

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, 31 October 2023

The **SPEAKER (Hon. D.R. Cregan)** took the chair at 11:00.

**The SPEAKER:** Honourable members, we 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 **SPEAKER** read prayers.

### *Parliamentary Committees*

#### **JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY**

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water) (11:01):** I move:

That the report of the committee be noted.

I will not speak for long about this motion because we have legislation that will be forthcoming in the next couple of weeks in this chamber. It is under consideration in the other place. I do want to sincerely thank all the members of the committee who contributed to this report and all the witnesses who attended.

I particularly want to thank the people who came from the two universities to present their case for why they felt that this was both in the state's interests and in their individual institutions' interests. I think it is very important that we listen to these two universities that have fine reputations and continue to make outstanding contributions to South Australian society and the economy and that we listen with respect and understand that the position that they have reached, that this is the right thing for the state as well as themselves, is worthy of consideration and action by this parliament.

I would like to thank you, sir, for chairing that committee. I think it was important that the committee be neither chaired by nor dominated by government members. This is a change that will be in many ways the largest microeconomic reform that has been seen in this state for some time, and it is important that as much as possible it be supported across the parliament rather than being only the brainchild of one party. That said, I think it is pleasing that this state government was able to accelerate the discussions that had previously already existed between those two institutions by expressing the interest of this government in a new university created from the two existing institutions and a willingness to be part of making that be successful.

While universities are primarily seen as the creatures of the federal government because the funding and many of the policy mechanisms that guide that funding are driven by the commonwealth government, they are nonetheless the creatures of this parliament by virtue of being created in acts of this parliament. Also, more importantly in many ways, they are so fundamental to the economic success of a state that for a state government to take a hands-off approach, to not pay attention, to not guide and support in every way that is consistent with the state's interests, would be to be derelict in our duty.

We are at a point in the journey of South Australia where we need to harness the intellectual capacity of every South Australian, and we need to attract every person here who is willing to contribute to that. Universities do that both through educating people here and by encouraging, creating and commercialising research that drives our economy onwards.

We have always been an economy that combines both primary production and manufacturing. We were for some time in South Australia the economy that had the highest proportion of people working in manufacturing of all the states. We were then victim of the big change in manufacturing, as much of the simpler work was offshored to places that were deemed to be

cheaper and easier to do that work. When that happened, we saw many people not only lose their jobs but their families fall into disadvantage from which it is difficult to emerge.

The only way that an economy emerges from that period is by educating and investing in its people. To do that through an education system, to give them the opportunity to fulfil their potential and therefore the potential of our state, we must be a more complex economy. We cannot allow ourselves to simply dig things up, chop them down, or grow them and package them and let that be all that we do.

While that part of our economy will always be essential, we must also harness the intellectual capacity of people living here to create and add value. That is what complexity is: the additional application of knowledge, of intellect to what we make and what we do, and that only happens when you educate and invest in people. For too long, Australia has spent time riding on driving down real wages and lowering the conditions in which people work, and we saw the resultant stagnation of wages and the decline in productivity growth.

What we need to do is invest in people so that we can drive up productivity and drive up standards of living through undertaking more complex work. The merger of these institutions is not something that is simply a good in itself that will allow those institutions to grow, to employ more people, but is something that will fundamentally change the nature of the South Australian economy in time. It will take effort, it will be complex and there will be things that will be difficult and challenging on the way. That is usually the case with important reform.

My belief and my gratitude is extended to the committee because I believe that what it has done is take seriously the extent of the weight of that reform in taking evidence, in considering the recommendations and in producing its report. It has not done a trivial light touch; it has seriously considered the weight of the proposition placed before this parliament and in so doing has discharged its obligations honourably.

I am grateful, as I say, to all who were involved in that committee, from all sides, recognising that there were two minority reports, but nonetheless indicated an understanding why this reform is important and a willingness to look at the legislation as it comes in. As I say, it will be debated in the other place this week, it will be coming here soon and I reserve other comments for that time.

**Ms HOOD (Adelaide) (11:08):** I am a country kid, I was a School Card kid and I was the first in my family to go to university, and I would not be standing here today without the opportunity of a great public education and support to move to Adelaide to start my university education. A new Adelaide University will be backed by a \$120 million student support fund that will help young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and from our regions to access university. I want to say to all the country kids, to all the School Card kids, to those who will become the first in their family to go to university that I see you, that this government sees you, and that it is big, bold policies like this that will help you reach your full potential.

My understanding and appreciation of the opportunity I was given inspired me to become an education journalist at *The Advertiser*. One of the many topics I would cover in that role was discussions regarding mergers between our tertiary institutions. They were raised from time to time, but nothing concrete ever eventuated. When the opportunity came for me to be part of the Joint Committee on the Establishment of Adelaide University, I jumped at it.

The committee was chaired by our Speaker, the Independent MP Dan Cregan, member for Kavel, and did not have a majority of government members. I want to thank the Chair for his diligent stewardship of our committee; my government colleagues, the member for Florey, the member for Gibson and the Hon. Reggie Martin; crossbench committee members, the Hon. Connie Bonaros and the Hon. Sarah Game; Greens members, first the Hon. Tammy Franks followed by the Hon. Robert Simms; and opposition members, the member for Morialta and the Hon. Jing Lee. I also want to thank the parliamentary staff, the research officers and the Hansard staff for their hard work, in particular Alison Meeks, Shane Hilton and Tonia Coulter.

We met over three months. It was a significant inquiry. We received more than 80 submissions and heard evidence from almost 50 witnesses, including academics, students, experts and business and community groups. The committee heard extensive evidence that the

fierce global competition between universities is only likely to increase, and that the state's university sector is likely to become increasingly less competitive without significant reform like this.

Our committee considered evidence that the proposed merger would likely deliver long-term economic benefits to South Australia, increase the international ranking of the new institution, attract more international students, enhance research output and quality and provide possible benefits of scale, including the reduction of barriers to research intensity and collaboration. Importantly, the committee heard evidence on the risk of inaction if the proposed amalgamation did not proceed. I am incredibly proud to be part of the committee to recommend that this amalgamation does go ahead and I will be pleased to see debate begin in the other place on the Adelaide University Bill this week.

In particular, I want to speak about research. This policy would be backed by a \$200 million research fund. When we heard evidence from witnesses, one of the key themes that came through in that evidence was that, under the current system in relation to research, funding rewards scale. We are not just competing against large institutions, particularly in the Eastern States, we are competing internationally—not just for research dollars but for research talent: the people and the brainpower that will drive significant research in this state.

When we look at our state, we have so much potential and so much opportunity. We are home to SAHMRI, our health and medical research institute, which next month celebrates 10 years at its HQ in the cheese grater. We have significant industries here, from the AUKUS agreement to build nuclear submarines, to the industry to establish South Australia as a renewable energy powerhouse through hydrogen, just to name two. What those two industries need is brainpower and that is what this new university can achieve. It will be able to get more students through and attract more research dollars so that we can really drive innovation, particularly in these two key industries that we are establishing in South Australia.

The big challenge we have is the tech revolution and AI, and the significant disruption that that will create within economies. What we do need, again, is that brainpower, those educated South Australians who can help drive innovation in our state because there are huge economic benefits that can flow from this. That is what we heard from witnesses including Business SA and particularly the Productivity Commission: that we need an amalgamation like this to drive those economic benefits in South Australia and, as our Deputy Premier said, increase the economic complexity of South Australia as well.

One of the other elements is \$30 million to attract international students to South Australia. One of the interesting points that was made around this was the economic contribution that international students make to South Australia, not just from the fact that their parents then come to visit South Australia. We heard from Adelaide Airport that on a large number of those international flights that come into South Australia are parents of international students. They come here, they stay here and they spend money.

The international students also provide an important worker pool for South Australian businesses. We know that there are worker shortages, so when those international students come here and study they also fill those gaps, whether in hospitality or retail. They are an important part of our economy to address those skills shortages we see in those particular industries. Importantly, they become ambassadors for our state: whether they stay here or whether they go back to their home countries, they are able to really put South Australia on the map as an amazing place to live, work and play.

As I said, this really is going to be a game changer for our state. We know that we have to be more competitive, both nationally and internationally, but we also have to understand that education is the way forward for our state. As a government we are not just looking at the university sector, we are looking from birth through to adulthood, whether it was our royal commission led by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard into early education in South Australia, where we are going to look at rolling out universal access to preschool for three year olds, looking at identifying the most developmental delays within our young children and making sure that we can reduce that by the time those children start school, through to high schools.

We are expanding our public education system in my local community by expanding Adelaide Botanic High to allow more local kids to access a first-class public education. We are then

building trade schools, because we acknowledge that not everyone will go to university. We are building trade schools, we are investing a huge amount in skills. I was with the Premier and the education minister a couple of weeks ago to announce a huge skills package to look at increasing the number of young people doing trades and particular areas of skills shortages, like child care. We are also investing in our tertiary institutions through the potential amalgamation of these two powerhouse universities, should the bill pass.

From birth through to adulthood we are leaving no stone unturned in using the greatest resource we have in South Australia, our people, to make a difference to our great state. Again, just circling back, I want to say to any kid who is thinking perhaps of doing something very different, something that has never happened in their family before, going to university: I know what that feels like, it is quite a scary experience, particularly when you are a regional kid. Not only was I making the decision to be the first in my family to go university but it meant I had to leave the town and the only place I had ever lived, the only place I loved to live, in order to be able to access that tertiary education.

For anyone who knows Naracoorte, my new housemates and I cried all the way from Naracoorte to Coonalpyn, to the silos, because we knew this was the last time we would ever really truly be able to call Naracoorte our home, because we were moving to the big city. I know that it can be quite a scary experience to do something that perhaps no-one in your family has ever done before, but it is policies like this that will help you reach your full potential, help you push forward with your chosen career and create the life that you have dreamed of.

For all those country kids, all those kids from low socio-economic backgrounds, whether you are School Card or in a lower socio-economic area, these are policies we are pushing for, fighting for and developing for you so that you can reach your full potential. Once again, I thank our Chair, the Speaker, and all the committee members for their hard work.

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER (Morialta—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11:18):** I am very pleased to have the opportunity to make some remarks on the Joint Committee on the Establishment of Adelaide University. This has been a lengthy process in terms of the time taken, and from the opposition's point of view the modest resources we have available certainly have been applied very heavily over the last four or five months as this matter has been considered.

With that in mind, I would like to particularly thank the Hon. Jing Lee MLC who worked with me from the Liberal Party's point of view. We have a very modest staff team in terms of the resources available to us, but I note Samuel Morrison, who was in the Leader of the Opposition's office and applied himself significantly to the role, along with Ryan Smith, Elise Baker, Ben Harvey, Lachlan Skinner from my own office, and other staff members who provided us support where possible.

In working through this matter, the committee was ably assisted by staff including David Pegram, not for the longest of terms but certainly seeing us through that first meeting and ensuring that the committee understood what it was doing to start with, until his role was taken over by Alison Meeks as joint secretary. Shane Hilton worked with us throughout. Tonia Coulter provided that secretariat role and there was research officer support from Alistair Taylor and Megan Fink when Alistair took on a different role. Their work was important throughout and enabled the committee to function very well.

I also recognise the other members of the committee: the member for Adelaide, the member for Gibson, the member for Florey, the Speaker from the House of Assembly, and from the Legislative Council the Hon. Reggie Martin, the Hon. Jing Lee I have mentioned, the Hon. Robert Simms, the Hon. Connie Bonaros and the Hon. Sarah Game. Ten members is a large committee and we spent a lot of time together over the course of our witness hearings and our deliberative meetings.

There was, I think, an opportunity for improvements that could have been done to this process had the committee had more time to reflect, had the committee had slightly different terms of reference, as suggested by the Liberal Party, the Hon. Frank Pangallo, the Hon. Rob Simms and the Hon. Tammy Franks prior to the formation of the committee, but within the terms of reference and the time frame that we had, I thank the other members of the committee for the collegiate way in which, for the most part, we conducted our business and, for the most part, worked pretty well together.

I was a co-author of a minority report suggesting that I did not agree with everything that the majority of the members of the committee signed up to. The Hon. Jing Lee joined me in co-authoring our minority report. I encourage members to turn their attention to it. I will draw some particular attention to some aspects during this contribution. I note the Hon. Robert Simms also identified himself as not being with the majority.

The Speaker was in the Chair. There were six other members of the committee and certainly there was a majority view that is reflected in some of the findings and the recommendations. That said, I agreed with a lot of the findings and the recommendations. The minority report highlights some difference in nuance on some of them. The majority report highlights some areas that should have been strengthened in our view and the majority report identifies support for a number of the recommendations as well.

I am going to start with the genesis of how we got here. One of the Labor Party's first election commitments was, for the future, a South Australian university merger. I want to remind people of where we have come from. The document with the Premier's face on the front states:

The harsh truth is that each of our universities alone are too small and too undercapitalised to make it into the list of top international universities. They simply don't do enough large scale research to be recognised as world leading, and that is holding our state back. Combined, our three universities don't equal the revenue of The University of Melbourne alone.

Frankly, I take issue with some of that. The universities we have in South Australia are all within the top 3 per cent of university rankings within the world. The University of Adelaide is within the top 1 per cent, Flinders University is just outside that mark and the University of Adelaide is the eighth highest ranked university in Australia and is a destination of choice for thousands and thousands of university students. It is ranked in the top 100 according to two of the measures last year and one of the measures this year and is a very highly ranked university. There is a risk of that ranking subsiding, which we will get to in the time coming. I think the Premier got that wrong in fact but, nevertheless, we will continue.

The other point I would make is, of course, that rankings are not based on scale of research, as this document suggests. Rankings are based on a number of things. Most of them have a research aspect that is very strong, but it tends to be the top quality research that we are talking about, not just the volume of research. The volume of top quality research is the key thing. The document goes on to say:

Labor in government will establish a University Merger Commission to chart a path. It will include the leadership of the three universities and be headed up by an eminent commissioner with higher education experience. Its task will be to determine how the state can be best served by the university sector.

Methodology aside, it is a worthy goal to consider how the state can be best served by the university sector. I always saw that as being the key function that the committee looking into this matter could serve. How is our state best served?

Of course, the university councils that provided the heads of agreement signatures to the government in signing up to this considered this from the point of view of their institution, as defined by their councils, as defined by their legislation. Their institution contributes to the state's interests, but their institution's interests are not necessarily exactly the same as the state's interests.

The University of Adelaide's interests are the wellbeing of the University of Adelaide, the volume of research, the wellbeing of staff and students, the success that they have in attracting staff and students. They contribute to our state's interests, but the University of Adelaide, the University of South Australia and Flinders University are all separate institutions and their interests are confined to their own institution, irrespective of the wellbeing of the other institutions.

There are examples where staff and students from within one state have gone to another institution from within one state. This will become quite apparent in my later remarks, particularly in relation to Flinders University. The wellbeing and the advancement of a new university, or the University of Adelaide or the University of South Australia, can only be considered in the state's interests when you take into account Flinders as well.

If the outcome of work we do today is to see taxpayers' dollars supporting the new university with detrimental results for Flinders, that is not a net benefit to the state and it does not meet the goal set by the Premier in his election document. The opposition will be here with some suggestions and some recommendations, of course.

The Premier's promise is for a university merger commission. I note that has not happened. At any rate, the Premier has said that there is a different path. The universities came to this suggestion that the Premier and the government considered, and the Premier and the government have decided in lieu of their election promise to go down this path instead, rather than having a commission.

At any rate, what was a commission intended to do? Let's have a look at that. The document goes on:

Should the independent Commission determine that a university merger is in the interest of the South Australian economy and the welfare of the people of the state, then a merger will be a first term priority for a Labor Government.

Intriguingly, the document then, after that full stop, says:

A university merger will be a first term priority for a Labor Government.

It is unclear whether this is a typo or if we have two separate promises there, but at any rate it is clear that the sense of this is that the first corollary for determining whether a university merger is a priority for the government must be that the commission should determine that it is in the interests of the South Australian economy—'economy' spelt with two Cs, I note—and the welfare of the people of the state.

Those are reasonable considerations. Those are considerations that a university commission would have determined under this policy, had the policy been implemented. In the absence of this policy being implemented, those are the two considerations that cabinet absolutely had to consider first and foremost before determining to pursue this merger, to bring this legislation.

One of the points I will be going into in some detail is that I do not believe that the cabinet did that. I think that if Treasurer's Instruction 17 was followed it was followed very loosely by this cabinet, the idea that ministers and cabinet should have in front of them the full set of information that they require to make a decision.

I just make the point. I am not going to dwell on it at length more than is necessary. The Premier and the Deputy Premier have stated publicly on a number of occasions that they neither read nor sought to read the business case for this institution's development. The Department for Industry, Innovation and Science gave testimony to a hearing, saying that they had not read the business case. They had not provided policy advice to the government, and it was understood that the universities had done that work of policy consideration as to whether this was in the state's interests. But I make the point again: it was not their purpose to find the state's interests; it was their purpose to find their own institution's interests, so we have a deficiency here.

The Department for Industry, Innovation and Science also gave testimony that the Treasury department was the lead agency, and when the Treasury department was given the opportunity to bear witness in the inquiry they said that their job was basically to negotiate a package with the universities such that the universities would be happy to implement this new interpretation of government policy (i.e. that there will be a merger without having had the commission first).

To put it in really simple terms, the government promised a commission. Let's even put that to one side. The government promised they would be focused on the interests of the South Australian economy and the welfare of the people of the state without having had any policy advice from the Department for Industry, Innovation and Science, which has higher education functions, nor Treasury, which was the lead agency.

Nobody within government provided policy advice to the government saying that it is in the interests of the South Australian economy or indeed the welfare of the people of this state. Nobody from government provided that. There has been no commission that has provided that advice.

Indeed, the universities that did work on whether it suited their institutions have not been in a position to provide that advice. It is not their job.

So, the government came with a new proposition that was not an election commitment and signed a heads of agreement with the universities saying they would do this despite its significant impact on our state, despite the significant spending of the significant investment of South Australian taxpayers' funds and without having any policy advice to suggest that it was good. We only had the Premier's word that he felt it would be a good idea. The policy document, by the way, went on to state:

The state should not start this process with a view about which universities should merge, nor which university should teach what degrees. The role of the State Government is to determine what our collective interests are as South Australians and that is where the process should start.

If only that had been true. I just read at great length from the opening statements of the policy document and every part of it the government did not follow through with.

The joint committee's purpose and importance I think is underscored here because the joint committee in many ways did a lot of the policy work and analysis and risk consideration that the government should have done, that a university merger commission would have done, that cabinet should have done and that ministers should have done prior to even bringing their work to cabinet, but the evidence we had was that they did not do it. We are here to help. The committee members worked at great length with diligence, supported by staff, to provide that policy work for the people of South Australia that should have been provided by the government. The Labor Party set out goals to achieve in their election document, which include that:

There are five outcomes that any merger must achieve:

1. South Australia needs an internationally recognised top 100 university in order to ensure the highest quality research is funded in this state to drive economic growth. This would also lead to SA being attractive to the best and brightest students and staff.

The value of having a top 100 university, to be clear, is that it is appealing to international students and some international students, particularly from some markets, are absolutely keen to be studying at a top 100 university. There is a premium that can be attached to the price charged to international students in a top 100 university. The University of Adelaide is able to charge more than other institutions in this state because it is a top 100 university.

We heard evidence that international students will, in many cases, look at the country they want to study in, and they will look at the rankings of the universities and accordingly they will choose based on what they can afford. That is understood. A top 100 university is not necessarily to drive new research; it is more likely to be a function of having achieved that research.

A top 100 university is not going to necessarily guarantee that you have the best and brightest students and staff. That is an insult to every student and staff member at Flinders University and the University of South Australia. Indeed, being a top 100 university is not a reflection on the quality of teaching and learning at an institute at all. Some of the world's most appealing, well-regarded and distinguished teaching universities do not focus on research and do not even figure in the rankings at all. At any rate, it is certainly a thing that is useful for South Australia to have in terms of our appeal to the international student market.

As the member for Adelaide said in her contribution earlier, I think all members of the committee unambiguously agreed with the proposition that international students are good for South Australia. They are good for our economy, they are good for diversity within our institutions, and they are good for our students to engage with and learn from. They provide positive impacts in terms of their direct contribution for their fees, their living expenses while they are here, their tourism expenses that they themselves contribute and the expenses that their families contribute when visiting. Indeed, international students provide a valuable resource for our communities and our workforce in the years ahead.

I agree with all of that. Everyone agreed with all of that, and so for that purpose we also accept the premise that it would be ideal to have a top 100 university. We kind of do, but there is

certainly that question mark over how sustainable Adelaide University's position in the top 100 is, and that has also informed the Liberal Party's consideration as we come to deal with this issue.

The second proposition that the government have put forward in their promise for this issue is:

2. South Australia's higher education sector must be actively engaged with local industry and business to optimise local investment, commercialisation of research and economic growth.

It is, but we would like it to continue to be, so sure, I am happy to accept that. I just want to reflect briefly, though.

I do not want to take it for granted, as some people seem to, that our universities do not do pretty good work in this area at the moment. If you go to Tonsley and talk to the people at Flinders University about the work that they are doing commercialising their research, it is a startup hub of some note. Indeed, Flinders students and Flinders researchers who have engaged with business are doing it extraordinarily successfully, as are Adelaide University researchers in their areas of key focus. Adelaide University has some very proud success stories in this area, and the other university that does is the University of South Australia—on a smaller scale to be sure. The idea that our universities do not do that at the moment is, I think, a bit of a misnomer, but we would like them to continue to do so.

The third proposition for the proposal from the government is:

3. The [South Australian] university sector needs to be stable and productive. Securing jobs and career pathways for academics, researchers and administrative staff will strengthen the university sector here.

I have no problem with that.

The fourth proposition is:

4. Students from all socio-economic backgrounds must have access to a university education in South Australia of an elite global standard, and students require internationally competitive employment outcomes in order to be sure that the investment of going to university will be of immediate and lasting value to them.

I want to dwell on this for a moment. The University of South Australia has some of the strongest graduate outcomes of any university in Australia. By some measures, it is number one in Australia—not in South Australia but in Australia.

There are other measures of teacher quality and teacher-student satisfaction. By those measures, there are strong results from all three of our universities. I think Flinders may even be ranked the top, and UniSA, if not Flinders, and Adelaide University is third of the three universities, but they are all definitely in the top quartile of Australian universities. Some of Australia's top-ranked universities feature very poorly by comparison in relation to the graduate outcomes and student satisfaction rankings. The point I make is that it is utterly wrongheaded for the government to pursue this only on the basis that we are going to have students desperate to be in a globally highly ranked institution in order to achieve their career goals.

South Australia's students are extremely well served by all three of our institutions at the moment when it comes to the quality of teaching and learning, and graduate satisfaction. The measures suggest that, and there is also not the correlation that is assumed in Labor's document between having a highly ranked university and graduate satisfaction. Again, the benefit of a highly ranked university over and above everything else is in attracting international students, and the function that drives having a highly ranked university more than anything else is the volume—not of research, but the volume of that top-quality research. It is not the only thing that feeds into most of the rankings, but nevertheless it is not a function that actually drives the domestic market particularly strongly.

There are all sorts of factors that feature in a South Australian student's desire to go to a particular university over another. I have spoken to a range of people throughout this journey. I have spoken to student representatives from different clubs and organisations at the universities; I have spoken to colleagues, friends and family. Everybody has a view on this matter, whether they have been to university or not—especially if they have been to one of the institutions. One of the questions I would ask is: what drove you to make your decision to go to Adelaide or Flinders or UniSA or any

number? For the record, the South Australian Liberal parliamentary team is made up of graduates of all three, with significant advocates for the education they received in the different institutions.

I have spoken to people who had made their decision based on geography: 'It was the university down the road from where I live.' This is something that is very popular at Flinders University. People in the southern suburbs are very proud of the fact that their institution is delivering great teaching and learning. In the regions, people living in Mount Gambier, for example, very much appreciate the offering that UniSA has in Mount Gambier.

Students may choose to go to a particular university because they want to go to a particular course. If they want to be a paramedic then they have to go to Flinders because that is where being a paramedic is offered. Some students had a particular interest in doing subjects or disciplines that are only offered at Adelaide. There is a smaller cohort that is attracted to a university because their parent might have gone to that university or there is a reputation attached, but this is by no means comparable to the driver for an international student that rankings are. We heard significant evidence to that effect as well.

People are proud of their university and they take pride in the things that their university points to. I am a graduate of Adelaide University; I did subjects at Flinders University as well. I am proud that my university had the connection with Howard Florey, who I think is one of the most important people who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and who did study at Adelaide University. I think that is something that brings me joy; it does not necessarily influence my feeling about the merger by any stretch. But I think the idea that it would be an elite global standard that somehow was not achieved actually is an insult to our universities as they stand.

The fifth purpose the Labor Party had for their election policy was:

All SA public universities must remain strong regardless of a merger configuration, and there must be a relationship between higher education and vocational training that facilitates increasing the qualification levels held by South Australians.

To be honest, nobody has really talked about the second part of the fifth one. There are two promises. First, regardless of the configuration, all South Australian universities must remain strong. We will come back to talk more about Flinders in due course, but I do not think that the particular package that the government has settled on adequately deals with that. We have said many times that Flinders University needs to be given more consideration.

The proposal as it is does not hugely go into this question of the relationship between higher education and vocational training. There is other work that is important in relation to vocational training. There is other work that I am very proud of that was delivered under the Marshall Liberal government aimed at increasing the number of people successfully completing apprenticeships and traineeships—support for the group training organisation (GTO) sector, for example, where the national average of some 50-something per cent of apprenticeships and traineeship completions rose up to about 80 per cent completions. I think the former government's strong support for GTOs and apprenticeships and traineeships was an important part of that. The former government's reforms to VET in schools was an important part of that:

- the idea that the school week should not be the only determinant of whether a young person can do a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship;
- the idea that schools should work to enable participation in the workplace first and then the schools provide extra supports to help students complete their SACE while undertaking their apprenticeship or traineeship;
- the idea also that state funding for vocational education schools should be geared towards where there are skills demand areas. Whether that is through an apprenticeship or a traineeship, if a business is taking on an apprentice then there is a demand for the skill, because otherwise the business would not be putting money in the game; or
- the skills shortage lists that have been identified. That is where we put our money, changing it from the previous one which was, 'We would fund any student to do any course once, and then when they found there was no job at the end they would have to pay for it themselves if they wanted to do more.'

That reform, focusing our training effort within schools on areas that had skills needs, was really important. The new government has kept it. That work is important. It was one of the promises that they would look at here. Maybe I take from it that they were so satisfied by the work the Marshall Liberal government did in reforming VET in schools and pathways that they did not feel the need to focus on that anymore. That is how I will take it.

We turn back to the recommendations of the committee. Indeed, I will turn to the process. This was dealt with particularly in the minority report. The point that I would make is that, having not gone through the process of having the commission of inquiry as was explicitly promised in the election document, the government could have said, 'We have decided not to do our election commitment because the universities have come to us with a better idea.' That is not what they said. They have said effectively that their election commitment is being fulfilled by delivering on this better idea that the universities have come to them with.

The reason why whether or not it is an election commitment is important is that that slightly adjusts the process that a cabinet needs to go through. If something has been an election commitment, then there is an obligation upon the government to deliver on that election commitment. They are the long policy considerations that you might expect from Treasurer's Instructions 17, that cabinet needs to consider a justification statement, that the justification statement should:

- (a) apply evaluation principles that are appropriate for the size and nature of the public sector initiative being evaluated; and
- (b) having regard to the estimated cost, magnitude and sensitivity, include sufficient scope and details to enable the approver to make a decision on an informed basis.

If something is an election commitment, then it is deemed that that work has effectively been done through the publication of the promise prior to the election, the consideration of which by the people of South Australia informing their views on who should form government. There is a benefit to the government in describing this policy proposal as an election commitment even though it is indeed not the delivery of their election commitment. It is an alternative to their election commitment.

What we observed through the committee was some of the most surprising testimony that I have encountered in my nearly 14 years in the parliament. It was very clear from the way that the public servants spoke about this proposal that they were under riding instructions, if you like. They were under no doubt that the government's view was that supporting this merger was the election commitment. That was their interpretation of the election commitment.

We have gone through the document and said what the election commitment was in some detail. I apologise to members who did not want to spend the last 20 minutes going through the Labor Party election document, but it is very clear in black and white that the policy document was for a university commission. We went through the five things that the commission would consider. If they decided not to have the commission, if they decided to do that work through another model, that would be a variation on the election commitment, but it was not that. They did not do that work. In fact, the public servants explicitly ruled out having done that work.

During witness testimony we could not have been clearer, because I went back and asked these questions a couple of times because I was surprised at the answers that we were getting. I think the member for Adelaide might have asked a pertinent question in relation to policy advice, in relation to whether the witnesses thought it was a good idea, and I think they said that it was. I asked, 'Was that the first time that you had been asked by anyone in government for policy advice on this question?' They made it clear that they were not there to provide policy advice to government on this matter. They were there to work on the bill that would deliver on Labor's election commitment.

The bill is, as has been mentioned, in the other place and, not wanting to make reflections on what we expect the other place to do, certainly there is a possibility that it will be here in the next sitting week. It is really unusual that such a significant proposition would have no policy advice provided by government. That is not to say whether or not the merits of the bill, the merits of the proposal, are good or bad. It is a duty of government to be fully informed of a decision before they take it.

The members of the Public Service identified that the policy work would have been done by the universities to inform their business cases that were going to the university councils. When asked if those business cases had been provided to the department, it became clear that aspects of the business cases had been provided. The department was given information that it requested, but it did not request the full business cases to be provided. No-one in government, as far as we can tell, has read all the documents that the university councils have read.

The university councils considered business cases that were relevant to their institutions. A lot of that material was shared material and some of it was specific to their institutions because, of course, if the university merger did not go ahead then those universities would want to protect their own information and interests going forward.

At this point I will take us back briefly to 2018. When I was the Minister for Education in 2018, I had the opportunity to bear witness to an earlier discussion of this. It was reflected on by a couple of witnesses to the committee what happened in 2018 and at least one of them put on the record some statements that I knew to be, at the very least, wild exaggerations of what I remember to be the case. I would also draw to the chamber's attention that the second reading speech given by the Attorney-General in the other place in relation to the bill that comes out of this document suggests that the former government's lack of interest in supporting the university was the problem, and that this government being interested in providing financial resources to the university was the difference that was going to make it work.

What happened in 2018 was the two universities organically coming together; the vice-chancellors and the chancellors discussing the proposal and coming to government. The government at that stage was absolutely, as we are now—with our statements from the Premier and from myself as Minister for Education to the institutions—more than happy to facilitate a merger if that was something the institutions wanted to do and if it was something that was going to be in the state's interest. That remains our position today, and I will put a bit more meat on the bones in the coming minutes of where that lands us.

But in 2018 the stumbling block was not the government's willingness or unwillingness to entertain the idea. We took every meeting that we were invited to. We were very clear that if resources from the government were needed at some level then we would entertain such considerations; we just needed to be provided with the ask. The universities never made it to that point. The councils of the universities determined not to proceed on a basis, as best I can tell because I was not in the council meetings, that they were not able to agree on certain factors. It has been suggested the name was still a stumbling block, so when the university vice-chancellors as they are now came up and agreed in terms of a transition process and a name, that is a different outcome from what happened four years ago.

The universities were also in an extremely different financial position four years ago. In 2018 and 2019, the level of government investment required to underpin the proposal would have probably been less than is required now, because they had not been through COVID. Indeed, a substantial amount of the ask from universities in relation to this matter is to underpin the councils' confidence that they are not going to reach any sort of liquidity flaw in what they might do as the merger proceeds. The universities had more money prior to the pandemic. The universities had to apply resources during the pandemic to keep staff, to keep students going, to maintain the level of service and to deal with the challenges everyone had during the pandemic.

The point I make is the circumstances were different and the reason that it did not proceed in 2018 was actually in no way due to interest or lack of interest or support or lack of support from the government. It was a decision the universities took and we do accept that the universities on this occasion have come to the decision differently. One of the vice-chancellors is new, two of the chancellors are new and, indeed, there is therefore a different set of circumstances that we are dealing with. There is a simpatico clearly between the two organisations at a leadership level and we accept, as is clear, that the universities do see it being in their interest. That is the first stage cleared. The second stage is whether it is in the state's interest.

My critique of the government is highlighted in the third recommendation in the minority report. We believe:

- (3) Any public sector initiative being considered by Cabinet should include a justification statement setting out the implications of the initiative...

The justification statement should—

- (a) apply evaluation principles that are appropriate for the size and nature of the public sector initiative being evaluated; and
- (b) having regard to the estimated cost, magnitude and sensitivity, include sufficient scope and details to enable the approver to make a decision on an informed basis.

That is the law at the moment. Treasurer's Instructions 17 is empowered, under section 41 of the Public Finance and Audit Act, to require that of government. What we therefore request is that all ministers in this government, and future governments, give consideration as to how they are fulfilling their responsibilities under the law, under Treasurer's Instructions 17.

Simply saying something was an election commitment does not make it so and it does not obviate your responsibilities to fulfil your obligations under the law. Ministers need to be very mindful that they are talking about a bill that will not only facilitate the provision of several hundreds of millions of dollars over the period of time of public moneys, but also that will have an impact on our state that is quite significant beyond the financial impact, beyond international students, and I want to focus on this for a moment. We are talking about a social impact on South Australia that cannot necessarily be measured in whether 5,000 or 7,000 international students might bring in an extra \$100 million to the institution, might bring in an extra \$100 million in research funding, might bring in extra funding.

We are talking about teaching our graduates, our professionals—our teachers, our doctors, our lawyers, our engineers, our scientists, our accountants, our economists, our policy officers, our social workers. These are the people who require a degree to participate in our workforce, our businesses, our public sector institutions that require degree-educated and qualified people, our researchers themselves, our school principals and our public servants. The quality of their education is really important. The experience they have at university is very important, and I think in a lot of the public discussion it was just assumed that ranking had a relevance to the quality of education. The truth is, it seems unfortunate, the rankings do not have much of a correlation with that.

We have schools of law and education at both universities at the moment. They do things differently and one of the challenges is going to be getting that right. The consequence of getting it wrong is not just financial risk, although we will get to that shortly. The consequence of getting it wrong is that with the universities that are turning out two-thirds to three-quarters of our teachers, our doctors, our lawyers, our accountants and so forth they will be giving them less of an experience than they have at the moment.

Any merger proposition should only be supported or considered, in my view, on the basis that their experience will be at least as good as it is at the moment, because it is a good experience at the moment. The ratings under the various registers of the quality of teaching and learning suggest that our students are having a good experience at the moment. It is a risk to bring those schools together, especially when they are in many cases using different pedagogies or different focus areas to deliver their course materials.

There is a range of risks to this proposal going forward in the way that we would like it to. The opportunities are understood and they are clear. We set out in our minority report that an alternative to the first recommendation should have been a finding that Hon. Jing Lee and I agreed with, and I quote:

- (1) On the balance of the evidence considered by the Committee, the economic and social interests of the State of South Australia might be advanced by the proposed amalgamation, but Members should note that these opportunities carry with them a number of considerable risks that need to be mitigated.

We said:

The proposal is not objectively good or bad. It is a subjective call, with opportunities and risks inherent in either approach. Members might also be persuaded that there are also risks in maintaining the status quo that haven't previously been fully articulated.

I thought the member for Adelaide spoke pretty well about these just a moment ago. The report continues:

The potential benefits of the proposal certainly merit the Parliament's serious consideration, but to dismiss the concerns and risks, such as those raised by a range of eminent individuals and interested stakeholders throughout this Committee inquiry, without taking further steps in mitigation, would be foolhardy and not in the state's interests.

We believe that while informed members acting in good faith could reasonably conclude that the risks inherent in the proposal are worth taking, or not, we would suggest that the measures presented in Recommendations 2-7 in the [majority] report are essential if the proposal were to proceed—

Noting that we also, in the minority report, recommended further measures to strengthen those recommendations. We feel those measures should have been considered as part of a full cabinet process prior to the announcement of the proposal, with submissions including details of all these issues.

We know that cabinet considered this proposal and considered the spending appropriation, it considered the bill, but many matters in the report—in the majority report and the minority report alike—do not seem to have been the subject of rigorous policy analysis or advice from the department prior to cabinet making its decision.

Two weeks ago the government held a press conference with the Hon. Sarah Game and the Hon. Connie Bonaros, setting out that those two members were going to support the bill and that there were two amendments to the proposal that were announced at that press conference. At the press conference the government confirmed it was going to add an extra \$20 million to the scholarship fund, which would be particularly focused on supporting regional students, and was going to provide a new scholarship fund worth \$40 million for a Flinders University equity fund.

Those things are welcome, but they do not address some of the key issues we have to grapple with. To be clear, we feel there are four main areas of concern that this parliament can consider: the first are the risks inherent in the proposal (and I will talk at some greater length about them); the second being the impact on Flinders University; the third being the opportunity, or lack of, for our regions; and the fourth being in relation to the Magill campus.

Risk I will deal with at some time, but at this point I want to commend the vice-chancellors from Adelaide University and the University of South Australia, who have been good enough to provide a letter to the opposition in response to our minority report and in response to the suggestions, because while the equity fund for Flinders is welcomed, while the \$20 million increase to the equity fund for Adelaide for rural students is welcomed—we certainly do not have a problem with providing more scholarships—they do not address a couple of key things.

We believe they do not address the need for there to be research equity between Flinders and the new institution, and they do not address the strong view that the Hon. Jing Lee and I presented that we need to have proactive support for those students who want to study in regional South Australia, not just for students who want to come from regional South Australia to the city. We want to see more opportunities for people to study in regional South Australia, more opportunities for regional communities to benefit from regional students being able to stay in their towns, whether they do nursing, teaching, medical training, or whatever the course might be.

While those matters were not addressed by the government and are not addressed in the bill, the Liberal Party will make a commitment to address those matters further should we—when we—win government in March 2026. I will spend some time talking about that in a moment.

In relation to Magill, I commend members of the committee for acknowledging the need to support the childcare centre at Magill. The recommendation in the majority report was supported, I do not think anyone would mind me saying, by all members; it was very welcome. However, there are significant assets for the community, for biodiversity, for heritage and for active and passive recreation, particularly on the western side of St Bernards Road, that need to be further addressed. The Liberal government, in the future, will ensure that community needs are first and foremost there.

When it comes to the risk of the proposal overall, I want to commend the university vice-chancellors for their response to the minority report. The vice-chancellors wrote to us and said:

Firstly, we should acknowledge the careful and constructive way in which both you and the wider community have engaged with the university as part of the parliamentary process.

They went on to write:

The minority report's recommendations propose a number of matters for consideration. Some are directed towards the government, others relate to how the universities could best manage the transition period and post merger activities of Adelaide University. We wish to respond in broad terms to those recommendations.

I will get to the bits where they talk about risks, and they do identify measures they are now taking, that had not been announced prior to the release of the report, that will help mitigate those risks. In the context of the fact that the government has secured the numbers in the Legislative Council, we certainly acknowledge that this is going to go ahead and we need to deal with the risks.

The vice-chancellors also talked about regional delivery. In acknowledging the calls in the minority report for more work to be done in regional South Australia, the vice-chancellors highlight, and I will quote from their letter again:

The recently released interim report of the Australian Universities Accord has listed as a priority the establishment of 'Regional University Centres' and 'suburb University Centres' throughout Australia. The Universities welcome this initiative and will be engaging with the Commonwealth to ensure that South Australia receives the appropriate level of support. It also believes that its curriculum and access ambitions align with the Accord's priorities. We would very much welcome State-based initiatives of this type to underpin greater access to our offerings around South Australia.

The Universities, and a future Adelaide University, will subject to sufficient demand and support actively engage with any such state policy initiatives designed to establish regional hubs or learning centres. As the founding legislation for the new Adelaide University obligates and the existing regional campuses of our two institutions demonstrate, the new University intends to serve the state, not just metropolitan Adelaide. As such, Adelaide University would, subject to the appropriate assessment, be extremely well placed to being an anchor tenant in any regional initiative that may be advanced in the future.

I will come back to that letter in a moment, but I want to put on the record my appreciation to the vice-chancellors for engaging with the opposition in such a constructive way. The witnesses that were provided to the committee included dozens of people arguing for and against the proposal, and indeed many who provided expert dispassionate advice about the merits, or otherwise, of the proposal. The vice-chancellors appeared twice, and indeed the other senior leaders appeared a third time, in camera, to provide some of the further foundation details.

For the vice-chancellors to see the university committee report and the minority report and take seriously its recommendations and findings, and that they would then engage with the opposition in a constructive and positive way, even after the government had secured the numbers to pass their bill, I think speaks very highly of their credibility and their desire to see positive outcomes come from this process. I thank the vice-chancellors for doing that work and for providing further recognition of the concerns raised by the opposition in our minority report and in public. It provides some level of comfort to us that they were being addressed, and I will talk about some of those risk mitigation strategies.

I imagine that a number of members of the house would be eager to learn that the opposition will be supporting the bill to establish the new university. We do this in the context that this proposal is too big to fail. The government has secured an agreement from the Hon. Connie Bonaros and the Hon. Sarah Game that they will support. We can count the numbers in the Legislative Council. This bill will pass in the Legislative Council this week, irrespective of what the Liberal Party does.

In that circumstance, in the beginning of 2026 we will have a new university in South Australia. It will be responsible for educating two-thirds of our degree-qualified graduates: our accountants, our doctors, our teachers, our nurses, our lawyers and a range of others, as we have said. It will also be responsible for 7,000 to 8,000 staff for 60,000 to 70,000 students. It is one of those propositions that, now it is going to happen, they call too big to fail. I think that speaks to why more risk mitigation work was needed to be done by the government, but it was clear two weeks ago that, once they had secured the votes that they needed, it was going ahead. They were very happy with themselves.

The opposition looks at this from the perspective of the state's interests. There was a pathway available to the opposition to oppose this bill for political expediency, because there will be

bumps along the road in the next couple of years, make no mistake. One of the biggest risks to the proposition is if there are researchers who are operating at a high level at Adelaide University who leave the institution in the next couple of years, not being happy with the way the culture is working out, not being happy with the way the transition is working out. That will have an impact on rankings.

I think everybody accepts that there is going to be a dip in the rankings for the new university, compared with the University of Adelaide. The vice-chancellors' proposition is that it will return within a couple of years. Indeed, I think the documents they put out expect it, certainly, within five years. But it has been put to us by other witnesses that it could take 10 years or longer to see that return and if the worst prognostications came to be true—if there was a 10-year return or worse on restoring the ranking—then the positive opportunities in this proposal will not be borne out.

There is an issue of culture and confidence that has direct implications for our future as a state, because if it did take longer than five years to bear out then you would not see the uptick in international students, you would not see the uptick in revenue and without that uptick in revenue you would not be able to invest in the sort of research that will see the continued prosperity that the proposal expects.

The opportunities in this proposal are significant for our state; we recognise that. We have recognised it all along, but the risks need to be acknowledged and mitigated, and we do not believe the government did that. One of the risks, therefore, is something where we would, if we took that politically expedient path, be contributing to that risk.

I wonder: what would the Labor Party do if they were in opposition? Some have said, 'Well, they would just oppose it, try and kill the bill in the Legislative Council and if they could not then they would spend the next two years seeking to undermine the proposal and taking political glee every time something went wrong.'

The Liberal Party is not about that, because our interest is in the people of South Australia. We want our kids to be able to experience the best possible education and the best possible opportunities, and that would not be served by taking the politically expedient path. So, instead, we work on something that is more constructive. We will support this bill because it is going to pass, it is too big to fail and it requires everyone to lean in to that effort.

But more than that we are also willing to put on the record today some policy commitments for when the Liberal Party forms government in March 2026. Some of the policy commitments that we can make now will alleviate some of the risks to our state getting the benefit from this proposal.

At great length the Hon. Jing Lee and I talk in our report—and indeed we talked about this in the committee, and the Vice Chancellor of Flinders University, Colin Stirling, talked at great length in the committee—about the risks to South Australia fulfilling its opportunities here if Flinders University does not get the research support.

With Adelaide University being the beneficiary of at least \$4 million a year, most likely more than that, as a result of the \$200 million research fund, that money is designed to secure new researchers doing high-quality research for Adelaide University. Taxpayers are paying for that. In attracting high-quality researchers to any institution, you can convince people to come from another country, you can convince people to come from another state. The easiest way is for somebody to be convinced to come from another side of town and change their commute, because it is easier to change your commute than to change your state or your country.

So there is a risk to our state fulfilling this opportunity if Flinders University is shut out from government funding for research. Flinders University does a range of research in very high-quality areas that are aligned to our state's Strategic Plan. A Speirs Liberal government, if elected in March 2026, will establish a research fund for Flinders University equivalent in its nature to that that has been provided in this proposal for Adelaide University. The detail, in terms of the size of the fund required and the returns that it will bear every year, will be announced between now and the next election, but the scope of work that it will do will be in alignment with our state's strategic priorities.

Flinders University is a world-leading university when it comes to research in defence, science and technology, in matters that are directly related to our AUKUS agreement and our AUKUS

opportunities for our state. This will be an area in which Flinders University's research will benefit directly our state. It will be an area to which this research fund will be applied.

Flinders University is a world-leading institution when it comes to agtech—agricultural technology—food production technology and science, and this is an area where funding from the Speirs Liberal government's Flinders University research fund will be applied in direct benefit for our state's interests.

Flinders University is one of the world's leading universities in relation to a range of health science and research areas. Curing diseases: there is extraordinary work being done at Flinders University. Particularly in this area, which is also a focus for the new institution, we would want to ensure that the work Flinders is used to doing is not undermined by the government-funded support for the new institution.

We want them both to thrive. We want them to be the best two universities in Australia when it comes to health science research. So that is also an area where the Speirs Liberal government's proposed Flinders University research fund will provide support to Flinders University.

So, that is the first thing. We will provide a Flinders University research fund in government, and it will ensure that, while there will be a cost to the budget, the nature of the way in which the Adelaide University research fund could well be reflected here is that the capital stays in the hands of the South Australian people. It sits on our balance sheet, and it is a cost that is only in terms of the foregone revenue, which would likely be a modest single-digit number in the millions that is not in our balance sheet going forward. In the context of the state budget, this is imminently affordable but it does reduce the risk of South Australia not realising the opportunity that this proposal presents.

The second area the Speirs Liberal government—if elected in March 2026, should we receive that honour from the South Australian people—will commit to is to further support regional South Australia. Flinders University is a very important university in the Australian context, particularly for the south. Our regions and the support we give our regions are critically important as well. The deal done two weeks ago identified \$20 million, which presumably might have a return of \$1 million a year for our students to receive scholarships, one imagines mostly to come to the city.

When students come to Adelaide, it is important regional students are supported in doing so and we certainly will maintain that extra fund. What is even more exciting is when students are able to access great education in the regions as well. We want to see the existing effort maintained as a minimum. We are talking about campuses at Mount Gambier, Whyalla, Roseworthy, and there are other efforts the universities are making at the moment, and we want to see that net impact realised.

But we also have seen the development in recent years of uni hubs around Australia. There is one at Port Pirie, for example, which a number of members would be very familiar with, where it is not just that there is an offering available to students through the anchor tenant—and the anchor tenant in Port Pirie is not a South Australian university but from the north-east—it also provides that resource within a community for other university students to be able to engage with their curriculum when they are not able to be on campus in Adelaide.

The factor that entered our thinking here is that there are parts of South Australia that are relatively well serviced. Potentially those regional centres do not have a wide variety of choices available to them in terms of what subjects are able to be offered and what courses are able to be offered, but certainly the access to facilities is there.

One of the factors in the universities' curriculum development that is interesting here is the way that they are proposing to rewrite the curriculum in a modular nature—stackable, some people call it—where you can do aspects of different degrees at different times. This would lend itself well to regional delivery where you might have a student doing remote learning, with access enabled by the internet for periods, and then they would have hands-on engagement with lecturers or courses at different times, whether that is coming to the city or a local hub. We would like to see more of that.

A Speirs Liberal government will commit to maintaining existing effort and sometimes that will mean applying state resources. But, more than that, we will see at least one new uni hub in regional South Australia in areas that are not currently serviced by our existing effort. This will require new investment and state government resources, which would have been a good way for the

government to go in the last couple of weeks when they were talking about their scholarship fund, but instead they focused only on things that will help those students who are in a position to come to Adelaide.

We are much more interested in seeing communities supported as well as that, because if you want somebody to be teaching in a regional area, as we always do—and as we know, there are skills shortages in teaching, early childhood, nursing, medical across the board—one of the best ways to get yourself somebody who is eager to work in regional South Australia is to have somebody who has grown up in regional South Australia who sees it as their community. The more times they are able to access and engage with their education in a regional area, the higher likelihood it is that they will seek to stay in that regional area upon graduation.

We want to make it as easy as possible, and that is why we think this is a tremendously important area that the government has neglected to deal with in this report. This is one of the reasons why I am so grateful to the vice-chancellors for engaging with the opposition because the vice-chancellors keenly and clearly understood the issue that the Hon. Jing Lee and I raised in our minority report here that was not addressed by the government and the relevant crossbenchers in their deal a couple of weeks ago.

The opportunity to nail down extra support and resources for students who want to study in regional South Australia, not just students from regional South Australia, is something that the Liberal Party is committed now to doing.

The third commitment that the Liberal Party will give should we win the next election is in relation to the community surrounding the land at Magill. The committee heard strong evidence from the Hon. Vincent Tarzia, the member for Hartley, in relation to his views and his community's reaction to the proposal and what their fears might be about what might happen with the land in that area.

The committee heard evidence from the Campbelltown council from a former Labor minister, the Hon. Chris Schacht, who is a local resident. He talked about the important role that that creek line plays through the campus in his daily recreation and that of hundreds and hundreds of other residents.

There are two patches of land in question when it comes to Magill. One is on the eastern side of the road, which is in my electorate of Morialta and which is scheduled under this proposal to be sold and master-planned by Renewal SA sooner rather than later. It may well be that this has been disposed of before the next election.

In doing so, I very strongly encourage the government to look at submissions from the Campbelltown council and others in relation to that land; namely, that maintaining sufficient open space so that the community still has access to open space in that area, which has been very heavily developed, and maintaining access to community recreation facilities, such as the Campbelltown council proposed, would be the best case scenario for that land. The government has a decision to make soon on that, and I urge them to make the right decision and to support the community.

In relation to the western half of the land, the proposal in front of the parliament put forward by the government is that UniSA can have five years on its lease with an option for five more, and so in five or 10 years that land will then be developed in one way or another. It is the very clear understanding of the Liberal Party—and as very articulately represented by the Hon. Vincent Tarzia, the member for Hartley, in whose electorate that land resides—that there are community assets in that area that are tremendously important.

The Magill Campus Community Children's Centre is a really important community long day-care service that dozens and dozens of families currently use. They have a waiting list and they want certainty about that site going forward. The committee has recommended that the government engage with them as soon as possible. My understanding is that the government will. I commend the government for that and urge them to do so.

That has to be protected for child care, long day care, early education and indeed child development. They do an excellent job there, and certainly given the government's stated aims for early childhood development it would be odd, frankly, if they did not renew that lease and support that childcare centre's continued opportunity to thrive.

There are also active and passive recreation facilities there. There is an oval that is used every weekend. There is a heritage building in Murray House that is stunning. Anyone driving down St Bernards Road will know the building I am talking about. Also, there is a creek line which has very high-level biodiversity and environmental value. These need protecting.

Renewal SA in their evidence to the committee did suggest that they saw more value potentially to be realised. It may have been Renewal SA or it may have been Treasury, but they are interested in selling more housing on the east side of the road than the west.

However, we make it very abundantly clear that, when it comes particularly to that land that the government would not have sold by the time of the next election, a Speirs Liberal government will be very focused on making sure that community needs are met. That means reflecting the opportunity for heritage value of Murray House, for the active and passive recreation opportunities, including organised sports that use those facilities, the childcare centre, that the tree line and the creek line be protected in the consideration of any development there, and community must be front and the centre in those expectations.

With that in mind, those are the three commitments the Liberal Party offers today on 31 October 2023 for what we will deliver in 2026, and it is important to recognise these things. One of the reasons the vice-chancellors of Adelaide University and the University of South Australia were eager for the perpetual funds to have a floor on how much money they will generate for the first eight years for their research and equity, as is in the legislation, is because they need to be able to plan during this risky transition period.

They need to be able to confirm what financial commitments they can make and do so on a basis not just of using their existing resources and the combined sum of their existing budgets but also having the security that, if there is a revenue dip in the next couple of years as a result of the required expenditure in transition and there are potential issues with retaining numbers of international students during the riskiest first couple of years, they have that surety that they are going to have that income coming in.

So we have a bit of time to work out the timing of our commitments. We feel that the problem with the perpetual funds being created for Adelaide University and not Flinders is not the short-term provision of finance to assist with the merger; the government could have just given a grant to facilitate a merger. The problem is providing perpetual funds that will go on forever only in one institution's benefit, and that is why, in the long term, Flinders has to be taken into consideration when it comes to this.

When it comes to the engagement of the vice-chancellors, I spoke a little bit about this earlier, but I am going to read the letter that they sent to the opposition because I think it is important. They have said that they are happy for this to become a public document. It was sent outlining their stated positions, articulating some new information and responding to some of the issues raised in the minority report. It is not a secret document. It is a document I received yesterday and am releasing publicly today. The letter is marked with the University of Adelaide's and the University of South Australia's crests and is to John Gardner, Deputy Leader of the Opposition—that is me:

30 October 2023

Dear Mr Gardner,

We are writing to provide a response to the Minority Report by yourself and the Hon. Jing Lee MLC as part of the Joint Committee on the Establishment of Adelaide University.

Firstly, we wish to acknowledge the careful and constructive way in which both you and the wider committee have engaged with the Universities as part of this parliamentary process.

We believe that the ambition of the new University is clear. As captured in our first collective vision statement:

'Australia's new for-purpose university is a leading contemporary comprehensive university of global standing. We are dedicated to ensuring the prosperity, wellbeing and cohesion of society by addressing educational inequality through our actions and through the success and impact of our students, staff and alumni. Partnered with the communities we serve, we conduct outstanding future-making research of scale and focus.'

They go on:

The Minority Report's recommendations propose a number of matters for consideration. Some are directed towards the Government; others relate to how the Universities could best manage the transition period and post-merger activities of Adelaide University. We wish to respond, in broad terms, to those recommendations regarding to risk and regional delivery.

#### Risk and its mitigation

The Universities, in their various submissions and evidence before the Joint Committee, outlined the detailed attention that has been given to matters of risk and their mitigation. We acknowledge the risks are tangible, though manageable and in our view outweigh the longer-term risk of not pursuing this opportunity.

The Universities have put in place very detailed plans and mitigations relating to all aspects of the merger, not all of which is in the public domain for competition purposes. However, there is some additional information we would like to provide you as part of our response to the Minority Report.

Following a rigorous tender and procurement process, with independent probity, the Universities have jointly appointed Deloitte as our Integration Management Partner. Deloitte has a proven track record of delivering successful integration projects of substantial complexity. They will support critical subject areas such as: integration and transformation oversight, project management and quality assurance, business process design, systems integration, change management and the communication frameworks. This partnership is one of the key measures that has been taken to de-risk this merger.

I think this next paragraph is very important:

Staff retention and attraction during any complex change of this scale is a risk. It is one that the Universities identified early as part of its transition planning. Processes and procedures have been put in place to retain/minimise the loss of key staff with an ambition to attract and retain more talent in the medium to long term. While the pre-legislative period does cause a level of uncertainty, we cannot yet identify any discernible trend to suggest that staff are departing the universities due to the merger. Indeed, the Universities can report the appointment of several senior and highly credentialed academics since the announcement of the merger, including from Oxford University, Durham University, St Andrews University, University of Southern Denmark and from leading Australian Universities.

The new Adelaide University is committed to enhancing the student experience and do not believe that the lived experience in a merged university will be in any way diminished. The enhancement of the student experience has been identified as a key institutional strategic goal, is a key transition path and is an area in which planning has already commenced. Indeed, it is proposed that Adelaide University will appoint a Deputy Vice Chancellor whose primary portfolio attention will be upon student experience and success.

The Universities welcomed the focus the Joint Committee placed on the risks involved in this merger. The Universities have always anticipated the risks and have spent considerable time identifying and putting in place management plans to address them.

Before I go on to the rest of their letter, I identify particularly the evidence that is in relation to staff retention. As I may have said before, one of the biggest cultural risks in any transition process, in any merger process of any institution, is that your key staff are not enjoying the experience, are not enjoying the cultural change, and depart.

We are talking about people who are able to get jobs anywhere in the world. While Adelaide, South Australia, is, sir, I know that you will agree, as we all do, the best place in the world to live—we have that going for us—there is a risk that they could get offered more money elsewhere at a culture they might feel more inclined to stay with. To see the benefits of this opportunity realised, if the business case, if the publicly released figures in terms of opportunity for international students and for money are to be realised, then staff retention is number one, two and three in terms of being able to realise them.

The second issue that I talked about earlier was student experience being an important focus, that, in an initiative by a university aimed at the financial benefits of international students rankings and research, the student experience not be lost as well. That the university is being proactive in seeking now and advertising, I think in the last week, to recruit a new deputy vice-chancellor of student experience and success highlights I think the willingness of the vice-chancellors to engage with a number of the issues that were raised during the university committee's considerations and the minority report in particular. I commend them for doing so and I thank them for releasing the details of staff who have been recruited.

In our minority report, we focused some time talking about how there is limited data to establish whether or not there is confidence or opposition amongst the majority of staff to the process. The NTEU, the academics' union, did a survey. I think they had some 1,400 responses from the three universities, which combined have in the order of about 10,000 staff. The vice-chancellors put

out information in March that welcomed people to provide questions or other responses. It was not a survey as such, but they had hundreds of responses too. But, again, that was open to everyone in the community and a relatively low percentage of people expressed an opinion.

The Liberal Party of South Australia put out research into the field. We put out a website inviting members of the community, interested people, people from universities to respond to the question of what they would support and provide their comments. We had about 1,700 responses and it was about 40 per cent in favour, 40 per cent against, and 20 per cent in the middle. This is exactly the sort of survey from which—I am sure you would understand, sir, as a former state secretary of the Labor Party—if you are looking to gauge community feeling, it is fair to say feelings were mixed in the community.

I think it is fair to say that it is widely acknowledged that there are some people and staff who are deadset against the proposal and there are some who are very keen on the proposal. I suspect that, of those who responded to most of the surveys, more staff responded negatively than positively. That highlights the risk. But there is a significant majority of staff who did not respond to any of the surveys. We highlight in the minority report that there is therefore a subjective question as to the level of risk in terms of staff retention or staff recruitment with the cultural question over whether people are going to enjoy this merger process or not.

It is true that people have known this has likely been coming for a while. The universities and the government made an announcement late last year in November or December, talking about the work that was going to be undertaken. Since March-April, they have had an idea of what the university was going to brand itself as, and since the heads of agreement in July, they have had an understanding of what was happening there.

While there has always been the proposition the parliament could reject the merger, the universities and I think particularly the government have spruiked hard, including through paid advertising, what the university would look like. In that context, it is fair to look at not just what might happen but what has happened in the last year. The data provided by the university vice-chancellors is, therefore, helpful in helping us form that view. It is new information. I know a couple of the researchers and lecturers in question in this list and recognise the significant role that they will play in the university going forward.

The vice-chancellors went on, in writing about regional delivery, and I quote again:

*Regional Delivery*

As identified in the Minority Report the viability of many offerings is dependent on scale. You correctly noted—

They indicate they were talking about me and the Hon. Jing Lee, and they quote from our report:

One area that merits serious consideration is that of courses with low student numbers. The Committee heard evidence that a risk inherent in the status quo is for such courses. As they require subsidy from other parts of the Universities' budgets, the future of these courses might be vulnerable in times of financial pressure. It was suggested that the proposed scale of the new institution would give such courses a much stronger level of protection.

They go on:

This conclusion is directly relevant to the regional campus and hubs. Both universities have invested in regional education research in Mount Gambier, Whyalla, Roseworthy and the Waite. In addition, there are focused activities in Port Lincoln, Ceduna, Elizabeth and the APY Lands. A university of scale provides the means by which the academic offerings in the regions become more sustainable and can possibly be further expanded.

In designing and implementing a new curriculum for the new University, a fundamental principle is that the student ambition and experience will be paramount. The new curriculum will be contemporary, 'modular, adaptable, and stackable' with digital underpinnings. The ability to engage with students through face-to-face, hybrid-mode or online education will provide important means of access for students in the regions. We believe that this approach to curriculum design and delivery will allow more regional students to attend Adelaide University without necessarily relocating to Adelaide.

The recently released interim report of the *Australian Universities Accord* has listed as a priority the establishment of 'Regional University Centres' and 'Suburb University Centres' throughout Australia. The Universities welcome this initiative and will be engaging with the Commonwealth to ensure that South Australia receives the appropriate level of support. It also believes that its curriculum and access ambitions align with the Accord's priorities. We would very much welcome State-based initiatives of this type to underpin greater access to our offerings across South Australia.

The Universities, and a future Adelaide University, will subject to sufficient demand and support actively engage with any such state policy initiatives designed to establish regional hubs or learning centres. As the founding legislation for the new Adelaide University obligates and the existing regional campuses of our two institutions demonstrate, the new University intends to serve the state, not just metropolitan Adelaide. As such, Adelaide University would, subject to the appropriate assessment, be extremely well placed to being an anchor tenant in any regional initiative that may be advanced in the future.

We again thank you for the opportunity to respond to aspects of the Minority Report. We are encouraged by the careful consideration that has been given to the establishment of the new Adelaide University.

Yours sincerely

Professor Peter Høj AC

Vice-Chancellor and President

The University of Adelaide

Professor David Lloyd

Vice Chancellor and President

University of South Australia

The vice-chancellors, in providing that document, have been very helpful to the opposition. It is not the only reason that we have come to the view of supporting the bill. I say, again, we were instructed by the numbers and by the impact that our taking a politically expedient route would have potentially had on community confidence in the new university.

If this merger is going to take place, it is something our state's prosperity, our future students' wellbeing and our staff's wellbeing demand that it be done well. It demands that it be done with a level of as much confidence as possible. To this end, we will hold the government to account and we will call out issues with the new university when they exist. Support for this bill does not give a blank cheque, by any means, for any failures that happen in the period ahead.

I think one of the biggest risks that we are left with is the way in which this whole process has been botched, in my view, from the start. Confidence from staff and students and the community at large is important going forward. If a lack of confidence in the culture of the transition and the culture of the new university leads to people leaving, then it will highlight, I think, the failure of the government to bring people with them from the start.

The election promise for a university commission assumed that there was going to be a level of public engagement in what the outcome would be. What we have instead is a pre-determined outcome by the government and, therefore, a process that did not involve further analysis of risk or benefit before the application of public funds being promised.

I think you have to look at the staff and the question of bringing staff along. I think that either the first or second witness to the Joint Committee on the Establishment of Adelaide University was the union, which represents a good number, a significant proportion, of the staff of the universities. They felt completely alienated from the process—a process required between the government and the university to be done behind close doors.

We heard from witnesses within government, who had been engaging in this process for months prior to the heads of agreement being signed in around the middle of the year, that staff who are expected to work in these facilities were operating in a vacuum of information, and all the information released in the second half of last year and the first half of this year was really notable in terms of its being full of buzzwords and catchphrases and lacking any granular detail, lacking engagement effectively with the staff.

We understand the rigorous secrecy provisions around a cabinet process. Universities had to put up with that as well as their own provisions around protecting their own data. It is an unfortunate state of affairs that, over the last 12 months, the staff and student communities have not been brought along on the journey in the way they could have been. We will do our best in the months and years ahead to support the process, as an opposition should, through holding the government to account on issues that come about.

It is important to note that the process could have been managed so much better by the government and, even if they were going to take the proposal from universities and not pursue the commission, I think there were government processes that should have been held internally that provided a greater level of rigorous scrutiny on behalf of taxpayers and an approach to the release of information about the proposal that brought much more information to public light earlier, that enabled more staff concerns in particular to be addressed through proactive engagement earlier.

Our support for the bill does not absolve the government of responsibility for any problems that we might see along the way, but we will support the universities in seeking to realise the potential of this ambition, because the alternative, if this fails, if this goes badly, could at the very least be very costly for the state and at the very worst be very bad for the state in a long-term way.

It is worth touching on this question of risk: risk to people living in the suburbs, whether that is near Magill or Flinders University, risk to the research projects that Flinders is able to offer and the retention of its staff and risks to lacking the full realisation of opportunities for the regions. Suburbs, regions and research: the commitments we have made for a new Liberal government in 2026 will alleviate a number of those challenges.

In terms of risks to the success of the project, I think it is worth turning some attention to those risks. The minority report highlights that evidence was provided by a number of serious stakeholders to the inquiry whose evidence was, I think, not given sufficient weight by the majority report. In our minority report we highlighted a couple of those, and I particularly draw members' attention to the appearances of the NTEU, the National Tertiary Education Union, and Professor Hanmer on 8 August, and they also provided significant submissions to the review, which are publicly available.

Professor Hanmer noted that the information, the submission, provided by Adelaide University and UniSA came at the end of calls for public submissions. Professor Hanmer did a significant service to the state by then providing subsequent reflections on their submissions as well, which was taken into evidence later. I encourage people to look at that.

Professor Bebbington appeared on 10 August 2023. Warren Bebbington was Vice-Chancellor of Adelaide University for an extended period of time, and is very familiar with the organisation and with higher education policy. His testimony was dismissed by the government I think pretty blithely and that is disappointing. I think they would have done well to listen to some of the concerns he has raised, but nevertheless, members wishing to familiarise themselves with the risks that he talked about, his evidence was on 10 August this year and the *Hansard* is available.

Professor Derek Abbott appeared on 6 September. I am probably going to start reflecting on some of the risks that he raised, but people can, again, read through the *Hansard* to read that engagement. Professor Thomas, a distinguished academic with an extraordinary career in scientific fields making an extraordinary contribution towards South Australia's success, gave evidence on 21 September.

It should be noted that at least a couple of these witnesses are still serving at Adelaide University at a very high level and are no doubt contributing to the positive rankings that Adelaide University has through the quality of their research work. Indeed, they are the subject of public acclaim in many cases for some of the things that they have achieved through their work.

Now that is not to say that I agree with all the risks and concerns that they have raised. Some of the confidence I have that this can succeed—not necessarily that it will succeed but can succeed—is as a result of some of the questions that we were able to ask in the in camera session. The committee considered evidence from the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia in camera on one date and we received submissions from them. It related to material that was commercially sensitive, that was commercial-in-confidence in some ways, that underlined the business case and in particular the risk register and mitigation impacts.

The universities and the government have not wanted to release the business case—the business case, of course, that we have heard the Premier and the Deputy Premier did not read—because they were concerned about the opportunities that it might give their competitor universities. As an example, for example if we are looking to pitch to an international student market then we do

not want the University of Sydney or Monash University to know our plans for that so therefore there was a risk to the state. We accept that.

The universities also identified that they did not necessarily want the line items of some of the budget spends to be particularised because that would leave the new institution in a weakened situation when trying to compete with suppliers. For example, one of the key expenses in a merger will be the assimilation of IT systems enabling the university staff to operate on a standard IT system and have protection from cyber attack with confidence and have a positive IT system that would engage the student learner experience as well as research.

I do not think that anyone here will be surprised that the experience of government and large institutions is that these are extraordinarily expensive things. It is not identified in a line item publicly because the university is understandably not wanting to put themselves at a disadvantage when negotiating with potential suppliers, but nevertheless that is something that does feed into the confidence or otherwise that people might have in whether risk mitigations are in place. I think critically the university is concerned not to give away risk mitigation proposals.

From the Liberal Party, our view is that not enough information has been provided publicly and the apparent secrecy over so much of it does lead people to have questions about whether all these things have necessarily been thought through.

Through the course of the inquiry, and particularly the in camera session, I became more confident that many of the things I would have raised had been thought through, are in the risk register and indeed have risk mitigation strategies. Whether or not I am fully satisfied they will definitely work or not, it is certainly a body of work that is significant and clearly of quality. But we cannot tell people what it is. That is one of the inherent problems with the process.

The Greens, the Liberal Party and the Hon. Frank Pangallo have for some time been calling for more information to be released. In the Liberal Party, I accept certainly that you cannot release everything, that there would need to be certain redactions to protect the state's interest in the sorts of areas I have just described. But I think this process could have been done better, with more information released.

That said, as I go through Professor Abbott's list of specific risks he brought to the attention of the committee, some of them I can reflect on, some of them I agree with, and some of them I do not share, and sometimes the reason for that is because I am aware of information the universities have given to the committee that is, for whatever reason, with the support of the government in particular, not able to be shared in a public domain. So be it. I am quoting from Professor Abbott. Under Risk 1, Professor Abbott points out that:

...the Adelaide merger study was done without transparency. Staff were not brought along. The NTEU survey showed 25 per cent in favour of the merger...on the ground those 25 per cent are largely lukewarm. One sees no enthusiasm. The elephant in the room is this: how can one possibly execute a merger as large and as complex as this if staff have not been engaged to a level where they have buy-in and ownership of the process?

I agree that that is a risk. It is a subjective question in my mind as to how many of the staff would be on Professor Abbott's side of the question and how many of the staff would be on the government's side of the question, and I suspect the fact is that there is a large group in the middle who actually just want to get on and do their jobs. Certainly, we go into this in the hope that staff will be brought along much more successfully now that it is a done deal.

Under Risk 2, Professor Abbott says:

University of Adelaide and UniSA are not well matched. They are different types of universities that serve the state differently, as I have described. To merge the two into a one-size-fits-all uni and yet operate at a Go8 level will attract fewer students into the state, as compared with operating them separately.

Then he talks about a two-tier system. I am not sure that I fully agree with this. There is evidence in the committee's report, for example, that suggests that the entrance level for those students using an ATAR to enter the University of Adelaide and UniSA is actually much more similar than I think is believed to be the case.

I think many domestic students will choose a university based on the campus fit that feels most right for them. Geographical choices fit into it. Vibe and culture even inform the student

experience, and there is a question mark over how those things will play out in the future with just one university. Certainly, for someone living adjacent to the Magill campus being able to walk to uni is no longer an opportunity for them to consider.

I think that some of the assumptions that many people might have about the quality of preparation for students going to the two universities is not necessarily accurate any longer. I reflect on contributions made by members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party to discussions. The concern of graduates of the University of South Australia was not that the new university would capture all of the quality and the prestige of Adelaide University. Their concern was that the positive student experience they had and the graduate satisfaction they had at UniSA would not be replicated. The truth is that is a risk too.

What we want to see, and what we will need to see if we are to see the opportunities fully realised, is the best of both universities brought along, and that will require work. I do not necessarily accept the risk described here.

Under Risk 3, Professor Abbott says:

...an exodus is inevitable. In a merger as large and as complex as this, resources and time get diverted from core business activities. The top 200 staff who are research intensive are those that can be employed in any university in the world with ease. As soon as merger activities slow down their research progress they will be a flight risk.

Certainly, that goes to some of the points I have already been making. If the worst-case scenario comes to be the case and a lot of those 200 staff leave, that will be a big problem for the university. That is a specific issue which was raised with the vice-chancellors and which they have addressed, and certainly I take some comfort from the vice-chancellors' response to this.

We certainly do not want to see those staff leave. I guess the call is to everybody: if you know a university researcher operating at a top level, encourage them to stay, because our state will need them. The risk needs to be understood there. I am not sure the committee report fully accepted it. I am grateful that the vice-chancellors recognise that risk and have duly responded.

Risk 4 identified is that:

...staff layoffs and cost overruns are inevitable. In year 4 of the Manchester merger it became clear that the goals of the merger were off target. The university went £3 million into deficit and laid off 400 staff. Then, in year 5 of the merger, £1 billion was injected to ensure its success. And this was a tiny merger where there were only 6,000 students. By contrast UniSA is over 30,000. And so the capacity for cost overrun is much bigger.

In relation to costs and future investments, I guess the point I would make—and this does touch on some of the material that was received in camera—is that I don't think it is reasonable to talk about the application of funds that are already in the universities' budgets for expenditure in the coming decade as cost overrun when applied in the new university's context. I will give an example. There are two health science buildings on North Terrace that have been invested in by the two universities over the last decade. They spent \$300 million each on these two separate buildings. The point has been made that, if you had two universities working together on one strategic plan, you might have had a better outcome than the two separate \$300 million buildings with one \$500 million building and you would have \$100 million left over.

The two universities that we have at the moment have forward budgets with significant investment expectations in relation to infrastructure, IT and curriculum design and development that are already in their budgets going forward. The merger would effectively see those quantum brought together and enabled to be invested strategically in the state's interests by one institution. The scale of those sums is significant, let's say, and I do not think would fairly be categorised as a cost overrun when they are expended.

Having insight such as we were given in the committee into that expenditure is useful in informing us. It is really unfortunate from my point of view that it is not available to the broader public to understand. I understand why the universities are reluctant to provide it, but I urge the universities and the government to again make available as much of the information as is viable—as is possible—to help build community confidence that they are not going to see cost overruns that might see the university coming back to the state asking for further investment.

In saying the Liberal Party will support the bill, we do so partly in confidence from having understood the business case detail that has not been released publicly that there is unlikely to be that further call on the taxpayer requiring further significant investment and that would be very unfortunate if it was not realised. Professor Abbott says:

Risk 5: the merger is unprecedented. The Premier himself has correctly stated that no merger of this type and size has been done before. But this should cause us immediate concern, surely. Add to that the large difference in ranking between the two universities, their different ethos, different cultures. What is concerning is that no-one knows how to even do a merger like that. Our management has zero experience with that.

Consultants have zero experience with that and so forth. He continues:

The chance of failure will put our state and our universities at risk of reputational damage.

That is a risk. There is no comparable merger.

Risk 6: irreversibility. Once the egg has been scrambled, you can't put it back in its shell. Therefore, if the merger were to go ahead it would need more realistic costing and much larger funding to ensure success.

Irreversibility, I agree with. Nevertheless, we have One Nation and the Hon. Connie Bonaros in the upper house confirming the merger is going ahead and I make my comments in that environment. With realistic costing and much larger funding I think that when you take into account the universities' own forward budgets that is probably less of a risk.

Risk 7: the project is highly undercosted.

I think that is basically addressed by the comments I have just made. He continues:

Risk 8: the merger business case relies on a further 6,000 international students. What if they don't come? The risk is heightened when you consider that the cost of living, housing and rent in Adelaide are sharply rising, while China is undergoing a property market crash right now and its economy is tanking. This change in economic outlook, together with geopolitical tension, means that reliance on extra international students is completely fraught.

To that end, it is a risk. The opportunity provided by the merger assumes that 5,000 to 7,000 international students will come here. That will unlock extra funding that can be applied to research, which will improve rankings, which will bring in extra international students, and so on. The virtuous circle relies on international students coming in and if they do not that is a risk. I will get to a conversation about addressing that question when we have the opportunity to come back. With that, I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

*Sitting suspended from 12:58 to 14:00.*

#### *Bills*

### **ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY BILL**

#### *Message from Governor*

Her Excellency the Governor, by message, recommended to the house the appropriation of such amounts of money as might be required for the purposes mentioned in the bill.

### **APPROPRIATION BILL 2023**

#### *Assent*

Her Excellency the Governor assented to the bill.

### **SUCCESSION BILL**

#### *Assent*

Her Excellency the Governor assented to the bill.

#### *Parliamentary Procedure*

### **ANSWERS TABLED**

**The SPEAKER:** I direct that the written answers to questions be distributed and printed in *Hansard*.

**PAPERS**

The following papers were laid on the table:

By the Speaker—

Auditor-General—Climate Change Risk Management Report 9 of 2023  
[Ordered to be published]

By the Premier (Hon. P.B. Malinauskas)—

Annual Reports 2022-23  
Infrastructure SA  
Motor Sport Board, South Australian  
Premier and the Cabinet, Department of the  
Premier's Delivery Unit  
Productivity Commission, Office of the South Australian

By the Deputy Premier (Hon. S.E. Close)—

Annual Reports 2022-23  
Controlled Substances Act 1984  
Freedom of Information Act 1991, Administration of the  
Legal Services Commission  
Privacy Committee of South Australia  
Public Advocate  
Public Trustee  
State Records Act 1997, Administration of the  
Summary Offences Act 1953—  
Report on access to data held electronically pursuant to Part 16A  
Return of authorisations to enter premises under section 83C  
Suppression Order  
Surveillance Devices Act 2016  
Youth Treatment Order Visitor  
Regulations made under the following Acts—  
Criminal Law Consolidation—General—ILOL Notices

By the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water (Hon. S.E. Close)—

Annual Reports 2022-23  
Co-Management Board—  
Dhilba Guuranda-Innes National Park  
Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park  
Mamungari Conservation Park  
Ngaut Ngaut Conservation Park  
Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park  
Witjira National Park  
Yumbarra Conservation Park  
Dog and Cat Management Board

By the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport (Hon. A. Koutsantonis)—

National Rail Safety Regulator, Office of the—Annual Report 2022-23  
Regulations made under the following Acts—  
Road Traffic—Miscellaneous—Ultra High Powered Vehicles

By the Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Correctional Services (Hon. J.K. Szakacs)—

Annual Reports 2022-23  
Bushfire Coordination Committee, State

## Community Road Safety Fund

By the Minister for Planning (Hon. N.D. Champion)—

Annual Reports 2022-23  
Adelaide Cemeteries Authority  
Architectural Practice Board of SA  
State Planning Commission  
Surveyors Board SA  
West Beach Trust

*Parliamentary Committees***PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

**Mr BROWN (Florey) (14:05):** I bring up the 47<sup>th</sup> report of the committee, entitled Noarlunga Hospital Mental Health Rehabilitation and Inpatient Unit Expansion.

Report received and ordered to be published.

**Mr BROWN:** I bring up the 48<sup>th</sup> report of the committee, entitled Rebuilt Mount Barker Ambulance Station.

Report received and ordered to be published.

**Mr BROWN:** I bring up the 49<sup>th</sup> report of the committee, entitled Rebuilt Victor Harbor Ambulance Station.

Report received and ordered to be published.

*Parliamentary Procedure***VISITORS**

**The SPEAKER:** Before I call questions without notice, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of delegates from the SDA, guests of the member for Adelaide. Welcome to parliament.

*Question Time***DEFENCE NAVAL SHIPBUILDING**

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition) (14:06):** My question is to the Premier. Will 9 Hunter class frigates be built at Osborne? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** On 28 October *The Advertiser* reported that the federal government is currently conducting a surface review of Australia's naval fleet, which will determine the exact scope of the program and whether it will remain at nine ships or be cut back to six or even three.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:07):** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. It is a question that relates to an incredibly important subject both to our national security as a country but also our shipbuilding capacity here in South Australia, an industry which is exceptionally important, particularly given the government's stated objective to increase the level of economic complexity that we have here in South Australia.

As the Leader of the Opposition is well aware, and I have certainly made it clear in this place, the commonwealth committed to the Defence Strategic Review. One of the recommendations that the commonwealth accepted on the back of that Defence Strategic Review was to have a 90-day review into the surface ship fleet that our Navy has, including its plans into the future.

That exercise, as the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, is something that the state government has been, I think, more proactive than any other jurisdiction in the commonwealth in making sure that we have our views known by the federal government. We did that both informally and formally in writing.

The commonwealth is undertaking its review. We now know from some public remarks, I think both through *The Advertiser* but also other media forms, that the commonwealth anticipates that it will announce its response to that review during the course of the summer. I am on the record and am more than happy to repeat here in the parliament that we would like the commonwealth to accelerate, expedite, its response to that 90-day review. But what is clear, I think, to everybody—including the federal government themselves, who are in receipt of the DSR report—is that one thing cannot be compromised in any way, shape or form, and that is the ongoing long-term commitment to surface shipbuild here in the state of South Australia.

That industry requires certainty; that industry requires long-term planning. Any discontinuance in any form, including uncertainty, that would result in a going back to the consequences of the valley of death in the past, is unacceptable. We need continuity; we need certainty.

In the state government's view, that would best be realised by a substantial commitment to the ongoing Hunter class program that has now well and truly progressed. I suspect many people in this place—both in the opposition and, I know, certainly in the government—have had the opportunity to visit the Osborne facility and BAE's work to see how far progressed they are in their respective blocks in not just the pilot program but actually the first ship. It's exceptionally exciting to see, and we know the prospect of a dramatic ramp-up in BAE's workforce over the course of the next 2½ years. That is something that the state government is actively working both with BAE and the federal government on.

Our position is clear: we want to see Hunter delivered. In terms of the number of ships, what matters most is the commonwealth honouring its commitment which it has made on the back of the recommendation for the DSR of continuous surface shipbuild happening here at Osborne. Our preference in the first instance is to make sure that is represented through the Hunter class program.

#### DEFENCE NAVAL SHIPBUILDING

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition) (14:11):** Supplementary question to the Premier: has the Premier received a briefing from the federal government with regard to a possible reduction in the scope of the Hunter class program and its potential impacts?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:11):** The short answer to that question is no, not a formal briefing. I have had the opportunity to speak to the Deputy Prime Minister both prior to our formal submission being delivered to the commonwealth and then post that formal submission being delivered to the commonwealth. I have also had the chance to speak to the Deputy Prime Minister in the last fortnight regarding a range of issues, including the surface ship review.

I wanted the Deputy Prime Minister to hear from me directly and not just through his, I am sure, diligent assessment of the South Australian parliament's *Hansard* but certainly, his reading of media reports, particularly from the *Tiser*. I wanted to make sure the Deputy Prime Minister was hearing from me directly the views that I have been making clear on the public record, particularly around wanting to see an expedited and timely response to the submission review.

But in respect of the Leader of the Opposition's question specifically, no, I have not received any formal advice or any brief, even in an informal form, from the commonwealth around what its response will be to that surface ship review.

#### DEFENCE NAVAL SHIPBUILDING

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition) (14:12):** My question is again to the Premier. Is the Premier aware of the recommendations of the special report produced by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and, if so, does he agree with them? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** On 30 October 2023 the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published a special report, 'An Australian maritime strategy: resourcing The Royal Australian Navy'. Recommendation six in that report is, and I quote:

...the planned production of nine [anti-submarine warfare] frigates should be reduced to six...the remaining ships should be replaced by multipurpose frigates or destroyers with greater missile capacity to support the [Defence Strategic Review]...

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:13):** No, I haven't had the chance to read ASPI's report that was released yesterday. ASPI is a significant contributor to the public policy debate around defence and our nation's posture in a range of geopolitical policy frames, and I acknowledge their work.

In respect of the advocacy around a reduction from nine Hunter class frigates to six, I don't imagine ASPI have been unique in proposing such an option. I am sure there are a range of options in front of the commonwealth around what to do in terms of the number of Hunter class frigates.

What is critical here to the state's interest and, we would argue, for the national interest is that there is the continuity of serious surface shipbuilding here in South Australia. Whether the commonwealth commits to six or nine Hunter frigates—and naturally six or nine is a long way down the track—whatever the commonwealth decides, what we will be arguing for fervently, and holding the government to account on rigorously, is making sure we have continuous, serious surface ship production here in South Australia, happening side by side with the delivery of the nuclear submarine program.

The Leader of the Opposition is welcome and should be acknowledged for his reference to outside advocacy from significant organisations like ASPI. I am also very aware that over the course of the last few days we have other significant Australians advocate positions in regard to shipbuilding capacity in our state. I acknowledge that none other than senior Liberal Alexander Downer is saying that we shouldn't be building nuclear submarines in South Australia—a senior Liberal saying that this program is a white elephant and a form of pork-barrelling.

I reject that view. Alexander Downer, I believe, to be wrong. I think in South Australia we do have the ambition and the capability to build nuclear submarines right here in our state. I think these are thousands of jobs—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier has the call.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I believe that these are thousands of jobs that will be developed not just in our state's interest but in the national interest. There is nowhere else in our country or within our federation that possesses the skills and know-how to be able to build—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Taylor!

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** —a world-class fleet for a Navy that seeks to protect—

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Hartley!

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** —our interests as best as we do. I reject the former senior Liberal's view on this matter.

*The Hon. A. Koutsantonis interjecting:*

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** No, he is a senior Liberal. I reject his view resoundingly. I believe him to be wrong, and I look forward to witnessing hopefully a bipartisan view—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Morialta! Member for Schubert!

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** —that is unqualified, that Alexander Downer is fundamentally wrong.

**DEFENCE NAVAL SHIPBUILDING**

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition) (14:17):** Supplementary to the Premier: the Premier just said that he would hold his federal counterparts to account rigorously. What does that look like?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:17):** It represents us using the full force of the state government to advocate positions both formally and informally, both privately and publicly. We will not be holding back in our remarks that we put on the public record just because the commonwealth government may be of the same political persuasion as the state government, which I think is something that might be a bit of a contrast to governments prior, but our views are firm in this regard, and we will be advocating accordingly.

**DEFENCE NAVAL SHIPBUILDING**

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition) (14:17):** My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier stand by his comments made earlier this month relating to the future of the Hunter class program in South Australia? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** On 19 October 2023, the Premier informed the house that, and I quote:

If the government were to abandon Hunter...then the problem with that would be straight back to the drawing board and we go immediately back into a valley of death. That is unacceptable from the state government's perspective.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:18):** Absolutely.

**HAHNDORF BYPASS**

**Mr TEAGUE (Heysen) (14:18):** My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. What, if any, works were undertaken on River Road in recent days, including last weekend, and to what extent were such works undertaken at night and at what cost premium and why? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**Mr TEAGUE:** I observed road widening works being done on the length of River Road last Friday afternoon, 27 October, including spraying shoulder surfacing. Within hours, residents reported observing trucks on River Road in the dark, late on Sunday night, 29 October, and into the early hours of Monday morning until 5am, 30 October, undertaking what appeared to be line marking.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Energy and Mining) (14:19):** There has been tree trimming, tree clearance, shoulder sealing and line marking. When those works were conducted in terms of the time frame, I will go and check. But if works were conducted at night, I would like the member to provide me with evidence of that, and I will absolutely take it up with the department.

**HAHNDORF BYPASS**

**Mr TEAGUE (Heysen) (14:19):** Supplementary: is it standard practice to paint lines on such a fresh road surface, and how long does the minister expect those lines to stay intact?

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister has the call.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Energy and Mining) (14:19):** It's an interesting question, sir. I will seek advice from my line-marking experts in my office. I don't know. My job is not to be out on the tools doing the shoulder sealing, the tree trimming or the tree clearing. My job is to lead the agency in terms of its strategic direction in terms of the government's agenda. I am happy if the member wants to raise those issues with me. I have not heard those concerns from the member previously; I am not sure if he has written to me about them, so if there was late-night work occurring—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister has the call.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** If there was late-night work occurring, members opposite have my number. They can call me, and I would have found out for them. If it's just being raised here for a political purpose, that's something different. I will go and get the answers to these questions and find out and respond to the house in due time.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

#### HAHNDORF BYPASS

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA (Hartley) (14:20):** My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. Can the minister explain to the house the status of trees along River and Strathalbyn roads? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** On 31 August in question time, the minister stated that there will be no trees cut down along River Road or Strathalbyn Road based on his advice. Since, residents have reported that several trees have been cut down and the minister's department has also informed residents that up to 27 trees will be cut down.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Energy and Mining) (14:21):** That is true. I did advise the house at the time that the advice I had was that no trees would need to be removed but, as the department was doing tree trimming, they came across trees that they believed were either ill or needed to be cleared. I understand—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister has the call.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** Well, members opposite are free to move any motion they like. If members opposite think that I have done anything deliberately to mislead this parliament, let's do it.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** In my memory, there has only been one member of this house—

*The Hon. J.A.W. Gardner interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Morialta!

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** —who was noted by this house for misleading the parliament. There is no-one on this side of the parliament—not once. The advice I received at the time was that there would need to be no trees removed. On subsequent advice the department felt—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** —that trees would need to be removed. I understand a constituent of the member for Heysen who lives on River Road contacted the agency, contacted my office, about potential tree clearance. I understand that that constituent was picked up and shown each and every tree that needed to be cleared and there was then consensus: 'Oh well, fair enough, these trees need to be removed.'

We received all the approvals that were necessary to remove these trees and that was done on the basis of safety. The alternative is to leave trees that we know to be unsafe on the roadside. That would be what we call irresponsible.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order, member for Unley!

#### **HAHNDORF BYPASS**

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA (Hartley) (14:23):** What longer-term infrastructure solutions is the minister considering for River Road? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

**The SPEAKER:** I assume this is a question to the Minister for Transport?

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** Yes.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** Morning radio this morning reported that a diversion is temporary and the government is considering longer-term infrastructure solutions for River Road.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Energy and Mining) (14:23):** Not for River Road, no, but a group of residents from River Road and other groups have come to the government seeking an alternative bypass solution. There so far have been five bypass solutions that have been offered to the people of Hahndorf: options 1, 2, 3, 4A and 4B, and now residents have come to me with a fifth option.

It's fair to say that in each and every option that has been considered by the previous government and our government there is one section or another within that greater area that finds it unacceptable. If we had gone with, for example, the Paechtown option, I think you may have seen Paechtown residents out the front campaigning against the government's plan to carve up Beerenberg and the strawberry farms, and the town of Paechtown, to build the bypass. Three of the options that were proposed and developed by the previous government all included River Road, and they concluded, in fact, up to 70 property acquisitions throughout that district.

What we are attempting to do is work with the community about what an alternative bypass could look like and could be, although some of the local residents have taken it upon themselves to doorknock impacted landowners on their proposed fifth bypass option, and those landowners are now contacting me and saying, 'We do not support this option.' The Premier and I undertook to cost and scope these new alternative plans that residents put to us. That work is underway. Residents have since come back to us again, with more ideas and more plans for the bypass, which we are now putting back into the system.

But this all goes back to the premise of: do log trucks and livestock trucks belong in the main street of Hahndorf? Up until recently there was no-one who supported those trucks remaining in the main street of Hahndorf. Why? Those trucks are dangerous, local businesses want them out, Hahndorf is an important economic contributor to the state's economy, and it is one of our best tourist attractions. I might get this wrong, but over a million vehicles or over a million people per year visit Hahndorf—this is not through-traffic; this is people going there to visit as a destination. Car parking is a major issue that was ignored by the previous government.

There needs to be a considered plan about how we deal with this, because having logs and livestock go through the middle of Hahndorf doesn't exactly add to the amenity of a German historic township that we want people to visit, nor to the amenity of the area. I am also very concerned about the previous government's plan for the upgrade of the main street of Hahndorf. I have been in parliament now for 26 years, and I have seen what upgrades can do to main streets. Just go to King William Road and ask those traders about what happened to their businesses.

**The Hon. D.G. Pisoni:** They love it. They love it at King William Road.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** They love it, do they?

**The Hon. D.G. Pisoni:** They have never been busier.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. D.G. Pisoni:** The restaurants are full day and night since that work was done.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** Yes, I remember the retailers talking about nearly going broke. I remember the landlords saying that they couldn't receive any rent. I remember the constant complaints from businesses saying that they were given no assistance to get through the works being done. But now, of course, those that survived, in typical Liberal Party ideology—the survival of the strongest, the fittest—those that survived—

*The Hon. D.G. Pisoni interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** Point of order, sir.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** —those that passed, well, you know—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for West Torrens, there is a point of order.

*The Hon. D.G. Pisoni interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Unley! Your colleague is seeking to raise—

*The Hon. D.G. Pisoni interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Unley is warned. The member for Morialta on a point of order: 134.

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** Thank you, sir. The member for West Torrens is clearly in breach of standing order 98.

**The SPEAKER:** I will listen carefully. The minister is very close to concluding his remarks because his time is about to expire.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** I am, sir. As I was saying, there is no perfect solution here, because every time the government has a proposal there is one group or another—I can't find a consensus. I am working with residents to try to come up with a consensus approach.

**The Hon. V.A. Tarzia:** Eighteen months they have had.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** Yes, my young friend interjects, 'Eighteen months.' I will give you an answer in a moment.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for MacKillop.

#### LIMESTONE COAST COUNTRY CABINET

**Mr McBRIDE (MacKillop) (14:28):** My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier please update the house on the recent country cabinet meeting in the South-East, the Limestone Coast?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:28):** Thanks, Mr Speaker, but, most importantly, thanks to the member for MacKillop because not only has he diligently again demonstrated his commitment to his electorate by asking a thoughtful question but he also was of major assistance in making sure that the country cabinet meeting that we had last week in MacKillop was a success.

It's fair say that, in both the community forum and all the different engagements that we had around it, there were some really serious issues raised by members of the member for MacKillop's constituency. There are many parts of the region and his community that continue to thrive and do well, given the very productive sectors and industries they represent. There are some very successful farmers and business leaders and entrepreneurs in the area, but there are also some elements of the community who are doing it a bit tough, including primary producers, particularly beef—or particularly lamb, in fact—who have seen a significant reduction in price recently on the back of a whole range of variables.

Obviously, the wine sector in the region in and around the Coonawarra is having a particularly difficult time at the moment—as we see in wine regions around the country including the Riverland, McLaren Vale and the Barossa, but we can talk about the progress there another time—but also the seafood sector.

The member for MacKillop kindly arranged for me to meet with both a wholesaler and a retailer in the sector who particularly rely on lobster for the bulk of the trade, and they are doing it tough. We haven't heard any news come out of China recently regarding movement on lobster tariffs, although I think there is reason for great optimism in that regard.

There was also an opportunity on the back of country cabinet for the government—following the advocacy from the member for MacKillop—to really try to deliver on a few issues that we know have been bubbling away in the South-East not just for the last few months but, really, years on years. The big one that has been lingering for a long time is a lack of mobile phone coverage of any quality throughout the Limestone Coast.

This is a challenge that I know is not unique to the Limestone Coast, but it has been a major issue in the Limestone Coast for a long time. Not just the member for MacKillop but also the member for Mount Gambier have certainly made representations to the government over this since we have been elected and also prior.

Fortunately, this government has been able to work with local government—no less than six councils in the Limestone Coast—and also with Telstra to formulate a comprehensive package that would see a \$27 million upgrade on 27 new mobile phone towers to be installed right across the Limestone Coast which will result in a dramatic increase, I think an over 40 per cent increase, in mobile phone coverage across the South-East, including data.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

*Mr Patterson interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Morphett!

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** That will mean big productivity—

*The Hon. J.A.W. Gardner interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Morialta!

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** —gains for businesses and primary producers right throughout the South-East. The member for MacKillop and the member for Mount Gambier can take a lot of credit for putting this together. It is on the back of their substantial advocacy and they have found a government willing to listen. More than that, they have found a government willing to act. In fact—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** —they have found a government willing to put our hands in the pockets of Treasury to make these investments, which means it's not just a hashtag we're talking about, but real policy making a difference on the Limestone Coast.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

### STRATHALBYN ROAD

**Mr TEAGUE (Heysen) (14:32):** My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. What, if any, road surface improvement works were performed between 24 August 2023 and prior to 30 October 2023 on Strathalbyn Road between Echunga and the corner of River Road?

**The Hon. A. Koutsantonis:** Can you repeat the dates, please?

**Mr TEAGUE:** On Strathalbyn Road, between Echunga and the corner of River Road—

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Heysen, he is after the dates.

**Mr TEAGUE:** —between the date of the announcement, 24 August 2023, and the date of the ban kicking in on 30 October 2023?

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Energy and Mining) (14:32):** In terms of the works, the advice I have is that vegetation trimming works commenced on River Road to achieve the department's standard vegetation clearance envelope of up to six metres. The majority of these works were completed by the end of October 2023.

**Mr Teague:** Strathalbyn Road.

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS:** I'm getting to it—with the remaining vegetation works on River Road anticipated to be completed by the end of November 2023, weather permitting. Vegetation surveys have been conducted for the maintenance works by a Native Vegetation Council accredited consultant. They have identified trees that need to be removed to achieve the department's standard vegetation clearance envelope of up to six metres. We consulted with Mount Barker District Council prior to those works.

We have been doing tree trimming and shoulder sealing works. Those works commenced on Strathalbyn Road in October and are nearing completion. Further tree trimming works are being undertaken on Church Hill Road and will then commence on Flaxley Road and Junction Road. The department commenced procurement for shoulder sealing works on Strathalbyn Road in October 2023 and works are expected to start from late 2023.

There have been some other assessments done in terms of speed which have seen a speed restriction of 60 km/h now on parts of Mount Barker Road and River Road, and that work is continuing throughout the district.

#### HAHNDORF BYPASS

**Mr TEAGUE (Heysen) (14:34):** My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. Does the government have any plan to monitor any impact of trucks on River Road?

**The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS (West Torrens—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Energy and Mining) (14:34):** Yes. I am advised that a previous survey that was done by the then government found that there are currently 1,900 vehicles in total using River Road per day, of which 130 are heavy vehicles. I understand that there are currently around 1,800 vehicles per day using Strathalbyn Road, of which 140 are heavy vehicles. We will continue to monitor this to see how many have been diverted from the Hahndorf main street. I do not expect there to be more than 50 or 60 per day, and that would be our worst-case scenario.

We are not quite sure exactly where trucks—we are not actually diverting trucks to River Road. We are not directing them onto that road. We have changed no classification. We are not requiring trucks to use River Road to get back to Mount Barker Road, but what we are doing is banning trucks from using the main street of Hahndorf. What we will see is that local knowledge will obviously dictate where a lot of these trucks go. That is not to dismiss the fact that there will be extra traffic on River Road; of course there will be. We will be monitoring that, and I am happy to make those numbers public.

#### SA WATER OUTAGE

**Ms STINSON (Badcoe) (14:35):** My question is to the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water. Can the minister update the house on the response to a recent SA Water outage in the southern suburbs along with any alternative views on the matter?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water) (14:35):** People will be well aware that on 24 October, SA Water experienced a serious outage of water supply to a number of suburbs in the southern suburbs of Adelaide. They were at the time undertaking some routine maintenance work. They had had a report that there had been a leak of supply and distribution on Lonsdale Road.

Although they thought that the works would be relatively minor, in fact, as they uncovered the extent of the infrastructure damage, they had to escalate to emergency works, then there was a movement of underground soil and water, which meant that the water had to be cut off altogether. Some hours later, the tanks that had been holding water for those suburbs were shut off. This was a

very significant outage. There were some 5,000 connections in Hallett Cove, Sheidow Park, Trott Park and some surrounding areas, and there were five schools that were shut as a result, which was extremely inconvenient, to say the least, for people living in that area, and highly disruptive to them.

For that, obviously both SA Water and the government apologise for the impact on them. During this experience, of course we kept the local member up to date, who is also the Leader of the Opposition, and ensured that alternative arrangements were, as much as possible, made available for people to go to the bathroom and so on. By the second day, we were able to open the schools, having been able to accommodate some of the infrastructure required, but that first day, those schools were closed.

What we have done as a result of that is I asked SA Water to consider whether they would waive a quarter of supply charge to the people in that area, acknowledging that although an interruption to supply can occur to people in pockets, to have 5,000 go out means that you cannot go round to the neighbours', you cannot go round to the local shops. You have the kids home from school because they cannot go to school. The disruption was of another order than that which is normally experienced, although all disruption is, of course, extremely inconvenient.

As may well be understood by most people, ESCOSA does in its regulatory determination acknowledge that there will be some service gesture payments, as they are called, made to customers on a case-by-case basis. In fact, I was asked about one of those recently in this house on a smaller outage that lasted for some time. I know that the Leader of the Opposition, when he was the minister, also talked about SA Water's compensation scheme being applied on a case-by-case basis. That is why it seemed to me passing strange, given that I assume it is a pretty tight ship over there, where the front bench talk to each other and have a shared view—

**The Hon. A. Koutsantonis:** That's a big assumption.

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE:** I'm a generous person. I'm always an optimist about human nature. It is passing strange that the shadow treasurer decided to question the wisdom and the sense of offering such a service payment—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE:** —and was on ABC Adelaide, concerned, saying, 'This sort of compensation is only going to be ordered'—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Colton!

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE:** —'when the minister decides she needs to provide political intervention'—as if political intervention is always a bad thing. But the decision nonetheless is made by the board, having had a recommendation—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

*The Hon. J.A.W. Gardner interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Morialta! The member for Morialta is warned.

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE:** So it's good to know that the opposition is continuing to have its view that this waiving of fees in order to make a service gesture is unnecessary. Members may recall that SA Water waived bills for 12 months following the bushfires. It waived rates to residents in Mannum during the 2022-23 River Murray floods. Also, the Leader of the Opposition has himself called—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE:** —for the state government to assist home owners, with the recent Felmeri Homes collapse. So it seems something that is—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister's time has expired.

#### **PATIENT ASSISTANCE TRANSPORT SCHEME**

**Mr BELL (Mount Gambier) (14:40):** My question is to the Minister for Health.

**Mr COWDREY:** A supplementary, sir?

**The SPEAKER:** I am so sorry, but you need to seek the call at an earlier stage. The call has already been given to the member for Mount Gambier. However, I will turn to the member for Colton next and we can treat it as a question from the outset.

**Mr BELL:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister advise the house if the health department has a targeted processing time for Patient Assistance Transport Scheme (PATS) claims? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**Mr BELL:** A Mount Gambier resident named Louise recently contacted the PATS office to inquire about the progress of her husband's PATS claim following a trip to Adelaide for cancer treatment. She was advised that currently there is a 10-week wait that will be increasing to 12 to 14 weeks due to a lack of staff and a backlog of claims.

**The Hon. C.J. PICTON (Kaurna—Minister for Health and Wellbeing) (14:41):** I thank the member for Mount Gambier for his question. I certainly haven't been advised of that and I will make inquiries in relation to that matter. PATS, as the member knows and all members know, is a very important scheme for people across country South Australia, and that's why this government took action at the beginning of this year to double the fuel rebates, which has been of great assistance to many South Australians. But certainly, if there are issues in terms of the processing time, then we will look into that with some urgency and take what appropriate action needs to happen.

#### **PERSONIFY CARE CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (14:41):** My question is to the Premier. When was the Premier informed of the data security incident impacting SA Health patients and what steps has the Premier taken since being informed? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**Mr COWDREY:** It was reported over the weekend that the patient records including details of more than 12,000 people were accessed by a non-authorized third party and medical records of 120 people had been deleted on 16 October.

**The Hon. C.J. PICTON (Kaurna—Minister for Health and Wellbeing) (14:42):** As has been documented, as was released proactively by the government on the weekend, Personify Care is a company that provides services to hospitals and health services right around the country. It's based here in South Australia. It has been used by SA Health since 2020 to provide patient portal services where people who might be going for appointments can input their information. They have had an issue whereby SA Health has been one of a number of clients who have been impacted by an issue where a human error from one of their staff has resulted in access being allowed that enabled the deletion of one of their files and folders that contained SA Health information. We are not aware of the other organisations that have been involved in that.

This is something that I believe happened on 17 October. I was fully briefed about this on Tuesday last week after some initial notifications that something had happened but without the full information being available on the Friday before that. We then worked very hard over the next few days to put together the full information to make sure we had the full comprehensive impact in terms of patients of which a small number comparatively of 121 had patient information from medical information as part of that. A larger number of some 12,000 had information such as name and contact details and phone number as part of that information.

There is not evidence that we have before us to say that it was accessed or copied. The only evidence that we have from that third party, Personify Care, is that it is deleted. Of course, we made the appropriate notifications to DPC as part of that work over those busy few days last week.

We thought it was important that we go proactively to give that information over the weekend as soon as that information was ready, and we have also been in the process of emailing and sending letters to people who have been affected by that and giving them the full information. This is something that Personify Care themselves are investigating, but we are also doing our work—from SA Health's perspective—to investigate and review the circumstances, and review if there are other things that need to be put in place to prevent such an occurrence happening in the future.

#### **PERSONIFY CARE CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (14:45):** My question is again to the Premier. Does the Premier stand by his comment in the house on 19 October? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**Mr COWDREY:** In response to questions from the opposition about the cybersecurity breaches that have occurred since March 2022, the Premier said that the Super SA cybersecurity breach 'is the most significant I am aware of'.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS (Croydon—Premier) (14:45):** Yes, I have no reason to believe otherwise.

#### **PERSONIFY CARE CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (14:45):** My question is again to the Premier. Have all impacted individuals been informed of the SA Health Personify Care data breach?

**The Hon. C.J. PICTON (Kaurua—Minister for Health and Wellbeing) (14:45):** The latest update I have is that where we have emails those emails have gone out. Where we are relying on postal information, either those letters have gone out or are in the process of going out with the full data matching occurring in relation to that. We will make sure that we will try to track down each of those patients where we can match them up to address or email information, to make sure that we can notify all of them.

#### **REGIONAL CAPABILITY COMMUNITY FUND**

**The Hon. L.W.K. BIGNELL (Mawson) (14:46):** My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Can the minister inform the house about the results of this year's Regional Capability Community Fund grant program?

**The Hon. J.K. SZAKACS (Cheltenham—Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Correctional Services) (14:46):** I thank the member for Mawson for his question. For those members of this place not familiar with the Regional Capability Community Fund, it is this government's election commitment to reinstate grant funding for farm firefighting units. There are few people in this place as passionate and better advocates for the reinstatement of this fund than the member for Mawson.

The member for Mawson saw firsthand the experience of his community in deploying farm firefighting units as a frontline capability to fight and tackle fires. Mr Speaker, I know in your community, and many other members' communities across the state, they were crying out for the reinstatement of this fund. I am very pleased to update the house on the successful rollout of year 2 of this capability.

Just this week, with members of the cabinet, I was able to spend three days in the South-East. I was able to meet with a number of individuals who were successful recipients of this capability, one of whom was Joe Cook on a little farm—I shouldn't say little—a farm just outside of Keith. He is a lucerne grower, particularly seeds, and he informed me about the really extraordinary capability that he is doing in terms of seed production and working with a couple of local producers there in getting quality seed out to the world.

It just happens to be that Szakacs, the literal translation for Szakacs, is Cook, so Joe Cook—and another redhead as well to boot—and I were able to catch up to learn more about what this means for him. He has been able to update an old and tired farm firefighting unit that he uses primarily during harvest and in the warmer months on his farm to be a critical frontline response to quelling and arresting fire spread. Joe was the recipient of a \$3,000 FFU grant. He spent close to five and a half thousand to replace his farm firefighting unit, his old and tired farm firefighting unit.

What was really pleasing to hear was that when we came into government and reinstated this fund, inexplicably cut by the friends of farmers, the alleged friends of farmers on the other side, we heard two things really clearly, the first of which was they wanted this up and running and they wanted it up and running by fire season. We were able to do that last year; obviously we are able to do it again this year. But the second of which was to utilise this fund to support local businesses as well, and that is a really important part of this. So not only did we want to get money out to farmers to upgrade their equipment, to improve their capability and to improve particularly also their safety equipment, but to actually get it into the hands of local business.

In doing so I was really pleased to meet the guys down at Cox Rural in Keith where Joe bought his farm firefighting unit from. I met with Luke and Matty and they told me just how pumped they were to see this fund back in operation as well, again not just because of improved capability, not just because we as an opposition and as a government listened to regional and farming communities about the need for this but getting money into regional and rural communities in time for the fire season.

#### **SUPER SA CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (14:50):** My question is to the Treasurer. Was the personal data of Super SA members uploaded to the dark web and, if so, when was the Treasurer notified of this?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN (Lee—Treasurer) (14:50):** I think this has been the subject of significant questioning in a Budget and Finance select committee hearing last Monday where the Department of Treasury and Finance and Super SA officials were at pains to give a great deal of detail about the circumstances of this.

Just to recap for the benefit of members, in mid August the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, through some of its ongoing monitoring activities, became aware that there was a likely data breach involving a former third-party contractor to Super SA, and over the ensuing weeks there were efforts between DPC and Super SA to understand the extent to which that data had been accessed, what the data was, to verify whether members were impacted and also to understand specifically which members were impacted. Again, this was not arising from a breach of Super SA's ICT environment but a breach of a former third-party contractor's environment, Contact 121, who was engaged, I am advised, for a three-month period arising from a data breach that occurred in 2019.

Of course, as I think I have canvassed in here but as was also canvassed in the select committee hearing last Monday, it was the government's expectation and also the obligation, as far as I am aware, for that third-party contractor not to have maintained that information on its servers but nonetheless it had, and that provided the context for this breach to occur.

As I explained to the house when I was questioned about this last sitting week, I became aware of this incident on Thursday, I think it was, 12 October. Members were notified from 16 October on the following Monday, and, of course, as the committee heard in evidence from the officers appearing last Monday, when the original incident happened back in 2019 there was a nine-month delay between the incident first becoming—

**Mr Cowdrey:** Were you told on the 12<sup>th</sup> about the dark web?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** This stands in stark contrast to how the matter was handled by the previous Liberal government where not only did the former Treasurer not say anything at all at any stage but it took Super SA many months to advise members.

So there seems to be one standard for the conservatives and another standard for everyone else, and in fact, Mr Speaker—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** —you will recall very specifically me asking a question of the member for Dunstan when he was Premier about another cybersecurity incident, which occurred in November 2020, and the member for Dunstan declined to provide any information to the house, and instead—

**Mr Cowdrey:** So did you.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** —said, 'We only comment on this—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Colton, you are warned.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** —if we feel that it's in the public interest.' So you've got the standards to which the Liberals hold themselves, down here, and then the standard to which they now—now that they are in opposition—seek to hold everyone else. The fact is, as I have already said, as unacceptable as the delays might have been for the members whose data was impacted, we strive to do better and we are doing better than those opposite.

#### **SUPER SA CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (14:54):** My question is again to the Treasurer. Has the personal data been removed from the dark web and, if so, when was it removed?

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer has the call.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN (Lee—Treasurer) (14:54):** My understanding is that the chronology of all of these events, including the specific references to which the member for Colton's question relates, were provided to the committee. Notwithstanding that, the witnesses that provided that evidence—

**Mr Cowdrey:** No, it was corrected by the Premier later that day and we still don't know.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Colton, you are warned for a second time.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your protection.

**Mrs Hurn:** You need it.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Says the member for Schubert, who can't get a question on their run sheet.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer has the call.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Apparently health is a big issue for them.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer has the call.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** And yet you're all the way back there. You're all the way back there.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Who can explain that, except you?

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** Point of order, sir.

**The SPEAKER:** Treasurer—

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Who can explain that?

**The SPEAKER:** Treasurer, please be seated.

*Members interjecting:*

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Not so chippy now, are we?

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for West Torrens! Member for Schubert!

*Mr Brown interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Florey is warned.

**Mr Whetstone:** You're awake back there?

**The SPEAKER:** Order, member for Chaffey! Your colleague the member for Morialta has a point of order under 134.

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** Standing order 98 requires the minister respond to the substance of the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Indeed it does. Treasurer, I bring you to the question.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** As I was saying, when the witnesses provided evidence to the Budget and Finance select committee last Monday, not only were they at pains to provide a detailed chronology of events—specifically alluding to the question that the member for Colton now asks in this place today—but they also undertook to ensure that they had that chronology absolutely correct and they undertook to provide that information to the committee subsequently, to make sure that the committee was being well advised.

These are the officers who were, to varying degrees, directly involved in the management of this matter. They are the ones best placed to ensure that the most precise information is provided to that committee. I will go back and check with them as to the advice they are providing, with specific reference to the question that the member for Colton now asks, and make sure I bring it back to the house.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Colton, you are on two warnings. I give you fair warning. You are in the course of asking a series of questions, so I would be reluctant to exercise 137A, but do note you are on two warnings.

#### **SUPER SA CYBERSECURITY INCIDENT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (14:57):** My question is to the Treasurer again. Has the South Australian government, or a third party, paid a ransom or engaged in any transactions associated with the removal of Super SA members' data from the dark web?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN (Lee—Treasurer) (14:57):** I had the opportunity to quickly look over the transcripts of the Budget and Finance select committee hearing from last Monday. My recollection from reading that transcript is that the real shadow treasurer, Heidi Girolamo, asked that very question of the—

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** Point of order, sir.

**The SPEAKER:** Treasurer, please be seated. There is a point of order under 134.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for West Torrens is called to order. Member for Schubert!

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** The Treasurer's asinine behaviour is contrary to standing order 98.

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Florey, order! I have standing order 98—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Some context, but only some, is required within the standing orders—or is permissible within the standing orders. The Treasurer has the call.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I note the deputy leader didn't raise a matter of privilege with respect to my response about the member for Colton's responsibilities. But what I do say is that we were absolutely at pains to make sure that accurate information is being provided to the parliament in this respect, and we endeavour to do so.

I have offered to take this line of questioning on notice if there are details being sought that I don't have with me right now because, as I said at the outset, when the member for Colton first asked me a question about this on Tuesday of the last sitting week, my immediate response was to confirm the existence of this incident and to provide as much detail as I could. As I have just explained to the house, that stands in stark contrast to how the member for Dunstan as the former Premier in this place—

*Members interjecting:*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Morialta is warned.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** —answered questions about cybersecurity incidents. We recognise, along with every other organisation, public or private, in this day and age, that these incidents happen and on a very, very regular basis. Pleasingly, most of these cybersecurity attacks are thwarted, but some of them aren't. When they aren't and they involve public sector agencies, I think what you have seen from the Minister for Health, what you have seen from me, what you have seen from the Premier, is an openness and transparency about this, and we will continue to provide those details to the people who are immediately impacted, and we will provide details to the parliament when sought.

#### TEACHERS DISPUTE

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER (Morialta—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:00):** My question is to the Minister for Education, Training and Skills. Can the minister advise the house whether there will be a teachers strike on 9 November, the fourth day of year 12 exams?

**The Hon. B.I. BOYER (Wright—Minister for Education, Training and Skills) (15:00):** I thank the member for Morialta for his question. Of course, my answer is that I very much hope not. I have said from the outset as we have entered into this enterprise bargaining process with the Australian Education Union that I didn't think there was any need for industrial action at any stage. We had a strike in term 3. Since that strike date, the government provided another offer—that is, two offers that we have formally put to the union now, the second one larger than the first, and I think the first would have been a record sum total, if you like, of about \$1.3 billion across the life of the agreement.

I have also said on every occasion that I have been asked, which is very regularly, that the negotiations have been taking place in good faith. They have been positive. Despite what might be reported or focused on by the general public, a lot of the work behind the scenes to agree on clauses around things that are of great importance to our teachers have got closer and closer, and a lot of those are resolved, but of course we are now at the pointy end, you might say, and focusing on salary.

Both the Premier and myself, and the Treasurer as well, have made it clear on the number of occasions when asked about what the union is putting forward as its position, which is a salary increase of 8.4 per cent in the first year of a new agreement, that it is just not something that is possible in terms of what the state budget can afford.

I have been, I think, very frank from day one in this role. In fact, in the first week of being the Minister for Education I said publicly that I acknowledge that classrooms have become more complex places over the last probably few decades. Workload has increased. There is a need to pay our

teaching workforce more to bring us up that league table in terms of where they sit compared to other teachers around the nation. We need to deliver a workload reduction, of course, because we have an issue in terms of retaining the existing workforce. That issue is not specific to South Australia; it is a national issue that we face. Being able to retain that workforce and attract the next generation of teachers are issues that are now central to the EB that we are negotiating.

My specific answer to the member for Morialta about whether there is going to be a strike again, and as the member for Morialta correctly identified, during year 12 exams, I certainly say there is no need for that. I do not think it will further the union's case. I am sure I speak on behalf of other members of this place that it would be unfortunate to have a strike at a time which is so critical not just for those South Australian students who are undertaking year 12 exams but of course also for their families, because it is a very stressful time for them as well.

Putting all those things aside, I reiterate to this place that negotiations have remained positive. Both parties have remained at the table from start to finish, and I am confident that we can actually come to agreement and deliver that pay increase to our staff, deliver that workload reduction to our staff, so that we acknowledge the work that they do, the importance of their work to our society, so that we can retain the existing workforce and send a really positive message to young South Australians who might be thinking about a future in teaching that it is something that we value and that we prioritise.

#### TEACHERS DISPUTE

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER (Morialta—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:04):** My question is to the Minister for Education, Training and Skills. Does the government's offer in relation to the education EB include support for principals? With your leave, sir, and that of the house, I will explain.

Leave granted.

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** During the last EB, principals had an extra per cent on top of the other staff pay rise in recognition of the particular challenge of recruiting principals to those positions, a challenge that still remains today.

**The Hon. B.I. BOYER (Wright—Minister for Education, Training and Skills) (15:04):** I thank the member for Morialta for the question. It is a very good question, and he is right. If we look at those extra complexities, the things that have got more difficult in the job over the last few decades, I think you could also make the same case and the same point in terms of the leaders of our schools: our principals. It is certainly harder—and this has been the case for many years—to attract people to put up their hand and become a principal. A lot of people see it as taking on a great deal of extra stress and work. I would point particularly to changes in society across the last 25 years around the rise of things like social media, but you can add to that things like vaping as well.

Last week, the member for Cheltenham and the Minister for Health joined me as we made a pitch to ban these incredibly unhealthy energy drinks as well—all these things that weren't around even when I finished high school at the end of 1999, and now new things and new problems are being heaped on the plate of our principals to deal with on top of the things they have to do anyway. In addition to the work we have to do to make sure we can retain and attract new classroom teachers, the member for Morialta is correct that we have to do something as well to make sure that we can do the same, it can be said, for principals.

We are proposing, in the current offer of the enterprise bargaining agreement, a 1 per cent increase to the Band A leaders. That is already in the offer that we are putting. And there are some things in terms of workload reduction for principals and leaders as well. I would point specifically to changes we had proposed as an election commitment, which we are working on now, around the Inclusive Education Support Program, which is money for students with disability, and there are nine steps of that.

We are proposing to make sure that the first three steps, if we can get agreement, will actually be able to be certified or signed off by the school instead of going through the application process at head office, which is time consuming for the teacher or the principal filling out the application, and

time consuming as well for staff in 31 Flinders Street to do that who could be spending their time doing other important work.

So we are approaching this question of what we do to support existing principals and actually inspire other classroom teachers to put their hand up and want to be a principal as well, both with a financial incentive and also a workload reduction as well.

#### *Grievance Debate*

#### **STATE DEBT**

**Mr COWDREY (Colton) (15:07):** This Labor government's economic credentials, or lack thereof I should say, have been on full display over the last few days. The old saying that you can't trust Labor with your money could not be any more accurate. The front page of Monday's *The Advertiser* reads, and I quote, 'State Hits a Debt End', revealing that debt will explode under this Labor government and this Treasurer by \$11 billion to the 2026-27 financial year. SA's net debt at the end of forward estimates is projected to hit thirty-seven and a half billion dollars to 2026-27.

But what does that look like at a household level, at a per capita level? It equates to a debt of \$19,000 a person in South Australia at this point in time. It is the second-worst position of all states around the nation, only second to the basket case that is the Labor government in Victoria.

What was very clear over the last couple of days is what this Treasurer does not want to talk about. He does not want to talk about his inability to turn a surplus last financial year, a \$500 million whoopsie as it was described at the time, or the over \$1 billion operating expenses blowout last financial year that squandered additional GST in state revenues. More importantly, he does not want to talk about his own budget papers that reveal that approximately \$12 billion of the combined \$18-plus billion price tag for the north-south corridor project and the new women's and kids' hospital project that have both blown out substantially under this government is an amount that actually sits out beyond the forward estimates. So there is much more debt coming for us in South Australia.

Despite the rhetoric by the Treasurer that this debt is being taken over the next four years simply for infrastructure, the reality is quite different. That debt is coming still; that debt is well into the future. Debt is going to go up, borrowing costs are going to go up, and that is on the head of this Treasurer. This feeds directly into *The Advertiser* editorial on Monday, and I quote the title: Mega projects need scrutiny in debt-laden state. Well, that is South Australia, but how did we get to this point where nearly \$20 million worth of public funding is not able to be looked at by our state's Auditor-General?

That is the position we are in, where the Auditor General's office is being denied access to the appropriate documents to interrogate these very projects. We do not even know if they have actually been undertaken in accordance with the law. How can the South Australian public have confidence in the significant projects and the significant changes that have been made to those projects by this government—the most consequential cost to be incurred by the state of South Australia over the last couple of years—without the Auditor-General doing his job?

As the editorial notes, the work of the independent watchdogs is more crucial than it ever has been. There is only one person who is frustrating that process. There is only one person who is standing in the way of that scrutiny, and that is the Premier himself. This is his legacy and his legacy only: that billions of dollars' worth of public money is being spent and massive debt is being undertaken by this government, with no scrutiny. His only response to this point is 'Trust me.'

Finally, I want to touch briefly on payroll tax. We have had the Treasurer this week reference a step change in payroll tax revenue coming into the state. That is true: we had a tight labour market and businesses have had to increase wages, which is a good thing. But what that means is that those wage bills for our bigger companies are up 10 to 15 per cent. More of those small businesses that have previously been under the threshold of \$1.5 million have started to hit that threshold.

We have a business community in South Australia that is being punished, that is paying a more substantial proportion of tax than they were just a couple of years ago, and this Treasurer and this Premier are happy to sit there and punish our business community and call it a step change in

revenue coming into the state. On this side of the house, we want to see small business succeed, we want to see small business create opportunities, but we simply do not want to punish them.

### LIMESTONE COAST COUNTRY CABINET

**Mr McBRIDE (MacKillop) (15:12):** It is my pleasure to be able to speak about the country cabinet going to the South-East and advocating for the Limestone Coast as a whole but particularly for MacKillop. We were fortunate enough to have the whole country cabinet, the ministers from the South Australian government, over there for two to three days.

When we started organising this, we started getting everything in place and the whole community started getting excited by this whole process: the visits, the consultation and the opportunity for my region to connect with the state government about all the things that we know can be done through state government, federal government or local government.

The announcements followed suit and are major. Obviously, the first one is the 27 mobile telephone towers for the whole of the Limestone Coast, \$27 million worth. It is a collaborative approach by local government, state government and, yet to be committed in this process, the federal government, plus the telco Telstra. They are all working together to get these 27 towers covering 2,400 square kilometres and addressing some major blackspots—not all the blackspots but a majority of the blackspots for the Limestone Coast.

Since I have been in politics, which is now five years and going on to six years, we have seen some towers already rolled out in MacKillop, and we have obviously welcomed them. It has been one of those things that we have been working very hard on to try to find traction. It would have taken us another 10 to 20 years, at the speed that it was going, to address what we have just done over the last week, and what happened last week on Thursday with the rollout at the Millicent CFS.

We went on to Bordertown, and this was even more interesting and equally as important in relation to the housing shortage. It was by no mistake that we ended up in Bordertown in the Tatiara District Council. We had the state government there working with local government to solve the housing shortage which really is Australia-wide and regional South Australia-wide, but particularly in the Tatiara district.

We have evidence, and I heard it from the council—the last council that was in power and previous Mayor Graham Excell, and now we have new Mayor Liz Goossens—that the issue has been rolling along for at least 20 years in the Tatiara district, in relation to a shortage of housing, and nothing really has been achieved. What has been allocated thus far in Bordertown is \$2.7 million on a 5.8 hectare site with 60 homes. The \$2.7 million is to help and assist the council with confidence and with development.

In particular, five of these homes will be built by the South Australian government for government employees: that could be police, nurses, teachers or government employees in general. Again, this will take pressure off the private housing market and bring the government back into providing government housing which has not been done since the 1980s. That is going to be a bit of a gamechanger.

State governments here in South Australia across both political spectrums have ignored this since the eighties. We get to this crisis point where we say, 'We can't even employ people in our region anymore like teachers and doctors and nurses and firefighters and the like, that all belong to the government.' They have been out there in the housing market, perhaps adding to the stress of the lack of housing. Now we are seeing the government return to this area. Long may it work well and I hope the model for Bordertown will be able to be rolled out right across MacKillop, the Limestone Coast and the rest of regional South Australia as a model that works and addresses this issue.

We also saw the playground at Keith, the \$1.1 million Don Moseley playground commonly known as the train park. The kids absolutely love the train. It is an old train from the Monash playground that was rebuilt in the park and the Premier had a ride on it the other day. The Premier allocated \$250,000 to that \$1.1 million build and the community was over the moon. They are nearly there with all the funding they require for that project.

Another rollout was for CFS firefighting capabilities: two more spotter helicopters and an overall announcement of an extra five winged aircraft to the state's firefighting capabilities, taking it from 26 to 31. That will be all the better to cover what we know can be tragic circumstances with the summer that is bearing upon us.

It was all well received. The community and MacKillop really did receive this country cabinet well and I think we had a good hearing with all the issues that we know MacKillop faces. Hopefully in the future we will see even more.

### HARTLEY ELECTORATE

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA (Hartley) (15:17):** I rise today to talk about a couple of events that I recently attended. Firstly, I want to talk a little bit about the Glynde Lutheran Homes. They recently unveiled a memorial in honour of Adolph and Metha Schulze, the founding family of Glynde Lutheran Homes in the suburb of Glynde in my electorate. This was established in 1957 by Adolph and Metha, and the Glynde village now comprises—believe it or not—over 100 two to three-bedroom retirement homes, spanning well into the electorates of both Hartley and Dunstan. These homes are now home to hundreds of residents between both seats.

Glynde Lutheran Homes was the first of its kind in Australia to provide both retirement living and a residential care facility. I think it is now in serious demand. It includes memory support and palliative care in the same precinct. There is something for everybody there: they even have their own cafe and their own hairdresser. Can you believe it? They do so well to accommodate the local residents.

Recently, we have seen the Glynde village thrive with people like Barb Hutchinson and others who take very good care of residents. When I am out and about doing some doorknocking or delivering a birthday card, I am always pleased—

*Mrs Hurn interjecting:*

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** Yes, absolutely, we do what we can. I am always pleased to see the very manicured gardens and facilities. The facility really does an amazing job in looking after its residents and keeping the place clean. The precinct even has a community centre where various activities are undertaken. They have outdoor areas and barbecue areas for family visits as well. They have a gymnasium, a library and also an onsite medical centre which provides a GP, a physio and also a podiatrist—how good is that. Like I said, you cannot go past the hairdresser when you go into one of the main entrances.

The facility also provides monthly outings. I think it would be a good idea, again, even to bring them into Parliament House. How delightful would that be. Maybe we could arrange some scones as well that day, if the catering staff are amenable to it. I am looking forward to maybe doing that in the new year.

Coming back to the Schulze family, one of the early migrant families, they really gave their life savings. They were so big in terms of giving back and philanthropy. They gave their life savings, their property and literally everything they had to this Glynde Lutheran home facility, following their passion to ensure that the village and care can continue for generations to come. As I walk through the electorate over time, they seem to be buying out neighbours and getting bigger and bigger. It shows that there is demand for this type of facility in our community.

We love having them there as well, and we love engaging with the local community. The Schulze family legacy continues to live on through the Schulze Cafe, located within the precinct, to allow those residents to not only bond but also interact with each other and enjoy each other's company. I look forward to continuing to visit the village and meet with residents and continuing to see the work that Barb and the team are doing to ensure that their residents have the best retirement and care in their more senior years.

I would also like to take this opportunity to update the house about the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Co.As.It. Many of you in the house may be aware that the idea for Co.As.It. came from the Hon. Mario Feleppa, a member of the other place, who has known my own family for many decades now. He was national President of the Patronato INCA. I know that he made several trips to

Melbourne to the Co.As.It. interstate to study that model there, pick out the best parts and implement them here. I think it was a good initiative that was started here in South Australia.

I believe it also enjoyed the bipartisan support of Robert Lawson at the time and also MPs like Joe Scalzi, my predecessor. It is important that these things are bipartisan. You would appreciate, sir, that there are over 100,000 residents in South Australia of Italian origin, many of them elderly, and there will be many more in the not too distant future. Organisations like Co.As.It. that specialise in running activities to make sure that people can age gracefully, providing culturally sensitive and appropriate services to people in their elderly years, are so vital. I congratulate Tina Taddeo, the President of Co.As.It., and I wish them all the very best moving forward. I know that they will enjoy the support of both sides of parliament in the future.

### DOZYNKI HARVEST FESTIVAL

**Mr FULBROOK (Playford) (15:22):** I rise to say a warm *dziękuję*, or thank you, to the organisers of last weekend's Dozynki festival. For those unfamiliar, Dozynki, or harvest festival, has been a mainstay of the Polish community in Adelaide since 1979. In Poland, festivals date back to as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Traditionally, farmers would celebrate the year's labour with a holiday after the crops, mainly grain, had been harvested. This would be done by landowners, who would organise festivals to reward their labourers and to celebrate bountiful crops.

The festivals usually involved lots of eating, drinking and dancing. I am pleased to report that nothing is lost in its modern-day iteration, especially in Adelaide. While I know Dozynki festivals are celebrated in the US and, naturally, Poland, I understand that our local festival is the only one of its kind within the Southern Hemisphere.

Given its national, arguably international, significance, it is no surprise it attracted visitors from around Australia, including Marcin Kawalowski from the Polish embassy and, from Brisbane, Henryk Kurylewski, President of the Polish Community Council of Australia—noting that you should forgive my Anglo tongue. I know that Minister Szakacs, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and I enjoyed their company, and I am pretty sure they will not object to me saying how pleased we were to have them join us in Adelaide. Following these dignitaries through the gate were over 4,000 locals, who had a fantastic time celebrating the best of Polish culture.

As I alluded to in my social media post, this was a great opportunity to soak up the fantastic weather and enjoy a *zywiec*, sample some fantastic vodka, and gorge on some pierogi and paczki and fantastic smallgoods, which I can happily say if you know where to look are readily available across Adelaide. I do not think this house needs to know what I ate on Sunday, but needless to say, I, along with my wife, my son, my nephew and my mum, did not need dinner when we made it home.

Beyond food and drink, there were countless activities for all to enjoy. Beginning with the morning Mass, the full program included lots of dance, traditional dress, music, art and crafts, a petting zoo, a Royal Flying Doctor Service flight simulator, and even a Polish pronunciation session, and a lot more than just that. Thanks also to the folklore ensemble *Syrenka* who flew in en masse from Sydney. It was wonderful to have you here.

There are a lot of people I feel need thanking for the event. Minister Szakacs did a fantastic job opening it and I can understand and appreciate his words on the necessity for those with an eastern European connection, in his case Hungarian, to rely on each other for a decent supply of food. To this day, I have to admit that I do look in horror when I see my son eating smiley fritz.

It was a bipartisan effort, with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition highlighting the stellar work of the Polish community standing shoulder to shoulder with their Ukrainian neighbours—sentiments I believe all members of this house would quite happily support. I also want to acknowledge and thank Minister Bettison for arranging funding through her portfolio and the many sponsors from the business community for their support in ensuring this fantastic event could happen.

My biggest thankyou goes to Josephine Conradi and the organising committee of Andrzej Trepa, Edward Dudzinski, Tracy Lo, Natalia Dworniczek, and Kasia and Michael Kroker for their hard work in pulling together this brilliant event. This exceptional team of volunteers worked tirelessly, often through the night, to ensure its success, and I do not think there would be a single person from

the 4,000-strong crowd who would disagree that they have done their community very proud. Like so many of us in this room, we all want the heritage of our descendants to remain vibrant and something we can all be proud of. While as a government we have boosted funding significantly on this front, we know we cannot succeed without amazing volunteers like Josie and her incredible team.

Before finishing, this is an opportune moment to remind the house that the hub of Polish activity in the state, Dom Polski, is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 9 December with a gala dinner planned. I am looking forward to being there and I encourage members of this house to join me. With 18,000 South Australians with Polish heritage in South Australia, myself included, it is great to see that like so many multicultural communities in our state, our heritage is alive and kicking.

### **CLARE VALLEY WINE INDUSTRY**

**Ms PRATT (Frome) (15:27):** There is much to attract people to the Clare Valley, there is much to celebrate about our fantastic region, no less than the tourism and the dining experiences, and I take this opportunity to celebrate and promote some of the internationally acclaimed and award-winning winemakers we have in our region.

Just recently three winemakers, no less, were acknowledged in the Halliday awards—so, three in the top 100—namely Grosset Wines, Adelina Wines and Rieslingfreak. I am delighted that today there is also fantastic news for Taylors which is the fantastic new cellar door in Auburn. They have won, to international acclaim, best wine in the world through the VINUS awards for their Taylors estate shiraz 2020 for \$20 a bottle. I recommend that you get online, Mr Speaker, and have a look.

In celebrating the wineries, the winemakers and the growers in the region, it is important that we remind ourselves what is special about country SA, what is special about our wine regions, but also the pressure that they have been under most recently. Of course, I make reference to the challenges that growers and winemakers have faced with the tariff pressure placed on our exports through China. While we might see some relief coming, that has had a flow-on effect with oversupply of wine.

Sadly, on Thursday morning last week, the southern part of the Clare Valley—Auburn, Leasingham and Watervale—experienced an unprecedented black frost event, and the impact is still being assessed. I wish to raise the profile of that weather event to the level of this house, and to profile what might be a smaller boutique wine region contributing 1 per cent, but it packs a punch when it comes to its quality and, of course, its recognition on the world stage for riesling and shiraz.

I want to remind the residents and the growers, the businesses, the suppliers and the local council, as well as the Wine and Grape Growers Association, that they have my full support when it comes to a response that is going to be required, given the extent of the impact of this black frost on new buds late in the season, with the likelihood of some of these vines recovering for the 2024 vintage being very unlikely. While it is an enormous setback, the grape growers and the winemakers in the Clare Valley are made of heavier stuff, so I know that they will rebound and we will work together to find solutions that support that industry in the Clare Valley.

But it does take its toll on the wellbeing and the mental health of primary producers more broadly, and I have spent the better part of the month of October marking mental health month as declared by the World Health Organization. The theme this year has been to have a conversation. I think that is a very important step that we can all take to engage with our friends, family, colleagues and neighbours, to have a conversation, and take the conversation further than 'R U OK?', 'Just checking in', and 'How is it going?', but 'What can I do for you?' or 'What do you need?'

The discovery I have made in the last month interacting with our mental health workforce is actually for the very sombre and serious elements of their work how joyous they are. I want to make a shout out to John Mannion and the Breakthrough Foundation, to Geoff Harris and the Mental Health Coalition. I attended the Lived Experience Workforce Awards and was surrounded by people who just love the work that they do. With great delight I attended the Talk Out Loud awards, a foundation imagined by Mary Galouzis who sadly lost her brother and has for many years now dedicated herself to this space. Country and Outback Health in Clare were hosting a breakfast that was to help us have

that conversation, and, finally, in the city, a Mental Health Coalition round table was held to start to unpack the challenges that we face in this space.

### AUTISM

**Mr ODENWALDER (Elizabeth) (15:32):** I rise to talk today about an important matter for many people in my electorate and in the north more broadly, and that is the proper recognition of the needs of the autistic and autism community in our society. In the north, we have the highest NDIS participation rates in the state—over 17,000 participants. For the NDIS more broadly, South Australia sits above the national average of 35 per cent with 41 per cent of our NDIS participants being autistic. With these stats in mind, it is very clear that there is a large autistic and autism community within the local area in the north. Speaking with providers such as Autism SA, they have shared how they have nearly 2,000 members registered with their organisation in the northern suburbs alone, though it should be noted this number is only registered members.

With numbers like these and communities as large as the autistic and autism community, it is clear that things need to change. After years and years of advocacy by the autistic and autism communities, I am very proud to be part of a Malinauskas Labor government who are the first in the nation's history to establish a world-first Assistant Minister for Autism in my friend, Emily Bourke MLC, as well as a nation-leading dedicated Office for Autism, which is led by an autistic director.

Beyond this, of course, we are also the first government in the country to develop an autism strategy, which will be co-designed by the autistic and autism communities, and provide our state with a roadmap towards better inclusion.

I was proud to join the Assistant Minister for Autism earlier in the year during the consultation process for the state's first Autism Strategy, holding community catch-ups in my local area of Elizabeth, as well as accompanying her to several schools in my electorate to talk with the new specialist autism inclusion teachers who are doing such a great job now.

During that consultation the feedback was loud, clear and consistent. Every person who is autistic is an individual with their own strengths, qualities and desires. There is a saying that when you have met one autistic person you have met one autistic person, meaning that there is not a singular way in which autistic people experience the world. Every experience of autism is different.

Historically, though, there exists unwarranted stigma and stereotypes when people hear the words 'autism' or 'autistic'. People often make assumptions, and because of these stereotypes the autistic community often express how they have felt misunderstood and unheard in the past. They have also shared how important it is to hear from autistic people and their families themselves, how important it is for autistic people to have a say on the policies and changes that will impact them. That is why I will be holding another opportunity for people to have their say in my electorate—a forum—along with the Assistant Minister for Autism.

This forum will be an opportunity for the autism community to engage with us, to educate us and to further inform us. The experiences and knowledge that we are gaining from these forums is critical to the Malinauskas government's push for better outcomes. During my time as the member for Elizabeth, I have spoken with many fierce advocates who have been fighting for years and years and years—fighting to just have someone stop, listen but most importantly to act. I am so proud to be part of the Malinauskas Labor government, a government that has listened and worked side by side with the autistic and autism communities to start delivering on making South Australia the autism inclusive state. We know this is just the beginning.

The forum on 8 November will provide further opportunities for members of the autistic and autism communities to learn more about the nation-leading Malinauskas Labor government's autism initiatives, as well as sharing their stories about how we can make our state more inclusive. There are many people who have dedicated their lives to supporting and improving the lives of autistic people—teachers, carers, allied health professionals and many who are also autistic themselves, and we want to hear from them. We want to hear from anyone who is involved and supports the autistic and autism community.

It is my hope that this forum will be a step forward as we continue to develop and implement our state's first Autism Strategy. I hope that it will help us all as we move forward towards the future,

and I encourage all those who can do to attend. This is an opportunity to be heard. We will continue to listen. We will continue to learn and we will continue to act and deliver on making South Australia not only the nation's but world leaders in autism inclusion.

*Parliamentary Committees*

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY**

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. S.E. Close (resumed on motion).

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER (Moriaita—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:37):** I am pleased to resume where I left off. I was talking about some of the risks that were identified in relation to the government's proposal to establish a new Adelaide University, including the investment of \$440 million through a range of mechanisms. I don't know whether that is the best way to characterise the investment actually—I will come back to that—but certainly it is an investment of funds with revenue to be disbursed to the universities annually, including purchase of land and a grant of \$30 million to support international student attraction.

That is a significant expense on the one hand; on the other hand, there are broader risks to the institution if it is not realising its ambition in the way that we hope it will. Some of those risks were elicited by Professor Derek Abbott, a distinguished professor at the University of Adelaide. Before the break in transmission I was going through some of the risks he identified in his testimony.

For context, I have also not said that I agree with all of the risks that he has identified but I think it is important to reflect on them. Some of them are significant risks, some of them are risks that have mitigation strategies in place, and there are just a couple I disagree with, but it is important to bear these in mind before undertaking the ventures such as that which we are talking about. I think that we got through to Risk 8. For Risk 9 that he identified, he said:

...the merger increases systemic problems. Currently, many large universities throughout Australia are under fire for a range of issues—including increasing corporatisation, overuse of consultants, poor governance, poor transparency, top-heavy management on inflated salaries, wage theft, overcasualisation of staff. These are the real issues that need fixing. A merger is a distraction and will worsen these problems. A merger will embed us more deeply with expensive consultants.

I am not sure I agree with him on all of those aspects. There are certainly some issues there that do need to be considered. I think that if there is one argument that has been put by advocates for this—and we will talk about timing later, but one of the benefits of resolving this this week and next week is that it does enable the university to get on with the business of merger rather than people having an uncertainty hanging over them.

I think that in an ideal world the committee might have taken more time and had more time to report, but if there is a benefit of having had the abbreviated time it is not so that students know what brand their university will have come Christmas this year for something that they might be applying for in 2026, as I think one minister said earlier this year, but it is that the focus work that is distracting senior management of the universities, and other staff, can have clarity around it. Therefore, that informs our position.

Risk 10 identified, and I am quoting again from the *Hansard*:

...our ranking will plummet. An exodus, together with the fact that major organisational change always causes a ranking drop, could easily cause an initial drop by 200 places. Evidence of this is that the University of Adelaide right now has been undergoing internal mergers of faculties and schools over the last three years...and what this does is divert time and money from core business.

I am not sure I agree with that one either, with due respect to Professor Abbott. Flinders University underwent a significant reform of its schools some five or six years ago. It did see a ranking drop—not a ranking plummet, but a ranking drop. What it has seen since then is a ranking increase. In the last round of rankings, where university rankings for 2024 have been identified in recent times, Flinders University was not unique but it was unusual against other Australian universities in that its rankings have been increasing consistently over the time.

Flinders University is—as I have said before, I think it is ranked about 13<sup>th</sup> or thereabouts, give or take one or two, depending on the ranking authority—the 13<sup>th</sup> or so best university in Australia, according to things that it measures. It is on a really strong trajectory. It will be number 10 in Australia

within a couple of years, if not thrown off course. It has every reason to be in a position to market itself as the best university from any measure, certainly outside of the Group of Eight, in Australia.

It has a capacity to invite international students from around the world, especially those who are not particularly wedded to the requirement to be in a top-100 university. It will be strongly placed to bring in all of those. Its research intensity is increasing dramatically. Its research outcomes and commercialisation of research and attraction of ARC grants has increased significantly in recent years—and Flinders has done that with significant disruption several years ago. There was a drop first and then an increase.

The merger is a much more significant realignment than that of Flinders, so the risk is greater. The risk highlighted by Professor Abbott here is one that must be addressed seriously and taken seriously, because if it was to plummet by 200 places as Professor Abbott suggests then that would be a serious concern. For the record, I do not think it will. I think there is enough certainty in relation to University of Adelaide's ranking. I am not suggesting that it is going to be in the top 100 and I do not think that they were even suggesting that necessarily, but I do believe that it will probably drop. I do not think it will drop by that much, unless there are significant staff leaving.

It is on that basis that Professor Abbott warns us; it is on that basis that Professor Abbott makes the claim. That risk is there. That risk is there if that many staff were to leave. It is a contested space, as I said before the break. If lots of staff leave then there is a real problem. It is the significant mitigation that the vice-chancellors and the transition council need to address. We are given some comfort by the vice-chancellors' response to our minority report highlighting the number of senior academic staff who have come on board to Adelaide University since the announcement of the heads of agreement, or at least since the news of the merger has been on board, and the confidence that they have given us that that will potentially continue.

That was Risk 10. Risk 11:

...the government has not read the business case and has not had it independently evaluated. This is an extraordinary oversight and the lack of independent review raises a big red flag. Federal and state governments review commercial-in-confidence proposals every day. I sit on various governmental and professional panels myself and review confidential commercial-in-confidence documents all the time.

I see no reason why staff have not been invited to review the business case. Those that come forward can sign a non-disclosure agreement, as is best practice. Governments always set up independent panels to review commercial-in-confidence grant proposals and business cases, as they should when public money is spent. There has been a failure of process.

I agree and have made statements on that. One of the recommendations in the minority report that the Hon. Jing Lee and I put forward went specifically to the failures of the government's process in relation to this. I spent some time earlier talking about that. I am not going to repeat myself.

In relation to risk, Professor Abbott continues:

Risk 12: difference in university cultures leads to compromise. If one were merging universities with a similar ranking and staff profiles, one might expect a good alignment, but UniSA and Uni Adelaide are not aligned, as explained earlier. Their missions and ethos are different.

I talked about students entering the university before. In fact, students going to UniSA and students going to Adelaide Uni are not that different in terms of their preparedness to deal with the complexity of university curriculum. Indeed, there are some courses where UniSA's ATAR entry ranking is higher than Adelaide Uni's, which might surprise some people. I think it is important to bear in mind that UniSA is a really well-regarded teaching institution. It has very high levels of graduate and student satisfaction. By any standard, it is a world-class university.

The difference, as best I can summarise it, if I was to say that there is one key difference, is that Adelaide Uni has a higher intensity of research than UniSA does. There is a higher volume of research. There is a higher volume of high-quality research. That is not to underplay the important research UniSA does. There is just less of it, and indeed it is less of a focus for the university.

The risk Professor Abbott is talking about here is not in relation to the preparation of students—we dealt with that earlier—but in relation to the expectations of staff. He says:

...their staff profiles will be quite different...when two quite different management teams sit down together to negotiate details of the merged university they will be at loggerheads. Decisions reached will be compromises, rather than meeting the intended aims of the merger.

That is a risk, I think, but it is not necessarily a necessity. It just highlights the significant body of work that the institutions have ahead of them to come together. If you have two law schools with different approaches to the practice of law, coming together is going to be a risk. If you have two schools of education, where one is very practical and hands-on focused and the other has more of a research mindset, then bringing that together will be a complexity, a risk—not one that is insoluble.

Certainly, we had before the committee examples in cancer research, where there are people who are already working together across the institutions and felt that they could do so better if they were integrated. There were examples no doubt of people in different schools in the two different institutions who would have a harder time than those who came forward, and many of them may not have felt comfortable coming to our committee. It would be foolhardy to progress in this venture without taking those concerns seriously.

I just highlight to the government, and the vice-chancellors have heard it from me direct, that this has to be a focus. Bringing these people together in the spirit of collaboration and working well together is a challenge, and it is one that everyone must be focused collaboratively to do.

Professor Abbott continues:

Risk 13: the new university act for the merged university is being rushed. Many observers and staff have been calling for improved governance and an overhaul of the university act. It would be a huge mistake for this to be a rush job that is not co-created in full consultation with staff. We need at least a year to critically review the act, with robust debate that includes staff and the oversight of an independent panel or commission.

I am not going to agree with Professor Abbott on all of that. I do recognise that he is not the only person calling for new governance. The union has called for new governance. I think that the Greens in the Legislative Council have put forward proposals for different governance, and no doubt the Liberal team will turn its mind to those tomorrow.

I don't necessarily agree that it is the consideration of the detail in the bill that needs to be delayed a year. The truth is that evidence we had from TEQSA backs up the information in the transition plan that was released in July by the vice-chancellors. This is in relation to timing.

For the new university to start its work on 1 January 2026—that means international students being able to enrol in the university from 1 January 2026, that means the university having authority given them to advertise for international students by the fact of it being a university, which requires TEQSA accreditation, and the fact of it being a university capable of enrolling international students, which requires CRICOS authorisation/accreditation—that new university must have its house in order well in advance of 2026. This is accepted.

The average pathway for an international student who is going to come to Australia means that they have made their decision potentially 18 months in advance. We need the new university to be advertising, and it must be an accredited institution before it can advertise. We need that to be done by the middle of next year if it is to open its doors on 1 January 2026. We accept that, and we have always accepted that.

The time line outlined in the transition plan highlights that TEQSA accreditation by 1 July next year would need legislation passed in this place in the first quarter of next year. That has not been challenged in any serious way up until the last few weeks of the committee. The government's preference has always been to sort it out by the end of this year, but the vice-chancellors have been clear that it was necessary by the first quarter of next year. They have always said the earlier the better, but by the first quarter of next year. They are able to provide some preliminary information to TEQSA to start the review process that they have to do.

TEQSA came to the committee and they said that, to formally consider the matter, they needed as much information as possible to be after legislation has passed. They would prefer it to be this year. That was a defining piece of evidence for me. It was new, it was novel. They acknowledged that it was quite possible they would be able to get the job done if the legislation passed early next year, and they would continue to work with the university. They made it clear that,

to have confidence in the 1 July start date, then the legislation passing this calendar year would make that a lot easier. We accept their evidence; they are the national regulator. It was slightly different to what was in the transition plan. It did not deny what was in the transition plan, but it was a different weighting. So we are dealing with that this week and we are prepared to deal with it.

On the detail of the bill, concerns were raised by Professor Abbott, the union and others. They would like a majority-elected council that will deliver the positive outcomes required. We have had a look at university councils before and how they have been evolving around the country. My view is that a skills base is really important for university councils and people with skin in the game, if you will, in relation to decisions that the council may take, such as representatives of staff bodies, staff unions, student bodies or student unions.

There is certainly a role for them and there has been a position on them ever since the draft legislation came out. They must be heard at the table, but to have a majority in that position I do not think provides the governance reform that would lead to the outcomes that are in South Australia's interests. Therefore, the opposition is unlikely to support significant reform along that way, but I certainly respect the backgrounds of those putting it forward.

It may have been Professor Abbott or it may have been another witness who talked about examples overseas of universities running quite successfully with boards dominated by people who are lecturers or who work or study in universities, and there may well be examples of that. I would note that they do not comprise the majority of successful universities around the world.

I refer to Risk 14 identified by Professor Abbott—and there are 16 in total that he went through with the committee, so there are just a couple more to go through to give due airing to these esteemed views—which provides:

Risk 14: alternatives have not been analysed. A good feasibility study not only looks at the target merger but also benchmarks it against other viable alternatives. The fact that this has not been done is extraordinary. It means there is nothing to gauge it in terms of cost benefit. Could there be lower cost alternatives without the enormous opportunity cost of an unprecedented merger? Due to all the previous risks I have mentioned added together, there is a high chance such a large structural change will outweigh the benefits. We need a further year to properly analyse this.

Notwithstanding the comment about a year, which I do not necessarily agree with, I do think that one of the failings of process throughout this whole university merger process put in place by the government is that we do not have a relative comparison between the different options.

We had Treasury tasked with the endeavour of negotiating with the universities a package that the councils would be comfortable with and that would enable the government's determined position of facilitating a merger to go through. We had the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science tasked with the bill and not asked for their policy advice. At no point was the counterfactual given serious policy analysis by government, and there was not just one counterfactual. It is not just a matter of standing still in the status quo, or the merger proposal as is. There are other options.

One of the significant things that has happened through this process was an acceptance, in response partly to the way that federal funding has changed over the last couple of years, that there is a place for state governments to invest proactively in research in our universities, especially in those areas of state strategic interest.

Up until now, state government investment in universities has been on an ad hoc basis. We have various projects that are supported. I recall, when I was education minister, there being a tender that went out for a research project worth half a million dollars, particularly focused on supporting students who do not engage successfully with their high schooling, and finding out what happens to them and how better we could engage them going forward.

These sorts of one-off or occasional relationships between the government and the universities are modest in scale in South Australia, certainly modest in comparison with other states. This perpetual research fund would see that relationship change so that state government would have a continual investment in university research that would enable research teams within universities to turn their attention more critically and in a more focused way to areas of identified state strategic interest, because the research funds at Adelaide University, and the one that we

proposed to set up at Flinders University, are constrained to an agreed set of state strategic interest topics of research.

The committee that will determine this is to be made up of three members appointed by the Treasurer and two members appointed by the University of Adelaide. We may do something similar at Flinders; we will have a look at that detail in due course. That committee will be working from a list that is agreed between the university and the government for state strategic interest. I have talked about the three areas that we highlighted in particular and that we focused on at Flinders: agtech research, AUKUS and defence, and health science. There will be potentially other ones at Adelaide University.

Having state government investment in research is novel. Here is the counterfactual: what about if we did that investment in research without necessarily having the merger take place? If it was decided that it is a public good to have these investment funds—a \$200 million research fund and a \$120 million equity fund to have extra research capability supported by state government and to have extra access for young people, or older people looking for new jobs, supported by the equity fund—no government department did any work on what that might look like without having to go through the opportunity cost and the significant cost and upheaval of having a merger. That is extraordinary.

Professor Abbott describes it as extraordinary and I agree with him. That sort of work should have been done. That that sort of work was not done by the cabinet highlights the risk that this government has indeed created in undermining confidence in the signature project.

We would hope, certainly, that the risk of not doing this fund at Flinders will be mitigated by the election of a Speirs Liberal government in March 2026. But the opportunity that may be lost through a different approach with less transition costs at UniSA and Adelaide University we will never know, and that is a shame. With Risk 15 put forward by Professor Abbott, he says:

...not following best practices. Manchester's description of its merger, tabled as evidence...cites critical factors to Manchester's success. I quote:

- Universities similar in research standing...
- Internal support from staff and students...
- Contiguous campuses;
- Both Vice-Chancellors retiring...

The proposed Adelaide merger ticks none of these boxes...

Some of that is debatable, but they are certainly risks worth looking at. In the last risk he identifies, Risk 16, he says that:

...80 per cent of mergers fail, and the reason is people aren't boxes. There are many well-known massive corporate merger debacles that we have all heard about...

He goes on to say that these:

...resulted in the loss of billions of dollars. Given our uni merger is unprecedented, what is it that emboldens South Australia to think it can execute this flawlessly based on a rushed through six-month study?

Certainly, those risks are worth considering. I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

#### *Auditor-General's Report*

### **AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT**

In committee.

**The CHAIR:** I declare the examination of the Report of the Auditor-General 2022-23 open. I remind members that the committee is in normal session. Any questions have to be asked by members on their feet. All questions must be directly referenced to the Auditor-General's 2022-23 Report and agency statements for the year ending 2022-23, as published on the Auditor-General's website. I welcome the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, and I call for questions.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you. My first question comes from Part A of the Auditor-General's Report, page 7. Is the Premier concerned that because the Auditor-General has been refused access to cabinet documents he has been—and I quote from page 7 of Part A—'unable to form an opinion on whether transactions were conducted properly and in accordance with law'?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** The government has been seeking to work with the Auditor-General to resolve the issue to which the Leader of the Opposition refers. There was correspondence between the chief executive officer of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Auditor-General going back to earlier this year—I think from May, from memory. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet, I know the Leader will understand, is responsible for all cabinet documents. The CEO submitted a proposition to the Auditor-General to contemplate about the verification of information, so that the Auditor-General could satisfy himself that all appropriate measures were in place.

The Auditor-General came back and suggested that that approach was not going to meet all of their requirements and, from memory, in a piece of correspondence that I read from the Auditor-General back to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet CEO, suggested another approach that might acknowledge the government's desire for cabinet confidentiality to be maintained but, at the same time, provide the Auditor-General with the requisite information they require to verify particular decisions. That is something that the government—and I am pretty sure I have stated this publicly—is considering, and we look forward to potentially resolving that matter in the not too distant future.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** On the same matter, is the Premier aware that this is the first time since the Public Finance and Audit Act was introduced in 1987 that an Auditor-General has had to qualify their annual controls opinion?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I am aware that the government is maintaining a policy that has been in place now for a number of years. The government has not changed any law, the government has not changed any regulation, when it comes to the provision or non-provision of cabinet documents to external parties. We have not changed any policies or procedures since we have come to government; they have been in place for some time. In fact, I understand it is Premier and Cabinet Circular PC047 which outlines the provision of cabinet documents to other bodies, including investigative agencies. From memory—and I qualify that my answer is from memory—I think that was last reviewed during the life of the former government and has not been changed by this government.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** How does the Premier respond to the following comment found on Part A, page 6 of the report:

A situation where the Auditor-General is not able to provide the Parliament and the public with assurance that government services were delivered properly and in accordance with the law, as intended by the [Public Finance and Audit Act], is unsatisfactory.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** The government are committed to making sure that we uphold the laws, policies and procedures to which we are bound. As I said, we have not changed any government circulars that pertain to the provision of cabinet documents or otherwise.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The Auditor-General lists on Part A, page 8 a range of cabinet documents he has requested access to but has been unable to access. These include more than \$20 billion worth of projects such as the north-south corridor and the new Women's and Children's Hospital. My question is: does the Premier agree that this is unacceptable?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** Agree with whom?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The Auditor-General's concerns.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I am happy for the Leader of the Opposition to point me otherwise, but I am not aware that the Auditor-General uses the word 'unacceptable'.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I will rephrase the question. On page 8, there is a list of cabinet documents requested by the Auditor-General, providing insight into the decision-making and financing of those projects, including the north-south corridor and the Women's and Children's

Hospital. Does the Premier believe that it is acceptable that these documents have not been provided to the Auditor-General, therefore inhibiting his analysis?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** There are only so many ways I can say the same thing. The government is simply adhering to the government and Premier and Cabinet circular that has been in place, including throughout a significant part of the former government's life. As is evidenced by the necessity for the Auditor-General to request these documents, there is not an absolute right or entitlement that the Auditor-General has to cabinet documents. We have not changed the law here or the regulation.

As I stated earlier, the government is open-minded to exploring various mechanisms that might be able to provide or furnish the Auditor-General with the information they require without compromising the key elements of cabinet confidentiality, which we are keen to preserve and uphold. One thing I would note is that I have been advised that the Leader of the Opposition has been contacted himself, requesting authorisation for access to cabinet documents that relate to the life of the former government. The Leader of the Opposition, as I am advised, has not responded positively thus far to the release of those cabinet documents. This is the advice that I have been given.

**Mr Cowdrey:** By whom?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** The government. If that indeed is accurate, as I am advised is the case, then it would seem that there is a huge degree of consistency between the government's position and the Leader of the Opposition's. The only inconsistency, of course, would be between the Leader of the Opposition's non-response to those requests, or non-positive response to those requests, and his stated public position that all cabinet documents should be made publicly available.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I do not have any, unless a request has come in within a matter of days that has not yet reached me. Chair, forgive me here, but the Premier has made an accusation of sorts and, unless that correspondence has come in within the last few days, I can confirm to this house that I have granted access to every single one of the documents that took place under the Liberal Party's four years in government—unless there has been an imminent request that we have not yet processed. My practice is to require the Auditor-General access, and perhaps we can revisit that in this place later if the Premier gets further advice.

I will move on though to the commentary in relation to sporting club and local infrastructure grants, which were provided as a result of election commitments. The commentary is on pages 6 and 7 of Part A. How can the Premier guarantee the payment of sporting club and infrastructure grants has been done in accordance with the law?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** Because cabinet approved them.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** How can the Premier guarantee his government is making decisions in accordance with the law if the independent Auditor-General cannot be sure?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** Because cabinet approved them.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Is the Premier concerned with the Auditor-General's findings that the sports rorts grants, otherwise known as the sporting club and local infrastructure grants, were:

...conducted outside the public sector framework.

That quote is from page 7 of Part A of the report.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** Obviously I have read the part of the Auditor-General's Report to which the honourable Leader of the Opposition refers. There are a few things I would say in response to that. The Auditor-General is in effect suggesting that election commitments that are made by a political party or a political leader or a local MP should be subject to a post-election analysis conducted by the Public Service to determine their validity of sorts. I completely disagree with that proposition. I think it runs contrary to the central premise of the way our democracy operates and our system of government.

The notion that election commitments should be reassessed by the public sector to determine what should be funded and what should not be would render election commitments somewhat meaningless. That would be a fundamental distortion of our political system as we know

it. I have said this before and I think it is worthy of repetition: if the opposition believes it wants to adopt the Auditor-General's methodology, they should say it.

They should simply say it because then, when we fast forward to the 2026 election, every promise that has been made—obviously the Leader of the Opposition would have to stand up at community forums, in debates on TV, their television commercials, and say, 'We commit to X, subject to the approval of a faceless bureaucrat who is not up for election, and they will determine whether or not this policy goes ahead.' That would be the practice they would be applying, which they are entitled to do. I will not be doing that.

I believe that the responsibility of elected officials, when they make commitments to their electorate, is to make sure that that commitment is deliverable in the first instance, and then, if it is, commit to it and, if they are able to receive the mandate of the electorate, then go about executing that, to which they are held to account in any event.

The counterfactual to what the Auditor-General is proposing is of course that governments get elected and then potentially do not honour commitments that have been made, which I do not think would do much to reassure the community of the democratic process more broadly. I am familiar with the remarks that the Auditor-General has made. I respectfully have a very different view to the Auditor-General. I think elections matter. I think democracy is sacrosanct, and I think if the people of South Australia provide governments with a mandate to deliver on their election commitments then governments are duty-bound to do their best to deliver upon them.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Referring to the various pieces of commentary I have already quoted across pages 6, 7 and 8 of Part A, and the Auditor-General's views that are put across there, my question to the Premier on that would be: what does the government stand to lose by granting the Auditor-General full access to cabinet documents?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** The compromising of cabinet confidentiality. The Leader of the Opposition, I think, would well appreciate that cabinet is a very unique forum.

**Mr Cowdrey:** You were fine to give them to him when you were last in government.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** Sorry, what was that?

**Mr Cowdrey:** You were happy to give them to him when you were last in government.

**The CHAIR:** The member for Colton should not be interjecting, and the Premier should not respond to interjections.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** The member for Colton should assess his facts. The Leader of the Opposition would well be aware that cabinet is an important and unique forum in a number of respects. One of the key elements that underpins the deliberations of cabinet is to know that they are happening with the sanctity of cabinet confidentiality and cabinet solidarity, the central principles to the Westminster system that the Leader of the Opposition understands all too well, particularly not just because of the fact that he was a former minister of the Crown but, indeed, because he was the cabinet secretary, I understand, in the former government.

That is something that we believe is worthy of preservation. As I have suggested and reiterated both publicly and in this forum, we are a government that is open-minded to engaging with the office of the Auditor-General to make sure that we can find a way to achieve a balance between the preservation of cabinet solidarity and the deliberations that are happening within it, and furnishing the Auditor-General with the information they require to be able to do their job in a manner that they deem appropriate. We are trying to achieve that balance. Like I said, with the most recent correspondence from the Auditor-General to the office of the Chief Executive of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, suggestions have been made that are under active consideration by this government.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Is the Premier and the government concerned or fearful that full transparency might reveal mismanagement or decisions that go against the public's best interests?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** No.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Again, referring to the commentary of the Attorney-General in this section, what message does the Premier believe it sends to the public when the government restricts independent oversight bodies from performing their duties to the fullest extent possible?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I would seek to explain to all concerned that the government has not changed any rules or regulations that relate to the availability of cabinet documents. These are the same rules and regulations that were in place under the former government.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** How does the Premier plan to address the growing concerns around secrecy and transparency, especially when it comes to the Auditor-General's role? In this year's report the Auditor-General has suggested (again, Part A, page 6) that legislative change could achieve what his transparency goals and access to documents aim to achieve, but the government is refusing to progress the opposition's bill that would do that very thing.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I think it is telling what the Leader of the Opposition refers to. The Leader of the Opposition appears to be advocating for legislative change. Now, why would there be legislative change? Well, it is because the opposition is advocating for a change in the rules, changing rules that—

**Mr Cowdrey:** No, a change in the outcome. It's change based on what you're doing.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Colton, you are warned for a second time.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** —were in place throughout the entirety of the former government. I am happy to keep reiterating that, as a government, we are very keen to work with the office of the Auditor-General and we are aware of one option that might be able to resolve the matter, and that is something that is under active consideration by this government that I hope will be resolved in the next few months.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** I move to the information technology general controls commentary on page 25 of Part A of the report. In that section, various control deficiencies in the state government's information technology environment are highlighted by the Auditor-General. Page 25 states, and I quote:

It is disappointing that our ITGC reviews regularly highlight these types of control deficiencies. I would again encourage all agencies to be more diligent in addressing them as part of their regular management of security measures and practices.

Premier, do you have reservations about the current status of the state government's cybersecurity preparedness, especially given we are about to embark on the largest expansion of defence-related projects in our nation's history through the AUKUS agreement, much of which will occur here in South Australia?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I think it has been acknowledged not just across the country but around the world—particularly in the West—that cybercrime is on the rise and the volume and scale of cyber attacks continues to increase to the extent that it represents a material challenge and threat.

The commonwealth's Australian Cyber Security Centre had more than 76,000 cybercrime reports in the 2021-22 financial year, and the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner has received 1,748 breach notifications over the course of the past two years from private organisations alone.

This is something that we do accept is a major challenge and a significant threat that has been discussed repeatedly in a number of forums and certainly has been a matter that has been the subject of discussion at national cabinet. We have seen around the country the devastating impact that cyber attacks can have, particularly on people's confidence around the security of their data—particularly from private organisations. We continue to work through the Chief Information Officer within government, along with other frameworks around the country, including under the Cyber Incident Management Arrangements for Australian Governments, to support strategic coordination of response efforts into various cyber incidents.

As a government, we continue to review our cyber practices and provide advice. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet regularly provides advice to various agencies in respect of these matters to try to continuously improve the area and make sure that we are deploying best practice in terms of policy and also technology, to protect the interests of South Australians through their government.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Has the Premier and his department any plans to introduce legislation or regulations mandating stricter cybersecurity standards for government departments and agencies, given the Auditor-General has identified these issues year after year?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I think the Leader of the Opposition would be aware that my understanding is the Auditor-General's concerns here have been around for some time. It is not a recent development. In terms of the government looking at various options about how better to improve government's response, how better to regulate the area in a criminal sense and also in a government's performance sense, and how are we structured to make sure that governments and their various agencies have a coordinated response in respect to this, is something that is under constant review.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** The agency audits, and specifically page 322 of Part C, highlight specific dollar value reductions in spending associated with cybersecurity resilience in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Can the Premier outline what the specific reduction in spending on cybersecurity was?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I will have to take that on notice for the Leader of the Opposition.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** There was a decrease in expenses for contractors, including contractors associated with cyber-resilience projects. Which contractor has been engaged previously and is no longer engaged? That refers to Part C at page 322. I acknowledge the specific nature of that question and understand if the Premier wants to take it on notice.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I am advised that there is a whole suite of various ICT contractors who provide services to government. I do not think we have a copy of that full list available here, and certainly what the changes in that list look like, so I think it might be one I am happy to take on notice.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you, Premier. If you could take that on notice that would be good, but could you also provide the nature of that contractor's work at a high level, to gain an understanding of where the gaps might be?

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** I am more than happy to look at that.

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Thank you. I move on to another part of the report, which is Part C, Agency Audit Reports, pages 316 through to 322. The Auditor-General's Report highlights \$38.4 million was spent from the Major Events Fund. Can the Premier provide a breakdown of how that funding was spent?

**The CHAIR:** Just for my benefit, what page was that?

**The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS:** Page 316, in Part C. That is the Agency Audit Reports.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I have found it.

**The Hon. P.B. MALINAUSKAS:** Thank you to the leader for his question regarding the Major Events Fund. The Major Events Fund was used for a range of different purposes across the financial year. The Leader of the Opposition would be aware that the government had a very specific election commitment to try to pursue the attraction of major events to the state. Obviously, there have been a range of major events that we have been able to announce over the course of the last 18 months since the election—the beach volleyball championships, investments through the Adelaide Festival, the Webex PGA event, the securing of the British and Irish Lions tour coming to South Australia, which the Scots are in, and obviously the AFL Gather Round and LIV Golf.

We have not been able to provide a specific breakdown of exactly how each event gets X amount of dollars because of the commercially confidential nature of those major events and the

fees that are attracted. That is a policy that has been in place for some time. It is there principally to preserve the government's position in a negotiating context so we do not have a situation where we are constantly having to barter or negotiate between various events around how much we pay. We would rather negotiate on an individual basis and maintain the strength of the government's bargaining position.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for the examination of the Auditor-General's Report for this section has expired. I thank the Leader of the Opposition and also the Premier. I now welcome the Treasurer and the member for Colton, who I understand is the lead speaker for this part.

**Mr COWDREY:** I will start in a similar vein to the previous session in regard to part A, pages 6 to 9. Is the Treasurer concerned that the Auditor-General has been unable 'to form an opinion on whether transactions were conducted properly and in accordance with law', in particular around some of the biggest infrastructure projects in our state's history?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I think it is clear that the Auditor-General would like to have the capacity to read the entirety of the cabinet submissions and attachments with respect to these particular matters. I have to say it has always been my understanding that what is being sought in relation to these projects—for example, the north-south corridor, the Women's and Children's Hospital; I think he also makes reference to the redevelopment of the Adelaide Aquatic Centre—is evidence that the decision has been taken by the appropriate decision-making body, which is cabinet.

It is one thing to have evidence of a decision and, once a decision is taken, then that decision is carried out according to the requirements of the public sector, whether it is Premier and Cabinet Circulars or whether it is Treasurer's Instructions, and all of the policies and frameworks that the relevant government agencies are subject to. It is one thing to know that the decision has been taken lawfully by the appropriate body, but I think it is something in addition to that to then say that that requires every page of each of the cabinet submissions and all of the associated documents that go with that.

**Mr COWDREY:** Does the Treasurer have any concerns that, for the first time since the Public Finance and Audit Act—an act that he is responsible for that was introduced in 1987—an Auditor-General has had to qualify their annual controls opinion?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I am not sure about the assertion that this is the first time that there has ever been a qualification of a controls opinion. I do not have the report in front of me, but my recollection is that last year's Auditor-General's Report chose to qualify his audit opinion with respect to the sporting and community grants that were lawfully considered and approved by cabinet and then appropriately given effect, largely, by the Department for Infrastructure and Transport. This is a matter of opinion. The Auditor-General has obviously felt so strongly about this particular issue that he has chosen to qualify his opinion.

My perspective on this is that I am entirely comfortable that the appropriate body that is entitled but also required to make the decision, whether it is for the grants that I referred to or whether it is for these three infrastructure projects, that that body cabinet has made the lawful decision and has authorised the initiatives and the expenditure of public moneys on those initiatives. If the Auditor-General remains dissatisfied with that because he has not had the benefit of reading all the cabinet submissions that he has wanted access to, then that is a matter for him. I am entirely comfortable that cabinet has made those decisions as the appropriate body responsible for making decisions, particularly on such sums of public money.

**Mr COWDREY:** Treasurer, the Auditor-General lists a range of cabinet documents that he has requested in relation to significant transactions and infrastructure projects of government within the report at page 8, what we have calculated to be more than \$20 billion worth of projects. Do you believe it is appropriate under the Public Finance and Audit Act for there to not have been appropriate scrutiny of these projects based on the Auditor-General's inability to access documents sufficiently?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** Again, I think these are matters of opinion. One is: can the Auditor-General feel satisfied that the decisions to proceed with these initiatives have occurred in the appropriate forum and under the appropriate legal authority? I was not here for the previous session that the Leader of the Opposition was questioning the Premier about. I do recall, and I think it was

from the previous year's Auditor-General's Report, that there was reference to the fact that the Auditor-General had made requests for particular cabinet documents. There was a discussion about that with the Auditor-General.

If I am not mistaken in recalling this, there was the offer of providing the evidence of the cabinet decision, i.e., that the lawful authority had been given by cabinet to approve those initiatives along with the expenditure of the relevant sums of public money. My recollection—and again I will correct this if I am misrepresenting what the Auditor-General's comments have been—was that that was not satisfactory for the Auditor-General and that it remains his strong preference that, rather than just being given the evidence of the lawful decision, he gets all the associated documents.

I think, as I said before, there is a difference between getting access to evidence of a lawful decision and the predilection of the Auditor-General that he should have all the information that cabinet was provided in deliberating the decision that was eventually reached. There is a longstanding convention in executive governments, formed pursuant to Westminster governments, and that is that there is cabinet confidentiality. The cabinet retains the capacity to deliberate free from scrutiny. I think we are on delicate ground now, where we move beyond the Auditor-General being provided with evidence of lawful decision-making into an environment where the Auditor-General insists on having a ringside seat at those deliberations, and by that I mean having all the material that cabinet is able to consider in the course of its deliberations.

**Mr COWDREY:** In the Treasurer's response, he references cabinet confidentiality—of course noting that under the previous Weatherill government, where he sat within the cabinet, the cabinet at the time was happy to provide sufficient documents to the Auditor-General in the early years of that government. If you make a comparison of jurisdictions around the country, there have been no issues for the federal Auditor-General in accessing appropriate documentation or cabinet documents through a matter of pure convention.

If we look to our west, in Western Australia the then McGowan government moved government-led legislation to provide express access to the Auditor-General in the hope that transparency, government accountability, would be seen as being at the forefront for that government. If you look to our east, in New South Wales the then Perrottet Liberal government moved a government bill of a similar nature to provide express access to the Auditor-General. Why is it that South Australia is different? Why is it that the South Australian government has no interest in providing the Auditor-General the access that he needs to undertake his work to effectively scrutinise this government in the decisions that they are making around multiple tens of billions of dollars of taxpayer money?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** There is no difference between the approach of this government and the approach of the previous Liberal government. The framework is exactly the same. There is a process, in fact, which was put in place I think in either late 2018 or 2019 by the former Deputy Premier of the Marshall government. That framework remains in place; that is, the Auditor-General of the day can request, of the government of the day, access to a cabinet submission, and a consideration is made as to whether that is released. So nothing has changed there. This government does not have a different regime compared with what the previous government did.

In fact, I remember—I think it was when the Auditor-General's Report was released in 2018—bemoaning the lack of access to cabinet submissions because no regime had been put in place, which had been promised by the previous Liberal Premier and the previous Deputy Premier. So, again, I do not think it is entirely accurate to characterise the behaviour of this government as being somehow completely at odds with the behaviour of other governments around the country or, more to my point, the behaviour of the previous Liberal government.

Of course, as the Auditor-General reflects on in his report, decisions are being made around access to those documents, and if I recall—I am not reading it as I am speaking—perhaps in the last year's report, if not in this year's report, there was a reference, and an offer had been made to the actual cabinet decision itself to provide evidence that the decision had been taken lawfully and appropriately by cabinet. My understanding from reading the Auditor-General's Report is that he remains unsatisfied with that. These are matters of opinion; he has chosen to express his opinion in

a manner that suggests that getting evidence of a lawful decision is not sufficient for him, and I guess that is a matter for him.

**Mr COWDREY:** In relation to your answer, I will ask the question more plainly: what has changed in your approach between your time in cabinet in 2014, where you were happy for those documents to be provided to the Auditor-General, and the approach of the current government?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** To the extent to which cabinet may or may not have discussed these matters—I am obviously not going to canvass that in here, particularly given my earlier comments around the important principle of cabinet for any government being able to deliberate confidentially and amongst itself—these are assessments taken at a point in time about a particular submission.

There are considerations that have to be reached: for example, whether cabinet submissions are released relevant to a current government or to a previous government. The process should be about that. The process is the same even though the decision may be different. Again, I am at pains to point out that from my reading of the Auditor-General's commentary in this report and last, he even makes it clear that the government has been at pains to provide him the lawful evidence that we thought would suffice for him to offer an unqualified opinion, but he has rejected that.

**Mr COWDREY:** In regard to your previous answer, did the current situation regarding the government's working interactions with the former Auditor-General have any influence on the introduction of a bill to this place that would allow the government of the day to appoint an Auditor-General for only a 12-month period?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I do not believe we have sought to introduce a bill to appoint an Auditor-General for 12 months. My understanding is that there was a request by the Ombudsman to have a legislative provision enacted that would enable an ombudsman to be appointed for a seven-year term, and that there was some debate amongst those in the other place about whether that should be a one-off or seven-year terms and you could have more than one term. I think that informed the perspective that you have one person who is an independent arbiter within the public sector, if I can put it like that, with the Ombudsman having that, and that might be appropriate to extend it to the Auditor-General as well.

**Mr COWDREY:** I move on to Part A, page 19, in regard to cybersecurity and the Auditor-General's reference in section 6 that:

All information held by SA Government agencies is subject to confidentiality, privacy, security and administrative processes of varying degrees.

He also goes on to reference that:

The critical processes for information and data assets are:

- collection and capture
- storage and retention
- maintenance and protection
- effective use.

With particular regard to retention and protection—not to labour the point; I only ask this again because we have not had a clear answer from you in other forums—in regard to the recent Super SA member data breach, when was the Treasurer first informed that Super SA members' personal data had been uploaded to the dark web for the very first time?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I was informed on Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> of the cybersecurity incident which saw the access of data from the third-party provider. I think you have asked me a question in question time: was that briefing specific about the dark web or not? I certainly came to understand that the incident involved information from what we understand at this point in time, I think, to be an international actor accessing the information on the servers—that may not be technically the correct word—of Contact 121 and posting references to that information, or references to that data, on the dark web.

If that information was specifically provided to me the first I knew of the incident, on Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup>, I cannot recall off the top of my head, but I am happy to go back and try to refresh my memory to the best that I am able and bring back a more correct answer. Obviously, the member for Colton has his own motivations; it is breaking news that cybersecurity attacks where data is stolen and posted on the dark web are somehow a revelation about cyber attacks on government agencies or third-party providers. It is unfortunately, for those attacks that are successful, par for the course.

My consideration, first and foremost, has always been how quickly we can let the members know, and I think all members in this place have already heard me reflect on that. Certainly, while this incident happened over a period of some weeks before ultimately Super SA was able to accurately advise its members of what had happened, it is a substantial improvement on how the original breach was managed in 2019. I would hope, in the regrettable event that this ever occurs again in the future, we would be able to respond in a more timely way once we know the particulars of that particular incident.

**Mr COWDREY:** In regard to the previous answer, are you able to clarify for the house now how long the information or the threat was available on the dark web? We have had varying accounts in the Budget and Finance Committee and then public statements from the Premier subsequent to that, the difference between 'three weeks' and 'a short period'. If it is the Premier's answer that was correct, that it was 'a short period', are you able to define for the committee what 'a short period of time' is?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I think part of the confusion lies not necessarily with the committee or the member but in the complexity of accurately communicating what went on here. There are two things to be considered. One is the existence on the dark web, as I am advised, of the threat to release data, and then there is the presence, for whatever period that was, of data itself on there. I think that is what might have led to some of the consternation from either the member or those opposite in response to the quite detailed and fulsome evidence that was provided to last week's Budget and Finance Committee.

We know that the chronology of the events starts from mid-August and moves through into the September period when this incident was first made clear to government—or specifically, I should say, Treasury and Super SA—but then there was a period of a further number of weeks in order to understand what had actually been posted and the extent to which—I think what our concern here is—member data, or information regarding the members, was able to be accessed.

That is perhaps why you have that concern, member for Colton, about getting varying reports, that it is either three weeks or roughly thereof or it is shorter than that. I think it relates to the fact that we are talking about the same incident but two different issues within that same incident. One is the threat—the threat is issued, as we know, because there is usually a demand that goes with that—and then there is whether that threat is ever made good and whether data is actually able to be accessed.

**Mr COWDREY:** Thank you for providing information. Can I ask the question again? How long was the data on the dark web?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** The threat of the data release was existent, I understand, for a longer period of time and then there was the contention about a shorter period of time when data was actually able to be accessed. As I said in my first answer to this last Tuesday or whenever you first asked me the question, this process is being superintended by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Perhaps for completeness sake so that I am not giving incorrect information to the house, I will redouble my efforts, checking with what they have so that we have the most accurate information for the benefit of the member in the house.

**Mr COWDREY:** So, despite the three minutes of information telling me that I was the one who was confused, you still cannot provide accurate information to the house about how long the data of Super SA members was on the dark web. You have your chief executive sitting next to you. You cannot tell us.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I think what I just said to the house was not necessarily it is your fault for being confused, I said what has led to some confusion is the fact that while we are talking about the one incident there are two different things happening. One is the overall, as we understand it, longer standing threat of a release of data and then what is specific to your point: how long was data started actually up and able to be accessed?

I am sorry that I am at pains to make sure that I am accurately explaining exactly what is going on and that I am willing, in an effort of openness and transparency, to make sure that you are getting the most accurate information that is able to be provided. But I am the Treasurer, here with me are senior officials from the Department of Treasury and Finance, and as I said in my previous answer this is an issue which has been superintended from day one by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, just as those very significant cyber incidents, particularly the one in November 2020, were managed by DPC. I am happy to take the question on notice and bring back as accurate an answer as I and the government are able for the member's benefit.

**Mr COWDREY:** With all due respect, I am not going to be lectured about transparency and openness by somebody who has refused to provide any transparency and openness or detail to this very parliament.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** I take exception to that, Chair. I have made it clear in my responses both in question time and also now in this forum that we are providing information. We are providing information as we have it accurately to hand, and we remain committed to do that, and I have indicated again that I will take that question on notice and provide accurate information to the member.

**Mr COWDREY:** So, Treasurer, you are going to have the chamber believe today that, over the last two weeks the line of questioning has gone on and information has been presented by the CE at the Budget and Finance Committee last week, you have not sought nor has your CE sought to bring information to this house of that nature to provide that answer to the house today.

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** You asked me a question not about the incident but when did I first know about the dark web element of the incident. Then you asked a subsequent question about how long was the information up, because the Premier said this at this time. That, to me, as in you member for Colton, may not feel consistent with advice that was provided to the Budget and Finance Committee of the other place. So I absolutely appreciate what is going on here: you are looking syllable by syllable for some inconsistency in an effort to try to draw out a political point, which so far seems to have evaded you.

So you will forgive me if I commit to this place to make sure that I provide accurate information as I can get it. You did not ask me those questions two weeks ago. I did not have the two weeks to go back and find the answers to those questions over the preceding period to right now because you have only just asked me the questions. I am happy to take it on notice. I am happy to provide accurate information, but do not accuse me of refusing to give you information or not being transparent.

**Mr COWDREY:** I will move on to Part C, page 379 in regard to the South Australian Government Financing Authority. In particular, I would like to ask questions in regard to the financial strategy approval that was missing for six months between June 2022 at the time of that budget, and then December 2022 when the financial strategy was approved by yourself. Can you explain to the house, firstly, how the financial strategy came to not be approved for that period of time and, secondly, how the Treasurer managed to have his trip to the US to meet with funding agencies and debt agencies, prior to him approving the financial strategy for those very things?

**The Hon. S.C. MULLIGHAN:** The purpose of my trip to the US was not to raise debt. The purpose of my trip to the US, as I have already fulsomely, accurately and transparently provided to the house, was to meet with credit rating agencies, was to meet with global financial and economic organisations, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and our principal reinsurer Aon, as well as meeting with some select other financial organisations—I do not have the list in front of me—including the Bank of America and so on, not only to gain an understanding as to where they saw the next 12 to 18 month period in a global and an Australian economic perspective, given that at that point in time everyone was assuming the US economy was about to go into recession, and of course that would have carry-on impacts for us.

That was the purpose of that trip; it was not to raise debt. After the budget, I did travel interstate to meet with entities that do provide debt to the government, and I am also aware that SAFA on a regular basis not only travels interstate to do that, but usually to various locations, principally, but not exclusively, to South-East Asia for those purposes.

In terms of the financing strategy, the Government Financing Authority Act provides that SAFA may transact in financial markets, borrow money within or outside Australia with the approval of the Treasurer. The limit to which SAFA can borrow is set out in SAFA's policy manual, which is approved by the Treasurer on an annual basis. The limit is set based on the projected borrowing over the current and forward budget estimates as required to finance the net debt in the non-financial public sector. The policy manual previously required SAFA to seek the Treasurer's approval for its annual funding strategy separately to the existing approval for it to borrow in markets. The approval to borrow in markets is provided in the debt ceiling approved by the Treasurer as part of the annual review of the policy manual.

Due to the timing of the state budget, and the requirement for the SAFA Advisory Board to consider SAFA's funding strategy at its subsequent meeting, it was not practical, I am advised, to request the Treasurer's approval of the funding strategy prior to the start of the financial year when SAFA commences funding of the state's requirements. SAFA executes its borrowing in accordance with the borrowing limit approved in the policy manual, and the funding strategy is focused on outlining SAFA's approach to achieving this. Given that the Treasurer's approval for SAFA to borrow in financial markets is already stipulated in the policy manual, the Treasurer approved an amendment to the policy manual so that the annual funding strategy is provided for noting rather than approval, and this addresses the Auditor-General's finding.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for this portion of the examination of the Auditor-General's Report has expired. I thank the Treasurer and the member for Colton, and for the next part I invite the Minister for Child Protection and the member for Hartley and the member for Heysen. Member for Hartley, you have the call.

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** Good afternoon, minister, and to your team. I refer to page 7, Executive Summary, Part A. Is the minister able to explain to the committee why there are no government records of the assessment processes and decisions about which individual sporting clubs and local infrastructure projects would receive grants, given that the process was undertaken by the now government whilst in opposition. This question relates to the Auditor-General's comments on page 7.

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** Thank you very much for the question and thank you to the team in the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing and my office for being here. I think we might have traversed some of this exact same question during the last session in relation to the previous Auditor-General's Report. I think we have also traversed it in question time and also, perhaps, in subsequent estimates committee hearings. I guess I have to say exactly the same thing as I have said previously, and that is that, as the Premier and the Treasurer spoke to earlier and covered extensively, all of the relevant processes, codes, etc., are adhered to.

As the shadow minister would note, there have been no particular findings in the Auditor-General's Report in relation to the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing. As the member is acutely aware, I think the matters he is referring to relate to election commitments, and again there have been questions responded to in relation to those commitments, which our government is setting about delivering upon, as we absolutely should be doing and as we will continue to do across the breadth of our broad set of policies and initiatives that we took to the election.

We will continue to deliver on those commitments and we will continue to adhere to relevant processes, codes, etc. If I can just say much more broadly, which I think as the shadow minister has heard me speak about previously in this chamber, sport is really powerful and in communities right across our state it brings people together, it improves physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. It includes people as part of community families.

Hardworking volunteers in clubs right across our state do an incredible job including people, again, and helping people to do and to be their best both on their particular playing field and beyond in life as well. I commend all of those volunteers who do that, and I commend them also for always

advocating for their particular clubs and the ways in which they can continue to provide that support, that sense of belonging, that enabling of improvement to physical, mental, emotional health and wellbeing to so many members of our community, as I know the shadow minister does both across the state and in his local community. I know that he always enjoys engaging with those volunteers and is a strong advocate for particular clubs and their needs, and I am sure he will continue to be so.

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** I have a supplementary to that: what is the minister's understanding about what exactly the assessment process is and how those decisions are made about which clubs and infrastructure projects would receive those grants? What is the minister's understanding of that process?

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** I think I have already covered this today, and I have certainly covered it previously. As I just said, they were election commitments. Also, as the Auditor-General's Report refers to in relation to the 2022-23 financial year, for the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing there have been no findings in terms of how particular funds, etc., were administered. Again, I commend the team for that work, and I again say that we will continue to deliver right across every portfolio on the commitments that we made at the election.

There are commitments in the women and domestic violence prevention sphere; there are commitments across human services portfolios, in consumer and business service portfolios—right across the full breadth of government. I know that my cabinet colleagues are working very hard with communities to deliver on every aspect of those election commitments, as we should be and as I am very proud that we are.

**The Hon. V.A. TARZIA:** Thank you very much. I will now pass on to my good friend, the member for Heysen.

**The CHAIR:** Do we need a change of advisers, member for Heysen?

**Mr TEAGUE:** Yes, I might just go to child protection. While the advisers are changing, I might just indicate that I will go straight to Agency Audit Reports in Part C. The focus of my questions in the short time available, and really following the significant events identified by the Auditor-General, will be first on budget cost on page 37 to start with; secondly, on the growth in children and young people in care, and particularly the disproportionate growth in the numbers of children in non-family-based care; and then, thirdly, I hope there might be an opportunity briefly to address the audit findings in relation to improvements in information technology general controls being required. I just indicate that to you, Chair. When the minister might be ready, I am happy to proceed.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr TEAGUE:** Proceeding then in order, first I direct attention to Part C, page 37 and the first dash point identified by the Auditor-General, 'Significant events and transactions.' The Auditor-General observes that child protection service costs exceeded the original 2022-23 state budget figure by \$81 million (20 per cent). To put that perhaps into relevant context, we see also at page 43, at about point 9 on the page, reference to the additional \$5 million that was provided to DCP as part of the Mid-Year Budget Review.

Going over to 44.1, we see further that that amount additionally comprises \$42 million of further resources to fund increased costs associated with providing care services to children and young people. The third dot point at the top of page 41 is 'additional working cash', which is not further specified but provides some context.

I direct the minister's attention then to page 46 and the middle part of that, from about point 6 on that page, a series of bars in a bar chart indicating the growth in expenses both as to budget from 2019 through to 2023 but then, more particularly, to expenses in excess of budget of which, as the bar chart indicates, 2023 is a stand-out example in terms of that blowout of cost. So there is a fairly broad-ranging context.

I might put the question in terms of the way I framed it in the first estimates hearing immediately following the 2022 budget. Given the increase in the budget to the Department for Child Protection year on year, which is not itself unwelcome, the extent of the blowout for 2022-23 is a source of concern to the Auditor-General. Given that \$170 million increase therefore in funds applied

to the Department for Child Protection, what results have been identified in terms of how those additional funds have been applied? What is the government's plan to avoid such a cost blowout in the course of the year ahead?

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** Just so I can answer properly, the \$170 million, I am not quite sure what you are referring to.

**Mr TEAGUE:** The sum of \$89 million is a 13 per cent increase over the 2021-22 budget. Service costs exceeded that budget by \$81 million, so 81 plus 89 is 170—partly budgeted, partly blowout of costs in excess of budget.

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** There is obviously a lot in that question, so I will try to—

**Mr Teague:** Just full context.

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** Yes, so I will give you full context also. I hope I am understanding the multiple questions in there, so I will try to take the themes, I guess. I think I have tried to explain this to the shadow minister before. In child protection and family support, primarily the core goal is always to do what we can to improve outcomes for children and to strengthen families where possible. Where that is not possible, it is to provide the best possible care. Where possible, that would be family-based care, either foster or kinship care. Where that is not possible, that would be residential care.

With the vision of improved outcomes for children, we are constantly balancing those various objectives. When I say 'balancing those various objectives', it is balancing, most importantly, in terms of getting the best possible outcomes for children and their families through tackling the complexity of issues that children and their families contemplate but also balancing in terms of where we direct particular investment.

If I am remembering correctly, the first point that you made was about the numbers of children in care. I wanted to give the member—

**Mr Teague:** I didn't mention children in care in this question.

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** You said the number of children. You said the growing numbers of children in care. That relates to the—

**Mr Teague:** I was giving an overall indication of where we are going. I will get to children in the second question. I am concerned with the blowout to budget in this question.

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** What you invest in children in terms of balancing the ability to give them the best opportunity for improved outcomes is also, of course, absolutely linked to where you direct particular investment. Everything is about those outcomes for children and doing what we can to improve those outcomes for children, and the investment obviously is balanced in particular ways to try to do that. We are always striving to do that, of course, as we should be.

Where I was going in terms of the numbers of children in care, which I think will be very pleasing to the member, is that over the past five years year on year, during 2018 to 2021, there was significant growth in the numbers of children in care—growth that went up to around 9 per cent year on year, sometimes 6 per cent, sometimes 7 per cent, up to 9 per cent. It is really pleasing that that number for this last financial year is in the vicinity of 2 per cent, so we are beginning to see that decrease. In regard to our investments that we are making in programs like family strengthening programs, effective intervention programs and reunification programs—and I do not want to overstate this; it is really important not to because there is still a lot of work to do—we can see a tiny shift in terms of that reduction after that blowout, using your language, over those past four years during the term of the previous government.

Having said that, when it is not possible to strengthen families, when there is no opportunity for effective intervention, family support programs, reunification or family group conferencing to work in the way that would keep a child safely at home, of course we have to take other actions. We are investing in reunification and we have put additional funds into reunification. We have put an additional \$35 million into family strengthening intervention programs. We have put an additional \$13 million into family group conferencing programs over here.

I will not apologise for this but, rightly, for the first time, we are beginning to invest in the way that we need to make sure that appropriate levels of support are there for children already in care. We have put significant additional investment into the care for those children and young people who are not living with their families, so that is a really important part of our investment. Again, I am not going to apologise for the fact that we are finally investing in the way that there should have always been investment for those children, particularly vulnerable children who are already in care.

There is a third area that we are significantly investing in. We recognise that we need to keep growing the numbers of family-based carers, both foster and kinship carers. We have invested with absolutely strong recognition of that in the most recent budget. We have committed more than \$100 million to support initiatives including financial support for carers—I am sure the shadow minister would be really pleased to hear that—as well as a 4.8 per cent increase on carer payments. In addition to that 4.8 per cent increase, we have also provided foster and kinship carers with children 16 and under with a \$50 increase to their payments. That is a really important part of responding to what carers all over the state have told us in terms of what they need to help meet those costs of caring.

Another very important thing, alongside developing a comprehensive carer attraction and retention strategy to keep building very importantly on those numbers, is we are seeing significant growth in the number of kinship carers. I take the shadow minister back to what I spoke about in terms of our \$13 million investment in family group conferencing. That is very important in terms of giving the best opportunity to identify kinship carers and to identify who can be around a child in terms of that extended family network. That is an incredibly important investment to grow the number of family-based carers.

Additionally, we have invested in this budget by again recognising that we need to grow those numbers: \$4 million into kinship care assessments means that we can employ additional staff members who can work much more fulsomely, efficiently and quickly to assess those identified kinship carers so we can have them in place as quickly as possible to provide family-based care to children.

Again—and I know we covered this in estimates—you always need to think about delivering those improved outcomes, and working towards delivering those improved outcomes, in a holistic sense for children and young people. You need to think about all those different mechanisms to balance appropriately the context for that child, bearing in mind the complexity of issues that a particular child and a particular family are facing: who else is around that child, whether the child should be in non-family-based care because there are no other alternatives, and really making sure that the investment is there for those non-family-based care residential settings. I am trying to answer in as fulsome a way as your fulsome question requires.

That is the balance that we continue to walk, and I am really proud that, since coming to government, we have invested an additional \$370 million-odd into the broad child protection and family support system, as we should.

In regard to the complexity that children and families are facing, I have spoken about the investment across the child protection and family support system. We know that to effectively deal with the complexity that children and families face we also need to make investments elsewhere. For instance, in the education setting—and I am sure the Minister for Education will be able to speak about this particular investment—there has been an investment in terms of mental health professionals in schools. That is, when you think about the system in its broadest possible sense, there are also investments, importantly, that we are making through other departments to make sure that we are responding to that complexity of issues that families face.

Similarly, there are investments in health settings and in many other departments as well. If we are all—and when I say 'we' I mean everyone in this parliament, everyone in our community, everyone across government, everyone in the sector—to live up to that mantra that so many of us speak to, that child protection and family support is everyone's responsibility, then we need to think about it in a holistic way right across government, and think about how those other investments and strategies also interact with us trying to improve outcomes with and for children and young people and their families.

I will flag—and I think this will absolutely demand, rightly, further discussion at other points—that I think there is absolutely much that we will be able to advance to help improve outcomes for children and young people through the investment following the royal commission into the early years. I think that there is an excellent opportunity to also connect work right across our community and right across government to advance outcomes for children and young people. That will be a really important investment in that regard, as will our investment into the new Women's and Children's Hospital and many other areas also.

**Mr TEAGUE:** I direct the committee now to page 45, perhaps in light of the emphasis in the minister's answer on the need to invest in improvement of availability of family based care, kinship care and so on. Going to page 45 at about point 2 on the page, we see the Auditor-General addressing just that, and indicating there that 'Family based care at 30 June 2021 increased by 1 per cent or 41 children,' so it goes to the 2 per cent that the Auditor-General identifies at page 37. That might be regarded as an encouraging number.

However, the Auditor-General indicates, and I ask the minister to direct attention there, to the concerning growth—12 per cent growth, 83 children—in non-family based care, the very thing that the minister has just directed attention to. That is a 12 per cent increase over the course of the year that, if we go back to the question I asked about money, was a year in which there is \$170 million of additional resources applied.

The chart that the Auditor-General sets out provides what might be described as a startling indication, by the darker section at the top of the 2023 bar, that the number in non-family based care is constituting a startlingly increased proportion of the overall. The Auditor-General makes the observation, in the following paragraph below that table, that non-family based care is significantly more costly to provide than family based care and is the main driver of the significant growth in child protection services costs.

So you have a blowout to budget that the minister has described as resulting from investments towards promoting family based and kinship care. The Auditor-General is belling the cat on that, though, by indicating that we have had this 12 per cent increase in the very thing that these funds have been directed to. As if to illustrate the concern, the Auditor-General points to the commonwealth Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services—the RoGS 2023—reporting that:

...in jurisdictions where data was available, annual costs per child were considerably higher for residential care (ranging between \$487,000 and \$956,000 in 2022) compared to non-residential care...

I hear and absorb and listen carefully to the minister's answer in relation to investments towards increasing family based and kinship care, but the Auditor-General is indicating that such endeavours have, in the circumstances of the report, been an abject failure.

One further observation is that the chart that the Auditor-General then refers to is the situation in South Australia relative to the rest of the country, and so we see South Australia has a lower proportion of children and young people in family based care than the Australian average across the board.

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** First of all, if I can just correct you: I knew that you were giving the parliament an incorrect figure before when you spoke about the \$170 million. You have actually doubled up your figures. What you refer to in terms of the \$89 million is the appropriation which funded the investment into the costs of caring. I just want that noted, that that figure is utterly incorrect, hence why it does not appear there in the Auditor-General's Report.

*Mr Teague interjecting:*

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** If you understand—

*Mr Teague interjecting:*

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** One figure speaks to the investment in the costs of caring, so it is not an addition; one is funding the other. I just wanted to put that on record because that was completely incorrect. The other thing that you have missed in your soliloquy is that the figure you are

also not accounting for is the investment in intervention, which has meant that particular children's families are strengthened and they have been able to stay safely at home.

The other thing that I would say is, in terms of your quote of the \$487,000 and \$956,000, if you read that line that actually refers to all jurisdictions, so it is not particularly a South Australian jurisdiction. Again, I just wanted to make it clear that that was not correct. Nevertheless, what I will explain again is that we, in this most recent budget, have made significant investment to grow the number of family-based carers. That investment—

*Mr Teague interjecting:*

**The Hon. K.A. HILDYARD:** Yes. This is about the previous financial year, so we have made that investment to address that issue. I am hoping that makes sense to you. That is why we have made that investment, but I am happy to talk through it again in the remaining time that we have. We are providing additional funds to carers to fund the cost of caring, and we are investing in family group conferencing and in kinship care assessments to grow that pool of family-based carers.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for the examination of this portion of the Auditor-General's Report has expired.

Progress reported; committee to sit again.

*Parliamentary Committees*

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY**

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. S.E. Close (resumed on motion).

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER (Morialta—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (17:37):** It is a great pleasure for me to continue discussing the Joint Committee on the Establishment of Adelaide University.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** A great pleasure for whom, did you say?

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** A great pleasure for me, sir. I enjoyed, over the course of some 40 or 50 hours, spending time with a number of our colleagues, and we learned many things. Applying myself as I do as a member of parliament, I also took a great many hours outside the 40 or 50 hours of the committee inquiry to explore issues, to think about issues, to do a great deal of reading and to engage with constituents who came to speak with me and with other stakeholders who had concerns.

It was a great many dozens of hours of my time, and I have much to reflect on for the benefit of the members who did not necessarily have the opportunity to spend so much time with our colleagues as I did. I think it is only fair to them that they have the opportunity to learn from some of the highlights of that time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** We thank you for your consideration.

**The Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER:** I am generous, sir. Thank you for recognising that. There are a couple of key issues that need to be considered in some detail. I want to spend a little bit of time talking about Flinders in this section—I think that we are going to be coming back tomorrow, as I understand, to conclude the matter—and the Magill campus and the regions. I spent some time before the break talking about some of the risks that were highlighted by some of the people with concerns about the proposal.

As I was going through those risks, I identified a number of them where I did not necessarily share the concerns and why, but I do think we need to explore a little bit more the way in which the international student market works as well because an understanding of that is utterly important to being able to understand the benefits, the costs, the risks and the opportunities of the bill that will presumably be coming to this house next week as it makes its way through the Legislative Council today and tomorrow. There is opportunity there. Every member needs to be informed of these matters because the consequences of the decisions that we make through this debate and the bill to come are going to be with us for some time.

I guess if there was one thing I was going to highlight in my contribution above all others it was an encouragement to the government to join us in reflecting on some of the opportunities that could be better realised with the suggestions we have put forward.

Specifically, as I discussed at around midday today, we think that the proposal, which does have some significant upside if fully realised, would be better realised with the inclusion of a research function fund for Flinders University. It would be better realised with a commitment from the state government to work with the new university and Flinders as well with the regional campus delivery or regional uni hub delivery or other offering in the regions very much their focus. I again encourage the government to take on board the reflections of the committee as far as they relate to the Magill campus.

Perhaps I might take a moment now to reflect on Magill. UniSA Magill, formerly a campus of the South Australian Institute of Teachers, has a history that its former students and former staff, and its current students and staff are very proud of. It is a beautiful part of the world. There are students and local community members who will actively use the facilities at Magill, the beautiful natural environment at Magill, on a daily basis. It is obviously somewhere I am very familiar with as one of the two local members of parliament for the site in question. The site on my side of the road is highlighted by Renewal SA and Treasury as an opportunity to realise some of the \$64 million that is proposed to be spent on purchasing this land in the shorter term.

Just to go back to a little bit more context, the purpose of this land transaction is to provide funds for the new university to enable them to help defray the risk of the transition process, which may be a contribution by state government towards helping them defray that risk, but it is a contribution which is intended to come at no net cost to the taxpayer. By having this land purchase of land for which University of South Australia has identified it has no ongoing need for beyond the next handful of years, the government is proposing to provide that ready cash to the university at a time when it may need it during the transition, and in return the government will have on its books land that has been valued at \$64½ million.

The decisions that government will then take in relation to the land are what is of most interest to me. The Deputy Premier has previously characterised it as a choice between the University of South Australia, were this deal not to take place, and the University of South Australia potentially selling the land to a developer or indeed the government purchasing the land, which the Deputy Premier, if I have fairly characterised her, suggests is a potentially better outcome for the community because the government can take the community's interests into account with potentially more justification than a developer might. A developer might be seeking to maximise the profit margin.

So I take the Deputy Premier at her word there. I therefore encourage her in particular and the Minister for Planning and the other members of the cabinet who will have the question of how they will deal with this land in the coming years to pay particular attention to the submissions from the member for Hartley during the process and the Mayor of Campbelltown on behalf of the Campbelltown City Council during the process.

I will start with the eastern side of St Bernards Road. The eastern side of St Bernards Road in the electorate of Morialta is a large patch of land which to the untrained eye might seem less utilised than the western side of the road but is in fact also an important part of the community. The fields, the ovals, the soccer pitches are used for informal soccer games pretty much every weekend. The area that was once dominantly tennis courts is now mainly used for car parking. As the University of South Australia will have use of the land for the next couple of years as it continues to be a campus, I wonder myself what they are going to do for parking if that ceases to be available as a car park. That is certainly going to be a concern for residents. I would highlight that inasmuch as the government thinks about the timing of what they might do with that land.

The Campbelltown City Council in its submissions to the committee, which is reflected in the majority report of the committee of inquiry, but I accentuate this, highlighted that this is a part of South Australia and a part of metropolitan Adelaide that has been developed at a rate greater than pretty much any other in the city. The infill and the removal of open spaces in the patch around this Magill campus, Magill and Rostrevor—that part of the Campbelltown area—has been dramatic over the last decade. In particular, between 2012 and 2019 under the planning regime instituted by then

former Deputy Premier John Rau, we were talking about a spate of infill development, block sizes at 150 square metres, setbacks that were minimal, and indeed a very dramatic change to the nature of that part of the Hartley and Morialta electorates, the Campbelltown council area in particular.

In 2019, the planning rules that applied to this area changed, which effectively increased the minimum block size from 150 square metres to 250 square metres, but the impact on that community of the loss of character, the increased density, the dramatic increased strain on amenity, on facilities, and traffic growth has been utterly marked, and we are still seeing developments approved prior to 2019 fully realised.

At the same time, just up the road you have the Magill Training Centre block, which was sold in the time of the Weatherill Labor government—again for housing—and another John Rau amendment to the planning rules has allowed the development of 400 dwellings on that space, but I think the community was comfortable with 200 dwellings.

That level of development includes some high density and it includes a five-storey apartment block right on the edge of the Hills face, facing into the city. It is where roads are narrow and where parking availability is minimal. As I pointed out in the SCAP meeting, the design on which the development was based, in terms of justifying how many car parks each dwelling should have, was on the public transport use in inner city Newtown in Sydney—not Newton down the road in Campbelltown but Newtown in Sydney, where the public transport availability is entirely different.

Residents in this area have in very recent times—the development is still being built at that Woodforde site—been confronted with what they see as very sub-optimal planning decisions, and so consequently they are concerned. Campbelltown council has highlighted the impact on this area of development to the largest possible degree, and has made a pitch to government for consideration. They have also suggested Campbelltown council is willing to put some skin in the game themselves for support in developing part of that land on the eastern side for active recreational facilities, for sporting and community facilities.

I do not want to get in the way of any negotiations that might be underway between government and Campbelltown council; I do not know if they are underway. I hope they are. I encourage ministers to familiarise themselves with the proposals from Campbelltown council and to take any meetings requested by Mayor Jill Whittaker, who I know has a good relationship with a number of members of the government. Certainly inasmuch as Campbelltown council has proposals for that eastern side of the land, as the local member they will have my encouragement and support.

In relation to the western side of the land, this is an area that is proposed to be maintained within the University of South Australia's active use for a few more years, but not forever, and I think the proposal is that UniSA would continue to occupy it for the next five years after sale, and after that potentially five more, and in the meantime there would be a master plan.

In terms of what the committee determined, there was a recommendation from the committee that the government actively commit to public consultation, community consultation and engagement in relation to that land at the same time as the other land. I will see if I can get the exact quote; it is not immediately to hand, unfortunately.

The other aspect that I want to thank members of the committee from the majority for agreeing to was also highlighting the need to engage with the Magill Campus Community Children's Centre, which is on the site. The Magill Campus Community Children's Centre is a long day-care service. It is certainly high quality. It is a community centre. It has certainly, imminently, the capacity to offer a preschool-style program, which is the government's intention for a majority of students when they introduce their three-year-old preschool program. This is a centre with highly respected staff, a waiting list from the local community and, hopefully, a big future.

The problem they have is they only have about three years left on their lease with the university. They have been unable to secure an extension of that lease to this point because the university obviously has not known what the plan was for the land going forward. That amenity, that facility for the community that is in so sore need, we know that there are many centres in Adelaide and the metropolitan area that are only half full that are not necessarily—some of them are challenging in terms of their viability. To see a centre that is full, with a waiting list, removed from our

local offerings would be a great disappointment. I do not think it is anyone's intention, but I would hate for it to be a consequence of land sale on the western half of the Magill campus.

The recommendation from the joint committee—I think I do have this one handy here—which I am very grateful for, was that:

...public consultation in relation to the use, development or sale of land at Magill and Mawson Lakes should commence at the earliest reasonable stage and councils with an explicit interest in the disposal of land should be involved in master planning processes.

I agree; the Liberal Party agreed. The recommendation continues:

Moreover, Renewal SA should, once the land is in the hands of the State Government, commence discussions with Magill Community Children's Centre as soon as possible with a view to renewing its lease.

This is the important part for which I was expressing my gratitude to the committee.

Renewing its lease at the rate we are talking about—it is basically a peppercorn rate—provides an amenity to the community which is important, but to the state government it is directly in alignment with the state government's plans for early childhood and I certainly encourage them to pursue that as soon as possible.

One of the key things we are talking about here is a community childcare centre with an active parent population engaged in their committee who will do fundraising, who will do work in the local community, who want to invest in the future of the site and want to invest in its infrastructure and, indeed, make the most for their centre in the future. It is hard for them to do that when they only have another three years on their lease. By engaging early and committing to a longer term lease, a significant-term lease, the government will get much more back from this centre than it is giving up, and so I urge them to do so.

The Liberal minority report goes further in relation to the eastern part of the land and says that:

As part of the public consultation recommended by this report, in relation to the Magill campus land, Government should include an offer to deliver on Council's suggestions for the development of community facilities on the Eastern part of the land.

I certainly encourage the government to do that. They are likely to make decisions in relation to this land prior to the next election so, as a local member, as the shadow minister for education, and as a member of this committee who heard from dozens and dozens of local residents keen on what is happening to this area—including Chris Schacht, Vincent Tarzia and the Mayor of Campbelltown—I make that plea to the government.

In relation to the other side of the land as well, there was some discussion in the committee about the way in which local members were presenting materials. The member for Hartley talked about this issue with residents at the door, talked about this issue with members of his community who were interested and provided evidence in relation to the feedback he got from his community. For my part, I have spoken to many local residents about this issue. I will share, for the benefit of the parliament, the comments I put in my newsletter a little while ago during the winter. In relation to University SA Magill campus, I wrote:

As mentioned on page one, the proposed closure of the Uni SA Magill campus is big news for us locally. The State Government has announced they want to buy it for \$60 million from Uni SA as part of their \$440 million Uni Merger proposal, however they are yet to say what they want to do with the land.

As Shadow Education Minister, I have been pursuing a range of questions about this merger through the Parliament and through the media. As a local MP, I am concerned about what the Government proposes to do with this precious site at Magill. The site includes significant open space, has important local environmental and biodiversity value, as well as sporting and recreational facilities valued by many. The Childcare Centre is a critical community asset. The facilities include buildings of heritage value. Many local residents enjoy the site every day.

I've worked hard to establish a Parliamentary Committee inquiry into this proposal, of which I am a member, and that inquiry is now underway. If you have a view about any of these matters, I'd be keen to hear from you.

As we have heard, many members of the community went on to make submissions to the parliamentary inquiry. I thank those who did that.

What I hope comes from this process in relation to the Magill land is a process that does not necessarily satisfy everybody. The government wants to realise \$64½ million in value, certainly as presented by Rick Persse on behalf of Treasury and the assumption of the Renewal SA officers.

If you only look at the dollar figure here, I think you are doing a disservice to a community that has had significant urban infill in recent times, a disservice to a community that has put up with some bad planning decisions up the road, leading to much higher density at Hamilton Hill than I think would have been desirable for the local community. It is a local community that does actually use the current open space on both sides of the road every weekend. As Chris Schacht said, people walk in that creek line every day as part of their physical activity to keep their health up, to keep them alive. The environmental impacts should be taken into account.

There are certainly spaces within that site that we are not talking about when we talk about the beauty and heritage of Murray House. There are some tutorial rooms, lecture theatres and areas within Magill campus that are, let's just be kind, functional. Certainly, I think that many members of the community will understand that there is an opportunity with some of these spaces for some level of appropriate use that is in the broader interests of the whole state as well as people who are looking to find a place to make their home.

I urge the government and ask the government to put the community's interests very high on the list of priorities. I commit—indeed, I recognise the commitment that the Leader of the Opposition has made today—that a future Speirs Liberal government certainly will do so. We will ensure that there are sufficient protections for the land on the western side of the Magill campus. We will ensure that biodiversity and environmental protections, the need for active and passive recreational facilities that are there, the community childcare centre and the heritage value of Murray House are well and truly taken into account in terms of whatever happens to that land going forward.

With time that may or may not be available this evening or tomorrow afternoon, I also wish to talk about not just the eastern suburbs of Adelaide but the southern suburbs of Adelaide, where we are looking at Flinders University and the opportunity that this proposal creates for better outcomes for students living in country South Australia, in regions around the state. In doing so, I reflect particularly on the way in which Professor Colin Stirling presented himself to the committee when he gave his evidence and the way that he has made himself available to the opposition and members of the joint committee from all sides of the parliament in terms of understanding the evidence that he has provided. I encourage members of the parliament to read the evidence he has provided. It provides a very useful context for the further commitment the Liberal Party has made for a research fund for Flinders University should we be elected in March 2026.

To summarise the commitments very briefly for members present, the research fund for Flinders University will support research work in line with the state's strategic interest. Obviously, Flinders University has expertise in defence industries. Some of the work they are doing at Tonsley is utterly world leading. There is also research in areas relating to agtech and food production, which is an important part of the South Australian economy that can only benefit from further protection and accentuation of that work, and indeed health sciences, which are very important. I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

At 17:59 the house adjourned until Wednesday 1 November 2023 at 10:30.

*Answers to Questions***CONSERVATION COUNCIL**

**21 The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition)** (29 August 2023). What is the total cost, incurred in 2022-23 and budgeted for 2023-24, of the Department for Environment and Water challenging the Ombudsman's ruling to release to the opposition the contract and associated documents for the Conservation Council of SA?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

The department did not make a determination on the FOI application within the statutory time frames. Mr Speirs subsequently submitted an external review application to the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman made a determination on the external review. The department has submitted an application to South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to review the decision of the Ombudsman as further information is available that wasn't before the Ombudsman at the time of his determination.

The department has incurred legal costs of \$7,999.20 in 2022-23 in relation to the SACAT proceedings. There is no specific budget allocated for this matter.

**CONSERVATION COUNCIL**

**22 The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition)** (29 August 2023). Why is there a \$10 million decrease in the estimated total project cost (\$20.3 million in this budget, down from \$30.8 million in 2022-23), and why does this differ from the \$37.6 million the previous Liberal government originally secured from the Australian government?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

Without reference to a project or budget paper that provides context this question cannot be answered.

**MURRAY-DARLING BASIN**

**23 The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition)** (29 August 2023). Is the department in any way funding the 'Life or Death for the Murray Darling: Q&A with Experts' sessions that the commissioner attended as a panel member between 30 June to 7 July this year? If so, how much?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

My agreement with the Commissioner for the River Murray in South Australia requires him to 'Lead a series of River Murray Forums in South Australia and participate in relevant interstate forums as agreed with the Government Party'.

The Murray-Darling Conservation Alliance, of which the Conservation Council of South Australia (CCSA) is an alliance member, convened the 'Life or Death for the Murray Darling: Q&A with Experts' sessions at which Mr Beasley was a panel member.

The South Australian government is party to a grant agreement with the CCSA that includes funding of \$71,799 for an activity titled: Supporting engagement activities of the Commissioner for the River Murray. The CCSA was paid that amount under the grant agreement during the 2022-23 financial year and the particulars of how that funding is applied is a matter for the CCSA. The CCSA will provide the department with a financial acquittal of funds spent by 31 January 2024.

**NATIONAL PARKS**

**24 The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition)** (29 August 2023). How many national park visitations were there in the past year, split by each park?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

Park visitation data is sourced through a booking platform which collates information relating to each park booking. Visitor data is only collected for parks where an entry fee is required. Parks visitation data is not collected at parks which have free entry and is therefore not captured in overall figures. Consequently, true park visitation is higher than reported visitor data.

Where visitor data is reported by car entry, the number of persons in each car cannot be known precisely. An average of 2.3 persons per car is assumed for Belair National Park.

During the 2022-23 financial year, of the 54 parks and reserves that the Department for Environment and Water collects park visitation data for, the number of visitations was 834,552 people. Break down by park is:

Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Region:

- Belair National Park = 164,680
- Cleland Wildlife Park = 118,631
- Deep Creek National Park = 33,698
- Newland Head Conservation Park = 4,847
- Onkaparinga River National Park = 5,799
- Para Wirra Conservation Park = 12,067

Eyre and Far West Region:

- Acraman Creek Conservation Park = 320
- Chadinga Conservation Park = 16
- Coffin Bay National Park = 25,839
- Fowlers Bay Conservation Park = 2,246
- Gawler Ranges National Park = 4,867
- Laura Bay Conservation Park = 159
- Lincoln National Park = 27,857
- Memory Cove Wilderness Protection Area = 2,813
- Nullarbor National Park, Wilderness Protection Area and Regional Reserve = 526
- Point Bell Conservation Park = 35
- Wahgunyah Conservation Park = 206
- Wittelbee Conservation Park = 1,083
- Yellabinna Regional Reserve = 1,524
- Yumberra Conservation Park = 1,694

Flinders and Outback Region:

- Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park = 30,507
- Innamincka Regional Reserve = 1,404
- Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre National Park = 865
- Malkumba-Coongie Lakes National Park = 33
- Tallaringa Conservation Park = 563
- Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park = 2,134
- Wamba Kadabu Mound Springs CP = 21
- Wapma Thura—Southern Flinders National Park = 1,153
- Witjira National Park = 3,713

Kangaroo Island Region:

- Cape Gantheaume Conservation Park and Wilderness Protection Area = 1,983
- Cape Willoughby Conservation Park = 66
- Flinders Chase National Park = 24,714
- Lashmar Conservation Park = 3,919
- Seal Bay Conservation Park = 94,931

Limestone Coast Region:

- Beachport Conservation Park = 1,914
- Bool Lagoon Game Reserve = 389
- Canunda National Park = 4,579
- Coorong National Park = 12,671
- Ewens Ponds Conservation Park = 5,409
- Little Dip Conservation Park = 6,255
- Naracoorte Caves National Park Campground = 2,543
- Naracoorte Caves National Park = 98,774
- Piccaninnie Ponds Conservation Park = 1,951
- Tantanoola Caves Conservation Park = 37,029

Riverland and Murray Lands Region:

- Chowilla Game Reserve = 666
- Dangali Conservation Park and Wilderness Protection Area = 142
- Karte Conservation Park = 115
- Loch Luna and Moorook Game Reserve = 1,116
- Morgan Conservation Park = 504
- Murray River National Park = 2,660
- Ngarkat Conservation Park = 4,641
- Tolderol Game Reserve = 458

Yorke and Mid North Region:

- Dhillba Guuranda-Innes National Park = 54,819
- Mount Remarkable National Park = 23,304
- Dutchmans Stern Conservation Park = 300

There were also 19,028 park passes purchased, these are broken down to:

- Single = 2,723
- Two months = 8,788
- Parks Multi Year = 3,820
- Desert Parks Pass = 3,697

#### FLAWS FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAM

**25 The Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition)** (29 August 2023). With regard to Flows for the Future, why was there an underspend of over \$4 million for 2022-23 from what was budgeted (from \$5.419 million to \$1.05 million)?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

That the 2022-23 budget of \$5.419 million reflects the original budget for the project and 2022-23 estimated result of \$1.051 million reflects the revised budget for the project.

The Flows for the Future program had an underspend in 2022-23 as very wet conditions late into the year followed by a mild summer and an early start to the flow season maintained high soil moisture in many catchments. These conditions limited the ability for construction activities to be undertaken during the usual November to March construction window.

Work instead focused on landholder engagement activities, review and validation of existing devices, calibration of watercourse diversions sites, and research and development of novel, inexpensive on-ground solutions to expand the options available for passing low flows.

The Flows for the Future program was recently extended until 30 June 2024.

**PROSECUTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**134 Mr TEAGUE (Heysen)** (30 August 2023). What system enhancements have been required of the Prosecution Management System project, as per footnote (c) of 2023-24 Budget Paper 4, Volume 1, p.17?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** The Attorney-General has advised:

In 2022-23, with the advent of the Courts Administration Authority Electronic Courts Management System (ECMS), the ODPP was required to modify the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions Prosecution Case Management System (PCMS) to facilitate the updated format of the court file number.

These changes were made by the vendor, Resolve Software Group Pty Ltd, in February 2023, at a cost of \$14,451.25 inc GST.

**DISTRICT COURT ASSOCIATES**

**135 Mr TEAGUE (Heysen)** (30 August 2023). What is the progress of the appointment of the extra budgeted associates in the District Court, and will this funding be temporary or permanent?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** The Attorney-General has advised:

The Courts Administration Authority received additional funding for the three financial years, 2022-23 to 2024-25, for Operation Ironside. The authority has utilised this funding for Sheriff's Officers and District Court associates, appointing four additional associates for this period.

The funding is temporary, commencing 1 July 2022 for three years.

**TARRKARRI, ABORIGINAL ART AND CULTURES CENTRE**

**136 Mr TEAGUE (Heysen)** (30 August 2023). What involvement has the Aboriginal Affairs agency and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs had in decisions regarding the future of Tarrkarri – Centre for First Nations Cultures?

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has advised:

No final decision has been made in relation to this project. The panel appointed to review Tarrkarri, constituted by Ken Wyatt AM, Bob Carr and Carolyn Hewson AO, handed down their final report in recent months. The government is closely considering the report and its recommendations. This work is being led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, as it was under the former Liberal government.

**GREEN INDUSTRIES SA**

In reply to **Mr WHETSTONE (Chaffey)** (14 September 2023).

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

The Green Industries SA (GISA) website hosts a series of webpages with content pertaining to the 2022-23 River Murray flood clean-up program. In addition to the flood clean-up progress page, the website includes information for impacted residents and property owners, around how to register for free clean-up support, and what this support entails.

Members of the community are able to keep up to date on recovery information, including the clean-up program, through [recovery.sa.gov.au](http://recovery.sa.gov.au) and the River Murray Flood Community Newsletter.

The GISA website page referred to by the Member for Chaffey on 14 September 2023 contained information from initial phases of the clean-up program. This page has been updated with information regarding the clean-up program more broadly.

The River Murray flood clean-up program content on the GISA website will be updated at program milestones and as new information relevant to the clean-up program is made available.

**QANTAS CHAIRMAN'S LOUNGE MEMBERSHIP**

In reply to **the Hon. J.A.W. GARDNER (Morialta—Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** (26 September 2023).

**The Hon. N.D. CHAMPION (Taylor—Minister for Trade and Investment, Minister for Housing and Urban Development, Minister for Planning):** Since the election I have frequented the Qantas Chairman's Lounge on the following occasions:

Date	Travel Details
27/6/2022	Flights – Melbourne – Site visits focusing on urban renewal projects
8/9/2022	Flights – Canberra – Attendance at Housing Ministers Ministerial Council Meeting, in addition to meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister and federal Minister for Housing.
8/10/2022	Flights – Trade Mission—Japan and South Korea
03/03/2023	Flights – Melbourne – Trade and Investment – South Australian Showcase at the Australian International Airshow
12/3/2023	Flights – Trade Mission—Singapore and Japan
11/04/2023	Flights – Townsville – Attendance at Trade Ministers Ministerial Council – Trade and Investment
08/05/2023	Flights – UK Trade Mission and UDIA study tour with Hon. Michelle Lensink MLC
04/06/2023	Flights – USA Trade Mission
July 2023	Flights – Personal Leave to Queensland via Jetstar
15/08/2023	Flights – Port Lincoln – Bush Summit

\*\*Please note ministerial travel has contained multiple legs where a lounge has been accessed on more than one occasion.

#### **QANTAS**

In reply to **Mr WHETSTONE (Chaffey)** (26 September 2023).

**The Hon. N.D. CHAMPION (Taylor—Minister for Trade and Investment, Minister for Housing and Urban Development, Minister for Planning):** I have been advised:

Neither my staff or I have met with anyone from Qantas, its executives, board membership or staff since my appointment as Minister for Trade and Investment, Minister for Housing and Urban Development and Minister for Planning.

#### **FLINDERS RANGES SACRED SITES**

In reply to **the Hon. D.J. SPEIRS (Black—Leader of the Opposition)** (27 September 2023).

**The Hon. S.E. CLOSE (Port Adelaide—Deputy Premier, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science, Minister for Defence and Space Industries, Minister for Climate, Environment and Water):** I have been advised:

Initial advice regarding unauthorised earthworks having occurred along the boundary of the Nilpena Ediacara National Park and Beltana Station was provided to my office on Saturday, 9 September 2023.