



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, PUBLIC WORKS AND
TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Tidbinbilla revised draft plan of management](#))

Members:

MS M PORTER (The Chair)
MS C LE COUTEUR (The Deputy Chair)
MR A COE

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2011

Secretary to the committee:
Ms V Strkalj (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.

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Amended 9 August 2011

The committee met at 10.02 am.

CORBELL, MR SIMON, Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

ALEGRIA, MR STEPHEN, General Manager, Tidbinbilla, Parks and City Services Division, Territory and Municipal Services Directorate

LANE, MS SHARON, Manager, Planning, Conservation and Land, Nature Conservation Policy, Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate

THE CHAIR: Good morning everyone, and welcome to this second public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services inquiry into the Tidbinbilla draft management plan. Thank you very much, minister and officials, for appearing before us today. I presume you are all very familiar with the privilege card that is in front of you and are aware of its implications?

Mr Corbell: Yes thank you, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: We have Mr Coe on the telephone, as he is absent at the moment. So he is going to participate in the hearing through a disembodied voice. Before we proceed to questions, minister, would you like to make any opening remarks about this particular topic?

Mr Corbell: No thank you, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: You are happy to proceed directly to questions?

Mr Corbell: Yes, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: Ms Le Couteur, would you like to ask the first question?

MS LE COUTEUR: I would. What are your plans for commercial vehicles entering the zone 1 conservation area?

Mr Corbell: I will ask Ms Lane to answer that question.

Ms Lane: The plan outlines some policies in relation to access to zone 1 for commercial tours. Essentially, it says that this would be permissible but commercial tour operators would be licensed and there are a number of conditions they would have to meet to get that access, and those sorts of conditions would be dealt with with the land managers in an agreement as part of the licensing process.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you already selected who the commercial operators would be? When we discussed this with the NPA, there was a lot of discussion about conservation volunteers. There seemed to be a belief that discussions had already taken place. Where are we up to with this? Have there been discussions? Has there been a selection in some way?

Ms Lane: In terms of the plan, it is actually a policy document. So it sets out the

policy framework for any commercial opportunities to access those areas. So any commercial operator who has an interest in doing that would have to go through those processes of getting a licence, getting permission, doing an environmental management plan and addressing all the issues that are outlined in the plan.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you have not had any—

Mr Corbell: Mr Alegria will add to that.

Mr Alegria: Further to that, we have at the moment a relationship with Conservation Volunteers Australia; in fact we have a contract with them. Part of their contractual obligation is to develop some tourism products and run ecotourism tours at Tidbinbilla. So that is the only commercial aspect that we have at the moment, and it is very small.

MS LE COUTEUR: I noticed you were putting quotation marks around “commercial”. One of the questions that also came up with the NPA was: do you regard CVA as commercial or community?

Mr Alegria: We regard them as a partner. We have a contract with them, so in that sense they could be regarded as commercial. However, the spirit of the agreement we have is that they are partners with us in achieving our goals.

MS LE COUTEUR: If you do have people doing tours with commercial vehicles in the conservation zone, will you go out to some sort of public process to determine who would be doing this or would CVA definitively, because of the existing partnership, be the operator? How would it happen? I appreciate that the plan of management gives the overall rules, but when we get down to the actual operators and what happens, how will you get those people—if you get those people? I am not trying to prejudge whether you would or not.

Mr Alegria: As you say, we will be guided by the plan in determining what any commercial operators could do. Whether we would go out and seek that is another question that we have not even considered, to be honest. At the moment it is almost a trial or pilot of this kind of tourism product at Tidbinbilla. Until we see whether there is even a market for it, it is really too early for me to say.

Mr Corbell: It is not really a proposal, Ms Le Couteur, in that government is saying, “We are going to put out to tender these activities.” It is not like it is a government tender at all; it is really a policy setting which can facilitate these activities either because existing arrangements perhaps can expand these activities or there are new proposals that are presented to the government that the government may wish to consider. It really is simply setting a policy framework to permit the assessment of such proposals and approve them if they are consistent with the policy framework.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify, minister, it appears that this is a pilot at the moment. Obviously there would be a review at the end of the pilot, I would think.

Mr Alegria: Yes. At the moment these products are part of the contract we have with the CVA and, indeed, they are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Every time we have any

kind of actual activity, like a tour, we review how it went and what we could do better. I guess in a formal sense that will be reviewed as well as part of the contract.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, did you have a question around this particular area that we are discussing at the moment?

MR COE: I was actually just sending an email. I am having a lot of trouble hearing the witnesses.

THE CHAIR: We are just talking about the contract that CVA has at the moment with regard to ecotourism. I just wondered whether or not you had any questions in this regard. I am sorry you missed the—

MR COE: I apologise if this has been answered already, but can you advise whether contracts such as the one that CVA is in with the government went out to tender or whether any similar projects have gone out to tender at Tidbinbilla?

Mr Alegria: The current contract with CVA was procured via a single select procurement several years ago.

THE CHAIR: Did you hear that, Alistair—single select procurement?

MR COE: I am afraid I cannot but I will review the transcript.

THE CHAIR: Okay. It was a single select tender some years ago. The other point that the minister made was that there is no tender process at the moment for other groups.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Given that you are having trouble hearing, Mr Coe, is it all right if we go back to Ms Le Couteur at the moment?

MR COE: Yes, that is fine.

MS LE COUTEUR: Still on the vehicle stuff, the NPA indicated that they thought that the Camel Back trail was not really that safe for vehicles and walkers and that it probably did not contribute to the sort of experience that people would expect to have in a national park area. What are your views on those issues, looking at it from both the point of view of people in vehicles and walkers?

Mr Alegria: When we work with CVA to develop these products—and it is a partnership—we take into account a whole range of issues when deciding how they are going to run. So things like safety, impacts on other users and, I guess, weather considerations are all taken into account. I am satisfied that our planning has been adequate to cover off some of those issues. I accept that people may have a different philosophy or may not wish to see a vehicle when they are walking, perhaps, but from an overall point of view in terms of delivering this tourism experience, I am satisfied that we have taken everything into account.

MS LE COUTEUR: They suggested a different route. If I look through the transcript, I will undoubtedly find it but I have not got it underlined. Presumably you have seen the transcript and know what I am talking about, even though I have not found the words. Have you looked at that?

Mr Alegria: That route was suggested to come through the Pierces Creek area. So rather than travelling in to the valley floor and up on to the Camel Back, coming in from the north. We have considered alternative routes but in a practical sense the one that we have decided on is really the best in terms of making sure that the tours are feasible. We do not want people to have to drive a very convoluted route to get to this destination. So we did consider that but there are issues with security, with gates, with the condition of the fire trails there. On balance, we made the operational decision that going the way that we go is most appropriate.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, were you able to hear that exchange just now?

MR COE: No, I am afraid I am unable to hear the witnesses.

THE CHAIR: We do apologise, Mr Coe. We have tried our best to include you. The discussion was around four-wheel drive vehicles and walkers sharing the same trails and how that is being managed. If you have a question in that regard, the only problem is that you might be repeating the same question. I just wanted to make sure that you were included in this hearing. Did you have a question around that?

MR COE: I do not want to waste the committee's time if, indeed, questions have been asked before. It is probably best if, rather than contributing to the discussion, when it is my turn, I simply start a new thread.

THE CHAIR: Okay. We might do that now, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Thank you. Minister, page 37 of the draft plan discusses corporate partnerships. I was wondering exactly what you have in mind in that respect and whether there are any other precedents for such partnerships or sponsorships which the government has gone into in the past.

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Mr Coe. I will ask Ms Lane to answer your question.

Ms Lane: In terms of specifics, I will defer to Stephen Alegria. Firstly, once again, the plan is just setting out a policy framework and providing opportunities for those sorts of things to occur in Tidbinbilla and for management to take up opportunities as they arise. So from a planning point of view, we just wanted to make sure that the community was aware that these opportunities might arise and the government will consider those as they come forth. Stephen, is there anything specific that you would like to mention?

Mr Alegria: In an operational sense, corporate partnerships or partnerships in general are something that the board and management are very keen on. Obviously, we already have that key relationship with Conservation Volunteers, but we also actively seek relationships with all sorts of other community, corporate and government groups. You would be familiar with Birrigai being part of Tidbinbilla now. That is a

good example of where we are actively seeking users to come to Birrigai and use our facilities there. That includes the folk festival, for example, coming, and a whole range of community and school groups. We are about to launch some advertising within government to encourage people to come and use our day conference facilities. So there are those kinds of things where we are really trying to target the key markets that we think can benefit our business, which is how Birrigai is run, on a revenue basis. Even with things like our endangered species program, we have an emerging relationship with Qantas, who help us with transport of some of our young brush-tailed rock wallabies. That is not a formal partnership but it is moving in that direction.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, did you hear the responses?

MR COE: I did not hear much of that but I do appreciate the answer and, as I said, I will simply have to review the transcript.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I might follow on with a question about accommodation. One of the concerns that we had from the previous witnesses was around how accommodation is managed within the park. They mentioned Birrigai as being a really suitable place for accommodation and they were very supportive of that. They were concerned about, if accommodation was provided within the park, how things like waste and other things would be managed so as not to threaten the environmental integrity of the park. Is there any comment on that area?

Ms Lane: The plan has a zoning plan scheme within it. We have been quite specific about it. If there is going to be accommodation developed within Tidbinbilla valley, it sets out an area where accommodation could be developed. Obviously, more work would need to be done after that if a proposal did come forth in terms of siting and so on. If there was a proposal put forward, they would have to go through the same environmental impact assessment process as any other development. So they would have to consider those sorts of things—water availability, groundwater, waste management, visual impacts, impacts on visitors and so on. Anything like that would have to go through a fairly extensive environmental assessment process.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lane, could you explain to us a little bit more about the zones, where they might be and what might be available in those zones at the moment? Just point us to where we need to look.

Ms Lane: Page 46. There are a number of planning layers associated with doing a plan of management. Under the territory plan, these areas are zoned mountains and bushlands, and then they have an overlay. There are two overlays that apply to Tidbinbilla. There is national park, which is all the hills around the valley, and there is special purpose reserve, which is essentially the valley floor.

There are two different legislative objectives for each of those. For national park, the primary objective is for nature conservation and the secondary objective is for research, education and recreation. With special purpose reserve, the primary objective is for recreation, under the Planning and Development Act. What the plan does is another layer of zoning beyond that. It says, “If we’re going to do things like development of accommodation in the valley, this zone within special purpose reserve is the best place to do it.”

The sorts of things that we have taken into account there are fire protection zones. We have looked at aspect and slope and those kinds of things, in determining where that zone should be in terms of higher density opportunities for recreational activities, accommodation and things like that. So we have tried to come up with a plan that takes into account the natural and cultural heritage values of the valley and of the national park and really refine where those sorts of activities could occur, without impacting unduly on the valleys of the reserve.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, we are just moving the microphone a bit closer to the witnesses.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, hopefully you can hear me now. We were just talking about accommodation and the zone in which accommodation could feasibly be developed, the constraints on that and what examination would need to be undertaken in order to allow any accommodation within that zone. Did you have any questions about that? If you have the draft plan in front of you, it is on page 46 that these zones are outlined. Do you have a question around that or shall we go on to other areas now?

MR COE: Yes, we can go on to other areas.

THE CHAIR: Did you have a question around the accommodation before we go on, Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: No, not specifically.

THE CHAIR: We might go on to your next question, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Going to page 4 of the transcript involving the NPA, Mr Griffiths talked about the Jerrabomberra master plan and how well it was developed. He said:

I hope that the development of a master plan for Tidbinbilla can go the same way.

He went on to say:

We are also concerned about how best to involve the community within the board of Tidbinbilla.

Could you talk to us a bit about how the master plan will be developed and how you are involving the community in the board and administration and decision making at Tidbinbilla?

Mr Alegria: We have not got a specific time frame for developing a master plan, but the plan of management does set out that the master plan will have community involvement in it. As to the second point you made about involving the community with the board, the board of management is an advisory board. It is not a statutory

board. It has four or five community members on it. That includes an Indigenous representative and some community and business representatives. Those representatives have a three-year term and they can seek renomination to the board. In fact, that process is happening at this time. We are seeking renominations for the community and business representatives to the board. That has been advertised in the *Canberra Times* and it is available for community members to nominate to seek to be on the board.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you have not particularly thought about how you are going to develop the master plan because you have no real time frames.

Mr Alegria: Until now the focus has been on developing the plan. Of course, that has been a huge task, mainly for my colleagues. Also, we have recently merged with Birrigai. That only occurred in July last year. Our focus to date has really been on getting that merger bedded down and making it work. It is quite a bold experiment really to have a merger of that nature. That has been our focus—making Birrigai work and building on the resource that we have there and doing all the other things that we do at Tidbinbilla clearly with the endangered species and so forth. Our focus has been on consolidation.

MS LE COUTEUR: I commend to you the Jerrabomberra process when you do get to it. One of the other things the NPA raised with us, which is something we have raised on numerous occasions, was the lack of any regular process for reporting and measurement on the state of our parks. In every estimates report we say, “You can’t seriously have as your output a survey of the human beings who go to the park because the aim of the park is not really the satisfaction of human beings.” I appreciate it is difficult to survey the other things—humans are the easiest to survey—but have you done some work on how you could better do reporting?

Mr Alegria: I understand that the management plan has priorities within the plan. It has, I think, broad time frames, but there is no requirement for specific reporting on outcomes. From an operational point of view, we report on outcomes in a variety of ways, as you would know, obviously, through the estimates process, annual reporting and budget reporting. But we also do things like water quality testing at Tidbinbilla. Within our programs—for example, the endangered species program—we have targets about how many animals we would like to breed and release into the wild. There is, in fact, a range of reporting mechanisms that we use that perhaps could be better integrated in the planning context.

Mr Corbell: It is probably worth making the point too, Ms Le Couteur, that there is longer term wildlife research and monitoring activity and biodiversity monitoring and research activity that, I guess, whilst perhaps not conforming with the financial year periods, nevertheless informs the government and the land manager about how the national park and nature reserves are tracking in terms of those core values.

I think we have a strong level of knowledge about what is occurring in a large part of our nature parks and reserves. I would not say it covers absolutely everything, but the core issues of concern are well understood. There is significant ongoing work in terms of research and monitoring in relation to those matters and activities are developed to respond to issues of concern. Whether or not that accords with a financial year

reporting framework is probably another question.

MS LE COUTEUR: That sounds good. I would like to make a plea for putting more of that into the estimates reporting, because it is frustrating to see the outputs that you report against having very limited relevance to what I think your core business should be.

Mr Corbell: I would not agree with that. One of the key functions of the land manager is to facilitate the overall custodianship that the community has in these assets. These assets are heavily enjoyed by a large number of Canberrans and, indeed, people from outside the ACT. So it is a core function of the park service to facilitate and educate visitor access. It is not the only function, but it is a core function.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, did you have another question either on this area or on another subject?

MR COE: I have got a question about general reporting. I apologise if I am repeating a question which the minister has answered. It is with regard to general KPIs. Ms Goonrey said last week that there really are not sufficient KPIs. Is this something that the directorate is going to be addressing?

Mr Corbell: Thanks for the question, Mr Coe. The government is always open to revising and improving KPIs and other performance measures in both budget estimates and annual reporting frameworks. I certainly welcome any suggestions people have in that regard.

MR COE: At the moment I understand that, according to Ms Goonrey's comments last week, or a couple of weeks ago, visitor satisfaction is pretty much the only KPI which is published. Does the directorate have any internal KPIs that are available that could be published for past years, not just for the future?

Mr Corbell: I am always interested when this issue comes up because people will often say, "You need to have better KPIs," but when you put to them, "What do you suggest?" it actually becomes a much more problematic exercise. As I say, the government remains very open to looking at how we can improve KPIs if there are areas of concern from stakeholder groups, but I think it is important to note that KPIs also have to be verifiable and auditable—if that is a word—and able to be subject to the scrutiny of the Auditor-General's process. Perhaps that may indicate why some measures are easier to put in place than others. But, as I say, the government is always open to suggestions from either this committee or indeed estimates or annual reports hearings on options for further enhancing accountability measures wherever they are able to be feasibly implemented.

MR COE: The question was: does the directorate have any internal KPIs that you are currently using?

Mr Corbell: In relation to what exactly?

MR COE: With regard to the management of Tidbinbilla.

Mr Alegria: We have what we would call operational goals. We do not call them KPIs. When we are doing our plans for the year, we set targets for ourselves about what we want to achieve and what the priorities are. However, they are not KPIs as such. They are really designed to guide our operational planning.

THE CHAIR: Are you happy for us to go on, Mr Coe, to another area of questioning?

MR COE: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Did you have another area of questioning? Otherwise we might go back to Ms Le Couteur.

MR COE: Thank you. With regard to where lessees are classified as being neighbours of Tidbinbilla, how many are there and how regularly do you meet with them?

Mr Alegria: We have one direct neighbour whose boundary adjoins Tidbinbilla. We meet with him informally on a regular basis.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Are you happy, Mr Coe? You do not want to ask any more questions in regard to the rural leases?

MR COE: No. I was keen to clarify that there was just one neighbour.

THE CHAIR: Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: I am afraid I am going to go back to accommodation. I am sorry; I should have asked this before. Am I correct that you do not at this stage have any actual plans for hiring out Nil Desperandum?

Mr Alegria: We are working on a policy which would allow us to hire out Nil Desperandum to the public.

MS LE COUTEUR: When you say “to the public”, does that imply that you will not be going through CVA? You are hiring directly to the public?

Mr Alegria: That is correct. We will be making it available through the TAMS booking system on their website and through the visitors centre for any party that wishes to come and hire it out.

MS LE COUTEUR: Okay, so no commercial provider; it will be direct?

Mr Alegria: Yes. If CVA wish to hire it out as part of their tour, they will need to make a booking like anybody else.

MS LE COUTEUR: And conversely that would also mean if a community group wished to organise a weekend for their members, they would go to the website like

anyone else?

Mr Alegria: That is right. And that kind of group is pretty much the main target market we have.

MS LE COUTEUR: Okay. That is not what we thought was happening. In general, there has been a lot of concern expressed by the NPA that national parks are increasingly being used for commercial ventures. Of course, they have also expressed this concern for other jurisdictions, which is not your problem. In general terms, does the ACT government have a view about how much commercial development there should be within the ACT's parks? I am interested in this with respect to Tidbinbilla in particular, given this inquiry, but I would also be interested in more general views on the subject.

Mr Corbell: Ms Le Couteur, what I would say is that the government is supportive of commercial uses where they can occur sensitively and in accordance with the overall management and conservation values of parks and nature reserves. There was an extensive review of opportunities and challenges following the 2003 fires, which Mr Hollway was put in charge of, and that identified a whole range of opportunities arising for the government as a result of the fires and how land in both nature parks and reserves, and indeed in rural lands, could perhaps be better utilised for a greater range of opportunities for and engagement by the community in those lands. So that is essentially where some of the issues in relation to Nil Desperandum and Tidbinbilla in particular initially sprang from.

The government would take the view that we would want to assess these issues on a site-by-site and case-by-case basis, but we do not adopt a blanket position that it is not to be contemplated. Our position is that it can be contemplated and suitable assessment made as to whether or not it is appropriate. I would simply say I think that is a positive thing for the community. If the impacts can be appropriately managed, if the core conservation values of a park or reserve are not undermined or threatened in any way, I think it is a good thing for our community to be able to engage with and experience our nature parks and reserves in that fashion. It strengthens community ownership of and engagement with valuable natural assets.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you see differences between what happens in Tidbinbilla, say, and Mount Ainslie and Mount Majura, which are closer to urban areas? I guess the other extreme is Namadgi. Are you managing them differently regarding the balance of conservation versus human impact?

Mr Corbell: Clearly, those areas that you mentioned have different values and different requirements in terms of their management. Areas of Canberra nature park that are close to or in immediate proximity to urban areas do have to be managed in a very different way from the more remote areas of Tidbinbilla or, indeed, the wilderness areas of Namadgi national park. So they are completely different in their context and their requirements. That is why I say that our assessment of these issues really must be on a case-by-case and site-by-site basis.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, did you have another question in a different area or in the same area that we are dealing with at the moment?

MR COE: I have one in a different area.

THE CHAIR: Okay, go ahead.

MR COE: It is with regard to bushfire management. In particular, how does bushfire management in Tidbinbilla work with the existing bushfire operational plans and also the strategic bushfire management plan?

Ms Lane: There are three tiers of planning for bushfire management. You have mentioned two of those. There is one that sits between the bushfire operational plan, which is an annual plan—and that is a statutory plan, so it is reported to the Assembly each year on delivery of that—and the strategic plan, which sits at the top end. In between that, there have been some subregional plans prepared which set out the five to 10-year plans for burning, doing prescribed burning for hazard reduction, mowing, asset protection and a whole range of other measures that might need to be undertaken for fire fuel management. So in between those two, the bushfire operational plan and the strategic plan, the subregional plans guide for the next five or 10 years. Then the bushfire operational plan picks up what that specifies for Tidbinbilla.

At Tidbinbilla, there are the asset protection zones, and I mentioned those. They are in the zoning area. Each year, there is a program of assessing fuels in the asset protection zones and undertaking physical removal of fuels. There has been some prescribed burning undertaken in those asset protection zones. Hazard fuel monitoring is also done in other parts of the reserve. Stephen, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr Alegria: No. I think that is a good summary.

THE CHAIR: Were you able to hear the answer to your question, Mr Coe?

MR COE: I heard most of it. By way of a follow-up, is the yearly plan discussed with the neighbours?

Ms Lane: Yes, my understanding is that it is discussed with the neighbours and the neighbours also have an obligation to manage fuels on their own property.

MR COE: Is it also discussed with New South Wales authorities?

Mr Corbell: This particular area is obviously not contiguous with New South Wales. There is broader consultation between ACT Emergency Services, the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service and relevant equivalent personnel in the ACT about the overall fire fuel management strategy, particularly on the western interface with the territory. But I would not expect there would need to be consultation about fire fuel management in Tidbinbilla with New South Wales authorities.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, did you have any more questions?

MR COE: Not on bushfires.

THE CHAIR: On another subject?

MR COE: No, I am finished.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Coe. Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: Going back to Nil Desperandum, there is meant to be a conservation management plan specifically for it. I am just looking at page 80. There is potential for it to be used in accordance with a conservation management plan for the building and its surrounds. How are you going to monitor that the use actually is in accordance with this plan?

Mr Alegria: Again, that is part of the operational plan that we are developing prior to having that facility available for hire but, in essence, it will be a case of documenting the condition of the building and the surrounds prior to any use and then immediately revisiting that after the use to assess whether there have been any impacts or damage or changes to the building.

MS LE COUTEUR: Will that be after each hiring that there will be an inspection?

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you any idea of how much use you expect it will be able to cope with or it will have? Are you seeing it will be once or twice a year or is it going to be every weekend?

Mr Alegria: We are hoping to have someone using it on a monthly basis. We really do not know whether that is an underestimate or an overestimate. It depends partly on how and where we get the message out that it is available, how many people are interested, the weather and so on. We are hopeful that at least over the next 12 months we will have enough use so that we can gauge how things are progressing—are we charging the right amount of money; are we giving people enough information? We are really trialling it, I guess, to see how it goes.

MS LE COUTEUR: I assume you are going to be expecting people to bring all their own stuff and to take all their waste out with them. That will be the deal?

Mr Alegria: That is correct. That is pretty much standard practice in the reserve as it is. People will be provided with a camp stretcher, but they will bring their own bedding and their own food. They have a toilet on site, so they are not out in the bushwalking-type arena. They will be required to keep the place as they found it in terms of waste.

THE CHAIR: Minister, there must be quite a lot of resources expended in making sure that the public are aware of their obligations in using the park, through education and also interpretive services, so they can enjoy that experience and get the most out of it.

Mr Corbell: Yes. The parks service do an enormous amount of engagement with general members of the public, as well as the more targeted partnerships they have with different groups and organisations that come into both Tidbinbilla and parks and nature reserves more broadly. It is a very demanding part of what the parks service do every day.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, you are finished; is that right? You have no further questions?

MR COE: I would like to ask a more general question about the management of reserves or nature parks. Minister, is it the government's view that having as many people through the parks as possible is actually a good thing?

Mr Corbell: It is not an open-ended approach, Mr Coe. It is certainly encouraging as many—I think the key words are “as possible”. It is important to encourage use and to encourage people to get out there and see our beautiful nature parks and reserves. The parks service plays a critical role in educating people about the opportunities that are there, the values of the parks and reserves, why they are special, why they are important, why they need to be respected and treated with respect. It is not as though it is a case of the government saying, “Absolutely, go for your life, do whatever you want in nature parks and reserves.” That is not what we are saying. We are saying, “These are valuable places, please enjoy them, please explore them, please learn about them and enjoy the beautiful character and values that they demonstrate every day, but also do it in a respectful way and understand that some activities are suitable for some areas but are not suitable for others and vice versa.” It is about education, it is about informing the community and it is also about encouraging them to use our nature parks and reserves sensitively and in a good way that is beneficial to all.

MR COE: From a philosophical perspective, you do not come to management of the national parks with an approach whereby fewer people visiting the parks is a better outcome for the environment?

Mr Corbell: I think that is a simplistic approach. There are some parts of a nature park or reserve where access is limited purely by sheer topography and the nature of the natural environment, and there are parts of our parks and nature reserves that have more restricted access for a range of reasons. That may be because of the sensitive nature of the ecosystems present that require a very light touch on the part of humans in that they should only, for example, walk in; they should not ride in or use vehicles, horses or whatever it might be. There are those parts of our parks and nature reserves which we do need to continue to manage in that way.

Equally, there are other parts of our parks and nature reserves that may need to have more restricted access because of other values, such as protecting the integrity of water catchments and making sure that human activities in those locations are more limited to protect overall public health considerations in terms of water catchments. Equally, there are other parts of parks and nature reserves that do enable broader access and a wider range of uses.

I think that is epitomised in the draft plan in front of you with the government indicating, even within Tidbinbilla, there are some parts of Tidbinbilla that have more restricted access and a more restricted range of activities. There are other parts of

Tidbinbilla that have a much broader range of activities. Those are consistent with the conservation values that we are trying to protect, promote and manage. I think there is room for everyone in our nature parks and reserves in accordance with maintaining the conservation values of our nature parks and reserves. I am very confident that these issues are not irreconcilable. But it is about recognising that it has got to be in the right place and in the right context, depending on the type of activity you are talking about.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: As there are no further questions, thank you very much, minister and officials, for appearing before us. You did not take any questions on notice so there is nothing to get back. If we have further questions we will get those to you as soon as possible.

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The committee adjourned at 10.49 am.