



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE,
ENVIRONMENT AND WATER**

(Reference: ACT greenhouse gas reduction targets)

Members:

**MS M HUNTER (The Chair)
MR J HARGREAVES (The Deputy Chair)
MR Z SESELJA**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

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**Secretary to the committee:
Ms M Morrison (Ph: 6205 0136)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Committee Office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

WITNESSES

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 2.02 pm.

HAND, MS LOUISE, Australian Ambassador for Climate Change, Department of Climate Change

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water inquiry into ACT greenhouse gas reduction targets. I just want to check that you have seen the buff card in front of you.

Ms Hand: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You have had a chance to read it?

Ms Hand: Yes, that is fine.

THE CHAIR: You understand the implications of that statement?

Ms Hand: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Before beginning this session, would you like to start with an opening statement?

Ms Hand: No, not necessarily.

THE CHAIR: We might get straight into some questions. Just to give a little bit of background, which I am sure you have been informed of, we have had an ongoing inquiry into reducing greenhouse gas in the territory, as far as a legislated target goes, and we provided an interim report to the Assembly last year. We decided there were a number of matters going on not only locally but also nationally and internationally that we would need to come back and revisit before making our final report. That is why we are having this series of hearings early in the year.

To start with, I have quite a broad question. Can you give us a summary of the outcomes from the conference in Copenhagen in regard to setting a global target for emissions reduction?

Ms Hand: I am the Australian Ambassador for Climate Change and the head of our international division in the Department of Climate Change. You will have heard all kinds of forensic fallout from Copenhagen. The fact is there were such strongly competing global ambitions between developed countries and major emitting developing countries—notably China, India, Brazil and South Africa—that it was impossible for the conference to get an agreement under the UNFCCC framework, which is the traditional forum for international negotiations on climate change.

However, a group of countries, led by leaders, were able, literally within the last 24 hours, to establish an agreement called the Copenhagen accord in which that particular group of about 38 countries—which had Prime Minister Rudd, President Obama, Merkel and Brown: a whole range, including from small island states like the Maldives, the Pacific and the Caribbean—were able to agree, with considerable negotiation, a set of principles that are in and of themselves quite forward looking and

will take us some distance.

They establish for the first time an agreement that two degrees increase in temperature was an appropriate international goal. That has long been a policy of Australia and developed countries, but it has not been accepted until now by the major emitting developing countries. So we have got agreement on two degrees Celsius. We got agreement that there would be some kind of international monitoring and verification of mitigation action globally, including, for the first time ever, some developing countries. That was an enormous concession on the part of China to agree to some kind of verification regime.

We got agreement for what is known as fast-start funding to get up to a total of \$10 billion in the next three years to go towards, particularly, action to help countries that are most affected by climate change get some adaptation practices underway. Those, of course, are the very vulnerable island states, parts of Africa, the least developed countries. We got agreement on a forest carbon mechanism, which is known as REDD—reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. We got agreement to accept the principles of forestry management in terms of their carbon storage. We got agreement for all countries who sign up to the accord to list their mitigation actions, the kinds of actions they would take towards a target, in a document that will be available internationally.

That all sounds very bureaucratic, but in fact it is the first time in a post-Kyoto environment where developing countries have agreed that they—not necessarily as fully as you would like or as perfectly as you would want—will allow their domestic actions to be listed in an international context. In the case of countries like China and India, their domestic mitigation actions that they have agreed to in their own parliamentary systems are very substantial and are, in fact, a great step forward. It is very desirable to have those out there listed internationally.

The accord was signed off at the very end with great difficulty, but we got there. Since then, in addition to the initial, I think, 28 countries, there are now 93 countries in this last month which have signed up to this Copenhagen accord and have listed their mitigation actions. That particular group of countries includes most of the major emitters—the US, China, India, the vast bulk of the Europeans, Australia, some of the Pacific and the Caribbean. It covers about 80 per cent of global emissions—that group of countries. The next step is to see how much bigger we can make that accord and how we can take those undertakings further. Those are our Copenhagen outcomes.

THE CHAIR: I guess you are saying that each country will need to list their mitigation actions. What has Australia put down on that list?

Ms Hand: I will provide you with some detail if you like but there are the renewable energy targets, the targets more generally that the Prime Minister put out on 4 May.

THE CHAIR: It would be great if we could have that document.

MR HARGREAVES: This is really an of opinion. This is gigantic stuff, it really is. The bigger countries like China, India and America are driven, if you like, politically from the top. But there are some places like Canada which are driven from underneath

and go up. Do you get a sense that these state-type jurisdictions are embracing it as much as their national legislatures?

Ms Hand: It is an interesting question. There is, globally, a lot of state and local government interest in climate change action. Personally, I think some of the more effective NGOs and lobbyists were representing those kinds of views. They have a very practical take on climate change action in those countries.

On the Australian delegation, we have representatives, I think, of the Victorian and Queensland state governments. There were four or five from non-federal government agencies. As things stand now, there is no immediate mandated role for those layers of government but it is inconceivable, once mitigation action kicks in by governments, that those layers of government would not be involved. They are great service deliverers in the environment and they have a lot of inbuilt capacity for management of climate change and mitigation targets. Their role is not clearly identified yet but it is inconceivable that they would not be playing a part.

MR HARGREAVES: Do you think the same thing would apply to some of those other countries? I know that India is a nationally led country but it is made up of a series of states. Pollution is actually in the states and not at the national level.

Ms Hand: Absolutely, and China too. We say, in a kind of hopeful way, that, because China has got this centralised government, this will work perfectly down to the ground. That is very unrealistic. You have got multiple layers of government in between. Each of them is exactly like everywhere else. Governance will be better in some places, and worse in others. Some will be resourced. With a lot of these things, they are taken forward by imaginative individuals as well. You will find some provinces in China or Indonesia or Australia will have a local government that has got an imperative, has got the bit between its teeth.

There is no way to guarantee uniformity globally. Because states sign up to treaties or global agreement, you just have to hope the governance arrangements and the capacity will all go right down to the bottom.

THE CHAIR: Were you saying that it was 28 or 38 countries that signed up to the accord?

Ms Hand: It changed variously during that long night. Let me give you the position. Right now it is upward of 93, more than 90. The initial grouping was 28. It may or may not have got bigger. Let me get it to you later today.

THE CHAIR: There was quite an increase in the number from Copenhagen to now?

Ms Hand: Yes. That was intentional. I am sorry, I have not got the exact figure. It was a very astonishing night in that you had actual leaders sitting down, trying to work out the text. We had Obama there, with a pencil, and others. The agreement in that accord was that, by 31 January, countries that wanted to be associated with the accord would have their mitigation actions ready for listing.

There is a lot of ambiguity around this kind of thing. In order to get the developing

countries in, you have to make it as facilitative as you can. You hope that they list their actions. Then you are in a position to support them and offer technical assistance, training and finance.

It went from that much smaller group on the night through to this much larger group at the end of January. That will be built on and we will make that an object of international diplomacy through the year.

THE CHAIR: Is Australia at all concerned that there may be some coercion by some of the developed countries of some of the developing countries, particularly those they might have trade ties or some ties with or provide assistance to?

Ms Hand: I have not seen or heard evidence of that. The developing countries were remarkably effective at holding their ground. The traditional patterns of cooperation on this kind of work have often fallen into a development assistance-like framework. I think nowadays they are very sophisticated and very much based on partnership models. I have not seen evidence of coercion.

MR SESELJA: I would like to get you to elaborate a little more on the accord. Each of the countries that signs up puts forward their mitigation measures.

Ms Hand: That is right.

MR SESELJA: What is the next step? You talked about monitoring. How will that monitoring work and what will be the impact of that monitoring? Will any part of this accord be in any way binding on any of those who have signed up to it?

Ms Hand: So far it is not a legally binding instrument. The Australian government has said that it would like a legally binding outcome to climate change negotiations. We are some distance from that. There is no question of that happening right now. If there is to be something legally binding, it will be after considerably more intensive negotiations over the next year or 18 months.

The exact kind of monitoring and verification has not been determined yet. There are the Kyoto-style monitoring and verification arrangements that are in place for Kyoto parties but of course that does not include the major developing countries. That will be one of the first things we look at in terms of the international negotiations this year.

You have got some countries that are reasonably open and are used to international verification teams coming through, for example, under IMF practices. You have got countries that are very resistant to the idea of international teams. It will end up being the most satisfactory thing you can get developing countries to accept.

MR SESELJA: So that is unclear in terms of the detail and monitoring regime?

Ms Hand: It has not even been negotiated. We have got agreement to the principle, which China has been adamantly opposed to forever. China feels that it made a considerable concession to agree to MRV, which was very important to developed countries. MRV is monitoring, review and verification. That will be the subject of negotiation this year.

MR SESELJA: You talked about China and India making substantial commitments through their legislatures. What has China committed to?

Ms Hand: China has a five-year plan which is passed into law in China. It is the way China manages itself on these cycles of the five-year plans. In China's five-year plan, which was, I think, drawn up only a couple of months ago, there are various actions in relation to energy intensity targets, renewable energy and various technological adaptations for climate change which are in China's five-year plan. That is about as binding a commitment as it gets in China. China makes the argument that, since this is binding in China, that should be regarded as legally binding internationally. This, of course, is a negotiating argument. It is not in any way concrete or agreed. In terms of China, that is where they are.

The Indian government put out a white paper on climate change and energy policy a year ago. They have put through their parliament a series of agreements on quite substantial work on renewable energy, solar and wind in particular. They are a very forward looking government and they are looking at how they can provide fuel and water for growth. They are very focused on growth.

MR SESELJA: You talked about energy intensity. From memory, what was announced by China was reported as talking about lowering emissions per unit of economic production. I think that was some of the terminology used. How will that play out in practice? Clearly, China is growing at about 10 per cent per year. If they were to reduce per unit but are growing their economy, presumably their emissions will continue to increase at a pretty significant rate still. Is that how you read it?

Ms Hand: We have asked China for clarification on all of that. The great question in this is: what actually is China's growth rate? They have come up to us all internationally and put out a press release not long ago that they were going to do a 40 per cent reduction in their business-as-usual rates. That has not been determined; nor has the growth rate been determined. There is a lot international analysis going on about exactly that.

The Chinese have not given us the exact answer we would like to hear, possibly because they do not see things that way and they do not measure things that way. The discussion is out there. It is exactly the right question to ask. If you look at the Garnaut report, it looked at just what China's growth rates would be. All the think-tanks in the USA and elsewhere are looking at exactly that question.

MR SESELJA: So at this stage it is—

Ms Hand: I can't give you a direct—

MR SESELJA: unclear as to what it will mean.

Ms Hand: I can't tell you what the Chinese have not established themselves.

MR RATTENBURY: Just coming back to the accord, you mentioned the agreed target was two degrees Celsius?

Ms Hand: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: I am struggling a bit with the science. Can you remind me what that equates to in a parts per million outcome?

Ms Hand: In Australia we talk about 450 parts per million or less. The Europeans are much more comfortable using this two degrees Celsius term. If you come from what we call the AOSIS countries, the small island states, the Caribbean, they have quite a profound position of 1.5 or 350. That said, they signed up—some of them—to the accord because it was the best thing on offer. But they reserved their position, probably quite strongly. They feel quite strongly that it should be less. But we say in Australia 450 parts per million or less.

MR RATTENBURY: And that equates to two degrees; is that what you are saying?

Ms Hand: Yes, that is right.

MR RATTENBURY: Coming back to the numbers that signed up, you said it is 28 or 38; you are not quite sure?

Ms Hand: Yes, I am really sorry about that. I should know this; in fact, I did until you asked just now.

MR RATTENBURY: That is all right; it happens to the best of us. Out of that, you mentioned there were a number of Pacific and Caribbean countries that signed up. How many was that?

Ms Hand: I would have to give you the exact list. Normally I carry them with me. The interesting thing is that one of the countries that really took quite a prominent leadership role was the Maldives. I do not know if you follow their thinking or their discussion publicly. They have got a very activist government which has taken quite a pragmatic approach and realises that the Maldives have got to do some contingency planning and strategic planning.

I do have the list with me. The countries that drafted the accord were Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Colombia, Denmark, Ethiopia, the European Commission, France, Gabon, Germany, Grenada, India, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Lesotho, Maldives, Mexico, Norway, PNG, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

MR RATTENBURY: By my count, that was three AOSIS countries out of 28, out of 180 countries attending the conference?

Ms Hand: But this group here is much smaller than the 180.

MR RATTENBURY: I am aware of that.

Ms Hand: So they were represented. Of course, there were regional group leaders there, too, like Sudan—that is listed. Sudan is the regional group leader for the G77,

which is a very large—

MR RATTENBURY: I don't think Sudan's signing up represents the G77, though. Is that what you are suggesting?

Ms Hand: No, not remotely, but Sudan was the group coordinator and the group spokesperson for the G77 and, as such, was included in that group.

MR RATTENBURY: What were the arguments put by those countries that did not sign the accord?

Ms Hand: It varies. For some countries, they just do not have the kind of inventories. They just do not have the capacity to put together a target and mitigation action. For some of them, their emissions are very low. The focus tends to be on the top group of emitters, the top 20 to 30. So some of those other countries are good to have, but in terms of the impact on getting to two degrees or less, or 450 or less, it is more important to have the bigger emitters in.

MR RATTENBURY: Following on from the accord and the outcomes of Copenhagen, what expectations do you or the Australian government have of reaching a consensus in 2010 at the next COP in Mexico—some sort of global agreement?

Ms Hand: It is impossible to speak for the entire global community, but there is a very strong will to get some sort of satisfactory climate change outcome. The Mexicans I think will be a very able chair. They are excellent multilaterally. The Mexicans have needed to use the multilateral system to express themselves politically internationally for a long time, and they are very able. They have got an excellent team. They are thinking ahead. I think they will do their best, as the Danes did. The Danes also were absolutely heroic in trying to put together the right conditions to get the right kind of agreement. But if you have got such profoundly competing national interests, it is quite difficult.

MR RATTENBURY: The Danes spent two years preparing, really, from Bali. The Mexicans have got 12 months. What is your prognosis of the chance of success?

Ms Hand: It is incremental with multilateral work. You get what progress you can at the time you can get it, and all sorts of things play into it. But I think the Mexicans are very able and we will be doing our level best again, all this year, to take it forward.

MR RATTENBURY: I guess the conclusion I draw from that is that there is certainly no confidence in having a binding agreement by the end of 2010, from what I am hearing you say. There is a hope but not a—

Ms Hand: We say, quite clearly, that we would like a legally binding agreement, but there are a number of other countries that do not share that view. We will keep negotiating until we get the best possible legal framework to get us to 450 or less.

MR SESELJA: The IPCC have been criticised quite a bit lately, and I think they have acknowledged that there are some issues. I think someone senior in the IPCC—I cannot remember the name—recognised that there need to be some reforms of IPCC

going forward. What is your view of where the organisation is at? Obviously, they have suffered some PR blows in the last couple of months. Do you see them continuing in their current form or do you see some form of change in IPCC, and how do you envisage that?

Ms Hand: There was a mistake in one part of one submission to one working group. It has been given the most enormous airplay. There is an excellent analysis of that particular set of criticisms on realclimate.org. It is absolutely excellent and well worth reading, because it addresses this particular set of criticisms. The IPCC itself is only 10 people and it draws on the work of climate scientists and a whole range of other scientists, hundreds and hundreds of them—an enormous amount of peer review, analysis and voluntary submissions. It is not actually an organisation in the form that you might be thinking of; it is a small group of people with access to an enormous body of current scientific work. So the science is rock solid on this.

With respect to the attack on IPCC over the foolish business of the Himalayan glaciers, which came out of one submission to one working group, out of a vast range of research and knowledge, it is unfortunate that that brought this tremendous criticism of IPCC, which does a very professional body of work. But, that said, the IPCC working group chairs are very concerned about it, and I expect they will be looking at how they can make sure that that sort of proofreading picks up these kinds of things in future.

MR SESELJA: Obviously, that is a change in procedures. There is talk of whether the IPCC will be re-formed in some form or another to deal with at least the perceived issues that have been put forward. Do you have any views on how they might be able to deal with the PR problem that they have at the moment?

Ms Hand: I cannot speak for the IPCC, but they have put out a huge body of work over time. The reports and analysis are extremely useful. It is the work that the UNFCCC agrees to work from. But I think there is very good material out there now. I refer, for example, to that particular website, with a very frank, analytical and highly intelligent set of arguments. There is a lot out there if anyone is interested. If they want to focus on criticisms of the IPCC, I am sure they will find a way of doing it, regardless of the rational counterarguments.

THE CHAIR: Earlier we talked about the connection between the Australian government and the states and territories. You said you thought it was inconceivable that there would not be some sort of tie-in with what is going on at the state and territory level. Obviously this is an ACT inquiry. I want to explore that a little bit further around what you see as the impact on the states and territories. You talked about this list of mitigation measures and so forth. What do you see is a link to, say, the ACT or another state or territory?

Ms Hand: I could not possibly speculate on that. I will send you the list of mitigation actions. I would imagine that anything that involves service delivery of the kinds of things where emissions are generated becomes the focus of all levels of government that are involved. I do not know enough about the ACT government and how it works to see how it would fit into the national target. I am assuming that you have people who are looking at this. I always enjoy the signs on the side of the buses, I have to say.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a view on, for instance, here in the ACT, moving ahead and looking at having a legislated greenhouse gas reduction target? Do you think there is benefit in waiting for some further work to be done at a global level? You said that with the delegation and so forth there were a lot of local groups and local governments. Mr Hargreaves raised the Indian example.

Ms Hand: I think we should all get started immediately. It is so apparent that this is the way the world is evolving and that this is an open question. Whether you fall into the sceptics camp or not, it is a form of risk management about energy sourcing and the way we live in terms of resource management. All over the world sensible governments are doing sensible things. I would not be waiting for a body that includes 198 people arguing to agree. There is a lot of very interesting science and there are a lot of interesting ideas in the field. It is attracting some wonderful people doing amazing things. I would be doing it.

MR SESELJA: You mentioned that a number of countries are doing sensible things in terms of the mitigation. Who are the standouts for you internationally that have done the most to reduce emissions and how are they achieving that?

Ms Hand: There are the absolute stars, like Norway, that have got it almost down to zero. There are some countries that are not so dependent on fossil fuels that have been able to work it, particularly the Scandinavian countries.

MR SESELJA: How did the Scandinavian countries bring about the reductions?

Ms Hand: It is different in different cases. Their reliance on fossil fuels perhaps was not so great to start with. I can send you some material on the various emissions patterns, but the Scandinavians have been very successful. Norway, in particular, is always the standout example of a country that has been able, by dint of its resource portfolio, to do it very well. Of course, the EU has got a price on carbon and has had carbon trading for some time. Then you have got countries in a totally different camp, like the Maldives, that are looking at how they can best serve their own adaptation needs. They are on the front foot. They are really looking at how you separate saline water from fresh water and how you accommodate changes in sea level.

MR SESELJA: You mentioned the EU's carbon trading scheme. What has been the overall reduction in emissions as a result of that scheme?

Ms Hand: I could not tell you that figure exactly, but I will find it for you. The EU have quite a respectable target and trajectory. I do not know if there is anything that correlates the ETS scheme and the reduction, but I will send you what we can.

MR RATTENBURY: I want to come back to the point about states and territories. You mentioned before when you were talking about being at Copenhagen that states and territories were taking a very practical perspective on action—I think that is how you described it. It has been touched on a little bit. Can you elaborate on what you meant by that?

Ms Hand: I cannot remember which one it was, but possibly it was the Italians that

had twinned with some of the big grimy cities in Asia and were talking about water and waste management, which has more of an environmental bent. You have cities in the world that have state-of-the-art ways of recycling and reducing emissions in waste generally. To have them twinned and helping with some of the mega cities in Asia I think is very practical. Then you have got small towns that do marvellous things with transport, like bikes. They make cycling a completely legitimate form of transport, not something that is dangerous and difficult and you cannot get a shower when you get to work. There are all sorts of practical dimensions to the transport action. So you have got these small-scale, rather homespun solutions on very small town levels and then you have these capacity buildings about big waste and energy and water systems. I always enjoy seeing those transfers.

MR RATTENBURY: I want to move on to the CPRS. What sort of reaction did the CPRS receive in Copenhagen?

Ms Hand: What part of the CPRS?

MR RATTENBURY: The fact that it perhaps had not been passed, whether it was seen as a viable mechanism, the targets in it. I imagine there was a general discussion about it. Australia is obviously advocating the strength of its own approach. I am interested in what sort of feedback the government received on that.

Ms Hand: The minister reported factually where we were on the CPRS. There is always interest, but there was not a reaction particularly.

MR RATTENBURY: The CPRS appears to be struggling in the Senate—I think we all see that in the newspapers—and there has been some discussion in the media about an interim carbon tax for a period of two years at around \$20 a tonne. Do you know whether there has been any progress on that and the federal government's view of that?

Ms Hand: From my perspective, the government has always said that it was still very committed to getting the CPRS through. There is not much more that I can add to that.

MR RATTENBURY: In relation to the Australian government's part in the accord in terms of what has been committed to, does that have with it a number in terms of the emissions reduction or is it simply that we are going to keep it to two degrees and these are the measures we are going to take? Is there detail in our submission to the accord as to our undertaking to actually say, "We will reduce it by five per cent or 20 per cent"?

Ms Hand: It has been put in precisely the terms of the Prime Minister's 4 May press release, which puts the range from five through to—

MR RATTENBURY: Five to 25, is it?

Ms Hand: Yes. It has been lodged as a range rather than a precise figure.

THE CHAIR: I want to move to the issue of offsets. I was wondering whether the Australian government has a fully developed position on offsets.

Ms Hand: You would need to speak to the offsets person. There are detailed technical discussions about offsets. We can find you somebody who would be happy to have that conversation. I am in international negotiations.

MR RATTENBURY: What position on offsets did Australia take into the international negotiations?

Ms Hand: We are pro offsets and pro investment in forest carbon. We would like to see a good, sound, well-governed system of offsets.

MR RATTENBURY: Does that international position on offsets only include forest carbon or does it include other offsets?

Ms Hand: We express it in terms of forest carbon. I will get you the position and send it to you. I do not want to speculate on another area of expertise. I will send it to you. I will take that on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: I have one other question. I do not know where this fits in your brief. You might be aware that the ACT government has a feed-in tariff regime in place. Basically, it pays generators a premium to generate renewable energy. Are you aware of why the federal government has not introduced a national feed-in tariff?

Ms Hand: No, I am sorry, I am not aware of it. I was not aware that we had one in the ACT, but thank you for telling me.

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, if you spend all your time in international negotiations it would be easy to miss. I am interested that internationally it is recognised as one of the more significant and successful policy measures for the growth of the renewable energy industry. Was there any discussion of those sorts of policy measures in Copenhagen?

Ms Hand: Renewable energy is a big part of the technical discussion. That proceeds in a rather less politicised way. So probably yes, but you would need to speak to the energy people in Minister Ferguson's department—DRET, isn't it?

MR RATTENBURY: Perhaps you can clarify then how the international negotiations work. If you are leading international negotiations but everybody else seems to be doing bits of it, how does it come together?

Ms Hand: A massive amount of whole-of-government clearing of positions in Canberra and then close delegation contact when we were away. These are minute negotiations around paragraphs of text, which fare or survive differently according to how the negotiation went. You are asking quite technical questions and I would rather you had the right answers, precisely, with plenty of detail.

THE CHAIR: I guess it is an interesting thing when there is international negotiation about how you pull all those areas of government together to then present an Australian view in an international context. As there are no further questions, I thank you very much, Ms Hand, for coming this afternoon and giving us that evidence. We

will have a transcript which we will send out to you in case you want to make any corrections or see any errors. That concludes our hearing for this afternoon.

The committee adjourned at 2.41 pm.