very quickly that the cohort of patients we were seeing as frequent presenters were not necessarily the cohort of patients who were self-presenting to emergency departments so it was incumbent upon us to join those people into the system. The minister mentioned the pilot of the 80 people who we looked at in the first instance. What she did not mention is when we did that first review there were 424 patients within the group that we reviewed and there were 24,000-odd responses from those 400 people in the one-year period that we looked at. The pilot of 80 has been quite successful, but I am pleased to say that there are now 500 people enrolled in that program. We want to connect those people who often have mental health conditions or alcohol and other substance abuse problems. As I said, these are not elderly patients; these are people in the community who are looking for a place within the community health network, not necessarily in the emergency setting or the emergency department setting for that matter.

**Mr ANDREW:** In my electorate I travel between Mackay and Rocky very regularly. Does your team find that the road is not suitable for some of your vehicles or you get vehicle damage from travelling on those roads? Do you find that those roads are fit for purpose with your team?

**Commissioner Emery:** I have not heard anything specific about that stretch of road. Last year we travelled 49 million kilometres across Queensland with a fleet of 1,700 ambulances and from time to time there is damage, there are accidents, but I have not heard anything specific about that stretch of road.

**Mr ANDREW:** With reference to emergency care, on page 7 of the SDS, how many people have passed away while waiting for Queensland Ambulance and what does the Queensland Ambulance Service launch in response to those deaths?

**Commissioner Emery:** As I mentioned earlier, we respond to about 1.4 million patients per year. Approximately 6,500 patients are in cardiac arrest before we arrive. That is the nature of the role that we play. As the other members have already mentioned today, unfortunately we cannot resuscitate them all. In fact, there are many that we cannot even commence resuscitation upon. Every one of those cardiac arrest cases, though, is audited for any learnings, but, as has been pointed out, the clinical interventions from Queensland paramedics are world-best.

**Mr ANDREW:** I do not dispute that. Page 3 of the SDS mentions increased funding of about \$30 million in 2024-25 to boost the Queensland Ambulance Service capital program. Could you explain to me if any of that \$30 million spend will be in the remote regions like in my electorate of Mirani, please? How is that going to be broken down?

**Commissioner Emery:** I do not think there is anything in the capital spend for Mirani in terms of new sites. There is \$12½ million in minor works and minor capital which is about upgrading and making sure existing facilities are fit for purpose. You have a very long and skinny electorate. I know that we invested physical resources into places like Mount Morgan last year and into Mackay. I think there are more paramedics again going into the Mackay area this year.

**Mr ANDREW:** That is good to hear.

**Commissioner Emery:** My colleague could give you a breakdown, if you like.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Commissioner, getting back to the member for Mirani's question about the old Sarina Hospital, I was going to offer a briefing for the member of Mirani on the health and hospital infrastructure in his electorate, and we could add QAS into that. Let's do that.

**Mr ANDREW:** I would like you to do that. That would be very good.

**CHAIR:** Member for Mirani, we need to close off on that time, sorry, and return to the opposition.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, have there been any other cases where a patient has died on the ramp since Mr Irving?

**Commissioner Emery:** I do not believe so. It is difficult for me to answer because we always hand over, but that is the safe transfer of care. Regarding the handing over of patients to the emergency department staff, I am not involved in any review or any understanding of their care beyond that.

**Ms BATES:** So there could be a death on the ramp that you are not aware of?



**Commissioner Emery:** Colloquially, talking about ‘the ramp’ is prior to the transfer of care. No, there have not been any deaths prior to the transfer of care. Obviously, as I said, we transport almost always category 1, 2 and 3 patients, including category 1 patients quite frequently, so there are patients who will go into cardiac arrest on transfer, as is unfortunately the nature of their illness, but, no, I am not aware of any other cases other than that one.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Commissioner. Minister, are you aware of any other cases where a patient has died on the ramp since Mr Irving?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** No. Again, as the commissioner has said, obviously we work very hard to get patients transferred off stretcher as quickly as possible and sometimes, particularly if they are category 1, they go straight into a resuscitation bay, but I am not aware of any patient deaths while waiting for transfer to the emergency department.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, I look at the latest figures for ramping at the Ipswich Hospital, which is where Wayne Irving tragically passed. It is 63.1 per cent. That is three per cent worse than it was at the same time last year. Why are things not improving after such a high-profile incident and after the glare of the public scrutiny?

**Commissioner Emery:** It is difficult for me to answer. Obviously, as we have already discussed today, the fix to ambulance ramping is a whole-of-system issue. All I can do is make sure only the right patients end up in the emergency department. The director-general and I visited, along with the health chief executive of the emergency department at Ipswich recently, to see all of the work that they were doing, but I am definitely not best placed to talk about ED flow and hospital beds.

**Ms BATES:** I will ask the minister, then. My question is the same as I put to the commissioner: the latest ramping figure at Ipswich Hospital, where Wayne Irving tragically passed, is currently 63.1 per cent, which is three per cent worse than the same time last year. Why are things not improving after such a high-profile incident and the glare of such public scrutiny?

**Mr Walsh:** Chair, I wanted to clarify a point. As the commissioner has indicated, when a patient arrives at a hospital and patient-off-stretcher time starts when the ambulance arrives, the first thing that happens is triage, as the member for Mudgeeraba—

**Ms BATES:** I am well aware, being a triage nurse.

**Mr Walsh:** I just want to explain why. I will not take too long. At the point of triage, the responsibility for the patient transfers from ambulance to the hospital, even though the paramedics remain involved in the patient. Therefore, the commissioner cannot answer questions about what happens on the ramp because it is the hospital responsibility, and this—

**Ms BATES:** Not if the paramedics are looking after the patient on a QAS trolley on the ramp.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** They are still in the care of the hospital, member.

**Mr Walsh:** The hospital is responsible for the patient at that point.

**CHAIR:** To go through the doors.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** That is right.

**Mr Walsh:** This is a question about the hospital operations, which was the previous section before the committee. I want to confirm that we are focusing on—

**Ms BATES:** Fine, thank you.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** In answer to the member for Mudgeeraba’s question, there has been a 4.3 per cent increase in high-acuity patients at Ipswich. The patient-off-stretcher time is the same, so it is stable, as for the previous quarter. Yes, we have seen a slight deterioration from last year, but that is because of the huge influx in patients, particularly really high acuity patients.

What we have done at Ipswich, which has seen an improvement in ED seen-in-time, is the work that we did late last year. We have put in place nurse and medical commander roles. The emergency department is now staffed by very senior clinicians. We have opened a surgical admissions unit with 18 inpatient beds. We have established a clinical initiative nurse in paediatric and adult waiting rooms. We have established a dedicated mental health clinician to provide advocacy, assessment and intervention for patients presenting with mental health related issues. Partnering with the Darling Downs and West Moreton Primary Health Network, the federal government has a Medicare Urgent Care Clinic at North Ipswich, which is great. The Ipswich Hospital expansion stage 1A, including new mental health facilities and a new 26-inpatient-bed ward and MRA suite, is also helping, as well as the satellite hospital.

I say this in terms of Ipswich Hospital: compared to last year, ED seen-in-time—that is, patients seen within the clinically recommended time frame based on their acuity—has increased 11.4 per cent. That is a huge increase, a huge jump in 12 months for ED seen-in-time. There are more people coming via ambulance, there are more high-acuity patients by ambulance, so POST is stable, but with ED seen-in-time, which means the high-acuity patients are getting seen quicker, there has been an 11.4 per cent increase. That hospital is doing really well with the challenges it is facing.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Minister. Commissioner, do you think there has been enough urgency in dealing with this, given the tragic and fatal consequences? It appears to be a deep-seated problem. I have been in that Ipswich ED, so I have seen for myself, and I have seen the frustration of your QAS staff in Ipswich Hospital. Do you think, as the commissioner, that there is enough urgency in dealing with this issue so it does not happen again?

**CHAIR:** I understand your line of questioning, member. You are seeking an opinion from the commissioner. Can you rephrase that or move to another one?

**Ms BATES:** Has the QAS commissioner done any risk assessment or analysis on the likelihood of another outcome like Wayne's occurring there, with the figures worsening?

**Commissioner Emery:** Have I done a risk assessment?

**Ms BATES:** Has QAS done any risk assessment?

**Commissioner Emery:** No.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, have you received feedback from your staff who are serving that region who are concerned about levels of what was once unchartered ramping numbers that now seem totally entrenched?

**Commissioner Emery:** Yes. As I mentioned earlier, there was only one occasion but we are very well connected to the paramedics and the staff in the West Moreton area. Recently the director-general and I did attend the Ipswich Hospital emergency department. What was very pleasing to me—the director-general concurs—was the relationship between the frontline staff. In fact, the tour of the emergency department, as I recall it, was jointly managed by a clinical leader from the emergency department and the senior operations supervisor from the Queensland Ambulance Service. They work hand in glove. It was very obvious to see. I am privy to the expenditure that has gone into the health and hospital services to address some of the issues that you have raised today, but to see firsthand the tactical changes that had been made to the department, in terms of patient handover, the safe transfer of care and the flow, was very pleasing. Whilst I agree—I have already said today—that sometimes paramedics get frustrated, the morale and the commitment of those people to take on what is a challenging emergency department was again, very pleasing to see.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you, Commissioner. There were public reports earlier this year about an individual who had a cardiac arrest and tragically passed away in an undisclosed regional location. That person had called triple 0, waited roughly half an hour, went into cardiac arrest and died. I understand they were so close to the hospital they could see it and that the incident happened in Cairns in May. Have the circumstances around that case been reviewed?

**Commissioner Emery:** I am aware of the case. There is enough information there for me to understand which case you are talking about. Yes, they have been. We did complete a review. The deputy commissioner and the local assistant commissioner from Cairns have met with the family to take them through the findings of that review. There were some outcomes for personnel from our perspective that required some additional education and changes to dispatch procedures, and that has been completed, so yes, I am aware of that.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. Commissioner, was there ramping occurring at the time?

**Commissioner Emery:** No. Can I clarify that, please, because there was an indication through the media at the time that there was ramping. I think there were eight ambulances at the emergency department when that triple 0 call came through, but that is where paramedics take their patients. There was no delay. It was an inordinately busy period of about two hours where there was a high surge to the tune of about 40 per cent in presentations to QAS which obviously flowed onto the health and hospital service for that two-hour period. As I said earlier, when we have those surges, when we have a 4,000 a day triple 0 calls—I am not saying this was—we are challenged and we prioritise resources to the extent that we can. On that particular day, after review, we found that there was extremely good cooperation between the health and hospital service and the ambulance service locally in terms of turning those ambulances around. In fact, it was an ambulance from the hospital that was dispatched to that patient.

**Ms BATES:** Commissioner, can you confirm that the bays were full? The patient could obviously see that. Would the patient have been better off walking across the road instead of waiting 24 minutes? He probably would have survived if his cardiac arrest had been witnessed in the ambulance bay at Cairns Hospital.

**Commissioner Emery:** Of course, that is the power of hindsight. That patient was not in cardiac arrest when they called the Ambulance Service. They were prioritised—hats off to the hardworking emergency medical dispatchers that work within the Cairns operations centre. You have seen it for yourself, as you have already said. They made the very best decision that they could make with the decision information that they had and they made a decision that that patient was safe to wait.

**Ms BATES:** It must have been tragic for the triple 0 operator when there was nothing at the end of the line. My heart goes out to that operator. Commissioner, were there unfilled shifts when this occurred?

**Commissioner Emery:** I do not know.

**Ms BATES:** Would you be able to report back to the committee? Can the minister take that question on notice?

**Commissioner Emery:** I could find that out but I would like to, again, provide some context. We roster more than 2,000 people every day. We build provision into that rostering platform for emergent leave, sick leave and planned leave, but 2,000 people come to work every day across Queensland. We manage with what we have. We deal with what we have. My understanding at that time is that there was not an issue in terms of resourcing, but there rarely is because we provision for it. My colleague has just told me that no, there were no unfilled shifts.

**Ms BATES:** Thank you. Minister, we heard earlier from the Commissioner that there are more Queenslanders dying of heart attacks in Queensland because ambulance response times have deteriorated significantly in recent years. Is this more proof of the tragic and fatal consequences of the Queensland health crisis under Labor?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I thank the member for the question. It is not quite what the ambulance commissioner said. I was really pleased to hear him say that our code 1A response times have seen the biggest improvement seen since 2018.

**Ms BATES:** Except for the man in Cairns?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Member for Mudgeeraba, you have just heard from the commissioner that there was a clinical review into that incident. It was not about resources, it was not about staff not being on shift and it was not about ramping. You have had that answer from the head of the Ambulance Service.

**Ms BATES:** There were eight ambulance crews that were parked in the bay—that is the bay full.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** But no-one was ramped, member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms BATES:** Why were eight ambulances sitting on the ramp if no-one was ramped?

**CHAIR:** Pause. Just stop. Member for Mudgeeraba.

**Ms BATES:** Minister, what we heard today is an astounding admission. Despite all the advances in modern medicine, technology and the billions of dollars spent, if you have a heart attack that is unwitnessed in Queensland, it is more likely that it will be more fatal now—it cannot be more fatal than fatal—than nearly 15 years ago. That is shocking. I think Queenslanders would be rightly dismayed to hear those figures. It should not be like this. Do you take responsibility for that?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Thank you, member for Mudgeeraba. What you have heard from the ambulance commissioner is that code 1A response times are improving and that we have been seen the best improvement since 2018. We have also heard from the ambulance commissioner that 58 per cent of their patients go to the emergency department and that they are working incredibly hard to support all of the patients that ring triple 0. We have the best rates of triple 0 calls answered in 10 seconds. We have a nation-leading position when it comes to response rates. We have the best rate of attending cardiac arrests in the country. I have not heard the opposition acknowledge any of this. We also have the highest number of paramedics per capita than any other state. We are the only one that is free—we are the busiest, they do the most and they have the best response times. Rather than criticising—

**Ms BATES:** I am not criticising, Minister.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Let's take our hats off to the hardworking paramedics in this state. They deserve it.

**Ms BATES:** I am very well aware because I do ridealongs with them all the time—not take photos!

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I think I remember a photo of the member for Mudgeeraba in some scrubs that had ‘MP’ on them.

**Ms BATES:** That is because I am an RN and you are not.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Without approval by Ahpra to do any clinical work, can I remind the member.

**Ms BATES:** Making it all about yourself and not about the patients. It is all about yourself.

**CHAIR:** Order! Stop. Member for Mudgeeraba, this is completely unhelpful.

**Ms BATES:** I was provoked.

**CHAIR:** I was trying to give you additional time and you continued to argue over the top of me. With a couple of minutes to go, Minister, do you have anything further?

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I have some things to say, thank you, Chair. In response to the member for Mudgeeraba’s question about legal fees for the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service investigation, I can advise that the cost of the legal fees was \$573,000. Given the scope of the terms of reference, part A and B, its complexity, the volume of information received and the number of witnesses, the legal firm engaged has provided ongoing assistance to investigators as they progress the investigation in relation to, among other things, evidence-gathering activities, ensuring the terms of reference are met and natural justice requirements are satisfied throughout the investigations. In terms of the investigators, there are currently two investigators who were appointed at the commencement who are still working on the investigation. I have a few concluding remarks, if we have time.

**CHAIR:** Please.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** I want to thank you and the committee members for the conduct of today’s hearing. As you have seen during this hearing the health portfolio is responsible for a wide range of issues that impact Queenslanders every day. We are experiencing immense demand and pressure, but, as you have heard today, our initiatives are improving and reforming the system. Our record investment in staff, capital, new services and expanded activity is all about fast-tracking patient care; however, none of this would be possible without our frontline health workers. I have met many amazing healthcare workers on the frontlines alongside those working in the Department of Health and I want to thank them all. Thank you to for the work you do every day. A special thanks to my director-general, Michael Walsh, his deputies and assistants: Peta, Mel, Colleen, Priscilla, Helen, Nick, Damian, Catherine, Haylene, Tricia and Tanya. I acknowledge and thank the QAS commissioner, Craig Emery, and his hardworking team.

I thank the chief executives of our hospital and health services and the heads of the statutory agencies for their valuable assistance. I also want to thank the support staff from the department including: Michelle, Tamara, Miranda, Holly and Anna. Finally, to my ministerial staff, my Chief of Staff, Olivia Amsden, and my team: Finn, Issy, Amanda, Michael, Steph, Maddie, Michaela, Courtney, Natarjsha, Asaesja, Rachel, Maddy, Mitch, Virginia, Alice, Shweta and James.

I express my appreciation to the Hansard team and to the parliamentary staff on behalf of me and my team. Thank you so much. I think I might have missed Alice, who has been with me since day 1. Olivia would have been in big trouble if we had not remembered Alice. To all of the staff in our hospitals and in our ambulance service: thank you for what you do every day.

**CHAIR:** Well said. Thank you very much, Minister. We have now reached the end of the time that was allocated for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the areas of responsibility administered by the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women. Thank you, Minister, officials and departmental officers for your attendance. The committee will now adjourn until 1.45 pm when we will then examine the estimates for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities.

**Proceedings suspended from 1.01 pm to 1.45 pm.**

**ESTIMATES—HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE—  
AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES; 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**

Mr G Bolton, Director-General

Ms J Clark, Acting Deputy Director-General, Corporate


Dr W Hall, Executive Director, Agri-Science Queensland

Mr A Bacon, Program Executive NFAEP, Biosecurity Queensland

**Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority**

Mr C MacMillan, Chief Executive Officer

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 **CHAIR:** Good afternoon, everyone. We will now resume proceedings. For the benefit of those who have just joined us, I am Aaron Harper, the member for Thuringowa and chair of the committee. With us here today is Mr Rob Molhoek, the member for Southport and the deputy chair. Other members of the committee are: Mr Sam O'Connor, the member for Bonney; Mr Stephen Andrew, the member for Mirani; Hon. Craig Crawford, the member for Barron River; and Mr James Martin, the member for Stretton. The committee is joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and ask questions at the hearing today.

I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the chair's discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting our witnesses today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. I ask all present to ensure that phones and other electronic devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. I remind everyone that food and drink are not permitted in this chamber.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the agricultural industry development and rural communities portfolio area until 3.15 pm. We will then adjourn for a short break until 3.30 pm before examining the portfolio area of fisheries and forestry until 5 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the times specified for that area, as was agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House, available throughout the chamber and on the committee's webpage. I also remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the standing orders and rules of the Legislative Assembly.

In respect of government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides that a member may ask any question that the committee determines will assist it in its examination of the relevant appropriation bill or otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, the director-general, officials and departmental officers and members of the public. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask officials and advisers to identify themselves the first time they answer a question referred to them by the minister or director-general.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of agricultural industry development and rural communities open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes?

**Mr FURNER:** Thank you, and I will be short. I thank the chair and the members of the committee for the opportunity to be here to speak on this amazing portfolio. This is a record state budget allocation for agriculture, fisheries and forestry and regional communities that is being examined today. It is great news for Queensland primary producers. I look forward to speaking in greater detail about our positive initiatives in these sectors and to taking questions from the committee.

While it has been a long time coming, I also want to reiterate the great news I announced in May about Queensland having a drought-free status. I can once again confirm that Queensland now is drought free, with the last two local government areas having their drought status revoked. In May Bulloo and Diamantina councils joined Queensland's other local government areas in being declared drought free. However, we all know that droughts will happen again in the future. That is why the Miles government now provides funding to help our primary producers prepare for the next drought.

I am proud to be a part of a government that has delivered groundbreaking reforms which mean that primary producers no longer need to be in a drought-declared area to access assistance. Drought assistance in Queensland has also been broadened and is open to eligible primary producers across all agricultural sectors, with a focus on preparedness and resilience. We are seeing some outstanding results because of this and our other policies to support the primary production sector.

I am pleased to announce that the latest AgTrends data shows that the total value of Queensland's primary industry commodities for 2024-25 is forecast to hit \$23.56 billion. This would be the second highest ever valuation of the sector. Meanwhile, the value estimate for the 2023-24 financial year is \$22.1 billion, higher than the five-year average. This is slightly down on the previous year due to factors including cattle price declines and also, despite the state being drought free, overall dry conditions.

Favourable conditions are likely to persist through 2024-25, with forecasts projecting: sheep and lamb production rising 15 per cent, from \$5.7 billion to \$6.6 billion; chickpea production increasing by 180 per cent, from \$250 million to \$702 million; wheat production up 12 per cent, from \$403 million to \$452 million; and forestry and logging production up six per cent, to \$144 million. I encourage anyone who would like to see more of the latest AgTrends to go online to the DAF DataFarm website.

We also know from the latest Ross Lobbegeiger report that Queensland's agricultural industry is continuing its upward trajectory. The gross value of aquaculture production increased by 17 per cent to reach a record high of \$263.2 million in 2022-23. Another important budget feature is \$3.3 million in 2024-25 for round 7 of the Rural Economic Development Grants program, which enhances regional employment opportunities and stimulates agribusiness development in regional Queensland.

Our strong focus on biosecurity is once again evident in the budget. Since Labor came to power in 2015, biosecurity funding has nearly tripled from \$108 million a year to almost \$300 million a year in the 2024-25 state budget. As I have said previously, estimated and actual expenditure may vary from year to year. The important thing is to look at the trend and there is a clear upward trajectory in funding for biosecurity under Labor.

Cost-of-living support is another massive feature of the budget at a time when Queenslanders need it most. Whether it is the \$1,300 power bill rebates, free kindy, FairPlay vouchers, cheaper car rego or the freeze on fees and charges, there is real cost-of-living support for all Queenslanders. Primary producers will benefit significantly from these supports, along with our other agriculture, forestry and fisheries initiatives. I look forward to taking questions from the committee. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thanks very much, Minister. We will start with the opposition's member for Gympie for your first question.

**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you, Chair. Just before I commence, I have a declaration. In accordance with my register of interests, I advise the committee that I am a landowner and livestock producer. I have a registered biosecurity entity and may be eligible for drought and natural disaster assistance.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, member.

**Mr PERRETT:** Director-General, I refer to the government's asset sale of the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges referred to in the SDS at page 9 and specifically the former Longreach agricultural college. Director-General, what was the successful tender amount for the college? How much was it and what did it include?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. As you are well aware, the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges closed in 2019 following the Queensland government's response to Peter Coaldrake's review and recommendations into vocational education, training and skilling in Central and Western Queensland. The Queensland government's budget of 2021-22 included funding of

\$16.7 million over five years to maintain the sites in a safe, fit-for-purpose condition, with specific capital investments as required to repurpose the former QATC properties for sustainable future use, including the development of the Smart Cropping Centre at Emerald. With regard to Longreach, the Longreach property was placed on the market in December 2022 through a tender process in up to six different configurations to give buyers options to purchase various parcels. Following the closure of tenders on 23 February 2023 the assessment panel reviewed each tender, with conforming tenders assessed against the advertised criteria, the price offered and Longreach and regional community benefits. The property settled on 5 June with a combined sale price exceeding market value and successful tenders totalling \$12.4 million.

**Mr PERRETT:** As a follow-up to that, who was on that assessment panel for that tender and how many were on it?

**Mr Bolton:** That is a question I do not have the answer to right now. I will endeavour to try to get that to you before the end of the session, if that is all right with the minister.

**Mr PERRETT:** So you will take that on notice. Thank you.

**Mr Bolton:** We will get you that information before the end of this session.

**Mr PERRETT:** With that, who was the local community member? I understand that there was a local community member as part of that panel.

**Mr Bolton:** I will need to get some advice on that and come back to the committee.

**Mr PERRETT:** Was the tender ever amended in terms of the cost and inclusions prior to the tender being accepted by the department?

**Mr Bolton:** As with any tender process, the tenders are not valued and often in most processes not all tenders meet the initial standards and there are often conversations held with the various tenderers. With regard to the specifics about Longreach, I do not know the answer to that question, but it would not be unreasonable. What I might do is request the general manager of Agri-Science Queensland, Dr Wayne Hall, come to the table and answer that question.

**Dr Hall:** I believe the question was whether any of the tenders successful were changed following their submission before the successful ones were identified?

**Mr PERRETT:** That is it.

**Dr Hall:** None of the successful tenders and those that were compliant with the requirements were changed between submission and acceptance of the successful tenders.

**Mr PERRETT:** Okay. As a follow-up through the director-general, is the department aware of what the proposed community benefits were from other tenders that were received?

**Mr Bolton:** Again, I might pass that question on to Wayne Hall, if I may.

**Dr Hall:** In terms of the successful tenders, I can certainly list those off. We received numerous applications that were not compliant. We had criteria that the tenders had to meet, but for those that were eligible for consideration because they met those criteria community benefits included tourism operations; re-creation of historical Chinese gardens on the Thomson River; expansion of sheep, cattle and goat production; sustainable hay production; making the campus facilities available for training activities; and obviously growing local jobs through tourism, education, horticulture and livestock production activities.

**Mr PERRETT:** Just to follow-up through the director-general, were there any specific conditions in the sale to ensure a training component to the property was retained under the new ownership?

**Mr Bolton:** I might refer that again to Mr Wayne Hall.

**Dr Hall:** There was no specific requirement for that.

**Mr PERRETT:** Right. Were any terms and conditions that the department set not adhered to by the purchaser or were there any terms or conditions that were removed after the tender was accepted?

**Dr Hall:** There were no terms and conditions removed. As far as I am aware, the purchasers have met all of the requirements for the sale process.

**Mr PERRETT:** Director-General, was there any community benefit considered as part of the tender that was approved and, if so, what was it?

**Mr Bolton:** Again, just to reiterate what Dr Hall spoke about, the community benefits looked at tourism operations; the re-creation of historical Chinese gardens on the Thomson River; expansion of

sheep, cattle and goat production; sustainable hay production; campus facilities available for training activities; and growing local jobs through tourism, education, horticulture and livestock production.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, not only is there a photo of you proudly locking the gates of the college and now that the college has essentially not retained a training component and was given away—in particular, that component of it free—how can the minister justify this in the middle of an agricultural skills shortage?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt there are other aspects in terms of skills required in the agriculture sector other than training students through a college that essentially was oversubscribed by staff rather than students—a failed program under the previous LNP government—where we saw students reduced to low numbers. I think my memory with regard to Longreach was that it was down to around approximately nine students which were complemented by three times the number of staff, costing the government at the time \$5 million per year.

It was an outcome that would not be able to be sustained. In respect of growth opportunities for labour in agriculture, I must make the point that labour shortages are not unique to agriculture. They are universal in every aspect of employment. I notice there is a trend in the possibility of growth in unemployment figures that will allay some of the issues in respect to staff in various sectors into the future.

Notwithstanding that, we worked quite closely with the federal government under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme, particularly through the outbreak of COVID. We were the lead state, in fact, in terms of attracting PALM students to the state. Complementing that, we have the Agribusiness Gateway to Industry Schools. I know that in the member's electorate the Gympie State High School has been a recipient of many those opportunities, as has Ferny Grove State High School in my electorate. That is one example. QAWN, Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network, is another example. Many of our stakeholders are using that as an opportunity to grow areas in terms of employment. Last year I announced the \$8 billion backing the bush program, where we are working with our key stakeholders, QFF and AgForce, to enhance the opportunities for growth with respect to skills in the workforce. That funding is part of the \$160 million Bush Boost investment that was announced in August 2023.

There are plenty of opportunities for growth. We see a lot of students these days doing their agriculture studies online. That is a reality of technology and also the opportunities that present themselves to students currently. It was only earlier this year that I visited Bowen and saw the growth of free TAFE arrangements that are open to students there with regard to aquaculture.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Point of order, Chair: we are steering away from the question about the nature of—

**CHAIR:** You might not be interested but I am because I grew up in Bowen, so finish that sentence.

**Mr FURNER:** That is purely one example where we are offering free TAFE, a hallmark of the Miles government, to make sure we see skills enhanced in every aspect of the need for employment right throughout our state.

**Mr PERRETT:** Director-General, with respect to the unsuccessful bids, did any of them offer training opportunities at that former college?

**Mr Bolton:** Each of the bids was assessed against criteria by the panel and they were rated in accordance of merit. Some would have included that. Some would have been nonconforming and were excluded. I cannot comment specifically on each of the tenders, though.

**Mr PERRETT:** Some of the offers did include a training component on that particular college?

**Mr Bolton:** I would imagine so. Again, I was not on the panel so I do not have any information on each submission.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, I refer to SDS page 9 and the \$4 million to finalise long-term decisions regarding the Queensland agricultural training colleges, which follows a \$4 million capital grant and \$2.7 million capital project commitment in the 2022-23 budget and a \$4 million capital grant and \$2.1 million capital project commitment in the 2023-24 budget. Given that QATC ceased operations in December 2019, almost five years ago, staff redundancies were taken care of and the assets were sold in 2021, what is there left to do?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government's 2021-22 budget allocated funding, as you pointed out, of \$16.74 million over five years to maintain those sites.



As you would be aware, the Central Highlands Regional Council had a change of mayor at the election this year. Tonight I will be meeting with the new mayor and other councillors from that region. I am certain people from my department will be there as well, looking at the opportunities to progress the arrangements we are seeking in Emerald.

As you have indicated in previous questions, the assets and benefits of the Longreach QATC have been sold to the Brittons and the Milsons. In fact, I was out there last year to see the benefit of some of those sales, with the Brittons having hay production in areas that probably were quite needed in certain parts of the state as a result of their purchase of the QATC land, and Berrigurra Station was one of those purchases out there. Specifically in terms of areas like Emerald, we need to work out arrangements of our smart farms. That cropping centre has been a highlight to agriculture. Under the previous mayor, there was dialogue and outcomes being sought with regard to several agreements allowing stakeholder groups to access facilities prior to potential sales.

The Central Highlands Regional Council has previously indicated in-principle support to acquire a portion of the property subject to due diligence, including the development of a site master plan. Those negotiations occurred with the council and DAF in the latter half of 2023 and into 2024. Before the caretaker period closed prior to the local government elections in March 2024, the Central Highlands Regional Council advised that they would not make any major policy decisions until the incoming council was able to be briefed regarding the progress of negotiations with DAF, which makes perfect sense. You do not want to be making an agreement leading into an election which may then be in jeopardy from a change of mayor or even councillors. As I indicated, tonight will be an opportunity for me to engage with the new mayor and council and make sure briefings occur for their vision for what they wish to do with the old Emerald QATC area.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, has the accommodation at the former Emerald college been earmarked for emergency accommodation?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. In fact, when I visited there, the Brittons indicated they had a contractor that was looking at students arriving. From memory, I think some of those were from the Gold Coast area. No doubt accommodation would have been provided onsite for them. No doubt that is one of the reasons there was an allocation of funding to support those colleges, particularly at Longreach, to bring them up to a suitable standard for whatever purpose the businesses that purchased those facilities were wishing to utilise them or for people to stay there.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, a whistleblower has contacted us to advise us that the accommodation cannot be used on that college site because it is unsafe; is that correct?

**Mr FURNER:** I have had no indication from anyone. This is the first I have heard of that, member. I would be keen to have greater dialogue with you or anyone else on this because, obviously, we want to make sure that, as a result of what has transpired over the past with regard to Longreach in particular, the purposes of those facilities are being met.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, I refer to page 8 of the SDS regarding staffing. Can you explain to the committee why there is no allocation of staffing to rural communities?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Member, if you look at the SDS on page 8 and the growth of FTEs, it has risen from 2,120 to 2,791, which is a far cry from the period when the LNP was in government and it slashed 600 staff from the proud Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. We are growing the area and they service that area right across—

**Mr LAST:** Minister, given your portfolio title includes 'rural communities', where in that document and the staffing table does it say the number of staff allocated to rural communities?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Rural communities is right across the sector in terms of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Despite there being no set allocation of rural communities staffing, there are copious numbers of DAF staff right across the sector, in every rural community in this state. Once again, a growth from 2,120 to 2,791 means 671 additional staff.

**Mr LAST:** Do you have any staff in your department tasked with working under the umbrella of rural communities? I know you have said that all your staff work in that sphere. Do any of your departmental staff have direct responsibility or 'rural communities' in their title?

**Mr FURNER:** I will have the director-general respond to that particular question.

**Mr Bolton:** I would like to thank the member for the question. As the minister indicated, the heart of what we do is around building strong regional communities. While there is no specific allocation within the SDS, it does go to the heart of what we do. If we exclude the Information Technology Partners,

which provides IT services to five departments and two state authorities, 74 per cent of our staff are located at 74 locations outside of the Brisbane CBD.

With regard to specific requests around the rural and regional communities, in January 2024 DAF completed a review of rural communities in terms of its function. The outcome of that review was to integrate the broader function of regional communities into our existing business areas. It just reaffirmed that everything we do is about developing thriving rural and regional communities.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, your charter letter calls on you to work with the Minister for Health and contribute to delivering health care to rural areas. Did you contribute to the government's boost for regional maternity services, announced on 17 July 2023?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Last estimates, when the honourable member appeared, he asked me a similar question with regard to my engagement with the health minister. I do that on many occasions. It was only recently that I was discussing an aspect of health in the member for Gympie's electorate. It was only a few months ago that we conducted our first mental health round table with representatives from Queensland Health and key stakeholders to discuss the growing area of mental health amongst agricultural stakeholders and primary industry staff. It is paramount in my mind to deal with the health of our primary industry stakeholders, and I will continue to engage with the Minister for Health in this respect on matters such as those to which I have just referred.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, seeing you contributed to the announcement, as you have just said, can you advise how many of the promised 20 GPs with advanced obstetrics training are currently working in rural communities?

**CHAIR:** You should have been here this morning, member for Burdekin, because that health portfolio—

**Mr LAST:** The minister has just contributed.

**CHAIR:** Hang on a second. When I started this session, I made it very clear what areas are within this portfolio. This is not the health portfolio. Do you have another question, member for Burdekin?

**Mr LAST:** Mr Chair, I seek your guidance. That is part of the minister's charter letter, hence the reason for that particular question.

**CHAIR:** You should stick to the appropriation, but I will allow it.

**Mr HEAD:** Is health care not important for rural communities?

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, we had a health portfolio session for hours this morning. You could have turned up and asked that question then. I ask that you stick to the appropriation portfolio area, thank you.

**Mr LAST:** Minister, your charter letter under rural communities calls on you to help rural communities and promote new investment. Can you identify for the committee the items in the capital program on page 9 of the SDS that relate to promoting new investment in rural communities?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. There are copious areas and examples of help for primary industries in rural communities, member. I will start with the announcement I made in my opening statement to today's hearing, and that was the \$3.3 million of Rural Economic Development Grants. This is a hallmark example of the Miles government providing assistance to rural communities by providing up to \$200,000 reciprocated by the primary industry holder to grow their business—not only to grow their business but also to grow employment in their business.

This is an area that we are extremely proud of. In addition, there is drought preparedness. We knew that, at some point in time, we would need to flip the coin with regard to providing assistance to primary industry providers, and I used the example, once again in my opening statement, of assisting them in areas before drought.

**Mr LAST:** Point of order, Mr Chair.

**Mr FURNER:** Hang on. I am still answering the question, Chair. If I am asked a question, I would like the opportunity to respond. I find it quite rude that I am being interrupted by this one.

**CHAIR:** I will ask that you do continue. I am interested. You might not want the answer, but I am interested in the response. The committee is interested, so please continue.

**Mr FURNER:** Thank you, Chair. When you are in drought, it is too late in some cases to provide assistance. That is why we flipped the coin with regard to providing drought preparedness assistance prior to people being in drought. In many cases, those millions of dollars have gone a long way in assisting those primary producers.

It was only this week that I met with the drought commissioners, Mark O'Brien and Ruth Wade, and they indicated that the government's achievements with regard to flipping the coin on drought assistance has paid off time and time again, in their opinion. This is the assistance that we are giving primary producers under the portfolio of rural communities. It is fundamental that we have been able people in times of need. The best support that rural communities can have is having a re-elected Miles government that will not sack DAF staff, which is the LNP's legacy.

**Mr PERRETT:** I have a follow-up question with regard to the Longreach Pastoral College. Director-General, we understand an \$11 million bid was considered nonconforming and the government instead went with a bid of \$7 million for the Rosebank campus section of that sale. Why?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. In terms of the specifics, I was not part of the panel. I would have to go back and look at the panel review. Normally, when you have a nonconforming tender, it is not eligible to be considered.

**Mr PERRETT:** Even though it was considerably more?

**Mr Bolton:** There are very clear rules set out for tenders through to probity. We would have had a probity adviser to that tender process. We are unable to consider tenders that do not comply with that probity process.

**Mr PERRETT:** Did that tender include a training competent?

**Mr Bolton:** As I said to the member before, I was not on the panel. I do not have that knowledge at this point in time, but it is something that I could endeavour to find out before the end of the session.

**Mr PERRETT:** In other words, we have thrown away training in Western Queensland?

**Mr Bolton:** No, in other words there was a tender process run with fair probity. The conforming tenders were assessed and the most meritorious tender awarded.

**CHAIR:** We might just go to government questions.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Minister, my question relates to fire ants. I refer to SDS page 1 and the effective treatment of red imported fire ants. Can you explain how DAF is assisting to protect Queenslanders from the impact of fire ants?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the honourable member for his question. The Miles government continues to support the approach of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program. Fire ants are one of the world's most invasive pests and would have spread across Australia without this eradication program. Modelling shows that they would have spread as far north as Bowen, as far west as Longreach and as far south as Canberra.

Our economy would be impacted, our jobs would be impacted and, without doubt, our great outdoor lifestyle would be impacted. A nationally coordinated and decisive response is Australia's best opportunity for eradicating this super pest. The National Fire Ant Eradication Program has demonstrated success in its efforts—success that has evaded other countries that have tried to contain them such as the United States and China.

Since the program was established in 2001, seven separate fire ant incursions in Australia have been eradicated, preventing their spread and reducing their impact. Cutting-edge drones are now part of the program's aerial fleet and are being used for eradication treatment in areas that cannot be reached by helicopters and ground field teams. The program is cost shared across all states and territories, as well as the Australian government, and is recognised as a world leader in fire ant eradication.

In July last year, all agriculture ministers across Australia supported continuing the eradication program by endorsing the new 2023-2027 response plan. It was my pleasure also to take the ministers last week to Berrinba to see the major centre of the Fire Ant Eradication Program. They were very pleased with the progress we are making.

The response plan is supported by \$593 million in funding by all national cost-share partners. This funding enables the program to scale up operations. This includes doubling the size of the treatment and surveillance area and increasing compliance enforcement capability to address human assisted movement.

The response plan structures program efforts by eradicating ants from the outer eradication zone and pushing them inwards. This reduces the reinfestation risk from the ants given their capacity for flight. The program is complemented by the Miles government's \$37.1 million Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce.

Eradicating fire ants from Australia requires a whole-of-community approach. FAST aims to mobilise local, state and Australian governments, communities and businesses to help with the fight. This will control and reduce fire ant density pending full-scale eradication efforts. The Miles government will fight to protect the great lifestyle that Queenslanders have, and that means continuing the fight against fire ants. That is what we are committed to and that is what we will deliver.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** I refer to SDS page 2 and the \$3.3 million in the budget for the Rural Economic Development Grants program, aimed at increasing regional employment and fostering agribusiness development in regional Queensland. Minister, can you outline the success of this program to date and any alternative approaches?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I will add to the response I gave to the member for Burdekin earlier. It is no secret that when it comes to supporting regional Queensland the Labor government not only talks the talk but also walks the walk.

The Rural Economic Development Grants program, a brainchild of this government, has injected nearly \$20 million into our agricultural sector since 2018. Under Labor, this program has created more than 3,200 jobs, turning policy into real economic lifelines for communities that the opposition might struggle to locate on a map. These are not just numbers; they are people's livelihoods—jobs that keep food on the table and help rural communities thrive.

More than \$13.3 million in RED Grants funding over the first five rounds has been provided to support 59 agribusiness projects worth over \$52.4 million, creating more than 3,200 jobs since 2018. This reflects our commitment to bolstering regional economies and providing opportunities when they are needed most.

In the latest round we allocated \$3.9 million to 24 businesses, creating up to 215 direct, long-term jobs across diverse regions. For example, we assisted a North Queensland mixed beef, cane and horticulture operation to build on-farm accommodation for up to 50 workers, and a Sunshine Coast nursery is constructing a micropropagation laboratory to grow at-risk marine plant species. Looking ahead, round 7 of the RED Grants underlines our innovative approach with a focus on supporting Indigenous owned agribusinesses and low-emissions agriculture, steering Queensland towards not only more jobs but also smarter, greener jobs.

The RED Grants are not just handouts; they are hand-ups. Each grant requires a 50 per cent co-contribution from recipients, fostering not just growth but also sustainable, responsible business practices. These grants have not only supported primary producers but also enriched the lives of everyday Queenslanders by providing significant new job opportunities across regional communities.

As we continue to roll out these grants, let us remember that these are the kinds of programs that paint a broader picture of a government that cares deeply and acts decisively. I urge all members, including those of the opposition, to recognise the substantial benefits this program delivers across not only Queensland but also the nation and the world. The choice is clear: continue advancing with a government that builds, supports and looks to the future or risk stagnation with a philosophy of cutbacks masked as cost savings.

In contrast, Labor's approach is about investment, growth and ensuring that every Queenslanders has the opportunity to prosper. After seeing the tremendous job growth and economic benefits the RED Grants have generated to date, it was a no-brainer for this government to continue investing—

**Mr MOLHOEK:** This is sounding more like a re-election speech, Chair, than an answer to a question.

**Mr FURNER:** What is that?

**CHAIR:** Please continue, Minister.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I said it sounds like a re-election speech rather than an answer to a question.

**CHAIR:** We do not need the running commentary, Deputy Chair. Please continue.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Well, I would like to hear about the program.

**Mr FURNER:** After seeing the tremendous job growth and economic benefits the RED Grants have generated to date, it was a no-brainer for this government to continue investing in rural communities and agricultural businesses that thrive as a result of this scheme.

The Rural Economic Development Grants program exemplifies the Miles government's vision for a thriving, inclusive and forward-thinking Queensland. It is about making sure that our rural and regional areas are not just surviving but thriving, with good jobs and sustainable growth.

Under the Miles Labor government, we are miles ahead in supporting Queensland's future. Meanwhile, the LNP are so far behind they may need a map just to find the starting line. This is Labor's way and it is the better way for Queensland.

**Mr MARTIN:** My question to the minister is about dangerous dogs. With reference to page 2 of the SDS, will you outline for the committee the work that DAF is doing to keep Queenslanders safe from dangerous dogs?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the honourable member for his question. Queenslanders asked for stronger dangerous dog laws, and the Miles government has taken these concerns very seriously. Almost 4,000 Queenslanders lodged formal submissions or completed surveys backing up a tougher approach to dog management.

Changes to the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 were passed by the parliament on 18 April 2024 and received royal assent on 26 April 2024. Amendments include a ban on keeping five specific dog breeds. These breeds have all been banned from importation into Australia. There is a new offence for not keeping a dog under effective control in a public place and a range of increased penalties for offences relating to dogs. Irresponsible owners of dogs that attack and cause serious injury or death can now face up to three years jail.

These amendments are being supported by a \$7.3 million funding package over five years. This funding will enable more coordinated, consistent and effective action in response to dog attacks and support dog management initiatives in First Nations communities. The package includes funding for three state investigators and one prosecutor. These positions will support local governments and commence prosecution on behalf of DAF on complex dog attacks. Two of the three state investigators, a prosecutor and a First Nations engagement officer have already commenced with DAF. The funding will also include a community education and awareness campaign to be rolled out over three years.

It is particularly disturbing to note that injuries to children are disproportionately represented in hospital trauma presentations resulting from dog attacks. This government is committed to strong, contemporary dangerous dog laws including laws that provide local governments with the tools necessary to enforce responsible pet ownership to minimise the risks to communities posed by dangerous dogs.

We will keep working with the community to get the message out about these new laws and help people with at-risk dogs to comply to make the community safer. The Miles government will always put the safety of Queenslanders first, and that is what these important reforms will deliver.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Mirani.

**Mr ANDREW:** Minister, can you give a quick update on the cost of pig damage to the state of Queensland?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I note his interest and that he has raised this matter previously. Feral pigs are widespread, as you would know, member, across Queensland. In 2023, feral pigs were estimated to cost the Australian economy \$110 million in private management costs and a further \$46 million in production losses. Queensland has the highest impact, accounting for 60 per cent of the nation's costs.

DAF is enhancing its coordinated feral pig control capability with a \$3.47 million investment over three years to reduce the risk of feral pigs spreading biosecurity threats and the costs and complexity of emergency control measures in the event of an outbreak such as African swine fever or foot-and-mouth disease. This includes \$2.16 million for the placement of four feral pig coordinators in regional or industry organisations and \$1 million in grants to facilitate innovation and diversification of effective and humane feral pig control tools. These will be rolled out as part of Queensland's Feral Pest Initiative.

Local governments are responsible for ensuring that feral pigs are managed by landholders who should take reasonable and practical actions consistent with their local plans and strategies. DAF advocates a collaborative approach to feral pig control. Best results are achieved when landholders work together to manage feral pigs in their local areas at a landscape scale. DAF undertakes feral pig research to improve available control options such as trapping or baiting methods. DAF is well respected in this field of research and promotes the benefits of its expertise through publications and engagement with local governments and landholders.

**Mr ANDREW:** With both major parties subscribing to 75 per cent emission reductions coming up to 2035, has the minister or his department done any modelling around how that will affect industries

such as the cane industry, grazing and horticulture? How will it affect the cost of their operations and access to their operations?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. I think everyone is focused on the future of not only the environment but also the economy. On 21 March last year I proudly launched the Queensland Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap. Despite there not being any targets set in the road map, major stakeholders like AgForce and Queensland Farmers' Federation are acutely aware of the benefits of a low-emissions position in the future. The road map is the result of a productive co-design approach with industry, with key themes and actions identified in a Queensland government commissioned CSIRO report. The road map is a key pillar in the Queensland government's Clean Economy Pathway to help deliver on the recent legislated target of 75 per cent emissions reduction by 2035 and zero net emissions by 2050.

It focuses on supporting sectoral transition and outlines strategy and enterprise level actions across the five focus pathways: livestock emissions; cropping and horticultural emissions; on-farm energy opportunities; carbon farming and landscape management; and regions and supply chains. To help this transition, government and industry are working together to implement the road map and deliver strategic actions. Initiatives underway include the recently commissioned Net Zero Emissions Agricultural Cooperative Research Centre and DAF's carbon outreach extension program, which complements the Australian government's Carbon Farming Outreach Program. The road map is pivotal to assist industry capitalise on new carbon markets and maintain ongoing access to traditional markets. By transitioning to a low-emissions production system and increasing landscape carbon capture, the Queensland agriculture sector will be better prepared to demonstrate recognisable credentials in future trade negotiations. Having been co-designed with industry, the road map has been integral to DAF's engagement with the Australian government in developing the Agriculture and Land Decarbonisation Plan. The road map identifies priority work areas and partnerships needed to assist Queensland's agriculture to continue its decarbonisation journey. We are working hard to ensure that is reflected in the national sector plan.

DAF is also collaborating with a US \$3.2 million project, using DAF research and expertise to improve the performance and health of beef and dairy cattle while reducing methane emissions. CRC also brings together a consortium of 73 partners across industry, education and government with the common goal of achieving zero net emissions in Australian agriculture, boosting a \$70 billion sector. The national collaboration has secured \$300 million in funding over 10 years, with the Australian government's contribution being—

**Mr ANDREW:** Point of order, Chair: I asked about costs and access to machinery. I would like to narrow it down. What is it actually going to mean for farmers and the way they work here in Queensland?

**CHAIR:** I appreciate that we are running into your time. We are joined by the member for Maiwar, so perhaps we can do a follow-up in the next session. Member for Maiwar, do you have a question?

**Mr BERKMAN:** I do, Chair. Director-General, can you advise how many research staff positions there were in the Invasive Plants and Animals Program at the end of the 2023-24 financial year? Just for clarity, I have asked questions around this before, but I am looking for numbers specifically about those positions related to the prevention and eradication program, not including other research positions in the department that might be collocated with those positions.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I will just get the team to provide me with that information.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I could ask an alternative question if that is something you are able to look at and come back to.

**Mr Bolton:** That would be appreciated.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I will refer that to the DG. I asked a question on notice in March of this year, question on notice 275, around the EU's incoming deforestation regulations and impacts on Queensland's agriculture industry. The minister advised that preliminary desktop work had been undertaken to gather necessary background on this new regulation. The question is: what did that work comprise, and does it include analysis or modelling of Queensland's expected compliance or noncompliance as a result of land clearing on agriculture land?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government continues to support industry by looking at the technical work and supplying data and evidence explaining our environmental policies and regulatory framework. With regard to the EU and proposed policy coming out of there, we will continue to engage with the Australian government, as the lead agency in those

negotiations, in particular the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, while we drive those trade negotiations with the European Union. We always work with other agencies across government, including the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation, including the SLATS report in terms of the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Have you received any further information regarding the EU's risk rating process under the EUDR and guidelines for how agricultural use is defined?

**Mr Bolton:** Not at this stage. We are having active conversations at the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee level. That is all the heads of ag departments. We are looking at what that might mean for us collectively. We are not alone in terms of the Queensland jurisdiction. We are actively aware of that, and we are having conversations and working with the Commonwealth about how we might respond to those.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Does the government intend to take any specific steps to ensure Queensland industry complies with the EUDR?

**Mr Bolton:** We need to wait until we find out where the policy lands and what those implications are and then we will make some informed decisions, including working with the Commonwealth on how we might comply with any requirements. The key focus for us is to make sure we keep our industry moving forward and that we are meeting international and social obligations to our communities.

I do have an answer to the previous question. As at 28 June 2024 there were an estimated 118 biosecurity FTEs located within Brisbane. A further 268 FTEs were employed within the greater Brisbane area, Berrinba, Coopers Plains, Dutton Park and Wacol. These include operational, scientific and support staff within the National Fire Ant Eradication Program, animal biosecurity, animal welfare, invasive plants and animals, and the plant biosecurity and product integrity programs. The remaining 227 staff are located throughout Queensland. Fifty-seven biosecurity officers, including full-time and part-time equivalents, are currently employed to undertake animal biosecurity and welfare work. These officers are located across Queensland, including in regional areas: 15 in the north region; 12 in the central region; and 30 in the southern region.

**CHAIR:** We are going to return to opposition questions. Before I do, I will say this: you were not here this morning when I laid out some expectations for the day. You have had a chance to reset now. You will find that I am trying to give you more time, as we did this morning in the health portfolio area, but I will not tolerate arguing with the minister or not allowing the minister to finish even though you might not like the response. I certainly will not tolerate outbursts, member for Callide. The same rules that apply in the chamber apply here. It's over to you. Let's try and finish this session without any unnecessary commentary.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, how many meetings have you had with the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce in the past financial year?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. No doubt all my meetings are documented quite well and accessible to the public in my diary entries. There would be several meetings with the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce. In responding to the member, I can say that in many cases people get confused in terms of the functions of FAST and the National Fire Ant Eradication Program. With regard to the taskforce, I can explain to the member that it is a Queensland government funded project of \$37.1 million to suppress the fire ants within the eradication zone. Off the top of my head, I could not quantify the number of meetings I have had.

**Mr PERRETT:** What were the outcomes of those meetings, Minister?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I can reflect on one meeting where stakeholders primarily from local government were in attendance. I think on most occasions it becomes an educational exercise for both them and other people—including yourself, as you have had at least two briefings from my office and the department—so they can understand the benefit of the program. The outcomes are varied in terms of people having an appreciation of the effect of this super pest and the outcomes with regard to how it interacts with the National Fire Ant Eradication Program.

During this time I have attended the Gold Coast and seen the excellent work they are doing down there as a local government with regard to the growth in their commitment. They understand that they have a general biosecurity obligation, like any local government has and any of us have as well. That should be taken into account because I think people in many cases forget that we all have a general biosecurity obligation to make sure we do not spread fire ants as this is a biosecurity risk. I commend the Gold Coast for having up to 13 full-time workers dedicated to fire ant eradication and the management of the program. We have actually trained employees and committed \$187,000 in bait to

that council. They treated over 3,000 hectares in 2023-24. That is one example of councils. It is definitely an opportunity for those people.

We announced just recently an opportunity whereby the members for Jordan, Logan and Ipswich West are accessing bait for their constituents at their electorate offices. We are looking at that as a pilot program. It is everyone's business to eradicate this invasive pest, and the more people who get involved the more outcomes we will see as a result of that.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, are fire ants surrounded?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. Certainly the program has an arc, and that is a part of the 2021 strategic plan. I am happy to table this, Chair, for the benefit of the members of the committee so you have an understanding of the arc.

**CHAIR:** Is leave granted to table that? Leave is granted.

**Mr FURNER:** Based on the plan, you will see that there is an arc surrounding that area. Notwithstanding cases of human assisted movement, we have seen breaches outside of that area. As the member would no doubt be aware, there have been breaches of late at Oakey air base, on the Sunshine Coast and in areas of New South Wales as far as Wardell and south of the arc. What the program does with regard to those particular incursions is send teams to eradicate them, and that has been the case in terms of those eradications beyond the arc.

**Mr PERRETT:** Director-General, how many high-risk businesses are in the Queensland fire ant infested area?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for his question. As the minister identified, fire ants are a significant problem and one of the challenges we have is working with industries. Part of the revised strategy is to ramp up the compliance and engagement program and work with those high-risk industries.

In terms of the specific number, we do not have a total number but we do work with industries more broadly, whether it is the turf industry, the nursery industry, the horticulture industry or the property industry. The biggest risk to fire ants is not around self-spread; it is around that human assisted movement, and that is why we are stepping up on the compliance. We are working with those key risk areas to make sure they know their obligation. Where we need to, we take an education approach and then stronger compliance if required.

**Mr PERRETT:** I have a follow-up question on that, but it might be a bit difficult if you do not know exactly how many high-risk businesses there are. I was interested to understand the annual cost to those businesses to comply with their minimum biosecurity requirement.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. It is a good question. We can give you some figures on what the program is costing in terms of the national cost-share arrangement as well as the FAST program. I guess the real answer to that is: if we do not address this insidious pest now, we are looking at costs to the broader community of \$1.65 billion a year. There was an article published in yesterday's *Guardian* that spoke about the impact in America at the moment. In the state of Texas alone there was \$1.1 billion spent last year on pesticides, with \$872 million of that being pesticides to treat the suburban areas. So there will be some short-term pain by everyone, including the partner jurisdictions that are helping to fund the program, but the long-term cost to Australia as a whole far outweighs the short-term costs we need to work with.

**Mr PERRETT:** Director-General, there are numerous community reports about delays of more than six weeks to treat reported fire ant nests. The KPI for the Fire Ant Eradication Program in its 2022-23 annual report was seven days to respond to community nest reports. What was the average response time in 2023-24?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I might call up the executive project director in a moment to see if he can provide the detailed answer to that. In general, if you look at the strategy on the plan that has just been handed to you, the priority areas are those red eradication areas. Where we have reports of fire ant infestations within the blue areas, they are triaged, and areas that are high risk—so schools, community play areas, other areas with sensitive users—get priority treatment. Then we work with landowners to look at potential self-treatment options. I might ask the project director if he can answer in a bit more detail.

**Mr Bacon:** The target that the program sets itself to respond to what is called suspect ant reports—they are not necessarily positive reports but suspect ant reports—is 12 days. It has fluctuated throughout 2023-24 in terms of the average days to respond, and that was due to significant community



reporting during the month of April. We actually had consecutive weeks where we had 2,000 suspect ant reports. To me, that shows a highly engaged community. The more reports we get, the better understanding we have of where the fire ants are.

We reached a cumulative total of over 6,500 suspect ant reports, but as of today I can tell you that we now have that backlog down to 756. That will bring us back into that aim of reaching an average of 12 days for responding. If I may add, we do prioritise our responses to those which pose public health risks such as schools, childcare facilities and our outlier detections, where we aim to respond within 24 to 48 hours.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, from 1 July, local councils are now responsible for managing fire ants on their land, including parks, sporting fields and reserves. A report by the Auditor-General last July recommended Biosecurity Queensland could better assist councils to regulate biosecurity risk. Why is the government refusing to fund local councils to undertake responsive fire ant management work in the broader community?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt it gives me an opportunity to expand on my previous answer of the likes of the Gold Coast where they are receiving funding for bait in respect to the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce of \$187,000 from the program. Looking at other opportunities for local councils, the figures before me are: Logan City Council has been provided \$34,000 worth of bait; Scenic Rim, \$30,000 worth of bait; Somerset and Lockyer Valley, \$12,000 worth of bait; Ipswich, \$24,000 worth of bait; and Brisbane City Council, \$19,000 worth of bait. The whole program is \$37.1 million. The Department of Defence is another recipient of \$28,000 worth of bait. So, there is ongoing support for local councils in regards to assisting them in their general biosecurity obligations.

No doubt, as the QAO report indicated, successful implementation of the 2023-27 response plan will ensure the program addresses the recommendations of the Queensland Audit Office report. It is the responsibility of those councils, and once again the responsibility of ourselves, to make sure we accept the general biosecurity obligations to ensure we eradicate this pest and report it. I am very impressed with the contribution that the states, territories and the Commonwealth have made, and also the complementary \$37.1 million that the Queensland government has made towards the eradication of this super pest.

**Mr PERRETT:** Director-General, when will DAF release the modelling on the effect a fire ant outbreak on Gold Coast beaches would have on their international reputation as a tourism destination?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I just missed the first part of it.

**Mr PERRETT:** When will DAF release the modelling on the effect a fire ant outbreak on Gold Coast beaches would have on their international reputation as a tourism destination?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I think that gets back to the broader question that I answered before around the economic impacts—that is, \$1.65 billion annually. In terms of modelling, I do not know that we have examined beaches specifically, but we have looked at the broader impact to the economy from social, commercial, economic and environmental perspective.

**Mr PERRETT:** Is the minister concerned that fire ants will impact the Gold Coast's reputation as an international tourism destination?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. As the minister responsible for biosecurity, I am always concerned about any biosecurity threat, whether it be fire ants or any other risk to our economy, but also our fantastic agriculture industry. No doubt, that is why I am impressed with what the Gold Coast city council is doing with the \$187,000 worth of bait that we have provided them and the fact that they have accepted their general biosecurity obligation of putting on an additional 13 staff. They should be commended for that. It is a prime example of local governments taking on their responsibility working with the state government to make sure we eradicate this pest. It is paramount that we assist local councils like the Gold Coast and, in recent cases, like the Sunshine Coast with minor incursion outbreaks up there, to work together to make sure we eradicate this pest.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Minister, I am not all that conversant with fire ant treatment. How do you get rid of fire ants? You mentioned earlier that some of your colleagues have fire ant kits available from their offices. Is that something that is broadly available to all members of parliament to offer their communities?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I indicated the kits that are going to be trialled. We are going to examine the effects of that. Obviously, there are obligations upon administration of that and keeping records. If you are interested, I will reach out to the Chief Biosecurity Officer to have conversations with yourself, or anyone else within the area of the eradication zone, to see whether the

possibilities of that are open. I think in the first instance we will see how this trial goes. I believe it should be a success because it is everyone's responsibility to eradicate this pest and, more and more, as you have seen with the funding we have put in, we have been able to, no doubt, put better capabilities in place. I mentioned the drones earlier. We have extended satellite locations on the Gold Coast, on the areas up around Caboolture, out to Lockyer Valley and Mutdapilly down towards the Lockyer Valley area. Also, we have extended the number of employees. We have been able to put a further 115 employees on and there are more to come. I think if everyone wants to take up the assistance and work with us, we are more than keen to work with you.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** How does the kit actually work? What do you do? What do you get; is it a box?

**Mr FURNER:** The previous practice has been that where people have sought a kit from the fire ant program, they make an online request, I understand, and that is mailed out to them. This will be more efficient and effective, but we need to make sure the processes of administration are in train to ensure we identify those people who have received them so we can follow up with those kits as well. I will see whether the director-general wishes to add to that.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. While we have the executive program director here, I will ask him because he is right across all that information.

**Mr Bacon:** Apologies. Do you mind repeating the question?

**Mr MOLHOEK:** How do you kill fire ants if you get one of these kits?

**Mr Bacon:** The kit that has been provided is an APVMA registered product that has an insect growth regulator in it. It is in the form of corn grit with the active ingredient of s-methoprene or pyriproxyfen. That product is put onto the ground. It is about 10 grams per hectare of active ingredient. The ants take it back to the fire ant queen. It renders her unable to produce viable offspring and the nest dies because it cannot actually feed the nest anymore.

**Mr FURNER:** Through you, Chair, I have a document to assist the members with more explanation about the eradication of ants.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Is leave granted to table that? Leave is granted.

**Mr PERRETT:** Can the minister advise what research and development work the government has funded into alternative control or eradication measures for fire ants?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. This is a program that is operated nationally. The Queensland government obviously has an input into the program through our Chief Biosecurity Officer. Any R&D will be conducted nationally through the program of improved benefits. Some of those, as I alluded to earlier, is drone technology and also fixed-wing technology in terms of distribution of the bait, but also there is R&D with respect to looking at the possibility of tracing and using other techniques. It may be appropriate, through the director-general, to see whether the Chief Biosecurity Officer or even Ash may wish to complement my response.

**Mr PERRETT:** My question is specifically about research.

**Mr Bolton:** I will hand over to Ash, the executive program director, around the research we are doing into this insidious pest.

**Mr Bacon:** I thank the member for the question. I will try to get you the exact figure, but as the minister pointed out, out of the \$593 million over four years that is allocated, there is an arm that is dedicated to science research and advice, and I am seeking that exact figure which I will be able to provide back. In addition to that, there is an allocation of \$2 million over two years specifically dedicated to innovation to look at new technologies to advance the efficiency and effectiveness of treatment and surveillance activities in the program we deliver, but I will endeavour to get you the answer to the specific funds allocated over the four-year period in the program for science research.

**Mr Bolton:** If it pleases the member, I can add a little bit to that, if you like. In terms of some of the research and technology that we currently engaged in, as the minister mentioned, we are now using UAVs or drones around some of the bait distributions so we can use better equipment particularly around sensitive areas such as livestock and those sort of things. We do a lot of work around genetic testing, DNA testing for the ants so we can better trace where they have come from, what might have caused their spread and, importantly, how we treat them. They are a very complex animal. A nest could have either one queen or multiple queens. The number of queens in a nest will greatly determine the type of treatment approach we take. Everything we do within the program is absolutely based on science and wholly on a lot of the genetic and DNA research that goes into it.

**Mr PERRETT:** I refer to prehearing question on notice No. 5. Expenditure for cattle tick monitoring and enforcement measures has essentially halved since 2019-20. Minister, why have these important services been cut?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt, seasonality changes the particular biosecurity risk you engage with as a department, but management of the program is delivered through a shared responsibility approach between the Queensland government and the cattle industry. The framework provides mechanisms to limit the spread of cattle ticks and minimise impacts in the cattle tick-free zone. Producers in the tick infested zone must meet a risk minimisation requirement before moving cattle and ensure they comply with their general biosecurity obligation.

There is a small number of tick infested properties in the cattle tick-free zone. These infestations are not unexpected and have usually been greater in years when environmental conditions support cattle tick survival. There has been above-average rainfall—I think we can all attest to that—throughout the state since late last year. DAF has observed a pattern of increasing cattle tick infested properties in susceptible areas of the cattle tick-free zone. The number of properties is consistent with data DAF has collected over many years. In terms of that area, I would like the director-general to discuss the general biosecurity obligation in relation to that particular figure.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for his question. The key issue is that it is a joint response between government and industry. We work with landowners around identifying and then responding to those infestations. As the minister mentioned, each landowner has a general biosecurity obligation, whether it is ticks, fire ants or other pests. We work with them and provide them with the best advice about how to respond to local incursions of cattle tick.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, has lumpy skin disease been detected in Queensland?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. The direct answer is no. There was a threat earlier this year, from memory, when there was an alleged outbreak of five cattle properties around the nation. Two of those were in Queensland. I think it is an example of good collaboration with not only those primary producers but also the Commonwealth government. I place on record my appreciation of the federal agriculture minister, Murray Watt, for his spontaneous engagement with Indonesia on threats of lumpy skin disease. It was thought at the time that those cattle were infected, but, through engagement with the country and both of the departments, it became apparent that that was not the case. Once again, this demonstrates the importance of preparedness and of departments like ours and the Commonwealth working together should there be an outbreak of lumpy skin disease or any other threat.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, given the impact of avian influenza—it is now found in three states—what are you and the government doing to prepare Queensland's poultry and egg producers?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I can inform the member that this was a matter before the agriculture ministers meeting last week. It is a real concern for those southern states that have been affected by avian influenza. Queensland is the second largest provider of eggs to the nation—estimated at \$383 million. Poultry and meat production is estimated to be \$679 million and employs 3,000 people. We are looking at working with the Commonwealth in respect of modelling and preparedness arrangements into the future. We look at biosecurity risks as a department, as was evident in our discussion on lumpy skin disease.

It is important that we work with the other states. It is another example of cost arrangements with biosecurity where you bring funding forward. Queensland will have to bring forward some funding, under the general biosecurity cost-sharing arrangements of the nation, to assist those states in dealing with this particular incursion. I can assure you that the department will work with the Commonwealth department in terms of modelling should this have an effect on our state.

**CHAIR:** We will go to a government question.

**Mr MARTIN:** Minister, the Ekka is coming up soon. I know that Queenslanders are all looking forward to it. Could you share with the committee the support the Queensland government has given to the Ekka this year?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the honourable member for his question. The Ekka is truly an icon and a showcase for Queensland's agriculture. I know that I and the member for Gympie will be there probably every day of the week to celebrate what the Ekka brings from the bush to the city. Every year Queensland's young and old make their way to the Ekka. As the committee well knows, it is more than sideshow alley and strawberry sundaes; it is also a demonstration of the importance of agriculture to the city. Since 1876, the Ekka has been an institution that has only been cancelled because of conflict,

contagious influenza in 1919 and COVID in 2020 and 2021. Since the COVID cancelled years, the Ekka has bounced back. I have no doubt it will go from strength to strength again this year. Over 400,000 people are expected to pass through the gates next month, from 10 to 18 August.

The Miles government will throw its full support behind this great event. The government will be sponsoring and supporting the Ekka to the tune of \$150,000 as a major sponsor, with \$105,000 coming from my department. Further to this substantial investment, our government will have the regular stands that highlight the good jobs that are undertaken across a range of agencies. No doubt, the best stand of all will be the DAF stand! The National Fire Ant Eradication Program will also be there with their display. This is an important community initiative that helps members of the public gain an understanding of this pest and the need for eradication.

I will be highlighting the Shine A Light fundraiser that my department and I assist with, supporting a women's refuge in South-West Queensland. The Ekka is the perfect place to demonstrate city support for the country. We will be drawing the winner of that competition at the Ekka, maybe getting Craig Zonca or the Premier along to do the draw. This is another example of us working together to support the prevention of domestic and family violence in South-West Queensland.

The Ekka—be it in the CWA tearooms or the woodchop, cattle, sheep, dairy or poultry—is an important demonstration of our agricultural sector to many within metropolitan Brisbane who may not be fully aware where their food and fibre comes from. I encourage all those listening today to ensure they make their way to the Ekka. They may learn something about agriculture.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I thought there might have been a 'farmers' friend' stand and 'farmers' friend' show bag!

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I am wondering if we can get a lazy 30 for the Townsville Show and the Gold Coast Show, Chair.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Barron River.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** I have a question about disaster assistance and QRIDA. Minister, can you outline the assistance that QRIDA provides regarding disaster assistance, particularly this year in the wake of Cyclone Jasper in my region?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I know the importance he has placed on supporting his community as a result of Cyclone Jasper. QRIDA is a vital part of my portfolio, often shining through its impact work in disaster assistance. When a national disaster is declared, QRIDA springs into action providing crucial support to primary producers, business owners and non-profit organisations through the joint Commonwealth-state disaster recovery funding arrangements.

This year QRIDA has been actively assisting those affected by Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the associated rainfall and flooding from 13 to 28 December 2023. The application deadline for assistance was extended to 20 December this year, allowing more people to apply and gain much needed assistance. Through the extraordinary disaster assistance recovery grants, QRIDA provides up to \$75,000 to primary producers and up to \$50,000 to small businesses and not-for-profit organisations for essential recovery activities such as purchasing equipment, cleaning up, removing debris and also repairing infrastructure. QRIDA also offers disaster assistance loans of up to \$250,000 to help businesses and primary producers repair or replace damaged assets and stock and cover essential costs to maintain business.

Specifically for Cyclone Jasper, QRIDA has been instrumental in delivering financial aid across multiple regions including but not limited to Cairns, the Cassowary Coast and the Cook Shire, ensuring timely support to those in dire need. As at 30 June this year QRIDA has processed significant amounts of disaster loans and grant assistance of 1,153 grants approved totalling \$14.86 million. Small businesses have had 378 grants approved totalling \$4.15 million. Primary production have had 704 grants approved totalling almost \$10 million and not-for-profit organisations have had 71 grants approved totalling almost \$770,000. Additionally, QRIDA has processed 23 disaster assistance loans totalling \$2.34 million and primary production has had eight loans approved totalling \$1.2 million. Small business has had five loans approved totalling \$723,000 and 10 essential working capital disaster loans have been approved totalling \$393,000.

Late last year and earlier this year we had Southern Queensland severe storms and rainfall from 24 December 2023 to 3 January 2024. Under the extraordinary disaster assistance recovery grants, we approved 172 applications totalling just over \$2 million; small business, 113 approved grants totalling \$1.176 million; primary production, 39 approved grants totalling \$654,007; and not-for-profit

organisations, 20 approved grants totalling \$181,209. From disaster loan funding under the South Queensland severe storms rainfall from 24 December 2023 to 3 January 2024 we approved eight loans for \$721,577, and from the Southern Queensland fires from 8 September to 7 November 2023 we approved 62 grants totalling \$1.03 million—this program closed to applicants on 14 June 2024—primary production, 62 grants approved totalling \$1.222 million; and disaster assistance loans, one loan valued at \$250,000. As you can see, these efforts are part of QRIDA's broader disaster assistance program which has provided over \$1 million in disaster recovery funds over the past year benefiting thousands of Queenslanders and helping to rebuild communities and economies.

The Miles Labor government's approach is about standing shoulder to shoulder with those affected by disasters, ensuring they have the resources to build and thrive, unlike the opposition which has been found lacking in providing timely and adequate support during crisis. The Labor government through QRIDA ensures the assistance is not only promised, but delivered effectively and efficiently. Seeing the tremendous job growth and economic stability generated by QRIDA's disaster assistance, it is clear why continued investment in these programs is a no-brainer for this government. QRIDA's disaster assistance programs exemplify our vision for a resilient and thriving Queensland. It is about ensuring our rural and regional areas are not just surviving, but thriving with robust support systems in place for when a disaster strikes. Labor has a long and proud history of helping those in need and this government ensures Queensland's future is secure and prosperous. This is the Labor way; it is the better way for Queensland.

**CHAIR:** I apologise, member for Mirani. We had two minutes left but the minister also has some questions on notice. Do you want to address those now or at the beginning of the next session? It is entirely up to you.

**Mr FURNER:** We might leave that to the next session, Chair.

**CHAIR:** I am giving my question to the member for Mirani.

**Mr ANDREW:** I appreciate it. I received a phone call from Graeme Blackburn in my electorate who is one of my constituents. In five years the cost of his irrigation went from \$1.50 to \$7 to \$10 a tonne. Will the implementation of the 75 per cent reduction in emissions mean less cane fields, less cattle and less horticulture in Queensland? Yes or no, Minister?

**Mr FURNER:** Can I get some clarity? You indicated that irrigation has increased?

**Mr ANDREW:** Irrigation has increased and the cost of everything. This is what I am trying to work out. Will this mean less cane fields, less cattle and less horticulture here in Queensland under the recent implementation—and both parties accepted it—of the 75 per cent reduction in emissions here in Queensland? Yes or no, will that result in a reduction? Surely we must know that. We have implemented it.

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. No doubt the member would be familiar with Queensland being the largest state in terms of area covered under agriculture; just slightly under 90 per cent of Queensland is covered by agriculture. I use the example of what we are doing with gas in terms of working with the gas commissioner and working with those providers in the areas west of the CBD of Brisbane in terms of co-management. There are some discounts that currently apply to irrigation prices for water supply schemes and that is through Sunwater and Seqwater. A 15 per cent discount applies to all irrigation prices.

**Mr ANDREW:** I raise a point of order. A 15 per cent discount on an increase of a couple of hundred per cent is not really much.


**Mr FURNER:** There is more.

**Mr ANDREW:** I hope so.

**Mr FURNER:** Irrigators can apply for an additional 35 per cent discount, resulting in a 50 per cent total discount on irrigation for horticultural crops from 2023-24. Under the Queensland Competition Authority Act 1997 the government has requested the Queensland Competition Authority undertake a review of the irrigation pricing practices of Seqwater and Sunwater and that will apply from 1 July 2025 to 30 July 2029.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the committee's examination of estimates for the agricultural industry development and rural communities portfolio areas. The committee will now adjourn for a break. We will resume at 3.30 pm with the examination of estimates for the portfolio areas of fisheries and forestry.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.16 pm to 3.30 pm.**

 **CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister, Director-General and officials. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas of fisheries and forestry open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Before we start, did you want to respond to those questions on notice?

**Mr FURNER:** Thank you, Chair. I do have some responses that the director-general is able to deliver to the committee.

**Mr Bolton:** I want to thank the member for the previous questions we have taken on notice. With regard to the question around the panel composition for the QATC and Longreach site disposal, we had a senior executive from Agri-Science Queensland within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; a senior officer within Research Infrastructure from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; a senior officer from Queensland Treasury; and a senior officer from public works in the department of energy and public works. The panel was supported by a policy officer based in Longreach who advised on local benefits for the tenders. Importantly, we had a probity adviser engaged from a firm by the name of O'Connor Marsden.

With regard to the tenders that were nonconforming, there was a question raised around why. There were a number of reasons, including offering to lease rather than purchase, offering to lease for various periods of up to five years then purchase, requesting major unacceptable changes to the contract, no signed or incomplete signed contract, purchasing entity to be determined, extended settlement periods for up to 180 days, directors guarantee not signed and no payments paid for the tender deposit.

With regard to the probity, I thought I would read out the conclusion from the probity adviser. It states—

Based upon the work performed as described and at the time of this report, nothing has come to our attention that indicates that the evaluation process undertaken by the assessment panel to arrive at its recommendation of successful purchasers did not follow the assessment process and procedures in all material respects.

With regard to the question about the research, we have \$17.7 million assigned for research and scientific services for the period from 2023-2027 and \$2 million for the same period for innovation.

Lastly, with regard to quantifying the number of high-risk industries within the treatment area, this is information that we do not record or measure, but we do work with peak bodies and industry bodies to engage with their members through that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I call the member for Gympie.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 5 and the Native Timber Action Plan to build a sustainable future for the native timber industry. When will the minister release the results of the two-year study promised in 2019 and due for completion three years ago?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I wish to bring the committee up to speed given the recent announcement of the Premier—that is, that the Miles Labor government released its landmark 30-year Queensland Sustainable Timber Industry Framework backed by a \$20 million package that will support the future of the industry, securing the good jobs in the timber industry, the timber supply and also the new Greater Glider Forest Park to be established, protecting high-value ecosystems and threatened species. It should be noted that in the 2019 decision, which was agreed to in Maryborough at a cabinet meeting, eastern hardwoods would have a two-year extension owing to a failure of the hardwood plantation, and those 14 permits have now been issued.

It is very clear that the government has made a commitment. We are continuing timber supply at current levels for a decade and to get the whole supply chain at the table. We will bring together the timber industry and the building industry unions, First Nations and the conservation area. Stakeholders will provide advice on six priority areas: securing sustainable timber supply, adding value to forest and timber supply chains, realising the value of forest and environmental markets, skilling the future forest workers and training a strong timber industry, growing Queensland's protected area estate, and backing First Nations forestry jobs and businesses.

The Sustainable Timber Industry Framework provides \$200 million. This funding will expand plantations for housing timber and can meet grower demand for forests from carbon markets and wood for housing. It also includes support for transport, training and certificates. I would ask the member: if you and your party are in a position to match that \$200 million for that commitment, today is the day—

**Mr PERRETT:** I think I am asking the questions here.

**Mr FURNER:** I think I am free to ask questions in my own right, so I would like to see that matched, whether today or in the future.

**Mr PERRETT:** Let us unpack what we have to start with, Minister.

**Mr FURNER:** It is important to have the facts on the record. There have been no changes to the timber allocations in South-East Queensland, and these were agreed in 1999 for 25 years. It was this government that extended the harvest allocations past the 2024 agreed end date and these permits have been issued. It is now up to the relevant parties to sign and return them to DAF.

My department has done some great work online regarding the greater glider. I know that industry will work to ensure sustainable objectives are achieved, and the decisions announced by this government set up a sustainable sector. We will see the likelihood of a very great future for the timber industry. Chair, I want to table the Queensland cabinet ministerial directory announcement through the Premier in Maryborough which would assist the committee in its understanding of that statement.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

**Mr PERRETT:** Just to be very clear, Minister, there is no timber action plan at all? The work has not been done?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I just explained to the member with regard to the outcomes for the future through the taskforce and framework that the Premier has announced. That was announced, as you can see by the handout that has been provided, in Maryborough with the member for Maryborough and the Deputy Premier with regard to the plan ahead for timber.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** So does this mean DAF is going to be growing timber or we are paying someone else—giving other organisations grants to grow timber for us?

**Mr FURNER:** Is that a question, I assume, through the deputy chair?

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Sorry; through you, Chair. I was just trying to understand what this \$200 million is. Is it an investment by the Queensland government in forestry or is it an investment in other people to grow wood for us?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. It is an investment in the timber industry and it is working with the industry and unions and stakeholders to continue the growth of a very vital industry in Queensland through what we intend to do, once again as indicated, with reissuing the two-year permits that have been provided to 14 permit holders whilst also providing certainty for the stakeholders into the future through that framework. No doubt there are always complex issues with regard to this issue, so we will be looking at the views in the future in terms of the native forestry and it is extremely important that appropriate consideration be given to those views in formulating the policies around that.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, how can Queenslanders have any trust over anything this government commits to knowing that commitments are made but never delivered on, like this timber action plan from 2019?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I think the example of that, Chair, is the very fact that two permit holders have signed the forestry permits agreement today, of the 14 that have been released, so there is certainty. There is trust. There is commitment from the industry with the Miles government. I do not need the member for Gympie questioning me or the Miles government on trust when the industry has prevailed and put its trust in this government to sign those permits for a further two years—

**Mr PERRETT:** Where is the timber action plan, Minister? You promised one in 2019.

**Mr FURNER:**—of growth in the native timber industry.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, given the Premier's 26 June commitment to undertake detailed work on how best to secure future sustainable supply, how is that different to what was promised in 2019? What has changed?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. As announced on 26 June 2024, long-term sawlog permits for the eastern hardwoods will be issued by the end of July 2024. That was the commitment given and I can confirm that DAF has delivered on that commitment. I think what the member fails to recognise is the change from 2019 to now is the substantive growth in people coming to Queensland and the pressure that has put on this industry—people wanting to build homes, people wanting to accommodate themselves and their businesses in Queensland. No doubt that is a good reason this needs to be reviewed.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, has the cost of timber gone up for those building and renovating because this government has failed to deliver a timber action plan as they promised five years ago?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt many prices have gone up—not just timber but the cost of labour. That is why we have initiatives in place for the cost of living. That is why we are providing the \$1,000 energy rebate, 50-cent fares, free kindy and so on.

**Mr HEAD:** Because they have lost track of the electricity grid.

**Mr FURNER:** The member for Callide chimes in again. He cannot help himself or control himself, poor little fellow. He comes down from the bush and—

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Minister. Let us try not to provoke. I have made it very clear, member for Callide, that there will be no running commentary. Let us keep it neat. Member for Gympie, do you have a follow-up question?

**Mr PERRETT:** I certainly do. Given the Premier's commitment on 26 June that there should be no reduction in current overall timber supply levels between 2025 and 2034, what are the current supply levels?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I will go through the areas in regards to supply. State owned resources supply was about 40 to 50 per cent of the Queensland timber processing sector annual native hardwood requirements and about 95 per cent of its annual native cypress requirements. DAF allocates and sells most state owned native timber through long-term sale permits under the Forestry Act 1959. They include two sale permits for hardwood sawlogs, western hardwoods region. They expire in 2034. Sale permits for the supply of cypress sawlogs for the cypress region will expire in 2037. Sale permits for hardwood sawlogs for South-East Queensland expire on 31st December 2024.

The state is liable to pay that compensation to these permit holders where it is unable to meet its supply commitments under the terms of the long-term permits. DAF also supplies timber from state owned native forests in Central Queensland, North Queensland and Cape York Peninsula under both long-term and short-term sale permits. As well as the more significant quantities of timber products such as sawlogs, DAF also sells smaller quantities of other higher timber products such as poles. DAF currently supplies pole timber under short-term two-year sale permits that are due to expire on 30 November 2024.

State owned native timber production in the South-East Queensland regional plan area will end on 31 December 2024. The recently announced 30-year Queensland Sustainable Timber Industry Framework confirmed that the remaining area of the former South-East Queensland forest agreement area, known as the eastern hardwoods region, the Queensland government will continue to supply native timber until 31 December 2026. Supply contracts of native timber sawlogs have since been provided. As I indicated, two of those have been signed, of the 14 that have been offered. Those contracts will replace the existing ones that expire on 31 December this year. The decisions after 2026 in the eastern hardwood region will be informed by the development implementation of that framework.

It is important to work with the industry and those involved. DAF authorises and oversees selective native timber harvesting operations on state forests and timber reserves where the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation is the custodian of the land management as well as other state lands such as leasehold.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, have supply levels decreased since the previous commitment in 2019 and, if so, by how much?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I want to reiterate this point: a national population increase coupled with declining domestic hardwood timber production has resulted in continued increased demand for hardwood timbers whilst domestic supply continues to decrease. This is placing greater reliance on imports or substitute products. Twenty-five per cent of hardwood electricity poles are sourced from Queensland's state owned native forests. Overall, the forest and timber industry has had an annual gross turnover of around \$4.9 billion, which includes the growing, processing, timber manufacturing and pulp and paper sectors. It is expected that the economic contribution of the forest and timber industry can be significantly grown over the next 20 years. Once again, the previous 1999 contracts did not change. They were always 1999 to 2024.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, what is the new baseline data?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Once again, this will be a matter of working through the framework with industry and stakeholders to see what that data will be. No doubt they are complex issues. We need to work with the industry around that. I can confirm that the development of



the framework is based on the Queensland government's 10-year commitment that there should be no reduction in overall timber supply levels from 2025 to the end of 2034.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, will Queensland plant more plantation forests to ensure no reduction in timber supply?

**Mr FURNER:** In some respects, through you, Chair, that is a hypothetical given the framework and the persons who will be involved as stakeholders on that committee are yet to examine aspects of further growth of forestry in the state. Those decisions about the long-term future of the native timber harvest and the Queensland timber supply will be informed by that statewide analysis as part of the new framework.

**Mr PERRETT:** Given warnings in the past few years that the severe shortage in timber is pushing up renovation and building costs, why is the government delaying until 2025 before ensuring no further reduction in overall timber supply levels?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. That is why we have reissued the 14 permits and, as announced earlier, two of those have already been signed. Once again, we will work with industry and those permit holders and stakeholders to ensure the supply of timber.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, given Queensland is currently a net importer of timber, what representations has the minister made to ensure that imported timber is sourced from countries with sustainable forest practices?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. You would be naive to think we have not been importing timber for decades, Chair.

**Mr PERRETT:** I am aware of that.

**Mr FURNER:** Good. I am pleased you are aware of that.

**Mr PERRETT:** That is why I asked the question: what representations do you make—

**CHAIR:** Let the minister respond.

**Mr PERRETT:** He called me 'naive'. I think it is a fair question.

**Mr FURNER:** Through you, Chair, I did not call you naive, member for Gympie. I said, 'you would be naive', not reflecting upon yourself. If you are that vain, you really need to wake up to yourself; I'll tell you what.

**CHAIR:** Order!

**Mr PERRETT:** I take personal objection to that and ask for that to be withdrawn.

**Mr FURNER:** I withdraw, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Do you have anything to add to that question?

**Mr FURNER:** The importation of anything, including timber, is a matter for the Commonwealth. That is why we developed the native timber advisory group in Queensland. I have been present for several meetings and we have discussed these aspects. I am really pleased—once again reflecting on Minister Watt—that the national timber body has been reinstigated, because we have been able to discuss matters like those the member has raised.

It is critical to grow the Queensland industry. I know that decisions have been made by other states, but certainly there is a need. The member, who represents Gympie and its surrounds, knows how important the timber industry is. That is why we have developed the framework and are working together with the industry to develop further opportunities for native timber and timber supply.

**Mr PERRETT:** How much additional timber is being sourced from overseas?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I might refer that question to my director-general to see whether there is an answer that he can deliver.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. As the minister mentioned before, importing goods from overseas is not something that we track or manage. That is managed and handled through the Commonwealth. I imagine that information would be available through the Commonwealth, if you would like to approach them.

**Mr PERRETT:** So the state is not aware of how much timber comes in from overseas from whatever source?

**Mr Bolton:** That is a Commonwealth issue. It is managed by the Commonwealth.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I am just trying to get my head around this whole issue of timber shortages. We have had policies in this state now for maybe 20 years where people plant trees to offset development, and I assume that is managed, to some degree, through DAF. I am just curious why we are short of timber in a state that has so much natural land resource and the opportunity to grow significant forest estates. Director-General?

**Mr Bolton:** Thank you, member, for the question. It is a good question. It is a varied question in terms of the response. As the minister mentioned before, we are seeing unprecedented growth within Queensland so we are seeing an increased demand for land, whether that is plantation forestry, agricultural land or our state forests. The challenge we have is the increasing demand for timber products to support building and renovation, as the member for Gympie mentioned. That demand, and hence the price increases, is being driven by a range of factors including inflation, labour, fuel, energy costs—all of those sorts of things.

In terms of the size of the estate, there has been some natural reduction of the softwood plantation over time—about three per cent. That is due to a range of issues including the plantation owner—HQPlantations—handing back areas in accordance with its licence after it has rehabilitated the land as well as some minor losses due to other requirements.

With regard to the future, there is an opportunity to expand and grow with plantation timber. We are actively having conversations at the senior level across government and even through meetings with forestry ministers about how we can do that in conjunction with the other states.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I just want to understand. The Beattie-Bligh government sold off all of our forestry and now we are subsidising the industry that we sold the forests to to grow trees again; is that correct? That \$200 million in the timber plan is to pay people to whom we sold the forestry to grow more trees?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I believe you might be referring to the 99-year lease that was sold to HQPlantations. That is still in effect now, and that is the softwood plantation. The Native Timber Action Plan deals with our hardwood. Softwood is mainly used for trusses and other domestic building products. Hardwood is using for flooring, furniture and fine-grain finishes on boutique pieces. Through the \$200 million package, we will work with industry to help it develop and grow and ensure that part of the industry is sustainable.

**Mr PERRETT:** Given that contracts for native timber logging cease at the end of this year, when will the minister respond to advice the government received in October 2022 on the future for native timber?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. The Premier announced a new framework last month, so there is a new proposal in town with regard to engaging with industry. The views and written submissions of the panel informed the panel chair's report, which was provided to the government for consideration in late 2022. On 26 June, as I indicated, the Premier made an announcement with regard to the development of a 30-year Queensland sustainable timber industry framework for the future of forestry.

I have conveyed my thanks to the chair for the valued contribution of the panel and advised that their future engagement may be sought. The new framework may seek participation of a new panel to consider the industry's future with regard to its continued growth.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, has the inclusion of green activists on the Native Timber Advisory Panel impeded the long-term sustainability of the native timber industry here in this state?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. There was a person on the original panel who I guess you could describe as a conservationist. On the two occasions I attended as a participant on the panel, I saw no direct correlation of their trying to reflect upon their views. In general, like any panel, they seek a consensus from the participants on the panel on what is best. Overall, they worked together quite collaboratively and sought an outcome as a panel that would be suitable for the sustainability of forestry in Queensland.

**Mr PERRETT:** How will the government increase the supply of timber to build the houses we need?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Through investing \$200 million and giving a commitment for a further 10 years at least, this government is addressing the growth of the industry and meeting Queensland's needs, whether it be for housing, power poles, logging, sawlogs—whatever the industry needs. The outcomes are a matter of consideration under the framework.

**CHAIR:** I will flip it around a little bit. I can see the member for Mirani is champing at the bit.

**Mr ANDREW:** Platypus Timbers, Smith Sawmills, O'Brien's Saw Mill, Nebo sawmills—what option and what access do sawmillers have to any of the thousands of hectares of renewable timber being cleared right now? What has this department done to give these mills, or any miller in Queensland, access to take timber from the sites of renewable projects that are being cleared?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I stand to be corrected but we engaged with some of these stakeholders when in Mackay at one of our regional cabinet meetings. The state owned resources supply up to 50 per cent of the Queensland timber processing sector's annual native hardwood requirements. About 95 per cent of that is annual native cypress requirements. DAF allocates and sells most of the state owned native timber through long-term sale permits, issued under the Forestry Act 1959. Most of these long-term permits authorised native timber harvesting in South-East Queensland, the western hardwood region, the cypress region and South-West Queensland. DAF also supplies timber for state owned native forests in Central Queensland.

**Mr ANDREW:** Point of order, Chair: I am specifically referring to the remnant vegetation on the tops of mountains that are being cleared for renewable projects. Does this department repurpose the timber that is being cleared here in Queensland from land used or cleared for renewable energy? Yes or no, sir?

**CHAIR:** Just allow the minister to answer.

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I might refer to the director-general to handle the specifics around that.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any large-scale clearing undertaken at this point in time. There is still a lot of planning that is happening across government. Certainly the conversations I am having with my counterparts are around that issue: how do we actually make use of any vegetation that is cleared? My department is working with other parts of industry, including the mining sector, looking at how they do some of their clearing and whether or not there are opportunities for the re-use of the timber that they clear, including with some of our First Nations timber producers.

**Mr ANDREW:** It just seems to be a double standard to lock up everything but to clear all of that timber and to not even use it is absolutely ridiculous.

**CHAIR:** We will take that as commentary.

**Mr ANDREW:** On my register of interest I am a master fisherman, so I have no licence or quota attached to my name. Concerning the fishing industry, the Bats brothers rang me from Cairns the other day. They told me that the government have capped how much they are going to pay for nets from professional fishermen when they revoke or take away their licences going forward. There have been suicides. There has been a whole raft of bad things going on within the industry in the mental health space. Why will the government not pay their fair share to resume the nets and the apparatus that professional fishermen use and have used to feed this state since we began? Can you please explain that?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. There are a number of structural adjustment packages that are currently underway. I can give you some information on that. I will pick up more specifically about your concerns around the nets.

There are three structural adjustments at the moment being managed through the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority, QRIDA. Stage 1 round 1 opened on 14 December last year and closed on 30 April this year. Stage 1 round 2 opened on 17 May 2024 and closed on 30 June 2024. Stage 1 includes payments and grants for advice related to the scheme, the surrender of commercial fishing licences and symbols, the surrender of quota units and loss of income. Stage 2 applications opened on 17 May and close on 31 July. They include payments for former skipper and crew, a further surrender of primary commercial fishing licences and symbols, payments for loss of income and also loss of income around the net licences, aquarium licences and hammerheads.

Stage 3—and this is getting to your point in particular—of the scheme opened on 31 May and closes on 30 January next year. It includes payments and grants for affected supply chain businesses, the surrender of fishing nets, the retrofit of boats that are used in large mesh gillnet fishing and to help business diversification. There are very set requirements about what types of net can and cannot be purchased or sold back through this scheme. I attended a workshop with commercial fishers about two weeks ago. That was brought to my attention. I was not aware that this was creating some issues. I provided an undertaking to the commercial fishers at that meeting that I would look into it. I have had

conversations with the team. We have an interdepartmental committee that is set up and governing this. They are currently looking at potential changes to the scheme that would broaden the application.

In terms of a broad principle, we do not want to see these nets left out in the broader community. I think all stakeholders, whether it is commercial fishers, recreational fishers or the environmental sector, would like to see as many of those nets purchased as possible. We are working through that.

**Mr ANDREW:** This is what we do not want to see—black market industries and those nets being re-used. If you are going to do it, treat them with respect. If we can pay them the right money, guess what? You will get what you want. That is all I wanted to say.

**CHAIR:** Minister, can you advise the committee on the status of the aquaculture industry in Queensland and how is it supported by the Miles government?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the honourable member for his question. As a member from the Townsville region, you would be familiar with Ornatas just north of the Townsville township.

The Queensland aquaculture industry has come a long way from the first recorded attempt to farm mullet on Moreton Island in 1951. The Miles government supports the future development and growth of an ecologically sustainable, diverse and innovative aquaculture industry.

The Lobegeiger report *Aquaculture production summary for Queensland 2022-23* revealed the total production value of the Queensland industry was \$263 million, employing around 855 full-time staff. It continues to be one of the fastest growing primary industries in the state. Currently, there are about 400 registered aquaculture authority holders in Queensland, with the most valuable sectors being prawn at 81 per cent and barramundi at 14 per cent, as well as new investment into species such as cobia.

In March 2023, the government announced \$7.5 million for the Aquaculture Transformation Project, invested over five years to boost research, development and improve regulation, and establish an aquaculture incubator at the Bribie Island Research Centre. The project includes the establishment of a ministerial aquaculture forum to oversee and drive improved industry engagement and the identification of priorities.

As part of measures to build a sustainable future for the fishing industry and protect the Great Barrier Reef, the government committed a further \$15 million to accelerate and adopt innovative best practice sustainable aquaculture in Queensland. In 2021, the Queensland government completed the designation of over 9,000 hectares of land for aquaculture development. The Queensland government is now identifying marine areas for aquaculture development. These marine aquaculture development areas will be suitable for non-intensive aquaculture development such as oysters and seaweed farming. Land-based aquaculture development areas are located in coastal areas that are suitable for farming a range of marine species in ponds that require access to seawater to operate.

Details of aquaculture development areas are available through the State Planning Policy interactive mapping system to support local councils to consider them in their own planning schemes. The identification of these areas assists companies seeking to determine locations across the state that represent the best opportunities for aquaculture development. Over 60 per cent of Queensland seafood is imported. Promoting and growing aquaculture in the state will provide Queensland grown product for Queensland consumers.

A key recommendation of the 2023 Future Fishing Taskforce was to develop a whole-of-government aquaculture policy and strategy that identifies research priorities, best practice regulatory approaches and which provides clearer direction for the future of the aquaculture industry in Queensland. I can advise the committee that the *Queensland Aquaculture Strategy 2024-2034* paper has now been released and is out for consultation for a period of four weeks. Following consultation, government will consider the feedback and look to finalise the strategy as soon as possible.

**CHAIR:** Apologies to the member for Maiwar. We were in crossbench time. We will go to you next.

**Mr BERKMAN:** In my prehearing question on notice regarding Queensland's Shark Control Program, I asked what practical work the department had conducted to test the efficacy of electronic warning devices, colloquially known as whale pingers, and how had their efficacy been tested on shark nets and drum lines. Can I confirm with the director-general that the answer did not address or did not allude to any primary research the department is doing? Am I to take it that that is not happening—that the answer is, in fact, no?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. The short answer is that we already use pingers on our Shark Control Program equipment. We are not doing further research into that technology. There is quite a bit of research that is already available on them. We are focusing our current research and development on other activities that would potentially be suitable to Queensland conditions.

**Mr BERKMAN:** In 2023 alone, as I understand it, the department's data indicates that there were at least 68 instances of animals found predated upon in shark nets and drum lines—that is, they had been attacked. Given the minister's concerns about swimmer safety, has the department raised with the minister this clear evidence that shark control equipment actually attracts sharks?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I would like to start by saying there is no evidence that we are aware of that suggests that the apparatus actually attracts sharks in.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Sorry, if I could stop you there. How else do you interpret the presence of animals that have been predated upon stuck in shark nets and on drum lines?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. Sharks are very much opportunistic feeders. If there are sharks in the area and there is an animal that is stuck then they will predate on those animals.

**Mr BERKMAN:** That brings me back to the central thrust of the question. If sharks are attracted opportunistically to feed on those animals that are stuck in shark nets, surely that creates some greater risk around the attraction of sharks by the presence of the shark control equipment.

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. I did ask that very question of the experts a couple of years ago. The advice they gave me at the time was that the attraction is very localised. If there is a shark within the area it will come to that particular source, but they do not draw sharks from large distances away. It is not like it is going to be drawing sharks from kilometres away. It is going to be localised within the local vicinity.

**Mr BERKMAN:** In the prehearing question on notice I asked about the decision not to remove shark nets from Queensland borders during migration season which has in turn led to multiple whale entanglements. Can I ask again very specifically: was the premier at the time, Annastacia Palaszczuk, involved in that decision in 2020?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. That is a question I cannot answer. You may like to redirect that question to the minister.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I will put that question directly to the minister, if I might. Was former premier Palaszczuk involved in any way in the decision in 2020 not to remove shark nets from Queensland borders during whale migration season?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. The member quite rightly raises the question around whale migration and the interaction with those mammals and shark control equipment. To my knowledge there was no decision—certainly that I am privy to—by the former premier with regard to any attempt to have those nets removed.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I will ask one final question, if I might. Thank you for your indulgence, Chair. Director-General, can you outline for me what is the department's approach to the pursuit of penalties under section 31 of the Fisheries Act in circumstances where a person enters an exclusion zone for the sole purpose of rescuing a whale that has become entangled in shark control equipment?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. That particular section of the act is very important because shark nets in particular, and drum lines as well, are quite dangerous apparatus. There have been deaths associated with this type of gear. People have become entangled in shark nets and drowned. The other aspect is: if there is an entanglement, particularly a large animal like a whale is very powerful and anyone entering the water is placing themselves at significant risk. Those exclusion zones are there for public safety primarily and also animal welfare. If a whale is entangled and people go in there to try and interact with them, they can cause greater distress and more entanglement with the entrapped whale. We have a specifically trained marine animal rescue team that we deploy to these types of rescue work. We work in partnership with Sea World. They are trained to mitigate that risk to themselves and release the animals as quickly and humanely as possible.

**Mr FURNER:** May I complement that response. I have been down to the Southport depot and engaged with the Stranded Marine Animal Rescue Team. They have very sharp knives in terms of spontaneously releasing nets and equipment off whales. In some cases those nets or equipment have not been as a result of the shark control program in Queensland; the whales have brought that equipment up from as far south as beyond Victoria. It is very important that people understand that these are trained people with the relevant equipment to release those mammals as quickly as possible.

**CHAIR:** We will go back to opposition questions.

**Ms LEAHY:** Director-General, I refer to the quarry material native title meetings, which I understand you would be familiar with. Have any parcels of land or types of land in Queensland been identified as not being subjected to future acts under the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993, given that only a third of Queensland has a native title holder?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. This is a very complex area.

**Ms LEAHY:** We know; that is why we are asking.

**Mr Bolton:** The key issue is that land falls in a number of characterisations: land could have a native title designation on it and we know who the parties are that we need to engage with; there might be areas that are subject to a claim and then we need to work with those potential claimants; and there are areas that are not subject to a claim.

**Ms LEAHY:** Would you call those undetermined areas?

**Mr Bolton:** That is correct. We have processes through a team we have set up specifically to deal with the native title issue for quarrying. There are various processes we do. Where we know the claimants or potential claimants, we will look to enter into a voluntary agreement with them. That enables us to continue to authorise the removal of quarry material for that local government. In areas that are undetermined, we have a process under the Native Title Act where we can go through a general determination process and look to draw out where there might be interests within that land. It is also important to note there are lands where native title has already been addressed, and we work with the various local councils to identify whether there are existing ILUAs we can bolt onto and add their quarry pits to or there are other forms of land tenure where native title has either been extinguished or addressed that might have quarry material where we can authorise the extraction of quarry materials for that council.

**CHAIR:** I am sorry, member. I know that you probably have a line of questioning but I probably need to give these guys a question as well. I will come back to you. Member for Barron River?

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Minister, I have a question in relation to women in recreational fishing. Can the minister inform the committee how the government is encouraging women to take up recreational fishing in Queensland?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. No doubt the Miles government supports women. That is evident by looking at the composition of the government benches. But it does not stop there. I am pleased to remind members that in 2022 Fisheries Queensland launched the Women in Recreational Fishing Network. It has thrived over the last two years, encouraging women and girls of all ages to take up fishing. Fifteen leaders across Queensland were chosen last year to be part of the network as ambassadors to promote, educate and encourage women to participate in recreational fishing. DAF allocated \$140,000 in 2023-24 to support the development of this network.

When I spoke to this question at last year's estimates hearing I advised the committee there were 1,200 members. I can now advise that in the last 12 months the network has grown by 60 per cent, generating an additional 700 members. A visit to the women in recreational fishing Facebook page tells a fantastic story. Last month there were great photos of trophy fish like the metre-plus barra caught by member Sharney Lennox at Lake Monduran in the Wide Bay-Burnett region, Melinda Henderson and her kilogram-plus bream caught in estuary fishing on soft plastics, and that cracking Currumbin ladies day with some metre-plus threadfin salmon.

For those women who might be inspired to get into the sport, there were ladies introductory fishing days in April 2024. A number of women turned up at Bongaree on Bribie Island to wet a line and get some helpful tips. On the Gold Coast, eight women attended a day-long boat-driving course and were awarded their boat licences, opening up new horizons for many who were previously confined to fishing off the bank or jetty or on the beach. We have just had the Women's Fishing Classic, from 11 May to 14 June this year. I particularly want to thank member Samantha Beckman for supporting Biosecurity Queensland. Some months ago she posted advice to members to be on the lookout for the freshwater gold clam, a significant marine pest which has been identified at Colleges Crossing and Savages Crossing on the Brisbane River.

With approximately one million fishers across Queensland, recreational fishing contributes more than \$2.5 billion to the state's economy and supports about 23,600 jobs. I encourage all members of the committee to spread the word. Invite the women in your life to try something new and different and join the Women in Recreational Fishing Network—you just might get hooked.

**Mr MARTIN:** Will the minister outline what ways the Queensland government provides information to recreational fishers?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Many Queenslanders love to fish. I do as well, but I only get that opportunity about once a year. There may be 900,000 or so recreational fishers in Queensland, and as the common personalised number plate says they would 'rather be fishing'. I am sure that right now the committee would prefer to be enjoying the Queensland outdoors and wetting a line. Thanks to the Miles government, in the next break members can check the fisheries app Qld Fishing 2.0 while they have a rod in the water. If members of the committee have not already done so, I recommend they download the app now or at least as soon as the estimates session is finished.

What was a great app is now even better as there have been some upgrades to it. These include: the 'My fishing' personalised feature replaces 'My fish photo'; the ability to input recreational catch and depredation data; provision of environmental data for fishing trips; stats so fishers can see what they have caught historically; social media sharing of photos and basic information from fishing trips; the ability to set preferences for favourite species, boat ramps and stocked impoundments; improved fish identification for 10 species—this is because we re-trained the artificial intelligence from photos submitted by fishers; and, my favourite, choose your own adventure, which is fill out the minimum data required or go one step further and add some extra data to get better fishing stats, photos and comments in your fishing history.

This app is the old fishing guide in your pocket but it is on your phone. This allows fishers to have greater, more current and specific information there and then at their fingertips. Since the app was launched, it has been downloaded 180,000 times. This just proves how popular it is, as well as the need to keep encouraging more downloads.

The other aspect I am asking the committee to consider when they are out fishing—as well as members of the public—is to report shark depredation, which is a key area of research that needs more data from recreational fishers. More data from the recreational sector will help better inform the assessment and management processes relating to fisheries in Queensland. It is a very simple process, and I encourage everyone listening and the committee to download or update the app now.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will now go to the member for Warrego.

**Ms LEAHY:** I have a further question to the director-general. What advice can the department give to local governments in relation to a pathway that is available to them to negotiate ILUA agreements in areas that are unclaimed or undetermined with respect to native title? Is there a pathway, and do they have to actually negotiate an ILUA or can they just have an agreement?

**Mr Bolton:** I thank the member for the question. We need to resolve native title in those circumstances, and there is a process that can be followed through the Native Title Act. If the member has specific councils in mind, I would be very happy to put them in contact with our team and we can work with them about that process and what we need to do in terms of advertising, looking for general consent and then working with them to keep them moving forward.

I have a bit more information. With regards to councils, we have been working very closely with all the affected councils with permits that expire out to the end of next year. They have been our immediate priority so that they can continue to access quarry material. Of those, 87 per cent have been able to have quarry pits authorised, so the vast majority are still continuing to work.

**Ms LEAHY:** Is that because they have ILUAs or they have been able to reach an agreement? What has been the mechanism to resolve that?

**Mr Bolton:** Both. Some of them have existing ILUAs that we can add these quarry pit agreements to. For others, we have had to negotiate with councils and the relevant native title holder to establish an ILUA. In the interim, we have also been able to secure agreements that enable us to continue to issue the permits, which means councils can continue while we negotiate the ILUAs. There is a very small proportion where we have had to go out and seek determination because there is no native title determined at this point in time.

**Mr FURNER:** If I may assist the member in regards to that question: it is an important question and I know many of the local council areas you represent are keen on this matter. More than half—in fact 56 per cent—of local governments requiring quarry pits are unaffected because councils have existing ILUAs in place or other native title requirements have been satisfied. I commend the councils in your area for their active involvement.

**Ms LEAHY:** Minister, just to follow up, have those councils been advised that they do not require them, or does that come through negotiations?

**Mr FURNER:** The department set up a specific taskforce in terms of not only relevant councils but also relevant departments. I want to put on the record many thanks to the resources department for their involvement in additional staff to make sure they are able to collaborate with these councils in resolving these areas of requirement. I also wrote to councils in that respect as well.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, I refer to SDS page 7, funding for fisheries and forestry industry development, and the Premier and Treasurer's 26 June commitment to a \$200 million Sustainable Timber Industry Framework. I note that, after years of silence on this issue, suddenly the announcement was made in response to the LNP's commitment to a timber action plan to secure timber for Queensland's future. Minister, where is the budget allocation for the \$200 million Sustainable Timber Industry Framework?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt if you reflect on any budget announcement, it is a budget set in terms of a projection of what the government may spend in regards to the relevant part of the portfolio. If you look at the estimated outcomes, you will find in most cases, if not all cases, it is greater and this will no doubt form the basis of that announcement in the future of an allocation of the \$200 million. It is an allocation that has not been put in the current budget but no doubt will be a commitment for the future for 2025 after the discussions commence. Once again, through you, Chair, I ask the member to study the SDS in regards to looking at a budget and looking at what actuals have been spent. You will generally find the actuals are greater than what the budget outcome has been projected.

**Mr PERRETT:** I was just looking for the \$200 million, but anyway. I have a follow-up question to the minister. Over how many years will the \$200 million be allocated?

**Mr FURNER:** I think that is clear in the announcement of what the Premier has indicated in his press release, of 10 years. Like many occasions, we see expenditure. One thing the Miles government always does is look after the agriculture sector. If it needs more funding, that will be a matter for the CBRC or cabinet to make those considerations

**Mr PERRETT:** It was not clear in the media release over how many years that \$200 million was allocated. Further to that, Minister, can you give the committee a break down of the \$200 million, including what it will be spent on and in what areas?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt, through you, Chair, that is a matter for the taskforce or the group for consideration in addressing the future of native timber. That will be the areas that I indicated earlier: securing sustainable timber supply; adding value to forest and timber supply chains; realising the value of forest related markets; skilling a future forest workforce and strong timber industry; growing Queensland's protected area estate; and backing First Nations forestry jobs and businesses. They are the six attributes. I have no funding allocation to those but that will be a matter for the timber industry framework to provide once that is up and running. They will sort through the allocation of the \$200 million allocated to those six principles.

**Mr PERRETT:** As a further follow-up question: Minister, the press release came out from the government and I did read it with great anticipation when I saw it come out. Thank you, Minister, for tabling this document earlier today with a photo of the Treasurer, the Premier, the member for Maryborough and a couple of others. There was one notable absence and that was you, Minister. I wonder why the minister was excluded from the announcement both in the press release and in Maryborough.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** You were saving money on private jets.

**Mr FURNER:** No, you do not need a jet to go to Maryborough. I thank the member for his question. As the member would know, he has seen me on previous occasions coming into this chamber with a walking stick at times because of a severe injury to my knees. I had a torn meniscus initially in my left knee which I had surgery for. On Tuesday of this week I had a further procedure to my right knee with two torn menisci. That is the first reason I was not in a position to attend the announcement in Maryborough with the Premier and the Deputy Premier.

The other two reasons are: the Premier and the Miles government have always understood the importance of the native timber industry in Queensland, and that is why they returned to the very place of the cabinet announcement in 1999 where the initial announcement with regard to the future of the timber industry was made. They are the three reasons I was not in attendance, but you can rest assured, member, that the Miles government treats the timber industry in Queensland as paramount in terms of its future sustainability.



**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you, Minister. I accept that explanation about your physical condition for not being there, but I was a bit surprised that there were not some words included in this major announcement from the minister in that press release. I cannot understand why the minister responsible for overseeing this would have been excluded.

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I can think of a copious number of times, Chair, when the shadow minister has been absent from many places I have been to. In fact, I reflect back to when the member for Callide was at the watermelon festival just last year and the shadow minister for agriculture was absent. Certainly, the member for Callide was there, as were many other shadow ministers. If you want to play these pathetic little games—

**Mr PERRETT:** Chair, with all due respect, I am not given private jets to fly around in.

**Mr FURNER:**—I can go tit-for-tat all day long.

**CHAIR:** Well, you know—

**Mr PERRETT:** I was referring to the press release and the fact that he was excluded.

**Mr FURNER:** Chair, I have heard the newspaper refer to him as the Sergeant Schultz of the LNP.

**Mr PERRETT:** Well, I am certainly not missing and I do have a direct connection, Minister, as you know, to agriculture and I understand it very well. The questions that came directly from industry about this announcement demonstrate that they do not understand. That is why I have asked very legitimate questions about how many years this \$200 million is allocated over, and you have refused to answer the question.

**CHAIR:** Member, he has answered the question.

**Mr PERRETT:** Not very well.

**CHAIR:** I do not want to get into this repetitive questioning. How about we move along?

**Mr PERRETT:** I will. I note that shortages of hardwood timber are impacting the supply of power poles interstate. What assurances does the minister provide that the loss in future hardwood timber supplies will not impact the need for power poles for the new electricity transmission corridors in Queensland?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. No doubt that will be a matter of extreme importance when the taskforce commences with regard to working through that particular aspect, but I can assure the member that we are committed to the sustainability of the forest timber industry and the regional jobs it protects. Once again, as the member is aware, there is \$200 million for a 30-year Queensland Sustainable Timber Industry Framework. That framework will discuss key aspects, whether it be power poles or anything else it is confronted with, and make sure those needs are met. That is why, as of this week, we issued the 14 permits. As I indicated in today's hearing, two of those have already been signed. We will work with the industry to make sure those provisions are provided into the future. That will be a part of the framework in identifying those areas.

**Mr PERRETT:** Doubling back to that announcement in Maryborough, did the Premier and Treasurer fly there in the private jet?

**CHAIR:** Do not even go there. I am going to rule it out of order. Move on with your questioning, please, member for Gympie.

**Mr PERRETT:** Has the minister consulted the industry about their requirements as part of the Sustainable Timber Industry Framework?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. I will table the letter that the Premier has written to Timber Queensland with regard to these areas. Unfortunately, I have only one copy, but I am sure staff may be able to provide copies. That clearly outlines the commitment of the Miles government with regard to the timber industry.

**CHAIR:** Is leave granted?

**Mr PERRETT:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted.

**Mr PERRETT:** I will move on in the interest of time, noting we are rapidly running out of time. Minister, I refer to the government's decision to phase out gillnets in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the rezoning of the Great Sandy Marine Park in the implementation of the net-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria. How much of the Queensland government's \$125 million structural adjustment package has been committed or paid?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. Obviously QRIDA is providing the distribution of funding of the \$125 million, but there are a number of areas in terms of the surrenders, if that is the question the member is asking.

**Mr PERRETT:** I can repeat it, if you like.

**Mr FURNER:** I think the director-general covered off on this earlier, but I will repeat those.

**Mr PERRETT:** It was specific to the \$125 million—how much of it was paid.

**Mr FURNER:** It was part of it, yes.

**Mr PERRETT:** It was quite specific.

**Mr FURNER:** Correct. As of 19 July, QRIDA has received 1,330 applicants and, of that, there has been \$51.1 million provided. For stage 2, which opened on 17 May 2024 and closes on 31 July, there have been payments made for skipper and crew support, the surrender of primary commercial fishing licences N3, the loss of income for N3s and N11s, loss of income for those holding A1 and A2 licences, and hammerhead shark loss of income. As of 19 July 2024, QRIDA received 149 applications under stage 2 and approved 49 applications to the value of approximately \$4.3 million. Stage 3 of the scheme is open to applications from 31 May 2024 and closes 30 January 2025, and that is for supply chain business diversification, the surrender of fishing nets, and the refit of the boats used in large mesh gillnet fishing. As of 19 July 2024, QRIDA has received 36 applications for stage 3. They are currently in the registration process and will be assessed soon.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, how many compensation claims have been paid?

**Mr FURNER:** I think that is a bit of a repetition on the numbers I have already indicated. They have already been explained to the member.

**Mr PERRETT:** I was asking for a specific number. Surely the department would know or, Minister, you should know how many have been paid. Surely someone would know. Surely someone is keeping track, seeing as there is \$125 million allocated to it.

**Mr FURNER:** I will go over that again. It is \$51.1 million for the approval of 1,081 applications. That is for the first stage, which represents the advice related to the scheme—surrender of the primary commercial fishing licences and fishing symbols, and the surrender of quota units and loss of income. Then you go to stage 2, which was opened on 17 May and closes on 31 July. As of 19 July 2024, there have been a further 149 applications received through QRIDA for stage 2 and 49 applications have been approved, to the value of approximately \$4.3 million. We are currently dealing with stage 3, which closes on 31 January 2025. Until it closes, we will not know the complete expenditure of that.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, you have correctly indicated the number there, but how many of the currently applications are still outstanding or to be assessed?

**Mr FURNER:** In the current stage 3—

**Mr PERRETT:** That have not closed off, Minister. I note there has been an extension on some, but for those closed off, how many are still outstanding or to be assessed?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. It may be appropriate to have the director-general get QRIDA to see if that can be answered.

**Mr Bolton:** Thank you for the question. I will ask Cameron MacMillan, the CEO of QRIDA, to come to the table and answer that.

**Mr MacMillan:** I thank the member for the question. With the minister's approval, we will take that question on notice.

**Mr PERRETT:** That is fair.

**CHAIR:** Do you have any further questions?

**Mr PERRETT:** I have plenty of questions. Minister, given the impact range from small operators to those employing large numbers of staff, how does the one-size-fits-all approach relate to this particular compensation package?

**Mr FURNER:** Through you, Chair, can I get some clarity around that question in terms of what it relates to, please?

**Mr PERRETT:** It relates to that compensation package—it is part of that \$125 million—and how it is being assessed and is there a one-size-fits-all approach? The feedback that I have been getting is that there has been concern. A member previously raised that there has been some frustration around

it. That is why I was seeking clarity about the compensation process because I have fishers in my region who are affected, as I mentioned before, and I have made those representations. They have raised those issues with me and I am seeking clarification, Minister.

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. To my knowledge, certainly the feedback we are receiving is that there is very great satisfaction in terms of the fishers who have been dealing with QRIDA, but it may be appropriate for the DG to explain how that engagement has been operating and any concerns that they may be aware of.

**Mr Bolton:** Thank you, Minister. I thank the member for the question. Each of the schemes that are managed through QRIDA have a set of guidelines that determine how someone might apply and qualify for that particular scheme. The schemes were developed in consultation with industry and, unfortunately, when it comes to these types of schemes you cannot fit every single type of situation—there are going to be some outliers. It is not possible to draw up a scheme that fits everyone. If there are some specific issues or concerns, I would be very happy to speak offline and to talk to the fisher who may have concerns and see what we might be able to do to support them through this process.

**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you. Minister, we understand that the future fishing taskforce recommendations that have been adopted by cabinet are being actioned through the interdepartmental committee; can you confirm this is correct?

**Mr FURNER:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr PERRETT:** When will these recommendations be actioned; what is the timeframe?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for the question. That would be an matter for the future fisheries taskforce and cabinet for consideration.

**Mr PERRETT:** Minister, I refer to page 1 of the SDS and the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-27. What reforms are left to be implemented?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. The Sustainable Fisheries Strategy has probably been one of the milestones of the Miles government in regard to reforms. As I indicated earlier, there has been the announcement of the recreational fishing app 2.0, deployment of a network of fish aggregating devices and implementation of the 17 harvest strategies. Fisheries Queensland remains on track to deliver all 33 actions in the strategy by 2027.

Key remaining items include the independent onboard monitoring for high-risk fisheries and the development of a harvest strategy for the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery. The continued development of the strategy will support sustainable fisheries, a successful commercial fishing industry and a vibrant and recreational sector in Queensland. The actions achieved in relation to setting sustainable catch limits include: 68 assessment works for 31 species and 42 fish stocks; prohibiting the taking of scallops in the trawl region exempt from southern off-trawl regions; the implementation of new management arrangements for east coast Spanish mackerel fisheries and so on.

**Mr PERRETT:** I am happy. I was curious to see what was still to be implemented out of that strategy. I am aware of what has happened, but I was curious to see whether there were any outstanding reforms as part of that strategy still to be implemented in the next couple of years.

**Mr FURNER:** I understand that progress is made readily available to the public on the DAF website.

**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you, Chair. Director-General, in your previous role, you last year advised estimates that the department has taken on some of the concerns that were raised through the review of the Spanish mackerel stock assessment and how it may apply or may not apply in the Gulf of Carpentaria king threadfin stock assessment which 'we will be releasing in the near future'. Director-General, has the Gulf of Carpentaria king threadfin stock assessment been released and what was the outcome?

**Mr Bolton:** I would like to thank the member for the question. I will get to the relevant piece. You are quite right that at the last estimates I noted that the stock assessment had been completed in 2021 and that that was to be used for management decisions in the Gulf of Carpentaria. That particular stock was estimated to be at five per cent of unfished biomass levels. Normally that would trigger the fisheries to be closed but, based on advice from scientists, we decided to collect more data. Before the completion and publication of the updated king threadfin stock assessment, we engaged independent scientists Dr Simon Hoyle and Dr Alistair Dunn. One of those experts was engaged by the fishery industry itself. They were engaged to help review the stock assessment for the king threadfin salmon. Their significant contribution to the stock assessment has enhanced the scientific robustness of the

model. The updated stock assessment was completed in May 2024 and it is due to be released soon. At the moment, subject to the minister's endorsement, I can give you a preview about where things are at, but at the moment the stock assessment shows the Gulf of Carpentaria stock to be between 13 and 44 per cent of unfished biomass. It is likely to be above 20 per cent. That means that we will be looking to make management actions in consultation with the industry as we move forward.

**Mr PERRETT:** A follow-up question to the director-general. Has there been any further stock assessment of the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery since the changes? If so, what is the outcome?

**Mr Bolton:** I would like to thank the member for the question. You are quite right, we have updated the stock assessment. We had initially programmed to have that redone at the end of next year not only off the back of the current stock assessment but also the work that was done in the Gulf of Carpentaria. We are looking to take the learnings from that and incorporate it into the new Spanish mackerel stock assessment. I can advise that the minister has asked us to bring that forward so we are looking to bring that stock assessment forward to the beginning of next year. That will incorporate the learnings from the Gulf of Carpentaria, including the scientific release of those individuals, and we will release it in the new year. One of the benefits of the revised stock assessment is that we will have the additional research data that was undertaken by CSIRO. There has been four years of close seasons which will aid in rebuilding the stock in that period. We are hoping to get some good outcomes through that process, or through the next stock assessment.

**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you.

**Mr ANDREW:** There are 900,000 recreational fishers in Queensland. How will the adoption of the 75 per cent reduction in emissions affect people in my area who crab in the creeks and fish in the offshore areas with outboard motors? Will that reduce these people's access to these areas going forward?

**CHAIR:** I will allow some latitude.

**Mr ANDREW:** It is a real question. It is an emissions reduction of 75 per cent across the board going out to 2035. It will impact farming, fishing and everything that pushes out any emissions. Can we please understand what this means to our recreational fishers?

**Mr FURNER:** I am not certain who that question is directed to.

**Mr ANDREW:** The director-general, minister or whoever would like to—

**CHAIR:** I will allow some latitude but there is literally one minute because we have to take some questions on notice, we have one question over here and a wrap-up in 10 minutes. Do you want to try to respond to that?

**Mr FURNER:** I am still uncertain whether it is directed towards me or the director-general.

**CHAIR:** I think he said either.

**Mr ANDREW:** Minister?

**Mr FURNER:** Sure. We are on record as supporting our recreational and commercial fishers and that is evident in our Sustainable Fisheries Strategy. Our strategy is recognised throughout the nation as the leading sustainable fisheries process. We will continue making sure that people can wet a line. As a keen fisher myself—as I indicated, only once a year—I am keen to see this industry grow. That is why we are doing so many initiatives in terms of supporting the growth of sustainable fisheries and making sure they are there for our children and grandchildren into the future.

**Mr ANDREW:** That is great to hear. Thanks, Minister.

**Mr MARTIN:** Minister, I understand that opera house yabby traps are still used legally in this state while some other jurisdictions have banned them. Have you given any consideration to Queensland's position on that?

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. In 2015 the Queensland government took action to reduce the impact of opera house traps on bycatch species including platypus, water rats, water dragons and turtles, following a review of the state's management of freshwater fishing. The rules required that entrances to funnel traps, including opera house traps, round traps and concertina traps must not exceed five centimetres in all dimensions and must be made of a rigid material for non-tidal waters east of the Great Dividing Range and east of the Gore Highway in Southern Queensland. In all other waters and listed impoundments, entrances must not exceed 10 centimetres in all dimensions. Restrictions regarding the use of solid floats with a minimum dimension of 15 centimetres were also

introduced to reduce the impact of ghost fishing by lost or abandoned funnel traps. Open-top pyramid traps were also introduced as an option for recreational fishers to use in all fresh waters in Queensland.

Fisheries Queensland released a discussion paper to explore the possibility of phasing out the use of opera house traps in Queensland waters, which closed on 9 May 2024. Fisheries Queensland is preparing a consultation report based on the feedback received, which will be considered by government along with possible regulatory changes in due course. Any changes would be accompanied by an education and awareness program around the use of alternative fishing methods and apparatus in Queensland. In recent weeks I have received a number of letters from students at the Maleny State School, some illustrated. They are campaigning for the removal of the opera house traps. I thank them for their advocacy. Their letters will form part of my deliberation when I consider the results of the consultation.

I do encourage members of the public to continue to report any suspected unlawful fishing in Queensland, including the use of illegal apparatus, to the 24-hour Fishwatch hotline on 1800017116. This information helps to improve compliance and evaluate the effectiveness of fishing rules.

**CHAIR:** We have approximately six or seven minutes left. You have some questions on notice. Do you want to address those now and then provide a wrap-up?

**Mr FURNER:** Yes, thank you. I would certainly like to have them addressed.

**Mr Bolton:** Very quickly, I will correct my answer to the member with regard to whether or not we record or monitor imports. We do not record that, but we do monitor it through the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, ABARES. They publish data on that which we keep track of. At the moment it is tracking at about 33 per cent, or about a third, of the timber that we use in Queensland.

There was a question about the number of applications that are currently under assessment by QRIDA that are not yet determined. There are 408 applications to the value of \$16.1 million still under assessment. I believe that addresses the questions taken on notice.

**CHAIR:** There are six minutes to go. Do you think I can squeeze one in? How long do you need, Minister?

**Mr FURNER:** I think we can give it a shot. I only need about a minute and a half.

**CHAIR:** I will ask this question because it is relative to my area. I understand Queensland has taken over as the freshwater barra sports destination of Australia and freshwater impoundment. Can you inform the committee what is driving this exciting fish tourism experience? I declare I have only ever caught one barra and it was at a barra farm in Townsville.

**Mr FURNER:** I thank the member for his question. It is a great story. I have caught a few barra but not in a fish farm.

Queensland's stocked dams and weirs, supported by the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme, offer fantastic world-class recreational freshwater fishing experiences and our regional fishing trails are a great way to explore Queensland. This experience is estimated to contribute more than \$333 million to the state economy annually, luring interstate and domestic tourists to the regions. With more than 60 dams and weirs across five state regions of North Queensland, Central Queensland, Wide Bay-Burnett, South-East Queensland and the Murray-Darling in the south-west, there are plenty of places to wet a line.

I can advise the member that it is not just barra but a range of species that are attracting tourists to the regions. They include Australian bass, Murray cod, Mary River cod, sooty grunter, saratoga and golden perch. Now, in late breaking news, I can also advise that up to 10,000 jungle perch fingerlings, an iconic Queensland native, are due to be released into Lake Kurwongbah and the Enoggera Reservoir as part of a three-year trial to have them approved as an impoundment species. Peter Faust Dam in the north, Kinchant Dam in the central region and Lake Monduran in the Wide Bay-Burnett are just three locations that are known to provide metre-plus barra photo opportunities. The scheme is supported by fishing licence revenue that directly funds the management of SIPS and community-based volunteer stocking groups that maintain and improve our freshwater fisheries. It costs less than \$13 for a weekly permit, \$60 for an annual permit and \$43 for a concessional permit. That is a bargain. Approximately \$1.3 million was raised from SIPS for the 2023-24 financial year of which more than \$944,000 was distributed for the upcoming stocking season to 40 active stocking groups to release juvenile fish, or fingerlings, into 63 impoundments and 150 waterways.

The big news was the establishment of the Fish 'n SIP\$ competition. The Freshwater Fishing and Stocking Association of Queensland, in partnership with DAF, delivered the Fish 'n SIP\$ \$50,000 tagged fish competition, which concluded on 31 January 2024. The competition was very successful, with a total of 13 fish recaptured by successful anglers to claim prizes worth a total of \$48,000. Given the success of this pilot competition, an expanded Fish 'n SIP\$ 2.0 competition was launched for this year. The new competition expands the competition to more dams in southern Queensland and doubles the prize money to \$100,000 by providing a bonus prize for the first capture in each impoundment. To date, three fish have been recaptured to claim prizes worth a total of \$53,750. Together with the Freshwater Fishing and Stocking Association of Queensland, the Miles government produces a great booklet, Queensland fishing trails, which tells the prospective fisher where to go and what they will find when they get there. I urge members to get on the fish tourism trail and enjoy wetting a line.

**CHAIR:** The reason I said it was relevant is that we release fingerlings at the Ross River Dam under the Townsville City Council. There are massive barra in there. We are just waiting for the current council to open it up so everyone can go there and do some recreational fishing. I might see you on the water one day, Minister.

**Mr FURNER:** I hope that happens.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Is that anywhere near Riverway Drive?

**CHAIR:** It is right at the end of Riverway Drive. Thank you for that. I had to bring that in. I did get Riverway Drive in. That was a challenge for me. I forgot. Minister, would you like to wrap up the session?

**Mr FURNER:** To conclude today's proceedings I would like to say thank you to the chair and the members of the committee for today. I would like to thank those members of the crossbench who may not be members of the committee but who came along today to ask questions regardless. The estimates process is an important feature of our parliamentary democracy, so thank you for participating.

I would like to thank my director-general, Graeme Bolton, all of the deputy directors-general and the hardworking staff of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Their efforts go into ensuring the most up-to-date and accurate information possible is available for the estimates process. It is invaluable. Many thanks to them, and that extends to more than just estimates preparation but also the work that all DAF staff do every day right across the state. Whether it is supporting primary producers, protecting our biosecurity or maintaining Fisheries, Queensland is a better place for your efforts.

I would like to also thank the staff of my ministerial office for their work in preparing for estimates. I want to put on record that this is Don Wilson's 24th estimates hearing, so well done, Don.

I look forward to continuing to work with my fellow cabinet colleagues to protect and support Queensland's agriculture. Furthermore, I would like to thank Hansard for their efforts in terms of this particular part of the hearing and the ongoing work they do to give words meaning. Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Well said. We have a couple more hours in the saddle to go, so thank you, Hansard. We have now reached the end of the time allocated to examine the proposed expenditure for the areas of responsibility administered by the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities. Thank you, Minister, officials and departmental officers for your attendance. The committee will now adjourn until 5.15 pm, when we will examine the estimates of the portfolio areas of the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Innovation.

**Proceedings suspended from 4.59 pm to 5.18 pm.**

**ESTIMATES—HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE—  
ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF; SCIENCE AND  
INNOVATION**

**In Attendance**

Hon Leanne Linard MP, Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Innovation

Ms S Litz, Chief of Staff

Ms K Faulkner, Senior Policy Adviser

Mr M Frawley, Political Adviser

**Department of Environment, Science and Innovation**

Mr J Merrick, Director-General

Mr B Klaassen, Deputy Director-General, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service & Partnerships

Mr A Connor, Executive Director, Office of Circular Economy


Dr M Jacobs, Deputy Director-General, Science

Ms L Diffey, Deputy Director-General, Innovation

Mr R Lawrence, Deputy Director-General, Environmental Services & Regulation

Ms M Curtis, Deputy Director-General, Environment and Heritage Policy & Programs

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 **CHAIR:** Good afternoon. We will resume the proceedings. For the benefit of those who have just joined us, I am Aaron Harper, member for Thuringowa and chair of the committee. With me today is Rob Molhoek, member for Southport and deputy chair. Other members of the committee are Sam O'Connor, member for Bonney; Steven Andrew, member for Mirani; the Hon. Craig Crawford, member for Barron River; and James Martin, member for Stretton. The committee is joined by other members who have been granted leave to attend and may ask questions at the hearing today.

I remind everyone present that any person may be excluded from the proceedings at the chair's discretion or by order of the committee. The committee has authorised its hearing to be broadcast live, televised and photographed. Copies of the committee's conditions for broadcasters of proceedings are available from the secretariat. Staff who are assisting witnesses here today are permitted to use personal electronic devices in the chamber. I ask all present to ensure that phones and other devices are switched to silent mode or turned off if not in use. I also remind everyone that food or drink are not permitted in the chamber.

The committee will now examine the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the environment and the Great Barrier Reef portfolio until 6.45 pm. We will then adjourn for a short break before examining the portfolio area of science and innovation until 8.30 pm. I remind honourable members that matters relating to these portfolio areas can only be raised during the time specified for that area, as was agreed by the House. I refer members to the program set by the House available throughout the chamber and on the committee's webpage.

I also remind everyone that these proceedings are subject to the normal standing orders and rules of the Legislative Assembly. In respect of government owned corporations and statutory authorities, standing order 180(2) provides that a member may ask any question that the committee determines will assist it in its examination of the relevant Appropriation Bill or otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being efficiently spent or appropriate public guarantees are being provided.

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

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, welcome. If you wish, I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes. We have a couple of former paramedics here if you need assistance. We are glad to have you here.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Very former.

**CHAIR:** If you need to adjourn, please do so. The floor is yours.

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you very much, Chair. I am chuckling because I would not be surprised if I have to. We all outgrow some things that we have in childhood, but blood noses are something at 43 I have not outgrown and I get them every winter when I blow my nose, so it is inopportune timing but I have may have to.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The opposition denies any involvement in the minister's blood nose.

**Ms LINARD:** I do apologise. It is a winter thing, so thank you, Chair. I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather today—the First Australians—whose lands, winds and waters we all now share and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I also pay respects to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders present in the room here today or watching and acknowledge any elders from other cultures.

I welcome this committee's scrutiny of the Miles government's significant investments in environment, science and innovation through its 2024-25 budget. From the outset I would like to acknowledge my department and all who work within it—from Environment and Heritage Policy and Programs, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Partnerships, Environmental Services and Regulation, science, innovation, corporate and the Queensland Mines Rehabilitation Commissioner. Each and every day the hardworking staff of my department work to make Queensland a better place to live, work and play.

Over the past 12 months this department has played an integral role in a number of our government's key policy decisions. My department led work to develop enhanced protections for the ecologically, culturally and economically significant Lake Eyre Basin. The basin is a vital part of Australia's largest drainage system and home to one of the last remaining free-flowing arid river systems in the world. It should have the highest possible level of protection, and thanks to our government it has. My department also contributed to the government's ambitious new interim greenhouse gas emissions target. Thanks to our government's efforts, we achieved our first interim emissions reduction target almost a decade ahead of schedule. Under the leadership of the Premier and the Minister for Energy and Clean Economy Jobs, we have now legislated a new interim target of a 75 per cent reduction in emissions based on 2005 levels by 2035 as we continue to work towards net zero emissions by 2050.

Our government has also delivered significant fishing reforms which address unsustainable fishing practices in the Great Barrier Reef. The science clearly shows that the widespread use of gillnets within the Great Barrier Reef is threatening marine life and critically endangered species within the World Heritage listed area. That is why we are implementing significant fisheries reforms, including making the reef gillnet free by mid-2027.

Our action on sustainable fishing, as well as climate change, water quality and tree clearing, has paid dividends. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee announced recently in a draft decision that it would not list the reef as being in danger, which we welcome.

My department also continued to implement the government's policy of expanding Queensland's protected area estate with a number of significant acquisitions, including the 352,000-hectare Vergemont Station in western Queensland, which is a key habitat for the endangered night parrot, vulnerable yellow-footed rock-wallaby and highly restricted Opalton grasswren.

In partnership with the Albanese government and traditional owners, my department has worked to have the Cultural Landscapes of Cape York Peninsula nominated to Australia's UNESCO World Heritage tentative list. Cape York Peninsula has a rich and complex natural environment as well as tens of thousands of years of traditional owner beliefs, customs and practices. It is home to 18.5 per cent of Australian plant species, despite being only three per cent of continental landmass. The landscapes are also home to over 300 threatened species including the green sawfish, Cape York rock-wallaby and southern cassowary. We will continue to work alongside traditional owner groups and the Cape York community throughout the World Heritage nomination process.

Within my department there is a significant group of people who work under Queensland's independent environmental regulator, Rob Lawrence. They regulate all environmentally relevant industries across Queensland and their work is often under-recognised. This year we had occasion to see how important their work can be when the independent regulator was required to consider the



environmental impacts of pumping excess carbon dioxide into the Great Artesian Basin. After a rigorous scientific assessment, the regulator found that the project was not suitable to proceed and, with the Premier's leadership, Queensland is now the first government to ban CO2 storage in the GAB.

Finally, my department has continued the implementation of our nation-leading Quantum and Advanced Technologies and Advance Queensland strategies, which will deliver economic and social benefits for our state. While the Miles government's 2024-25 state budget is unapologetically a cost-of-living budget, it also funds the continued protection and conservation of Queensland's iconic natural environment as well as the encouragement of scientific research and innovation.

The budget delivers an almost \$1.2 billion allocation for my department, one of the largest funding allocations in the department's history. The budget commits: \$48.3 million to support Queensland's national park infrastructure as well as our ongoing efforts to expand Queensland's protected area estate; \$39.2 million in funding to enhance Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's fire management capacity and capability; \$18.1 million to purchase additional fire vehicles, fire units and support equipment, upgrade road and fire-line networks and recruit 39 specialist personnel to help the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service manage bushfire risk; \$23.5 million over four years and \$6.3 million per annum ongoing to continue implementation of the Threatened Species Program; an additional \$31.3 million over four years and \$8.4 million ongoing so that we can continue actions under the South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy; and \$89.7 million over five years across government to develop and deliver the Queensland Quantum and Advanced Technologies Strategy and the Queensland Quantum Academy.

I am proud that Queensland is the first Australian state to deliver a comprehensive quantum strategy—a strategy that builds on more than 30 years of quantum research in Queensland and turns world-class science into practical, everyday applications across diverse industries. Building on the great work our government has done to strengthen and grow Queensland's science sector, today I am pleased to announce the release of the *Future Queensland Science Strategy 2024-2029*. Our government recognises that science and emerging technologies will be central to responding to the challenges Queensland faces as well as unlocking future sustainable economic growth and supercharging Queensland's job creation in our transitioning economy. The strategy provides the strategic vision for Queensland to be world-leading in the translation of science for economic impact and social and environmental outcomes. Our Future Queensland Science Strategy outlines a plan to maintain and increase Queensland's national and international competitiveness and seeks to better align research and industry development efforts in priority and emerging areas to secure the state's long-term prosperity. I look forward to the committee's questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister. We will start with opposition questions. Member for Bonney, it might be helpful to allow the minister to look after herself. I do not know if you have something that the director-general can start with?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Chair, you cannot take the protection racket that far! The minister is very capable.

**CHAIR:** I knew you would say that.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Chair, with your indulgence, from the outset, as shadow environment minister, I echo the minister's comments and thank everyone who serves in the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation. You all play a unique role in protecting what makes our state special. This may be a robust process, but we are all here to make sure we are achieving outcomes. We know that you have put a lot of preparation into this and we thank you for that and for what you do. Unfortunately, my first question is to the minister.

Minister, in 2015, when Labor was elected, 7.8 per cent of Queensland was classified as protected. Then environment minister Miles committed to increase that proportion to 17 per cent. After a decade in power, the budget reveals that Labor has increased the protected estate by just 0.79 per cent, to 8.59 per cent. On current progress, it would take a further 11 decades for the target to be achieved. Why should Queenslanders have any faith in Labor when your core commitment to protect our environment will take over a century to deliver?

**Ms LINARD:** Opposition member, I thought you were kind! I am sitting here bleeding and that is your first question? I am joking. My nose is okay. Thank you, Chair, for your consideration, too.

Thank you for the question, member. It is something that I know you raise often. When I reflect on the 17 per cent target that our now Premier made when he was the environment minister, I am incredibly proud that he is ambitious and continues to be aspirational for where we need to go as a state in the protection of our incredibly biodiverse state. When we look at perspective, Queensland is

bigger than 90 per cent of the world's countries. Queensland is absolutely huge. To reach a 17 per cent target will be a significant effort. However, it is one that we are committed to as a government.

When we think about the \$262.5 million investment that was made under the former minister, Minister Meaghan Scanlon, in expanding public protected areas, I think it is pretty inspiring to see that all of those funds, from my recollection, are now committed. I know that it does not sound significant to see that we have moved to 8.6 per cent protected, but that is extraordinary. When we look at the public and protected areas, we have the largest private protected area estate in the country. At 8.6 per cent it might sound like we have a long way to go to 17 per cent—and I do not disagree with you, member. However, what it does not make clear is the significant advancement that we have made as a state Labor government with regard to those protections. I am really proud of that.

When I look at numbers, we now have 9.5 million hectares in the public protected area. Overall, we have 15 million hectares because we have about five million hectares in private protected areas. When I think about the largest by land area in Australia, 33 per cent of our protected areas are private protected areas. The amount of expansion that we have done as a state is extraordinary, and I am really excited about what we are doing as we move towards 17 per cent.

We are committed to the federal government target too—the 30 by 30—with respect to terrestrial and marine environments. We are already at 50 per cent, I think, with respect to protections for marine environments. Have we got a way to go? Yes. Are there opportunities out there under the Commonwealth reforms around OECMs—I know that is something you are very interested as well, member—absolutely. We are heading in the right direction and our commitment, I think, is unquestionable.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, surely the point of setting a target is to achieve it. I know that you used the word 'aspirational' there. I think that is being very generous for something that will take over a century to achieve on the current progress. You said that you are committed to the federal government's 30 by 30 target. Their target is for 30 per cent of Australia's land area to be protected. Does that mean your target is 30 per cent, not 17 per cent?

**Ms LINARD:** No, we are committed to contributing to the federal target, which is 30 per cent of Australia to be protected. We are doing the heavy lifting when you think about the land mass that we are protecting here in Queensland. It is aspirational. It is a stretch target. You have communicated your calculation on how long it will take us to get there. We have clear plans in this government for the expansion of protected areas, both public and private.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So what is your calculation? How long will it take?

**Ms LINARD:** A hypothetical question?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** To get 17 per cent?

**Ms LINARD:** I do not answer hypothetical questions, member.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You have to have some idea of how long it is going to take, Minister.

**Ms LINARD:** We also did not put a timeline on it.

**CHAIR:** You have had your go. I will allow some latitude in the response. Minister?

**Ms LINARD:** If you look at the acquisitions that we have made in the time that I have been the environment minister, which is 14 months, you can see how focused we are as a government and as a department with respect to meeting those targets. We want to meet those targets not for the sake of meeting a target but for the protection of biodiversity. That is what is driving us—what outcome do we need for the conservation of biodiversity in this state?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, key stakeholders like The Pew Charitable Trusts said the budget was missing a vision for the environment. The Treasurer actually did not even mention the word 'environment' in his budget speech but he did say that he would be asking Queenslanders to make a choice about their future and to not express an opinion about the past. Is your failure to deliver over the last decade an example of this?

**Ms LINARD:** I absolutely refute the premise of the question. We have not failed. We can focus on the past year alone, since I have been in this portfolio. If we think about the protections that we have introduced with respect to the Lake Eyre Basin and the GAB, if we look at the expansion of private protected areas, if we look at the protection of threatened species in the Great Barrier Reef, they alone are reforms that our government continues to deliver. With the support of sectors and conservation groups like Pew, they are reforms that we are delivering because we are absolutely focused on the environment.

I appreciate your comments about the Treasurer but, as the Queensland environment minister, I am working every single day with stakeholders and across government to deliver real reforms in this government. I appreciate that you were referring to another's comment, but it is not true to say that the budget lacks a vision for the environment. I absolutely refute that. Our vision is very, very clear. You only have to look at the highlights for this year alone and at the multiyear budget, which is what we have here, to see that.

If we think about the management alone of our protected areas, these are four- and five-year funding programs that have previously been announced. We are very clear about our goal—conserving biodiversity, expanding protected areas in this state and protecting threatened species. We are working with the Commonwealth and continuing to lead reforms around bioregional planning. It is very clear that Queensland continues to put its shoulder to the wheel to meet Commonwealth targets and to legislate emissions reduction, and we will continue on that course.

The Premier is a former environment minister. I do not believe that the conservation sector, including Pew, is questioning whether this government is focused on the environment.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, the minister and I were both at the launch of a campaign called Protect Beautiful Queensland in April. The minister gave a speech at that event and part of that speech has been quoted on the Protect Beautiful Queensland Facebook page. The quote was—The vision ... of Protect Beautiful Queensland is to double Queensland's protected areas by 2030 ... you have no greater ally in this aim than Premier Steven Miles and our Labor Government, because of course we share the same goal.

I am happy to table that Facebook post, if you like, Chair. Director-General, when did the minister update you on this 2030 timeline for achieving the government's protected area target?

**Mr Merrick:** I cannot speak to the specific comment there, I am sorry. I have not seen the comments on Facebook. Obviously, we are wholly committed to delivering on the very significant investment that we have received to expand the protected area estate. Since the protected area strategy was introduced in 2020, something like nearly three quarters of a million hectares of protected areas have been acquired. As the minister said, we can see continued growth in the private protected area—4.99 million hectares. As you said, it is larger than the total protected area estate in Victoria.

It is also important to recognise that we are not the only player in terms of expanding the protected area estate across Queensland. We have heard recent announcements by the Commonwealth about new Indigenous protected areas. In Queensland, they form a very small part of the total protected area estate. In 2022, they accounted for 0.48 per cent of the Queensland land mass. In comparison, the Indigenous protected areas in Western Australia account for 66 per cent of all the protected areas in Western Australia and cover something like 20 per cent of the Western Australian land mass. There is a range of players here who have a contribution to make to achieve the targets that we all aspire to, which is growing the protected area estate to 17 per cent.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, you have not heard of this 2030 timeline from the minister that she publicly stated?

**Ms LINARD:** I am very happy to clarify given the comments were my own.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** No. My question was to the director-general.

**Mr Merrick:** We are working hard to achieve the 17 per cent target that has been set out.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** By any particular year? Has the government given you a particular year?

**Mr Merrick:** What I would also say is in this context—and you mentioned 30 by 30 at the start.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That was not my question, Director-General. My question was about 2030 in that timeframe.

**Mr Merrick:** Over 50 per cent of Queensland state waters are protected, so we have already met that target as well.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am talking about land area, Director-General, by 2030. Have you heard this from the minister before?

**Ms LINARD:** Commonwealth target.

**Mr Merrick:** As I said, we are committed to delivering the 17 per cent and play our full contribution in terms of the Commonwealth target.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, so there has been no communication from the minister about a 2030 timeline that she has publicly stated to stakeholders?

**CHAIR:** Did you want to add something, Minister?

**Ms LINARD:** I would love to.

**CHAIR:** I will give you some latitude here.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I do not think you get to do that, Chair. My questions are directed to the director-general.

**Ms LINARD:** You are asking the director-general about my comment.

**CHAIR:** Member for Bonney, what I consider this last couple of minutes is badgering the director-general. During his responses you are talking over the top of him, so I will allow some latitude. Minister, do you want to add something to that?

**Ms LINARD:** My presentation on that night stated both the 17 per cent target that we have—which is just under a doubling of where we are now—and our commitment to the Commonwealth target of 30 per cent protection by 2030. That is what was in my speech. I appreciate the wording that they put on their Facebook page, I think, is what you referred to originally?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Yes.

**Ms LINARD:** Yes, but I am very clear about those two targets. That is what I said in that presentation. I can get my speech notes, member. I know you were there. We have never said 17 per cent by 2030. The Premier, who was the minister who made that target, has never said that, so of course my director-general has not been advised by me about that target because that is not what I have said. I am very supportive of that program. I appreciate how they represented that online, but they were right: they have no greater supporter of the Commonwealth aspiration, their aspiration and our 17 per cent aspiration than this Miles Labor government.

**CHAIR:** Just before we go on, Minister, I appreciate that the member for Bonney was not here this morning or for the previous portfolio area. I set some very clear expectations. I will remind the member: when the minister or the director-general or any other departmental official is answering, please allow them to answer without speaking over the top of them. I want to give you as much time as possible. That is what I have been able to achieve in an orderly manner throughout the day. This is our final session through to 8.30 pm. Let's keep it neat and organised. I hand over to you for your next question.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, did they post that without checking with your office? There was no confirmation with your office?

**Ms LINARD:** I would have to confirm, but I do not think so. They may have checked with my office but Pew can put their posts up. I have always been clear about my targets and our targets as a government. If that is not reflected accurately then I am happy to make it clear right here on the record, as I always have in the House. I have never said any different.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You have made it clear that there is no timeframe to achieve the government's target that it set a decade ago?

**Ms LINARD:** The 17 per cent target.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** With no timeframe.

**Ms LINARD:** I would love to hear how the LNP are proposing to achieve any expansion with your one-page environment policy that does not mention conservation once.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** There is plenty of time till the election, Minister.

**Ms LINARD:** I cannot wait to hear any policies from those opposite.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can you check with your office about whether they did clarify that post that specifically had the timeline of 2030? Is that okay?

**Ms LINARD:** I can. Either way, even if we check, member, the factual position—my position and our government's position—is that we have a 17 per cent target and we are committed to contributing to the federal government 30 by 30. That is the fact.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, how much of the announced \$262.5 million for protected area acquisition has now been expended?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. Just to confirm, in 2023-24 a total of \$111.8 million was acquitted on the program which included the acquisition of 12 properties and a range of capital works. A total of \$139.1 million remains across the next two financial years for land

acquisitions. That money is held centrally by Queensland Treasury and is drawn down as we conclude individual acquisitions. As the minister indicated, though, we are in advanced negotiations around a range of those acquisitions, so we are very confident that expenditure will be fully committed.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, I refer to a media statement released on 11 July about two new national parks being formally established. One of them was in the Gladstone region—Eurimbula National Park, about 6,091 hectares. When was this property, in particular, purchased?

**Mr Merrick:** Sorry, member. With respect, Eurimbula is not a new national park.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That was the headline of the press release of 11 July.

**Mr Merrick:** I am happy, if the press release is available, to have a look at that.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Sure.

**Mr Merrick:** In the Gladstone region in the last year we acquired Spadely Station on Curtis Island which was 1,600 hectares and will be an exemplar in terms of ecotourism adjacency to the national park estate. I might invite the deputy director-general to speak to the specifics that you are speaking to.

**Mr Klaassen:** The two new national parks referred to in that media release are The Lakes National Park and Malbon Thompson Range National Park. They are the two new national parks.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can I get clarity on Eurimbula, though—when that was purchased by the department?

**Mr Klaassen:** I would have to seek advice. I would need to check the exact date, but we can get that before the end of the session.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am happy to come back to that.

**Mr Merrick:** Perhaps it is worth clarifying that there is generally a process post acquisition and a period before parks are formally declared as well. That process is a comprehensive one in terms of the preparations and the process that we need to go through before declaration is completed.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Yes, that is what I am trying to figure out—how long it has taken for that to be added to the protected estate. Director-General, with regard to OECMs, how much of the \$2.8 million for revitalising Queensland's Private Protected Area Program is going towards implementing OECMs and has any assessment been undertaken by the department of how much more land could be added to the protected estate under this new classification?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. The principal purpose of the funding for 2024-25 is to allow continuation of the Private Protected Area Program through the NatureAssist program. We are also pleased that there is matching investment from the Commonwealth of \$3 million. It will principally be for new nature refuges as opposed to OECMs, but I would say the department has undertaken significant work in relation to understanding the potential for OECMs in Queensland.

Clearly, we have only just had approval of the final framework for OECMs, so we understand what the process will be at Commonwealth level for the approval of OECMs. We are working with the federal government in that space, and \$400,000 has been allocated over two years to support implementation of the framework in Queensland.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The second part of that question was: do you have any assessment of how much could be added to the estate if OECMs become active?

**Mr Merrick:** The department has done work. I will check with the deputy director-general whether we have that figure with us. No. It is substantial, but in part it depends on owners of the land bringing forward their properties through the new OECM framework. An example would be that there is very significant Defence land that also has significant conservation values. I think from recollection when we did our initial work there was the potential of something like a million hectares in Queensland and much of it very high value from a conservation perspective.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I would be interested in those figures if you could come back to us with those. Just to clarify from that press release, it was 'Eurimbula National Park (Gladstone), estate expansion—about 6091 hectares'. That was the property in particular I was looking to get clarity on. Director-General—or any one of your deputy directors-general may be able to answer this—over the last year, how many requests has the department received from landholders interested in making their property a private protected area?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. I might seek advice from the deputy director-general.

**Mr Klaassen:** We do not have that figure to hand immediately. We would have to see if we can seek that and come back to you before the end of the session.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am happy with that too. Minister, earlier this month I understand the government received a letter jointly signed by the Queensland Conservation Council, AgForce, NRM Regions and the Queensland branch of the Pew Charitable Trusts urging you to take further action to support private landholders to create nature refuges on their property. That letter said—

Nature refuge landholders are taking practical action to manage wildlife habitat on their land ... but their ability to plan and implement effective conservation actions is at times constrained by a lack of financial and technical support.

When this government is so clearly struggling to meet targets they have set, why are you not willing to better support private land conservation?

**Ms LINARD:** This year's budget had \$2.4 million there to expand the program. We are very grateful to also partner with the Commonwealth, with \$3 million in the next financial year to expand that program. Since we released the Protected Area Strategy in 2020 we have expended \$20 million with regard to private protection expansion. We are very committed to private protected area expansion, as we are to public protected area expansion. It is not true to say we are not committed at all. If we think about 33 per cent of Queensland's protected area, five million hectares being protected areas, and 575 private protected areas in Queensland, the largest by land area in Australia, our commitment is clear.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That is \$2.4 million to manage 4.9 million hectares of land. Is that seriously adequate?

**Ms LINARD:** I think \$2.4 million and the Commonwealth investment, so we are talking about \$5.4 million, is significant. Would landholders like more money? Would my portfolio like more money? Would I like more money? I do not think there would ever be a minister or director-general who would not say they would not like more. I appreciate the calls from the conservation movement, the NRMs and all of those bodies that would like to see more of an investment. We have made clear our investment in this budget to continue that program, and we remain committed to it.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, that is 50 cents a hectare just on the amount you are providing this year. That is \$20 million back to when, 2007?

**Ms LINARD:** Yet it is still \$2.4 million from the state more than any plan you have communicated publically with respect to protecting Queensland's environment. I come back to your one-page environment policy for the future of conservation in Queensland that does not mention the words conservation, traditional owners or rangers.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, you are the government; not the opposition. I just want to remind you of that.

**Ms LINARD:** Member, we are talking about a vision for Queensland. We have it; the LNP does not.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, you have some of the key stakeholders across the environment and agricultural sectors coming together, which does not happen very often. They are asking you for more support. You have been in power for a decade. Is this seriously the best you can do?

**Ms LINARD:** I disagree. I think it is quite common that the conservation sector comes together and speaks with one voice and they—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I said with the agricultural sector as well, Minister.

**Ms LINARD:** Apologies, I did not hear you say the agricultural sector. I do not think it is as uncommon as you say at all, actually. I think the division between the two sectors should be a thing of the past, and it is something that the Farmers' Federation and I agree on. We have far more in common with respect to the positive management of land than we do division in that regard. I do appreciate the division between the agricultural sector and the environment sector is something the LNP encourages. Your colleagues, member; I am not pointing the finger at you. My answer with respect to our investment in private protected areas is the same as the last question, which is the same question you have just asked again.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I have regularly been a long-term advocate for private land conservation, even to you directly.

**Ms LINARD:** I know.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Just to pile some more work onto the deputy director-general, how many applications does the department typically receive for these NatureAssist grants the minister has

referred to? I note the most recent round, round 10, had two successful recipients. Are you able to provide us with some kind of idea how many landholders are applying for these grants?

**Ms LINARD:** Yes.

**Mr Klaassen:** I was waiting for the authorisation.

**Ms LINARD:** I apologise, Deputy Director-General. Authorised.

**Mr Klaassen:** I cannot give you the specific number for the last round, but the NatureAssist program does target specific landholders where we know there are interests in that. There is a process that identifies the property holders that are interested. We work with them to see if the property is suitable, if it has the right values, if they have the right management intent. If they do, then they can get a grant under the NatureAssist program. That is what I can advise you on that.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General or Minister, are you able to provide any information on how many applications there are or how many landholders are seeking this support?

**Mr Klaassen:** I would have to get the figure for the last round, so if we could come back to you before the end of the session.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That is fine, thank you. Minister, I just want to pick up on that exchange from before. You said that every minister would like more money, every director-general would like more money. \$2.4 million is all you have managed to get this year. Have you asked for more money and have you been rejected? Have you been unsuccessful in securing that? Clearly you have, but have you been trying?

**Ms LINARD:** Member, nice try. Firstly, I am not going to divulge what I do or do not ask for in budget deliberations.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The result is clear.

**Ms LINARD:** Again I come back to the fact that it is the Miles Labor government that has a vision for our environment. I still cannot wait to hear yours. With respect to the same question you have asked three times, there is \$2.4 million from the state to continue the program we have invested in since the release of our strategy for protected area expansion in 2020. The \$20 million already spent since then is a significant sum in this respect. The Commonwealth has committed \$3 million. Through our LRF fund we are investing in and partnering with landowners who want to be part of either having private protected areas or having some sort of conservation as well as productive use of their land. We continue those partnerships. We are committed to those partnerships. That will be a long-term investment from our government.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I might go to the director-general next. I will change topics and move on to the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro proposal. Can you give us an update on where the EIS is at for that project?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. In terms of an EIS, the project is not yet a coordinated project so an EIS has not commenced for Pioneer-Burdekin.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can you give us any update on any technical advice the department has provided to the process for that project?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. I certainly can. In relation to Pioneer-Burdekin, I think this is where there may be some confusion with Borumba, which is a declared coordinated project under the state department of public works.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** There is no confusion. I just wanted to show how little progress has been made on the project.

**Mr Merrick:** The main works for the Pioneer-Burdekin project are likely to follow the same assessment process we are seeing for Borumba. That would require an environmental impact statement that satisfies both state and Commonwealth legislation. The project is currently at the stage of preparing a detailed analytical report which will set out a whole range of parameters for the project such as benefits, costs and so forth. The department has provided early advice into this. That advice particularly relates to a range of potential impacts around formal species but also detailed assessments and modelling of water quality and so on that will be undertaken. We are also supporting the project in terms of providing a range of permits for non-invasive terrestrial and aquatic ecological surveys and a drone survey to collect a range of subsurface geological information. Clearly, in terms of those surveys the primary responsibility is with the proponent. That said, we provide regular advice about the

standards to which that work should be undertaken and will be part of the process of then assessing that work further down the track.

**CHAIR:** Member, you have had nearly half an hour. We are going to move to other questions from the crossbench. I am going to go to the member for Mirani.

**Mr ANDREW:** I want to understand a little bit about the coral situation recently proposed by the federal government. Can you provide any clarification around the federal government's application to the Queensland coral fishery—or just coral—declared as an approved wildlife trade operation under the act? There are a number of other changes proposed as well, including the possible trade of currently exempt native species. Maybe the director-general could give us some information around that.

**Ms LINARD:** Sorry, Member, I was conferring with the director-general. I understand that is a matter for Minister Furner.

**Mr ANDREW:** Okay, thank you. I move to studies and reports concerning the renewable sector. Can you give us a clear answer about the situation concerning the sound and noise for koalas, sugar gliders and other animals on the Great Dividing Range? What studies have we done? How much has your department spent? Have we got anything from the renewable sector to show us that there is no harm and danger going forward to these iconic Australian animals?

**Ms LINARD:** Member, is that question for me?

**Mr ANDREW:** Yes, please.

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you for the question. I recall that you have asked a question in the House. I believe it was in relation to low-frequency noise and koalas.

**Mr ANDREW:** That is correct.

**Ms LINARD:** So you are coming from that angle. I did speak to my department about this post that. My understanding is that we are not aware of any particular studies that focus on the impact of wind farms on koalas. I think it is a fair point to raise that the koala population here in South-East Queensland are living in a community and an area with significant ambient noise, with both low- and high-frequency sounds. Director-General, I am not aware of particular studies in this regard but is there anything you want to add? Member, you also mentioned sugar gliders.

**Mr ANDREW:** It is not just noise; there is the removal of habitat as well. There is a whole thing that goes into that.

**Ms LINARD:** If you are talking about removal of habitat, that is a different matter to scientific studies. We have touched on this before. My agency does not have a direct role in the assessment of solar and wind projects—that is under the planning legislation, so Minister Scanlon—unless there is an EIS, and then we provide technical advice to that. We are still looking at the Commonwealth EPBC Act. If it interrupts matters of national and environmental significance then that may trigger an EPBC assessment.

**Mr ANDREW:** Is there an EIS done on any of the renewable sector as far as the wind farms or factories are concerned?

**Ms LINARD:** If it is a large project it might be declared, but I am not aware of an EIS.

**Mr ANDREW:** Is there an EIS? Have these matters been addressed?

**Mr Merrick:** I think principally solar and wind projects are assessed and approved through the planning system.

**Ms LINARD:** So the environment department does not have anything to do with EISs?

**Mr Merrick:** Sorry, we have a referral role under the planning system through the SARA process that will provide advice into the planning process. An EIS is a specific assessment and approval process under either the state development and public works act or the EP Act. That is a different assessment and approvals process.

**Ms LINARD:** It is a different matter if it is on park, if it is on land—like a national park or something like that. I know that you are talking generally. If you are talking about a particular project, we are happy to go to that.

**Mr ANDREW:** Some of these are national parks. Some of these go into national parks and they go across all sorts of boundaries. So the environment department has not done exhaustive studies on how this will affect our wildlife here in Queensland? These are koalas and sugar gliders and all of the things that live in these pristine areas, remnant vegetation areas. We are buying all of these other



properties and we are offsetting that and we are clearing all of this other land. Why have we not done the due diligence on this?

**Ms LINARD:** Just to be clear, member, what we are trying to outline is that it depends on what land tenure these projects are proposed on. You are speaking in general terms; we are trying to respond in general terms. We do have a role through the SARA process. We also have a role if there is an EIS declared. We have a role if these projects are proposed on land that the department manages under the NCA. If it is not actually coming into contact with our own land, if it is a project that is being assessed by the minister responsible for the Planning Act, then we do not have a direct role. I think it is much easier to talk to you in terms of particular projects. We can keep talking about the different levers. It is not that they have not been done; it depends on the land tenure and the project itself as to the involvement of this department.

**Mr ANDREW:** I do not think the animals or creatures who live in this state are worried about tenures. We are worried about the fact that they cannot speak for themselves and that someone has to defend them. This is what the environment department should be doing.

**Ms LINARD:** I do agree, member, but you cannot compare apples with oranges. A small-scale project on cleared land that might previously have been used for grazing is not the same as a project that might be proposed on a national park or a conservation park that falls under our purview. It is not true to say that there is no involvement of the environment department in the assessment of these projects at all. It depends on where they are and the size of the project as to which lever is triggered.

**Mr ANDREW:** Okay. With reference to—

**CHAIR:** Member, I am going to pull you up because we have the member for Maiwar here. We have an allocated time for crossbench questions and you are well and truly into it. I have to give him some time.

**Mr ANDREW:** Okay.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I want to refer, first of all, to my pre-estimates question on notice, which related to the recycled input into plastic bags around the plastic bag ban. Your response made clear that there was some content on the government website that referred to post-consumer recycled plastics that was inconsistent with what the regulation requires, and that has now been changed, as I understand it. Mr Merrick, was it at an earlier point the department's intention for the 80 per cent recycled minimum to be a genuine post-consumer recycled requirement? If so, when did that change?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. With the minister's approval, I might call forward the head of the Office of Circular Economy, Mr Andrew Connor, to speak to that.

**Mr Connor:** I thank the member for the question. I think in fairness, yes, there had been deliberate consideration given to the inclusion of the post-consumer plastic versus the pre-consumer plastic when we were putting the recommendations together around the provisions within the legislation. Some key things have happened in the Australian recycling plastic marketplace in recent years. Most significant was the collapse of the REDcycle soft plastics recycling scheme. Since that happened there has been a lot of effort going on around the country to re-establish effective soft plastic collections and recycling. Given that and the impact on the supply of recycled soft plastics in the local market, we did make a deliberate decision to include the pre-consumer soft plastic that can be recycled and should be recycled because you are effectively talking about offcuts within manufacturing processes.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Understood. As part of that shift in position away from post-consumer recycled plastics, was there pressure brought to bear from the National Retail Association or other peak bodies that drove that shift?

**Mr Connor:** Not that I am aware of. There are some complexities, particularly around traceability and verification of the sources of recycled soft plastic. We do accept that there is improvement that is needed around the trackability. There is also work happening particularly through the Cooperative Research Centre for the Solving Plastic Waste, which the Queensland government is a founding partner of. That is aimed at improving traceability of plastics and recycling generally.

**Mr BERKMAN:** That is very helpful. Director-General, in relation to the allocation in the budget to continue implementation of the Threatened Species Program, how much of this funding is allocated to preventing land clearing where it is likely to impact a threatened species habitat, and what does that work involve?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. Just to confirm, in terms of the prevention of land clearing, that is not the actual intent of the program. The program is more focused on dealing with key threats to threatened species and recovery of threatened species populations, rather than preventing clearing.

**Mr BERKMAN:** But loss of habitat would obviously be one of those threatening processes that plays heavily into the risks that you are considering in the Threaten Species Program, I would assume.

**Mr Merrick:** That is correct, albeit there are other mechanisms that we seek to deploy to address that situation.

**CHAIR:** We will move on to government questions.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Minister, I have a Cape York question. Can the minister provide an update on the tentative World Heritage listing for parts of Cape York Peninsula, and why is progressing to a full nomination a good thing for Queensland?

**Ms LINARD:** I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to provide an update to the committee on the recent addition of the cultural landscapes of the Cape York Peninsula to Australia's World Heritage tentative list, and our approach to continue with a traditional owner-led approach towards a full World Heritage nomination. Cape York Peninsula is a truly special place, rich with cultural heritage and natural beauty, and it belongs on the World Heritage list. Last month I joined with traditional owners, the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, our Premier, Deputy Premier and the members for Cook and Cairns to announce the region's inclusion on the tentative list. This long-term Labor government commitment has had country and people at its heart, and will continue to do so.

Consent was provided by 10 traditional owner groups and approval provided for the inclusion of seven GPS coordinates to form the serial nomination. These coordinates represent some of the most important areas of Cape York Peninsula's unique landscape. Rock art occurs across Cape York Peninsula, some of which has been dated to 17,000 years ago, with evidence of occupation at some of these dated to 34,000 years ago. Free, prior and informed traditional owner consent supported our tentative listing, a signal of intention that we will continue to do the work necessary to progress towards a serial World Heritage nomination for parts of Cape York Peninsula.

As part of the tentative listing process, I have been fortunate to visit some very special locations on Cape York Peninsula and to see important cultural and natural sites through the eyes of traditional owners who have lived on these lands for tens of thousands of years. I am thankful for their generosity in sharing their stories. World Heritage listing has the potential to offer tourism, employment and economic benefits, as well as the strongest environmental protections for the values for which a place is listed.

A full nomination will take years to deliver and will only progress for areas that have the free, prior and informed consent of traditional owners and relevant landowners. The process towards World Heritage nomination will consider areas that might be included, how they will be managed and the resources required for adequate governance and management. Resourcing to support governance and management will take time to understand as the unique circumstances of each group will be considered.

Our government has committed \$2.4 million to help continue the work over the next two years to enable us to better understand the cultural and natural values in need of protection and conservation, as well as what will be required to manage areas that might be included in a full World Heritage nomination into the future. The funding of \$2.4 million will also support additional Cape York heritage assessment grants, supporting cultural value assessments on country, research, communications and governance activities undertaken by traditional owner groups to inform a World Heritage cultural landscape nomination, and continuing and ongoing engagement with all stakeholders with interest across Cape York peninsula.

World Heritage listing does not change or impact on existing tenures. Contrary to some recent media articles, it also does not mean that UNESCO will take over management of country. World Heritage listing provides additional protection focus and extra rigour which will provide a trigger for the assessment of any potential significant impacts on the property and its listed values to avoid harm to those values. If an area is included in the boundary of a World Heritage property, legal land use activities that took place prior to the listing, such as four-wheel driving and cattle grazing, can continue within a World Heritage property, although new activities or any enlargement, expansion or intensification of grazing or other activities that are likely to have a significant impact on World Heritage values would need to be referred to the Australian government for assessment and approval.

Over the coming years, the Queensland government will work with stakeholders across Cape York, including traditional owners, landowners, land users and the community to progress the nomination. This tentative listing is first and foremost about giving effect to their aspirations. To say otherwise, as some, including the federal member for Leichhardt have, is disingenuous and disrespectful to their voices. A full World Heritage nomination will not encompass the whole of Cape York Peninsula. An economic future for the cape must and will be considered in consultation with those who it may impact.

**Mr MARTIN:** Will the minister advise on the steps taken by the Miles government to address concerns about the impact of industrial odours in the Ipswich region?

**Ms LINARD:** I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased to update the committee on the steps that our government is taking to address serious issues with industrial odours in the Ipswich region. I would like to acknowledge the concerns of the Ipswich community regarding odour impacts from waste activities in the Swanbank and New Chum industrial areas, especially where the growth of communities has resulted in housing being in close proximity to activities that have the potential to produce odour. I recognise the work of the independent regulator within my department which proactively pursued solutions.

After strong representations made by the members for Bundamba, Ipswich and Jordan and following a community meeting I attended in Ipswich last September, the department began implementing a comprehensive and multifaceted five-point plan in an effort to provide relief to the community. The five focus areas have included: increased targeted compliance campaigns, including multi-agency operations and strong enforcement action against noncompliant operators; enhanced community engagement through actively meeting with a community reference group, monthly drop-in sessions and publishing regular community newsletters; expanding a long-term air quality monitoring capability by employing new technology and equipment; implementing legislative changes to improve and clarify compliance and response powers based on recommendations from an independent review; and modernising licence requirements for composting facilities.

Over the past year, there has been an increase of almost 40 per cent in the number of inspections conducted when compared to last year, and nearly triple the number of enforcement notices issued. In addition, following persistent odour impacts on the Ipswich community from noncompliant waste operators in the Swanbank area, our government ordered an independent review of the Environmental Protection Act, with the focus on powers and penalties. All of the recommendations have been enacted, with the latest legislation changes made in June this year. Together, these actions have assisted in providing much needed relief to the Ipswich community. Reports of nuisance odour have reduced by approximately 80 per cent when compared to this time last year. The work we are doing in this space is, however, importantly ongoing, with the department recently undertaking community consultation on changes to composting facility standards. The proposed changes will enable the regulator to require composting facilities near residential areas to use in-vessel or enclosed processing for highly odorous waste, and that transporters of highly odorous waste do not take waste to sites which do not meet these requirements. The consultation closed on 14 June and the department is now considering the feedback received.

Despite there being a significant downturn in the number of community nuisance reports received, my department will continue its focus on raising the waste industry's performance, including through targeting its compliance efforts on waste operators within the Swanbank industrial area, and will take the strongest possible enforcement action against any operator wilfully breaking the law. Thank all, Chair.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Will the minister provide detail of the Miles government's recent acquisitions to grow the protected area estate and how these properties will contribute to conservation and restoration of Queensland's unique biodiversity?

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you very much, member. This is a topic I love talking about, as you have heard through the questioning already here. I am very pleased to update the committee on some of the significant land acquisitions that our government has recently made. We have increased the size of Queensland's protected area network from 13.1 million hectares to almost 15 million hectares since 2015 and, more recently, our Labor government has committed a record \$262.5 million over four years to grow our protected areas—the single largest investment of its kind in Queensland's history. Over the past year alone, we have spent \$111 million on the program which included the acquisition of 12 properties totalling more than half a million hectares that will be added to the protected area estate to protect Queensland's unique biodiversity for further generations. This includes the purchase of the

352,500 hectare Vergemont Station, one of the most significant properties ever acquired for protected area. This acquisition was supported by a \$21 million philanthropic donation brokered by the Nature Conservancy Australia, which is believed to be the single largest donation for land protection in the country.

In addition to Vergemont Station, the government also purchased the 138,000-hectare Tonkoro Station near Longreach which will connect the protected area corridor including Diamantina National Park, Mount Windsor Nature Refuge, Pullen Pullen Special Wildlife Reserve and Goneaway National Park to create a total protected area landscape of almost 1.5 million hectares. Vergemont Station and the neighbouring Tonkoro Station will consolidate suitable habitat for rare and endangered species including the critically endangered night parrot and the highly restricted Opalton grasswren and will protect perennial waterways, springs and wetlands of significance in the Queensland headwaters of the Lake Eyre Basin. Our government recognises the important economic value of these properties to Western Queensland's iconic boulder opal industry and has committed that up to 40,000 hectares of Vergemont Station will be set aside to continue to support opal mining operations. Together with the opal mining occurring on other properties, the areas that are set aside on Vergemont and Tonkoro will help to ensure the industry's long-term future.

This year we purchased part of Melrose Station, which will increase the adjoining Bladensburg National Park by approximately 65,000 hectares, almost doubling that protected area. An additional 8,000 hectares adjacent to the Lakes property was acquired. Together, this land was dedicated as the new Lakes National Park on 27 June 2024. These acquisitions will also result in local employment, as new rangers will be engaged to deliver land management programs; local contractors will benefit from capital and minor works projects; and tourism opportunities will be examined to bring more visitors to these regional areas.

We have also acquired the 1,600-hectare Spadely Station on North Curtis Island—the first ecotourism adjacent acquisition since the release of Queensland's Protected Area Strategy. Spadely Station is within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area and will protect estuary, wetlands and habitat for migratory birds and threatened fauna species and support nesting habitat for the vulnerable flatback turtle. Our Miles government has also purchased 213 hectares of land to extend Daisy Hill Conservation Park, one of Brisbane's most well loved and patronised urban conservation parks.

In addition to these new public acquisitions, our government continues to work towards our commitment towards reaching our long-term target of protecting 17 per cent of the state's land mass through the expansion of our Private Protected Area Program. On 27 June this year, over 300,000 hectares was added to the protected area estate which included the declaration of the new Abingdon Downs North Nature Refuge and the extension of the existing Crystalvale Nature Refuge. I am also pleased to note the execution of the conservation agreement to establish Queensland's second special wildlife reserve, the Edgbaston special wildlife reserve, in May this year. This special place provides critical habitat for 26 plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world.

Our government is committed to accelerating the transition of high-value state forest to the protected area, and this year the first tranche of forest into protected area has progressed, comprising 2,550 hectares with a further 10,857 hectares planned for dedication later this year. Our government remains steadfastly committed to continuing to expand our protected areas and to protecting our environment.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Over to questions from the opposition.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Can we have a map of those areas for the committee members?

**Ms LINARD:** I am not sure I can provide that right now.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** No, not right now, but I would just love to see where all of these places are.

**Ms LINARD:** We can certainly do it for you, even if it is after the hearing. I am sure we can find a lovely map for you.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you, Chair. Following on from the member for Barron River in his passion to protect more of Queensland, I will go to the minister. On 19 June you responded to my letter regarding the protection of Taylor Point on the Cairns northern beaches by saying that it is rated as 'low priority for acquisition', but the local member, who sits on this committee, has said that protecting it is his 'No. 1 priority'. Is the state government's status of this site as 'low priority' proof of how ineffective Craig Crawford is?

**Ms LINARD:** Wow.

**CHAIR:** That is really low blow, member for Bonney. I rule that question out of order. You have a fellow member here. You are an experienced member. I will ask you to move on to your next question.

**Ms LINARD:** Very unbecoming.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Well—

**CHAIR:** No. I have just ruled it out of order. It is completely inappropriate.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** Rephrase.

**Ms LINARD:** I am happy to answer a rephrased question.

**CHAIR:** Rephrase the question or move on.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** How do you reconcile your government having one of your own members saying that acquisition of this particular property is his No. 1 priority while your determination of this property is that it is low priority?

**Ms LINARD:** I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to wax lyrical about the extraordinary local member for Barron River. He is giving a voice to the aspirations, concerns and hopes of his community. When the department assesses the properties we acquire, there is a clear process about what are the under-represented values we should have in the estate. That is very different from saying that it is a low priority for our government. I first clarify that point. The department has a model that it uses to assess the land we buy. It is a rigorous model and it is important that we do so, because these are public funds and it is important that people know that the land we are buying is absolutely furthering the interests of conservation. That is not to say that this piece of land is not incredibly precious. It is, not only for its natural value but also for its cultural value. The member for Barron River has been very clear about his aspirations.

I believe that when I responded to you, I mentioned that it is the local government—we have also been speaking to them—that might be the more appropriate manager of that land. I understand that it is a place where people often like to go. I understand that it is a small parcel of land. There are many reasons that I made clear to you in the correspondence that this agency would not look at purchasing it, but it does not mean that we do not hope that we will see protection of that piece of land in conjunction with other stakeholders in the area. Because the member for Barron River is such an extraordinary member and advocate for his local community, I have no doubt he is continuing to work on that outcome.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, is it a low priority or is it the No. 1 priority?

**Ms LINARD:** I have answered that question.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I do not think you have.

**Ms LINARD:** I really have.

**CHAIR:** You are being repetitive, member for Bonney.

**Ms LINARD:** I really have—and the letter answered that question, so you now have it—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It did. It very clearly said it was a low priority for the government.

**Ms LINARD:**—verbally communicated. It said other things, actually. It outlined why—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So it is not a low priority for the government?

**Ms LINARD:** Member, it is in writing and I verbally addressed that point, so now you are choosing for political purposes to ignore what we have explained. If, however, the department just started buying land anywhere without any rigour then you would criticise that. Instead of playing politics, it would be nice to recognise that this department has clear rigour in respect of the expenditure of public funds to expand public and private protected areas. We are not the only body in government at any level of government that provides protection for land. While it would not be declared a national park—it does not meet those particular requirements—it does not mean that we should not conserve it. I hope that we do, and that is what I know the local member is pursuing.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The local member on Facebook has said that the plan is for the state government to purchase the land and for council to build and manage the public asset. Is that the plan—for the state government to purchase the land that you have classified as low priority?

**Ms LINARD:** I am very happy to go back to the letter and say to you that when we assessed it against our values-based framework for acquisition under existing money it did not meet those requirements. I am touched that you consider me the state government, but I am one part of the state government. The member continues to have conversations with this government, the Labor Miles

government, hoping to protect that. I also raised it with the local government and other conservation groups when I was there for community cabinet.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, as part of the state government, which other parts of government are looking to acquire this land?

**Ms LINARD:** I do not speak on behalf of other parts of government, member. I am here to speak on behalf of my department. I have spoken verbally and you have a letter outlining in writing our current position on the basis of how we expend public funds for acquisition of land.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You have no information on this plan that the member for Barron River is talking about to acquire this land as the environment minister in this state government?

**Ms LINARD:** You are asking me whether, across government, I am aware of every conversation the local member for Barron River is having about his electorate? I know it seems extraordinarily unreasonable but, no, I do not. I do not phone-tap him; I am not following him around. I am literally responding to the direct question about my portfolio. I am sure it would be very interesting. The member for Barron River is very interesting—

**Mr CRAWFORD:** You are welcome anytime.

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you—and very active on behalf of his constituency, but question asked and answered.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So no other department that you are aware of is looking into this?

**Ms LINARD:** I have answered the question. That is not what I said.

**CHAIR:** Member for Bonney, move on.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Okay, understood. Director-General, I will go to you and I will go back to the Pioneer-Burdekin. Last year you discussed being in the early stages of assessing the impacts of local threatened species, in particular, the platypus populations in the area. Can you provide an update on the department's work in this regard?

**Mr Merrick:** I would refer the member to the answer I gave earlier that we are supporting the work that is being done by Queensland Hydro in preparing the detailed analytical report which includes works that they are undertaking to examine a range of environmental issues including the potential impact on a range of species and, as I referenced in the answer earlier, matters relating to modelling water quality and other aspects.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can you provide us any update on what has been in this work that the department has undertaken on Pioneer-Burdekin?

**Mr Merrick:** For clarity, the work, as I said earlier, is actually led by Queensland Hydro as the proponent. That is consistent with any major project; the proponent is required to do the detailed work to the standards and approaches that we set out and then we will review that work.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, at the estimates hearing last year I asked if you would visit the site of the Pioneer-Burdekin Pumped Hydro project before the estimates hearing we are at today. Twelve months ago you said—

I will certainly be visiting Eungella and I am sure in many capacities as Minister for the Environment.

...

I am very happy to give that commitment ...

I note that you met with the Save Eungella organisation at community cabinet in Mackay in April. Have you visited the site?

**Ms LINARD:** I have met with concerned stakeholders on two occasions in Mackay in respect of that project. I know I communicated to you last estimates as well that, yes, I have been to Eungella, the national park. I have not been to the site, but the Premier himself went to the site to meet with concerned stakeholders. I have heard their concerns and met with them twice now.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, last year when it was revealed that almost all of the liquid paperboard containers collected and returned by Queenslanders to Coex were being exported to India, the former minister coincidentally announced the government would invest in establishing a saveBOARD facility to process these items on the Gold Coast. A recent question on notice confirmed there is no date for the opening of this facility. Can you update us on when this popper recycling facility will be operational? Can we even have a rough timeframe?

**Ms LINARD:** The lead agency for that facility is state development. That would be a matter that you would need to direct to Minister Grace Grace because that is where the funding has come from. I do look forward to the saveBOARD facility coming online. At the same time I recall your concern about where product was going through Coex. I believe I advised at that time that the majority of liquid paperboard returned through the scheme was going to a Spanish company. I would like to advise the committee that the CEO of Coex has visited that facility for full reassurance of its recycling quality. Of course, I look forward to having the saveBOARD facility on the Gold Coast built and constructed so we can see that product going to a higher order use here. I am sorry I cannot give you the exact date. I do not have that information with me. It is not my agency.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** In terms of that Spanish company that you referenced, where is that facility? Is that in Australia or is that overseas?

**Ms LINARD:** It is overseas.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** In Spain?

**Ms LINARD:** That is my understanding, yes.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Did Coex staff travel to Spain to assess this facility? You just said the CEO went over.

**Ms LINARD:** A member of Coex did to reassure themselves of the facility and ensure that the product that was being recycled here is actually being recycled. I understand the rest is being recycled by saveBOARD in New South Wales, but I look forward to that product being recycled here.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, last year you assured this committee that Coex had found no evidence that these items were not being recycled, and it was a substantial number. It was nearly 130 million poppers from Queenslanders that were being sent to India. If this was the case, why has there been a change from sending them to India and to instead sending them to Spain?

**Ms LINARD:** I cannot comment on that. That is a process obviously that Coex manages. I do want to make the point that I want to be assured, of course, that the product that is going there is being reused like it is committed to be. That is what Coex have sought to do and what they provide that reassurance to me as minister and that is what I have relayed to you.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Did Coex staff travel to India as well, or was it just Spain that they wanted to visit?

**Ms LINARD:** The contract is with Alier, a Spanish company. That is the company their agreement is with, so that is where they travelled to get reassurance.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Why the change if there were no issues, like you reported to us last year?

**Ms LINARD:** I just mentioned to you I cannot say why; the contract is with that company.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You are not interested? You do not want to look into that to find out why they made the significant move?

**Ms LINARD:** If you are asking me to ask why they are using a different company, my expectation of Coex is that they are doing their due diligence to ensure that these products, whether they are actually being recycled domestically or being transported overseas, are not going to some other nefarious process but that they are being recycled. I expect Coex to make sure they have reassurance processes. There has been concern with respect to liquid paperboard. You yourself have communicated concern. I am glad that they took it seriously and have provided reassurance in that regard, but I would prefer—and look forward to—having that product recycled domestically.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That is a substantial difference in terms of the distance that these items are being sent not only from Australia to India but also now from Australia to Spain. Do you know how much Coex staff spent on that trip to Spain to assess this?

**Ms LINARD:** No, I do not have that information. They are a private company.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Are you able to get some further information on why the contract was changed, why they have decided to send them even further around the world to Spain instead of India if there were apparently no issues?

**Ms LINARD:** My recollection of conversations with Coex and the CEO of Coex is that this is a highly respected company. That is why it is going to this facility. I am informed by the director-general that he understands that that company is providing that service to a number of states.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, sticking with this topic broadly, the National Waste Report says that Queensland has the worst access to kerbside food and organic waste services of any state in the nation. Last year you said that in order to reach the landfill diversion targets 1½ million households would need to access kerbside organic collection services. When does this target need to be reached by?

**Ms LINARD:** I would be very interested in you providing a page reference to where they say that we have the worst program in the country in respect—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Worst of any state. It is the National Waste Report. I would have thought the environment minister would be across that.

**Ms LINARD:** I would love to hear the quote. What page exactly did it say that Queensland has the worst, or were you just—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It is a graph that shows the lowest access of food and organic collection—

**Ms LINARD:** The lowest access to—right.

**Mr O'CONNOR:**—which is the worst, I would say, because your job is to increase access, Minister, isn't it?

**CHAIR:** Member, do not argue with the minister.

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I think he was answering the question, Chair. I think the minister was provoking him.

**Ms LINARD:** I think I was provoked technically there, Chair, but we do not want to get into a he said/she said because I will win. Coming back to that, if we look at FOGO and we look at waste, again, we have been clear about our targets and aspirational targets about where we want to see both waste reduced and in respect of reducing the environmental impact from waste going to landfill.

With respect to FOGO or any waste, we are part of the answer, as is the local council and the federal government—the three levels of government—and, of course, consumers' behaviour in terms of where they are putting their waste and the decisions they are making. Our government has made available to councils, which actually provide the kerbside bin collection services that you are asking about—it is not the state's responsibility to do kerbside collection—a \$151 million fund which councils can apply to in order to introduce FOGO or FO or GO as they wish. We are doing that to support them not only with bin harmonisation and the provision of bins, but also education around FOGO. We absolutely want to see a reduction in food and garden organic waste going to landfill, and that is what we are working towards: making that funding available. We have been able to make that funding available because it was our government that reintroduced the waste levy. That waste levy is what has seen a reduction in more than 70 per cent of waste coming over the border. Imagine where we would be if the former LNP government had not scrapped the waste levy. We would be even further ahead on our targets.

I can only imagine because you did scrap it and we reintroduced it, but it is paying dividends. I look forward to continuing to work with local councils that are applying for the FOGO funding and really give a shout-out to those councils that are already leaning in with respect to that program.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, industry has repeatedly raised with you the issues they are facing in organic recycling. In a June letter from the Queensland waste organisation WRIQ, the national organic recycling body AORA and the national recycling body WMRR, they said—

... since October 2023 Queensland—

the government—

appears to have done all it can to make the FOGO industry in Queensland unviable.

I am very happy to provide a copy and to table this letter for the benefit of the committee. Minister, these key organisations in this sector requested an urgent meeting with you in this letter over a month ago. Did you meet with them?

**Ms LINARD:** I thank the member for the question. I have met with those three bodies many times and attended events and spoken about these issues. My department consults with them regularly and we appreciate the concerns that they have raised in there. We will continue to talk to them about those matters, but I think, to be fair, some of their key concerns around FOGO have been PFAS related. One of the key things they are asking for in that correspondence is changes to be made at source rather than industry dealing with that at collection of waste and processing of waste.



Just recently when I went to the national environment ministers council it was Queensland and I as Queensland minister who called on all jurisdictions in the Commonwealth to absolutely harmonise and to work very diligently and focus on making packaging reform that will make it easier for industry in this respect, rather than having to deal with the risk and carry the risk downstream. It was Queensland and I as environment minister that asked that all EPAs across the country look at PFAS and what we can do to not only ensure community safety but also take up some of the concerns they have mentioned.

Industry and council also have said that industry need long-term contracts and continuity of feedstock for them to be able to economically stack up and invest in processing facilities. We will see that as more councils come on board and provide long-term contracts of seven and eight years for FOGO or FO or GO, and you will see these industries investing in additional processing capacity. That is why we have a significant fund and that is why we invested in regional waste management plans, so that we can provide support to councils but also to industry to try and pull the right levers at the right time to see improvements in this regard. We will continue listening to those bodies. They are very strong advocates on behalf of industry, but of course as government we have to balance the interests of public safety with industry concerns and also what council is raising. We have many stakeholders to balance.

**CHAIR:** A brief question—final one.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Brief? I will go to the director-general, if this is the last one I can get in. Director-General, the Burleigh Head National Park management plan was prepared 25 years ago and extended again in 2023 with only minor amendments. Volunteers say the national park is overrun with exotic grasses and other weeds and they have not been properly supported to restore the park in keeping with the direction of the Burleigh Head National Park management plan. How much funding has been allocated towards the management of weeds and other pests in the national park and what data has been collected by the department to establish whether the objectives of the plan are being met? I am happy for you to take that on notice, if you like.

**Mr Merrick:** In terms of the specifics about expenditure on pest and weed management in Burleigh Head National Park, we would have to, with the minister's permission, take that on notice. I am happy to speak more broadly around our work on pest management for the member if that is useful, because we have been increasing the investment we make in pest and weed management. It is a comprehensive approach that we take. In the last financial year the department allocated \$11.8 million for pest control programs in parks and forests, including \$1.35 million for the Strategic Pest Management Program. That strategic pest program targets pests that threaten a national park's most important values, including threatened species, and that pose risks to public safety and present biosecurity risks. I might just see if the deputy director-general wants to add anything more in relation to this.

**Mr Klaassen:** We do have a dedicated team of rangers that are based at Burleigh and they do work regularly on Burleigh Head National Park, so they are out and active. They work with the local traditional owners and they work with volunteers, so it does receive a deal of attention through the rangers who are working across the park there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Deputy Director-General.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am happy for the rest to be on notice, if that is okay.

**CHAIR:** Given that we started a couple of minutes late, we are going to go over by a couple of minutes trying to get some of those questions on notice. However, we have a 10-second question and a one-minute answer perhaps.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** A one-second answer, Chair. Minister, in relation to the member for Bonney's commentary on me before, I have a simple question regarding Taylor Point. Is your department the only department of government that buys land?

**Ms LINARD:** No.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to address any of the questions taken on notice to date? Otherwise, we can enter into the next session to try and answer some of those?

**Ms LINARD:** Yes, I understand we have one matter. I will defer to the director-general first and then we might have another matter.

**Mr Merrick:** In relation to the question from the member for Bonney in terms of requests around the Private Protected Area Program, in the last year the department received 52 approaches from landholders potentially interested in establishing a private protected area in 2023-24. Once an inquiry is received, the department commences an assessment process to determine whether a property is

suitable to be declared a private protected area. This commences with a desktop assessment and includes a field assessment where necessary.

**Ms LINARD:** We have another answer, Chair, with respect to the member for Bonney's question about Eurimbula.

**Mr Merrick:** Thank you, Minister. It regards the date of purchase for Eurimbula, noting the actual national park is considerably older. Turkey Station, which is actually an extension, was purchased by the department in 2014. Following purchase, a five-year leaseback arrangement with the owner was negotiated. This was subsequently extended on hardship grounds following fire and flooding. Another matter that required negotiation, including with the traditional owners, was the continuation of existing recreational fishing activities in the estuaries around the park, and these matters account for a longer than usual gazettal timeframe.


**CHAIR:** I think there are a couple of other questions, but we can address those in the next session.

**Ms LINARD:** In the break we will also just quickly check how many we have and make sure that matches what you have on record.

**CHAIR:** Yes; thank you. The committee will now adjourn for a break. The hearing will resume at 7 pm with the examination of estimates for the portfolio area of science and innovation. Thank you, Minister.

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you, Chair.

**Proceedings suspended from 6.47 pm to 6.59 pm.**

 **CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister, Director-General and officials. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio area of science and innovation open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I call the member for Bonney, unless you want to address any of those other issues?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** No. This is great, Chair, thank you. Director-General, in terms of the department's overall operations, where are you at in terms of reducing your emissions to net zero?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. We continue to make significant progress in terms of the target that we have set of net zero emissions by 2030 for departmental operations. The department is demonstrating strong progress towards the target. Over the past two years we have achieved a 25 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. We have contracts in place to provide 100 per cent renewable energy to all premises connected to the grid. We are achieving further reductions in emissions through energy efficiency measures and the installation of solar power systems, particularly to displace diesel power generation in our remote off-grid buildings. As at June 2024, the department has installed over 550 kilowatts of solar power systems in grid-connected buildings and 600 kilowatts of solar power systems in off-grid buildings. In total, we have seen a tenfold increase since 2018.

The department is also committed to establishing a carbon-neutral vehicle fleet. Since 2019, the department's fleet of leased small and medium-sized vehicles and SUVs has transitioned from 90 per cent petrol or diesel to 98 per cent low emissions—that is, electric, electric hybrid and/or hydrogen vehicles. Action is now being taken to transition hybrid vehicles to full electric. The department currently has 16 fully electric vehicles with another 11 on order. The department will continue to pursue opportunities to achieve emissions reductions in coming years as it works towards our goal of net zero by 2030.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Do we have figures on the emissions or how close you are to net zero?

**Mr Merrick:** We certainly have the latest available data. I can report that for the latest available year—noting that we receive data from the department of public works—emissions in 2022-23 were 5,374 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. Around 3,586 tonnes or 67 per cent are from our vehicle usage, noting we have a very substantial fleet with national parks, of course.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** A lot of Land Cruisers.

**Mr Merrick:** Some 770 tonnes or 14 per cent are from electricity and just over 1,000 tonnes was from air travel. We continue to make every effort we can to reduce in those areas.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, how many department staff travelled to the BIO conference in Boston? I am happy to get figures for this year but I am particularly interested in 2023.

**Mr Merrick:** I can certainly say that this year no departmental staff travelled to BIO. I am almost confident in saying that in the previous year no departmental staff travelled to BIO.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Just the Chief Scientist? Is that who normally goes? I think they were there last year.

**Mr Merrick:** I would have to check that.

**Dr Jacobs:** My understanding is that certainly not this year and I do not believe the state development department—

**Mr Merrick:** The mission to BIO is now led by the department of state development.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** But the Chief Scientist was not there last year?

**Mr Merrick:** The Chief Scientist has in previous years travelled.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can I get the cost to the department of the travel of the Chief Scientist?

**Mr Merrick:** I would have to take that on notice, through the minister. It is in prior years. It is some time ago since the Chief Scientist has probably travelled.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am happy for you to take it on notice if you want to get the figures for the costs of the Chief Scientist's travel.

**Ms LINARD:** The historical figure of the chief scientist at that time?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I believe they were there last year, from what I can see.

**Ms LINARD:** We will seek to clarify.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr Merrick:** What I would say in this regard is that attendance by the Queensland government has been a very longstanding commitment that the government has made across many governments. I think it stretches back to the early 2000s.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, is the state development delegation separate to the Life Sciences Queensland delegation?

**Mr Merrick:** No. To clarify for the member, state development actually lead the overall Queensland government engagement in terms of BIO. That includes the joint presence we have with Life Sciences Queensland.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Does the department support LSQ financially for their delegation?

**Mr Merrick:** I will quickly take advice.

**Ms LINARD:** Chair, may I take this moment to welcome to the hearing our executives and our DDGs from science and innovation and thank our environment colleagues who may have left.

**Mr Merrick:** Minister, I might invite the Deputy Director-General of Innovation to speak to that last question.

**Ms Diffey:** Certainly this year, through the office of the Chief Entrepreneur, the department provided funding through LSQ to support six start-ups to attend the BIO mission. They paid not for their travel but just for their tickets to the conference itself. I would have to come back to you with the cost of those tickets.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I would be interested in that, if you could take that on notice. Can I get the figures for what the department provided to LSG generally; how much funding is provided?

**Dr Jacobs:** Thank you for the question, member. We did provide to you a question on notice in previous years when we were providing support to LSQ. We can get that information if you like, but that is for previous years again.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So there is currently no funding for LSQ from the department?

**Dr Jacobs:** We can check whether there has been any in the last financial year as well, but I know we did do it for the previous year.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It is just the one-off funding for this delegation to BIO?

**Dr Jacobs:** No, sorry. If I could clarify, we have provided funding to LSQ for undertaking regional forums in Queensland and that is the most recent funding that we provided; not for the travel to BIO.

That is my understanding. If I could, through the director-general and the minister, clarify that for my memory's sake?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** And that was BIO this year. Was there any funding to LSQ for BIO last year?

**Dr Jacobs:** For our science division for BIO, I do not believe so. I believe that the funding that we provided last year—and it may have been the year before now because that is when I think we did the question on notice—it was actually for the regional forum. I can get you that information.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am keen to know of the support provided to LSQ, if that is okay.

**Mr Merrick:** We will seek to clarify this, but I think the principal form of support to LSQ is through the department of state development.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Any information on that would be helpful so thank you for taking it on notice. In the budget measures and on page 2 of the SDS, there is reference to \$89.7 million being spent over five years to develop and deliver the Queensland Quantum and Advanced Technologies Strategy and the Queensland Quantum Academy. How much of this funding, if any, is going to the company PsiQuantum?

**Mr Merrick:** At this stage, none of that funding is going to PsiQuantum. We are not a party to the investment deal with PsiQuantum.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can we get a breakdown of that funding? I know the academy was specifically listed in the budget but I could not see much more detail on the \$89.7 million. Can we get a bit more information on that?

**Mr Merrick:** Certainly the new grant programs are: the \$20 million Quantum Commercialisation Infrastructure Program, which is designed to help build infrastructure and a commercial pipeline of quantum and advanced technologies systems, devices and components. There is a \$15 million Quantum and Advanced Technologies Co-Investment Fund, which is designed to attract new investment and foster collaboration in quantum and advanced technologies development and application. There is a \$10 million allocation towards the Quantum Decarbonisation Mission to accelerate the development and application of quantum technologies with the potential to make significant contributions to decarbonisation. There is the \$5 million Quantum 2032 Challenge Program, which is designed to catalyse the development of quantum-based innovation in sports tech and related areas for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. There is \$3.81 million allocated towards the Quantum and Advanced Technologies Talent Building Program to facilitate the development of a diverse and skilled quantum and events technologies workforce. There is \$6 million for the academy itself.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** To clarify, the funding for PsiQuantum is coming straight out of Treasury and whatever other arrangements that have been made? There is no funding from your department going to PsiQuantum?

**Mr Merrick:** At this stage, that is correct. This was canvassed quite extensively by the Under Treasurer in the hearing earlier this week.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, what input did the department have on the choice of PsiQuantum for this major partnership? Yours is obviously the expert department on this. What input did you have into the government's decision to invest so heavily in this company?

**Mr Merrick:** As I said earlier, we were not party to the detailed negotiation with PsiQuantum nor the financial agreement with PsiQuantum. We have at times provided advice in terms of leading quantum expertise that could support the decision of government but that is the extent of our involvement in this.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So the department which manages the quantum strategy and is the expert within government in this field had no input into the government's decision to invest nearly half a billion dollars in this company?

**Mr Merrick:** With respect, I think the strategy is a more recent strategy that was launched. I suspect the discussions with PsiQuantum probably go back a couple of years. Whilst we have broad lead for science, quantum is a rapidly emerging field and we do not have in-house, genuine expertise in quantum technologies. We provided advice to Queensland Treasury about the people who are best placed to talk about the particular capabilities of individual companies. There is tremendous expertise in Queensland to draw upon in terms of supporting the decision around the investment in PsiQuantum, and that comes from longstanding investment by the Queensland government—going back to the Smart State days—that actually helped to build the quantum capability in our universities.

Separately, we have supported a number of initiatives to date and will continue to do so. I look to the deputy director-general for the details, but we have invested in the Centre of Excellence in Quantum Biotechnology. Again, we were one of the foundational investors. That centre is led by Warwick Bowen at UQ. He is making a tremendous contribution through Quantum Innovation Queensland. That centre was successful in raising \$35 million through the ARC Centres of Excellence Program.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, you said that the process of engagement with PsiQuantum started a couple of years ago, but I believe the strategy was only released last September. How was the government's quantum strategy released with a company to invest in already identified?

**Mr Merrick:** I think the Under Treasurer dealt with this matter. The government is involved in a range of discussions across a whole range of industries, dealing with potential companies that may be looking to expand or relocate into Queensland. That was part of their regular process. The quantum strategy itself is an entirely separate matter and reflects the current and growing importance of quantum to the Queensland economy.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The quantum strategy is different from the enormous amount of money the government is investing in a quantum computing company.

**Mr Merrick:** They are not mutually exclusive, no, as the minister said. We were not party to that decision and entirely complementary.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, you head the department of innovation. This is one of the most significant investments in quantum computing. You are the minister responsible for the government's quantum strategy. Why was your department not involved in this decision?

**Ms LINARD:** Firstly, we are not the only department across government that is involved in supporting and facilitating innovation and science. We are very proud to be key facilitators and to represent both strategies and frameworks that outline funding programs in lots of different departments. Investment attraction, the different funds in State Development and Treasury and the Queensland Venture Capital Development Fund are all complementary and work concurrently.

In October, the former premier released the quantum strategy. I am very proud to have that under the portfolio. The director-general outlined the different funding programs—in excess of \$50 million—that I announced in June to facilitate that. This is an incredible opportunity for Queensland. In fact, CSIRO estimates that, as a country, our economic return from quantum could reach \$2.2 billion and 8,700 jobs. I think it is wonderful that we are working across government to make sure that Queenslanders—our businesses, jobs and opportunities here—are playing a part and leading in that, particularly given that this provides an opportunity to solve some of the most complex problems.

I am proud, as the director-general indicated, of the investments that were made back in the Smart State days. I remember the investments into nanotechnology that have directly, over time—30 years—contributed to this. I was then working in the area of state development. They are not mutually exclusive. They are complementary, and I cannot wait to see where the strategy takes us. Do either the director-general or the deputy director-general want to add anything else about quantum?

**Mr Klaassen:** Thank you for the question, member. It is a very pivotal time and I do think the PsiQuantum investment is very complementary to the strategy. With the support of the Australian and Queensland governments, that investment is a significant manufacturing and production partnership, bringing high-impact quantum computing opportunities to Queensland with applications across health and pharmaceuticals, chemicals, energy, security and food production. It will create up to 400 highly skilled jobs, establish partnerships with quantum and advanced manufacturing industries to localise its supply chain and build collaborations with universities to grow the Australian quantum talent pool.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, should Queenslanders be concerned that, reportedly, almost half a billion dollars in funds and equity from their state government have been invested into a company into which the expert department that you lead had no input?

**Ms LINARD:** So you are asking me about an investment decision that was made in a different department and you are asking for my opinion on that?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You are a member of the government, are you not, Minister?

**Ms LINARD:** That would be outside the purview and terms of this hearing. I understand where you are trying to take the hearing.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am just amazed that an investment into a quantum computing company by a government that you are a member of did not come before you or had no input from you or your department. That is extraordinary to me.

**Ms LINARD:** You are concerned that negotiations on an investment the government made did not come to me when I was not the minister in the portfolio over time?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You were on the quantum strategy, Minister. Can I get some clarity—

**Ms LINARD:** Sorry, the director-general would like to make a comment.

**Mr Merrick:** To clarify the comments I made earlier, the department itself does not have leading-edge knowledge around the latest developments in the quantum sector. Through former chief scientist Hugh Possingham, we convened leading experts within Queensland to provide advice to Treasury. We played a facilitation role, recognising that we cannot have scientific expertise across every potential emerging developmental area.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** But, Director-General, your department put together the quantum strategy; is that correct?

**Mr Merrick:** It did indeed, yes, with support from Quantum Innovation Queensland.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** When was that strategy finalised? When was that produced? What was the timeline for that? Can we get some details on that?

**Mr Merrick:** It was released in October 2023.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** When was it prepared? What was the process for that within government? Can we get some information on that?

**Ms LINARD:** It was publicly released in October 2023.

**Mr Merrick:** It certainly went through a very rapid preparation process, taking on board inputs from people within the broader ecosystem in Queensland.

**Ms LINARD:** And is overseen by the Quantum Innovation Queensland advisory group, led by our Chief Scientist.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, have you met with anyone from PsiQuantum?

**Ms LINARD:** No, but I acknowledge that you have.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Sure. I am interested in this because I am the shadow minister for this portfolio.

**Ms LINARD:** Excellent.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You are the minister for this portfolio. How come you have not met with anyone from this company?

**Ms LINARD:** Then I am sure they would hope that you are not trying to cast aspersions on why we have invested all this money on behalf of Queensland taxpayers—which is essentially the tone of your earlier questioning. I am very interested in the strategy, member.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I am just amazed that the minister responsible has not met with this company that has received such an extraordinary amount of money from the government.

**Ms LINARD:** Member, I am very interested in our quantum strategy and, in fact, attended the first meeting of the Quantum Innovation Queensland advisory group, led by the Chief Scientist, and I am very supportive of the investment that my colleagues in State Development and Treasury made in regard to that company. I look forward to seeing what it delivers for Queensland with respect to solutions to some very complex problems.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Minister, when will you be meeting with the company?

**Ms LINARD:** I do not have a crystal ball, so I cannot tell you exactly what date and time I will be meeting with them, member. The importance here is that we have made an investment decision as a government. We have released a strategy which clearly communicates our intention to see the benefits and potential future benefits of quantum here in Queensland delivered—the jobs delivered. I have recently released over \$50 million of potential programs and grant programs for application. I look forward to seeing how that will move forward our quantum strategy in Queensland.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I will move on to another topic still within the innovation portfolio. Director-General, last year the minister stated the Queensland government was working with an innovation company and the Chief Entrepreneur was midway through the Beyond Cups Innovation Challenge. I note that the answer to question on notice 15 states—

Successful applicants across each category are now delivering their proof-of-concept projects with an industry partner.

Is there any projection on when it could be realistic for Queensland to have a ban on single-use coffee cups based on this work?

**Mr Merrick:** With the minister's agreement, we might bring forward the executive director of the Office of Circular Economy. In terms of something bought in single-use plastics, there is live work underway to harmonise nationally the approach around the next phase of phasing out single-use plastics. We have committed to play our full part in that process. In terms of the specifics around the coffee cup challenge, I might hand to Andrew.

**Mr Connor:** The specific answer around the projection of when is not at this point, but we have had some very encouraging potential options for alternatives to single-use coffee cups. We have a keen interest in re-useable options. We have been working with the Boomerang Alliance to test models around re-useable systems. That is a key part of this. If we can re-use it, it is better than a single-use product. With respect to potential for single-use products, we are also looking at different material types that can improve circularity and sustainable outcomes.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, I want to ask about the scientific evidence around PFAS levels. From the consultation I have had, it seems that the industry is unanimously aligned on the PFAS level the government has set for compost being unachievable until bans of this substance are potentially implemented further up the pipeline. Industry has told me they are unable to invest in the new facilities they need to meet our organics recycling targets. They have been very vocal about the unfairness, in their opinion, of Queensland's composting industry being the first in Australia to have regulated limits on PFAS. What scientific evidence has the department gathered to use this as a realistic and attainable limit for composting facilities?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. We have in advance called forward the deputy director-general of environmental services and regulation. I will hand over to him because there has been extensive work done on this matter. Before the deputy director-general starts, I think it is also important to state there is a growing body of evidence internationally about the health and environmental impacts of PFAS. That work—and you can see the work, for example, done by the US EPA—is showing that the potential health impacts are very significant. We do not resile from the fact that we have taken a leading position in terms of enhancing regulation around PFAS because we are doing it in the interests of Queenslanders and the environment. With that, I hand over to the deputy director-general.

**Mr Lawrence:** I thank the member for the question. PFAS is obviously one of the emerging chemicals that is causing a great deal of interest across the globe. In terms of Queensland, we were the first state to ban PFAS chemicals in firefighting foam in 2016. We have led around the biosolids issue. Biosolids coming through sewage treatment plants contain levels of PFAS. We have developed guidance around the use of biosolids to protect good quality agricultural land from an accumulation of PFAS into the food chain and protecting public health and water supplies.

As we go forward, there is something in the order of 14,000 different types of PFAS. We know that PFOS, for example, has been declared by the World Health Organization as a potential carcinogen and PFOA as a carcinogen. The US EPA is saying there is no safe limit for PFAS.

We know that in our organics waste stream we are seeing PFAS coming in through packaging material. As the minister indicated, the minister presented to the environment ministers meeting in Sydney to ask that the federal government look to banning and bringing forward bans of PFAS into packaging material, which is one of the key issues for composting because that material is coming into compost and potentially contaminating it.

We have done a fair bit of work in that space. In my team I have a couple of very experienced scientists who are very good in the PFAS space. We have done a lot of work there looking at what levels are appropriate. At the end of the day, compost in Queensland is unrestricted. Once you have composted it, it could go to landscaping or kindergartens, schools and so forth. There is a need to make sure that we are regulating this carefully because we know that we are going to have problems going forward and we already have issues from historic contamination.

In terms of the numbers that are in the requirements around compost, we talked to the industry. I met with industry groups that you mentioned earlier on a number of occasions and talked through the concerns they had. I appreciate their concerns. I accept their concerns. We are working very closely with the industry. We have about 22 sites across Queensland who have already agreed to those numbers to operate within Queensland, so they are achievable. It is clear that the numbers we have

come up with are about protecting public health and about protecting the environment. That is what those numbers are there for. We can demonstrate that they are accurate and correct.

The other piece is that we have been quite clear that we are not going to be black and white around the regulation. We understand that there will be some time to understand the flow of materials into a site and where the PFAS is coming from and being able to regulate it. We believe fully that if industry keeps an eye on what is coming in they will be able to manage it to a level that meets those limits. We accept there will be little blips along the way and we will work with industry around that. We have tried to be as reasonable as we can, recognising that we have a responsibility to ensure that this material is handled appropriately.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you, Mr Lawrence. Can you provide this committee with a list of those 22 sites that have agreed to these limits?

**Mr Lawrence:** Yes, we can.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you. I would appreciate that. Through you, Director-General or Minister, is that fine?

**Mr Merrick:** As an additional point, I pay credit to the scientists within the department because, in partnership with scientists from other organisations, they have done leading work looking at the impacts of PFAS particularly in turtles in the Ipswich area. They show some very concerning findings in terms of effects on reproductive behaviours and capacities of those turtles. This is why we take this matter so seriously.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you, Director-General. Mr Lawrence, are we able to get some more information on the samples and the testing that the department relied on to come up with those limits? That is what my question was specifically about—the scientific evidence that your scientists have used for these limits.

**Mr Lawrence:** We could certainly put together some information, but it would take a reasonable amount of time because it is quite complex science to be able to do that, but we could certainly put something together.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Is there something in the form that you share with industry that shows them the evidence for why this decision was taken? Is there something that you could prepare for us? I think there is a capacity to take it on notice a little later, if that is okay. I completely understand it might not be tonight.

**Mr Lawrence:** I think we would need more than tonight to put that together.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** We will not do that to you.

**Mr Lawrence:** We certainly can put some information together for you.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That would be helpful—if that is okay with you, Minister and Director-General?

**Ms LINARD:** I would just note that I am the only one who can take it on notice, not the director-general. I am happy to take it on notice. I want to make the point to the member that the department, the director-general and I have met repeatedly with the industry. I do say again to the industry, whose interests you are representing here today, that we are absolutely listening to them and their concerns. We know that we need to stop it at the source, not downstream. This is about public health. In this place we make decisions in the interests of public health. In 10 years time I am not going to have it on my conscience that I have not acted in respect of PFAS to protect my children and everyone else's children in this state. I do take advice from my agency about what the science is saying. They have told me they can meet the limits. I think we need to be clear and note concerns, work with them, take leadership at a national level—which I have—and make sure we serve the public interest first and foremost.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I will move to government questions. Minister, could you advise of the ways the Miles government is supporting innovative women to grow their innovation-driven businesses?

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you very much, Chair, for being a champion for women in innovation, as I am also. One of Advance Queensland's six key priorities is to build a well-connected, inclusive and thriving innovation ecosystem, and this cannot be achieved without women. Queensland's female founders are going from strength to strength with the backing of our Miles government. We are shifting the dial by increasing the number of women participating in the state's future economy.



Supporting innovative businesses led by women represents a major opportunity for our economy. A recent report from Asialink predicted that boosting the number of female business owners to equal that of men in Australia could add up to \$135 billion to the national economy. Queensland's nation-leading Backing Female Founders Program delivers funding programs and other initiatives to women doing the hard yards of building innovative businesses by using emerging technologies and disrupting traditional industries.

On International Women's Day this year I announced in parliament the opening of a second round of the Accelerating Female Founders Program as well as expanded eligibility for the Female Founders Co-Investment Fund, two key programs under the Backing Female Founders Program. Recently I was absolutely thrilled to announce the 11 recipients of the Accelerating Female Founders Program round 2. The 11 recipients will receive a total of \$2.167 million to deliver a range of business development programs over the next two years. This is with the aim of supporting more than 500 innovative women across the state with the skills and connections they need to soar. Founders will receive support and expertise, including mentoring, coaching and product prototype development and testing to overcome some of the key challenges they face as women business owners of innovation-driven enterprises. Initiatives include: Gold Coast based Indigenous Innovation Ventures in partnership with Bond University, helping growth stage First Nations female founders; Townsville-based Australian Impact Group will support early stage female STEM entrepreneurs to grow their businesses; Farmers2Founders will assist female founders in AgTech move their business to the next stage; Tech Ready Women's Investment Ready Program will help bridge the gap in innovation and entrepreneurship.

I was also delighted to announce two new recipients of the groundbreaking Female Founders Co-Investment Fund: Ochre Sun, led by First Nations founder Alana Kennedy, will receive funding to support the growth of Ochre Sun's innovative skincare that uses sustainably and ethically sourced native ingredients; and Luxe.It.Fwd will receive funding to support the growth of its sustainably-driven circular fashion re-commerce platform that provides consumers with more affordable preloved luxury goods and reduces waste in the fashion industry.

I am proud of the work our government has done to support more than 2,000 Queensland women through our female founders programs to overcome some of the barriers these incredible entrepreneurs face.

**Mr CRAWFORD:** Minister, can you provide an update on the way the Miles government is collaborating on scientific research with other governments and organisations across the world?

**Ms LINARD:** I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to update the committee on how our government is strengthening our state's science sector by continuing to develop Queensland's strategic international science partnerships with countries such as the United States and Germany. Not only do these partnerships allow researchers to share ideas and experience and undertake collaborative projects that address significant global challenges but they help to keep Queensland research competitive and maintain our global reputation as a science leader.

Queensland science has a track record of successfully partnering with leading international researchers and companies to explore shared interests and collaborate on important research that helps deliver economic, social, community and cultural value. Germany has long been hailed as a global leader in scientific research and technological development, and Queensland enjoys longstanding trade investment links and collaborations with Germany. Over the past two years the Queensland government has also worked hard to strengthen our research relationships with Germany.

In 2022 the Queensland Treasurer, on behalf of the Queensland government, signed a joint declaration of intent for cooperation in bioeconomy with the German federal government through the Ministry of Education and Research. Under this partnership the Queensland government has committed \$3 million to implement the Queensland-Germany Bioeconomy Collaborative Science Program. The first round of recipients will be announced soon.

Last year, in my first week as Minister for Science, I signed a declaration of intent with the Bavarian State Minister of Science and the Arts to support collaborative projects in a variety of areas of importance for both of our jurisdictions. Bavaria is a significant economic region in Europe, and it is a great compliment to our research capability that Bavaria has chosen to work with Queensland. Under this new strategic partnership the Queensland-Bavaria Collaborative Research Program was launched in April of this year with two categories of funding: seed and development.

I am pleased to inform committee members that under an open and competitive process, and working with our Bavarian colleagues, 10 joint projects will be supported through the seed grants

program. The Queensland government will provide a total of \$80,000 to assist the Queensland recipients undertake projects with their Bavarian partners in priority research areas including artificial intelligence, aerospace, emission reduction technologies, health and the bioeconomy. One project, for example, will use novel mass spectrometry techniques to understand better cell responses to various treatments and the impact of drug resistance. Other projects include looking at new energy-efficient solutions to harness waste biomass for sustainable chemical production and studying heat transfer control in hypersonic flight. The development grants program, which closed for applications on 10 July this year, will award up to four Queensland research organisations up to \$130,000 each to support innovative research projects benefiting Queensland. This funding will be matched by the Bavarian government's support of its relevant research institutes or universities.

In an often turbulent world, forging international alliances is crucial for Queensland to address key issues alongside reliable partners. Our relationship with Germany is especially valuable and presents substantial opportunities for both the present and into the future. Like Germany, Queensland is encouraging research and industry partnerships in new areas of technology development. This is reflected in the Queensland government's recent investment in quantum and advanced technologies.

The Queensland government also has a longstanding MOU with the world's largest research and museum complex, the Smithsonian Institution in the United States. The Queensland-Smithsonian Fellowships Program enables fellows to benefit from working with the Smithsonian Institution, giving them the opportunity to access sought-after expertise, collections and facilities and increase their knowledge and skills in their chosen field. Fellowships are awarded for a diverse range of projects, including those in the natural and social sciences, natural and cultural heritage, aerospace and aerosciences, education or museum management. The fellows then apply this beneficial newfound knowledge and experience to their work at the Queensland organisation that employs them.

Past fellows have conducted vital work that will benefit Queensland, such as Dr Nathan Waltham from Griffith University. Dr Waltham used his fellowship to boost his research capabilities about how to apply statistical models to map key habitats and approaches to measure water quality improvement following habitat restoration. These skills are important and necessary for Queensland as we advance towards a healthy and sustainable reef ecosystem.

Our relationships and collaborations with other international governments and researchers will play a significant role in turning scientific advances into the industries of the future, and I look forward to seeing the positive opportunities and impacts this will provide for Queensland.

**Mr MARTIN:** Will the minister please advise the committee how the government is supporting First Nations people's engagement in biodiscovery?

**Ms LINARD:** Queensland is Australia's most naturally diverse state. It has 13 terrestrial and 14 marine bioregions supporting more than 1,000 ecosystem types, including rainforests, savannas, rangelands, the dry tropics, wetlands and the coast. Queensland has 70 per cent of Australia's mammals, 80 per cent of its native birds and more than 50 per cent of its native reptiles, frogs and plant species. The state is also home to five World Heritage listed areas, including the Wet Tropics, the Great Barrier Reef and K'gari World Heritage area, the largest sand island on earth. Such biodiversity creates significant opportunities to explore beneficial uses of those plants and animals through biodiscovery. For example, 50 per cent of the approved drugs in the past 30 years have been made either directly or indirectly from products found in nature.

The Miles government is committed to developing Queensland's biodiscovery sector so that the benefits can flow on to all sections of the community well into the future. To ensure the sustainability and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of this vast potential, Queensland was the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce best practice biodiscovery legislation through the Biodiscovery Act. The act ensures: that the benefits of biodiscovery are shared fairly and equitably with the community; that the collection of biological materials for biodiscovery is sustainable; and that the use of traditional knowledge for biodiscovery is protected under prior agreement with the custodian of the knowledge. This regulatory approach increases certainty and efficiency for researchers and promotes the conservation and sustainable use of Queensland's native biological resources. First Nations peoples' traditional knowledge of biological diversity is an invaluable resource for researchers seeking to collect, understand, develop and commercialise new and innovative medicines and other products for commercial purposes. Our government understands and respects the important contribution traditional knowledge can make to a thriving biodiscovery industry and the potential benefits that can flow to First Nations communities themselves.

To ensure the potential benefits flow to First Nations people, our government, in partnership with First Nations representatives, reformed the Biodiscovery Act in 2020. Those reforms introduced a traditional knowledge obligation that protects access to, and use of, the traditional knowledge of First Nations peoples. Supporting researchers to meet their traditional knowledge obligation is a traditional knowledge code of practice. The code sets out how researchers can obtain free prior and informed consent for the use of traditional knowledge. The code also guides how researchers and First Nations custodians of relevant traditional knowledge can productively work together to develop benefit-sharing agreements on mutually agreed terms prior to the accessing and use of traditional knowledge.

An example of a groundbreaking discovery partnership involves the collaboration between the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people of the Camooweal-Upper Georgina River area, who hold traditional knowledge about the use of spinifex, and the University of Queensland with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the amazing properties of this grass. Together, the partnership has thrived with commercially viable products being developed, such as medicinal gels, with many potential applications for osteoarthritis, drug delivery and cosmetic treatments, with benefits flowing to the community in the form of patents, employment opportunities, and training and development opportunities.

Since the introduction of the traditional knowledge obligation, the Queensland government has engaged with over 900 people from First Nations groups, biodiscovery entities, research institutions and government departments to raise awareness about the traditional knowledge protections and discuss the support available. Several resources have also been released, including the traditional knowledge guidelines, providing best practice information and advice to support culturally appropriate collaborations between biodiscovery entities and First Nations people to achieve traditional knowledge obligation, while a strength and support toolkit seeks to support First Nations people participate and initiate biodiscovery projects. Through the Biodiscovery Act and the traditional knowledge obligation, the Queensland government is helping to foster positive and mutually rewarding collaborations between Queensland's thriving biodiscovery sector and First Nations people for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I am going to go to the member for Mirani.

**Mr ANDREW:** With reference to page 7 of the SDS, can the minister or the director-general advise what role science services play in the development of food manufacturing through Queensland bio hubs? Basically I am trying to get to the fact of fake meat, created meat, through bio hubs. Have we funded anything? Have we looked into any of that in the scientific realm through your department?

**Ms LINARD:** I am very happy to defer to the director-general about fake meat.

**Mr Merrick:** To the best of my knowledge, I do not think we have invested.

**Mr ANDREW:** That is good. That is excellent.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You have made him very happy, Director-General.

**Ms LINARD:** I assume you are not a fan, Member.

**Mr Merrick:** What I would say is that a few years ago the former acting chief scientist, Paul Burch, led a major piece of work around synthetic biology but I do not think we actually invested ourselves.

**Mr ANDREW:** Director-General, the department monitors air quality around the state annually. I have read that the main air pollutant of concern with Queensland air comes from particulate matter. Can you explain what particulate matter is and what causes it, aside from dust and fires? What significant health impacts does it pose to the general population?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. The department of environment and science provides a range of air monitoring data that underpins public health alerts issued by Queensland Health particularly during bushfire episodes but also in relation to broader air quality issues. The team has done tremendous work expanding the statewide ambient air quality monitoring network from 87 to 99 locations. This includes six new stations in Western and Far North Queensland communities. Members of the community now have access to near-real-time air quality information on the department's website, helping them to make informed decisions to protect their own health during bushfires, particularly smoke episodes.

Over the last four years, we have invested \$5.3 million in expanding the ambient air quality network and the department's reporting capacity through: installing particulate monitoring equipment at five existing monitoring stations in South-East Queensland and Mount Isa; establishing new air quality monitoring stations at Ayr, Cairns, Deagon, Maryborough, Nambour and Toowoomba; deploying 63 smoke sensors, of which 24 are in South-East Queensland, 12 are in South-West Queensland, seven

are in Wide Bay Burnett, five are in Central Queensland, eight are in North Queensland and seven are in Far North Queensland; and commissioning a new air quality data management system with the capacity to handle increases in data from the expanded monitoring network, improved reporting content and time frames and provide flexibility to respond to emerging air quality demands. Those report on both particulate matter at 2.5 and 10 microns. I might ask the deputy director-general to speak to their importance in terms of human health.

**Dr Jacobs:** I thank the member for the question. PPM 10 and PPM 2.5 refers to the diameter of the dust particles. It is microns. Any particles 10 microns or less gets picked up in PPM 10 and any particles 2.5 microns or less get picked up in the 2.5 measuring data. It is just the adverse health effects on the lungs is my understanding. That is why we are monitoring for those sizes of dust and smoke.

**Mr ANDREW:** The minister mentioned 50 per cent of biodiscovery was made from some of our local things. I want to ask about coral and sponges. We harvest about 200 tonnes commercially. Does the department issue licences for chemical or even medical companies to take away coral and sponges in some of this biodiscovery area?

**Ms LINARD:** I will seek some clarification from my department in that regard. Can I add to your previous question, if you do not mind. With the exceedances in the last financial year, you referred to smoke from bushfires but the other exceedance was dust from vehicles on unsealed roads. That is just to give you a fulsome answer. That was the other one where we did see some exceedances in the last financial year. Director-General?

**Mr Merrick:** In relation to the biodiscovery question, not to my knowledge have we entered into a biodiscovery agreement in relation to coral.

**Mr ANDREW:** So no coral is harvested for biodiscovery?

**Mr Klaassen:** Could I clarify that?

**Mr Merrick:** Yes.

**Dr Jacobs:** To be clear, the biodiscovery legislation legislates for minimum quantities to be accessed and used for biodiscovery. Harvesting of corals is not biodiscovery, so it would not be picked up in that legislation at all. To be clear, harvesting of corals is not. We would have biodiscovery agreements with universities. I think JCU has a biodiscovery agreement with us, and they may investigate coral metabolites—they are the chemical components that may reside in corals—but it is not the same as coral harvesting, if I could make that clear.

**Mr ANDREW:** I understand that. It is not harvested like that, but it is used probably to make some of these medications or some of this stuff?

**Dr Jacobs:** Corals and metabolites from marine are very much sought after in terms of cosmetics, sunscreens, pharmaceuticals because of the complex nature of the chemicals within corals. It is very important as a source.

**Mr ANDREW:** That is why I ask: do we give away permits for that? Do we issue permits?

**Dr Jacobs:** We do issue permits for biodiscovery, but not for the harvesting.

**Mr ANDREW:** The US recently reduced acceptable levels for PFAS in drinking water. Can the director-general advise how the US limits compare with ours currently? Are we going to change ours to meet their expectations or are we higher as far as acceptable levels?

**Mr Merrick:** I will invite the deputy director-general to come forward, Minister, if that is okay. What I can speak to is, in terms of the regulation of drinking water, in Queensland, reticulated town water supplies are primarily operated by local governments and water utilities, as you are aware. These entities are regulated by the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water and Queensland Health under the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008. The act requires the registration of all drinking water service providers and imposes a range of other requirements, including the need to develop a drinking water quality management plan.

Queensland Health is responsible for administering the Public Health Act and the Public Health Regulation 2018. This provides Queensland Health officers with the powers to direct drinking water service providers to take certain actions when there is a risk to public health. The Public Health Regulation sets standards for drinking water, based on the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. Those guidelines are published by the Commonwealth government and provide guidance towards regulators and suppliers on the monitoring and managing of drinking water quality.

Queensland Health plays a key role in providing expert health advice and support for risk assessment and drinking water incident response, and water service providers are required to comply with the regulatory framework. The department is not aware of any drinking water monitoring results that have exceeded drinking water quality lines for PFAS, and the department is not responsible for undertaking any monitoring of drinking water. I will check if the deputy director-general wants to add to that.

**Mr Lawrence:** I thank the member for the question. The only point I would add is that currently the National Health and Medical Research Council is conducting an independent review of health-based guideline values for PFAS, so that is under review. The Australian water guideline at the moment is quite a bit higher than, say, the United States, but that is under review at the moment.

**Mr ANDREW:** That is what I was getting to. Thank you.

**Ms CAMM:** I will start with the minister, but she may want to divert to the director-general. With regard to the Female Founders Co-Investment Fund and the Accelerating Female Founders Program, do you have the quantity that you expend in marketing that program across the state since its inception?

**Ms LINARD:** You are absolutely right, member: I will have to defer to my department about that matter, but thank you for the question and thank you for being interested in the program. I can say that since it was launched we have supported 2,000 participants. Do we have that? I would imagine we do not have that element of funding for the program. I am deferring to the deputy director-general.

**Ms Diffey:** Thank you for the question. We do not have the marketing budget for that particular program. It would be primarily through social media, though.

**Ms CAMM:** Minister, with regard to the Female Founders Co-Investment Fund, how many applications were received in the last two years? Do you collect data around those applicants as to whether you can distinguish how many applicants identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse?

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you for the question, member. I invite the director-general if he has received those numbers.

**Mr Merrick:** Sorry, member, I am just confirming that the question was in relation to the Female Founders Co-Investment Fund?

**Ms CAMM:** Yes, correct.

**Mr Merrick:** We received 21 applications, submitted and processed to date since the fund was launched. Three have been approved and three provisionally approved subject to funding conditions being met. It is a rolling program.

**Ms CAMM:** Do you keep data as to whether any of those applicants would—

**Mr Merrick:** Yes, we would do.

**Ms LINARD:** We would do, because I know across the innovation program generally that eight per cent of successful recipients are funded, from the great figures that my department has provided in their many briefs—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—but if you are seeking, member, a specific figure about that program, that is a very specific detail and we will have to come back to you.

**Ms CAMM:** No, that is fine. You were saying that out of 21 applications three have been approved and three preapproved?

**Mr Merrick:** Provisionally approved.

**Ms CAMM:** You may not be able to answer my next question. Since the establishment of those who were approved, are there any who come back who subsequently then cannot raise the investment share that they require? Can you explain to me a little bit about that process around the provisionally approved and the approved? Does that mean they have already raised that capital?

**Mr Merrick:** The provisional approval is where they have to confirm the capital is raised, as I understand it. Those who are fully approved are those who have the matching investment in place.

**Ms CAMM:** What is the process around evaluating those who have been approved to that success? Is it an ongoing monitoring, or is it an evaluation annually? What sort of reporting do those applicants do once they have been approved to measure success?

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. It is interesting coming back to the innovation department or it coming to this department because what I would say is that this is an area in which there has been very extensive investment in the evaluation of the effectiveness of programs. I will speak

to some of the examples more broadly across the investment streams that Advance Queensland has. As an illustrative example of what we will do with the Female Founders Program, noting those investments are at an early stage—if we take, for example, the Ignite Ideas program, there is a comprehensive and independent evaluation that is made on a periodic basis. What that has shown is, for example, our programs accelerate time to market, 30 per cent increase in the probability of generating revenues, 94 per cent increase in the probability of profit, 32 per cent increase in the probability of creating jobs in Queensland, 50 per cent of recipients through Ignite Ideas have increased paid hours for staff, and 59 per cent of companies have created new jobs in Queensland. This comes from being able to both match recipients of Advance Queensland support with a comparative group and then doing various regressions analysis.

Two years post Queensland government support through Advance Queensland programs and Ignite Ideas, median profit has increased by 94 per cent above the level of the comparative group, and there is a 20 per cent increase in the level of firms exporting. In terms of any other issues, the deputy director-general might want to flag in terms of the process. We also have regular milestone monitoring.

**Ms Diffey:** That is correct. Through the contract they will be required to provide reports. As their projects progress and close out the contract there will be a final report that is provided. We do not necessarily do evaluations on individual investments; we would do it at program level. Once we have enough recipients who have been through a process, that is when we would conduct an evaluation of this particular program.

**Ms CAMM:** What is the length of time of those contracts, or is it quite specific to the applicant and the business model they are operating?

**Ms Diffey:** Thank you for the question. The length of time for securing the investment is up to six months. I will need to seek advice on the length of time for the contracts once they are in place.

**Ms CAMM:** Thank you. Are you happy to take that question on notice?

**Ms LINARD:** Yes.

**Ms CAMM:** I have a question to the minister in relation to question on notice 1483, which I asked back in November. There was a MoG and I got the response in April. The recipients were outlined by region and there were no recipients in Western Queensland or on the Gold Coast. Have there been further recipients since that question on notice in April? Do you have that data at all?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** None on the Gold Coast.

**Ms CAMM:** None on the Gold Coast that were listed, thank you, member.

**Ms LINARD:** I defer to the deputy director-general for innovation, thank you.

**Ms Diffey:** Subsequent to that question on notice, which I do not have before me, we have subsequently approved the Female Founders Co-Investment Fund recipients, but I would need to check where they are from, and also 11 new Accelerating Female Founders service providers which would certainly provide services to Western Queensland and the Gold Coast, as to well as other places across the state. They will obviously just be kicking off. We are the participants in those programs so they are service providers and then female founders participate in their programs. I would need to check if we have that information to hand, but certainly the intention is that female founders across the state should be able to access the right kind of program for them.

**Mr Merrick:** It is very much a demand driven program. We would welcome any support in promoting the program.

**Ms CAMM:** Thank you very much.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, I am wondering what has happened to the State of the Environment report? On the website 2020 is the last update. I just checked it—you never know, in estimates week things get updated pretty actively—but I cannot see any updates since 2020. Can you provide some further information? That is obviously a very important way of communicating the data that your scientists have put together.

**Mr Merrick:** I might take some quick advice because I think part of the reason for transitioning from a paper-based periodic State of the Environment report as required under the EP Act to the online system was to ensure that, where possible, we can provide up-to-date near real-time data where it exists.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** 2020 is the last one I can see on there.

**Mr Merrick:** But I think if you went to some of the data that is underlying that, there is probably more recent data. I might take some advice on that. I might ask the deputy director-general, environment and heritage policy and programs to come forward.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** There is not much data past 2020, or no data past 2020 that I can see, so I would be interested in that.

**Ms Curtis:** Under the Environmental Protection Act, we are required to publish a report on the state of Queensland's environment every four years. As you mentioned, the 2020 State of the Environment report is published and it was released in 2021. Work is underway to prepare the 2024 State of the Environment report. That is, as the director-general mentioned, an interactive and data-driven web-based report. We expect to have that finalised in mid-2025. That will cover the period from July 2020 until the end of June 2024; however, we will provide longer trend over time analysis for data where relevant. It does take some time to gather all the data and to make sure it is published in the report.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That is standard to have it come out the year after the period that it ends?

**Ms Curtis:** That is right.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Through you director-general or minister, it would require an amendment to the act to have more regular updates in this way?

**Ms Curtis:** Under the act, at the moment, we are required to publish one every four years, yes.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you. Director-General, I will go to you again. The 2022 Biodiversity Conservation Strategy stated that 'species declines are accelerating in that between 2007 and 2022 the number of species listed as threatened in Queensland increased by 97 animals and 244 plants'. Can you provide the most recent updated numbers that you have?

**Mr Merrick:** We certainly can provide the numbers.

**Dr Jacobs:** I can provide some numbers on the CAM but let me find it.

**Mr Merrick:** I think from recollection the number of threatened species is 1,054 currently in Queensland but I will get the deputy director-general to check because that is off the top of my head.

**Ms LINARD:** That is correct.

**Mr Merrick:** That is correct; there you go.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Very good.

**Ms LINARD:** But unfortunate.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Yes. It is very good that you could recall the number, but it is unfortunate that it has gone up.

**Dr Jacobs:** I have an update in terms of the misaligned species.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That was the data issue.

**Dr Jacobs:** That is the CAM data. I have the update. As of yesterday there was 536, of the 547 Queensland misaligned endemic species nominations complete. That is the Common Assessment Method species.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thank you. I will go to deputy director-general for innovation, but to the director-general first. With regard to the Queensland Innovation Precincts and Places Fund, can you provide some further detail on the \$295,000 that I noticed in the budget for the Gold Coast Health & Knowledge Precinct which is, of course, in my electorate? I am interested in this in multiple ways.

**Mr Merrick:** With the minister's blessing—

**Ms LINARD:** Of course.

**Mr Merrick:**—we may pass that question to the deputy director-general to respond to.

**Ms Diffey:** Thank you very much for the question, member. Yes, the \$295,000 figure was out of what we call stream 1 of the Queensland Innovation Precincts and Places Fund which was for strategic assessment. I would need to get further details on the specifics of exactly what is in the contract but I engage regularly with the Gold Coast Health & Knowledge Precinct. In fact, I was down there last Thursday evening—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Good.

**Ms Diffey:**—at an event they were hosting. I am aware that they are working very hard to understand how they can grow their investment and collaboration environment on the precinct. I expect that is what that particular contract is helping them to develop their strategy around.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It is not for physical work on the precinct; it is more for the joint team with Griffith, the council and your department?

**Ms Diffey:** The partner department for the Gold Coast Health & Knowledge Precinct is Economic Development Queensland so not us, but yes.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** What involvement do you have internally with government? I know EDQ have the lead and they obviously have the land and run it from that perspective, but what involvement do you have? You were down there last week.

**Ms Diffey:** The Gold Coast Health & Knowledge Precinct has engaged with Advance Queensland fairly actively, particularly through the precinct office. They have been a participant in what we call the Queensland Connects program, which is where they worked out what was their must-win battle as a team was—so all those players that you mentioned. Subsequent to that, they have received three Regional Futures—Collaborative Projects funds. I can find the details for those if you will give me a moment. They are valued at \$200,000 each to help develop activities on the precinct that align with their Queensland Connects program.

We engage regularly—not necessarily in a financial sense but the precinct office likes to engage with other precincts across the state such as the development of the Boggo Road precinct, or the Herston precinct or out at Springfield. In fact, the event I was at last Thursday evening was the Queensland branch of the AusBiotech organisation holding a session on precincts. Members from the other precincts across South-East Queensland were in attendance. Obviously it had a biotech focus and we discussed the advantages of having different precincts and a portfolio of precincts in Queensland and how the precincts can collaborate. We engage with them on those kind of activities.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I would welcome the breakdown of the 295, if that is okay.

**Ms Diffey:** Sure.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Sticking with precincts, with regard to the Innovation Precincts and Places Fund, there were two grants awarded to Launch Y(E)P. There were two grants awarded to them totalling \$1.29 million. I note that that also falls under the Female Founders Fund. Was that additional funding, or was that the same funding? I had \$1.29 million as the figure.

**Ms Diffey:** The Launch Y(E)P received funding for both stream 1 and stream 3 out of the Queensland Innovation Precincts and Places Fund. They are also a provider under the Accelerating Female Founders Program. They are all for different activities and they are different funds.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Thanks for the clarity. Page 10 of the SDS had a \$7 million difference between the budgeted and actual spend for 'advancing Queensland through innovation'. Can you provide a reason for this?

**Mr Merrick:** Sorry, can we just—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It is page 10 of the SDS.

**Mr Merrick:** I thank the member for the question. I am assuming that would relate to the timing of payments once contracts are in place.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It was 28.455 but the actual was 21.

**Mr Merrick:** I might invite the deputy director-general to speak to that.

**Ms Diffey:** Thank you very much for the question. The 21 that you are referring to is in the Service Delivery Statements for the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation. The innovation portfolio was cut across two SDSs because of the machinery-of-government changes that happened in December. We are also a part of the Department of Tourism and Sport SDS for this last publication. I can give you the figures if you would like me to that have cut across them all.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Sure. How many figures are we talking about?

**Ms Diffey:** Not lots.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That is good. That is okay then.

**Ms Diffey:** The 2023-24 estimated actuals across the two Service Delivery Statements added up to 41,200. The original budgeted, as you say, was 48,310,000. At the time that we were estimating



the actuals we were very heavily into delivery mode of our grants and programs under the road map, and I am pleased to say that the actual actual for 2023-24 is 50 million.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I will stick with you, Deputy Director-General, with the indulgence of the minister and the director-general. Can we have an update on the 2022 announcement of three regional science and innovation hubs? I think it was called Partner Up Queensland Regional Science and Innovation Network?

**Ms Diffey:** Certainly. That one was a partnership with the Office of the Chief Scientist. It was actually a partnership between the two of us, but we were in different departments.

**Dr Jacobs:** The three hubs have been part of a pilot program and that is still on foot. I do not have any detail.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** It has been about 15 months that it has been running.

**Dr Jacobs:** Sorry, what was your question again?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The pilot program has been running for about 15 months but it is still ongoing.

**Dr Jacobs:** At this stage it is still ongoing, but it is a pilot. We are looking at other regional science and innovation programs as well.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Are there staff employed as part of this, or is it existing staff that you have reallocated over to that?

**Dr Jacobs:** They are staff employed at the hubs, is my understanding.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Were they new or have you reallocated them to those hubs?

**Dr Jacobs:** No, they were employed by the hubs, sorry, to be clear.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** This question is to either of you—whoever has this information. Do you have any information on the participants per hub, the people who have taken part?

**Dr Jacobs:** I can get you that information if you like.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** You have it, Dr Jacobs?

**Dr Jacobs:** Minister, if I can get that information on—

**Ms LINARD:** How long would it take you?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Just some data on how it is going is what I am looking for, particularly the participant numbers with each hub.

**Ms LINARD:** Not to put undue pressure on you, Deputy Director-General. It was more just to ask: is that something you feel you have here, or were you asking me because you need to take it on notice?

**Dr Jacobs:** I feel I need to take it on notice, Minister. I do not have it with me.

**Ms LINARD:** Permission granted, Deputy Director-General.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** There is no time sensitivity to it, Deputy Director-General.

**Ms LINARD:** Do you want us to take that on notice?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Yes, if that is okay, officially. We had those other ones on waste that I think would be later anyway—the PFAS data, unless it has magically appeared.

**Ms LINARD:** We do have some answers for you.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I will leave that up to the chair. I will keep going with questions, if that is okay. Dr Jacobs, does that connect with the announcement of the \$7 million for the collaboration between regional universities? That was 18 June. Does the Partner Up program connect with that, or is that separate?

**Dr Jacobs:** They are separate programs. In terms of the Partner Up program, it was a pilot program and we will be looking at whether that continues. The \$7 million program for the Regional University Industry Collaboration Program is separate, but it will have a facilitation element to it. That is being delivered under a contract with the CSIRO. There will be regional facilitators employed under that contract by CSIRO.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Is that \$7 million federally funded? Is CSIRO taking that?

**Dr Jacobs:** No, it is not. That is the Queensland government's \$7 million.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That is the state's component of that program?

**Dr Jacobs:** That is the state's component and CSIRO is under contract to deliver that and it will have a regional component to it.

**Mr Merrick:** Just to be clear, the reason we are partnering with CSIRO is that they have very successful and proven programs to accelerate the commercialisation of university and other research. We are building on their success to date and providing additional capacity into regional universities to achieve significant economic benefits for their regions by spinning out and scaling up the opportunities that are coming from university research.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I will move to another topic: threatened species. The Audit Office found in their *Protecting our threatened animals and plants* report that only two of their previous seven recommendations had been fully implemented. Can you give the committee an update on how many have now been implemented?

**Mr Merrick:** Thank you, Minister. I am very pleased to—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Not quite yet, Director-General, thank you. You said, 'Thank you, Minister.'

**Ms LINARD:** Because I was assisting him to fulsomely answer your question, member. You keep asking my Director-General questions, so I am here keeping myself busy supporting my Director-General.

**CHAIR:** Thank goodness he is following along after the premier-elect was here this morning!

**Mr Merrick:** I am just here to serve.

**Ms LINARD:** As am I.

**Mr Merrick:** I can update the committee, and thank you to the member for the question. In terms of the first recommendation relating to enabling the proactive listing or reclassification of species by the Species Technical Committee, I am pleased to report that the recommended actions are complete and fully implemented with a risk-based approach now in place whereby conservation status assessment can be prioritised for this financial year. For example, assessment will include species that are listed as near threatened and those species that might be threatened by emerging threats such as climate change.

The second recommendation is also complete and is related to reviewing the Nature Conservation Act to ensure timely listing by amending the legislation to enable the minister to add, delete or reclassify species within a specific timeframe following the receipt of the recommendation from the Species Technical Committee. I am pleased to inform the committee that the act was amended on 13 February 2020 to require the minister to decide to reclassify a species conservation status within 30 business days of receiving the Species Technical Committee recommendation. That has been fully acted upon by the minister since that time.

The third recommendation spoke to providing increased transparency of the threatened species assessment process. The department is on track towards completion of this recommendation by the end of 2024. Information about the Species Technical Committee is now published on the web including the process and supporting documents for making and receiving nominations for species for listing. The website is regularly updated to keep the public abreast of the assessment process and decision-making following each meeting of the Species Technical Committee. There does not appear at this stage to be significant demand or benefit to implement public consultation on individual species nominations. However, the department is investigating options and is looking at developing a process to make any future assessments of threatened species listed under the NCA publicly available.

The fourth recommendation related to developing a governance framework for the common assessment methodology. That work has been progressed and the deputy director-general spoke to the progress there. Sorry, but that should have been the fifth recommendation related to the review and the deputy director-general gave the latest update that we have almost completed that work around the 547 misaligned species. The sixth recommendation related to the delivery of an integrative comprehensive conservation strategy to meet the requirements of the Nature Conservation Act. That was approved by cabinet on 12 September and published on 7 October 2022. The seventh and final recommendation related to monitoring and reporting on population trends of threatened species. I am very pleased to be able to inform the committee that the department has developed a suite of documents and processes that demonstrate progress towards implementing this recommendation. This includes a framework for threatened species monitoring and evaluation reporting which employs an iterative adaptive management approach to planning and program execution as set standards for monitoring, evaluation and data management.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Director-General, is that five of the seven?

**Mr Merrick:** That was—sorry—six and I missed the fourth recommendation which related to developing a governance framework for the common assessment method project to ensure that Queensland was meeting its obligations under the national intergovernmental MOU. Our success in implementing this recommendation was previously identified in the follow-up report, with the procedural guide now finalised and in use. Further to this, I am happy to advise departmental staff are active on the national common assessment methodology working group. This working group meets monthly with a focus on facilitating cooperation, communication and information sharing across the MOU.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So that is five of the seven?

**Mr Merrick:** I think that is more than that.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** How many implemented or completed was the question. I heard two there that were not.

**Ms LINARD:** They are all being implemented.

**Mr Merrick:** Five are fully completed and the remaining two are very close to being finalised.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** So two outstanding, yes.

**Ms LINARD:** Chair, we have—

**CHAIR:** I was going to ask. There are approximately seven minutes left, Minister. Is that enough time to go through all of those?

**Ms LINARD:** If that is okay. We would like to answer a number of the questions.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms LINARD:** Director-General, if you would like to run through the answers that you have there and then, Chair, if possible, I will run through the record that we have with respect to what has been taken on notice and what has not so there is clarity in the committee. If that is okay, Director-General, I will hand over to you.

**Mr Merrick:** Yes, certainly. In relation to the question around OECMs and how much can potentially be added to the state if OECMs are approved, the department commissioned preliminary analysis of the potentially suitable land for OECM recognition from Emeritus Professor Marc Hockings of UQ who is a leading expert in the management of protected areas and that identified potentially up to 20 million hectares that might be appropriate for assessment. This was before the national OECM framework was approved in June of this year. The department will now consider an OECM approach for Queensland that aligns to the national framework, and clearly we have revised that figure in light of the new framework.

The member for Bonney also asked a question in relation to how many NatureAssist grants applications from landholders have been received in the last round. A total of 19 expressions of interest were received over the last two rounds of NatureAssist grants, with six progressing to nature refuge declaration. The member for Bonney again asked about the 22 sites that have agreed to PFAS limits. I have a list here, member, which I can read into *Hansard*. It is D & R Lavis Processing—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Could you table? Is that easier?

**Mr Merrick:**—Garland Trading Co., Goodsell Earthmoving, JC & AT Searle, Johnny Farming Co., Jones Wood Based Products, Lockyer Valley Regional Council, Mackay Compost Farm, McCahill's Earthmoving & Supplies, Neale and Lynette Griggs, Oakey Beef Exports, Rocky Point, Shark Recyclers, Sonandco, Stiller's, Terra Firma have two sites, Teys Australia Biloela, TFT Hoe Hire, We Kando and Wood Mulching Industries again have two sites. That is 22 sites in total.

In terms of the question around costs relating to Chief Scientist travel, I do not think in the current incarnation of the department that the Chief Scientist has travelled to BIO recently. Since 2007 four departmental employees have travelled to BIO and these costs are over multiple financial years and would involve records from previous agencies. It is not the current incarnation of the agency. I think as the deputy director-general mentioned, we did support six Queensland companies to participate in the Queensland BIO conference. The cost of the tickets to access BIO was \$16,622.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** That was for LSQ, was it?

**Mr Merrick:** That was for the startups. The member asked about details of the Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct—the 295. That detail is available on the Advance Queensland website.

**Ms LINARD:** Chair, just coming back to when Eurimbula was purchased as a national park—answered; how much can be added under the OECM framework—answered; how many landholders were interested in putting their land up for protected areas—answered; how many grant applications have been received from landholders—answered; and how much funding has been provided for weed management in Burleigh Head National Park we will take on notice.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Can I just clarify on the number of landholders. We got the figures for the NatureAssist grants, but I missed the number of landholders who have asked to become a nature refuge. Was that the 19 figure, Director-General?

**Mr Merrick:** That is 19, with six progressing to a nature refuge declaration.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Okay; right. What was the 52 then? That was the NatureAssist?

**Mr Merrick:** I would have to—

**Ms LINARD:** Where did the 52 come from?

**Mr MOLHOEK:** What was the 52? I thought there was a figure of—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The 19 was the NatureAssist grants, was it?

**Mr MOLHOEK:** I heard 22.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Numbers everywhere!

**Ms LINARD:** It is late on a long day. We sought to clarify a historical figure of the Chief Scientist's costs to attend BIO conference—answered; cost of tickets for the startups to attend the conference—answered; cost of funding for LSQ last year—answered; 22 locations—answered—in respect to PFAS levels composting; length of time for the contracts in respect of the female founders co-investment program on notice; and the breakdown of the 295,000 in Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct—answered.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** The PFAS sampling was the other one. I think that was going to take a bit more time by Dr Jacobs.

**Ms LINARD:** I am sorry, but was that the science in respect of—

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Yes. There was 22 of the sites but there was also the underlying science—just some sort of summary of that.

**Ms LINARD:** With respect to the negotiation between myself and the member for Bonney, I think we have agreed on three matters to be taken on notice. Would that be correct?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I think so, yes.

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you, Chair.

**CHAIR:** If we can have those back by 8.30 pm on Monday, 29 July that would be fantastic.

**Ms LINARD:** Of course.

**CHAIR:** Did you want to do a wrap up?

**Ms LINARD:** I would love to make some closing comments, if I may. I will just quickly check: Director-General, did you have an additional—

**Mr Merrick:** I have realised that the 52 was an answer I gave earlier and that related to the approaches from landholders potentially interested in establishing.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** What time period was that, Director-General, sorry?

**Mr Merrick:** That was in the last financial year, 2023-24. As I said at the time, once an inquiry is received, the department commences an assessment process to determine whether a property is suitable and can be declared a private protected area.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** And how many of those will progress to become private protected areas?

**Mr Merrick:** That is subject to the process around desktop assessment and includes a field assessment where suitable.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Ms LINARD:** Thank you very much, Chair. Chair, I thank you for the opportunity to provide a brief closing statement. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to highlight the Miles government's ongoing efforts to protect and conserve Queensland's iconic natural environment, to

strengthen scientific excellence in Queensland and to foster innovation. I would like to thank you, Chair, and all members of the committee, committee staff and parliamentary staff who have all supported this hearing. I would particularly like to thank you all for your patience at the start of the hearing when I had a blood nose, which is highly embarrassing, and you were all very generous about that. Thank you.

I keep my most warm and sincere thanks to my Director-General, Jamie Merrick; to my deputy directors-general Ben Klaassen, Rob Lawrence, Mary-Anne Curtis, Mark Jacobs, Lea Diffey and Rhiannan Howell; and to senior executives James Purtill, Kerrie Wilson, Andrew Connor, Brad Lang, Vivienne Van Der Laak and Mike Kirton. I thank each of them and in turn their teams across the department for the frank and fearless advice that they always provide and for their professionalism. This is a very large and broad agency with a lot of expertise. I am very proud to represent it, but I really do want to acknowledge that the advice given is always very frank and fearless and their professionalism is of the highest standard. A warm thank you also goes to the departmental staff involved in the estimates process including Trinity Lowe, Kerrie-Ann Clarke and all of the staff who have helped to prepare information for the hearing. A lot of effort goes into the briefs. I think there were 133 briefs with significant detail. I read every single word and I always say that whenever I speak to the department because I want each and every person to know that their work is valued, that it matters and that I deeply appreciate it.

I also acknowledge that we have the Queensland Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner and the Chief Scientist in the room. I thank them warmly for their advice. I again acknowledge the service of all who work within the department and the stakeholders we work alongside to deliver in the best interests of Queensland, its environment and science and innovation ecosystems.

Finally, special thanks go to my ministerial team without which I could not meet the many demands of this incredibly privileged role of being a minister in the service of Queensland. I want to thank each and every one of them for their support and for their expertise in their own particular areas. I certainly want to thank them for the good humour that they bring each and every day to what is often a very pressured environment but always a privileged environment in which we serve the people of Queensland. Thank you again, Chair and members of the committee. I know it has been a very long day for all of you.

**CHAIR:** It certainly has, Minister. We thank you, the director-general, officials and departmental officers for your attendance here today. That concludes the estimates hearing for the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee for 2024. I thank my fellow committee members and the visiting members who participated in the hearing today. I also thank the secretariat and team, Hansard and the parliamentary broadcast staff, the attendants and any other parliamentary staff who assisted here today. I now declare this hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 8.30 pm.**