



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: [Ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region](#))

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 24 MARCH 2011

**Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 6205 0435)**

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.

WITNESSES

CORBELL, MR SIMON, Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment,
Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police
and Emergency Services **25**

PAPPS, MR DAVID, Chief Executive, Department of the Environment,
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STEWART, MR DANIEL, Director, Economic, Regional and Planning,
Policy Division, Chief Minister’s Department **25**

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 9.31 am.

CORBELL, MR SIMON, Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

PAPPS, MR DAVID, Chief Executive, Department of the Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water

STEWART, MR DANIEL, Director, Economic, Regional and Planning, Policy Division, Chief Minister's Department

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water. We are inquiring into the ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region. I want to make sure that everybody has read the privilege statement. Can you please confirm that you understand the content of the statement? Thank you.

Before we proceed, minister, would you like to start with an opening statement?

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am appearing this morning on behalf of the government, and specifically on behalf of the Chief Minister, whose portfolio has prepared the government submission for the inquiry's consideration. I do not intend to make an opening statement, but the officials and I are happy to try and answer questions the committee has in relation to the submission.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I might start there. As you said, the Chief Minister's Department has coordinated the development of his submission, so it has been an across-government exercise. My question is this: whose responsibility is it to be coordinating across government sustainability initiatives setting us up for the future and so forth? That is my opening question.

Mr Corbell: The administrative arrangements provide for the Chief Minister's portfolio to have overall responsibility for sustainability policy at a whole-of-government level. That is why the Chief Minister's Department has prepared this submission. There are, of course, close linkages and some areas of overlap between the Chief Minister's portfolio and my own portfolio, and these are managed in a collaborative way between the relevant ministers and agencies.

THE CHAIR: What confidence does the government have that the collective programs that are outlined in the submission will put the city and the ACT in a place overall where we are succeeding in being environmentally sustainable?

Mr Corbell: Sustainability is a significant challenge, Ms Hunter. I do not think the government has ever suggested that it has the full suite of policies, programs and activities in place to deliver sustainability in completely resourced terms. It is an ongoing exercise, but the government believes that we are taking very strong and proactive steps to address some of the key sustainability challenges the ACT faces.

THE CHAIR: What do you see as the primary indicators for reaching the outcomes and also the indicators for measuring how we are going?

Mr Corbell: There is a range of indicators across government, and they are focused on particular areas. There are obvious areas of focus such as energy, water, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity. These are all areas which the government uses, and it has specific measures in its annual reporting framework to try to address those sorts of issues.

THE CHAIR: Does the government have any strategic objectives in relation to ecological footprint, consumption and population? If so, could you outline what they are?

Mr Corbell: As the government has outlined in its submission, the idea of an ecological carrying capacity for the ACT's human population is a very important concept. It is a broad concept, because we are already, in our current patterns of consumption and technological development, well beyond what is a notional carrying capacity for the ACT. That is because, like all advanced industrialised societies, we use technology to extend our use of resources beyond our immediate locale.

The government makes the point in its submission that the notion of a carrying capacity is a difficult one to apply to human populations. Whilst it is a notion that can be reasonably applied to other ecosystems, such as a particular animal species and how it interacts with its immediate hinterland, the notion that you can apply a strict carrying capacity approach to the human population is a very difficult one to apply, simply because technological capacity, industrialisation, has meant that human societies reach beyond their immediate hinterland in seeking out the resources and the products they use or desire. That is clearly the case in relation to the ACT.

You ask about population. The ACT government's position in relation to population is that we rely on demographic projections to plan for a city which, on every indication, will continue to grow. The government does not have a specific target or objective in relation to population, and the government has recently reiterated that, based on current projections, the city is going to continue to grow significantly over the next 20 or 30 years, reaching half a million people by the middle of this century. That population projection is driven by a range of factors that the government believes are not significantly impacted upon by ACT government policy. Primarily, the increase in population is driven by natural increase—that is, more births than deaths, so a continued extension of the average life expectancy and at the same time an increase in the number of people being born.

It is worth noting that in most demographic projections released by the ACT government the net migration figure is around 500 people. That is interstate migration. That really does highlight that our population growth is being driven internally within the city, and it is a factor of more births than deaths. Short of draconian and dictatorial measures to try and control that sort of growth, which the government certainly does not support in a democratic society, we simply have to plan for that inevitable increase that is coming towards us as a city.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hargreaves?

MR HARGREAVES: Nothing at the moment, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Just on population growth, you have said in the past that you are in favour of a much larger population for the ACT. Is that still your position?

Mr Corbell: I think the Chief Minister and other ministers, including myself, have indicated that a city of around half a million people would certainly provide significant economic opportunity and significant opportunity in terms of the range of amenities and services available in a large population centre. We are all on the record as saying that. But that does not reflect an agreed government objective in terms of population growth. I think our comments simply reflect our understanding of how the ACT's population is trending over time.

Indeed, the most recent ACT population projections that were released by the Chief Minister earlier this month highlight that by 2059 we anticipate a population of over 500,000 residents and our total population growth between 2009 and 2059 will be in the order of 204,000 people, or a 58 per cent increase. So these are the facts of our city's projected growth.

This is a modest projection, and, again, I would simply make the point that it is driven overwhelmingly by natural increase. Interstate migration is not a significant factor in driving this population growth.

MR SESELJA: The government recommended on page 2 of its submission that the committee separate out its consideration of sustainable use of resources which are essentially geographically fixed in the ACT, such as soils and habitat for native species, from consideration in the elements of the ACT community's broader use of global resources as determined through our ecological footprint. How does the government see that happening in practice? How would you be able to physically separate out those two elements?

Mr Corbell: There are certainly areas where we can be more concise about what the impact is on land take in the city versus food production, which are perhaps two good examples. For example, we know that there are impacts from human settlement patterns on existing ecosystems and existing use of land. So, in having regard to that, you need to make sure you have a strong planning and legislative framework in place that protects and preserves specific native ecosystems within the ACT's borders and make decisions about land release and land allocation having regard to the need to protect an appropriate and representative amount of land to ensure the maintenance of those ecosystems.

Comparing that with food production, obviously the ACT is overwhelmingly reliant on food supply from outside of its borders, and often that food supply comes from a very long way away, as it does for most other large settlements around the country. We get our food from many thousands or even tens of thousands of kilometres away from us. The government makes the point that it is very difficult to make assessments about what our carrying capacity is when you look at an issue like food, because of the technological capacity we have as a human society to source food from very long distances away.

MR SESELJA: To summarise the argument, is the government arguing that, for the committee's purposes for this inquiry, effectively, the ecological carrying capacity should be put to one side and we should be looking at the environmental constraints on our activities here and completely disregard those other factors which go into determining the ecological footprint?

Mr Corbell: I do not think the government has a fixed view. I think what we are trying to say to the committee is that you need to be circumspect about the strict application of a carrying capacity approach when it comes to human population because of the complex factors involved. I refer back to our earlier discussion about land versus food as a simplistic but not unreasonable example of some of the complexities that are involved in this discussion.

THE CHAIR: Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: At a public meeting on Tuesday night, the Chief Minister, when asked about population—I either do not recall or he did not give a time frame—said that the population growth in the ACT would be approximately two-thirds ageing population and natural births and about a one-third migration. That figure is not expressed in this document. Does that accord with your understanding? I am not trying to trip you up here; I am trying to match the sets of numbers.

Mr Corbell: That is about right. It is important to remember the population figures provided in the government submission to the inquiry have now been superseded by a new analysis that has been released by the government in the last month. The work that has been done by the ACT government demographer recognises that increase in net international migration is anticipated in the medium scenario—which is the scenario we adopt, not the low growth or the high growth—to be approximately 2,500 people per annum for the forthcoming two years, then 2,000 for the following five years and then 1,500 for the remainder of the projection period. The projection period is from 2009 until 2059.

The net interstate migration figure under the medium growth scenario is anticipated to actually be zero, so as many people leave as arrive in terms of interstate migration. Then the rest of the growth is, indeed, natural increase.

MR RATTENBURY: Does the government have a position on whether they want to try to adjust that rate of natural increase in any way?

MR HARGREAVES: I would like to know how you are going to do it.

MR RATTENBURY: I will come to that.

Mr Corbell: No, we do not.

MR HARGREAVES: Not without a pair of scissors, anyway.

MR RATTENBURY: I guess the question is that—

Mr Corbell: Are you suggesting that the government should intervene in the birth

rate in the ACT?

MR RATTENBURY: The federal government in recent times, you could argue, has taken positive steps to boost the birth rate through provision of the baby bonus, for example. My question is: how does the ACT government feel about that? Have they put a view to the federal government as to whether that should be continued with, for example?

Mr Corbell: No, we have not. We do not adopt the view that it is the role of the ACT government to try to make deliberate interventions about that birth rate. I simply make the point that we are not interested in that sort of social engineering, which is what it is. We simply make the point that the birth rate in the ACT is lower than the national average, if I recall correctly. I think our fertility rate is lower than the national average. I do not have that to hand, but I am happy to confirm that. As populations increase in terms of their average level of education and their average disposable income, fertility rates reduce somewhat. It is not dramatic, but it does occur.

MR RATTENBURY: Page 7 of the government's submission says that a larger population for the ACT will allow us to take advantage of economies of scale. It talks about a population figure of 500,000. That is a figure that often comes up in public discourse around the ACT's future population size. Do you have any understanding of why that number is the one that people always talk about?

Mr Corbell: I think it is generally seen as a benchmark for what is starting to become a significantly sized city but still a small city by Australian let alone international comparators. What we do know is that as we approach that level of population, the cost efficiency of large scale infrastructure investment continues to improve. So particularly for some of the more costly infrastructure projects that many in Canberra would like to see, such as rail investment, light rail investment, once you start to approach a population level of that amount, the capacity of the city to finance and to justify investment in large-scale infrastructure, not only in transport but in water and power capacity, becomes more cost-effective.

MR RATTENBURY: Are there any particular benchmarks at which modelling shows that a certain population justifies a certain investment? Do you see what I am trying to get at? Are there any specific measures around what those economies of scale are?

Mr Corbell: These exercises really are done on a case-by-case basis; so you would need to look at the particular cost analyses for different projects. But it is probably worth looking at some of the work that has been done, for example, around transport infrastructure, particularly rail infrastructure in the territory—and I would refer you to the Infrastructure Australia work that the government has engaged in and other exercises that previous governments have engaged in—around the cost of some of that infrastructure. That does not preclude, I have to say, governments making decisions to make those investments earlier but, obviously, the cost-effectiveness of those cases is different if you have a lower population base.

MR RATTENBURY: One last question, if I might. Is it purely a function of population or is it a function of density as well? We hear this debate in the ACT that

density will enable us to do certain things. Do you see a trade-off there?

Mr Corbell: These are difficult and complex questions. It is important to stress that at one level the larger your population, the larger your rating base, the larger your economic activity. Obviously, the trade-off to that is that you have got more people to support under that scenario. These are not black and white questions.

Nevertheless, what the government is trying to say in this submission is: regardless of whether or not we believe or people believe that 300,000, 400,000 or 500,000 people is an appropriate population for the ACT, the fact is there will be half a million people living in this city in 2050 or so. Therefore, we have to make decisions about how we plan for that city and for those people who want to live in that city at that time. That is the challenge.

We can have some interesting and, at one level, fairly esoteric discussions about whether or not this is a good thing but, short of a dramatic curtailment of natural increase, that is the city that we will face in that time frame. We need to make planning decisions and other key decisions to prepare for that. That, fundamentally, is the government's position.

THE CHAIR: We have talked about the ACT's population. This inquiry is also looking at the carrying capacity and issues across not just the ACT but also the region. Minister, how does that fit into the government's thinking? What vehicles are you using? Is it the regional leaders forum? What particular mechanisms are in place so that there can be that bigger-picture view of population increases? We know a lot of new residential developments are going up around Queanbeyan, Yass and so forth. How is all of that being factored into how we are facing all of those challenges?

Mr Corbell: We certainly have regard to population growth in the region because it has a significant impact on this city as a regional centre. The government's submission draws your attention to what the growth rate is, in particular at page 8, which highlights that the south-eastern region which surrounds the ACT is projected to grow and age at a faster rate than the ACT.

The current population of the region is approximately 218,000 people. That is projected to grow by 28,000 over the next 10 years or a 12.8 per cent increase, and by 55,000 over the next 20 years, or a 25 per cent increase. Much of that growth will occur in areas closest to the territory, in Queanbeyan, Palerang and the Yass Valley. Those are issues which are had regard to through the regional planning arrangements that the territory has with New South Wales.

I would argue that there is a need to further strengthen and enhance those arrangements and to provide for closer coordination of decisions around not only new urban development areas in the region but also specifically the transport connections and other infrastructure questions that arise from that. Increasingly, the ACT government will need to take the view that it is not just a government for the territory but it has an important leadership role in the region, in coordinating its activities and investment decisions around infrastructure with regional governments, whether that is local government or the state government. That is something which will continue to be an emerging and important area for the ACT government.

MR HARGREAVES: I have a quick question, if I may. I seem to recall that in about 2005 or thereabouts there was a discussion with the New South Wales state government around information sharing, particularly as it related to settlement. I recall the urgency of it was around the supply of water to possible towns like Googong et cetera. If I recall correctly—and I am looking for an update—one of the issues that you put forward was that we cannot, either of us, develop large-scale towns and town centres in isolation from each other. If I also recall, you had some difficulty in getting a dialogue going with that state government. I was wondering whether things have improved at all.

MR SESELJA: It might be better after Saturday.

MR HARGREAVES: I doubt it very much.

Mr Corbell: Mr Hargreaves, I think you are referring to a discussion that took place about four or five years ago where there was a need to clarify the regional planning arrangements for the region, what the settlement pattern was going to look like in the region and what the implications were for water supply in particular. Fortunately we have reached settlement on a wide range of those issues, most predominantly in relation to water.

There is now a clear agreement between the three governments—the ACT, New South Wales and the commonwealth—on the issue of water supply from the Googong River and catchment and how that is shared between the territory and the broader region, in particular the Queanbeyan City Council which is the obvious area of growth and future development. So there is an agreed arrangement in place between the three levels of government about how water will be supplied and guaranteeing access for all affected settlements.

In relation to the settlement pattern itself, there is a regional management framework in place between the ACT and the New South Wales governments and local government areas, which seeks to identify and plan for where settlement will take place in the broader region. I think it is important that we continue to strengthen and enhance the engagement between levels of government around that framework. Obviously, we look forward to engaging with whoever is the appropriate New South Wales minister after Saturday in relation to those issues.

THE CHAIR: Could you explain that a little further? There is a regional management framework. It is a New South Wales minister. Who has carriage of it? Who has responsibility? Who ensures that work is done and so forth?

Mr Stewart: The regional management framework was signed by the Chief Minister and the then premier of New South Wales in around 2005, I think. As Minister Corbell alluded to it, it picks up a number of issues but primarily arrangements around water supply, and settlement patterns were another key issue identified. So there was an agreement under that document to prepare a regional settlement strategy. For a variety of reasons, a formal strategy has not been prepared. What we have now is an ACT spatial plan and a New South Wales Sydney-Canberra corridor planning strategy.

In effect, the spatial plan identifies the settlement intent for the ACT—the territory itself—and then the corridor strategy identifies where the New South Wales government sees settlement occurring within that area. We have regular meetings and dialogue with Queanbeyan City Council in particular but also the New South Wales Department of Planning about where the New South Wales government sees some of those—where they are fast-tracking particular settlements or where they see priorities.

Obviously, there has been a lot of activity around Tralee and Googong over the last few years. It is certainly likely to continue in that regard. There is not a formal strategy in place around where settlement is likely to occur in one jurisdiction versus the other. It is more about information sharing and getting an understanding of where the activity is starting to ramp up. For us, as the minister said, we have three of the five fastest growing non-metropolitan Sydney New South Wales councils directly on our border—Palerang, Yass and Queanbeyan—growing at a rate well in excess of our own population growth rate. That raises a number of issues for the ACT.

The more information that we can get in terms of our dialogue with New South Wales planning and the individual shire councils, through things like the regional management framework, through things like the regional leaders forum, through the regular meetings that the Chief Minister has with the Mayor of Queanbeyan, the better our agency is able to understand what those settlement impacts will be on the delivery of our services or the services that the ACT government provides that are accessed by a good number of New South Wales residents.

THE CHAIR: It is good to see that there are regular meetings with the Mayor of Queanbeyan and that you have also identified that when you go out towards Yass through Murrumbateman there is a lot of residential development going on. There are a lot of people commuting into Canberra every day, which is raising those sorts of transport issues. It is everything from people coming in and children going to school in the ACT, using the hospital services and so forth. What is being done with the other local councils in the region? Is the regional leaders forum adequate or does more need to be done around actually having some agreements or having some plans that give some certainty as to what may happen in the future?

Mr Stewart: There is not the regularity of meetings with those other shires to the same extent that we are seeing with Queanbeyan. At the moment the regional leaders forum is seen, as I understand it, an adequate form of engagement for those shires beyond that immediacy of the ACT. I guess, realistically, that the bulk of the growth that we have seen in recent years has been within Queanbeyan. Palerang and Yass do not, at this point in time, have the same capacity. For those two in particular, water remains an issue in terms of their ability to develop much beyond where they currently stand.

I guess what I would say is that we do have a regional leaders forum. Issues such as settlement, transport and environmental factors are discussed at those meetings twice a year as they are held. But we do not have that regularity of contact between the Chief Minister and those mayors in the same way that we do with the Mayor of Queanbeyan.

THE CHAIR: What sort of environmental issues have been raised and discussed?

Mr Stewart: The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has a standing brief to that forum, primarily because she does the state of the region as part of her work program. So she will give a presentation. The forum has looked at a range of issues for the last two or three years since I have been involved. There have been visits to wind farms and small-scale solar. There is certainly an interest within the region as to the capacity of the region to be showcasing and developing its renewable energy credentials, if you will. But, in terms of a formal work program relating to environmental projects, there is nothing at this point in time that is joined up across the entire region.

MR SESELJA: Mr Stewart said earlier that the region is growing a fair bit quicker than the ACT. That obviously does have implications, some of which have been touched on—the fact that we have a lot of people in our region using services here in the territory not contributing to the tax base in the same way that residents do. Has the government done any work to examine why it is that the region is growing faster than the ACT? Do you, minister, see it as a positive, do you see it as neutral or do you see something that you would like to see addressed?

Mr Corbell: I think the view that the government would take is that there are risks and benefits from growth in the region. The risk obviously is to the territory's tax base. If there is more growth outside the city than there is inside the city and yet the city continues to be the primary provider of key essential services such as health, education or other services, then that places pressure on the territory's revenue base.

That was one of the key reasons that drove the territory and the government back in 2003-04 to make decisions about new urban development fronts in the city and to provide for new urban development fronts such as Molonglo in the city to counter what would otherwise have been a paucity of new development fronts in the city versus the region. So we recognise that it is a risk.

At the same time, we recognise that there are benefits to this. The territory is not going to be able to provide the same range of lifestyle choices that could perhaps comparatively be offered in the region. There is a need for a diversity of housing and lifestyle choices. We know that many people choose to live outside of the ACT because they want to live in a more rural environment as opposed to an urban or suburban environment. They choose the region for that reason. But they still want to have the proximity and the access that is afforded by living close to the ACT and the amenity that comes from that.

There is also, of course, the opportunity to provide for a range of different economic activities and uses by having activity in the region as well as in the ACT. I think the key issue for us is to make sure that we work collaboratively with local government areas and the state government in the surrounding region to ensure that key services are provided effectively. For example, we have seen good collaboration between the territory, Queanbeyan City Council and the New South Wales state government in relation to upgrades of some key road infrastructure connecting the two jurisdictions which are used by residents from both the ACT and the region. We have seen good collaboration and cooperation in joint funding arrangements even in relation to some of those sorts of projects.

I think that is the basis that we are going to have to continue to work on. I think it would be very clear that we are now starting to see the region emerge as a much more significant factor in all of our thinking. I think that is something that is a good thing because it requires us to view our interests as common across borders rather than solely the ACT versus other parts of the region.

MR SESELJA: So you put it down to lifestyle choices. You do not believe that housing affordability, for instance, has any impact on people's decision not to settle in the ACT?

Mr Corbell: There is no doubt that housing affordability is a factor and that some people are making choices about living in regional areas close to the ACT. That is certainly something that the government is very cognisant of. That is why the government is working to improve housing affordability in the territory, providing additional land release in the territory and focusing on mechanisms to control land prices in the territory.

These are all things that we continue to focus on, but there is no doubt that that is nevertheless an issue. It is worth highlighting some of the measures around affordability and the costs to renters and home purchasers in the territory. They are outlined in the government's submission at page 44.

MR SESELJA: Do you agree with Bernard Salt's conclusions that what is potentially happening is a Manhattan Island effect where people on lower and middle incomes are finding it increasingly difficult to purchase in Canberra and will instead live in the region and work in Canberra?

Mr Corbell: Of course, it is worth making the point that whilst there are higher housing costs in the territory there are also on average higher disposable incomes. So these are factors that need to be kept in mind. It is worth also drawing attention to the Real Estate Institute of Australia's measures of housing affordability, which show that in June 2010 for home purchases the proportion of income needed to meet mortgage payments is 18 per cent compared to a national average of 34 per cent and a New South Wales figure of 38 per cent. For renters, the ACT has the lowest proportion of family income needed to meet rent payments of all states and territories at 16.5 per cent compared to the national average of 25 per cent.

MR SESELJA: So you agree with the Chief Minister when he says that the ACT is affordable?

Mr Corbell: The fact is that the Chief Minister is making the point that there are independent market, industry-based measures of housing affordability that confirm that, whilst there are pressures in the ACT market, the ACT is doing well compared to a number of other jurisdictions.

MR SESELJA: So the ACT is affordable, in your opinion?

Mr Corbell: I think I just answered your question, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: You tried not to.

Mr Corbell: You are trying to get me to answer in a way that you would like. I will answer the questions the way I see fit.

MR SESELJA: So is it affordable or not? Was that a yes or a no?

Mr Corbell: The ACT is more affordable than many other jurisdictions in many other parts of Australia.

MR SESELJA: And we should just be grateful? Okay. Page 9 of your submission talks about regulatory impact statements being required for any new or amending legislation proposals that might impact on a stakeholder group. That is a pretty broad definition. I imagine that would apply to most legislation. How many regulatory impact statements have occurred in your portfolio areas in this financial year?

Mr Corbell: I will have to take the question on notice, Mr Seselja. I simply do not have that figure to hand.

MR SESELJA: And are all of the regulatory impact statements that are done in your portfolios made public?

Mr Corbell: Not necessarily.

MR SESELJA: What are the factors that determine whether or not they are made public?

Mr Corbell: Cabinet's consideration of them.

MR SESELJA: How many of yours have been made public?

Mr Corbell: Again I would have to take that on notice. I simply do not have that figure to hand.

MR RATTENBURY: Back on the regional approach, yesterday we had Dr Schooneveldt come in and give evidence. He, particularly from a regional point of view, highlighted the lack of transport infrastructure as being a significant factor for the growth of this region. Picking up on some of the discussion with Mr Seselja, people are choosing or being forced to purchase housing perhaps outside the ACT. We are seeing a very significant increase in the number of people commuting in and out of the city. How is the regional forum seeking to address that?

Mr Stewart: Most specifically in relation to Queanbeyan, the Chief Minister and the Mayor of Queanbeyan have convened an eastern regional transport task force. I think that is its official title. That group includes representatives from the New South Wales bureaucracy, a variety of ACT government departments and Queanbeyan City Council itself. That group has been tasked with looking at opportunities for improving public transport connections between the two cities and also exploring the transport impacts of those proposed developments in nearby New South Wales, most particularly Queanbeyan—sorry, Tralee and Googong.

That group has been up and running for six to eight months; I could double-check the timing of that. It has been specifically tasked with looking at that issue and how we can improve that, first and foremost with Queanbeyan itself, because that is where the large majority of those border crossings are occurring each day in terms of people coming into work in the ACT. I guess as those other settlements—Yass, Bungendore and so forth—continue to grow, that would be an area for further work.

THE CHAIR: That group has been up for six to eight months. What results have they had so far? What are they concentrating on?

Mr Stewart: I would have to come back to you with specific results or specific issues. That is an issue that is being handled by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. But there has been a lot of work looking at the transport modelling on both sides of the border. The ACT government has its own transport modelling arrangements—transport models within TAMS. Those individuals running those models have a view as to what some of the impacts of regional growth would mean for the ACT. However, Queanbeyan City Council also has its own transport model, and a large part of the work has been trying to reconcile those two models and come up with some middle ground. I do not think the divergence is large, but it is still there.

THE CHAIR: But it is pretty clear if you stand on any of the two avenues coming into Canberra from Queanbeyan each day that they are bumper to bumper.

Mr Stewart: Indeed. The group has been tasked with coming up with a reasonable baseline of what those transport movements are and what the impacts of those future settlements are, and bringing back options to government around public transport for enhancing the transport connections between the two. And then, as I understand it, there is also money in the existing ACT budget for a variety of enhancements to public transport along Canberra Avenue and that main connection between Queanbeyan and the parliamentary triangle and Civic.

MR RATTENBURY: Is there a time line for coming up with those options?

Mr Stewart: I do not know. I would have to check on that.

Mr Corbell: There are a number of critical issues I think governments will have to address into the future around this issue. One of these is the infrastructure provision issue, particularly where private development on one side of the border drives the need for infrastructure enhancement in public infrastructure on the other side of the border. At the moment there is no clear arrangement that can be utilised to ensure that developers assist with the cost of transport infrastructure enhancement on the other side of the border. Obviously it can occur within New South Wales. The New South Wales state government, through its instruments, or local governments to a lesser extent, can put certain obligations on developers to fund certain pieces of infrastructure that are required as a result of their development, but that cannot translate over the border. So there will be a need into the future for us to develop a model and try and achieve agreement on how these things can be addressed and how these mechanisms can be put in place. But we are a long way from that, and I think it is still very much a new and opening discussion about how these issues are addressed

into the future.

MR RATTENBURY: Can I just come back to this. Earlier in the hearing, you gave some figures on the international migration intake into the ACT—the projections. That was 2,500 for the next few years and then 1,500 a year after that. Are you able to give us a breakdown of the nature of that migration? Is it refugees, family reunions, skilled migration?

Mr Corbell: It is overwhelmingly international students.

MR RATTENBURY: And they are expected to stay permanently?

Mr Corbell: They are now counted as permanent residents under the ABS counting data, so we actually saw a spike in the most recent census in terms of international migration as a result of the ABS making decisions about how long someone had to be resident here to be counted. Obviously, most international students, if they are here in the territory, are here for three years or more, so they are now being added into that cohort. That is a significant change; it is a change in terms of counting but it is not really a change in terms of the number of people on the ground.

MR RATTENBURY: Does the government have any strategic objectives around the international migration intake?

Mr Corbell: International migration is, of course, within the authority of the commonwealth, because they establish the visa and other thresholds that have to be met for people to enter Australia. But we certainly take the view that the international student base is an important area of economic activity for the territory. Our tertiary institutions are important employers; they are important generators of economic activity in the city. Having the city seen as a desirable destination for high-quality tertiary education in particular, with an international reputation, is a good thing for our city and one that we do support quite strongly. Indeed, members of the government—my colleague Andrew Barr, for example—have led delegations overseas to sell further the message of Canberra as a destination for international students.

MR RATTENBURY: Does the government have any breakdown of how many of those international arrivals are resulting from the Live in Canberra program?

Mr Corbell: I do not know whether we have that. Live in Canberra has overwhelmingly been focused on interstate migration to deal with skill shortages—so identifying those people who can come to Canberra and deliver particular skills. It is overwhelmingly a within Australia exercise. I would simply draw your attention again to what we anticipate net interstate migration to be, which we expect to be zero. The net gain is zero. I think that perhaps puts a bit of a reality check on what Live in Canberra is all about. Live in Canberra is not about trying to grow our population as much as about attracting people here with the necessary skill sets to meet some skill shortages in our economy.

MR RATTENBURY: Do you expect that program to continue?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I wanted to go back to the issue of energy. Earlier in the hearing there was discussion around the region being seen as a bit of a showcase for renewable energy and so forth. Of course, we are still awaiting with lots of anticipation the ACT government's energy policy. Minister, is this energy policy going to be strictly about within the borders of the ACT or are we taking a regional approach within that policy?

Mr Corbell: No, the policy is focused on the ACT. Energy policy in New South Wales is the responsibility of the New South Wales government.

THE CHAIR: But surely—

Mr Corbell: Management of the grid and the network is a matter for other jurisdictions.

THE CHAIR: I would have thought that we could never generate our own energy within the ACT borders, so there would be some sort of discussion—for instance, taking a more regional approach.

Mr Corbell: In what way?

THE CHAIR: I guess at the moment we do have wind farms around the ACT. There are some benefits for the ACT from that.

Mr Corbell: Yes, but we have a national electricity grid. These generation facilities are part of a national grid, which is a cooperative scheme across all of the south-eastern Australian states—from South Australia all the way through to Queensland and including Tasmania. South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, the ACT, Queensland and Tasmania are all connected to a national grid which is managed, already, through COAG agreements, the Ministerial Council on Energy and a range of national regulatory bodies. So, to the extent that there are issues occurring in one region that affect other regions or other jurisdictions, these are managed through those arrangements. I do not see what we could add to that by trying to have an energy policy that focused on the region as such.

THE CHAIR: It is not about a focus; it is an understanding that we are not an island.

Mr Corbell: No, we are not an island. But the fact that we are not an island is already recognised in terms of the government's arrangements of how electricity is generated and distributed within south-eastern Australia.

THE CHAIR: When might we see that energy policy?

Mr Corbell: This year, Ms Hunter.

THE CHAIR: No other, more specific, date?

Mr Corbell: I think I have given you a more specific time frame before, but I do not have that in front of me at the moment, I am sorry. I think I have tried to answer that

question before and I think you do have an answer from me on that issue.

MR RATTENBURY: I think that those dates have passed on a number of occasions.

Mr Corbell: I think I gave a more recent update earlier this year.

THE CHAIR: I wanted to go back to the ecological footprint. What capacity do you think that the ACT government has to influence some of the things that are measured in the ecological footprint? I am thinking primarily of consumption of services and resources.

Mr Corbell: Again, the ACT would argue that it is very difficult to establish an ecological footprint in that context, except through the use of some of the methodologies such as those that have been adopted by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The commissioner has done some very good work around trying to quantify the level of consumption per capita in the territory. We certainly believe that is very useful work and work that helps inform our understanding of consumption patterns in the territory and what the overall impact of consumption is on global resources.

THE CHAIR: Obviously economic growth and development is at the heart of government policy and that sometimes has tensions if you have an objective around reducing consumption of goods and resources. I am wondering if the government has done any work on producing alternative economic frameworks that might better facilitate those quality of life outcomes but also address the need to reduce consumption and improve our ecological footprint.

Mr Corbell: In what respect?

THE CHAIR: What sort of work, what sort of planning, what sort of visioning has the ACT government done around moving to a clean economy—around programs that promote a reduction in consumption to citizens of the ACT?

Mr Corbell: We have done quite a bit of work in terms of natural resources and encouraging Canberrans to use natural resources and the products that are derived from them, particularly in the utility sphere, quite proactively. For example, the water resource is the most obvious example. We have, I think, been very successful as a city in communicating and educating ourselves about how we need to use that resource wisely, that it is finite and that it needs to be managed sensibly. We now have a very, I think, rigorous and nuanced water management regime in terms of how households should be using water on a daily basis, as well as a range of programs and other activities that assist Canberrans to install appliances and other services in their households to use water resources more wisely.

It is the same with energy. We provide a range of programs, services, advice and education to households to assist them to use energy in a more sustainable manner to reduce their energy consumption and obviously reduce their overall energy costs as well, which is beneficial to those households economically. We are also focusing very strongly on waste. The draft waste strategy focuses very clearly on a range of mechanisms to reduce the amount of waste that is generated in the territory, or at least

the amount of waste that has to go to landfill in the territory.

One of the key objectives of the waste strategy is also to focus on reducing the generation of waste. There are a range of ways this can be achieved. For example, the territory's participation in national schemes around packaging requirements for products and focusing on national strategies that require or encourage manufacturers to reduce the packaging content of products is one way that we can have a significant impact on waste, as well as other measures such as product stewardship, where we cooperate with other jurisdictions in the implementation of national product stewardship regimes where manufacturers are obliged to provide for the collection, reuse and recycling.

THE CHAIR: Has the ACT government involved itself in any of those discussions around packaging and stewardship?

Mr Corbell: Yes, we are frequently involved in those discussions through my participation as a member of what was the environment protection, heritage and conservation ministerial council. It will have a new name under the Hawke arrangements, but nevertheless it is the ministerial council that has obligations under the national packaging covenant, under the national environment protection regime, which imposes common, uniform obligations on all jurisdictions in relation to a whole range of things from air quality, water quality, pollution measurement and so on all the way through to packaging, waste management and national waste measures. We are frequently and regularly involved as a standing member of those arrangements both at the ministerial and departmental level.

MR RATTENBURY: Does the government actually have an objective to reduce the ACT's ecological footprint as measured by the commissioner?

Mr Corbell: I think the government will be interested in what the committee concludes is a sensible way forward in relation to ecological footprints, how they should be measured and to what extent a carrying capacity for the territory is a reasonable proposition.

MR RATTENBURY: I am asking about the ecological footprint. There is a recognised measure. The commissioner has one.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: Does the ACT government have an objective to reduce that ecological footprint?

Mr Corbell: We certainly have an objective to reduce it.

MR RATTENBURY: Do you have a goal in mind, a number?

Mr Corbell: No, we have not quantified a particular number, if you like. This is a very difficult exercise. I do not believe there is any jurisdiction in the country that has done so, so far as I am aware. Our focus has been at the next level down, which is a more detailed level—that is, our performance in a range of sectors such as greenhouse

gas emissions, water use, energy use and waste generation. That is where we focus our measures at this point in time.

MR SESELJA: But you have said you want to see it come down. You do not know by how much?

Mr Corbell: We know it will come down if we use energy more sustainably, if we use water sustainably, if we reduce the amount of waste to landfill and so on. We know that it will come down. But no, we have not sought to put a particular measurement on that highest order assessment.

MR SESELJA: I agree with you on the challenge of those other aspects that are as a result of consumption of goods, in particular goods sourced outside the region. Does the government have a policy that they want to see that come down, or are they acknowledging that there is really not much they can do?

Mr Corbell: Sorry, in relation to what?

MR SESELJA: In relation to goods sourced outside the region. Obviously they make up a big part of that ecological footprint. Are you acknowledging that there is not much the government can do you, or do you actually see that the government can have policies and programs aimed at bringing that down?

Mr Corbell: There are some limited opportunities in a limited number of areas, but I think we have to be realistic about the fact that we are not going to, for example, be a centre for elaborately transformed manufacturers. We are not going to be a city that produces televisions or computers or fridges or microwaves or ovens or large amounts of furniture or electronic equipment. We are not going to be a city that does a lot of that. Indeed, there are not many large cities in Australia that generate those goods. They come from other centres in the global economy. So, yes, Mr Seselja, we do believe we need to be realistic about this issue, but there are some limited opportunities which the government seeks to provide its support to.

One of those is in relation to home-grown produce and opportunities for more types of home-grown produce to be generated locally, to be sold locally and so on. We support that through community gardens and measures such as that. That is very much the way that we seek to engage in that sort of exercise. But it is limited. I think necessarily it will be limited because of the nature of our economy, which is overwhelmingly a service economy and not a manufacturing economy.

MR SESELJA: Page 38 of the submission refers to sustainable transport and it looks at the government's targets for walking, cycling, public transport trips to work. There is a 20 per cent target by 2011. Where are we up to on that at the moment?

Mr Corbell: I would have to take some advice from the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, but as I understand it, in general, the introduction of the new ticketing system for our bus fleet will give us a much more robust and reliable data set in relation to patronage for public transport usage. So we will be using the coming year particularly to have a close look at the data that is generated from the new ticketing system so that we understand how we are tracking in terms of patronage on

public transport.

We know there are a range of measures that are used to identify modal split in relation to cycling and walking, including ABS data. I am happy to provide you with an update based on what the department's most recently published assessment is about progress in relation to those targets.

MR SESELJA: Presuming that we are not at 20 per cent—I do not think anything I have seen suggests that—how are you actually going to start to achieve some of those targets? What are you planning on doing differently? You have been doing a lot of these things over the last few years. The plans have been in place over a number of years. We have had the on-road cycle lanes. There have been various attempts by the government, but what will the government do to actually achieve these targets, or are you not too fussed as to whether you actually reach them?

Mr Corbell: The government are committed to these targets, and we believe that we will be on track to achieve these targets. It is important to remember that the 20 per cent split is walking, cycling and public transport. We know, for example, already that, if I recall correctly, public transport modal split is currently around about half that. I think it is between seven and 10 per cent. Cycling equates for another three to five per cent, and walking would be about half that number. So, if you just look at those in rough terms—I will stand corrected—it is close to 20 per cent already of journeys to work by modes other than motor vehicle. I am happy to provide you with some more concise figures, but that is my recollection of where we are travelling at the moment.

We remain committed to these targets. They are an important part of addressing our energy emissions, our greenhouse gas emissions, in particular. The government have made significant investments in improving public transport provision over the last 12 to 18 months in particular with the transport for Canberra initiatives; the upgrade of public transport infrastructure, such as the Belconnen bus facilities and the transit way between Belconnen and the city; the development of new public transport infrastructure and the planning for that in other parts of the city such as Erindale; and, of course, the upgrade of frequency for line haul bus routes, such as the new red rapid service which was funded in the last budget.

MR SESELJA: Is the primary motivator for these targets emissions reduction or is it looking at issues around congestion? Obviously, we could face a radically different scenario in 10 or 15 years where many of our motor vehicles may not actually emit that much. Will they still be just as relevant if we have got very efficient motor vehicles?

Mr Corbell: Congestion as well as greenhouse gas emissions are the two key priorities. Obviously, if we want to envisage a future where there are electric vehicles, that is very beneficial from a greenhouse gas emissions perspective, but there are still significant public infrastructure costs that have to be met if you have an expanding population. I remember when I first became Minister for Planning, the then director of ACTION buses, Guy Thurston—who would be well known to Mr Hargreaves in particular—said to me that his biggest enemy was the Hyundai Excel which was purchased by teenage girls, he said, for \$15,000 a pop. The relative cheapness of small passenger vehicles was a very significant factor, and it remains a very

significant factor. There are significant costs to the community of continuing to expand very expensive infrastructure to meet growth in the use of motor vehicles. So, in short answer, yes, congestion is just as important a consideration as greenhouse gas emissions.

MR HARGREAVES: On the subject Mr Seselja has raised, minister, one of the initiatives that have popped up in the recent past has been the introduction of T2 lanes, which are to encourage multi-occupancy of private vehicles, taxis and all that sort of stuff. Has there been any work—it may be a TAMS question—done on whether there has been any movement in increasing the number of multi-occupancy commuter trips?

Mr Corbell: I would have to ask TAMS, Mr Hargreaves, but I am happy to do so.

MR HARGREAVES: It just occurred to me that I am not aware of any sort of data collection in that area. I do not think it would be terribly difficult to sit someone outside Adelaide Avenue with a clicker for a while. It may be something that the government might like to think about.

Mr Corbell: I am happy to make inquiries of TAMS.

THE CHAIR: I would like to—

Mr Corbell: Madam Chair, I am sorry; I understood I was scheduled to give evidence for only an hour.

THE CHAIR: I understood you were here until 11 o'clock, minister.

Mr Corbell: I beg your pardon. I thought I was here for only an hour. I do have another engagement, I am afraid. I can perhaps give you just five more minutes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. We might go to final questions then. There must have been some mix-up between the committee office and your office.

Mr Corbell: Yes. I apologise for that.

THE CHAIR: Because of that, we will take the opportunity to put some questions on notice through the normal process.

I wanted to pick up on the issue of food which was mentioned. You spoke about it most recently around the issue of community gardens and so forth. We do have the eastern broadacre study and I am wondering whether further consideration has been given by the government to allocating some of that area to local food production.

Mr Corbell: I am sorry. I do not have that information available, Ms Hunter, but I am happy to seek advice from the planning authority.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR RATTENBURY: I have a series of questions I would like to explore on the nexus between the ACT's natural areas and urban planning related to the expansion of

the city, but I think it might be best if I put those on notice. It requires a bit of detail and it does not sound as though we have the time for it.

THE CHAIR: And certainly I also alert you that I have a question around the biodiversity maps and the overlay into areas that are going to be developed into urban areas and whether that has been done or not. It does seem as though those questions would take a little bit longer than four minutes, so thank you, minister and officials, for appearing this morning. As I said, we will be putting questions on notice. A transcript will come to you and we invite you to look at that in case there are any errors that you feel need correcting.

The committee adjourned at 10.43 am.