



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2009-2010](#))

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2010

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, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.....	70
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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 2.01 pm.

Appearances:

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
Cooper, Dr Maxine, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
Burrows, Ms Sarah, Senior Manager
Sargent, Ms Narelle, Senior Manager

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and I welcome everyone to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water. Today, the committee is examining the 2009-10 annual report of the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, commissioner and officials, for appearing today. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the yellow-coloured privilege statement that is in front of you on the table. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of that statement?

Dr Cooper: Yes, Ms Hunter.

THE CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, commissioner, would you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Cooper: Thank you very much. I would like to give a brief overview of what happened in the year 2009-10 and then present to you the continuation of that year, which is what we are working on currently.

First of all, under statutory requirements, we did submit a quite comprehensive report on the expanded role of the office. We gave that to the minister in September 2009. We also progressed a review of the ACT state of the environment framework. That was the first time a review had been done in the 17 years from when it was first undertaken, and we can certainly expand on what that review has helped us shape for next year's state of the environment report. We also did an audit assessment of ACT government agencies' environmental performance reporting. Although we did not finish it in that financial year, we did finish it in this financial year and have submitted that on the 22nd of the 10th.

We also undertook an investigation into trees and, in the process of doing that investigation, the Chief Minister and Minister Corbell, the minister for climate change, energy and water, asked for an interim report on street and park tree removals because the agency needed to undertake those quite quickly. We have given them that report and they have responded to us.

We commenced the Canberra nature park investigation. We also facilitated the inaugural annual grassland forum, in partnership with government agencies, the Friends of Grasslands and the Natural Resource Management Council.

We also released the regional state of the environment report update on the 30th of the 10th. I think one of the really important things we have done which is not a major

time consumer for us but is certainly a major benefit is that we launched the young people ambassadors group in June 2010. They are all volunteers and they have been incredibly supportive and incredibly productive in what they have been doing. We conducted our first stakeholder forum in September. We coordinated the ACT's 1 Million Women launch on climate change on 6 May and then participated in the national one on 24 June.

We also progressed with TAMS colleagues, where we reside at the Dickson Motor Registry office, our sustainable working group to develop a resource management plan for the building, which we know is abnormal—normally the resource management plans are for departments but we have actually arranged a relationship there.

That is what we were doing in 2009-10. Currently, continuing from that is the investigation into trees, the Canberra nature park investigation, and we are certainly looking at the state of the environment 2011 report.

One of the things emerging from all of this is green infrastructure across the city. We would like to share with the committee that when you look at things in small pieces, like looking at the trees, separate from the Canberra nature park, you do not quite realise the situation Canberra is in in terms of green infrastructure. In terms of green infrastructure, this city has an immense amount more than any other city. It really comes home when you get figures like these: in Canberra, we have generally got about 12 persons per hectare of park area. In Brisbane, the figure is about 75 people per hectare. If you go to Melbourne, it is about 158, and if you take into account the influx of workers, you have actually got 1,358 persons per hectare. So the amount of green infrastructure this city needs to support is incredibly significant and it is no wonder we grapple with the management challenges we have and it is no wonder we grapple with the funding arrangements. That is coming out, certainly, very clearly in our investigations.

That is what we are doing. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make those comments.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, commissioner. I would like to pick up on a few points that you have raised in your opening statement. You were talking about green infrastructure and you mentioned funding arrangements. What is it about the funding arrangements? Do you have suggestions about how that needs to be improved or how it needs to be restructured?

Dr Cooper: We will be looking at that in the two investigations in detail. We will be looking at that particularly in the trees one, because it is part of the terms of reference. But it has raised the question for us when we have been talking to other agencies about how they do manage some of their funding. We have a series of papers being produced. One of the papers which we will probably put out in the next week or so is around what other jurisdictions do when the base funding is limited. So we have looked across the country and a lot of them use levies. Why do they use levies? How do they use them? What do they do? Everybody grapples with funding issues. We have looked around some of that. Certainly, the issue for us as a society is that we have a large amount of green infrastructure, full stop. So it is no wonder that we are

grappling with some of the problems that we have, and that other jurisdictions are also grappling with, but maybe ours is magnified.

THE CHAIR: With the trees investigation, where is that up to?

Dr Cooper: We are looking to finish the tree investigation this month. However, under section 15(7) of my act, if I make comment or have an opinion that could either expressly or impliedly be a criticism of an agency or a person, I am obliged, as I would anyway, to let that agency have a look at it. We certainly have done a lot of analysis that affects TAMS, ACTPLA and DECCEW. Some people could infer that it is a criticism; others would infer that it could be an analysis. So we will be giving those agencies, when we are finished, the chance to give further information or comment and then we will be in a position to submit it. We would imagine we will need a couple of weeks at least in January.

THE CHAIR: And that gets submitted to government?

Dr Cooper: Then it gets submitted, after they have had a chance to respond.

THE CHAIR: We will wait to see it, when it gets released. I also want to pick up on the state of the environment framework. You mentioned in your opening statement that work had been done. I note the report that came out around how the framework could be changed, indicators could be changed and so forth. Could you give us a bit of an idea about what has changed there?

Dr Cooper: Certainly. I would like to call upon Sarah, because Sarah has been our project manager for this and knows it in detail.

Ms Burrows: What we did in the review was look at the framework that we use now and also get the consultant to look at what has been done around the world obviously over the last 15-plus years since it has been initiated. What we have come up with is a framework that is fairly similar to the last one. What was important was that we had a framework that continued on and could be used as a comparable system—so rather than starting everything from scratch and from new baselines we could actually look back and be able to compare using the last state of the environment report.

The themes that you will see in the new state of the environment report, which are land and water, biodiversity, air, climate and people, are quite similar to the ones that we have used in the past. What is quite new in this state of the environment report is that we are going to introduce driving forces. We have identified a number of driving forces, which are population, land use and transport systems, climate and consumptions. What driving forces do is provide demographic, social and economic development which then in turn exerts pressure on our environment. So what are we doing and what actions do our society have that force a change in our environment?

That is the key change. If you then look at the indicator classes under each of the themes, they are, again, fairly similar to what we had before. But what we have then done is pull out headline indicators. This is largely a communication tool, if you like, in that there is a large amount of information in the state of the environment report under each of those classes. What we wanted to do with these headline indicators was

pull out key aspects of each of the themes that really give us an indication of where we are going and what the key issues might be.

Dr Cooper: If I could just add that we involved many members of the community. We have had some very skilled people in groups advising us on what goes in this. For instance, under climate change, Will Steffen from ANU invested a lot of time trying to get the right indicators. He came up with things like physical climate effects, which is a different way of reporting, so that lay people can understand. Also, all the government agencies were involved in various working sessions. What we come up with they can use but it is also relevant to the community.

MR HARGREAVES: My curiosity has been aroused, ladies. On page 11 of your wonderful report—and I congratulate you on an easy read; some of the other stuff we have had in the annual report area has not been an easy read—you refer to complaints. The last one is about water reuse innovation. You talk about being involved in many agencies and the ICAC. Which ICAC, because we have not got one?

Dr Cooper: This is an error.

Ms Burrows: It should have been the ICRC.

Dr Cooper: The ICRC. Thank you for the compliment and thank you for picking that up.

MR HARGREAVES: Not a problem.

THE CHAIR: I did have the same question—

MR HARGREAVES: It should be the ICRC?

Ms Burrows: Yes.

MR HARGREAVES: Right. Somebody has got a fixation about ICACs.

Dr Cooper: The person who wrote it was from New South Wales, so we will say that there is a bit of cultural—

MR HARGREAVES: Not a problem. Thank you for that. I will come back a little later.

MR SESELJA: Pages 12 through to 15 go through some of the complaints. I just wanted to talk through some of them. Perhaps we can get an update since the annual report came in. I was interested in some of the pending ones. The first one is from November 2009 on air quality monitoring. At the time of printing you were waiting on information from the environment protection authority. Have you received that information yet?

Dr Cooper: We have. They have provided an annual air report to the complainant, so we have been able to resolve that issue.

MR SESELJA: When did you receive that information from the EPA?

Dr Cooper: I am sorry, can we take that on notice? I have not got the date.

MR SESELJA: It was some time after the annual report was finalised, presumably.

Dr Cooper: Yes.

Ms Burrows: I think it was shortly after.

Dr Cooper: Yes, shortly after.

MR SESELJA: Okay. Likewise, the next one is the removal of hazardous trees on Captain Cook avenue.

Dr Cooper: We are actually still waiting for that one and we have asked many times.

MR SESELJA: So we are waiting on TAMS. What exactly are you waiting for from TAMS?

Dr Cooper: We have sent specific questions about what they propose in their communication on that. We are still waiting on that particular issue.

MR SESELJA: Have they indicated to you why there has been such a significant delay? It is now more than 12 months.

Dr Cooper: No, they have not.

MR SESELJA: They have not. So we might take that up with TAMS separately. Turning over, we had a complaint in relation to solar access. That was lodged in February 2010.

Dr Cooper: Yes. There is an issue around that of the tree supposedly, allegedly, being poisoned, so it has become a little bit more complicated than just the shade issue.

MR SESELJA: So who has alleged that the tree was poisoned?

Dr Cooper: A neighbour.

MR SESELJA: Is it the person making the complaint or—

Dr Cooper: No. The complainant is the person who would like the tree removed and now the other neighbour is concerned that the tree may be poisoned. We are working that one through and waiting on some further information.

Ms Burrows: And you have a tree assessment from TAMS on the tree.

MR SESELJA: Okay.

Dr Cooper: It is back with TAMS at the moment for more information for us.

MR SESELJA: This complaint came in in February 2010. When did you ask for the additional information from TAMS?

Dr Cooper: We usually ask within the immediate week, but on this particular one we had been out and had spent many hours looking at this issue. Then it must have been about mid-year that the poisoning—

Ms Burrows: Just before I came—

Dr Cooper: Yes, it must have been about mid-year. On this particular one I would not say this is an agency issue. I would say it is a circumstance issue associated with the trees.

MR SESELJA: It says there that the suspected tree health issues were raised in May, so that is the suspected poisoning?

Dr Cooper: That is right.

MR SESELJA: How do you, as commissioner, deal with those because obviously these are things potentially well outside your remit?

Dr Cooper: That is right. We just deal with the issue around the shading. The complainant actually wants the tree either pruned or removed. So we are waiting from TAMS as they look into the alleged poisoning of the tree to see where that is. Once that has been resolved then we can deal with the complaint. That is why it is taking a little bit of time.

MR SESELJA: So TAMS has carriage of investigating that separately?

Dr Cooper: The poisoning, yes.

THE CHAIR: Could I go back to the complaint that Mr Hargreaves referred to—constraints on water reuse innovation. It says under “Comment”:

This is a complicated policy issue which involves many agencies ...

Could you give us a little more information on what it was about?

Dr Cooper: They have raised the issue around the whole policy framework for the reuse of water. The complainant is satisfied that if we are actually considering this it is not just a matter of asking an agency a few questions and then saying yes or no. We have actually said to the complainant, “We need a bit more time.” Because it is not an urgent issue—it is an important issue to him—he is happy to wait. We may still, having looked into it in much more detail than we have at the moment, go back and say that we are not going to progress on that. But we just have not had the time on an issue that is not immediately pressing out there to deal it.

MR SESELJA: Just on some further complaints issues, subsequent to the completion of the annual report there have been, obviously, reports around the discovery of an

asbestos dump near Molonglo. Have you received any complaints about that or have you looked into that issue at all?

Dr Cooper: No. The only thing I have had is a conversation when I was phoned by the Auditor-General.

MR SESELJA: When you were phoned by the Auditor-General in relation to that?

Dr Cooper: Yes, to the asbestos issue.

MR SESELJA: So at this stage—

Dr Cooper: With that happening, if somebody did come to us we would certainly ask them, because of confidentiality, if we could let the Auditor-General, or whoever else is currently investigating it, deal with it.

MR SESELJA: Okay. So you would wait for the Auditor-General to complete an inquiry before you would consider—

Dr Cooper: Or we might actually ask the complainant. Yes, we probably would, because at this moment, not being involved at all, we would be looking at what the systems issues are.

MR SESELJA: In contacting you, was the Auditor-General seeking particular information from you or just seeking an opinion? What was the nature of that?

Dr Cooper: Because we deal with the environment and asbestos, and I understand the remit of her considerations are much larger. She was just asking for some advice around how you generally deal with asbestos. It was general questions like, “In complaints like that, what is the general procedure, if it were a pure environmental issue, that I would be using?”

THE CHAIR: Mr Rattenbury, did you have anything on the complaints?

MR RATTENBURY: Yes. While we are on the complaints section, page 11 refers to a complaint from a rural landholder about kangaroos. Can you elaborate a little bit on what the issues were there because it was not entirely clear to me from the annual report?

Dr Cooper: Let me remember. This one went on for a while. There was an issue. Narelle worked on that one with me. They were not satisfied they had high enough numbers in their licence to cull. They felt that the numbers should have been larger than they were. So we looked into what that meant in terms of the impact. We came up with some suggestions and we have put that back to the agency.

MR RATTENBURY: What has been the outcome of that?

Dr Cooper: I understand the agency is making changes to its procedures. In terms of the process of killing kangaroos, in one of the recent culls they undertook, because of the animal liberation people wanting to have a surety that the process was according

to codes, I actually went out that night and was taken through the whole process. Although it is not directly related to this, it is connected to it.

MR RATTENBURY: Was the quota raised as a result of the landholder raising the concerns?

Dr Cooper: I have not followed up on the specific case. What we were looking at was the system issues to make sure that the system fairly looked at what the complainant raised.

MR RATTENBURY: What evidence did the complaint use to make their case?

Dr Cooper: Their case was around an issue, if I recall rightly—and my colleague, Narelle, may be able to add—that if you did not cull in one year, then the following year you were penalised. They could not understand the sense in that. If you did not cull in one year, why should you be penalised and not be allowed to cull the same amount you would have culled in the year you were first given the licence? If your grandmother or somebody had died and you did not get to do the culling in that particular year, that meant that next year your culling licence would be for fewer. That was a real issue for the rural lessees.

We thought that was a bit stringent and that what you should be doing in terms of culling is looking at the numbers you need, not necessarily what happened in the previous year. That is what I mean by systems issues. We mostly try to address it in a systems way. If it is a particular case, of course we would make a recommendation about increasing. But that is really up to the agency to look at the exact numbers.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: In regard to one of the other complaints, the Tuggeranong Canberra technology city proposed development, you talk about the complaint relating to environmental health issues. The comment does not elaborate on what kind of investigation took place or what assessment was made of that complaint. I think the comment simply is that the complainant was advised that it was assessed under the Planning and Development Act. What assessment was made of those particular concerns that were raised?

Dr Cooper: I recall that they were concerned about the 2.5 versus PM10 measurement. We went back and checked. I would have to go back and check for you but they thought it was examined under a PM10 rather a 2.5. We then went back and checked that the analysis was done on the 2.5. Therefore, in terms of the due process that was undertaken, it was adequate.

MR SESELJA: Once that information was provided they were satisfied that the correct examination had taken place?

Dr Cooper: I cannot speak for them but they did not come back to us.

MR SESELJA: That was the nature of their complaint?

Dr Cooper: That is my memory at this moment.

THE CHAIR: I want to pick up on a comment that you just made in relation to the complaint about the water reuse, that it was not a priority and that you had to reprioritise within the resources you have. Do you have enough resources to be doing the work that you are doing?

Dr Cooper: I think I do. In these independent roles, where you are one commissioner, you really do have to consider each issue yourself. I think we have got adequate resources. Thank you. But the issue here was really a time issue of having one commissioner. I think one commissioner is probably enough at this point in time. I made a priority decision and they were accepting of that. As I said, we may not even progress it beyond the complaint stage. Given the issues that were raised, I think it was worth it.

I will just say that there was another one on waste that we did. It took us three months. That was a previous one but that took us three months of just looking at the issues the complainant had raised. That was in the previous year. Sometimes when you get these, on the surface they look pretty significant and you have got to do a bit of work to find out that the agency has really complied with what needs to be done or you then decided to do a full investigation. I think this one is raising issues that need that depth of analysis.

THE CHAIR: In your opening statement you mentioned the expanded role of the commissioner and the report that was given to government in September 2009. It was quite some time ago. Have you had any indication from the minister or the government when that might be responded to?

Dr Cooper: No.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: I have got a curiosity question. You talked about recommendations on progress around reducing the kangaroos and controlling rabbits and stuff like that. On page 39 you mention the Belconnen area and the grazing pressure to be reduced by reducing the number of kangaroos and controlling rabbits on Caswell Drive. You state that, given the size and the location of the site, it might be necessary to reduce the number of kangaroos on land in the vicinity of the site rather than concentrating only on the site. I understand that. How do you propose that the number of rabbits be reduced and how do you propose that the number of kangaroos be reduced?

Dr Cooper: On these recommendations for the grasslands, what we did was look at the conditions of the land. We then had many long discussions with the agency. We also checked with the AFP on this particular one, I think, in terms of where you could and could not shoot. For that particular one, you would reduce by the normal method of culling. But you would probably do it in its broader catchment area, not right on that site.

We try to make sure that any recommendation we make is able to be implemented.

The agency definitely said it was. We would leave the number of rabbits to the agency to determine how they would do it. What we try to do here is say to the agency, “From an ecological perspective, this should be a priority site,” rather than tell them how they do that culling or deal with the rabbits.

MR HARGREAVES: Do you have a view on the method to be employed in those two cases?

Dr Cooper: On the rabbits, we have, very fortunately, had someone spend several months in our office, a volunteer, a retired CSIRO scientist, who has produced a report on how you should control rabbits. We have shared that with the agency. That will come out as part of the investigation into the Canberra nature park. My views will probably be shaped after conversations around that particular report.

In terms of the kangaroos, we have met with a group called THINKK from Sydney to look at the Canberra nature park investigation. My view, until I get further information, is that the most humane method of dealing with kangaroos, unfortunately, is culling by shooting in a humane manner. We are, though, open, as THINKK have said, to alternative ways of looking at kangaroo management. We have asked them to give us whatever reports they have. We will incorporate that into the Canberra nature park study.

MR HARGREAVES: There was some work being done about 2½ years ago, maybe three, about artificial birth control of kangaroos. Do you know whether there has been any progress on that?

Dr Cooper: I would have to look at it. That is being controlled by the TAMS scientists. I fully support that. When we actually looked at the grasslands, we left there animals that were the subject of experiment. We would have to ask TAMS how that has gone and talk to their scientists directly. I think we should invest in that. At the moment we also have other problems with kangaroos. That was probably the advice we had at that particular time. It is probably 10 years off before there is something commercially available to help.

MR HARGREAVES: In respect of the rabbits, I take it that you are still at the point where poison is the best way?

Dr Cooper: I would have to come back to you.

MR HARGREAVES: I saw that there was a change almost back to 1080. It was mentioned in your report that there was some poison used to deter rabbits and then it was decided to change back to 1080. I am mindful of the fact that you have this issue not only in the nature parks but also on the sides of the Kings Avenue bridge. Am I correct in assuming that it is part of your consideration that, whatever methods are employed, they need to be safe for other fauna and people?

Dr Cooper: Without doubt. This is where I think Canberra is in a particularly challenging situation. At the beginning I mentioned the notion of our large green infrastructure. As a city, our challenges on management, I think, are far greater than those for many other cities. I agree with you. A report will probably be released to

agencies next week. If you would like, I could let you have a look at the rabbit paper. It is not made public until it is finalised.

MR HARGREAVES: That would be interesting. I seem to remember—and I am still trying to find it—the change to 1080 was because of fox management.

Dr Cooper: I would have to check that.

MR HARGREAVES: I am having a flick through here as well. I do not know the residual effect of 1080 versus other poisons in terms of its half life. It will be in that report, will it?

Dr Cooper: It is beyond my expertise; so I would go to the experts and ask them for a bit of assistance on that.

THE CHAIR: Mr Rattenbury?

MR RATTENBURY: If we could come back to the kangaroo discussion which Mr Hargreaves started, you talked about your meeting with THINKK. Is there any other work that you have done or are there other people you have liaised with around obtaining evidence or research?

Dr Cooper: We are not aware of new evidence or new research. The THINKK people have a view that they have some additional information. If anyone comes to us, we would be more than happy to take that on board. At the moment we are not being made aware of anything new, other than what was in the grasslands work, which we undertook an extensive consideration of.

MR RATTENBURY: Speaking of grasslands, I would like to ask about the grasslands forum, which is mentioned on page 5 of the annual report. You held the forum. Can you tell me who attended the forum? The annual report lists a number of people who came. Are they the only people who attended or were there others?

Dr Cooper: I have not got the list of people but it was pretty broad. It involved scientists. It involved the government. It involved all the community groups. Everybody who had any interest in grassland was there. They shared information. They raised issues. The agency was talking to some of the community groups. There was a forum for some of the issues that needed to be resolved to be dealt with. I am happy, if you like, to send the list of people who attended.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. That would be helpful. Outside of what might be called formal outcomes and networking, were there particular outcomes or were there recommendations given to government as a result of the forum?

Dr Cooper: No, there were not any recommendations given to government as a result of that forum. Some of the participants were from government agencies. They felt comfortable in trying to resolve the issues between each of them.

MR RATTENBURY: It is essentially operating on the theory that bringing people together results in outcomes?

Dr Cooper: Absolutely.

MR SESELJA: On page 17, it talks about the government's monergy campaign. The footnote for that cites the *CityNews* advertising feature. Why is that the case rather than, for instance, getting the information on the campaign directly from the department? Is there an issue there in terms of communication?

Dr Cooper: No. I just think my colleague who wrote it at that particular time—maybe it was in the paper the day she was writing it. She certainly knew about it from the agency as well.

MR SESELJA: So there were not other documents that were provided that would assist in terms of—

Dr Cooper: Absolutely, yes. We have complete access to all the public information.

MR SESELJA: Did you have any input into that campaign or is that just something you have seen?

Dr Cooper: No, we did not. Our campaign is the campaign about “what can I do?” which is themed across the year, according to different issues. So it is broader than just the carbon campaign.

THE CHAIR: With respect to the “what can I do?” campaign, what is it going to be doing this year, and do you have any indicators on the program so that we can assess that impact?

Dr Cooper: Two questions, two answers. My colleague Narelle mainly works on the “what can I do?” campaign with the young ambassadors. She has a workshop, I think, in January.

Ms Sargent: February.

Dr Cooper: With the young ambassadors, they will then decide what will be their target activities for the year. Remember that they are voluntary, so this is around a voluntary group. In terms of targets, that is always a vexed issue and we have asked ourselves: is it the coverage you get in the papers? How do you actually manage change? So, no, we have not got an indicator, but we would be open to anyone suggesting one.

THE CHAIR: Who is the target audience?

Dr Cooper: The target audience is the broad community but the voice out there at different times comes from different groups. Sometimes we will use our connections with the 1 Million Women. Sometimes it will be through the different ones in the young ambassadors. What the psychology is telling us is that, in order to get change, you actually talk to your peer group. Therefore, we have got the women with a mixed spectrum of ages and then we have got the young ambassadors. So they go out and connect with their social networks. How do you measure that? It is probably over

20 years; I do not know. But we are taking the advice of the psychologists.

THE CHAIR: How much was spent on the program in the last financial year?

Dr Cooper: Extremely little. Maybe a thousand or two. On the young people ambassadors program or the “what can I do?” campaign?

THE CHAIR: The “what can I do?” campaign.

Dr Cooper: It would be in the thousands. It is not very much at all because we use the young ambassadors.

MR HARGREAVES: How were the young ambassadors selected?

Dr Cooper: I will leave that to Narelle. We did put out a call. We went to a lot of trouble to try and find them. We went to the school groups.

Ms Sargent: We ran a trial of the young people ambassadors program, for which we had three, if you like, hand-picked ambassadors. Following a review of that trial, the indicators were that it was a very successful program, so we called for expressions of interest in November last year, and that was across the broad spectrum of the community, with the age cohort being 12 to 25 years. We were after anyone who met that cohort, and in particular across the broad spectrum of schools, universities, young professionals, Indigenous, non-Australian background—so representing all spectrums. We managed to cover that range fairly well.

Dr Cooper: Although we did have a problem with Aboriginal.

Ms Sargent: We did not get an Indigenous representative.

Dr Cooper: We did not, and we went to the various bodies to see if somebody was interested and we were not successful there. We also had problems with somebody from the trades area.

Ms Sargent: That is correct, yes.

Dr Cooper: So with a couple of areas from which we really would have liked to have some young ambassadors, we just were not able to tap into them. We went to CIT; we did a whole range of things to try to tap into those two areas.

MR HARGREAVES: I am surprised to hear about the Indigenous difficulty, given the extent to which some of our Indigenous community are keen on seeing those traineeships in Namadgi national park actually get legs and end up in permanent jobs rather than just traineeships. I would have thought there would have been a reasonable transmission of one idea to the other, but clearly not.

Dr Cooper: Mr Hargreaves, if anyone knows of anyone who would like to be a young ambassador from that particular cohort, we would be more than open. The only thing is that we cannot afford to pay. This is a voluntary thing.

THE CHAIR: How many young ambassadors do you have?

Dr Cooper: Nine.

THE CHAIR: Are you following any of this out into schools? Have there been partnerships with schools?

Ms Sargent: Two of our ambassadors are from schools and we do work quite heavily with a number of different schools and with the AuSSI schools as well.

MR HARGREAVES: Could we get a list of those ambassadors, indicating to us where they come from, what they are interested in and why you think they have those networks which, when stitched together, will look pretty good? It does not have to be right now.

Ms Sargent: One of the things, because of the way young people operate, is that they have a website.

MR HARGREAVES: Are you expecting this old geriatric to look up a website?

Ms Sargent: The card I have given you is about the young people ambassadors.

MR HARGREAVES: I thought it was a TV set.

Dr Cooper: We have allowed them a lot of freedom, inasmuch as they set up their own website, so they are communicating. They may say things that I may not agree with, but we thought it was important to respect that generation in terms of the way they want to communicate.

Ms Sargent: And on the website it actually has a profile.

MR HARGREAVES: That is far too much democracy, Dr Cooper!

Ms Sargent: So they all have a profile which indicates why they were keen to be a young person ambassador.

Dr Cooper: We will send it non-electronically.

MR HARGREAVES: We can get it now; thank you very much for that. On page 23 of your delightful tome, in the recommendations you talk about the government not pursuing a national park designation for Goorooyarroo and Mulligans Flat because they are not large enough to meet the IUCN criteria for a national park. Firstly, can you tell us what the IUCN is? I do not know. It is probably my ignorance, and I apologise for that. Secondly, how big do you have to be to get national park status?

Dr Cooper: IUCN is International Union for Conservation of Nature. I do not know how big you have to be, but that comment was the government's comment, so they were not keen to have it as a national park at that stage. We are relooking at the issue in Canberra nature park and we will be talking further with the government agency, not the government at this stage.

MR HARGREAVES: I would have thought that Mulligans Flat, with the you-beaut predator fence around it, would have been an absolute starter for that sort of designation.

Dr Cooper: One of the concerns which we are looking into is that, if you call it a national park, maybe the criteria are such that you cannot do the innovative management that they are doing by putting up fences and reintroducing animals. That is something we are looking at, because we would not want a positive outcome for the environment stopped because of the nomenclature around the land.

MR HARGREAVES: We would be interested if you could give us a quick screed on that. I would be interested to know what is standing in the way of something like Mulligans not getting proper status, given that it is supposed to be reintroducing native species. It has its own challenges in terms of kangaroo population control within the fencing, and how that actually sits together. I was talking to Dr Baker about this yesterday, about how the problem is that the ground has baked so much and the water has gone out of the ground and you cannot actually get the native grasses to reseed and regeminate. So that is a challenge for us. Maybe we can introduce modern technology by coring or something like that which will encourage the native grasses to regeminate and regenerate. But if there is something in the way of that, I would not mind knowing about it.

Dr Cooper: If it is all right, Mr Hargreaves, that is an important issue. We can come back to you but can we capture it more in about February, when I have had a bit of time? We are still focused on the tree one.

MR HARGREAVES: Absolutely; your wish is my command.

MR RATTENBURY: On page 17, you talk about consumption. I know that your office has been involved with the ecological footprint; it is in today's paper. The implied comment you make in the annual report is that the ACT has inappropriate consumption patterns. Could you elaborate on my understanding of what you are saying and perhaps give us some specific examples that you might be able to highlight?

Dr Cooper: We had a presentation yesterday to the committee on the ecological footprint. I think the key message is to consume differently. So you consume things that actually last. Rather than buying 10 mobile phones that go within six months, you might buy one that lasts for four or five years. You also consume energy differently. So instead of having non-renewable, you would have renewable. That is it, in simple terms. So consume differently is what we have to do. But that is beyond government. That is a societal issue. And in today's paper, we were very pleased that on page 5 the *Canberra Times* went to a very ordinary, non-green person to talk to them about what they are doing, and they have completely changed their consumption to be much greener and have lowered their total impact.

MR HARGREAVES: They are pretty forensic, these *Canberra Times* people, aren't they? They find people under rocks and everywhere, don't they?

MR RATTENBURY: You touched briefly on the government. Do you believe there are specific strategies that the government could put in place to improve these issues around consumption?

Dr Cooper: That is something that we are going to interrogate on, coming up to the next state of the environment report. Having done the analysis, we would prefer to give it some real consideration. Certainly that is one of the issues going into the next SOER.

MR RATTENBURY: Over the page, you talk about population. You mention that it is important to get population levels for both Australia and Canberra right. You make the observation that both too little and too many might be problematic. Do you think it is appropriate to set a population target for Canberra?

Dr Cooper: I think that is a very vexed issue when our ecological footprint is so big that we are taking resources from everywhere else. I think you have got to look at the kind of society we are. If we actually had a border where you grew everything within it and you could self-sustain, you might have some arguments. I wonder how you then achieve some of those major equity issues. I think it is much more complicated than setting a particular target. Some of the things we were talking about yesterday with the committee included whether it is time to look at other things around capacity of the region in terms of the ecological capacity and what we actually produce.

It is incredibly complicated. I do think, as a globe, we have got to address world population. We know that, no matter what we do, there are major disasters around the world. The population is going to be growing at quite a rapid rate for the next 40-odd years. I am not saying we do not address it. How could Canberrans address it? We are extremely well off compared to many people. Australia, I am proud to say, actually gives a lot of international aid. Maybe instead of directly controlling where you are giving it, you give it indirectly so that the net population control around the world, through better health, through better education—we all know the impacts there—is a greater investment for us all.

MR RATTENBURY: In light of the ecological footprint work you have done and the impact that one Canberran has compared to somebody in another country, I am interested in the point that was drawn out.

Dr Cooper: If we went and lived somewhere else with the same lifestyle, we would have the same impact. It is not a matter of “I will live here”. If most of us went and lived in another country we would probably go with the level of affluence we have got. Although we might grow as a person within that, we would probably still be drawing on more resources. I do not see it as black and white as that.

MR RATTENBURY: I am not a member of this committee but this committee is conducting an inquiry into carrying capacity. Have you made a submission to that inquiry?

Dr Cooper: Hopefully we helped the committee yesterday by having the person who did our ecological footprint give a presentation for an hour. We are very open to the next state of the environment report. If the committee thinks there is further work that

we could contribute to this discussion in the community, we would be open to see what we could do.

THE CHAIR: I would very much like to follow up on that point. Thank you for organising that briefing yesterday. I know the committee found it very interesting and very useful. Are you planning to do further work in this area?

Dr Cooper: We would like to because we think that, while it is a government issue, it is much more a social issue. These are incredibly vexed questions. I do not think any of us have got the answer. We are going to be scoping the next state of the environment work in February. We would be more than happy to try to do a couple of key papers before the next SOER which comes out at the end of the year.

By doing some papers, what we can then do is get community input and we are able to work out some of those issues such as the footprint. It will now be getting some community people input and some discussion. If there are some key issues that the committee thinks could be worked into that process, we would be open to that. Also, Chief Minister's, as I think I mentioned yesterday, are doing the triple bottom-line reporting. That interfaces. We are more than happy to work with any agency to try to blend the kind of work we are doing in with supporting changes.

THE CHAIR: In the presentation yesterday a lot was said about the growth in consumption and that it is coming from goods and services. There was a great article today in the *Canberra Times*. It focused quite a bit on the energy efficiency and so forth. Even if you bring out those issues around goods and services, what it means, what it looks like and how people may change their behaviour—

Dr Cooper: I will have to take that on board. I will look to Sarah. She is my pilot on this. One of our driving forces is consumption. That is something we will definitely be looking at.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: On page 49, dealing with the triple bottom-line reporting, I want to drill down on a couple of matters. The operating statement shows that total expenditure went down by 10½ per cent. Is it fair to say that most of that, if not all, is due to the next line which looks at own-source revenue, which is a one-off every few years? There is \$315,000 that you did not get in revenue. I suppose, in net terms, expenditure went up a little, if you were to completely discount that?

Dr Cooper: I think it has stayed—

MR SESELJA: Part of that \$315,000 would have been used for ordinary expenditure?

Dr Cooper: That is state of the environment. That would have been regional state of the environment.

MR SESELJA: That \$315,000 revenue would also have been part of the expenditure of \$1.45 million?

Dr Cooper: Yes.

MR SESELJA: In that case, in real terms expenditure has gone up a little but not in a massive way, a few percentage points? Are there any particular areas of expenditure that have gone up and have contributed to that, once we factor out the \$315,000?

Dr Cooper: I do not think so.

MR SESELJA: One of the positive achievements listed is energy use. You have total energy use going down by about 35,000 megajoules, office energy use per person going down significantly and office energy use per square metre going down as well. What have been the main things you have implemented to achieve those changes?

Dr Cooper: We have implemented nothing. We are a tenant. On the sustainability working group, we have been vocal in asking TAMS to put in place the new heating and cooling system which has changed it dramatically. We benefit. Importantly, so does the motor vehicle registry office.

MR SESELJA: With that total energy use going down, what has been the total expenditure on energy for 2008-09 versus 2009-10?

Dr Cooper: I would have to take that on notice and get back to you. That will probably also give it to you for the whole building. We take a proportion. In our audit assessment report that we did on our agency's report on all of this, it is a challenge because we simply say that, of the total building, we have five people proportionately; that is it. Another area within the building could be using much greater energy or we could. It is averaged out.

THE CHAIR: In your opening statement you said that you were part of a resource management plan. Did you say that was part of TAMS or—

Dr Cooper: Because of the relationship we have, we have actually got a resource management plan for the building. Then we apportion parts of that out.

THE CHAIR: So you are able to have some influence on or input into improvements, changes in this area?

Dr Cooper: We do. I would say that the staff at the Dickson Motor Vehicle Registry office are to be totally commended. They have been brilliant. They have gone out and done the waste management. It has been, if you like, a really great relationship. We are a bit eccentric because of the type of business we are in.

MR HARGREAVES: I do not believe that for a second.

Dr Cooper: I would like to publicly thank staff at DMVR.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja, do you have any further questions?

MR SESELJA: No.

THE CHAIR: I want to go to the eastern broadacre study. On page 23, you list the government responses to some of the recommendations to the 2007-08 state of the environment report. There is mention of the eastern broadacre study. Were you involved heavily or at all with the development of the eastern broadacre study? Did you express views? What was your role, if any?

Dr Cooper: We were extremely pleased with the openness that ACTPLA greeted our grassland report with. It seems that they have incorporated all requests in terms of protecting grassland in the Majura Valley. We are still concerned about airport operations and that northern road and we are still, quite clearly, hoping that that reserve which we recommended, which is in the broadacre study, will not be progressed. As we know, that is on commonwealth land. They are the major concerns. Certainly that northern road and the airport will always be a concern. The airport are clearly saying that they want that road developed.

THE CHAIR: Another one was around the European wasps, on page 27. This has been an issue which has come up in the community from time to time. Are you comfortable that the government has prioritised the management of European wasps sufficiently?

Dr Cooper: If you want an answer to that, I would like to be given a little time to look into it a bit further. This was a response some time back, for that financial year. If you would like our views on it, again if you could wait until February or thereafter, I will do that.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: You may choose to answer this or not, as is your want. There have been some conversations around the role of the conservator in terms of approving the chopping down of trees or not. As I understand it, the conservator has the authority to determine whether or not I can chop down a tree in my backyard but does not have the authority to do so if I want to chop down one on my nature strip. Do you think that inconsistency should be removed?

Dr Cooper: I am addressing that inconsistency in the tree investigation. My views on that will be very clear in the tree investigation.

MR HARGREAVES: A wink to a blind horse is good enough for me.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: I wanted to go back to Mr Rattenbury's line of questioning earlier in relation to consumption. Your answer was that—

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja, the page?

MR SESELJA: Page 17. Your answer suggested, as you outlined to the committee yesterday, that people need to consume smarter or differently. You used the example of mobile phones that last longer and the like. The report says that inappropriate and

over consumption is a major contributor at the moment to both greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental issues. What are the particular areas of the consumption pattern in the ACT that you believe are contributing to that over-consumption?

Dr Cooper: One of the over-consumptions is certainly around our food. We throw out a lot of food here in the ACT. That is something that actually does not cause us any harm if we reduce. We all go out to restaurants—

MR HARGREAVES: It might do a lot of good, actually.

Dr Cooper: We all go out, or at home—and I put myself in; I am human too—although we try to reduce, we throw out a fair bit of food. Food is one of the most obvious ones. The other ones are certainly around the kinds of products that we buy. There are a lot of products out there that you can buy quite cheaply and you know that they will not last. Invest just a bit more money in something more solid that lasts a bit longer.

The other thing I would like to see us, as a culture, doing is actually fostering some things that are not there at the moment, like refurbishing things. How many people actually have the couch fixed rather than chuck it out and buy a new one? There are a whole lot of things that I think, as a society, we could do a bit differently and even foster more services and more industries back here in the ACT.

MR SESELJA: In principle I think they are all things that people would agree with. Aside from environmental impacts, the idea of buying quality and it lasting longer is simply a wise long-term decision. How do you propose to change that kind of behaviour, given that it has always been the case, has it not, that some people always buy the cheap thing because it is there and it is cheaper and other people buy the thing that they believe will last? How would you propose, in broader terms, changing those kinds of patterns of consumption that are pretty well established?

Dr Cooper: I believe we can all change, no matter where we are in our cycle of life. I think it is about peer pressure. The big glossy campaigns on the telly are questionable; it is about talking to people. That is why we have got the linkages we have got. It is a long, hard conversation and most of us actually change by saying, “You did it. Okay, I’ll do it.” That is why we target a small area. I have not got the solution to revolutionise society all at once, but—

MR HARGREAVES: I would like to follow that up, if I can. I heard a phrase recently about young people and buying clothes. It was called “landfill fashion”. It is all about having something that you only need for a week. It is easier to buy another one than wash the old one. So it ended up with a lot of this stuff going into bins and landfill. The same thing applies to small appliances and all the rest of it—hairdryers and all of that. Should we be targeting that mindset with a campaign to actually identify it as a syndrome and saying to people, “You are in the grip of a landfill fashion syndrome at the moment; get out of it”?

Dr Cooper: I think any of those kinds of conversations are invaluable, because it is the only way we will ever actually change in being aware of what we are doing.

Without speaking for you, I would say that we are all caught up in some of that.

MR HARGREAVES: I will take that as a support for that sort of campaign, Dr Cooper. Thank you.

Dr Cooper: As long as it is targeted at the peer group. May I just check something with Mr Seselja? Did you want a further discussion on that?

MR SESELJA: We could probably speak for a long time about it. It is a vexed issue. You raised the issue around getting things fixed. We all know that it is becoming increasingly the case that either the expertise is not there to fix a lot of our things or the cost of labour is such that it is far cheaper to replace a lot of household items.

Dr Cooper: Yes, I agree.

MR SESELJA: Those kinds of economic decisions that people are making are very difficult to overcome when they see the alternative, and in some cases there simply is no alternative, just because of the shortage of skills in a number of areas.

THE CHAIR: And also the way things are made and they do not provide those parts for very long. As you say, it is hard to fix.

Dr Cooper: Probably we all have lovely personal stories. My latest humorous one is the dropped coffee pot. It is one of those ones that you put the coffee in—the silver one that percs up—and the handle fell off. Quite clearly it was welded on. So I thought, “I’ll find a welder to do this.” It took me a while to find one, and it cost me a good bottle of red, but I ended up finding somebody—

MR HARGREAVES: That is tax evasion, Dr Cooper!

Dr Cooper: When he welded it, though—the humour of this—quite clearly he was not into coffee because he welded it so that the lid is permanently up a bit. There are humorous stories about us all trying to do things a bit more—

MR HARGREAVES: He wasn’t Italian, was he?

Dr Cooper: He was. That was the best part. He just didn’t get it. He wasn’t into his coffee; he was into his wine. I think that just by sharing stories like, “Okay, you got that fixed; how did you get it fixed?” people will start to pick up things—I hope, but I am an optimist.

MR HARGREAVES: You certainly are!

THE CHAIR: Mr Rattenbury, and then we will go to final questions.

MR RATTENBURY: I just wanted to ask about the offsets policy. You mentioned on page 43 that one of three matters arising from the grasslands report was the development of an offset policy by government. Can you tell us whether you have had any discussions with the government about the development of its offsets policy? I believe it is doing it at the moment.

Dr Cooper: They are. We are actually looking at that, both under the tree investigation and also under the Canberra Nature Park one. We are getting a paper developed. In fact, we have it. We have had a few papers with the two investigations. We have had an independent paper put to us which our committee have a few problems with. So we are working that through at the moment. We will certainly, in our nature park, be very clear on what we think around some of the offsets.

MR RATTENBURY: What do you think are the biggest challenges of using offsets in the ACT?

Dr Cooper: I think the fact that we have actually protected so much so well is part of a big problem. In other jurisdictions it is pretty easy to find the offset area. If you then want to invest in terms of money, rather than land for land or site for site, how much do you invest? Where do you invest it and who actually does the accounting for some of that? It has been raised by one of our committee members that maybe the offset approach should be questioned. Maybe you just keep the lands according to the planning process, because we have got very strong planning processes, rather than even try the offset approach. We have got a conflicted advisory group on this at the moment.

MR RATTENBURY: I think it is an interesting discussion. I recently came across the concept of a strategic offset where an area that was already reserved was being used as an offset, or resources were being put into its management. Have you any comment on that sort of approach?

Dr Cooper: That is the kind of thing that has been addressed in our independent paper which was done by Dr Phil Gibbons. He has got a matrix saying where he thinks the offset should or should not be used. That will come out in due course but, as I said, at the moment we are working that through with our committee. We are aware of what the government agency are proposing and have had a look at that. So ours will incorporate, if you like, a response around the whole issue of their directions, as well as ours.

MR RATTENBURY: So that paper will be publicly available at some point?

Dr Cooper: At some point, yes, it will. We are not sure whether we will have it in time to finalise the report. On the tree investigation, we have put out quite a number of independent reports as we have done it. But this particular one we are still finalising. It will definitely come out with the main report, if not before. I am not sure yet. It is a timing issue.

MR RATTENBURY: You mentioned your investigations. The investigation on the Canberra Nature Park and the reserve system, from my recollection of dates, is rather later than you had hoped for.

Dr Cooper: No. Fortunately, it never had a date.

MR RATTENBURY: That helps.

Dr Cooper: Which was always lovely, yes. The Canberra Nature Park issue is much more about the long term so we have given priority to the tree one. However, having said that, the Canberra Nature Park has involved months and months of field work. We have looked at 35 sites and done how many plots?

Ms Sargent: 207 individual plots, so an average of six sites per nature reserve.

Dr Cooper: We have had a person working with us who goes out and looks at what is called the land function analysis—how healthy the land is. We are yet to get that final report. It has taken a long time. The methods she is using first of all were trialled in February. We wanted to have a design or a method whereby, once we had done it, the agency could do it in a cost-effective way. It was valid for what we needed to find, but when we finish we would like the agency to have it on a regular basis to do the same work. She did a pilot back then and has spent many months doing these other ones. So, yes, it has taken time, but it is because at the moment there is not a pressing, urgent issue around any particular aspect of it. But it will certainly shape long-term strategies—we hope. As to the tree one, as I said before, we are certainly aiming to finalise it this month with the agencies having a chance to respond.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I just had one final question about contracts, and that is on page 57. I note that most of those—the vast majority—are single select tenders. Could you just explain why that is?

Dr Cooper: That is because of, generally, the timing that we have had to bring somebody on board relative to the skill base that we could get. They are all, as you can see, very small. So you balance whether or not you phone three people or whether or not you know the skills base of the people that you have got and you deal with that. As to the one for Ms Sarah Sharp—the largest one, \$53,000—no-one else but her had the credentials in terms of the land function analysis that we are talking about. She also worked with David Tongway who invented the method. She was trained. It is an innovative method. We looked around and she was the only one that had the skill base for that.

It was the same with Chris Dey and the ecological footprint. As I mentioned yesterday, when we asked for other people to do it they all said, “Go the University of Sydney.” So after the Institute for Sustainable Futures and a few others said, “You’re wasting your money asking us; we’ll just ask them,” we went direct to the people who do it. For each of those big ones there were clearly reasons—there were reasons for all of them—but for the smaller ones we knew they could deliver within the time.

MR SESELJA: Just on that: I know that some agencies in their annual reports will put a reason when there are single selects.

Dr Cooper: Certainly. I would be happy to do that.

MR SESELJA: It might be worth having that as an additional column for next year.

Dr Cooper: Yes.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, commissioner, and the officials for attending today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded you, so you will have an opportunity to check that transcript and suggest any corrections. I now formally declare this public hearing closed.

Dr Cooper: Thank you very much, committee members, and thank you, Mr Rattenbury.

The committee adjourned at 3.10 pm.