

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**Tuesday, 24 June 2025****ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B****Acting Chair:**

Mr L.K. Odenwalder

Members:

S.E. Andrews
Mr J.A. Batty
Ms L.P. Hood
Mr J.B. Teague
Mr S.J. Telfer
Ms E.L. Thompson

*The committee met at 09:00**Estimates Vote***COURTS ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITY, \$102,134,000****Minister:**

Hon. K.J. Maher, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector, Special Minister of State.

Departmental Advisers:

Hon. Justice L. Stein, Supreme Court Justice, Courts Administration Authority.

Ms P. Croser, State Courts Administrator, Courts Administration Authority.

Ms L. Abrams-South, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Courts Administration Authority.

Ms S. Briggs, Acting Finance Manager, Courts Administration Authority.

Ms M. Garreffa, Senior Business Analyst, Courts Administration Authority.

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing for Estimates Committee B. I respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners of this country throughout Australia, and their connection to land and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

The estimates committees are a relatively informal procedure and, as such, there is no need to stand to ask or answer questions. I understand the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition have agreed an approximate time. Do we agree?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: It looks like we agree for the consideration of proposed payments, which will facilitate a change of departmental advisers. Changes to committee membership will be notified as they occur. Members should ensure the Chair is provided with a completed request to be

discharged form. If the minister undertakes to supply information at a later date, it must be submitted to the Clerk Assistant via the Answer to Questions mailbox no later than Friday 5 September 2025.

I propose to allow both the minister and the lead speaker for the opposition to make opening statements of about 10 minutes each, should they wish. There will be a flexible approach to giving the call for asking questions. A member who is not on the committee may ask a question at the discretion of the Chair.

All questions are to be directed to the minister, not the minister's advisers. The minister may refer questions to advisers for a response. Questions must be based on lines of expenditure in the budget papers and must be identifiable or referenced. Members unable to complete their questions during the proceedings may submit them as questions on notice for inclusion in the assembly *Notice Paper*.

I remind members that the rules of debate in the house apply in the committee. Consistent with the rules of the house, photography by members from the chamber floor is not permitted while the committee is sitting. Ministers and members may not table documents before the committee; however, documents can be supplied to the Chair for distribution.

The incorporation of material in *Hansard* is permitted on the same basis as applies in the house; that is, that it is purely statistical and limited to one page in length. The committee's examinations will be broadcast in the same manner as sittings of the house, through the IPTV system within Parliament House and online via the parliament's website.

I will now proceed to open the following lines for examination: the portfolio of the Courts Administration Authority. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I welcome the Attorney-General. Do you have an opening statement?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, Acting Chair, no opening statement.

The ACTING CHAIR: Could you introduce your advisers first, please.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Today, I have to my right the Hon. Justice Laura Stein, a Judge of the Supreme Court. To my left is Penny Croser, the State Courts Administrator. To her left is Linda Abrams-South, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Courts Administration Authority; and behind me are Stacey Briggs, Acting Finance Manager, Courts Administration Authority; and Mishelle Garreffa, Senior Business Analyst, Courts Administration Authority.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, minister. You do not have an opening statement?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No opening statement.

The ACTING CHAIR: Excellent. How about you, member for Heysen?

Mr TEAGUE: No opening statement.

The ACTING CHAIR: I assume you are the lead speaker.

Mr TEAGUE: I am just a member of the committee, sir.

The ACTING CHAIR: Just a humble member of the committee—then proceed to questions, thank you.

Mr TEAGUE: Thanks very much, Acting Chair, Attorney, Judge, and thanks all for joining. I will turn first to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 126. I might flag a general interest that might sound more specific to questions down the track in the interaction between particularly the Youth Court and its DCP and DHS-related functions that are expressed in the data, but first, in general, there is a table at about point 6 on the page: workforce summary and FTEs as at 30 June. We do not see there the 2024-25 FTE budget, but I understand that was 718 FTEs. The estimated result is 699. Of those 18 FTEs that were budgeted for but not retained over the last financial year, is there an explanation specifically for that?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Just to clarify, member for Heysen, we are looking at the totals on that last table—

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: —the estimated result of FTEs being 699.1 as compared to?

Mr TEAGUE: As compared to 718, which was the budget for 2024-25. We do not see that on the table.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have that in front of me.

Mr TEAGUE: I do not either.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: So your question essentially is 18.9 FTEs difference, why then is it nearly 19 less than what we budgeted for as the estimated result?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, if I am right about that figure.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that the funding is for some of those officers who are primarily Sheriff's Officers within the courts, and that funding has not been needed because of some of the major cases, particularly in relation to Ironside. While those matters percolate their way through as they have to the High Court, the funding for those particularly Sheriff's Officers has been carried over with an anticipation that particularly things like Ironside matters will find their way to fruition over the next year.

My advice is that it is primarily Sheriff's Officers who were budgeted for in anticipation of the needs for Ironside cases. Clearly, that has not happened to the extent that was anticipated with the High Court challenge, and then the High Court challenge to the federal legislation, but it has been carried over so that hopefully, when we get a result from the High Court on the challenge to the legislation, they can be used now.

Mr TEAGUE: I think the only follow-on question from that is that we do not see 2025-26 going to 718, we see it going all the way to 734.1. Is there some further uplift that is expected at some stage for the same topic, or is there some other reason?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is, yes, very similar reasons. As the anticipated significant increase in activity once the Ironside trials start in full swing, we will see a need for that extra staffing.

Mr TEAGUE: It is not a technical term, but does that mean that we can sort of think about 700 FTE or so as a sort of steady state, and 718 or 734 reflecting a kind of seasonal load that will then subside again?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that, in effect, is around about the case. The increased figures from the year before with the 18 more that were identified in the first question, the 34 more anticipated to be needed because of the special circumstances, particularly with Ironside, and that is time-limited funding, but there will be things we cannot anticipate that may indubitably increase the need for these sorts of services in court. It is not seasonal because I think seasonal probably happens regularly. These are one-off unanticipated events that had to have been accounted for.

Mr TEAGUE: If there is a comparator or a corollary, we have heard it in other agencies—DCP stands out, for example—where the minister has sort of telegraphed as a virtue the employment of more people being self-evidently a sign of things being positive in the agency. We would leave that for others to judge. I am not asking the question, obviously, with a view to it being self-evidently negative or positive, but just for information.

If there are FTEs, it might be helpful perhaps to advise the committee: if there is a seasonality to it, that they are not specifically associated with a particular case or cases, but are these FTEs employed for any unusually short term? Is there something that might be anticipated in advance to say they will actually come and go on present settings?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: This might provide some help, I think. My advice is there are 15 new and ongoing FTEs for the ordinary operations of the courts that are budgeted for. There are 18 carried over that will be specifically attributed to both Ironside and the possibility of further trial in the Alzuain case.

Mr TEAGUE: Going one page further on, page 127, and a table that is at about the same level on that next page, investing expenditure summary, a question about the Court of Appeal office

accommodation, the first of those existing projects. My recollection is that the 2024-25 budget had estimated completion by June last year, with a total project cost of \$1.3 million. So two questions: why is the project being delayed and why the variance to project costs from the last budget to this one?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that the funding in previous budgets that was provided for the Court of Appeal office accommodation has been completed, that there have been Treasury approvals for what has been in that budget line to be applied for other purposes. I am informed that there was carryover approval of \$328,000 to 2025-26 for court modifications in the Sir Samuel Way building relating to multidefendant trials. It has been completed, but although it is still under that budget line there has been approval for carryover and reallocation of that funds for other purposes.

Mr TEAGUE: Is there a way, neatly, to make sense of that \$999,000 figure, therefore?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It might be easiest if I take that on notice to provide a consolidated answer.

Mr TEAGUE: I have one more question on that table. Sir Samuel Way facade repairs has been a feature for some years. My recollection, again, is that—I am not sure; it might appear here on the face of this table as well—that was to be completed in June 2025. We now see that its estimated completion is June 2027. I cannot recall what the previous project total costs were. I think \$11.5 million has been around the mark for a while. I do not think that has changed, but with the two-year delay on the project completion is that then going to come at a greater cost? And what is the reason for the delay?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that it has taken longer than initially anticipated because of the nature of the building—the heritage status of the building and the construction materials in the building. I am advised that prototype works have been designed to verify the methodology that is going to be needed for that treatment of the facade of the building and to inform broader scopes of the work. That work is underway but, yes, it has taken longer than anticipated, because of the very nature of the building itself.

Mr TEAGUE: But there is no cost impact as a result of the two-year delay?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that they have to verify exactly how you can do these sorts of works on a unique building. That work is underway, but that needs to play out.

Mr TEAGUE: I understand, and that explains the delay, but in terms of the cost, there is no shift in the project cost?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, there has been nothing that suggests that yet, but that does not mean that once more is known about how you remediate or do these sorts of repairs there may not be changes.

Mr TEAGUE: Perish the thought of a comparison, but we heard from the government that the hydrogen plan was going to be \$593 million all the way until it was not. I am not rushing to put this in that category. The budget has been set at \$11.5 million. Ordinarily, one might think that just with the CPI and cost increases and all that stuff over time it might naturally end up costing more, but there is no particular reason why it has come in less than it would otherwise have been that accounts for the delay being able to be absorbed within the budget?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I said, my advice is that it is difficult work. It is taking longer than anticipated. Until we know for sure exactly how works will be carried out on such a unique building, we will not know exactly what the cost will be, but that is why it is being done prudently and methodically.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright, I get the delay, but again we have a very specific total project cost of \$11,494,000 and that has not changed, despite the two-year delay.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That has not changed. As I think you pointed out, member for Heysen, as projects mature and evolve it is not only price that can change but scope, backwards and forwards, can change as well. You can obviously work towards a budget and vary what you do and how you do it to make it as well.

Mr TEAGUE: It is well known that the building suffers from concrete cancer, and there are the heritage aspects of it. All that is well known. Is the minister then saying that, confident of the project costs, that is going to stay at \$11.494 million and they will just have to cut their cloth to fix a bit of it?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Not necessarily; how you stage what you do in what order and the timeframes obviously can be looked at, but we are not even up to that stage yet. It is just the prototype design work to verify the methodology to properly assess the condition of the facade and what might happen.

Mr TEAGUE: It might just leave one anticipating that at some stage we are going to see a total project cost in a future budget that will be a very different figure to that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Well, you know what they say.

Mr TEAGUE: You would just call that a hypothetical at this stage?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Well, yes; the project is underway and we are verifying how it looks. We will see how it goes.

Mr TEAGUE: I will go to some performance indicators, and pages 130 and 131. Before I do, this is a question that, through you, I have asked of the Chief Justice when he has been here and I asked Justice Stein: just in the broadest separation of powers sense, is the court satisfied that it is sufficiently resourced in order to do the work it needs to do?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, I am advised that there is a budget, and the Courts Administration Authority work within that budget as efficiently and effectively as possible to deliver the services that courts do.

Mr TEAGUE: On behalf of the committee I thank the courts for the work they do in the interests of all South Australians. Turning to those performance indicators, I might ask a question in the broad, and I would welcome if the Attorney wanted to reflect on this in respect of any particular aspect: is this proposition good that performance indicators are either generally or in specific circumstances a guide to where further investment is needed? Just hold that, and I will be more specific: if the Attorney has anything to say about how much that is guiding where further investments either of capital or labour in the form of FTE are applied, then that would be interesting. If I turn first to the criminal jurisdiction—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Which particular page?

Mr TEAGUE: The bottom of page 130 has performance indicators starting and then we have a series of backlog indicators that go over the page. I will just go to the top of page 131 and the District Court, and the percentage of lodgements pending completion that are greater than 12 months old, for a start—and this is one of those targets where the lower the figure the better. I am not sure if these are RoGS targets or targets that you have set, as I have now been reminded, but there is significant variance anyway, more or less consistent variance, from one year to the next between actual and target estimated result and target, in more or less four times the number that are still pending.

The target for 2024-25 was 10 per cent, the 2024-25 estimated result was 39 per cent—and again, you have this heroic target of 10 per cent. Is this the actual pattern we can expect to see or is there a realistic prospect of approximating the target?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We have traversed this in most estimates, and I think this will answer the statement/question you introduced this with. The targets that are set down are, as you indicated they might be, set by RoGS (Report on Government Services). The targets are the same for every jurisdiction, so the targets are not changed to reflect differences that happen right across the states and territories. As I am advised, the targets were set down in 2003, more than 20 years ago. They were reviewed in 2015 but without any substantial change.

The notion that variance from a target is indicative of where there is more investment needed probably is not a particularly good indicator of where more investment is needed. Targets that were set down more than 20 years ago and are exactly the same for every state and territory, without any

differences of how their court systems work or the varying levels in the judiciary, probably are not particularly useful. I think in the question that was asked, 'Are these targets merely ambitious without a hope of being met?' given that, in some cases, yes.

Mr TEAGUE: It is a bit extracurricular, but given we are talking about RoGS, is the Attorney or the courts aware of a league table that has a star on it? Is there any jurisdiction that is actually remotely relating to these targets?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is, in that 10 per cent target, there is no state or territory for 2023-24 that has met it.

Mr TEAGUE: Is that a matter for attorneys?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Possibly. We could spend a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of resources, a lot of officials constantly reviewing targets, setting different targets in different states. I am not certain that is the best use of limited resources.

Mr TEAGUE: If we have covered off on the sign for investment required and also an interpretation nationally of a RoGS figure that is 20 years down the track, does the Attorney regard performance even remotely close to that target as being something desirable or part of policy consideration, or is that state of affairs steady-state and that is what the government is prepared to live with?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think obviously you want your justice system to run as effectively and efficiently and timely as possible. Tending towards targets as low as 10 per cent is something to aim for, but, as I said, for targets that were set down in 2003 that no jurisdiction meets, I do not think any jurisdiction would realistically say, 'Well, we are not meeting those targets. Something is fundamentally wrong,' or, 'We need huge investment in a particular area.'

Mr TEAGUE: Not to single out the District Court for particular focus here—the whole table tells a story in a way; the Magistrates Court figures are similarly at variance, and I will come to the Youth Court in a moment—I just highlight that that second figure for the District Court completion greater than 24 months old has gotten quite significantly worse from year to year. Here we have, again, a RoGS target of zero, an actual result in 2023-24 of 11 per cent against zero, which looks actually quite good compared to 2024-25 at 17 per cent. Is there a reason for that deterioration?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We have many Ironside matters that have started, that are not progressing at the moment and are quite old, waiting for decisions of the High Court. It is no 'coinkydink' that there are these Ironside matters that have started, have not been able to be finished, and there are matters that are getting towards a couple of years old. So it is Ironside that can largely, I am advised, be attributed to many of those. You start the prosecution, you have the evidentiary challenges that we saw find their way through our Supreme Court, then to the High Court, changes of the law made at a commonwealth level, and those laws being challenged. There have been significant delays in Ironside, particularly prosecutions that have started that have not been able to continue while those matters are being decided.

Mr TEAGUE: So if one is looking for Ironside impacts on our court system in South Australia, one can look at the FTE count and say, 'Well, there is a lot that is in the pipeline, therefore we have not employed everybody and we are therefore at 699 versus 718 but we are projecting to go to 734.' At the same time, you can see there is a big uplift in the non-completes after 24 months that is also due to that workload. They would appear, at first blush, to be contradictory, but perhaps they reflect different parts of the pipeline.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think it is correct that the carryovers waiting for Ironside trials to start mean there are fewer particularly Sheriff's Officers employed, but the flipside of that is there are matters that have started but are being put on hold and while they are on hold we do not need as many Sheriff's Officers. So, yes, those lodgements pending greater than 24 months increasing because of Ironside also have the effect of the carryovers and not needing the staff as of yet.

Mr TEAGUE: On that, let's assume there is actually something more than a steady state in the offing. We have a criminal justice administrative task force doing some work. To what extent is that work directed towards reducing backlogs, or is that off the table?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, the criminal justice task force has been doing some very good work coming up with proposals that will be put to government to, in part, increase the efficiency of our criminal justice system and, if they work, they necessarily will have an effect on how things flow through and may have an effect on backlogs. But, as I said, for those over 24 months my advice is it is largely attributable to the delay in Ironside stuff.

Mr TEAGUE: So the criminal justice administrative task force might have—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If there are specifics on that task force it is probably better to do it in the AGD rather than the courts. Hopefully, it will have some effect on some of the recommendations when they come in and review the function of the courts, but it is hosted within the Attorney-General's Department.

Mr TEAGUE: I am happy to come back to it and the Attorney might remind me as well if there is more to say to advertise its good work in the AGD. I am happy to do so, just while we are directed on the backlogs I thought to mention it.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, I will not remind you.

Mr TEAGUE: I thought you might not. In terms of backlogs, to be clear, there is no new money, as far as I can tell, directed at reducing backlogs. We can talk more about the administrative task force.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If I can, member for Heysen, I do not think that it is entirely correct to say there is no new money directed to reducing backlogs. There has been significant investment in this budget, particularly for the DPP and investment and Forensic Science SA, which does a lot of work in the criminal justice system. In previous budgets and Mid-Year Budget Reviews, there has been further money, particularly for DPP and for the courts as well, to reduce anticipated backlog from Ironside in particular, so there has been significant investment to reduce the backlog that is showing up in the figures but cannot be addressed yet because we have not started those trials.

Mr TEAGUE: As the Attorney has already said, it may be that money is not likely to shift those data that are 20-odd-year-old RoGS data. As far as the government is concerned, is there anything else that then might contribute? If it is not money, is there some capacity via policy and reform and so on to address that? It is really an open question. Maybe the answer is that we keep on working every day, but is there anything on that front that might transform the situation via policy reforms?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There certainly may be things. You touched on it with the task force that is housed within the AGD, and we look forward to working our way through suggestions that they have made. Is there something that is going to be absolutely transformative that will fundamentally change it to have no backlog? I doubt it very much, but certainly the former Liberal government and the former Labor government have done things to try to address that, whether that be how guilty plea discounts work—a whole lot of things that both governments have put in place have had some effect. It is something we will obviously always strive for if there are sensible reforms that can be made that do not do anything to jeopardise community safety, in particular. We are always open to them if it is going to create a more efficient criminal justice system.

Mr TEAGUE: I flagged an interest in the Youth Court, and I will turn to that at page 131. I might ask that you keep handy also the table on page 136, again at about point 6 on the page, under performance indicators. That is under Program 2: Alternative Dispute Resolution Services. There are two bold headings, 'Family conference' and 'Care and protection', and then, at the top of the following page, the activity indicators continue with family conference and care and protection.

Starting at page 131 and the file line in the activity indicators table, which is about halfway down the page: the Youth Court had a projected number of finalisations for 2024-25 of 4,000. Its estimated result was considerably in excess of that, at 4,631. I know that the judge of the Youth Court is not here, but is the Youth Court, and the judge of the Youth Court in particular, conscious that the judge of the Youth Court is now on the joint committee? Has that court in particular raised any resourcing concern to government and to you, Attorney, in light of that workload?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that these matters are finalisation numbers in relation to criminal matters before the Youth Court. Many of these relate to administrative breaches of bail that have seen an increase. I have regular meetings with the judge of the Youth Court, and I do not remember any request being made that the criminal matters before the Youth Court require more resources. My advice is that many of the ones that are the reason for the increase are administrative breaches of bail matters that are heard but count as a stat for criminal finalisations.

Mr TEAGUE: If that is the case, what has changed? Is that the result of—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: In terms of the factors driving that, I would not have answers to that now. I can take that on notice and see if the Youth Court has a view or keeps statistics. There might not be, but I am happy to ask.

Mr TEAGUE: For the Attorney's benefit, then, is it the case that that might not be a demonstration of a dramatic uplift in breaches of bail per se but rather a different means of dealing with those?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. As I am advised, it might also be a matter for police as well as to how these matters are detected and enforced and brought before the court; it could be reflective of that.

Mr TEAGUE: But it is possible it is a reflection of an increasing number of breaches of bail?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Or the detection of breaches of bail.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. The number of breaches that the court is having to deal with and is dealing with. We go from a projection of 4,000 to 4,631, and the Attorney says that is largely, if not wholly—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that is one of the factors and explanations for the increase.

Mr TEAGUE: It is a relatively large increase in the administrative burden of dealing with breaches of bail.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: It is not seasonal or temporary in that it sounds a considerable change in the 2025-26 projection, now to 4,500.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. I do not have the previous years' figures to compare before, but the actuals for 2023-24—I am just reading this, 4,226—it may have been that the estimated was significantly below that and structurally we come in above the estimated result. I am happy to go away and take that on notice and have a look.

Mr TEAGUE: Thanks.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: But certainly in terms of the number of offenders, off the top of my head I think the Australian Bureau of Statistics youth offender rate sees South Australia as the lowest number of offenders per 100,000 of anywhere in the country. Only the ACT has a lower number than that. It is clearly not more young people offending, with the lowest youth offender rate of any state in the country.

Mr TEAGUE: The Attorney referred to it—the 2023-24 actual—at least to go that far back, because here, on the face of the table, that actual result of 4,226, is the Attorney also telling the committee that that was largely the result of the same cause?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not know is the answer and that is why I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: Suffice to say, though, that despite the 2023-24 actual of 4,226, the projection was restored to 4,000, so it was perhaps regarded as an outlier and there was reason to think it might reduce again; whereas this year we do not see it reverting to 4,000, we see it a tick back from what was a significant increase, but not so much. We might be going around the same cause and effect,

but is there anything to explain why the projection now might be regarded as less ambitious than what the projection was in 2024-25?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, I am happy to take that on notice and bring back a reply for the member.

Mr TEAGUE: The proposition that is out there for the moment is that we have this kind of breach of bail crisis going on in the Youth Court. If the Youth Court is doing what it can to manage that increasing load and has not raised the need for more resources to deal with that load, then that might be as the result of good administrative practice, but the volume itself seems to be sounding a warning, just on the face of that line.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, I am happy to take that on notice. I do not have the Youth Court people here with me.

Mr TEAGUE: I appreciate highlighting the difference between the Youth Court's work on the criminal side that we have just been talking about and then, on the alternative dispute resolution services side, that is demonstrated there in the performance indicators at 136-136. Maybe the best demonstration of the workload of the Youth Court, first on the family conference side, is the first line of that table at page 137, Activity indicators—Family conference. Do you have that?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: We see there that, if we work from 2023-24, the actual figure is 1,901, but the projected result for 2024-25 was less, and the estimated result considerably higher. So there is a projection of 1,800, with an estimated result of 2,224, which seems to indicate the Youth Court is doing a lot of active work in that space, considerably more than the 2024-25 projection.

We have heard a lot from the DCP and DHS side about reforms that will amp up family conferences for all the right reasons, but the projection for 2025-26 reverts to the 2024-25 projection. So that does not seem to indicate any structural increase in those referrals and, in fact, given 2024-25, would seem to indicate a substantial reduction for the year ahead. Is there any explanation for that? Does that sound elsewhere now?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, without the people from the Youth Court here to talk about how they set the projections—and I do not know—I am just guessing one explanation might be that they have the same projection again and if there are further trends that keep it towards what we have seen of the estimated, they might change for the next year. I do not know what has gone into the formulation of the projections.

But just to be clear, this is not child protection family conferences, which certainly have been spoken about and been the subject of a lot of discussion, I know, during recent legislation; these are in the criminal area. These sorts of family conferences occur when a young person admits the commission of an offence within the meaning of the Young Offenders Act. Referrals are made to the conferencing unit by South Australia Police and by the Youth Court and family conferences are essentially another stream or diversionary process that offer a restorative approach, with victims given the opportunity to participate in the process as well.

Having been fortunate to visit a couple of times the Youth Court in Adelaide and also have regular meetings with the judge of the Youth Court, it is reported to me that the participants often find these quite valuable. In particular those on the other side, victims related to offences, find this quite a valuable outcome. Of course, anything we can do to lessen young people coming into significant contact with the criminal justice system is a good thing for the prospects of later in their life still not coming into contact.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, and I just flag that, in case there was any doubt about it, I share those sentiments entirely. I have referred to this crossover of interest to DCP and DHS and reforms on the DCP side that the Youth Court has a keen interest in. We are here doing a budget estimates process and therefore including scrutiny of the resources allocated to the Youth Court. First, perhaps I will ask: is there some particular reason why it would be necessary to refer to advisers not here in relation to the Youth Court specifically? It is not a trick question.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If you have questions about care and protection matters that the Department for Child Protection work on, there is a very good possibility I am not going to have much information at all on the drivers behind those sorts of things.

Mr TEAGUE: I am limiting myself to this aspect of the workload, the sort of thing that might find its way into the judge of the Youth Court or to those responsible for the Youth Court, including the administration authority generally, speaking up for resources for the Youth Court—the result of its many burdens, put it that way. Here we see a couple of indicators of a criminal burden.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am not sure what the—

Mr TEAGUE: It has not sounded in any particular request for additional resources?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I said, I have regular meetings, and I cannot recall that we have had more family conferences or that we are hearing more about administrative breaches of bail and we need more resources. I do not recall that.

Mr TEAGUE: Just to interrogate that line item then a little bit more.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Which one are we still on?

Mr TEAGUE: The first line item on page 137.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The family conferences?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. The number of youths referred to family conference. Just to be clear, the 1,800 that is repeated as a projection is not RoGS data? That is an actual thought through figure that is specific to the jurisdiction?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is my advice. Of course RoGS data is the same in every single jurisdiction. To have an absolute number, not a percentage, would be of even less utility given the different sizes in jurisdictions.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, of course. We are not dealing there with some ever-fixed mark inappropriately stuck somewhere that cannot be changed. In fact, we see that the projections change in that very table further on. Anyway, we have stuck with the same projection. Does that give us a clue that there is anything unusual about that trajectory of growth of the number of youths referred to family conference over projection year-on-year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Not necessarily but, again, I am happy to take that on notice. It might be they have merely carried it over and repeated it to wait to see if those figures continue, but what was in mind when those were set I am going to have to take on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright. I appreciate the Attorney's willingness to take that on notice, and I will not wring that out, as it were, any further. Clearly, there is valuable information that might be provided, and I would just flag a keen interest in it. If I might just put one general observation in terms of the Youth Court facilities generally, has the government given consideration—even off its own bat—to the accommodation and adequacy of those facilities? I think it is well-known that they have been unchanged now since Dunstan and King were both on a plaque over at the red-brick building.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I said, I have had the privilege and the benefit of being able to visit the Youth Court a couple of times, and I think it is fair to say—and I do not think this is limited just to the Youth Court—but in a world of unlimited resources, many levels of our court system would be grateful for new, improved accommodation, but it is a matter of resources and the functionality of how things are working. Certainly, it has been raised with the Youth Court.

Mr TEAGUE: If I might just turn a couple of pages back to performance indicators.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: On what page is that?

Mr TEAGUE: On the way, perhaps to page 135, Sub-program 1.4: Coroner. If there is time, I will just address briefly some of the performance indicators in terms of civil jurisdiction and then some more on the criminal side, but I am just conscious that time is getting away. Sub-program 1.4: Coroner, page 135, the government has provided the extended funding for a third Coroner. That came about subsequent to the last estimates in the Mid-Year Budget Review, as I recall. Then we

are seeing a part-year reflection of that set of circumstances, but without improvement in the backlog. There has been a 1 per cent improvement, I think, as I read it.

The activity indicator, the final line on page 135, tells us that the projection for 2024-25 was 3,200 coronial finalisations, the estimated result is 2,888 and the projection for 2025-26 is a reduction in the 2024-25 projection down to 3,000. Despite, therefore, the funding for a permanent third Coroner, we see simultaneously a reduction in the projection for coronial finalisations. Is there anything the Attorney would like to say to explain that? Whether he would like to or not, could the Attorney inform the committee about why the apparent reduction in performance is projected? Do we need a fourth Coroner?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As the member for Heysen has pointed out, there have previously been three coroners, but there was time-limited funding that former governments of both stripes had provided that ran out. For a period of time there were two coroners. We could see that there was easily enough work for the three coroners, and after six months, as the member pointed out, a Mid-Year Budget Review reinstated that funding, not just time-limited funding as it has been before but ongoing funding. I am aware that there is, essentially, catch-up in terms of the work of the Coroner that needs to happen. Why the projections have been set at those figures, again, I do not have the benefit of having someone from that jurisdiction here, but I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: Thank you. There is one rather important thing that I did not get to on page 136: it is going back to those questions a moment ago. At page 136, the performance indicators, the family conference and the care and protection headings, we see there what might be regarded as a drastic reduction in the percentage in this case in this table of family group conferences that result in valid agreements for care and protection of children. That has dropped and, even leaving targets aside, it is well under target. Even looking at actuals, the 2023-24 actual was 91 per cent of those family group conferences that resulted in valid agreements for care and protection of children, and that is down in 2024-25 to an estimated result of 57 per cent.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have one minute, Attorney.

Mr TEAGUE: It is not quite halved, but it is a drastic reduction in valid outcomes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, halved would have been down to—

Mr TEAGUE: Forty-five.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Halved from the actual for 2023-24 would have been a lot lower than that. The advice I have is that referrals have significantly reduced. I am advised that referrals to the conferencing unit received for family group conferencing are increasingly complex matters, so the combination of the referrals reducing and the complexity of the matters contributes to that.

The ACTING CHAIR: The allotted time having expired, I declare the examination of the Courts Administration Authority complete. We will now move on to the Attorney-General's Department and State Records. That is the Attorney again, but presumably some new advisers.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, \$155,240,000

ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, \$90,903,000

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT AND WATER, \$192,478,000

**ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT AND WATER,
\$33,270,000**

Membership:

Mr Cowdrey substituted for Mr Batty.

Minister:

Hon. K.J. Maher, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector, Special Minister of State.

Departmental Advisers:

Ms C. Meador, Chief Executive Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Kilvert, Executive Director, Policy and Community, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr D. Corcoran, Director, Financial Services, Attorney-General's Department.

Ms T. Brooks, Principal Accountant, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr J. Lai, Principal Adviser, Budgeting, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr B. Bruce, Chief Executive, Department for Environment and Water.

The ACTING CHAIR: I advise again that the government and the opposition have agreed to examine expenditure lines for the Department for Environment and Water to ask questions on the review of sand management on metropolitan beaches that has been delegated to the Attorney-General by the Deputy Premier. I declare the proposed payments open for examination once the Attorney's advisers are in place and then I invite him to introduce anyone new to us.

Mr TELFER: I will do the omnibus questions while they are settling in:

1. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how many executive appointments have been made since 1 July 2024 and what is the annual salary and total employment cost for each position?

2. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how many executive positions have been abolished since 1 July 2024 and what was the annual salary and total employment cost for each position?

3. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what has been the total cost of executive position terminations since 1 July 2024?

4. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, will the minister provide a breakdown of expenditure on consultants and contractors with a total estimated cost above \$10,000 engaged since 1 July 2024, listing the name of the consultant, contractor or service supplier, the method of appointment, the reason for the engagement and the estimated total cost of the work?

5. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, will the minister provide an estimate of the total cost to be incurred in 2025-26 for consultants and contractors, and for each case in which a consultant or contractor has already been engaged at a total estimated cost above \$10,000, the name of the consultant or contractor, the method of appointment, the reason for the engagement and the total estimated cost?

6. For each department or agency reporting to the minister, how many surplus employees are there in June 2025, and for each surplus employee, what is the title or classification of the position and the total annual employment cost?

7. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what is the number of executive staff to be cut to meet the government's commitment to reduce spending on the employment of executive staff and, for each position to be cut, its classification, total remuneration cost and the date by which the position will be cut?

8. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what savings targets have been set for 2025-26 and each year of the forward estimates, and what is the estimated FTE impact of these measures?

9. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:
 - (a) What was the actual FTE count at June 2025 and what is the projected actual FTE account for the end of each year of the forward estimates?
 - (b) What is the budgeted total employment cost for each year of the forward estimates?
 - (c) How many targeted voluntary separation packages are estimated to be required to meet budget targets over the forward estimates and what is their estimated cost?
10. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how much is budgeted to be spent on goods and services for 2025-26 and for each year of the forward estimates?
11. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, how many FTEs are budgeted to provide communication and promotion activities in 2025-26 and each year of the forward estimates and what is their estimated employment cost?
12. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, what is the total budgeted cost of government-paid advertising, including campaigns, across all mediums in 2025-26?
13. For each department and agency reporting to the minister, please provide for each individual investing expenditure project administered, the name, total estimated expenditure, actual expenditure incurred to June 2024 and budgeted expenditure for 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28.
14. For each grant program or fund the minister is responsible for, please provide the following information for the 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28 financial years:
 - (a) Name of the program or fund;
 - (b) The purpose of the program or fund;
 - (c) Budgeted payments into the program or fund;
 - (d) Budgeted expenditure from the program or fund; and
 - (e) Details, including the value and beneficiary, or any commitments already made to be funded from the program or fund.
15. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:
 - (a) Is the agency confident that you will meet your expenditure targets in 2025-26? Have any budget decisions been made between the delivery of the budget on 5 June 2025 and today that might impact on the numbers presented in the budget papers which we are examining today?
 - (b) Are you expecting any reallocations across your agencies' budget lines during 2025-26; if so, what is the nature of the reallocation?
16. For each department and agency reporting to the minister:
 - (a) What South Australian businesses will be used in procurement for your agencies in 2025-26?
 - (b) What percentage of total procurement spend for your agencies does this represent?
 - (c) How does this compare to last year?
17. What percentage of your department's budget has been allocated for the management of remote work infrastructure, including digital tools, cybersecurity, and support services, and how does this compare with previous years?
18. How many procurements have been undertaken by the department this FY. How many have been awarded to interstate businesses? How many of those were signed off by the CE?

19. How many contractor invoices were paid by the department directly this FY? How many and what percentage were paid within 15 days, and how many and what percentage were paid outside of 15 days?

20. How many and what percentage of staff who undertake procurement activities have undertaken training on participation policies and local industry participants this FY?

The ACTING CHAIR: I now declare the aforementioned payments open for examination. I call on the Attorney to make a statement, if he wishes, and to introduce his advisers.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will take you up on the latter, Chair. Behind me I have Darren Corcoran, Director, AGD Financial Services; Tanya Brooks, Principal Accountant, Attorney-General's Department; and Justin Lai, Principal Advisor, Budgeting, Attorney-General's Department. On my far left I have Adam Kilvert, Executive Director, Policy and Community, Attorney-General's Department; and Caroline Meador, Chief Executive, Attorney-General's Department. On my right I have Andrew Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department, who, I would like to point out, is in his 27th year of budget estimates.

The ACTING CHAIR: That is quite an achievement.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is a superhero effort; like, holy guacamole, Batman, 27 years! I thought it might be bitumen or gravel, but I am informed that the gift at a 27th anniversary is sculpture, so I will be sure to present Andrew with maybe a homemade sculpture from one of my kids at a later date.

The ACTING CHAIR: I look forward to that. Do you have anything further to add to your statement, minister? That is your opening statement? Excellent. Member for Colton, do you have an opening statement? Are you the lead speaker? Perhaps we will just open it up for questions.

Mr COWDREY: I will start by expressing my gratitude to the government for allowing questions in regard to the beach management review.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Perhaps, Chair, if we are going to do a couple of beach management questions, I can talk about the government's review that is going on at the moment, but in terms of day-to-day operations that is not something I have control over. Maybe if we can swap with Ben Bruce from the environment department for a moment to help provide answers.

The ACTING CHAIR: Did I understand from that that you have a statement to make, minister?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No; I do not have a statement to make. I am happy to refer to the budget papers and take questions.

Mr COWDREY: I interpreted the most recent comment in the same way you did, sir, that a comment was about to be made in regard to day-to-day operations, which I thought was outside the scope of the minister's role.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No; to clarify, in terms of day-to-day operations that is outside my role in taking on the review and future—

Mr COWDREY: I can assure the minister I would never dream of stepping outside the scope of his responsibilities, so I will ensure the questions are constrained to the beach management review itself. The budget reference is Agency Statements, Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 142, with reference to Adelaide Beach Management Review in the first paragraph below the table. When will the government release the outcomes or make a decision, if that is more specific for you, in terms of future steps and activities to be undertaken on the Adelaide metropolitan coastline?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We are actively looking at what has been put forward for the review and the results of testing that is being done.

Mr COWDREY: Minister, why has my community had to wait more than three years for the results of a review?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Because we wanted to do this properly, not in any sort of rushed way. I might add that those beaches in the West Beach, Henley Beach area this year have received

a record amount of sand to replenish those beaches, more than has happened in any other year before. So the idea that nothing is happening and that there is not sand being replenished—I think it is very important to be very clear that more sand has gone onto those central beaches in the West Beach, Henley Beach area than has ever happened before.

Mr COWDREY: Yet if you step down there, minister, the beaches are in the worst shape they have ever been in. Henley South in particular has seen significant erosion events to the extent—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is just as well the government is putting on record amounts of sand, more than the Liberal government did in any one of their four years in government recently.

Mr COWDREY: Have any options been ruled out by the government based on feasibility, cost, environmental damage, or any other reason?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am not going to start pre-empting the results. As I said, they are under active consideration.

Mr COWDREY: Has a suitable sand source, offshore or otherwise, been identified for any long-term dredging program and, if so, when and where, noting that advice previous to now was that one did not exist?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can advise that is exactly why such an in-depth program of testing has occurred.

Mr COWDREY: Yes, minister, but has any been identified?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I said, I am not going to pre-empt the release of what actions are going to be taken, but it is under active consideration.

Mr COWDREY: But you do not contest that prior to now a significant enough or suitable sand source had been identified?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is exactly why the most thorough testing of these things, I think, that has ever occurred has been undertaken as part of this process.

Mr COWDREY: Why was dredging of the West Beach sandbar included in the dredging trial, having not been mentioned previously or consulted with the purpose-built consultation groups or the community more generally?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is, notwithstanding consultants identifying the sand source that the member has mentioned as being extremely suitable, that option to dredge, even for testing, was not taken up.

Mr COWDREY: That was not the question, minister. The question was: why was the dredging undertaken without prior consultation with the community groups that had been established?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: What dredging is the member referring to?

Mr COWDREY: Perhaps if we want to get into semantics, why was the proposed dredging at West Beach considered without any consultation with the purpose-built community consultation groups?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Why did something that did not happen, not happen; is that the question?

Mr COWDREY: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Because it did not happen. You are welcome.

Mr COWDREY: Have you or any member of your staff ever spoken with or communicated with the member for Port Adelaide, the Deputy Premier, in regard to directions or decisions of the review or the review more broadly?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Not since taking on the role of actually undertaking the review.

Mr COWDREY: Why was the responsibility for the beach management review given to you, noting that Minister Scriven is responsible for PIRSA and makes decisions on a day-to-day basis in her ministerial responsibilities with scientific-based evidence and research? I also note the fact that under the portfolio of PIRSA there is significant research undertaken in regard to seagrasses and other issues that are directly relevant to the Adelaide metropolitan coastline. Having selected a different minister, there conceivably could have been an argument that it would not have been seen as being as close to the Deputy Premier as perhaps a decision to hand that responsibility to you.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not understand most of what was asked, but in relation to why I am doing it it is because I was asked and I am happy to do so and I am a team player. I understand these are foreign concepts to the South Australian division of the Liberal Party, but that is how we work in the South Australian division of the Labor Party.

Mr COWDREY: You are close personal friends with the Deputy Premier, are you not?

The ACTING CHAIR: The minister can answer this in any way he wishes. We are all good friends.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not see the funding allocated to my friendships in the budget, but if you have a budget line for that I am happy to. I am happy to have a budget for my friendships. That would be awesome.

Mr COWDREY: I will finish by again asking on behalf of my community: when will the government make a decision and give certainty to them?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We are looking at this matter as quickly as possible, but we are also taking into account as much of the information for long-term solutions as possible.

The ACTING CHAIR: Do I understand there are no further questions in relation to the Department for Environment and Water?

Mr COWDREY: There are no further answers, I assume, so no.

The ACTING CHAIR: In that case, minister, would you like to rearrange your advisers.

Mr TEAGUE: I have a question for the Attorney-General's Department. I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 15. That is the Attorney-General's Department, Investing expenditure summary table. About halfway down that table, about point 5 or 6 on the page, there is the South Australia Forensic Centre. We see there an estimated completion of June 2031 and a total project cost of \$362,088,000 and a 2025-26 budget of \$15,900,000 and, moving further to the right, an estimated result for 2024-25 of \$22 million, which is considerably in excess of the budget amount for 2024-25 of \$14 million.

There are a couple of figures that are not there. This is a comparator to the questions earlier about works on Sir Samuel Way. For comparison, last year the estimated completion date was June 2028. We now see it is June 2031, so there is a three-year delay in the estimated completion. Last year, we saw the total project cost reported in the budget papers as \$348 million and that is now being reported as \$362 million, which is about \$14 million of budget blowout for the project. Could the Attorney explain, firstly, reasons, if any, for the delay and, secondly, for the budget blowout?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will be happy to. I know that the member for Heysen likes to use loaded terms like 'budget blowout'. What I can say is, my advice is—

Mr TEAGUE: If there is a technical term that I might better use, I am happy to.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Okay, 'acquisition of land' is a better term to use and I will explain why. I am advised the original budget of \$348.9 million excluded land-related costs. During 2024-25, additional funding for land of \$13.2 million was provided, bringing that total budget to the \$362.1 million. So I do not think it is fair to say 'budget blowout'. It would of course be very hard to complete a building project like this without any land. You need to build on the land. So that takes into account the acquisition for the funding of the land—

Mr TEAGUE: That begs the question of: why the \$348 million budget previously?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Sorry, it is additional funding for the acquisition of land. In terms of the completion dates—I think that was the first part of the member's question—I am advised that the revised project completion date will more closely align with the proposed lease period of the existing facilities at Divett Place in the city, to ensure a more effective transition between the current site and the new site. The relocation of the forensic centre will be a very significant process involving, I am advised, around 320 staff, including the fit-out and transfer of very finely calibrated machinery and instruments.

This reflects also that it is an extraordinarily complex facility. These sorts of things, forensic centres, are one of a kind. You do not build other ones like this in each jurisdiction. They have very specific needs in terms of reducing the possibility of contamination and exactly what is needed for, as I say, the finely calibrated instruments and machines. It is exceptionally complicated, but it is also closely aligned with the lease period of the existing building.

Mr TEAGUE: That is a helpful answer, with respect. There are no perfect analogies. I have already made some passing reference to the government's hydrogen project being a \$593 million project until it was not at all, and here we see, perhaps in some ways, an imperfect analogy to the new Women's and Children's Hospital, a more substantial project but where time and cost, if they are extended, have these effects.

That answer perhaps then begs a follow-on; that is: we have seen the total project cost at \$348 million in repeated budgets, I think for two or three years. I think that has been the budget amount. Does the change to \$362 million—if that is to be explained away by the Attorney making what is a pretty obvious point, namely, if you are going to decide to build a new building you are going to need land on which to build that new building—reflect a late change of approach, away from using the existing land on which the existing building is located, to renovate or replace the building on a greenfield site?

My recollection is that at all times it might have been well and truly in the mix that building a new building was an easier, more productive and likely outcome. In which case, who forgot to budget for the land acquisition, in the first place?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that Treasury was managing the land acquisition.

Mr TEAGUE: So it is their fault.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No; a proportion of this. In terms of putting it on the same site, I do not think we own that site in Divett Place.

Mr TEAGUE: No, it is a lease.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is a lease. Until some more work had been done around what land might cost and the actual needs of where it might go—because, as you say, it is correct that it would be much more effective and efficient and would serve the needs of South Australia in a much better way to have a brand-new build. But the initial budget, I am advised, was the cost of the building, and then more work needed to be done about where it might be located.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright, but—and you will forgive me—does that say that Treasury accounted for that additional \$14 million until now, and that now that the delay has been sort of set out it is now convenient to set out that additional cost that we could have found elsewhere in other agencies until now?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I would have to check with Treasury in terms of internal accounting processes and how they represent what things might cost—or it simply might be when there is more information as to how you are going to do a project, to include them. But I am happy to go and check that.

Mr TEAGUE: That does not sound like a yes. It certainly does not sound like an accounting tool, so one is left to—and I am glad if the Attorney wants to take on notice some aspects of that. But I think the proposition for the time being is that for some years we have had a total project cost of \$348 million against an anticipated completion of June 2028.

I said this was an analogy to Sir Samuel Way because there you have a significant delay in the completion of the project, and I was flagging that one might anticipate that comes with a project cost increase, just through the CPI and general process; whereas, in that case, the Attorney said, 'No, \$11.5 million is still the figure. It is two years delayed but \$11.5 million is still the figure.'

Here we have a three-year delay and a \$14 million increase in the total project cost, but the Attorney is very quickly and readily saying, 'No, that's because we have just discovered we need to account for the acquisition of land.' Leaving aside that whole question of the responsibility for whoever has forgotten to account for that until now—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, I am happy to take that on notice, but the inference initially was that it was a budget blowout. When I was able to say that it takes into account land cost, it was as if someone has been negligent in forgetting it. I am happy to take it on notice but I will not agree with the characterisation that the honourable member is—

Mr TEAGUE: Chair, from the committee's point view, I make it clear that I am very glad to associate myself with the characterisation, unless and until further advised. It strikes me that it is a clear budget blowout and that without more the delay in the estimated completion itself would be the obvious explanation for that budget blowout.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Except that I have said that is not the reason.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, I appreciate that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That could be true except for the facts.

Mr Telfer interjecting:

Mr TEAGUE: That is good.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is, isn't it?

Mr TELFER: We took it on notice, so we do not know all the facts, do we?

Mr TEAGUE: There are two sets of disturbing outcomes here, as far as I can tell. One is that there is a significant cost increase, the result of a significant delay, and the other one is that we are told that the cost has not changed despite the delay, but we have an extra element that was heretofore not accounted for. Either of those two, I think, need to be explained. I appreciate that the Attorney has taken that on notice and I am sure the committee will be glad for that information more particularly in due course.

As it stands, on the face of the budget papers, and at the risk of repeating myself, we have a three-year delay and we have an increase in the project cost of \$14 million. Is there anything else that the Attorney might have to say to the committee about the reason for the delay, or is the Attorney telling the committee that that is entirely virtuous in that it more appropriately lines up with the lease period for the existing building?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am happy to repeat and say that I am advised that the project completion date will more closely align with the proposed lease period, and also the complexity, as traversed before, of this sort of facility.

Mr TEAGUE: At the risk of being really trite, we have known the lease period at all times, have we not?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: And the revised project completion date more closely aligns with that.

Mr TEAGUE: Which we have known at all times.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: So it would seem that the government is making good decisions.

Mr TEAGUE: But not until this year, so someone has made a bad decision until this year on that analysis.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, I do not accept that characterisation.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright. I just flag that, as far as I am concerned, all balls remain somewhat up in the air while the Attorney has taken a series of things on notice.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: To be clear again, in terms of the budget, my advice is that the original budget of \$348.9 million—and I am happy to find out the reason. It may well be because there was no decision on the type of location—distance from the city, etc.—that the facility might end up being built in. I know some of those factors were under consideration, so additional funding has been provided as a more detailed design phase occurs. I do not think there is anything at all unusual in that sort of process.

Mr TEAGUE: It kind of then stands in contrast with the Sir Samuel Way kind of scenario where the project cost has not changed even though we have had delay.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think \$11 million for renovations to the facade of a heritage-listed building is a very different thing to a new state-of-the art forensic science centre, which, again, is a different thing to a Women's and Children's Hospital. I think they are obviously all different projects.

Mr TEAGUE: Just focus then on the estimated completion.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It might be worth just saying that I know that we are getting into the weeds a little bit in terms of exactly how costs are being accounted for—

Mr TEAGUE: I am not; you might be.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: —but I think it is worth noting and remembering that there has been a decision to invest over a third of a billion dollars into a new facility. I think this is a very good thing for South Australia.

Mr TEAGUE: Indeed.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We have seen, in different jurisdictions around the world, problems in the equivalent of their forensic science places, sometimes due to the actual physical nature of the buildings and how samples are contaminated. The government that the member was a part of previously, and Labor governments before that, had not seen fit to do this. So the fact that there is hundreds of millions of dollars being invested into a state-of-the-art forensic science centre I think is a very good thing.

Mr TEAGUE: It is fantastic. The SA forensic centre is a standout example of a centre in urgent need of replacement and the funds to do exactly that are enormously welcomed. That puts the spotlight on competence and capacity and an actual outcome, and so hence the keen interest in its completion and what I might presume is the sentiments of South Australians, let alone those experts who do that wonderful work, are somewhat disappointed, if not shocked, to see that that will not actually happen until three years later than what the government has been telling us in the budget papers throughout its term.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It will happen much quicker than any proposal the former Liberal government had for a new forensic science centre—much quicker, because there was none. So it is 'never' compared to '2031', which is a much shorter timeframe than 'never ever'.

Mr TEAGUE: Here we are directly jousting rejections of characterisations. So after wholeheartedly rejecting that characterisation—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We can look back at the 2018 to 2021 budgets and I am certain there was not any provision for tens, let alone hundreds of millions of dollars for a new forensic science centre.

Mr TEAGUE: What we have seen for now several years is a projected completion date of June 2028, which, without more, appears to have simply gone out the window to a new completion date somewhere further off towards the sunset, if not beyond the horizon.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Infinitely quicker than any proposal the former Liberal government have; that is also true.

Mr TEAGUE: I will take that as a comment, Chair. Perhaps then to illustrate the present sort of straitened circumstances more particularly, I am turning to page 29 of the same budget paper and

volume, and there we see Program 7: Forensic Science SA, performance indicators. I stress, as the Attorney has indicated already, that we are talking about some of the best people not only in the state but in the country and the world doing this work.

We see in the performance indicators that the major indictable DNA cases, with the suspect completed within seven months—and it has been the subject of additional resources having been provided in 2025-26 to deal with demands going forward—we see this really substantial series of drop-offs in performance. The 2023-24 actual was 62 per cent. The target, which has been maintained year-to-year, remains 75 per cent, but the 2024-25 estimated result is at 45 per cent, which is a significant deterioration, even on that 2023-24 actual result. Is there any explanation the Attorney can provide? Have substandard facilities contributed to it, and is a more urgent application of additional resources necessary?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice in relation to that particular statistic is that the estimated result is mainly due to the impact of changing laboratory practices following a commission of inquiry into DNA analysis in Queensland, and upskilling of new staff in this area. The change to laboratory practices now means more biological samples are progressing to full DNA profiling, which results in more complex samples needing to be interpreted and reported. Since 2024, I am advised, four new positions in biology were established to address this increase in demand for DNA analysis, and significant training of these new staff members is underway.

I am advised that rejuvenation of the biology workforce will have long-term benefits for forensic science and, of course, as the member pointed out, additional funding on top of what has been provided in previous budgets and Mid-Year Budget Reviews. Through the 2025-26 budget we will see even more additional scientific staff, and an administrative report, provided to biology to further address the increased workload complexities, and eventually aim to decrease the turnaround times for cases being completed.

The member would be aware of some of the occurrences, particularly in Queensland, that have occurred, and a commission of inquiry into the handling of DNA analysis in Queensland, so it is making sure that there are changes to practices in South Australia.

Mr TEAGUE: Does that answer also account for the even more startlingly dramatic deterioration in performance that we see at the bottom of that table—illicit drugs cases preliminary results issued within two months—also the subject of additional resources in both the Mid-Year Budget Review for 2024-25 and in the 2025-26 budget? There is a deterioration that is really quite dramatic, from a target of 90 per cent to an estimated result of 20 per cent.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. We were previously talking about the biology section, now to the chemistry section with illicit drug samples. As the notes in the budget papers indicate, there is an increased workload and also an increase in the complexity of the cases. Early this year (2025), three new positions in chemistry were established to address the growing complexities in these illicit drug cases. It follows ongoing funding that was provided in the 2024-25 Mid-Year Budget Review. It is expected that, within approximately three months, the chemistry part will again be issuing illicit drug preliminary reports within two months.

Mr TEAGUE: Is the government confident that those additional resources are actually going to resolve that current low case load, or is there going to be more to be done? Are you satisfied, Attorney?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We will obviously monitor how the extra resources we are providing improves and impacts on the case load and the turnaround time. We have, in a couple of budgets and in the Mid-Year Budget Review, progressively increased the resources available, particularly for FTEs. The fact that we have done that consistently demonstrates that we will monitor and respond as necessary.

Mr TEAGUE: What kind of backlog does that actually represent, in terms of numbers?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: How do you mean?

Mr TEAGUE: It is expressed in terms of percentages in that table.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have figures in terms of raw numbers, but I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: Thank you. I see that the Attorney does not lean on this data as an explanation for the increased project cost of the new centre, despite having said things have changed, in terms of what we have seen in Queensland, changed methods, etc. I would have been interested if that was the case, that the centre needs to be somehow beefed up or altered in terms of its capacities, given what we have learned over time.

The Attorney has not lent on that as an explanation. We have seen that, okay, it is a land cost point, but the scope of the centre has not changed. I was going to head to saying: is that performance indicator table itself a pretty good argument for saying, 'All the more reason to get on with the job,' or is it actually a resourcing matter that, with appropriate resources applied, new methods, you can deal with it in the current facility, you struggle on until the new one comes along?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that the impact of the inquiry in Queensland has changed the way tests have to be done, and that has resulted in some of the figures we have seen. The inquiry in Queensland was known when work started on looking at a new building, so that is already factored into account, is my advice.

Mr TEAGUE: To give the Attorney the full benefit, does the lease run until June 2031, or does it run six months after that to allow moving of equipment or anything like that?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have the lease details with me here, but I am happy to take the question on notice. I have some high-level advice that I was able to provide, but details I will have to take on notice. As the member is probably aware, most lease management issues are through the Department for Infrastructure and Transport, and I think that is the case with this one.

Mr TEAGUE: No-one is saying that no-one has been aware of the term of it, obviously?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: How do you mean?

Mr TEAGUE: Everyone has been aware of the term of the lease the whole time?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will have to take that on notice in terms of the details of the lease.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, but you are not suggesting that it has somehow come to light that the lease runs until some time that was not known, and that therefore that is now impacting on the estimated completion?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am giving you the advice I have been provided; I am happy to see whether there is more detail.

Mr TEAGUE: To be really clear, the Attorney has referred wholly and solely to a decision made about the term of the lease as explanation for the estimated completion date of the project changing from June 2028 to June 2031.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I did not say wholly and solely anywhere.

Mr TEAGUE: I am giving you the benefit—if there is any other reason.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: You have asked for an explanation. I have said this is a factor.

Mr TEAGUE: Are there any other factors?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am happy to take that on notice, but certainly factors will include the complexity we have talked about of this sort of facility. I am happy to take on notice whether there is anything further I can add. To try to characterise me as saying it was wholly and solely only this, I do not think is particularly fair.

Mr TEAGUE: That is why I have given you the benefit.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: And that is why I am saying this.

Mr TEAGUE: I appreciate you taking that on notice.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: And I appreciate you appreciating it.

Mr TEAGUE: But for the time being, there is no other reason the Attorney is providing to this committee?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: With all projects there will be a variety of reasons—this is one I have been advised of.

Mr TEAGUE: The one you have advised the committee of just now.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Mentioned to you, yes.

Mr TEAGUE: Sir Samuel Way, the total project cost: I might just indicate, as I perhaps already revealed my surprise, that the—again I will use the words wholly and solely—reason for the total project cost increasing from \$348 million to \$362 million is acquisition of land that was not previously accounted for.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Sorry, I was not listening. Can you just say everything you said again?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. In terms of the total project cost, the Attorney has said now, in a number of different ways, that the whole and sole reason for the total project cost blowing out, to use that term that I have adopted for myself, from \$348 million to \$362 million is the acquisition of land that was heretofore not accounted for in the budget line.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can repeat what my advice is: the additional funding for land of \$13.2 million was provided. That brings the total in the budget to \$348.9 million; add \$13.2 million and it takes it to \$362.1 million.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, that is what we see in the budget.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: Did the Attorney just say at the outset that the acquisition of land was included previously as well?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, my advice is that the original budget excluded land-related costs.

Mr TEAGUE: Right. Curious, given what the Attorney said about the rather obvious point that you need land in order to build a building.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. That is why it is accounted for as the project develops and there is more information about the types of locations that might be suitable.

Mr TEAGUE: So in the future, whenever we talk about a new building—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No; in relation to this.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not think you can take something in relation to one thing and extend it to everything.

Mr TEAGUE: Can't you? Why not?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: What is that?

Mr TEAGUE: Is it not a common accounting standard or something? Somebody has made the call. This has been much vaunted, and I might say welcomed. There is nothing controversial about a lot of what the Attorney said about characterising the urgency of the need for this, but we have seen it in the budget, year on year on year—unchanging project cost.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Year on year on year. How many years does the member think it has been in the budget, because year on year on year would take it back to the last government and, as we have discussed, they had an ambition to do nothing with the forensic centre.

Mr TEAGUE: I reject that characterisation. The whole time this government has been in government, year on year on year—I think there are three previous ones—we have had a project

cost of \$348 million. My proposition is: are we to have to, when we first see that, say, 'Hang on, does that include the land on which you are going to build the building?'

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For any project, if you ask does that include the land you can answer if it includes the land, yes, sure.

Mr TEAGUE: In this case, it was kind of just going under the radar until now, and now it pops up as, 'Hang on, we are now going to account for the land on which we are going to build the building.' It is not a very reliable project cost if it at all times contemplated a new building but only just now does it budget for the cost of the land on which to build the new building.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: What is the question?

Mr TEAGUE: I guess the accounting question is: why now? Why include it in the budget now and not three years ago? And two years ago? And one year ago?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I say, I am happy to check with Treasury. This is not something that I have actively made a decision about, how these things are reported. I am happy to go away and check with Treasury. As I have said before, it is a stark difference to the policy of the former Liberal government not to have a new centre.

Mr TEAGUE: There is the proposition as it stands. I am grateful to the Attorney for taking the opportunity to add to that, if you would like to. I move to page 26, same paper and volume. We are now in Legislative and Policy Services, program 6 of AGD. You might find it before I do, but my recollection is it was earlier this year that the government announced the creation of the new Young Offender Plan. That included a range of things: bail laws, penalties, and a focus on youth street gangs. As far as I can see they do not get mentioned as highlights or targets. Is Legislative and Policy Services doing any work on those matters? If so, how do we see that sounding in terms of the budget?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am happy to answer, but it is novel way to address budget papers to say, 'I am referring you to this page and I don't see something on this page, therefore I'm asking a question about it.'

Mr TEAGUE: I appreciate that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As novel as that may be, I am happy to answer the question. In relation to the work in the Young Offender Plan, certainly Legislative Services has been heavily involved, as the honourable member knows from having been the planning minister responsible for the functions of the Attorney-General for a number of months. If you included every single thing that Legislative Services do over the course of a year you would run up many, many pages of budget papers, but they certainly have been involved.

Mr TEAGUE: Has it finished its work on the Young Offender Plan?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No; that is still ongoing. The member would be aware that there are a number of elements to that. Changes to the law to deal with street gangs is being finalised, and also—

Mr TEAGUE: I think they were described as bikie-style reforms—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Of course, Legislative Services were involved in this part as well, looking at whether we could just add them, essentially, to the laws that have been extraordinarily successful in disrupting outlaw motorcycle gangs in South Australia.

Mr TEAGUE: Has any work commenced on those?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Absolutely; there is very well developed and well progressed work on those, but the different structures, the less formal and less rigidly hierarchical structures of street gangs, have meant that we are looking for a bespoke approach in relation to them. Work is very well developed.

Mr TEAGUE: Does the Attorney have a time at which SALRI is expected to complete its bail law review?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes; SALRI is doing a bail law review. As I am sure the member appreciates, SALRI does exceptional work in doing very indepth and complete analysis of issues they take on board. I do not have a date for that, but part of the Youth Offender Plan is looking at that very small cohort of young people responsible for a disproportionate number of matters that come before the Youth Court.

We have previously announced and are doing work, discrete work, in relation to that small cohort of offenders in terms of bail and sentencing. It does not appear on page 26, but Legislative Services are necessarily involved in that as well.

Mr TEAGUE: Just like the roundtable meeting for the Young Offender Plan that was held, I think, back in March, are AGD involved in that as well?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes, AGD was the driver of that.

Mr TEAGUE: Are there going to be more of those? Has there been feedback to attendees—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There has certainly been further consultation. I think there already has been with organisations and individuals who have attended that, as we have developed the responses, particularly the legislative responses.

Mr TEAGUE: Still on 26, we have a target now, it is actually appearing on the page. The second dot point and the first dash points, among those targets is 'Assist the passage through parliament of legislation to criminalise coercive control'. When is that legislation going to be implemented?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: All other things being equal, I would expect that legislation to pass some time after the winter break. It has passed the lower house of parliament and is now in the Legislative Council, and I would expect it to pass some time after the winter break. In terms of the actual implementation, when it comes into force, it will be significantly after that.

One thing that has certainly been impressed on me is how important is the education piece around coercive control. Just having new laws that criminalise this sort of behaviour is not nearly as effective as when it helps to influence the standards people accept. Those involved in the domestic and family violence sector have talked about a time of around 24 months from when the laws are finalised before they come into operation to allow that education piece. It is not just the education piece to make sure it is well understood that these are the standards that society expects, but it is also making sure that there is a significant lead-in time to make sure those who will enforce the law, SAPOL and others, understand what this behaviour is, what to look for, etc.

Something that was impressed upon me when we had consultations with those who have been involved in the sector and the groups that represent the sector for many years is the desire for a long lead-in time to make sure the laws are as effective and well understood as possible.

Mr TEAGUE: Not to verbal him but just to make reference to the portfolio responsibility, relevantly, the Minister for Police and Treasurer maybe in the course of estimates, publicly anyway, has given an indication that the government is not implementing those laws until 2028. I think that was coming from a Minister for Police perspective and, therefore, reflecting part of what the Attorney said about the need to make it work from the perspective of police. Nonetheless, does the Attorney agree it is significant? I think the Attorney is embracing that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is significant. It is certainly, from those who have worked in for many years and represent the sector, a very deliberate very significant lead-in time. It is partly for those who will be enforcing the law to properly understand what it is but, as it has been impressed upon me, an ability to have that education campaign before these laws commence to try to change behaviours and attitudes, knowing that this is what society expects.

Mr TEAGUE: I take it, therefore, from those two or three answers—and, I might say, I put it to the Minister for Child Protection in particular, who is on the record back as long ago as 2021 saying these are urgent matters—in terms of what are a variety of shared responsibilities within government for legislating through to implementation, from the Attorney's point of view, is the Attorney satisfied with the actions necessary to achieve the target and that the implementation phase that is

subsequent to it, including the timeline to 2028, is about right and necessary and desirable for the best outcome?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. Based on those who have much more experience and much more understanding in this area, yes, I am, for the reasons I have outlined.

Mr TEAGUE: I turn to pages 58 and 59 in the few minutes remaining and questions in relation to the Victims of Crime Fund. I could run through these fairly quickly and, to the extent the Attorney would like or it might be more convenient to take on notice, please let me know. What is the total balance presently of the Victims of Crime Fund?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that, as of 31 May this year, it is \$248 million.

Mr TEAGUE: How much has been paid out of the Victims of Crime Fund this financial year, and how much has been paid into the Victims of Crime Fund this financial year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not think we have a year-to-date figure, but I am happy to take those on notice. Certainly, for some of the last couple of years, the amount that was paid in by way of victims of crime levies was less than the amount that was paid out. But I think in a couple of years we have seen the fund actually increase because of interest that is paid on the accumulated capital account. Although \$248 million is a substantial amount in the Victims of Crime Fund, it is regularly paying out a substantial amount as one-offs. For example, I am advised that payments from the fund are expected to exceed the revenues into the fund for both 2025-26 and 2026-27 financial years.

Part of that is some of the very substantial calls on the fund that happen from time to time. During the course of the previous Liberal government, states including South Australia signed up to the National Redress Scheme. I am advised that we have a further approval of what was originally budgeted for but an extra \$135 million for the National Redress Scheme budgeted from our Victims of Crime Fund. There is a substantial amount in there now, but there are things that total hundreds of millions of dollars that are outside the normal operation of the fund in recent years as well.

Mr TEAGUE: Thank you. In the time remaining I have some questions in relation to the Justice Rehabilitation Fund. How much has been paid out of the JRF this financial year? How much has been paid into the JRF this financial year? How many programs will be funded out of the JRF this financial year? How many of those will be for youth? What is the nature of those programs and the average cost of the programs?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am happy to take that on notice, the year-to-date and a list of the programs.

The ACTING CHAIR: The allotted time having expired, I declare the examination of the Department for Environment and Water and the Administered Items of State Records complete, but further examination of the proposed payments and Administered Items for the Attorney-General's Department will continue after the break.

Sitting suspended from 11:00 to 11:15.

Departmental Advisers:

Ms C. Mealor, Chief Executive, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Ms N. Saunders, Executive Director, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation.

Mr D. Corcoran, Director, Financial Services, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr C. Macauley, Acting Director, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation.

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome back, Attorney, appearing in your role as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The portfolio is Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation. I advise that the proposed payments remain open for examination. The committee remains the same and I call on the minister now to make a statement, if you wish, and to introduce your new advisers.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I have no opening statement. I have with me Nerida Saunders to my right and behind is Craig Macauley from the Division of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and, once again, Andrew Swanson and Caroline Mealor from the Attorney-General's Department.

Mr TEAGUE: Thanks to all here attending. Minister, if I might start by directing attention to Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 17. We see there the program summary for program 1 within the Attorney-General's Department, which is Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, and the program summary, first of all, going over the page to the top of page 17.

We see the net cost of providing services at the penultimate line and we see there that the 2024-25 budget was a tick under \$1 million over the actual amount of net costs for 2023-24, which was \$12.2 million. The budget for 2024-25 was \$13.4 million. The estimated result for 2024-25 was \$15.5 million as the net cost of providing services. So there is \$2.1 million of—and I have used the words before—budget blowout or additional expense on a budget of 13.4, a significant amount of additional expense. Is there any particular reason for this significant overspend to the budget?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is answered quite extensively in the explanation for the significant movements immediately below it. In both of the years the member referred to, compared to the next year, there were carryovers approved. With the increase in the expenses from 2024-25, the estimated result compared to the 2024 budget, in fact the majority of it is primarily due to a carryover but also in relation to additional funding of 0.4 of a million for Closing the Gap and an increase in the grant funding to SAACCON of 0.3 of \$1 million. When you add all of those together, the 1.4 plus 0.7 takes you to \$2.1 million.

The refresh of Closing the Gap and the current model was something—and I pay tribute to it—that was signed up to by the former Liberal government. After the original Closing the Gap targets were refreshed, there was significant work that the state has done, and continues to do, in relation to that, and we see additional funding for that.

Mr TEAGUE: The minister is therefore one step ahead of where I was heading—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Always one step ahead.

Mr TEAGUE: —and I appreciate it might save the committee some time, in that we indeed see in that first paragraph that there are those two items of additional funding for Closing the Gap and for SAACCON, of \$400,000 and \$300,000 respectively. Dealing with the carryover of funding—and perhaps also the minister has referred to that not being the first time it has occurred—what is the reason for the carryover? How do we see that explained by reference to the actual in 2023-24, then the budget in 2024-25 and then the estimated result, each of them increasing year on year? Is it due to less-than-anticipated activity each year and then carryover with additional—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that it is multifaceted; there are a number of reasons. Some of the reasons are around having filled some but not many positions within the department, which has allowed for a carryover to be requested and to be made. It also reflects some of the funding programs—for example, for Aboriginal monuments and statues—and when they are going to be delivered. The program is well underway, but of course, in a budgeting sense, you allocate a certain amount each year and if it does not happen in that year but is going to happen then carryovers are often requested, particularly for things that are not going to be delivered in the timeframe that had originally been allocated in the budget.

Mr TEAGUE: We now move to the second paragraph of the explanation. Interestingly, the first paragraph of the explanation does not include that reference to Aboriginal monuments and statues but the second does, insofar as that is \$500,000. My recollection was that in the first budget, upon the current government coming in, there was provision of \$250,000 in each of the four years.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I cannot remember, but it was something like that. It was \$1 million all up, and I think it was, as is done, allocated evenly over the forward estimates. Perhaps with hindsight—knowing that there is a significant degree of planning that needs to go into this, not just in terms of physically deciding what the statue will be, where it will go and getting permission for where it is going to go but also in having consultation with the family of that Aboriginal person, which is exceptionally important—it might have been rather optimistic to start expending that in the very

first year. But yes, it is my recollection that it was allocated reasonably evenly over the four years, I think, and that has certainly given rise to carryovers.

Mr TEAGUE: I do not mean this in any particular pejorative way, but I have raised the question of whether the carryover funding, year on year, is a reflection of a certain amount of inactivity—or the non-deployment of funds, if 'inactivity' is not the right term—that would include the monuments and statues program as a good example of a non-spend of money in the previous two, three or four budgets.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think it is probably a particularly good example, because it is an indication that it is not as if there is not activity happening and it is not the case that the money is just going to be kept and not spent. It is going to be spent, but the way it has been apportioned between budget years has meant that it has not been spent early in those years.

Membership:

Mr Batty substituted for Mr Cowdrey.

Mr TEAGUE: I notice the minister was referring to something along the way and I was anticipating an answer, but is there nothing more to add?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: In terms of the allocation of the budget, I am advised the honourable member was partially right in his recollection. It was split over a number of years. It was two lots of \$500,000 rather than four lots of \$250,000 over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 budget years.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: But the result is the same in terms of it.

Mr TEAGUE: That makes that \$500,000 then more directly referable to one year's allocation. If that is then to be explained by way of carryover, as I read the second paragraph, that might be ambiguous. Is it actually part of the \$1.4 million that is carryover, or is it that \$500,000 allocated in a previous budget has not been spent and that has gone away and there is now new funding of \$500,000, or is it part of the \$1.4 million carryover?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that the \$0.5 million in that second paragraph for Aboriginal monuments and statues is not included in the \$1.4 million, but it had been moved to that year. I am happy to take it away and see if it might have been a carryover from the year previous perhaps, but it is not included in the \$1.4 million. It is not money that went away and had to be sought for again, it is the money that was there previously. It is not in the \$1.4 million, but exactly how that has been accounted for I am happy to find out for the honourable member.

Mr TEAGUE: I guess my curiosity is why it finds its way into the second paragraph at all. If it is spent in the sense that it is sitting in Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation and earmarked for deployment or committed or contracted and so on, that would make sense in circumstances of it not having gone further than that. But it is included in this explanation of the increase in expense for the 2024-25 estimated result, so I flag that I am just not 100 per cent clear on how that is derived. Do we go back to the previous budget where the \$500,000 first appeared?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I said, I do not have that information with me now from that previous budget year but I will take it on notice so that I can provide some clarity on that.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright, thanks. To the broader point then, really the thrust of the question in more general terms is, is it possible for the minister to explain to the committee how the funds that are the subject of the carryover, the \$1.4 million—I have described it a couple of times as inactivity or not deployed funds—what areas of budgeted activity does that actually work for? Is there a means of explaining, therefore, 'Oh well, the program has not been active as much as anticipated in this discrete area,' or is it sort of a generalised inactivity?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I might, just so I can provide as much clarity as possible, take that on notice to look at the constituent part of that \$1.4 million and bring back a reply for the member.

Mr TEAGUE: In the same vein—and maybe this is an opportunity for the minister to add any relevant information in this regard—I was not taking too many clues from the final line of that table, the FTEs, at least as far as 2024-25 budget to 2024-25 estimated result is concerned. But there is a significant movement of FTEs from 2023-24 to estimated result 2024-25 and to budget. The relatively minor actual 2023-24 to budget 2024-25 increase in net cost of providing services would not perhaps be fully explained by the FTE change, but it is certainly not explained by the FTE change from budget 2024-25 to estimated result 2024-25, is it?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I have advice in relation to the differences you see there. I am guessing some of the questions will be, 'What has been the dramatic increase in the need for FTEs?' because it is a third more in the 39.4, 40.3 and 39—significantly more. My advice is for the 2023-24 year, due to difficulty filling all the roles, there were 6.8 FTE vacancies that year. So if you had 6.8 filled there, you would have had 38.7, which would have been very similar to the other year. So my advice is it was in relation to vacancies that had not been filled that year at that time.

Mr TEAGUE: That might have gone some way to explaining the carryover—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Carryovers, yes.

Mr TEAGUE: —in that year, but it does not go very far to explain carryover—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I say, I will go and get some further and better details on that.

Mr TEAGUE: I am back to page 16. Just before I do, by reference to either the net cost of providing services or to the activities, highlights and targets generally—it is a matter that I have flagged with the minister—I am conscious that part of what the Attorney-General's Department is doing in the course of its responsibilities vis-a-vis Aboriginal heritage in South Australia is providing information services, including seminars and getting around the state.

I invite the minister to reflect on the extent and cost and nature of those services, but in terms of any programs of education in relation to Aboriginal heritage, has there been any change that might require any change of practice among landholders, farmers or pastoralists, including the result of any legislative changes?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is there has not been any change in the way that the education programs or roadshows or the sort—I understand that when organisations request people from Aboriginal affairs to come and talk to them and engage about how Aboriginal heritage works, they respond. I am informed that happens from time to time with people in the primary industries area or mining area. Wind farms are another area that interact significantly with the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

I am informed that, when requests are made from people, if it can be accommodated within their workloads, the Aboriginal heritage team at the department try to respond to those requests that are made to come along and provide information or a session. So it is not a roadshow that is going around continuously, but certainly where able, I am advised, the department is very keen to make themselves available to inform the community and different groups as much as possible.

Mr TEAGUE: That is rather more, with respect, accurately and elegantly expressed than what I have just done. I did not mean to flag anything new in terms of a roadshow. If that is appropriately in response to requests then, as I understand it, that is what has occurred. In the course of the last year in those activities, has there been any cause for raising of anything new the result of legislative change? I think it is clear that there has been recent legislation that has increased penalties for breaches that have been of long standing, but is there anything new that has actually been added to the range of activities?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think I understand the question. As of a result of, I think, the September 2024 legislation that passed both houses of parliament, changes came into effect on 1 January this year. In terms of the scope of the remit, and the protection under the Aboriginal Heritage Act, nothing has changed. Anything that was protected before there was some changes to the fines is similarly protected afterwards. Anything that the act does not cover, still does not cover, so in terms of the activity that landholders can undertake, in that sense there has been no change.

What there has been a change to, I think, is changing attitudes in the community over time, particularly when you look at the destruction of cave art at Juukan Gorge and other such matters, and a change in the fines in South Australia. It was an election commitment, and there has been a significant increase, with up to \$2 million for companies and \$250,000 or two years' imprisonment for individuals who intentionally or recklessly damage or disturb Aboriginal heritage.

There is now also a lower level fine, recognising that these sorts of big fines for that intentional reckless may not be appropriate. A lower level offence is created with penalties of \$50,000 for companies or \$10,000 fines for individuals who damage, disturb or interfere with Aboriginal heritage, but there is a defence available if the person did not know, or could not reasonably be expected to know, that it was Aboriginal heritage. The fines have changed. In terms of what is covered, absolutely no change. The sites and objects that were covered under the act in 2023 are the sites and objects that are covered under the act in 2025 and 2026.

Mr TELFER: Just further to that, the scope, the activities, have not changed?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No.

Mr TELFER: Has the management or the policing, for want of a better word, of the oversight structures changed at all?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No.

Mr TELFER: It is the same?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is no, that has remained constant. There are authorised officers who can conduct investigations and they happen from time to time. The policing, in effect of the provisions, has not changed either, is my advice.

Mr TELFER: So there have not been any further directions of those authorised officers to—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: An increase? No, there has not been. In my experience, having worked in Aboriginal affairs and with the Aboriginal Heritage Act for more than two decades now, it is often either traditional owner groups or others who will bring information to the department, and then the department will investigate. There is not some new unit that is going out proactively. It is as it has been in the past, and the scope of what is protected has not changed either.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of the net cost of providing services, and the capacity to respond to those requests, is there—and this might just be a means of illustrating one aspect of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation's work—a cost associated with such responses? Who is involved? Is there a dollar, an FTE—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For investigations of breaches?

Mr TEAGUE: No, for what I inaccurately described as 'roadshow', but the minister more accurately described as capacity for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation to respond to a request for participating in a seminar—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Did you mean in relation to Aboriginal heritage matters?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, in relation to what we have just been talking about.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice that I sought earlier is that is a function that is ordinarily undertaken, that there has not been a dedicated line or FTEs put on to do that, but it is within the existing budget, as it has been in the past.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. To underscore that, it has been a part of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation's work for a period now of many years. We know that the old act has been in place since 1988 and has been amended along the way lots of times, but there is no budget or FTE allocation or any significant change in activity that might be referable to pre and post September 2024?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: In my advice, in relation to those changes that were made in relation to the amount of the fines and the changes that were made to the act, nothing has been budgeted, put in or done differently. As we traversed before, the scope remains the same. Any Aboriginal site

or object that was protected pre these changes is still protected post these changes. It has not increased the scope of how the act applies in that respect.

Mr TEAGUE: A good demonstration of that might be to use a set of circumstances that have arisen before so far in the course of these committees. We might have been finding ourselves talking about something that does not appear in either the targets or the highlights for that reason.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: If I then stay with that table on page 16, highlights for 2024-25 include, as the first dot point highlight, the support for the implementation of South Australia's First Nations Voice to Parliament at a local and state level. How has Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation worked with the First Nations Voice to Parliament in terms of providing that support?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For the First Nations Voice?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, and how is that sounded in terms of cost and FTE deployment?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can advise that, in terms of the support provided for the elected First Nations Voice, it is approximately the secretariat that supports that elected body, which totals approximately \$700,000 a year. I am advised that the 2024-25 budget is \$690,000, rising in 2025-26 to \$701,000, in 2026-27 to \$711,000 and in 2027-28 to \$725,000.

Mr TEAGUE: And the FTE?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that it comprises six FTEs.

Mr TEAGUE: That is six FTEs of the—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The Voice secretariat.

Mr TEAGUE: But what I was about to say was of the FTEs in the program summary table—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The question is: the program summary number of FTEs, are they included in there? My advice is yes, they are.

Mr TEAGUE: I recall there was a time—and there is nothing controversial about it for the moment—when the Voice and its associated bureaucracy was possibly going to be wholly outside Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not think there was ever a time where that was happening.

Mr TEAGUE: No. To the extent that there was ever a consideration—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am not aware of it and, as minister, I would probably be aware of it. I am not aware that the government was considering that.

Mr TEAGUE: That is all as stated as recently as just now. Those FTEs are within Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation. For completeness, regarding the terms of the 2023-24 actual, the minister has referred to the 6.8 FTE that were vacancies at that time. How many, if any, of those 6.8 FTE vacancies were secretariat vacancies?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will have to take that on notice. Just so I have the question right that I am taking on notice: of the, I think it was 6.8, vacancies that I mentioned in the 2023-24 actuals, the question is how many of those were attributed to the Voice secretariat? Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: It might be the same question, but it might just be another way of getting there and the information might be available. How long have the six FTEs at the secretariat been engaged?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that recruiting commenced after the act passed, then ramped up once elections had occurred.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, taking that as read.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: We might revert to the question you have taken on notice. It is a possibility, at least, at the moment that the 6.8 FTE vacancies as at actual 2023-24 might have included some—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If there are six people, it may have included some.

Mr TEAGUE: But it was not all of them. There was some engagement of FTE by then at the secretariat?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: This is just off the top of people's heads; if it is different, I am happy to go away and bring back another answer. The inaugural head of the secretariat of the Voice started in around November 2023 and then other staff came on after that. If it is November 2023, and we are talking the 2023-24 financial year, there would have been four or five months where there was not—the head of the Voice secretariat commenced on 8 January 2024, so for half of that time of the 2023-24 financial year there was the head of the secretariat and the other staff had not commenced. In terms of the actual numbers and how they influence the vacancies, I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: I will move off this in a moment, but that just means, to be clear, that we have six FTEs engaged at the secretariat as at right now?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is my advice.

Mr TEAGUE: That is the plan; that is the full complement. As at January 2024, there was one key appointment that had been made to that secretariat. We are filling in the gaps together. As at the 2023-24 actual, we know that the whole Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation had a 6.8 FTE vacancy and it is just how many of that five, as at that time—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If there was no-one there for half the year, that would account for half of the vacancies.

Mr TEAGUE: Or most of the vacancies.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Sorry, it is FTEs at a point in time. It is not rolling. That is why we will need to check.

Mr TEAGUE: I am only assuming in that that because you are ramping up FTEs and because it is such a short timeframe it is not as rolling as it might be if we were talking about the FTEs over the page within the office of the DPP, for example.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It may well, and it stands to reason to account for some of those. It has been pointed out to me that that FTE count is not the average number of people over the whole of that year, so you cannot apportion half a year to half a position. It is as at 30 June on that date, and we do not have those figures here with us today.

Mr TEAGUE: This might be a short answer. Indeed, it might already have been answered, but for clarity what functions, if any, does Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation undertake to assist the First Nations Voice, other than contain within it the secretariat for the First Nations Voice?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is it is largely the administrative type of support that is provided by any department that has people sitting within it. I do note that from time to time, when it is needed with programs, officers from Premier and Cabinet, as a whole of government agency, help coordinate, in particular, the meetings with ministers that members of the Voice have. However, in terms of support, the secretariat sitting administratively within Aboriginal Affairs provides that administrative support. They are the ones who, organisationally, support the Voice.

Mr TEAGUE: So that is what we can read as what the first dot point item means? That 'Supported the implementation of South Australia's First Nations Voice to Parliament at a local and state level' applies to the secretariat to the tune of \$700,000 that employed six FTEs? That is what that support means, bearing in mind those other connecting—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I said, I am sure there are administrative, payroll, those sorts of ancillary supports that you provide anyone who works in a department, but it is that secretariat that provides that.

Mr TEAGUE: While being somewhat specific about it, given that is expressed as a highlight of 2024-25, 'supporting the implementation' might just as well be described as 'supporting the operations or the functioning of' the South Australian First Nations Voice, or as, 'provided the secretariat of', given that it is now relatively long-established.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I would not describe it as relatively long-established after only a couple of years; but it might well be described in a whole range of different ways.

Mr TEAGUE: Okay, but there is nothing that is associated with 'implementation' as such that is materially or significantly outside of secretariat functions year to year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The secretariat sits within Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr TEAGUE: When one reads 'implementation', one might tend towards phases that move from implementation to ongoing functioning and so on.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is a matter of semantics to a large degree. Certainly, with the implementation of the First Nations Voice to Parliament, for which the secretariat provides support, there were elements of it that happened for the first time that year. For example, there was the first address to the joint houses of parliament, the first meetings with the cabinet and then subsequent meetings with different groups of ministers on different policy areas.

I would not in any way describe it as long established; it is still relatively early and there are still elements of how it functions, certainly over the 2024-25 year, have been happening for the first time. I think it is probably correct to say 'implementing' in some respects, as well.

Mr TEAGUE: Those examples the minister has given might come at a cost, but they are also examples of things that are recurring.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Indeed, but a lot of those are occurring for the very first time in that year. If you are talking about being 'implemented', that may be a fair way to describe it.

Mr TEAGUE: For completeness, when one turns to targets 2025-26, the final dot point talks about continuing in the same sort of vein, but rather than supporting the 'implementation' it moves to supporting the 'operations'. As the minister said, we are talking about what might be semantics, but there has been a semantic choice made in the expression in the budget papers.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Sure; and I think in 2025-26, as compared to 2024-25, most of the things that happened are things that have happened before. I guess that is probably a reasonably fair way to describe it.

Mr TEAGUE: I think it has already been pretty thoroughly answered, but the costs of support for implementation and support for operations, in terms of the \$700,000 rising to \$725,000 figures the minister has just given, more or less wholly is by reference to the costs of the secretariat?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is my advice, yes.

Mr TEAGUE: We are still on Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 16, and staying with highlights and targets. To return to the topic but perhaps in a more specific way, highlights for 2024-25 include, as the second dot point, 'Continued to work on the design and delivery of new statues and monuments to commemorate Aboriginal leaders.' Rather than wait, we see the balancing point that features as the first dot point of targets for 2025-26, which is still on the planning side, 'Continue to plan and assist with the delivery of six statues to commemorate Aboriginal South Australians.' It is more or less expressed in the same terms—one talks about Aboriginal leaders, the other one talks about Aboriginal South Australians.

Substantively, we are talking about, on the one hand, a highlight which was the continued work on the design and delivery of those new statues, and then the target is continuing to plan and assist with the delivery. Do we read anything into that in terms of any progress that has been made? We have already addressed the fact that money has been brought forward now from several years ago.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The choice of the words I do not think you can read anything into. You could have almost repeated the top one to the bottom one, but I do know that there has been

significant work that has happened. For a number of reasons, including needing to seek permission of family, etc., I will not talk about exactly where we are, but there has been significant work that has been undertaken on those. I would not read anything into the words that are used to note a difference between the highlights and the targets, except by the time 2025-26 rolls around it will be more advanced than it was the year before.

Mr TEAGUE: That sounds good. Only because the minister has reflected on it earlier by reference to the second paragraph on page 17, would the minister in hindsight say to the committee that this is one of those areas where it might have actually been better to have, in terms of forward estimates three and a bit years ago, zero, zero, zero, zero, \$1 million at the end, rather than it being front-loaded? Is this a question of 'as it has turned out'? What do we know so far?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Maybe, given we are now in the fourth year of the current government, knowing everything that we know now, you might have reflected it differently so it was not in the second and third year, or the third and the fourth year, \$500,000 each—loading it a bit more bit more towards the end, perhaps.

Mr TEAGUE: Put it this way: has any of that \$1 million been spent at all?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that in the order of \$200,000 has been spent.

Mr TEAGUE: It features as the second highlight, and that highlight describes 'work'. Has that all happened in the last financial year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is, yes, I think so.

Mr TEAGUE: What has that been constituted by? What is it comprised of?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is commissioning and getting ready for that first statue. Once again, I will not go into details of that final step, but it is in relation to the process of getting statues. I never knew that the processes are quite intricate in terms of how these things are done and made, etc.

Mr TEAGUE: I appreciate that. I am not going to press the minister. It is maybe for a whole variety of reasons. The government might want to make announcements in its own time and all the rest and there might be other reasons, but, suffice to say, have the subjects of the six monuments been determined?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think it is fair to say, no, not all of them. There has been a process that former Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, Dr Roger Thomas, ran early in this term of government to suggest some names. It is certainly something that we intend to have a discussion—it will not be determined—with the representative Voice about in some of those further ones.

Mr TEAGUE: So have any of the subjects of the monuments been determined?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Once again, I am happy to say that work has progressed, but there will be more to come in the coming months about it.

Mr TEAGUE: Right, but have any of the subjects of the monuments been determined?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Work has progressed and there will be more to come in the coming months about that.

Mr TEAGUE: It does not sound like an answer. I want to say it sounds like no.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I would not necessarily read it that way, but more will be said in the coming months.

Mr TEAGUE: So it is possible that some but not all of the subjects of the monuments have been determined. Is there some reason why the minister is not able or elects not to tell the committee that?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Work has progressed and there will be more that we will have to say about it in the coming months.

Mr TEAGUE: There has been no additional money that has been identified over and above the amount that was first identified in the 2022 budget, the \$1 million?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: So there is \$800,000 left?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think, yes, roughly, but I will go back and check and take it on notice because I want to double-check.

Mr TEAGUE: So there is about \$100,000 left. There has been \$200,000 of work on—it must be because it is a highlight of 2024-25—design and delivery of the new statues and monuments. What does 'design and delivery' mean in this sense, in that this committee is not to know, at least at this stage, whether or not that design and delivery includes work on the design and delivery of a monument in respect of a chosen subject? To rewind to our engagement a little earlier on forensic science, is it a matter of identifying the land on which the monument might—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will be able to say more about this in the coming months. I am just not in a position to at this stage.

Mr TEAGUE: Not in a position to say anything else?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, but I am happy to share more in the coming months. I know the member for Flinders is very interested.

Mr TELFER: It is a highlight of the budget. I want some information about a highlight.

Mr TEAGUE: It is the second highlight.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can tell you that, during the 2024-25 financial year, there has been work on the design and delivery.

Mr TEAGUE: That is what the highlight says.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I know.

Mr TEAGUE: It is the number one target for 2025-26. It is not number one, but the first dot point.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For the benefit of the member—and I am not sure if the member in his time performing the functions of the Attorney-General went through an estimates process—these are not in priority order.

Mr TEAGUE: Sure.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: These are dot points. There is not a 1, 2, 3, 4 next to them, but, yes, it is one of the dot points.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright, so they are all equal.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is one of the dot points.

Mr TEAGUE: It features as the first stated dot point.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, please, I do not want the member to take it that there is a hierarchical order of the dot points on the page. It might not be that all dot points are created equal. There may be some that are more important, but I would not take a position on the page as a definitive indicator of that.

Mr TEAGUE: What is really abundantly clear is that this is a matter of sufficient importance to the government that not only did it appear prominently as an election commitment but it has appeared, with this level of prominence, in both the highlights and the targets for each budget that we have seen under this government. It is described somewhat differently in the highlights than it is in the targets. We do not read too much into that, but what is clear is that the target for 2025-26 is not raising expectations too much, in that it is very clearly characterised in terms of the continuation of a planning and assisting phase. It is not indicating that it is actually the achievement of the delivery and completion, and so on, of six monuments.

The minister has not gone as far as to identify any subject of a monument and has at least made it clear to the committee that the balance of subjects, if not all of them, are yet to be determined. We are nearly four years on and we are talking about funding having been moved into another year. That is all there on the face of the budget papers. Is there anything else the minister is able to say to this committee about the delivery of the election commitment, to put it that bluntly?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If I had a date for when it is all going to be completed by, I would give it to you. I do not have a completion date. It was hoped and anticipated that this work, certainly when it was thought of, might be a continuing sort of work—that it would not just be this number but might encourage further investment in statues of Aboriginal people, right around South Australia, by other organisations, groups or councils as well.

Mr TEAGUE: The minister has mentioned Dr Thomas. Did the services of anyone outside of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation contribute to that cost? Is there anything else that the minister can say to the committee about the constituent parts of that \$200,000 that has been spent?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have details here with me, but I can see what I can bring back.

Mr TEAGUE: Will you take that on notice?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will take that on notice.

Mr TELFER: Minister, on page 16 the Aboriginal Affairs program speaks about providing whole-of-government policy advice and leadership. I am interested in what involvement your agency might have had in the development and upcoming finalisation of the Aboriginal Enterprise Procurement Strategy. Is that something that you have been working on hand-in-hand with Treasury? It is something that a lot of organisations within my electorate, in particular, are interested in, in making sure there are opportunities to be able to get involved in different levels of providing service and otherwise to government. Is it something that your department has been involved in directly?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Certainly in a whole range of areas, including procurement, it is something that I know comes across my desk—advice or thoughts are sought about such things. There is a very powerful way that government can directly help and benefit Aboriginal people's businesses and communities through procurement. We buy a lot as a government, as other levels of government do as well, in looking to see where we can support First Nations enterprises. It is an important way in which we can provide economic independence.

Mr TELFER: Has your department been working with Treasury? One of the targets for Treasury, in Budget Paper 4, Volume 4, page 162, is specifically about the development of that procurement strategy. Is that something you are—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Where is the reference? Actually, without you telling me the exact page, I am advised that, very regularly, Aboriginal Affairs provide advice and input on a whole range of—

Mr TELFER: On that particular procurement strategy?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have the budget paper in front of me, but in a whole range of areas they provide advice, as do I as minister.

Mr TEAGUE: I am still at the page 16 highlights and targets. In terms of highlights 2024-25, we see, at the fourth of those highlights, there is work with the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission to create Aboriginal cultural heritage maps of the state for use in emergency and disaster events. Is there anything the minister can provide to inform the committee of the use of Aboriginal cultural heritage maps in emergency or disaster events?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can provide a bit of information. When I was out meeting with traditional owners, particularly after the River Murray flood events, this came up when there necessarily needed to be very quick responses and the taking of soil and sand to fill sandbags and putting them in different places was needed in a very quick response.

Some of the feedback I received when visiting Aboriginal communities in the River Murray area, during and after that flooding event, was that there was maybe bit of a lack of proactive

understanding of what is there. When local councils or emergency services get sandbags they do not know if there is any knowledge that this could be a burial ground or have important Aboriginal culturally modified trees there.

Particularly as a result of some of the feedback in relation to the River Murray flood events, there is now a signed memorandum of administrative agreement with SAFECOM and, as part of the program, Aboriginal Affairs—and this is just at the very start of this program—are looking to research and prepare a method for developing a digital heat map of Aboriginal heritage across the state. It would not replace the central archive, the central register of Aboriginal sites and objects, but they want to be able to derive some sort of heat map where, in emergency situations, emergency services could use it to mitigate the risk of impacting upon Aboriginal heritage.

Mr TEAGUE: The highlight talks in terms of creating these maps. Obviously that is based on existing knowledge, but the creating process is presumably referable to the map for the purpose. I think the minister has partly addressed that point but, by reference perhaps to the flood, can the minister advise the committee of any information about the use of those maps to the extent that they have been created, and perhaps outline the process of creating the map, and are copies available?

The ACTING CHAIR: You have two minutes on the clock, member for Heysen.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that there is not a map that has been finalised and published, but the way that I am advised that this is intended to be rolled out is on a local level—local emergency services working with traditional owner groups in the area to develop that understanding and a map in those local areas, rather than something that is done on a complete statewide basis. My advice is that it is with local emergency services groups and TOs.

Mr TEAGUE: But there is no such map in existence?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, but it is being developed.

Mr TEAGUE: So it has not been deployed in terms of the flood, but that is an example of the kind of thing.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No. In terms of the flood response I gave, that really gave rise to awareness of why this would be beneficial. No, it certainly was not developed for the flood event.

Mr TEAGUE: But it is a highlight again.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: Once created, the map would then be available to a local CFS, SES brigade, would it?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that is the intention but also I think, from my memory of talking to Aboriginal groups and those responders in the River Murray, it was not just the State Emergency Services but often local councils that were doing a lot of the work in terms of the sandbags and the moving of soil to influence water flows.

Mr TEAGUE: That is a pretty generalised explanation. Is there any particular cost associated with the creation of the maps, and is there any sort of centralised protocol in terms of, once created, the custodianship of the maps? Will they be as accessible as possible, including for those local purposes, centrally and coherently able to be drawn upon? For example, if you as minister were to roll in to a local area and say, 'Have you got any of those maps that were created? If so, where are they? I don't have them because they are in the local area,' or is there also a carbon copy that is sent to Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will have to take that on notice. I do not have that minutia of operational detail. As I understand, there has been a memorandum of administrative agreement signed with SAFECOM, but I am happy to go away and see what I can bring back in terms of some more of that detail.

The ACTING CHAIR: The allotted time having expired, the examination of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation is complete. Further examination of proposed payments and Administered Items for the Attorney-General's Department will continue after the lunch break.

Sitting suspended from 12:16 to 13:15.

DEPARTMENT OF THE PREMIER AND CABINET, \$508,394,000

**ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THE PREMIER AND CABINET,
\$27,324,000**

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, \$155,240,000

ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT, \$90,903,000

Membership:

Ms Pratt substituted for Mr Telfer.

Minister:

Hon. K.J. Maher, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector, Special Minister of State.

Departmental Advisers:

Ms E. Ranieri, Commissioner for Public Sector Employment.

Mr S. Johnson, Director, Enterprise Bargaining, Industrial Relations and Policy, Department of Treasury and Finance.

Ms C. Hodgetts, Director, Finance and Procurement, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Ms J. Barbaro, Director, Workforce Integrity, Strategy and Capability, Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment.

Ms C. Mealor, Chief Executive Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr. A Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

The ACTING CHAIR: We are now up to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment. We are still with the Attorney-General in his capacity as the Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector, also Industrial Relations and Policy. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I call on the Attorney to make a statement, if he wishes, and then to introduce his new advisers.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have a statement, but I will happily introduce those who are up here with me. To my right is Erma Ranieri, the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment. To my left is Simon Johnson from the Industrial Relations and Policy Branch of government, and to Simon's left is Claire Hodgetts, Director, Finance and Procurement. Behind us we have Josie Barbaro, Director, Workforce Integrity, Strategy and Capability, Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment. In the cheap seats in the very back row are Caroline Mealor and, for the 27th time, Andrew Swanson of the Attorney-General's Department.

The ACTING CHAIR: Would the committee like to do it in the order expressed, so go to DPC first and then AGD in the first half an hour of the committee?

Mr TEAGUE: I am regarding myself as bound by the allocations within the broader picture.

The ACTING CHAIR: So 1.15pm to 1.45pm we have the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment and Industrial Relations and Policy, so I suggest you go to the first one first. Just be mindful that both of those things are in the first half an hour of the session.

Mr TEAGUE: If there is a change at the half hour mark, I will be clear about that.

The ACTING CHAIR: I invite you to make a statement, if you wish, as well.

Mr TEAGUE: Just questions, thanks, Chair. Starting with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, Budget Paper 4, Volume 4, Program 5: Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment (within DPC), page 23, and I might have cause to turn over the page, including by reference to the employee survey at page 25, but mainly focused on the highlights and targets at page 23.

There is a discrete question in relation to the penultimate dot point, which is the coordination of the governance and implementation of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy, Anti-Racism Strategy, and the Safety, Wellbeing and Injury Management Framework. The DEI strategy refers, helpfully in this context, to implementing a target for disability employment in the public sector of 3 per cent, which I think would be well known.

Given the recommendations, including specific and disaggregated targets and new public sector employment hires target/merit principle, can the minister advise, perhaps with the assistance of the commissioner, whether the 3 per cent target is still on track to be met by 2026, as I think the minister might have advised the parliament as recently as last year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Thank you for the question. The strategy introduced a target of 3 per cent employment right across the public sector by December 2026, which aims to more than double the current employment data. I can inform the member that the public sector workforce data reported that 1,584 employees disclosed that they live with a disability in June 2024 (1.34 per cent).

It is important to note that the data collected in the 2024 People Matter Employment Survey, however, indicated that the public sector is significantly ahead of what is reported in those targets, that is, those who have disclosed that they live with a disability, so that self-reporting of just 1.3 per cent. The 2024 People Matter Employment Survey of the public sector indicates that 5.73 per cent of respondents disclosed a disability.

The data is only as good as people self-identify who report in the data. The workforce data report in June 2024 had 1.34 per cent of people having disclosed that they live with a disability; however, the 2024 People Matter Employee Survey had that figure of those who responded at 5.73 per cent.

Mr TEAGUE: So 5.73 per cent. Given that figure, in terms of that process or any other work, what work was done and/or continues to be done regarding how and when the target might be increased to a more ambitious target?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can go through some of the strategies and deliverables, in effect. There are 31 deliverables in the strategy, so I will not go through all of them, but perhaps provide a highlight: encouraging agencies to sign up to the We're Equal initiative of Equal Opportunity SA; establishing an award category for leadership and diversity inclusion as part of the Premier's Excellence Awards; enhancing recruitment outcomes for diversity groups with a review of policy and procedures; and 29 agencies in the public sector collectively employing over 100,000 staff have committed to renewing White Ribbon Australia workplace accreditation, recognising the important role workplaces play in preventing and responding to family and domestic violence as part of the overall strategy.

There are a number of areas that the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment is working on to do things that create the environment that will allow us to do better in our diversity of employment in this respect.

Mr TEAGUE: Bearing that in mind, and also bearing in mind the minister's expressed confidence at meeting the current target—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I might go back on that, just so that I am clear. I pointed out that the target of 3 per cent had the public sector workforce data at 1.34 per cent, but people have to self-identify as living with disability. We can contrast that with the People Matter Employment Survey, which had it at 5.7 per cent, so you could reasonably expect that the figure sits somewhere between the two, quite possibly. We are keen to get that 1.34 per cent of self-identified people disclosing much

closer to 3 per cent. It is cause for optimism that the People Matter Employee Survey has it there, but we still want to lift that 1.3 figure to closer to 3 per cent.

That data is collected when someone first starts their employment in the public sector. If, on being employed, they do not disclose that they are living with a disability, then very often it is never updated. It is going to be a combination of better employment practice but also better record keeping, making sure that we are capturing as best we can if people are comfortable with their circumstances.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of coherence, how is the 5.73 feeding into the 3 per cent, and in turn how is—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The figures we use are the public sector workforce data. That is derived from how people describe themselves when they first start work in the public sector. That is not where we are aiming at 3 per cent—that is 1.34 per cent—but by way of explanation, it is almost inevitable that there are people who are living with a disability but do not disclose that when they first come to work in the public sector. It gives some cause for optimism that in the People Matter Employee Survey, which last had about 2,300 respondents, 5.73 disclosed living with a disability. That survey is anonymous as well.

Mr TEAGUE: To then get around all of that, is there any work that has been undertaken to determine new pathways, measures, programs or supports that are going to enable the public sector to meet that target? Is there anything new that needs to be done, any work that is to be done to meet it? If so, what is the funding and staff allocation to those actions?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that one of the biggest factors is not what the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment themselves are doing in terms of recruitment but how they are helping agencies who do—

Mr TEAGUE: Of course.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: —all the recruiting that comes into the public sector, so enhancing recruitment processes for outcomes for diversity groups, a review of their policies and procedures. It is not five individuals in the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment who are going to make differences in these areas, it is the work that they do in helping out the line agencies which do all the hiring, understand recruitment outcomes—

Mr TEAGUE: What does that cost and how many of them are involved?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that there is a team of three people within the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment who do work particularly on recruitment and diversity with line agencies.

Mr TEAGUE: And the cost is to be extrapolated from?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have their exact title.

Mr TEAGUE: There is deployment of human resources towards that task?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes, and of course then that does not take into account all the work that the agencies will do.

Mr TEAGUE: Of course. Has any work been done regarding the setting of a disability employment target that is specifically for new hires, beyond what we have just talked about?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I guess that goes to the very nature of giving advice on better recruitment practices.

Mr TEAGUE: We will go back to the highlights and targets and the first of the dot points under highlights. I think the balancing point, or the companion target, is the first of the dot points under targets. We have heard that those dot points are in no particular order of priority.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: They are not necessarily in order of priority, indeed.

Mr TEAGUE: But they happen to appear as the first mentioned on both fronts.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am not going to argue with you about how you see that.

Mr TEAGUE: It is clearly a highlight and a target. My question, perhaps by reference to one of the attached offices, is: did the Premier's Delivery Unit participate in the survey? In terms of the action plans in response to the survey results, are we going to see action plans including, by reference to attached offices, the Premier's Delivery Unit?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that each department gets results. It can be disaggregated into different parts of departments, but certainly given that it is intended to be anonymous—and necessarily needs to be to encourage answers as fully as possible—I am advised that if there is a unit within a department of fewer than 10 people, then it is not disaggregated and is counted as part of the department itself.

Mr TEAGUE: It just happens to be on the next page: the Premier's Delivery Unit is perhaps a good example of such a circumstance in that we see there that its budgeted FTE for 2024-25 was seven FTE and its estimated result was nine FTE, so under the 10. It has a budget of nine FTE for 2025-26. Am I to understand the minister's answer as saying that, yes, it would be expected that the staff of the Premier's Delivery Unit would participate in the survey and therefore benefit from the publication of its results and the action plans developed in response to those survey results, but, being under 10 FTE, ordinarily there would not be a disaggregation of that unit's response beyond the agency, beyond DPC?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that is correct.

Mr TEAGUE: The same would not so easily apply to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment itself, having well in excess of 10 FTE.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That office tends to do pretty well in these surveys.

Mr TEAGUE: High levels of participation.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Nearly 100 per cent, and that is a big number.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of the pitfalls and problems of disaggregation of small numbers, I have said that the office of the commissioner is not quite in the same category as the Premier's Delivery Unit, there being an estimated result in 2024-25 of 44 FTE.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: What page are we on?

Mr TEAGUE: Over the page, page 24. I did flag the possibility of turning the page, and here we are.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: You did. You were very good to flag that you might turn the page, and now you have turned the page like you said.

Mr TEAGUE: We are now on the final line of the one and only table on the following page, page 24. I think perhaps the reason I gave for turning the page was even to page 25, which reveals the cost of the survey, but we will get there if we do. Sort of unrelated to the survey specifically, the budget for the office of the commissioner had a budgeted FTE of 36 for 2024-25, which was a significant reduction of 15 FTEs from the previous actual. But that did not transpire, so you end up having still a reduction of actual from 2023-24 to estimated 2024-25 but only to 44, so budget to estimated is an FTE increase of eight. Is there a reason for that, and how is that best explained?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that is largely accounted for in things that the office does in addition to the commissioner's statutory responsibilities under the Public Sector Act that are done on a cost-recovery basis. I can go through a couple of those in a moment. They are things that the office does that are not part of their everyday business but they are asked to do, and they do so on a cost-recovery basis, so they receive income to employ more people to do those things.

I am advised there are increases in the FTE count for doing things such as the South Australian Leadership Academy course, run in conjunction with the Institute of Public Administration; systems such as myCareer and Gov SAfety across the government; and the South Australia public sector employee survey, which is on a fee-for-service basis in doing that. It includes other cost-recovery programs delivered in 2024-25 but not included in the 2025-26 budget, such as whole-of-government coordination for the White Ribbon workplace accreditation, anti-racism strategy, and actuarial valuations where fundings transferred from agencies is required. There is a range of things

that the office does that are not part of their statutory responsibilities. They cost-recover and they have FTEs that go along with them, is my advice.

Mr TEAGUE: How do you mean they have FTEs that go along with them?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: When they cost-recover, they receive money for the services they provide and they employ FTEs to deliver those functions.

Mr TEAGUE: Because I was going to give you an out, which I think you probably then achieved when I heard you say that the survey was outsourced. It cost half a million to do it, but that was outsourced, so there is no FTE for that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that some of the work of the survey itself might have been outsourced, but a lot of that work in terms of interpreting and providing the results to public sector agencies resulted, I am advised, in two to three FTEs in the office for that.

Mr TEAGUE: Am I right that that is done, and therefore those FTEs go away and you are sort of on the trajectory that this looks to be revealing, because it is there again in the budget for 2025-26?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: From time to time these things do come up—the White Ribbon accreditation across government, providing services for leadership courses. My advice is it is essentially like the base-level funding for the statutory responsibilities and then, as there are those cost-recovery projects, FTEs are often added as part of that.

Mr TEAGUE: I am looking to interpret the FTE trajectory. You have an actual FTE of 51 for 2023-24 with a budget heading back down to 36. The estimated result is still 44—on a trajectory to reduce, but not quite there—and then we see in 2025-26 the FTE budget is still on that downward trajectory—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Downward?

Mr TEAGUE: Downward from 51 actual in 2023-24 to estimated result 44, and then down for budget 2025-26. So it would appear to explain that the things that are the subject of one-off work go away, the FTE goes away, and the baseline trajectory is towards about 36 or 37.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is, in a sense, correct: that 36 and then an increase of 1.5 FTEs represents the baseline, the statutory functions of the office, and then the one-off work that keeps coming with different projects that come and finish and then new projects start. So that is the underlying statutory function of the office, but there is significant one-off work, different work, that comes in each year.

Mr TEAGUE: Are we to read that then as: the 2025-26 budget of 37.5 FTE is not likely to be the result because who knows what comes up?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Indeed—but it is impossible to estimate what it might be, not knowing what work on a fee-for-service basis is going to come in.

Mr TEAGUE: So that is one of the less helpful line items in the budget papers, in that sense.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Well, it is; it is those unknown unknowns. You do not know. Past performance is probably a predictor that you are going to have more FTEs for one-off work that comes in, but you do not know what that is, and it is very hard to try to make assumptions and forecast it.

Mr TEAGUE: One thing that I was meaning to ask: we mentioned the Premier's Delivery Unit which, while we are talking highlights and targets, is fantastic because it is a unit that is established to oversee things, and the highlights are all having overseen things and the targets are to oversee things. It is a full oversee. The staff within that unit, those nine, they all sign the code of ethics, do they not? They are all subject to the code of ethics in the same way as everyone else and the same way as they participate in the survey.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I assume so. As they are public sector employees, that would be a reasonable assumption.

Mr TEAGUE: We have a few minutes. I just want to refer to the program 13 matters within Industrial Relations.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Remarkable—this might be Mr Johnson's first estimates question. You have made his day because he was going to get docked a day's pay if he did not get questions. What are we doing?

Mr TEAGUE: Budget Paper 4, Volume 1. We are back to AGD now. I refer to Program 13: Industrial Relations—

The ACTING CHAIR: Which page?

Mr TEAGUE: Page 40, Sub-program 1: Industrial Relations. This is a question—it might be a couple of questions in the minutes remaining—in relation to the status of what is a fairly large number of enterprise agreements that are the subject of the first highlight, and more particularly the first dot point target for 2025-26, in that the continuation of negotiations and the providing of advice about public sector enterprise agreements is then a rather long list that might take me more than the remaining two minutes to read out, but it is there at page 41. How is that going, and do you anticipate that that list might be reduced and completed in an orderly way in the course of the year ahead?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I think it is fair to say that you could anticipate that that list will reduce in an orderly way. As you have highlighted, the vast majority of public sector agreements are currently at various stages—some of them very early, some of them quite advanced—of negotiation. Teachers, for example, is not up in the very near future, but—

Mr TEAGUE: Sorry, I missed that: teachers is what?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Teachers is not up—

Mr TEAGUE: It is not up?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: —for negotiation, but the vast majority of public sector agencies, as I say, are in various stages of negotiation. Some of them are only just starting negotiation. Others are very well advanced, like the allied health professionals' agreement, for example, for allied health professionals and allied health assistants. I am advised that it is looking at commencing a ballot within the next week from the proposal that was put. Others are less well advanced, but we have made a commitment and we will continue to bargain and negotiate in good faith. There are regular meetings that occur between the IRAP section of government and public sector unions.

Mr TEAGUE: I think I have asked the Premier—

The ACTING CHAIR: The allotted time has expired. The examination of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment and Industrial Relations and Policy is complete. The examination of the proposed payments and Administered Items for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is adjourned until tomorrow; however, we are continuing with the examination of the proposed payments and Administered Items for the Attorney-General's Department. I will wait for you to change your advisers, Attorney.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr M. Francis, Chief Executive Officer, ReturnToWorkSA.

Ms C. Mealor, Chief Executive Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr A. Swanson, Chief Financial Officer, Attorney-General's Department.

Mr G. Farrell, Executive Director, ReturnToWorkSA.

Mr P. Caskey, Executive Leader, Finance and Investments, ReturnToWorkSA.

Mr B. Pfeffer, Director, Compliance and Enforcement, SafeWork SA.

Mr R. Templeton, Director, Workplace Education and Business Services, SafeWork SA.

Mr S. Johnson, Manager, Government Services and Stakeholder Engagement, ReturnToWorkSA.

Ms C. Phung, Senior Accountant, SafeWork SA.

The ACTING CHAIR: We are now moving to the portfolios of ReturnToWorkSA and SafeWork SA, with your hat on as the Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector. When you are ready, minister, the proposed payments will be open for examination.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: To introduce those who have joined us, to my right is Michael Francis, Chief Executive Officer, ReturnToWorkSA. To my left is Glenn Farrell, Executive Director, SafeWork SA. Behind me, we have Rob Templeton, Director, Workplace Education and Business Services, SafeWork SA; Brett Pfeffer, Director, Compliance and Enforcement, SafeWork SA; Paul Caskey, Executive Leader, Finance and Investments, ReturnToWorkSA; and, of course, once again from the Attorney-General's Department, Caroline Mealor and Andrew Swanson. I am Kyam Maher, the minister concerned.

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome, thank you. No opening statement from you, minister, or you, member for Heysen?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No.

Mr TEAGUE: We will certainly call, though, Chair.

The ACTING CHAIR: Certainly, go ahead.

Mr TEAGUE: I might turn first to SafeWork SA. My primary reference point throughout is going to be Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, page 43, for the sub-program and its performance indicators. The SafeWork SA FTE budgeted for 2025-26 is 208.4; correct?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes, that is what the budget paper, down the bottom of page 42, says.

Mr TEAGUE: How many of those roles are inspector roles? Is there anything in particular to be said about that in the context of what is a 10 FTE increase on budget last year and a 1.5 FTE increase on the estimated result from last year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that in terms of regulatory staff they include inspectors, including scientific and technical inspectors, senior advisers and specialist staff within a professional stream, 13 investigators, managers and team leaders, and that the number that would be incorporated within the estimated result for the 206.9, the FTEs for the regulatory staff, is an estimated result of 108.9. Then for the 2025-26 budget year, where it is budgeted for FTEs at 208.4, it is anticipated that it will be of regulatory staff.

I will go back: the budget year of 2024-25, the 198.1, it was budgeted for 119 regulatory staff and for the estimated result of 206, it is 108.9. Somewhere in the order of half of those are regulatory staff. My advice is that it has been a year-on-year increase since the last election where I think the number of the regulatory staff was very significantly less than what it is now.

Mr TEAGUE: Is there a forecast vacancy rate across SafeWork SA? If so, what is it?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is there is a current vacancy rate of 8 per cent, and that the ambition and forecast is to fill all the roles.

Mr TEAGUE: What is the budgeted cost of employment of SafeWork SA staff for 2025-26?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For 2025-26 for the 208.4 FTEs, what is the dollar amount associated with the 208.4?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will have to take that on notice. I will have to go away and come back and bring an answer back to that. We just do not have it here with us.

Mr TEAGUE: We are addressing regulatory staff overall, how many regional inspector positions are funded for 2025-26?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: So your question is: of the 208.4 budgeted for 2025-26, how many of those are the regulatory positions of which we have said over the last couple of years it has been about half? Is that your question?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, and how many are regional?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that it is somewhere in the order of 10.

Mr TEAGUE: And that has not changed substantially?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is: no.

Mr TEAGUE: What is the turnover rate for inspectors, not just regional but overall, over the last year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Just to check: is the question regarding the last 12 months?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Is it the regulatory staff or everyone? Do you want how many have left and how many have come in?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For regulatory or for everyone?

Mr TEAGUE: Regulatory is the focus; inspectors in particular.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Without doing some pretty quick mathematics, I am trying to compare a whole lot of different dot points. We might take that on notice and bring back an answer.

Mr TEAGUE: How many inspectors are classified as trainee, provisional or junior?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that, in total, there are about 40 staff who have completed their training and are in the phase of working with other officers to get further experience.

Mr TEAGUE: About 40?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: About 40. I am advised that there was an inspector development program in 2024 that had about half of those, and another one in 2025 that had about the other half of those.

Mr TEAGUE: Just to round out that inquiry, is there a guide that might be consistently applied in relation to the workload for each of them? Is it at any material variance regionally?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Do you mean like a thingamajig that has what is expected and a guide in different places, or is there—

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. Of each of them, and are we seeing regional variance in case load?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is—and I think this goes to the answer, but if it does not I am happy to have further questions—that in terms of case load it is a pretty even spread between those who work regionally and those who work in the metropolitan area. But if there are times when, in certain areas, there are decreases in the usual case load, then the officers do more proactive work rather than the reactive work of responding to reports or complaints. My advice is that it is reasonably even between regional and non-regional.

Mr TEAGUE: Do you have any idea of volume per?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We will have to take that on notice and get the detail.

Mr TEAGUE: Perhaps it might be helpful to have some reference more specifically to the activity indicators on page 43. We see there, in the first of the three criteria, a target number of compliance and enforcement visits. There is a note there that the minister might talk to. We see that it is not expressed in terms of a target but as a projection of 10,000, which is the same in 2024-25 and 2025-26.

That is at very significant variance for the actual for 2023-24 at 6,813. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding an estimated result for 2024-25 that is closer to that actual for 2023-24 at 7,500, it is increasing. It might perhaps be observed to increase in line with the additional FTE but still at considerable variance to a projection or target that has been maintained at the same level. What is the interaction between the target and the actual result, and is it anything other than just a shortfall to expected performance?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is the ambitious projections and targets in compliance and enforcement visits are expected to be closer to coming to fruition, as the inspectors, who have gone through their training and are in the early stages, start to be able to operate independently. So it is expected that the projections of 10,000 get much closer to being realised as those officers become able to function independently when there is that increase in compliance staff.

Mr TEAGUE: There is at least two years' worth of examples of a considerable shortfall of result compared to projection. Has that led to or in any event has there been concern raised to the minister or to the department or management in relation to the capacity for case loads applied to an individual's visits, and has that come from unions?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Unions put a whole range of concerns about how many things operate, including the regulator. But in terms of the compliance and enforcement visits, it is not something that has been complained about the case load or not being affected because there are too high case loads. Certainly, I think we went to extraordinarily low levels a few years ago in terms of the regulatory officers and we are now building up the numbers and the capacity again.

Mr TEAGUE: And I have differentiated out those who are working in a regional area. Particularly with regard to the regions, no expression of concern that has come to the minister's attention?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, I do not recall anyone expressing concern in relation to that.

Mr TEAGUE: There are two dynamics going on. One is the recruitment of additional FTE, then what I would describe as a relatively substantial proportion of those under training, and then the tertiary point being that they are, no doubt, all aware of what has been maintained as a target or projected level of visits that is well in excess of actually achieved levels of visits, so whether that combination of dynamics might be seen as something that could lead to concern, but none of that is—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Certainly, and in relation to that, no, I do not recall having had that expressed.

Mr TEAGUE: This might be something the minister could be assisted with: does the minister presently have confidence that site visits for serious issues are being completed, more or less covering the full gamut, or are there serious issues that really are not the subject of visits because of a lack of capacity?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that serious matters are responded to possibly more quickly than they might have been in the past and more thoroughly, but for serious matters my advice is they are responded to generally within one or two days. Unfortunately, we see regularly in the media very serious injuries happening at workplaces, so it is one of the primary functions of SafeWork to respond to those sorts of incidents.

Mr TEAGUE: I think I am perhaps most conveniently back at page 42, in terms of a reference to ask about advertising and communication. What is the budgeted cost of government advertising across all SafeWork SA platforms for 2025-26? You might be about to take that on notice.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am about to take it on notice. In terms of the breakdown of the education programs that SafeWork engages in I am happy to take it on notice, but do you want the strict advertising costs with media outlets or the broader costs of that education and information program?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can get that. In fact, rather than take it on notice this may be of some help. For the next financial year it is in the vicinity of \$550,000 that broadly sits in the education space for SafeWork SA.

Mr TEAGUE: That might be contributing then. I asked that in the context of these visits for serious issues. In that context, where there is a substantial amount of money being spent, does that lead to the minister having confidence that all site visits are being completed, including specifically in relation to serious issues?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. As I said, my advice was that for serious issues there is generally a site visit within one to two days, and often same-day service.

Mr TEAGUE: I am conscious that we do not want to leave ReturnToWork out in the cold entirely. There are a couple of questions for ReturnToWork.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The Industrial Relations and Policy Branch got their first question in three years, so I think ReturnToWork can get some of your attention now.

Mr TEAGUE: We are covering ourselves in glory here. In order to ask a couple of questions of ReturnToWorkSA, I will be resorting to Budget Paper 3, pages 77 and 78, but not a lot more specifically than that. We see there that the Return to Work Corporation of South Australia is a public financial corporation. At page 78, in the table describing the public financial corporations, the ReturnToWork Corporation of South Australia is described as having a steady number of FTEs at 321, which is the same as where it is presently as at 2025. I want to ask about the premium rate. What is the average premium rate for the 2025-26 period?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The average premium rate is 1.85 per cent. This is the third year it has held steady at 1.85 per cent. I can indicate that probably as important as the rate is the scheme's capacity to be sustainable. We are at a funding ratio now of 99 per cent—so almost a 100 per cent funding ratio—with a projection, if all goes well over the next year or so, to hit the 100 per cent funding ratio. I might just say that, when we came into government, the funding ratio was down to below 92 per cent. Once you hit 90 per cent, that is a level that triggers a review of the scheme in relation to how it is performing.

We have traversed early on in this term of government the issue of the Summerfield decision that was left completely unabated by the former Liberal government that had the scheme almost funded below what triggers a review. We have turned that around, and it is now funded, as I say, at 99 per cent, with an estimate to be funded at 100 per cent.

Mr TEAGUE: We were going so well.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: When we came to government, it was on a huge downward trajectory to fall below the 90 per cent.

Mr TEAGUE: We were going so well. I will move to the—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Well, you did ask about the premium.

Mr TEAGUE: I will go on. I presume, therefore, that you would describe the break-even premium rate as—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The average premium rate is different from the break-even premium. They are not the same thing.

Mr TEAGUE: No, they are not. The break-even premium rate has assumptions that underpin it, but you have been able to talk to the trajectory that we have been on at 1.85. So what are the assumptions, and are you satisfied that they are accurately feeding into then an accurate break-even premium rate?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There is an independent actuary, and I think for quite some time Finity has been the scheme's actuary. I think Finity probably do a lot of this actuarial work for schemes right around Australia. I have to say I am not going to pretend to understand how every one of the inputs work for the actuaries who understand this scheme.

Mr TEAGUE: Why not?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: One thing I have come to understand is that it is extraordinarily complicated work.

Mr TEAGUE: No!

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Given we have had the independent actuary, who is exceptionally well experienced at other schemes around Australia, I think we can have a fair degree of confidence that we can rely on how they go about taking into account the assumptions and measuring the scheme's performance. The 1.85 is covering our break-even premium, which I think is almost self-explanatory, because we are heading towards a proper funding ratio of closer to what the scheme needs.

Mr TEAGUE: We could go on, but time is short. Perhaps if there is time for one more: when is the next scheduled internal audit of the premium rate setting, have there been any changes to risk management policy and what contingency measures are in place if there is an underperformance?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that typically a review of premium rates will happen in about April of each year to review and set the rate for the next financial year.

Mr TEAGUE: On those contributors, is there confirmation that there has been no change to risk management policy based on audit or board findings in the last 12 months?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice, in terms of building in risk factors, is it is quite a dynamic process in terms of different areas of the scheme and different areas of the economy. It is quite dynamic in terms of how they are accounted for when this sort of work is done, but the risk margin that is calculated and taken into account for the scheme has been very steady for some time.

The ACTING CHAIR: The allotted time has expired. The examination of ReturnToWorkSA and SafeWork SA is complete. The examination of the proposed payments and Administered Items for the Attorney-General's Department is now complete.

Sitting suspended from 14:16 to 14:30.

**ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE,
\$4,403,410,000**

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, \$41,799,000

**ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA,
\$588,000**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, \$6,077,000

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, \$8,759,000

JOINT PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES, \$20,555,000

ADMINISTERED ITEMS FOR THE JOINT PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES, \$4,342,000

Minister:

Hon. K.J. Maher, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Public Sector, Special Minister of State.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr M. Sherry, Electoral Commissioner, Electoral Commission of South Australia.

Ms A. Cashen, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Electoral Commission of South Australia.

Ms L. Tisma, Manager, Finance, Electoral Commission of South Australia.

Mr R. Crump, Clerk, House of Assembly.

Ms M. Bradman, Manager, Joint Parliamentary Services.

Ms C. Freeman, Director, Organisational Performance, Department of Treasury and Finance.

Mr T. Smith, Manager, Policy and Entitlements, Electorate Services, Department of Treasury and Finance.

The ACTING CHAIR: Welcome back, everybody. When the minister is ready, we will move on to the portfolios of the Electoral Commission of South Australia, the Legislative Council, the House of Assembly, Joint Parliamentary Services and Electorate Services. The minister will be appearing in his role as Special Minister of State. I declare the proposed payments open for examination. I call on the minister to make a statement, if he wishes, and introduce his new advisers.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Thank you, Chair. I have no statement, but I shall introduce the people who have joined me here for this final session today. To my immediate left is Mick Sherry, the Electoral Commissioner in South Australia. To his left is Alice Cashen, the Deputy Electoral Commissioner. To my right is Connie Freeman, Director of Organisational Performance at the Department of Treasury and Finance. Behind me we have Megan Bradman, Manager, Joint Parliamentary Services; Rick Crump, Clerk, House of Assembly; Luba Tisma, Manager, Finance, Electoral Commission of South Australia; and Tony Smith, Manager, Policy and Entitlements, Department of Treasury and Finance.

The ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Heysen, do you have an opening statement? No? Straight to questions?

Mr TEAGUE: Straight to questions.

The ACTING CHAIR: Any indication of the order you want to do this in? They are all there, so—

Mr TEAGUE: Provided it is not necessitating an instant move of personnel, I have a couple of questions about Electorate Services and then I flag that I will go to Electoral Commission SA for a bit. I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 4, page 146. The Agency Statement has covered itself in glory this year because the whole Special Minister of State side has regularised itself. We see there is no doubt about it, minister: the minister is the minister responsible for Electorate Services, which is program 1 within DTF.

I go to the program summary that is about halfway down page 146, where we see expenses, and I am also paying attention to FTEs. The budget for 2025-26 in terms of employee benefit expenses is up on the estimated result for 2024-25 in the order of \$531,000, and that is despite a 0.1 FTE reduction. Is there an explanation for that? Is there a single cause or multiple causes and, if so, what are they?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We do not have information before us about a 10 per cent increase in employee benefit expenses, but I am happy to take that on notice and bring back a reply.

Mr TEAGUE: That might be the whole answer, but can I just press it to the point of: is the minister able to at least identify to the committee if that is the result of an increase in payments to employees who are employed and/or is it characterised by redundancies and employees leaving?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We do not have those figures but, as I say, I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: It could include one or both of those?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, without the figures—

Mr TEAGUE: So limiting ourselves then to matters of principle, in terms of the accounting process, those are both in the nature of employee benefit expenses; is that correct?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Again, how these redundancies are treated in an accounting way, I am happy to take on notice and bring back what it is in this particular case.

Mr TEAGUE: So to be clear: we do not know what the \$531,000 relates to?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The difference between those two figures?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, the \$531,000.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is exactly what I am going to take on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: We do not know what it relates to and we also do not know, indeed, whether or not it might include one or both of employee payments and/or redundancy payments?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Once again, I would not want to speculate and inadvertently mislead the committee.

Mr TEAGUE: I would not want you to either. We do not know.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am happy to take that away.

Mr TEAGUE: That is why I thought I would ask early. If an answer emerges in the course of the next 45 minutes, then I would be happy to be interrupted to come back to that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am always happy to interrupt you, shadow attorney-general.

Mr TEAGUE: Thank you very much, Attorney. So parking that for the moment, but only parking it from my point of view and perhaps leaving it on the road as far as the minister and those here are concerned, I turn then to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 12, and over to ECSA. We see the agency, the Electoral Commission of South Australia, commencing at page 9, and by the time we get to page 12 we first see the objective, the ministerial responsibilities and the description of the administered items.

I might turn more particularly to page 13 and the program net cost of services summary. In the table that immediately follows there is one program, Electoral Services and, unsurprisingly, there is a significant increase in the 2025-26 budget up from \$7.5 million estimated result this year to \$39,838,000 for the budgeted year and that is apparently for the purpose of the 2026 state election.

ECSA is also responsible for public funding of election campaigns for participating individuals and parties and for special assistance funding for the reimbursement of administrative costs under 'new regime'. Bearing that in mind, under the new funding regime for political parties that is going to take effect from 1 July, will ECSA be managing that and those relevant payments?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: In terms of the administration funding that the member referred to, I am advised that applications after six months of operation, so at the end of the year, are put into the Electoral Commission. My advice as to how the process is intended to work is that they will assess those applications and then seek funding from Treasury for that administration funding.

Mr TEAGUE: So the increase in funding for ECSA that we see there in the table—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The table at the top of page 13? Which table are we—

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, the table towards the top of page 13, that one line item, Electoral Services. Does that increase in funding include any of the public funding? If so, what amount?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is, no, that does not. That will be separately sought from Treasury.

Mr TEAGUE: This might relate to the work that comprises what is more or less in line with the 2024-25 budget to the estimated results; it is a minor increase over budget, but within that range. Has ECSA done any work on what expected public funding will look like, as well as the recurring administrative cost of that?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: We will maybe deal with those separately. Should we do public funding first?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Under the new legislation that parliament has passed, there is public funding that is public funding that can be in advance and then the remainder of public funding

after an election. I will get some advice about both of those elements. I have been advised that there has been some very preliminary work undertaken in relation to public funding. Although there might be some advanced public funding that can be derived from past results, the entirety of public funding will be dependent on results at that particular election.

You also asked about administration funding. I am advised, in relation to the total quantum of administration funding, there has been some very initial work that has been undertaken, but, as I said, there will be claims that will be put in after the first six months of the new scheme, which starts on 1 July—so six months away, at the end of this calendar year—participants will put in their claims for administrative funding that will be assessed by ECSA and then asked of Treasury.

Mr TEAGUE: Still with an eye to that table and the funding for 2025-26, \$39,833,000, none of that amount is funding for distribution; we have that?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is my advice; that is the amount that it costs on a yearly basis for everything ECSA does, plus, as you know, it is a very significant increase because it is an election year and running a state election is a very expensive proposition.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of ECSA's administrative burden and in terms of this new public funding scheme, perhaps by reference to work done and/or preparation for the cost of enforcement, has ECSA done any work in the course of this last year and, if so, at what cost, on enforcement compliance for the changes to be applied on 1 July?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice for the financial year that is about to end, 2024-25, is that there is an estimated just under \$50,000 for the requirements to prepare for the new funding disclosure, administrative funding, public funding, compliance and enforcement, because—it is not in yet—that rises to in between \$900,000 and \$1 million after that, once all elements of the new regime come into operation.

Mr TEAGUE: That means this coming year?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. I am advised that the indicative figures are for 2025-26, \$949,000, and for 2026-27, \$967,000. Then going forward for 2027-28, dropping down I presume post election and post having to make all the calculations for public funding to \$729,000, and for 2028-29, \$740,000.

Mr TEAGUE: I am just seeing where that sounds in terms of any more specific reference in the papers. Is that more particularly—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The amounts that I have just given?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, the amounts that have just been given, are they more particularly set out? If so, I have missed it.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, this is advice that I have been able to give you over and above what is set out in the budget papers in response to your question.

Mr TEAGUE: I understand that. If so, if we are to find where those costs, particularly for 2025-26 obviously, are to be drawn from, are we drawing them from the \$39,833,000?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that these funds are held by Treasury, like the funds for the administration payments to the parties and for the public funding held by Treasury, and to be released to ECSA.

Mr TEAGUE: So the whole thing, including—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The costs of administering it and the actual payments themselves are not within the \$39 million is my advice.

Mr TEAGUE: If and when and to whatever extent those questions are asked of the Treasurer, then the Treasurer will be able to identify that there is an outsourced service to be provided by ECSA at Treasury's cost for the administration, including of compliance and enforcement?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: And the actual payments themselves. That is the advice.

Mr TEAGUE: The payments themselves clearly are in a separate category, but we are just focused on ECSA, and so whatever resources ECSA needs to do oversight, administration, compliance enforcement, you name it—all those activities for which it is responsible—then we will see ECSA drawing on DTF funds that are not identified in ECSA's budget papers at all?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is they will be reflected in ECSA's budget papers going forward but, as this is all relatively new, it has not been transferred to ECSA's budget yet while they work out exactly what is needed. I am giving you indicative costs of ECSA at the moment.

Mr TEAGUE: Those indicative costs, are they drawn from anywhere that might be revealed—just for coherence and reference—in anything within the rest of DTF's—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am not responsible for that part of the budget.

Mr TEAGUE: I know that.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am not sure I could provide much guidance for that.

Mr TEAGUE: I appreciate that. We are not, as it were, at the point of being able to find those costs on the face of, or set out as a line item, anywhere that the minister is aware of, and certainly—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, it is not that—I just could not tell you. It is not in my budget, in my area within the budget.

Mr TEAGUE: That is helpful.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Where it is accounted for, that is not a question I have an answer for you.

Mr TEAGUE: Sure, but it is helpful to the extent that you are not going to find it in the ECSA budget provision.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Not this year but, as I have said, my advice is the intention is you will find it in the ECSA budget going into the future.

Mr TEAGUE: It will therefore be in the old reversion to the normal administrative year-on-year. It might be regarded as an anticipated addition on the \$7.5 million or so that it is usually running at, this administrative compliance and enforcement.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There are new streams of administrative funding that is past paid, so you would presume that it will reflect that—we talked about it in other hearings—baseline, essentially, for the agency.

Mr TEAGUE: Staying with the same table, there is an estimated result for 2024-25 that is \$160,000 or so over the 2024-25 budget.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Which one is this?

Mr TEAGUE: Same table, same line.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: At the top of page 13?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. Focused on the 2024-25 year and comparing the budget to the estimated result—and we have a variance of about \$160,000—I might just ask: is there any particular cause for that overspend, estimated result in excess of budgeted amount?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The estimated result being \$166,000 above what was forecast in the budget?

Mr TEAGUE: What was budgeted.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: What was budgeted? What does that \$166,000 make up?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: One of the reasons could be—and this is another one I might need to take on notice for that small variance—the Black by-election that occurred in that year that funding was provided and there was an underspend in there. That may be a possible explanation, but I am

happy to go away and see whether there is any further information. I commend the member for not using the term 'budget blowout' for this \$166,000.

Mr TEAGUE: It sort of tends towards it. I would not have guessed that—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It is quite a small variance.

Mr TEAGUE: I would not have guessed that was the cause, but rather more substantial items. Of course, there was the fairly high-profile piece of litigation that was the result of the challenge to the 2022 Adelaide City Council election. That went for some time and resulted in part of the election being declared void, and it is all public record. By reference to that discrete excess amount, is that in any way an answer? In any event, what was the total cost to ECSA of that whole exercise, including ECSA being represented in the Court of Disputed Returns, and so on?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is that it is over a number of financial years in the order of \$500,000 in total for investigation and legal representation services. The new election is paid for by the Adelaide City Council—that is not paid for by Electoral Commission SA—and it is the Central Ward election to be held on 25 August. The approximate cost, subject to the number of postal vote returns, to be borne by the City of Adelaide will be about \$85,000.

Mr TEAGUE: But ECSA will administer it?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes, ECSA administers it, but like general local government elections it is paid for by those bodies whose elections they are.

Mr TEAGUE: Will there be any cost to ECSA of administering that election?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is no, that it is essentially full cost recovery for conducting that election.

Mr TEAGUE: Cost recovery in addition to the \$85,000?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, sorry, cost recovery for the \$85,000. ECSA do not pay for it. They are reimbursed for the conduct of the election, but the amounts for legal costs and investigation costs for the litigation that precedes this election are borne by ECSA.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes, I understand that. I am just focused on the supplementary election. The supplementary election will cost about \$85,000. ECSA will bear that and then seek reimbursement from the Adelaide City Council of the whole amount?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As is the usual course of any local government election.

Mr TEAGUE: Is there any work for ECSA to do to prevent or avert such circumstances as that dispute occurring in the future and, if so, is it doing it? Is there anything for ECSA to do?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes, I am happy to say that I am advised that there are integrity measures that ECSA is implementing for the upcoming City of Adelaide Central Ward election to be held, as I said, on 25 August. Things in place include that City of Adelaide staff are carefully examining each voters roll application that is received. Ballot packs are only sent to electors on the voters roll. ECSA staff will check that the name on the returned declaration envelope matches the enrolled elector and that the signature matches the name. Where required, ECSA staff will check the signature on the returned envelope against the signature on enrolment forms and also contact electors to confirm their vote. So there are significant integrity measures, I am advised, being put in place following this.

Mr TEAGUE: Having traversed the cost of the litigation borne by ECSA, the cost of the supplementary election that will be borne by ECSA and then reimbursed to ECSA by Adelaide City Council, are those measures that have been just described adding to the cost otherwise of that supplementary election, in part, perhaps?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that, no, this does not add significantly to the cost.

Mr TEAGUE: So it is not rendering an election more costly on each occasion?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: My advice is no, it is not.

Mr TEAGUE: So it is the application of measures with the object of avoiding the vulnerability to such a dispute in the future?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes, that is my advice.

Mr TEAGUE: What cost do they come at?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: The measures I have outlined? My advice is at no significant extra cost.

Mr TEAGUE: Still at Budget Paper 4, Volume 2 and still at page 13 for the key agency outputs, the first dot point is the conducting of elections for representatives to be members of the Local First Nations Voice, and I think, more particularly, or at least also, referred to in Sub-program 1.2: Non-parliamentary Electoral Services at page 17. The second dot point highlight for 2024-25 is the conducting of two First Nations Voice supplementary elections. Perhaps by reference to the dot point item at page 17, what was the cost of conducting the two First Nations Voice supplementary elections?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For the two supplementary elections, I am advised total funding provided was \$386,000, although actual costs ended up being \$247,000, so it was just under \$250,000 for two supplementary elections. That would be \$125,000 approximately for each one, which compares very favourably to the three by-elections that we have seen for the House of Assembly. I think the Black by-election was some \$682,000, and I am advised that both the Dunstan and Bragg by-elections were more expensive than that.

Mr TEAGUE: We have just addressed the cost, perhaps for the completeness of recent references, of the supplementary election in the Adelaide City Council in the order of \$85,000. Presumably, the logistics contribute. If one were to compare Adelaide City Council's supplementary election with a Voice supplementary election, logistics and distance and the rest contribute to the \$40,000 difference.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Certainly, I know in previous discussions that I have had with the Electoral Commission, when you go out to regional areas, yes, everything you do in an election tends to cost that little bit more.

Mr TEAGUE: Am I right in drawing at least a broad comparison: \$85,000 for the Adelaide City Council supplementary and about \$125,000 for a First Nations Voice supplementary election?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I will give another comparison: the \$123,500 on average for a First Nations supplementary election compared with three-quarters of a million dollars for the three Liberal members who have left their seats. In that comparison, the First Nations Voice elections cost a fraction of what each by-election has cost when a Liberal member has left a seat so far in this term.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of that analysis, then, if we are to embark on it, how many electors were eligible to participate in those supplementary elections?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have figures in terms of the number. One thing we do know, though, is we do not have complete figures. When people enrol, there is not a box that is ticked in terms of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identification. We do not have a figure to tell you, 'This is what the roll is,' because it is not something that has been collected consistently. There is no roll so that you can say, 'This percentage voted,' because it is not something that is collected when people tick a box on a form.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of the first overall election, am I right that that data is not retained, therefore, as a comparator? Not that anyone expected the supplementary election, but is there not even a comparator that is available?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have figures, but there may be 'this many' people voted at the first election and 'this many' people voted in the same geographic region for the second one. Without having figures in front of me, my guess would be in a supplementary election you would see fewer people voting, which tends to follow what happens also for state elections at a general election. For the seat of Bragg, Dunstan or Black, you would ordinarily expect more to vote at a state election when there is greater awareness than you would expect at a by-election in the future.

Mr TEAGUE: So it is not known how many voters were eligible to participate?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There is no tick in a box on a form that the AEC has when you enrol.

Mr TEAGUE: It is not known how many were eligible, including by reference to the election that had occurred? It is just a question of clarification. There is no retention of a form of roll based on what has occurred previously?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: If the question is: is a roll kept of those who have voted before and then added to for those who vote at the next one—

Mr TEAGUE: Or compared against?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, that is not done.

Mr TEAGUE: Can the minister advise the committee how many votes were cast at those elections?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised it was about 2,600 at the initial First Nations Voice elections. For the contested election for the supplementary election it was about 150 votes.

Mr TEAGUE: That is 150 votes in total for both?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There was only one that was contested.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Although it would be misleading to say you do not apportion costs to the non-contested one, because of course you do a whole lot of work setting it up and getting ready.

Mr TEAGUE: Yes. But the minister is satisfied that in terms of apportionment they are about equal in terms of the cost of preparation?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I do not have those figures. As I said, I do have the figure for the actual cost for both of them, the non-contested one and the work that was necessarily involved in doing that and the contested one, which was \$247,000. My guess is that the contested one might have been a greater portion of that, but I do not have those figures.

Mr TEAGUE: I have sort of gone there a little bit, but in terms of comparing the supplementary elections to the original elections, is there anything for the future that ECSA has acquired in terms of capacity, knowledge, expertise and so on in order to apply towards the next such occasion? If it does not include any reference material, is it a matter of a novel endeavour?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I can say, because, as you would expect, I have had the benefit of discussions with the Electoral Commissioner about these elections, certainly I think in previous discussions the advice has been that there has been significant amounts learnt by the Electoral Commission in a whole range of areas, including working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, particularly in remote and regional areas.

I remember a statistic that just under half—something like 46 or 47 per cent—of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live outside the Adelaide metropolitan area, which is a much higher proportion of people outside of the area than for non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander South Australians. Working with different groups, ACCOs and others, certainly I know it is something that ECSA did to a great extent during the first election, but of course lessons will be learnt about how to do that better.

Mr TEAGUE: I do not know if 'better' is the right word, but in terms of the way that has become familiar locally and so on, there is the matter of staffing polling booths, and ECSA has a whole variety of ways of doing that for elections of all different kinds. To what extent is ECSA staff travelling around the state for the purposes of these elections in a way that it may need to do less of as the process becomes more familiar?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I guess there are two elements to that. I am advised that ECSA is starting up awareness and education campaigns shortly in relation to the second lot of First Nations

Voice elections. But for these second elections, polling places and polling officials will be utilised the same as on polling day, so there will be a great deal of synergies able to take place, as state election polling places and polling officials are there in any event to conduct the general election in March 2026 in South Australia to be utilised for First Nations polling as well.

Mr TEAGUE: In the minutes remaining, I might just head back to page 146 of Volume 4 and spend a few moments back on Electorate Services. I will start by going back to where I left that question. I appreciate the minister took it on notice, but there has also been a half-hour or so—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I have not had any notes passed to me, I am afraid.

Mr TEAGUE: So the question as to the reason for the \$531,000 in additional employee benefit expenses, notwithstanding a 0.1 downward FTE, is a matter that the minister has taken on notice, just in case there was anything to add while we are here.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: As I say, I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr TEAGUE: Alright. I think perhaps most conveniently at page 146, who is the current manager of Electorate Services and when did the current manager begin in that position?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised Lisa Samarzia holds that position. I am advised she was acting in that position and was formally appointed to the role very late last year or very early this year.

Mr TEAGUE: What happened to the previous one?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: There was, I am advised, previously a long-term manager in that position. In between that and Lisa coming in, there was someone who was in there for only a couple of months, then Lisa took over the position as acting and has since started ongoing late last year or early this year.

Mr TEAGUE: What was the period of that short-term—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised it was a matter of months.

Mr TEAGUE: Does that previous manager still work in Electorate Services?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised no.

Mr TEAGUE: Were the circumstances of departure voluntary or otherwise?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: I am advised that we do not discuss individual employment matters of specific individuals, but I am advised that the person who was in there for a short amount of time has taken up other opportunities.

Mr TEAGUE: In terms of staff turnover in the last 12 months, how many staff have left Electorate Services and for what reasons?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Making up those 40 are the driver fleet; we do not have information in relation to that. Outside the driver fleet, there are 14 FTEs in the actual Electorate Services team and I am advised that the turnover was about two.

Mr TEAGUE: And the circumstances of the turnover of those two is something that you are not talking about?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes. As I say, with individual employment matters, we would not traverse anything.

Mr TEAGUE: Still on page 146, turning to the highlights, I go to the first dot point which is the negotiation of a new enterprise agreement for assistants to members of the South Australian parliament. That is described as a highlight. I have not cross-checked it against any associated target, but my understanding is that the EBA negotiations are still ongoing.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: That is right. They are in an advanced stage, but still ongoing.

Mr TEAGUE: So is there a need to revise the highlight to describe it in terms of it being in the present tense?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Maybe. Instead of 'negotiated' it might be 'negotiating'—that may be a way to describe it. But it is—

Mr TEAGUE: It is not quite complete.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: Yes.

Mr TEAGUE: When is it going to be complete? Would you therefore describe the current state of it as delayed? Was this all prepared? The budget papers are prepared in circumstances where it is anticipated that this would be complete—

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, I think that is just wording. I do not think that there was an anticipation that this was definitely going to be completed, and then it went to print and then it was not completed. I know this is ongoing. It is at an advanced stage. I think there has already been one vote on a potential agreement. It is one of those ones that is at an advanced stage but is not complete now.

Mr TEAGUE: Would you describe it as a delay at this point?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: No, I would not use that at all. In my now three-and-a-bit years' experience as industrial relations minister—we went through quite a number of agreements that are up for negotiation at the moment, and it used to be three years but it is now a maximum of four years that agreements can run—every term of parliament, every agreement will come up. I would not describe this as a delay or anything that is particularly different from other agreements.

Mr TEAGUE: Has any particular industrial organisation raised any concerns regarding the EBA process or its terms?

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: For assistants?

Mr TEAGUE: Yes.

The Hon. K.J. MAHER: It would not surprise the member that unions will regularly meet with ministers and put forward their views, whether it is firefighters, ambulance officers, doctors, teachers or others in a whole range of areas. I think many members are represented by the ASU. I am sure I have had representation from the ASU, as I have talked to them about a whole range of other matters: who they represent and issues to do with local government and portable long service leave. If the member is asking whether concerns have been raised that this is completely outside of how all other negotiations are going, no, that certainly has not been raised.

The ACTING CHAIR: Alas, the allotted time has expired. The examination of the Electoral Commission SA and its administered items, the House of Assembly, Joint Parliamentary Services and its administered items, and the Legislative Council is complete. The examination of the proposed payments for the Administered Items for the Department of Treasury and Finance is adjourned until tomorrow. Thank you to the minister and the witnesses.

At 15:16 the committee adjourned to Wednesday 25 June 2025 at 09:00.