



Debates

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MADAM SPEAKER (Mrs Dunne) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Uriarra Village—proposed solar farm Motion and petition

MR WALL (Brindabella) (10.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the definitive language used by the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development when awarding licences to two new large scale solar developments on 19 August 2013, “two new solar farms will be developed in Canberra as a result of the Solar Auction process”;
- (b) a site opposite Uriarra Village at Coree was chosen for a seven megawatt development; and
- (c) residents of Uriarra were not aware the site opposite the village was being considered for a large scale solar development until after the announcement was made; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) consider and acknowledge the overwhelming sentiment of the community of Uriarra Village to relocate the large scale solar project away from the village;
- (b) ensure the project does not proceed at the current location;
- (c) consult with the proponent to identify an alternate site that will not significantly impact on a residential area; and
- (d) ensure call-in powers are not used to progress the large scale solar development opposite Uriarra Village.

Pursuant to standing order 84, I present the following petition from 1,128 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly the proposed placing of a 40 hectare, large scale solar generator plant, 50 metres from Uriarra Village and under 100 metres from homes.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to call on the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development to **reject the site proposed by**

OneSun and ensure that large scale alternative energy plants are sympathetically situated to benefit both the environment and residents of the Australian Capital Territory. We further request that **large solar plants not be located in close proximity to residential areas.**

Petition received.

MR WALL: The motion I bring to this place today is one that epitomises, in my view, what is fundamental about our role as members of the Legislative Assembly, and that is communication and consultation. This motion, at its heart, is about our constituents. The ratepayers and taxpayers of the ACT, we should all remember, are responsible for giving us the responsibility that we hold in this place to represent them.

The motion before us today is a reflection of the sentiment of many of these constituents, namely, the residents of Uriarra, a large number of whom have managed to join us in the gallery today. These residents are committed to retaining their village as a unique community that offers a unique lifestyle here in the bush capital. I am sure that some members here will be well aware of Uriarra Village and some will have even spent some time there. There are others, though, and many other Canberrans also who will not have a clue where Uriarra Village is or why people would choose to live there.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to take this opportunity to paint a picture of an idyllic lifestyle, minutes from the city centre, where Uriarra Village is. It is located about four kilometres north of the Cotter Reserve and sits at the foothills of the Australian Alps. It began life as a settlement for forestry workers back in 1928 and the census of that year tells us that there were 30 families that were in residence here at that time.

In 2003 the devastating Canberra bushfires made a very significant impact on the village. Sixteen of the original 23 homes were lost and burnt to the ground. After much debate in the community and work by a few committed individuals, the decision was reached to rebuild the village with a view to creating a unique residential area sympathetic to its bush surrounds. In 2007 building commenced for the new Uriarra Village and this was when many of the current 100 or so families chose to begin their lives there in a unique rural village setting only minutes from the heart of our capital.

In June 2012 the Chief Minister, attending the inaugural Uriarra community day which was held in conjunction with the official naming of the suburb Coree, said in a press release:

Uriarra Village is an important part of Canberra's history and is an example of Canberra as the 'bush capital'.

It is great to see the extensive redevelopment following the 2003 bushfires and I hope to see the Village continue to grow and prosper for future generations to enjoy.

This paints a picture of a community who have now banded together with great strength to oppose what they see as an enormous threat to the current way of life, a

project that will significantly change the intended character of the village and impact on their future prosperity. This threat is the proposal to construct a large-scale solar operation, some 26,100 panels placed over 40 hectares of land directly opposite the village. It is very important to note that this development will be, at its closest point, only 115 metres away from homes.

This community would be among the first to welcome any initiative that gives this kind of environmental benefit. After all, the village was built with very strict design requirements which included reducing the environmental impact on the land as well as retaining the rural elements of the village. I would like to quote from a letter that I have received from a resident which states the point very well:

To hear that the ACT government is going ahead with renewable energy sources is music to our ears and those of future generations. To hear that a 40H solar plant is to be built near Uriarra fills us with pride that this community could be so closely associated with a great renewable source of energy. To discover, however, that the said plant will be 50m from the northern edge of our Village is an absolute slap in the face to us and the community which has been built around renewable energy principles and design whilst being sympathetic to our rural surrounds.

What does add insult to injury is that these families were firstly notified of this proposal an hour after Mr Corbell made the public announcement, an announcement in which he used very definitive language, language that did not indicate there would be any opportunity for consultation. I will quote from the minister:

I am pleased to announce that two new solar farms will be developed in Canberra as a result of the Solar Auction process.

I would be doing residents a great disservice if I did not echo their words when describing their lifestyle and what they perceive to be the single biggest hurdle in their lives to date. So I would now like to read directly from emails sent to me and other members of the Assembly outlining their fears and disagreeing with this project. I will quote directly from a couple of other residents:

My biggest concern is the impact this will have on the value of my home and my livelihood.

My husband and I have worked hard to build our home in Uriarra and so far the sacrifices have been worth it, we love it out here and the community is a very warm and caring one. We over extended as most families do just to be out here, to give our children the childhood that we had. To live in a community of wonderful like minded people who were after a piece of paradise in the country. It's worth the financial struggle and it's worth the extra travel to give our children the best rural outdoor lifestyle. Even in winter the children of Uriarra are outdoors, they just rug up and off they go. Our community is a blessed one and we have regular get togethers and social events celebrating our lifestyle, this is our utopia.

The Solar Farm proposed directly across the road from my house is causing myself and my husband real concern. Should the solar farm go ahead it will be

115 metres from my front door, directly across the road. Our home was designed to overlook the area where the solar farm is proposed. Losing the view is one thing but approving something that will devalue someone's home is just wrong. It is absolutely unfair. Not having consultation with the affected community as a key part of the solar auction submission is absolutely appalling and shows a complete lack of empathy towards the people affected by this.

A key saying in real estate is "your house is worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it." It is common sense, why would anyone looking for a rural outlook in the country buy a house like mine that overlooks an industrial site that is surrounded by high security fencing? Even screening will not take it away. This is what is keeping me awake at night. This is the livelihood of the hard working people in our village, this is my livelihood, and our opinions don't seem to matter to the decision makers. This is a real possibility that my home will be worth less than what it is mortgaged for, this is financial ruin for us. This will also bring down the values of homes across the village whether they overlook the site or not.

Again, from another piece of correspondence that my office has recently received from residents:

I am a resident of Uriarra Village and like most residents bought into the estate on the back of advertising and marketing by the ACT Govt, in conjunction with the developers, of a rural lifestyle, ambience and sense of community.

I invested my life savings, heart and soul into my property as well as adhered to the very stringent leasing and development rules, which the ACT Govt helped draft, to ensure the village retained its rural look and feel.

You can only imagine my shock and outrage when I then heard of plans to locate an industrial solar plant across the road from my village. It is not that I am opposed to alternative forms of power, such as solar; it is just that I don't want it located 50 metres from our village. Nowhere else in the world, to my research, is a solar plant of this size located so close to residential houses.

I feel completely betrayed by the ACT Govt and in particular, Katy Gallagher and Simon Corbell, who partly sold me this dream, only to destroy it in less than two years of living here. My disgust with this decision is only exacerbated by the fact that Katy Gallagher attended our community naming day and spoke of how she was so proud to be involved in this project and to ensure that the rural lifestyle of the village was able to be maintained after the devastating fires of 2003. Clearly her pride waned quickly!

Again, another resident has written to me:

We purchased the first of the private lots at Uriarra Village. We are a Canberra family with a long association at Uriarra Village going back 35 years. Being the first to purchase, we realised the inherent risks of putting all our life savings and effort into an unknown future. Whilst the rural beauty of Uriarra Valley and the backdrop of the Brindabella Mountains is a place where we could build our dream home and enjoy the rural lifestyle into old age, we were also concerned that the village itself would grow and prosper along similar lines. We researched heavily the guidelines pertaining to the re-development of the village and the

planning principles espoused in the Shaping Our Territory report. This gave us strong heart that we and the rest of the community would grow into the future in a rural lifestyle that paid respect to our surroundings. We fully embraced the concepts of solar passive design, with building form, layout and density that was sympathetic to the surrounding landscape.

We've now lived at Uriarra for nearly 5 years and have watched this village grow around us, to the point where this village is almost complete. It has been heartening to see others embrace the same concept of low impact living as put forward in the Shaping Our Territory report. We have prided ourselves on our house's 6 plus star energy rating and educated our children on the basics of sustainability for future generations. Our footprint on this Earth and our impact on the environment around us are miniscule. We are the most firm believers in renewable energy and the impact our daily lives have on the environment.

The most crucial part of my motion here today calls upon the minister not to use his call-in powers for this development. In this case it is my view and that of many of my colleagues that Mr Corbell should take into consideration the very strong will of the community and the proximity of this proposal to residential homes and allow the development application process to run its proper course. In this instance the minister must not use his call-in powers.

If we were to consider the precedents of Mr Corbell using his significant call-in powers in certain planning projects, I would be feeling very disappointed right now. After all, this is the man responsible for calling in projects such as the controversial Alexander Maconochie Centre, the Flynn community hub, despite very strong opposition by the community, not to mention more recently the Brumbies development at Griffith. Despite a significant groundswell against the project by the community, the minister again used these powers. More recently he has demonstrated his form to use them on solar developments, using them for Australia's largest solar farm at Royalla.

These examples show us a minister who is trigger happy and arrogant when it comes to the use of call-in powers. This mechanism is now being used far too lightly and does not allow for the due diligence of the planning process to proceed. These powers have been designed to be used rarely and in cases where there is substantial benefit for the territory as a whole. This does not seem to be the current way of thinking that the minister subscribes to.

It is, however, interesting if we look back in history to a time when he was not a minister, to a time when he stood on this side of the chamber, in opposition. And when debating in August 2001 Mr Corbell said:

The Labor Party does not believe that the call-in power is a normal part of the development approval process. Indeed, it is our view that it is a power to be used only in exceptional circumstances.

How times have changed! It seems now that the minister has had a significant shift in views and perhaps he has spent too many years in power and lost perspective of what is important to his community.

I now ask that members of the Labor Party and our Green colleague think very carefully about the impact that this motion will have and give it the support that it deserves, not just here in the Assembly but also to send the message to the wider community that we do care. It is an opportunity to think about the impact that disregarding the very real concerns about the location of this project will have on the lives of the Uriarra Village residents and the wider community. It is an opportunity to allow due process to occur and to ensure that the residents of Uriarra can put their case forward in a proper way through the proper channels.

Please, minister, do not cut them off at the knees in this instance. I call on members, particularly Mr Rattenbury, to put aside party politics and to do the right thing by the community here today.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney—General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (10.14): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute”

“notes”:

- (1) the Government’s commitment to securing a sustainable future for our City by reducing its carbon emissions by 40% by 2020 and implementing a 90% renewable energy target;
- (2) that the Solar Auction process is delivering large scale renewable energy generation at an affordable price for consumers, with the three proposed projects capable of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 1.4 million tonnes at a peak cost to households of around 45 cents per week in 2016, dropping down to around 27 cents per week in 2021;
- (3) that the three solar farm projects proposed or approved are projected to deliver economic benefits worth more than \$100 million to the ACT economy and create over 100 jobs in the construction stage; and
- (4) that the concerns raised by residents of Uriarra Village will be fully considered through the development assessment process set out in the Planning and Development Act.”.

Madam Speaker, I understand the concerns that have led to this motion being put before the Assembly today. I feel it is important that I clarify a number of important aspects about the government’s policy for the establishment of solar power plants in the ACT. The ACT’s large-scale solar auction was developed in the context of the government’s climate change action plan 2, known as AP2. Successful proposals under the large-scale solar auction process will directly contribute to our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets as set out in AP2.

Actions 12 and 13 of AP2 relate to further developing large-scale renewable energy generation to achieve a target of 90 per cent of the territory’s electricity consumption

being sourced from renewable energy by the year 2020. The solar auction has provided for a total of 40 megawatts of solar generation capacity in the ACT and was the first capacity release under the Electricity Feed-in (Large-scale Renewable Energy Generation) Act passed in 2011. That law provides for a total of 210 megawatts of renewable energy generation capacity in the Australian capital region.

The full 40 megawatts has now been awarded and comprises the FRV Royalla solar farm 20 megawatt proposal, the Zhenfa Canberra proposal for a 13 megawatt solar farm proposed to be located on the corner of the Monaro Highway and Mugga Lane, and the OneSun Capital proposal for a seven megawatt solar farm to be located immediately adjacent to the Uriarra Village, awarded under the regular stream in August 2013. The seven megawatts awarded to OneSun under the solar auction form part of a proposed total 10 megawatt project by the proponent.

Forty megawatts of solar power generation is expected to generate enough electricity to meet the demands of 10,000 ACT households. Over the 20-year feed-in tariff entitlement term, it is expected that these projects, if they proceed, will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 1.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. The cost to householders is very low. It is expected to peak at 45c per household per week in 2016 and reduce to just 27c per week by 2021. The government anticipates that the current review of the solar auction mechanism will confirm our view that the auction does deliver exceptional value for money for the ACT community.

The three solar farm projects proposed under the auction are projected to deliver economic benefits worth more than \$100 million to the ACT economy and create over 160 jobs in the construction stage. There are two separate processes occurring in relation to the establishment of these facilities. Firstly, the solar auction process and, secondly, the development application and assessment process. The successful outcome for a proponent that is taking part in the solar auction process is dependent on an approved development proposal.

The solar auction itself is administered by my directorate, whereby the development application process is administered by the planning delivery division of the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate under the Planning and Development Act. In the exercise of these powers these public servants act statutorily independently.

In relation to the solar auction, my announcement on 19 August this year as to the outcome of the regular stream was in relation to the awarding of grants of entitlement only and is akin to the sorts of announcements governments often make regarding future development proposals. Such announcements inherently have provisos attached to them, including the need to successfully complete a development application process.

I acknowledge that there has been considerable community interest in the proposed development of a solar farm adjacent to the Uriarra Village. However, it is worth highlighting that the formal framework for considering community input is through the public notification process incorporated in the development assessment process under the Planning and Development Act. The announcement in no way diminishes

the opportunity for public comment and my directorate will process the development application in the normal manner. In this regard, any concerns raised by residents during the public notification process must be fully considered prior to any decision being made.

It is worth highlighting too that the government did not allocate, nor identify, any parcels of land for proponents involved in the solar auction process. The identification of suitable land and associated risks in obtaining development approval for a solar facility were and remain the responsibility of the proponent. In making a favourable assessment through the solar auction neither the territory, nor I as the minister, have made any warranty or representation about the successful implementation of the proposal. The proponent carries all financial risk associated with the success or failure through the development assessment process. It is a matter for the proponent to identify their optimal location, or alternative location, for a solar generator, not the government.

The grant of the feed-in tariff entitlement is entirely separate to, but dependent on any related development application submitted by the proponent. Under the feed-in tariff legislation, as the minister I can consider a variation request from a proponent regarding their grant of entitlement or deed of entitlement, which may include a request for a revised location of a successful proposal. Relocation of a proposed solar generator may have implications for the proponent's project costs and planned implementation time frames. If a proponent were to make a variation request, there would be probity and other risks that would need to be explored and managed appropriately.

If the developer does not meet the agreed project milestones, including the achievement of a development approval, the minister has the power to cancel the grant of entitlement, subject to certain make-good processes being followed. In this circumstance the amount of generating capacity could be awarded to another party in the auction.

Let me be very clear about the development assessment process. Public consultation is yet to commence on a notified development application, because no application has yet been lodged with the Planning and Land Authority. Projects of this nature are permitted in the applicable zone in the territory plan and have been for many years. It is the right of a lessee or their representative to seek approval for the development of a solar farm in the zone irrespective of whether or not they are successful under the solar auction process. The Planning and Land Authority has the power and the obligations to decide such proposals independently and without ministerial direction.

I cannot, and must not, commit to ensuring that a solar farm is not developed in this location at this time. It would be quite wrong for me to purport to dictate any such outcome. For me to do so would risk compromising the ability of the Planning and Land Authority to discharge its statutory obligations in relation to the matter. If a satisfactory development application is received by the Planning and Land Authority it must be publicly notified for 15 working days. This is effectively three full weeks, during which time any member of the community is able to view details of the proposal and make a written submission.

This provides an important opportunity for people with a strong interest to provide comment and a formal mechanism for consideration of those community views. In addition to public comments the decision-maker, whether that is the planning authority or the minister, is required to consider a range of matters including the objectives of the zone, the suitability of the land where the development is proposed to take place, advice from entities and the probable impact of the proposed development.

Madam Speaker, no application has yet been received. We do not know if the proposal will trigger the need for an environmental impact statement under the Planning and Development Act. What we do know, though, is that if a development proposal for a solar farm at this site is received it will be required to be accompanied by an assessment of environmental effects addressing impacts on the amenity of surrounding land uses, rural character and the role and character of the hills and ridges as a visual backdrop to this setting.

Examples of key matters that the planners will have to assess on receipt of any application include visual impacts, impacts of glare on road users and aircraft, ecological impacts, bushfire hazard management, heritage-related impacts, water use and management, and site management during construction. It would be completely premature to make any commitments about the use of ministerial call-in powers in relation to this proposed development, given that no formal development application has been received by the Planning and Land Authority at this time.

I must note that these powers can be used to approve or refuse a development, and form part of a statutory function granted to the minister under the act designed to protect the broader public interest. To make a commitment surrounding the use of the call-in powers without first allowing the statutory procedure for doing so and without knowing the details of an application would be improper and no different to the principle of the Assembly asking me to approve something without a development application.

The key differences when a decision is made about the use of call-in powers is that the minister makes the decision, instead of the authority. The decision cannot be amended and there is no third-party appeal. But it is not the case that there is no public consultation or that it is foreshortened. As I have indicated in my earlier comments, it is quite clear that that process is followed to the letter, regardless of who the decision-maker is.

An example of the recent application of the call-in provisions was the decision I took in relation to the Royalla solar farm. I determined that the proposal should be approved in that instance because it would provide a substantial public benefit for the broader Canberra community. It would abate hundreds of thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over its life. It would generate jobs and investment in our city. I considered in deciding that application the advice from a variety of government entities, representations from the community and the proponent's response.

Madam Speaker, an application for development approval of a proposed solar farm must be processed in accordance with the planning laws and it must be assessed on its merits, taking into account public comment, agency advice and other factors. Assessment of the matter on its merits, taking account of the public interest, is also required in relation to any decision to call or not call in any such project. It would be improper, pre-emptive and speculative for me to pre-empt this process and these assessments by acceding to a request to guarantee a particular outcome at this time.

While it is a matter for this Assembly, I would suggest that members take the time to consider carefully whether it is appropriate for this Assembly to pass a motion asking me to pre-empt the proper assessment of these matters contrary to statutory requirements for assessment based on the merits of an application that is yet to be made.

The government is committed to ensuring that the assessment of these matters is completed in a proper manner as required by the planning law. We are also committed to helping our city make the transition to a sustainable future, a future where we abate the detrimental impact that carbon pollution has on our climate. I spoke yesterday about how vulnerable our city is to the changes that climate change can work on it. I talked about the impact of more significant heatwave events, heightened bushfire risks, extended droughts or severe storm events.

These are all consequences that our city faces now. As a city, we have obligations to act to try and abate some of the impacts of extreme climate change. One of the ways that we can do that is through making a shift to renewable energy sources. We should allow the processes set out under the law, in both the solar auction process and under the Planning and Development Act, to decide whether or not certain renewable energy projects proceed.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.28): I thank Mr Wall for bringing this motion to the Assembly today because it is clearly a matter of significant public interest to which the Assembly should turn its mind. The ACT Greens want to see solar built in the territory. We strongly support the policies on renewable energy and tackling our greenhouse gas emissions. It was the Greens who initiated a proposal for the 40 per cent greenhouse gas reduction target by 2020, one that sets the territory up very well to set us on a path to sustainability. We strongly support the 90 per cent renewable energy target. Again, this practical measure will help deliver the greenhouse gas reductions the territory is seeking and position the ACT as a leader.

The ACT Greens have strongly supported the government in their rollout of the large-scale solar farms as part of a mix of technologies and programs that will be needed to meet the targets that have been set. We remain committed to expanding rooftop solar in the territory through the renewable generator guarantee, which would pay a fair price to people who are generating electricity and feeding it into the grid. The ACT needs to be ambitious to meet our targets. They are country-leading, nation-leading and world-leading targets, and to achieve them will take considerable effort.

That said, I would like to acknowledge the community concerns that have been voiced both here and in other places. It is fair to say that the proposals for these solar farms have caused some concerns in the community. We must recognise and acknowledge that the community have significant concerns and anxieties about the developments of solar farms near their homes. For the record, I want to be clear that I completely appreciate that many in the Uriarra community have concerns about a solar farm being built right across the road from their homes. They have certainly expressed those concerns to me very clearly. Probably the first thing that came to my attention when I came back from leave last week was the clarity and the number of contacts I had received, and I am sure others in the chamber have had such contacts as well.

It is important to be clear that two processes are at play here: the solar auction process where the feed-in tariff contract was awarded by the government, and the development process once the development application is lodged. Mr Corbell has touched on some of these points. The solar auction process is the first process.

What is needed to be prepared for the solar auction process? First of all, there has to be technical viability of the project—things like geotechnical studies and grid connection assessments. The solar auction process does not require the proponent to provide any assessment of the social or economic impact. That is the way the process is currently set up. That might be something we need to reconsider, but, at the moment, they are the rules on the way the solar auction process works.

The process also does not require proponents to engage with the community prior to submitting their proposal. Proponents may choose to; they may decide they want to go and talk to the community before submitting their proposal, but it is not a requirement in the act. Unfortunately, the announcement of the auction outcome, therefore, comes as a surprise to the community. The way it has been operated is that proponents, through commercial-in-confidence considerations, I guess, generally have not been active in putting their intentions out to the community. In the eyes of the community, the outcome of the solar auction has appeared to pre-empt the outcome of the planning process.

This, of course, was not assisted by government communications that suggested that the development was a *fait accompli*. In fact, that is not the case. The proponent is still required to get development approval, and if approval is not forthcoming the government is under no obligation to continue with the feed-in tariff contract. That is quite an important point. If the development approval process takes into account some of the concerns that have been raised and rejects the proposal, the government is in the position of not being financially or contractually committed to proceeding.

This brings us to the development process, which is still to come. The proponent has yet to submit the development application, as I understand it. The DA process will, of course, include a period for community consultation to be undertaken. That is not a long period, and that is something that is set in the rules, but it is the time when the community gets the opportunity to clearly put their concerns about the project. It is a short period, and that point has come up many, many times with projects that have been contentious in the community, and the community certainly needs to be ready so that, when the window opens, they take the opportunity to put their case.

I believe the development application process should be allowed to run its course and that every opportunity should be allowed for the community to make their case. Indeed, the Greens have spent many years arguing about the planning system and working hard to ensure there are good notifications, good opportunities for community consultation and input and for the right to appeal where mistakes are made in the decision-making process or where there are disagreements about interpretation of the law.

Some issues arise out this example. The solar auction process is currently being reviewed in light of the recent processes, and we need to think about whether the process could require a level of community consultation prior to proposals going forward. I do not think that detrimentally impacts on commercial-in-confidence considerations, and that might be something the review needs to look at. That may not improve community acceptance of the proposal, but it certainly would avoid concerns about being left in the dark. The planning process could also potentially be improved to require a level of pre-development application consultation, as is currently required for developments of buildings of a certain size.

Turning to the specifics of Mr Wall's motion today, many statements of fact are in the motion that build a narrative of a lack of community engagement, but I am not sure that all aspects of his motion take us forward. I have circulated an amendment that I propose to move once we have dealt with Mr Corbell's amendment that, I think, picks up the key points. I will come back to the content of that in a moment.

I appreciate that Minister Corbell's media release on the day of the announcement made it sound like the project had the green light, although I do not believe this was a cynical attempt to wave the project through. I think that is simply the nature of the way these things tend to be written and portrayed in the media.

I have a couple of concerns with Mr Wall's motion. I think it fails to recognise the dual processes that have been and are involved here and the need to maintain the integrity of those processes—ie, the solar auction and the development application process. I think the right place at the moment for the concerns of the residents of Uriarra to be dealt with is in the development application process, which will assess environmental impact and visual impact. Issues of noise, loss of amenity, loss of view and loss of value should also be considered through the development application process. The government stepping in and starting to liaise with the proponent about the site potential undermines the integrity of the solar auction process at this stage, so I think the DA process really is the critical point.

When it comes to call-in powers, I urge the minister not to call in this proposal. I agree with Mr Wall on that issue, and my amendment will maintain the call for the call-in power not to be used in this case. Certainly the planning minister has used the call-in power on a number of occasions, and it is well-known history that, over many years, the Greens have been vociferous opponents of the call-in power. In fact, in this Assembly we have moved many times to remove it from the legislation. Unfortunately, we tend to lose those votes—13-4 in the last Assembly and probably 16-1 in this Assembly. We tend to be a lone voice on this. Nonetheless, it remains an

area we have considerable concerns about, and I intend to make further proposals when it comes to call-in powers in the coming months.

Today I propose that the Assembly sends a message, and I agree with Mr Wall's comments that this project should not be subject to the call-in powers and that the community should be able maintain their full rights of engagement through the planning process.

Let me turn briefly to the history on consultation and planning law changes, because the issue today is really a planning issue. It is ironic to see Mr Wall standing up for better community consultation on planning and development issues. The Liberals do not have a history of working to improve consultation and engagement on planning. In fact, they have a history of blocking the Greens' attempts to open up better engagement in the community. When my former colleague Ms Le Couteur introduced a bill in 2009 to expand the community's rights to notification and review, both the Liberals and the ALP voted against it at that time.

That bill merely proposed a better balance to the right of residents to be informed and have a say in developments that affect them with the need for an efficient planning system. There has been a consistent lack of support when it comes to denying third-party appeal rights in the city and in our town centres. The Greens, again, have been the ones who have consistently fought for those rights of appeal and been voted down by the Liberal Party and the Labor Party combined.

I note, though, that when the government introduced provisions to withdraw community appeal rights at the Kingston Foreshore last year, just as they had done for the city and town centres, when the Greens moved to retain third-party appeal rights for the Kingston arts precinct the Liberal Party supported that, and we certainly welcomed that support. It leaves us in an interesting position where it seems that, if it is a road or a car park or a large-scale office development with no appeal rights it is a free-for-all as far as the Liberal Party is concerned, but when it is the run-up to an election or there is something else going on, it wants those appeal rights back. I look forward to a further discussion about how we find a better policy outcome on this issue of third-party appeal rights because I am not sure where the line lies at the moment.

The other observation I make is that in 2011 the government and the Greens worked together to create a mandatory pre-development application consultation process for proponents of larger developments. This has been a win-win situation for both developers and the community as it has given them the opportunity to work together to improve proposals, saving time and money further down the planning process. However, unfortunately, the legislation does not cover non-residential proposals, and thus the solar farm proposal before us today has no legislative requirement for pre-DA consultation. What we have seen in the success of the legislation that has passed is that where proponents and communities sit down together in advance of the application we see really good outcomes. Certainly the developers I have spoken to that have used this have identified that it has actually saved them money and time because they are able to resolve some of the issues the community rightly raises. They then design their proposals differently and they tend to get things done a lot quicker and more cost effectively.

Let me conclude by saying that I appreciate that this is a very difficult issue. I welcome the support voiced by the community for renewable energy and their desire for the ACT to be a more sustainable jurisdiction. Equally, I hear the anger and the frustration at the way this process has rolled out and the sense of surprise that there was not an earlier discussion about it.

As I said, I will move an amendment to Mr Wall's motion that in some ways picks up all the points the Assembly agrees on to some large extent: that we want to achieve our greenhouse gas targets and that we acknowledge that the residents of Uriarra are concerned and they should have the ability to participate in the planning process without being impeded. The amendment calls on the government to ensure that call-in powers are not used in regard to the development application submitted by the proponent of the solar farm proposed for Uriarra.

I will not be supporting Mr Corbell's amendment. Whilst I agree with many of the statements in it, it is important that this Assembly makes a clear statement about the use of the call-in powers in this circumstance, and I will move my amendment when the opportunity arises.

Amendment negatived.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo), by leave: I move:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) the Government's commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 40% by 2020 and implementing a 90% renewable energy target;
- (b) that the Solar Auction process is intended to deliver large scale renewable energy generation at an affordable price for consumers, with the three proposed projects capable of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 1.4 million tonnes;
- (c) that residents of Uriarra have expressed a range of concerns about the solar project proposed at Uriarra, including that they were unaware that the site had been chosen prior to the Solar Auction outcome being announced; and
- (d) that the concerns raised by residents of Uriarra Village will be fully considered through the development assessment process set out in the Planning and Development Act; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to ensure that the call-in powers are not used in regard to the Development Application submitted by the proponent of the solar farm proposed for Uriarra."

MR COE (Ginninderra) (10.42): I will start by moving an amendment to Mr Rattenbury's amendment to Mr Walls's motion on Uriarra Village:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the ACT Government to ensure that the call-in powers are not used to support the Development Application submitted by the proponent of the solar farm proposed for Uriarra.”.

It seems Mr Rattenbury is trying to walk on both sides of the fence here. The fact is that Mr Rattenbury’s motion calls on the government to not use call-in powers. Call-in powers can be used two ways—they can be used to progress something or they can be used to stop something. We on this side of the chamber have no problem whatsoever with Mr Corbell using his call-in powers to stop what is being proposed for Uriarra Village. So the amendment I move today to Mr Rattenbury’s amendment is that the ACT government ensure that call-in powers are not used to support the development proposed for Uriarra.

We on this side of the chamber have no problem whatsoever if Minister Corbell wants to put a lot of people out of their misery by saying this is not going to be progressed and that this is the wrong site. Quite frankly, I believe Minister Corbell, the Chief Minister and the entire government not only owe that to Uriarra Village residents and the rest of Canberra but also to the proponent, because they will put everyone out of a lot of misery if, in fact, Minister Corbell shows a bit of leadership, calls in this development application, says it is wrong and calls for it to be placed in a more appropriate location.

I also think the government is putting ACTPLA planning assessors in a very awkward situation here. When you have the minister all but saying this is a done deal, what kind of second-guessing will the planning assessors be doing when they go to independently evaluate what is being proposed? Minister Corbell is saying “there will” be three developments, “there will” be more than \$100 million, “there will” be more than 100 jobs, “there will”, “there will”, “there will”. Frankly, that puts immense pressure on ACTPLA planning assessors, and you wonder just how fair a process it can be when it comes to assessing the development application.

I think everyone will be put out of their misery, correctly and fairly, if Minister Corbell shows some leadership and uses his call-in powers to say that this is not appropriate. If and when a development application goes in, that will be a real test for Minister Corbell. It is a shame Mr Rattenbury does not want that to happen. Mr Rattenbury seems hell-bent on giving the proponent appeal rights. I think everyone would be better off if Minister Corbell shows some leadership and gives advice about a better location that would serve the proponent, Canberrans and, of course, Uriarra Village residents.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (10.46): This is an extraordinary position from the Liberal Party. Mr Wall’s argument is how terrible the application of call-in powers is and how it foreshortens the process and does not allow people to have their say, but it is all right to use them as long as you have used them “for the decision we want”. Where is any sense of the application of due process and merit-based assessment in that assertion?

We have not even got an application before the Planning and Land Authority and Mr Coe is now directing the government to say, “Well, just refuse it. It doesn’t matter what the application says. It doesn’t matter what the public consultation process says. Just refuse it.” That is an absurd proposal from the Liberal Party. Either you have a problem with the application of call-in powers or you do not, but you cannot have it both ways. You cannot assert that on the one hand a decision which would be favourable to a development application would be unjust but a decision that would be unfavourable to a development application proponent would be just. That is absurd and that is not the way planning law in this city operates. It is not a process where the local council or the Legislative Assembly gets together and decides on a whim whether or not a development application should be approved. That is not the way our law works and nor should it be the way our law works.

The act sets out very clearly that there is an opportunity for the proponent to make an application. There is an opportunity then for people with an interest in the proposal to make a submission, a comment or an objection. There is then the opportunity for the proponent to reply to those matters, to seek to address them and to give their response on them. Then there is an opportunity for government agencies and other entities, such as utilities, to give their comments on whether or not they believe the proposal should be supported or rejected. And then there is a decision.

Is Mr Coe saying that that is just not relevant, that that is just not needed—that without seeing a development application, without seeing the advice of the referral entities, without seeing the advice of the planners and without seeing the advice and the comments from those with an interest in the proposal that it should just be refused?

Mr Coe: Yes.

MR CORBELL: Heaven forbid Mr Coe should ever become planning minister. If he has such a complete lack of regard for due process, administrative decision making and fairness then he will be an absolute farce if he ever is in a position to be a minister for planning. Ministers have obligations to adhere to administrative decision-making principles, fairness and merit-based assessment. To suggest that a minister should act unilaterally, without any regard to any of those matters, just shows how poorly advised and informed Mr Coe is.

The government does not support this amendment. The government reiterates that the best way for these concerns and conflicting interests to be resolved is through the planning process. There are two parties here. There are residents who are concerned about what they perceive as an impact on their homes and their properties, and those issues should be properly taken into account and assessed on their merits. But there are also other interests.

There are the interests of the proponent who wishes to build a development that they believe is lawful and in accordance with the territory plan. There are the interests of the leaseholder, the property owner, who must give their consent for development to occur. They also have rights under planning law. It is the job of the planning law to mediate these conflicting and often different interests and to seek to reconcile them,

address them and assess them on their merits. That is the process the government will seek to ensure is applied in relation to this proposal, as it is with every other proposal in our city.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.51): I think this is an unfortunate amendment. An amendment that seeks to remove appeal rights for one party in a process is simply unfair. You cannot come in here and say that one group has a right to appeal but the other does not. The position that I took today is that all people should have a right to appeal. That is why I think it is really important that the call-in power is not used here. The community should have a right to appeal through the normal processes if they disagree with the decision. That is what the call-in power removes. If the call-in power is exercised, the community or anybody involved lose their right to take an appeal to ACAT and have that appeal assessed on its merits.

To accept the amendment that Mr Coe has put forward removes that same right from the proponent. That is unfair. That is not walking both sides of the fence. That is actually about having integrity in the process. The Greens have long fought in this place for people to have access to appeal rights. I have got legislation coming up on Thursday—the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act—which seeks to increase standing for more people to be able to access the courts because we truly believe that people should have a right to exercise their day in court if they have a decent case to make.

We have got a good proposal here. The amendment I have put forward acknowledges both sides of this argument. There are two sides to it. The proponent has a right to make their case and seek to build a solar farm, just as the residents have a right to strongly make the case that it will have a detrimental impact on them in the ways that they have put forward. To somehow suggest that the proponent would not be able to appeal, saying that they disagree with it, is inherently unfair. It lacks integrity and it is not a position that I can support.

The suggestion seems to be that if I do not support this amendment the Liberal Party will not support my amendment. That is just tit for tat. That is really sad politics. That is about saying, “If it’s not our way, it’s the highway.” No, this is about actually recognising that we are at the start of a process. The amendment that I have put forward is very clear. It acknowledges the desire to build renewable energy in the ACT. It acknowledges that the residents of Uriarra have real concerns and that those real concerns will be assessed during the Planning and Development Act process, as they should be. It specifically calls on the minister not to exercise the call-in power.

Let us be even-handed about this. It completely lacks integrity to say that one side can have appeal rights but not the other. I think most people would find that quite a bizarre situation. It goes to the confused place on planning policy generally that the Liberal Party find themselves in. This is rank populism. This is not decent policy making. I think that is really unfortunate. I will not be supporting Mr Coe’s amendment.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.54): I would like to start by commending Mr Wall for bringing this motion to this place today on behalf of the residents of Uriarra. He has articulated the case very well, in my view, and it is a reasonable case. The case that Mr Wall has made is based on legitimate concerns of the community. It has been argued convincingly, and I commend him. It is based on a lot of hard work that he has done in the community. This is what it means to be a good local member and be in touch with the community. That is what we are here to do. Ultimately, we are here to be representatives of our community, and he has done that today.

It is great, Madam Speaker, to see the residents of Uriarra here. It is fair to say that the gallery is not often full. It is only when there is an issue of great importance to the community that we will see these numbers come in. It is clear that this is a matter of great importance to the people that live in Uriarra. The decisions made in this place today are going to have a profound effect on the lives of people in this gallery today and their friends and family that live in Uriarra. We have a great responsibility to make sure that the decisions that we make in this place are the right ones.

Ultimately, we have a decision to make here. The Liberals have a view that, based on the arguments as articulated by Mr Wall, the people of Uriarra are right; that they have a legitimate case. The case is that the solar farm should not be built on their doorstep. We are of that view. There has been a lot of debate about planning rules, regulations, DA processes and call-in powers, but the nub of this issue goes to point (2)(b) in Mr Wall's motion—that is:

ensure the project does not proceed at the current location;

That is a very simple statement. That is what the people of Uriarra want us to decide today. It is a simple thing for this Assembly to decide on. This is about leadership. The minister and Mr Rattenbury have made some mealy-mouthed comments about the process because they are not prepared to stand up in this place and make a decision.

What we have seen from the minister is a failure to acknowledge that he has got this wrong. I think he would earn much more respect in the community if, instead of making passionless, emotionless speeches blinded by ideology about the planning process, he actually got to the nub of the issue and realised that he has made a bad decision. If he acknowledged that, if he accepted that and if he supported Mr Wall's motion, he would earn a lot more respect from the people of Uriarra and more broadly from the community. There is a reason why Mr Corbell struggles to get two per cent of the vote in his electorate. That is because he does not at any stage, at any time, make any attempt to have any degree of empathy with the people he purports to represent.

What we have seen from Mr Rattenbury is a pattern of behaviour in this place also, and that is his desire to walk both sides of the fence. Ultimately, you have got to make a decision. Mr Rattenbury needs to make a decision and it is here before him. Is he going to squib this? Is he going to come up with some mealy-mouthed pretence that he is concerned? Well, he is not.

Mr Rattenbury's concerns are more broadly recorded, perhaps. He does not like the politics being put into the planning process. But sometimes politics have to come into the planning process because we in this place have to make decisions. We have to say, "No, that is a bad call." We will stand up and we will say that it is a bad call. Mr Rattenbury, through his amendment, is basically taking away the decision of the minister and of this place.

The unintended consequence of Mr Rattenbury's amendment is that if the DA went through the process and ultimately it was decided that it was going to be on the doorstep of Uriarra, the minister would not be able to stop that, even if he wanted to. The unintended consequence of what Mr Rattenbury is doing is actually taking away the power of this place and the power of the minister to stop it if he wants to. That is unacceptable. The whole point of this motion, the whole reason that the residents of Uriarra are here today, is to stop this solar farm being built on their doorstep. That is why we are here. We will not be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment because all it does is throw further confusion into the issues that we have today.

What I call on this Assembly to do today—Mr Rattenbury and Mr Corbell—is to say that it is perfectly reasonable for the people of Uriarra to say that this solar farm should not be built on their doorstep. I think that is a perfectly reasonable thing to say. It is not a judgement on solar. Many of the comments today from Mr Rattenbury and Mr Corbell were about carbon emissions and solar more broadly. It is not a debate about that. I am sure many of the people of Uriarra would support the solar farm more broadly. It is not a debate about that. It is a debate about whether this should be built on their doorstep, and clearly it should not.

The people of Uriarra are right. Mr Wall is right. We are with the people of Uriarra. We will support what they are saying. We will reject Mr Rattenbury's attempt to walk both sides of the fence and throw further confusion into this problem. Despite the fact that the Labor Party and the Greens will not stand up to make sure that a right decision is made in this place, Mr Wall and the rest of the Canberra Liberals will continue to advocate that the solar farm not be built on the doorstep of Uriarra, because it is a bad decision and it is going to have a big impact on people's lives. The failure to support this motion today is going to drag this issue on and cause further disquiet and distress for the people who live in Uriarra. They deserve better from the government and from the Greens.

Question put:

That Mr Coe's amendment to Mr Rattenbury's proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 9

Mr Coe	Ms Lawder	Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher
Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth	Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman
Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall	Dr Bourke	Ms Porter
Mr Hanson		Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury
Mrs Jones		Mr Corbell	

Question so resolved in the negative.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (11.05): I will just speak briefly to this motion. I agree with one of the issues that Mr Hanson referred to in his speech, and that is that it is good to have the opportunity to discuss this matter in the Assembly. It is important for the ACT Legislative Assembly that local issues are aired on the floor of the Legislative Assembly and that there is the opportunity for differing views to be debated. That is something that the government wholeheartedly supports.

I would like to welcome to the chamber the residents of Uriarra who have come to listen to this debate. From the government's point of view, we have heard your concerns; we understand the concerns as they are raised and the strength with which those views are held. We are certainly not sitting here, in response to opposition allegations, arrogantly ignoring the concerns of local residents.

But we are not the proponent of the development, and that is the issue here. We are not the proponent. There is a planning process that needs to be undertaken. If this solar farm is to proceed, it needs to go through the planning process. With those planning processes, the laws have been established by this chamber with the specific purpose of keeping politicians out of development decisions. Some of the debate we have heard this morning borders on creating a situation like the one with the Wollongong City Council and raising some of the issues that have existed in other jurisdictions where council and local members get involved inappropriately in matters that should be dealt with independently through the planning process.

Members of the opposition do not seem to understand that there is not even a development application that has been lodged for this proposal. The opposition would like to extinguish it before a development application has even been lodged. I urge Uriarra residents to stay involved and to continue to raise their concerns—to raise them with the proponents and to raise them through the planning process should a development application be lodged or when that development application is lodged. Those views are important, and the independent planning authority needs to respond to them.

There are a lot of questions about this development—whether an environmental impact assessment is required, for example. Those are the issues that need to be and would be drawn out through the planning process.

On the issue of the call-in powers, the call-in powers do sit there as a ministerial or executive power that is able to be used in certain circumstances. They have been used over the period of time since self-government. Mr Smyth used them 15 times, I think, in his time as planning minister—including, I notice, for the Manuka cinema to be developed and for the heritage value of the previous cinema to be lost to the community forever. I did not know that you were responsible for that one, Mr Smyth. So there have been occasions when the powers have been used—15 times when Mr Smyth used them, seven or eight times when Gary Humphries used them. That was in the space of about four years. Then they have been used maybe about 10 times in the space of 10 years. So the call-in power is used sparingly, and it is used with caution, but it exists as a power.

If you do not like the call-in power in general, remove it from the planning act. You do not use it for the best times and then not use it on the times you do not agree. That is not appropriate. The call-in power is there for appropriate use in appropriate circumstances.

Mr Coe interjecting—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe and Mr Hanson, order!

Mr Coe: Like now?

MS GALLAGHER: For it to be used now, Mr Coe, you would need a development application actually to have been lodged. It has not. Mr Coe decides that prior to any consultation occurring, prior to anything happening, something should just be stopped. Go and say that to every person who is proposing a potential development in Canberra. Send the message that anyone proposing a potential development in Canberra could have that development stopped by the Assembly before they even got past the first step if Mr Coe feels like it.

Is that seriously the message that we want to send about how we do business in Canberra? Mr Wall said on radio today—I do not know if he knew that he was not correct—that the call-in power stops consultation. It does not. The only thing that the call-in power changes is the decision-maker in relation to a proposal and the right to access third-party appeal or go to ACAT to continue to agitate against the proposal. That is what it changes. It does not change anything about the consultation process in the lead-up in relation to the proponent. It does not change anything. All of that must continue.

As you would know from reading the act, there is a whole set of criteria that need to be followed before the call-in power can be used. People are, I think, either confusing others, with an unfair purpose in mind, by trying to scare people and say that the call-in power could be used to extinguish consultation rights for potentially affected parties. That is simply not correct.

What affected parties need to do is this, and I know the Uriarra residents will do it. Uriarra is a lovely place to live. It is an exquisite place to live. The community open day, with the naming of Coree, was a lovely day—a day that sits in my memory, a lovely day being Chief Minister of a beautiful city. I think many more Canberrans would love to live out in Uriarra if they went out there and had a look at how lovely that place is.

There has not been any stronger supporter of Uriarra than this government. It was this government that took the political decision to rebuild the village after the fires, despite the costs involved with that. It was this government that directed ACTEW to connect water and sewerage out there. The ICRC made a criticism that it was not efficient and

that other people would have to pay for that. It was this government that took the decision to do that—to support the ongoing viability of the village and the amenity the people of Uriarra enjoy out there. It is this government that has done it.

But on the matter of process for a potential development to be built out near Uriarra, we, who are not the proponents, believe that the planning process, as established by the Assembly, needs to be followed. That planning process allows for all the concerns that Uriarra residents and you have made to the government. It is through that independent channel, not through political interference, that this matter should be determined. If changes are to be made, if proposals are not to go ahead or if the development does not proceed, it is up to the independent planning authority to take that decision.

Just yesterday we saw an example of an independent planning decision working and responding to community feedback. That was the development at Belconnen. Resident feedback was that they did not like the scale of the development that was being proposed. That developer has come back with a revised development proposal for that site. That was specifically in relation to residents' concerns. It showed again that the independent planning authority and the decision-making process that has been endorsed by this Assembly work.

It might not be the answer that Uriarra residents are wanting to hear today, but it sets an independent process, a fair process—a process where Uriarra residents can air their concerns; where other residents of Canberra who may support solar farms can raise their concerns; where the proponents can have their concerns listened to; and even where the leaseholder, the landowner out there, can have their concerns listened to. Then it is over to the independent planning authority to take that decision.

The use of the call-in power is a separate matter. I do not think anyone is in a position to determine whether or not it should be used when a development application and a process have not even begun. It is ridiculous for the Assembly and the Liberal Party to be sending a message to all of the people who might be considering development in this town that, should the Liberal Party not like it, they will be seeking to extinguish development proposals prior to them even being lodged with the independent planning authority. That is the message that you are sending out today. Uriarra residents, we hear you, we understand the concerns you have raised, but—

Mr Hanson: And you are going to ignore them.

MS GALLAGHER: I am not ignoring them. The fact that we are having this debate today clearly demonstrates that no-one is ignoring anything. But there is a difference of opinion between you, who want to extinguish a proposal now—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe!

MS GALLAGHER: and us, who want to allow the process to continue, an independent process.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Rattenbury's amendment be agreed to. I remind members of the opposition that when I call you to order, I expect you to be called to order or I am going to start warning and naming people.

Ordered that the question be divided.

Question put:

That paragraph (1) be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9		Noes 8	
Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Corbell		Mrs Jones	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That paragraph (2) be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 1	Noes 16	
Mr Rattenbury	Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher
	Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman
	Dr Bourke	Mr Hanson
	Ms Burch	Mrs Jones
	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
	Mr Corbell	Ms Porter
	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the negative.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Wall's motion, as amended, be agreed to. Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.20): I thank Mr Wall for his motion today. Since the announcement about the solar farm at Uriarra a month ago I too have been inundated with correspondence from the residents of Uriarra Village. The point they are trying to make is not about the merits of solar power, the ACT's targets or the DA process. It is about the community who live at Uriarra Village, the families who have chosen to make Uriarra their home. It is about noise, loss of amenity and loss of view, and

subsequent loss of value of their homes, as Mr Rattenbury pointed out earlier. It is about the proposed location of the solar farm. The Assembly has the opportunity today to send the message that the proposed location is not acceptable and we can save the proponent the time, effort and money of going through with that particular location.

Many people who purchased in the area did so based on the community idea and the rural outlook—not being too far away from the capital of Australia but feeling like they are nowhere near it. The village has been developed in a way that ensures best sustainable practices by enforcement of rainwater tanks, sewerage treatment, internal fire sprinkler systems on each house and many other requirements. Although there is a lot of regulation in the building stage, it is a much loved village and community for all those who have chosen to live there.

So we just need to pause and reflect on what is facing the citizens of Uriarra at present. Imagine you have a young family and like many other Australians you want to bring them up in a rural community lifestyle. You come across Uriarra Village in searching for options for your family. After going through the application process you purchase a block of land in the village. Over a couple of years you spend a lot of time and money building a house for your family following all the requirements which come at no small cost.

Your house is facing the direction which is stipulated in the development rules. You have your rainwater tank, sewerage system and fire protection system just as the development process requires. You move into your new house, potentially with quite a high mortgage. You have to work long and hard to pay off the mortgage and the expenses for your move to your new lifestyle, but because of the benefits of living in this community you know it is worth while. You sit on your front porch and have a coffee in the morning while the kids play in the street with the surrounding neighbours and you know your constant hard work to afford your lifestyle is worth it.

Then one day you hear an announcement that the government is going to have a solar farm developed not even 100 metres from your front porch. The rural feel and outlook will be gone with 26,100 solar panels, 2.5 metres high plus security fencing being built right in front of your home. You abided by all the development requirements to ensure your home fitted in with the rural feel and outlook of the village, but regardless of what you have done, it was all about to be destroyed by this potential development.

Your mortgage, which may be higher because you wanted to live in the village atmosphere and because you followed all the requirements, could end up being more than what your property would then be worth. The value of your property might plummet. Your view, which is currently paddocks and mountains, will become one of fences and solar panel construction.

This is the story that many Uriarra residents are facing. Whether it is a young family or a retired couple, the village is full of people who have made sacrifices and worked hard to be able to live in a village providing them with a lifestyle they desire. These families do not understand why a proposal to build this enormous solar farm so close to their village may go ahead. With thousands upon thousands of hectares available in that area, why? Why is the proposal to have this within 100 metres of their homes?

Ironically most of the homes in Uriarra face towards the proposed site because of the development rules; so it is not something in their backyard but in their front yard. The key design objective in Uriarra Village has always been to maintain the rural character of the village. The exhaustive set of criteria which needs to be followed by those building there is only to ensure this aim is achieved.

Madam Speaker, one family who live in Uriarra and who have raised their concerns over this proposal moved there a few years ago. Previously they lived in Macarthur. But five years ago when there was a plan to build a gas-fired power station near their home in the middle of suburbia, they decided to move. Although the power station plan was eventually scuttled by community opposition, they made the decision to go to the rural village of Uriarra for the atmosphere and community for their young children.

It was obviously an unwelcome surprise when it became known they would face similar concerns years later in an even more unreasonable location. This time, instead of being one kilometre from their home, it may be just over 100 metres from their home. How is this fair?

Elementus Energy have a statement on their website. Part of that statement says, "The solar farm is to be located in the district of Coree approximately 30 kilometres to the west of Canberra. It is to be located on 40 hectares of rural grazing land and will complement the current land use." If you read that statement on its own without any knowledge of the village of Uriarra, that might sound very reasonable. But I pose the question: how does a 26,000 panel solar farm complement the current land use? How does it complement this lovely rural village?

I echo Mr Wall's comments and I encourage the minister to listen to the residents of Uriarra and work with the proponent to identify an area of land that is not so close to people's homes. I encourage the minister to guarantee the people of Uriarra that he will not use his call-in powers to progress the development. I encourage the minister to listen to what the residents are saying, to gain an understanding of the situation they are in and genuinely take a moment to consider the consequences for these families and this community.

Again, I thank Mr Wall for bringing this motion to the house today and I urge the minister to consider the views of the Uriarra community.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (11.28): Madam Speaker, I rise to support Mr Wall and thank him for bringing the motion on. It is very simple. It is about saying to the proponent: we are not against a solar power station. We are against it at this site. Save yourself the time and the expense. If you are desperate, Mr Corbell, to have this power station built, the quickest way is to put it on an appropriate site from the start. So this is about saying to business that we are actually here to help you get your solar power station built as quickly as we can in the appropriate site. More importantly, it is about saying to the people who live next door to it that we do not want you to live through the stress of this process that could stretch on for months and months and months.

It is about certainty. It is about leadership from this place. It is about listening to the people we represent and it is about saying that everybody can win here. I have gone out and listened to the people this morning and heard what they said. They have a very simple map. The map shows an abatement zone on three sides of the Uriarra Village. It is quite a wide abatement zone but on the side where the power station is proposed to go that zone does not exist. Why is it that you need the bushfire protection on three sides but you do not need it on the fourth?

If you go out and talk to the people, as we have this morning, many of them said that they would be quite happy if it were pushed 400 or 500 metres further north and a row of trees put in place so that, Ms Lawder has just said, it is not in their front yards.

It is very simple today. Let us send a very clear message from the Assembly that, one, we are in favour of appropriate development in an appropriate location but, two, what we will not surrender is the amenity of the residents who will have to live with it every single day from the moment that it is commenced.

Mr Rattenbury: I seek leave to move the amendment circulated in my name.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not think we can do that, Mr Rattenbury. Bear with me for a moment. This has been a very complex debate today. This is now the fifth set of amendments. Mr Rattenbury, you cannot move that amendment because you proposed to omit the word “progress” from paragraph 2(b) but we have already omitted paragraph 2(b). So you cannot move that amendment. Just so that everyone understands, the question is that Mr Wall’s motion, which now consists of Mr Rattenbury’s paragraph 1, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

ICT research—funding

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (11.32): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of technology in driving innovation in the ACT economy;
- (b) that supporting and encouraging technological innovation is essential to growing and diversifying the ACT economy;
- (c) that the ACT Government is currently seeking Canberrans’ views on how to make Canberra a world leading digital city that will lead to the development of a Digital Canberra Action Plan;
- (d) that technology supports every sector in our community, including business, health, education, transport, community services and sustainability; and

- (e) that faster broadband, especially the National Broadband Network, encourages digital literacy and innovation in households and businesses;

(2) further notes:

- (a) that NICTA, Australia's Information Communications Technology (ICT) Research Centre of Excellence, is Australia's largest organisation dedicated to ICT research and its Canberra Research Laboratory is undertaking world leading and world renowned ICT research activities;
- (b) the innovative and important work undertaken by NICTA's Canberra Research Laboratory and its contribution towards shaping an innovative and diverse ACT economy;
- (c) the ACT Government was a founding member of NICTA, and has provided sustained and significant funding and in-kind support to NICTA;
- (d) that NICTA has a staff of 55 full-time researchers and 50 PhD students who are working to develop technologies that will meet the current and future needs of Canberra and the nation;
- (e) the close collaboration between NICTA, the ACT Government and local universities, including establishing a number of projects where NICTA's advanced ICT expertise can add value to the issues the ACT Government faces as a service deliverer; and
- (f) that the proposal to cut \$42 million in funding for NICTA over two years, which was announced by the new Commonwealth Government before the Federal election, will substantially impact NICTA's capacity to continue undertaking research and development; and

(3) calls on the Assembly to:

- (a) support the ACT Government's continued funding and support for NICTA;
- (b) lobby the new Commonwealth Government not to implement the proposed funding cuts; and
- (c) lobby the new Commonwealth Government to maintain and/or increase funding for NICTA.

Madam Speaker, today I would like to outline the importance of the digital economy to growth in the ACT. Let me begin by giving you a vision of the digital world in 2020. The roll out of the national broadband network will be the building block for the digital economy. By 2020 all government agencies will be using digital platforms as a major channel of service delivery.

New digital technologies and digital platforms are, of course, enablers of public sector delivery programs and initiatives, and digital services are a fundamental part of that

service mix. Along with the development of improved online security and identity arrangements, this will dramatically reduce the prevalence of hard-copy transactions for doing business with government. The use of high-definition video will be common for more complex interactions requiring real-time communication.

Almost every household will make extensive use of high speed broadband. Most will have multiple internet-connected devices. The OECD estimated that an average household with two adults and two teenage children had 10 internet-connected devices in their home during 2012. The OECD predicts that will have risen to 25 devices by 2017 and 50 devices by 2022.

The majority of Australian businesses will be using digital platforms for most of their marketing, business administration, service provision, recruitment and training. They will engage beyond their immediate region with an increasingly broad customer base. Businesses will also make extensive use of video and access a combination of both private and public clouds. Geography will no longer be the barrier to employment that it used to be. With the spread of teleworking and the use of digital platforms for business transactions and service access, more Australians will be able to seek employment in industries located in areas other than where they live. Telework will enable more people, including those with disabilities or carer responsibilities, to enter the workforce. The availability of telework will also allow more people to stay in the workforce longer and reduce congestion on the roads.

Australia's digital industry sector will be thriving. More students will undertake courses leading to a career in this sector and the application of creative design thinking will lead to the development and commercialisation of new digital applications and services for global customers. Students at all levels of education living in any part of Australia or even overseas will have the opportunity to attend virtual classes taught over video technology by specialist teachers, complementing education in the classroom. It will be commonplace for students and others to undertake virtual visits to cultural, scientific and other institutions where the opportunity to have these experiences may have previously been out of reach due to geography or lack of resources.

Increasingly, the home will be an integral part of health and aged care service delivery, particularly for those with chronic disease. Care coordinators will use digital platforms to monitor key health indicators and assist with health education, medication management and rehabilitation of patients who are at home.

The digital economy will transform economic and social opportunities in regional Australia. Fast, reliable and affordable broadband enabled by the NBN will allow new businesses to be created around our region. The digital economy underpins every aspect of contemporary life. It has transformed the way we work, communicate, collaborate and connect with our communities and each other. It drives business transformation and innovation across all sectors.

The ICT industry generates some \$91 billion of revenue and supports Australia's \$100 billion of the digital economy. The ICT industry contributes to as much of Australia's economy as the mining sector and only marginally less than the

manufacturing and finance and insurance sectors. Australia's economy and the high standard of living Australians enjoy are a result of the ICT sector's substantial contribution.

According to the Australian Computer Society, or ACS, and Australian Bureau of Statistic figures, the ACT ICT sector employs more than 21,000 Canberrans, which is around 10 per cent of the ACT's entire workforce. The ACT government recognises that the digital economy is fundamentally important to our future productivity, our competitiveness and our social and economic wellbeing. Correspondingly, the ACT government was a founding member of NICTA—Australia's information communications technology research centre of excellence—in partnership, of course, with ANU, the University of NSW and the New South Wales government.

Effective use of the internet and digital technologies offer opportunities for our city to improve connectedness of citizens and organisations; improve service delivery, both public and private; drive and facilitate economic transformation, innovation, efficiency and productivity; support social engagement and inclusion; improve environmental outcomes; and improve democratic participation and policy outcomes.

A key objective of the ACT government's approach is to ensure widespread access to affordable and high speed internet and digital technologies so the ACT community as a whole will benefit from faster and more efficient online communications. There are four key elements to the ACT's approach to maximising the benefits from the digital economy, and the first is digital inclusion. We aim to increase and improve connectivity of Canberra citizens to the internet and the use of digital technologies. Free computing services and access to the internet are provided at ACT libraries, and we are examining free wi-fi hotspots in town centres. Both government and non-government schools will be provided access to high speed broadband.

The second element is open government. We will continue to give effect to the ACT government's commitment to providing open, accountable and transparent government involving ACT citizens in decision-making processes in a meaningful, accountable, responsive and equitable way. The ACT government both invests in and uses ICT to promote open government and online community engagement for the benefit of the community and regards government information as a public resource.

The third element is engagement. The ACT government is committed to engaging with citizens using digital tools to enable citizen-centric collaborative government. The government conducts community cabinets using Twitter to engage directly with ACT residents as well as community groups and non-government organisations. Time to talk and ACT community engagement online sites are permanent forums for online community consultations, enabling a broad cross-section of the community to participate in government policymaking and decision making. A wide range of ICT-supported programs are in place across the ACT, ranging from streamlining access to services with Canberra Connect through to support for the online schools community with the smart schools, smart students program.

The fourth is industry development. Faster broadband speeds delivered by the NBN will support the further development of a vibrant digital sector and start-up companies.

Industry access to the NBN is supported through a range of grants programs and business advisory services, including Innovation Connect, of ICon, and the Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre. The government also supports leading-edge research and ICT innovation through funding NICTA and a number of other funding programs.

The ACT government recognises the importance of a ubiquitous, reliable high speed broadband for the ACT community and businesses and will work closely with NBN Co and the new government on the NBN rollout plans. More than 14,000 homes and businesses in Gungahlin can now connect to the NBN via fibre to the home. More than 50 per cent of homes and businesses around the Gungahlin town centre have signed up for the NBN, with retail service providers such as Telstra, Optus, iiNet, which was TransACT, and so on. This is one of the highest take-up rates in the country. Indeed, high speed broadband demand in Gungahlin has outstripped supply, with some customers having to wait at least 10 weeks to be connected.

The ACT government has secured federal government funding of \$1.3 million for three Australian government digital economy programs that aim to maximise the benefits of the national broadband network. The digital enterprise program helps small to medium-size enterprises, or SMEs, and not-for-profit organisations maximise the opportunities from digital engagement. Targeted group training sessions and one-on-one advice assists participants to use the NBN to improve existing business processes and better achieve organisational goals.

The ACT digital enterprise centre based at the Canberra BusinessPoint facilities provided by the Canberra Business Council conducts training in cooperation with a digital hub at the Gungahlin library. The centre administers a dynamic training program for SMEs and not-for-profit organisations to enable them to use and develop high speed broadband applications and functionality to diversify and innovate. In its first five months of operation, the digital enterprise centre managed by the Canberra Business Council has organised 17 events for 152 business people and 55 one-on-one sessions for the business community.

The digital hubs program will help communities to gain the digital literacy skills needed to exploit the benefits provided by the NBN. The ACT government has established a state-of-the-art digital hub at the Gungahlin library and a dynamic NBN training program to improve digital literacy, user confidence and knowledge of NBN functionality for the benefit of the Canberra community. Since its launch in February 2013 the digital hub has provided 113 free community group training sessions and 384 individual sessions involving more than 600 members of the community.

The digital local government program helps local governments improve their online service delivery and encourages further innovation in online service delivery. The ACT government will establish the Canberra digital community connect using the broadband capability afforded by the NBN. The ACT government proposes to extend its existing online community consultation platform—time to talk—into a real-time interactive video platform for the Canberra community. Current technology trends suggest there will be an increasing demand for online consultation to include video engagement with government.

The new commonwealth government's NBN plan involves installing fibre to the node and not fibre to the home. The details of what the new government policy will mean for further roll out of the NBN in Canberra is not clear, as it is contingent on the findings of a number of reviews of telecommunications policy foreshadowed by the coalition. All we know is that the Canberra rollout is likely to slow down or be delayed under the Coalition's current plans.

As a pioneering step in our journey to promote effective and efficient government, one of the initiatives is the business development strategy, a prize-based innovation competition to engage ACT innovators and SMEs in the development of the new digitally based government services. Our aim is to stimulate innovation in electronic and mobile technologies, in turn helping to improve community access to government and public sector services.

The digital Canberra challenge consists of two competitions a year over three years. Each competition will run for six months. Leading up to each round of the competition, the ACT government directorates as well as the general public will have the opportunity to put forward unresolved business requirements or challenges they consider relevant to the scope of the competition. One to two of the challenges will then be selected and, in turn, ACT innovators and SMEs will be invited to submit conceptual responses. Two collaborative projects will be selected to be developed. Coaching, mentoring and research assistance will be offered to the selected contestants during the course of the projects. The results of each project will be published as a case study. The best case study, as judged by the panel, will receive \$12,500 in prize money and the runner up \$7,500.

In closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me outline our plans for a digital Canberra. The ACT government is currently seeking the community's views on how we can make Canberra a world-leading digital city. We are interested in thoughts and ideas on how we can capitalise on digital opportunities. We believe Canberra has unique qualities that we can leverage to transform the way we work, do business and access government services.

We are seeking community input on how we can diversify our economy, enable businesses to access new customers and international markets, support digital skills and improve digital literacy, publish open data for use by citizens, and provide better services to the Canberra community. The input we have received already is giving us some good ideas on the development of the digital action plan. We also want to deepen the linkages between researchers, businesses and government so we are truly recognised as a digital city.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (11.47): I thank Mr Gentleman for his motion today, but I am somewhat surprised that for the entire 15-minute speech that Mr Gentleman just gave on his motion in support of NICTA—by the way, we do support NICTA; we always have—there seemed to be very little emphasis on NICTA. He talked about technology; he talked about technology at length. I just hope that in his presentation Mr Barr will talk about what NICTA actually delivers and why we should be supporting it—which we are.

I also found it interesting that this motion is brought before the Assembly by a member of a government that, while promoting the importance of technology in driving innovation in the ACT economy, has extreme difficulty in actually delivering on such statements and promises. I would ask where the commitment to technology was when this government promised at the last election—but again has failed to deliver—free wi-fi at bus interchanges and on all ACTION buses. I am sure that we all remember the headlines about the famous Andrew Barr media releases. I will quote from one titled “Connected Capital”:

If re-elected in 2012 ACT Labor will invest \$2.9 million ... to connect Canberrans with free Wi-Fi in all town centres, bus interchanges and on all ACTION buses.

Fine words. Where is the action—just to coin a pun there?

As we all know, the government talk a lot about the technology directions that they have, but they do not seem to be actually able to deliver on them. Let me just go to this example about wi-fi. It is not innovative—in the sense that it is already in use; it has been used for quite a while. The promise was quite a clear promise. That is just a small example about the commitment to delivery: there is plenty of commitment to the rhetoric about it, but where is the commitment to delivery, Mr Gentleman or Mr Barr? Like Labor governments around Australia—thankfully, they are diminishing rather rapidly—they talk the talk but rarely deliver on what they promise.

We support NICTA, and we always have, but this motion by Mr Gentleman has shades of opportunism and shades of the famous thought bubbles by the former Labor Prime Minister Mr Rudd. Great idea; let’s do it. But where is the substance behind it?

National Information Communication Technology Australia—NICTA, as it is known—is Australia’s information and communications technology centre for excellence. It was established as part of the backing Australia’s ability program launched under a Liberal government in 2001. In his federal address, Prime Minister John Howard is quoted as saying:

In launching Backing Australia’s Ability today, the largest group of measures ever put together by an Australian Government to foster innovation, and in calling upon those in the scientific, education and business communities to take up the opportunities offered by it, I am confident that, together, we can create a climate to harness the talents of our best and brightest and effectively compete in the world of which I’ve just spoken.

By providing significant additional resources and the means by which talented Australians can have a go in the field of science and technology, we are seeking today to nurture a new generation of young scientific minds capable of achieving great things for their country.

Since its official opening on 27 February 2003, NICTA has realised Prime Minister John Howard’s objective to become the leading research and innovation centre for ICT in Australia, underpinning the Liberal Party’s commitment to growing the

economy. NICTA's values—invent, inspire, collaborate, make it happen, excel—represent their culture and the cutting-edge research projects that will continue to drive Australia's future.

As the leader of ICT research and innovation in Australia, NICTA's list of past and present research projects is impressive, to say the least. Current research projects include the bionic eye project. As a member of Bionic Vision Australia, a national consortium of researchers, NICTA is working on developing a retinal prosthesis, or bionic eye, capable of restoring the sense of vision to people with blindness. I have visited NICTA on about five occasions over the last five years and I have received presentations on a lot of this technology that they are working on.

Another one is the smart transport and roads project, which aims to make traffic control systems smarter through the use of calculations to establish an understanding of how traffic flows over a wide area network of traffic. They then use that information to compute changes at the level of each traffic light to optimise traffic flows across that network.

Projects like these will have a profound impact on Australia and internationally, and seek to further strengthen and support sectors such as health, transport, primary industries and education, to name just a few.

NICTA has five offices located around Australia, including one located in Canberra. The Canberra research lab comprises five research groups: computer vision, machine learning, networks, optimisation and software systems. The Canberra lab collaborates with the ANU, government and private enterprise. Through its collaborative approach with ANU, NICTA offers additional research training to PhD students in IT research fields. The eGov Cluster, managed by and based at the Canberra research lab, provides a stream for industry, research and government to collaborate on increasingly complex problems facing government today.

Nationally, NICTA sponsors a number of competitions, including GovHack, which focuses on supporting and encouraging the hacker culture in Australia using government data to create innovative means of delivering data sets as well as solving issues that arise through technology. I am happy to add that several award recipients from GovHack 2013 were students from Canberra.

Since its formation, NICTA has created almost a dozen new companies, has created a substantial technology and intellectual property portfolio, and has collaborated on a range of joint projects as well as supplying new talent to the ICT industry—all since its inception through a Liberal government initiative back in 2001.

We would remind the government that back in May it was the federal Labor government itself that sought to decrease NICTA's funding and left the question of funding for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 forward estimates periods open to be considered in the 2014-15 budget. Former Prime Minister Rudd only belatedly announced a \$42 million funding injection on 8 August 2013, knowing full well that Labor would not be returning to government to make good on its promise. Labor's plan of phasing out

funding in its entirety was known throughout the industry and was expected to come into effect in 2015, after changes were made to this year's budget. I do not recall too much by way of this local government communicating to the then government their displeasure at such potential cuts.

The current discussions around funding cuts to NICTA are premature, to say the least. It is well to remember, however, that NICTA is still eligible to seek funding from the Australian Research Council, and it also receives funding from the University of New South Wales, ANU and New South Wales government—as well as the ACT government, which, Mr Gentleman notes, has provided significant funding. Funding is also provided through the Victorian government and the University of Melbourne, as well as from NICTA's own commercial enterprises.

Whilst ACT Labor continues its policy of taxing more and spending more money than it earns, Liberal philosophy is all about growing the economy. We do support NICTA, but we cannot know with any certainty what its federal government funding will be. And neither does Mr Gentleman. Much of this motion is premature and speculative. However, the opposition has always supported NICTA and will continue to do so.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (11.57): I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion forward today, because NICTA is a great institution. Australia has a strong history of science and innovation. We have all benefited from lifesaving discoveries made by Australia's outstanding researchers. As we move into an increasingly complex and resource constrained future, our national wellbeing will become ever more dependent on further technological advances.

Australia is in the perfect position to become a leader in the global transition to knowledge-based economies. To do so, we need a robust and nimble research sector, with the ability to tackle the difficult problems that we face.

The Greens believe that we need a strong research sector in Australia to help move away from the industries of the past, and to deliver the jobs of the future. This will mean ensuring that every dollar spent on research is spent well, and that our great public research agencies, like the CSIRO, our universities, medical research institutes and NICTA, work together with each other, with industry and with international partners.

NICTA is an organisation that was established with exactly those goals in mind. It was designed to build capacity and strengthen investment in strategic information technologies. It was designed to pursue high-impact research excellence that would deliver national benefit and create wealth for Australia. It was developed as a world-class, world-scale research institute. And as a recipient of significant public research grants, it was an organisation in which Australia was investing in our future prosperity.

That is why it is highly disappointing that the incoming Liberal federal government has seen fit to cut \$42 million in funding for this important organisation. At just the time when Australia needs to be investing strategically in research and innovation, we

will suffer further setbacks under another conservative government. A federal government that does not see the need for a minister for science cannot be accused of indulging in vision. A federal government with plans to diminish and curtail a national broadband network cannot be accused of understanding the opportunities of the modern era. A federal government which intends to audit ARC grant applications for topics they do not like cannot be accused of understanding a rigorous peer-reviewed grants application process.

Of course, the Gillard government's \$2.3 billion cuts to tertiary education to pay for school funding reforms did not inspire a lot of confidence either, but I digress.

We must increase our investment in research and innovation rather than cut it. We must deliver a stable and dependable funding environment to free our researchers from a rolling funding shortfall and to allow them to focus on their work. We must provide the kind of funding which can see projects through to fruition.

As you may not be aware, Australia's investment in science and research is lagging behind many other developed countries; and, according to the Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb, we may be set to go backwards. Australia currently invests 2.2 per cent of GDP in research and innovation from both private and public sources, the equivalent of about \$900 per person per year in Australia. This is well behind regional competitors Korea and Japan, behind the United States and even further behind world leaders such as Israel, Finland and Sweden. Australian investment in research and innovation currently ranks only 13th amongst OECD member countries and is significantly below the OECD average. Worst of all, our public sector investment has been on the decline in recent years. As the Chief Scientist has recently warned, it may go as low as two per cent in the coming year, one of the lowest national values in the OECD. These cuts to NICTA may signal the next steps in that national decline.

It is with this downward trajectory of funding in mind that we must view these cuts to NICTA, a vibrant and dynamic organisation that has already had such successes as its role in the bionic eye or the operating systems currently driving 1.5 billion mobile phones worldwide. An organisation like NICTA must be supported with a stable and ongoing funding model for Australia to truly reap the benefits of its innovation.

As you have already heard today, the ACT enjoys good working relationships with NICTA through both the territory government and the ANU. As Mr Gentleman's motion notes, the ACT government was a founding member of NICTA and has committed to significant funding for the organisation.

Science and innovation is the key to future prosperity in Australia, and NICTA is delivering the kinds of innovations that can make a daily contribution to our community. When I visited the facility last year, I saw people working on practical real-world innovations that mean our society can run more efficiently and more effectively.

The TAMS Directorate is already embracing real-world ICT innovations such as our significant investment in Canberra Connect and the recent rollout of our Canberra Connect app. If any members have not yet got it working for them and running on

their smart phones, I would be happy to show them how it works. Using the fix-my-street section, you can report potholes, long grass, dumped trolleys, graffiti or trees that need to be pruned—pretty much everything you currently write to my office about.

TAMS is also currently trialling the innovative NXTBUS project. NXTBUS is a real-time passenger information system that will monitor the location of all ACTION buses during operation, allowing real-time information to be provided to passengers via digital displays located at bus stations and major bus stops, via the internet and, I think for most people's real interest, via their mobile devices. The system will provide passengers with improved options when planning their travel and is expected to increase patronage across the ACTION network. TAMS has already invested \$12.5 million in this project, and we expect it to be fully operational by the end of this year.

These are the kinds of innovations that are possible with stable and strategic investment in research and innovation. NICTA is the type of organisation that should attract stable funding as a strategic investment in our future benefit. It should concern all Canberrans that the federal government has chosen to forgo such an investment in a short-sighted round of funding cuts.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (12.03): I thank Mr Gentleman very much for bringing this motion forward today, for his ongoing interest in this area. I certainly thank him for his passion for representing his community in Tuggeranong and particularly for his very strong advocacy to bring a national broadband network to Tuggeranong. I know he is a very supportive member when it comes to promoting Canberra's ICT agenda, both in terms of our digital city agenda and also the economic development opportunities that come from further investment in ICT. I thank Mr Gentleman very much for his passion and for his commitment on this issue and for bringing the motion forward today.

I would like to spend a little time touching on the importance of technology to our city's future and the role of the government in fostering and supporting this important sector. More than ever before, technology, and in particular, information and communication technologies, are recognised as key drivers of innovation, of economic growth, of prosperity and, importantly, of social wellbeing. ICT are critical technologies. They are pervasive, embedded and ubiquitous. They have a major impact on the creation and improvement of new products and the creation of systems for services.

They have been responsible globally for the largest transformation of the world economy since the industrial revolution. An innovative and integrated ICT industry is essential to the territory's knowledge-based economy. ICT is a critical enabling technology which underpins other important industry sectors within the ACT such as defence, security, education, environment, health and even tourism. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any area of economic activity, including the role of government itself, that has not been impacted by ICT.

I am pleased that Canberra has a vibrant and thriving ICT sector and is home to a number of world-class research and innovation institutions such as NICTA, the CSIRO, our universities, a large number of multinational companies and many innovative SMEs. Canberra's reputation as a world-leading knowledge and business innovation centre is gaining momentum. We are seeing a burgeoning entrepreneurial sector in the territory with the establishment of more ICT start-ups. Spaces such as the co-working space E29 in the ANU exchange precinct position this city to become a leading city for the development and application of digital technology.

The Chief Minister acknowledges and has led the critical role of ICT industry development in the city. Certainly through her leadership she is ensuring that this government plays its part in building on this very strong base. Through the government's business development strategy and other government programs and policies we are supporting a wide range of digital initiatives, including but not limited to the digital Canberra action plan, CollabIT, the digital hub based at Gungahlin Library, the Digital Enterprise Centre, Innovation Connect, the digital Canberra challenge and, of course, our largest investment, NICTA, the national centre for research excellence in information and communications technology.

Recently, the government has engaged with the local community and local businesses to have their say on the evolution of Canberra into the world's leading digital city so that we can work together to drive improvements in productivity, connectivity, innovation and services locally using the latest thinking around digital technology. The ideas generated will inform the digital Canberra action plan, which the government will release later this year.

The government also supports the ACT CollabIT program, which is delivered in Canberra by the Australian Information Industry Association. CollabIT is about stimulating collaboration and bringing organisations involved in the ICT sector together to pursue opportunities for mutual benefit. The synergies created by these collaborative ventures greatly benefit all involved and the CollabIT program continues to deliver real outcomes for local firms.

Just last month, I launched the ACT government's digital Canberra challenge which aims to engage local innovators and SMEs in the development of new or improved digital government services to support a dynamic, healthy and prosperous digital city for the 21st century. As Mr Gentleman's motion focuses particularly on NICTA, I am pleased to be able to restate the ACT government's strong support for NICTA. We were a founding member. This Labor government in 2002 became a founding member and in July last year we entered into a new four-year \$12 million funding agreement.

The ACT Labor government joined with the New South Wales Labor government, the Victorian Labor government and the then coalition government federally in 2002 to establish NICTA. It was a coalition government that at that point in time appeared to have an interest in supporting NICTA, an interest that has now disappeared, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Doszpot: Always has and always will be.

MR BARR: That is not the case, Mr Doszpot, and you know it. NICTA is Australia's most successful ICT research centre and it is recognised internationally. The ACT government's support for NICTA is a direct investment in Canberra's innovation and economic future. It is a key element of the ACT government's vision for the ICT sector. In my view and in the view of many others, NICTA's Canberra research laboratory has been NICTA's highest performing laboratory over the last 10 years. It has engaged in challenging collaborations across the country and projects that have the potential to transform major industry sectors through advanced research and to provide Australian firms and organisations with a competitive advantage by making major productivity gains.

Locally NICTA's Canberra researchers are working with the ACT government, ACT companies and research groups at the ANU and the University of Canberra in areas such as e-government solutions, solar energy output prediction, e-health, social media monitoring, the bionic eye and public transport. Further, NICTA generates about 20 per cent of all spin-outs from Australia's research and university sector. These spin-outs contribute to Canberra's entrepreneurial environment. The most recent from NICTA Canberra was the Performance Assurance in July 2013, with another company to be spun out from Canberra later this year.

NICTA also plays an important role in skills development in the territory. NICTA Canberra is building and maintaining the professional ICT skills base in the ACT by ensuring a strong flow of highly skilled and entrepreneurial researcher and research and development professionals into industry, government and research organisations.

Nationally, NICTA graduates over one-quarter of all PhD graduates in ICT. This year NICTA Canberra has 59 PhD students working on projects. NICTA will also soon be working with the Australian Information Industry Association on the national digital careers program, which aims to build ICT participation and career interest at primary and secondary school level.

The research projects, spin-outs and skills developments demonstrate the important role that NICTA Canberra plays in the territory. An independent analysis by Deloitte estimates that two of NICTA's projects based in the ACT, as I was alluding to yesterday—ePASA and the Automap projects—will have a combined annual impact of \$354 million a year on the national economy either through cost savings or increased productivity. This same Deloitte study also estimates NICTA's economic benefit to the nation at \$2 billion per year through productivity and efficiency savings.

It is clear that NICTA is a key partner in Canberra's innovation future. Its research is improving productivity and efficiency in a number of industry sectors and contributes to important social outcomes in health and education, not just in the ACT but nationally. So the coalition's announcement just prior to the federal election that it would cut \$42 million from NICTA's funding over two years from 2014-15 will undoubtedly have a substantial impact on NICTA's capacity to continue to undertake this important research and development work.

Joe Hockey made it very clear in the document he released a few days before the federal election that the Liberal Party nationally has had a change of position on NICTA and is now withdrawing its funding. That is very disappointing. It follows a pattern that we have seen in Queensland where the Queensland government cut funding for NICTA. I am pleased at this stage that it would appear New South Wales and Victoria are maintaining their funding and I can give this commitment: the ACT government's funding will be maintained. I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion forward today.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (12.13): I am speaking to this motion because I think it is important that this Assembly highlight the prominent role of information and communications technology research in delivering better services and building more effective infrastructure for our community. The ACT government has a positive policy when it comes to innovative use of ICT to improve the delivery of services, to make communications to Canberrans more effective and to enhance infrastructure. A great example of this innovation is the way that the emergency services have dramatically improved their communication of incidents and warnings to the community and improved the flow of information within all relevant parts of the government.

The ESA website, which was developed in 2011, became the central point for the ACT government's single point of truth for information during emergencies. The single point of truth is part process and part technology. The SPOT process is a streamlined, non-bureaucratic channelling of all information during an emergency, in and out of one single point of truth. The SPOT technology architecture was designed, built and tested in-house to disseminate emergency alerts, updates and warnings to multiple platforms, including the ESA website, Twitter and Facebook accounts, RSS and GeoRSS, email and SMS distribution groups.

This allows each emergency alert, update and warning to be distributed literally at the same time, literally within seconds to multiple audiences—for example, the media, general public, Canberra Connect call centre, and ministers and senior ACT government executives. There are several components to the SPOT technology architecture. The SPOT online application is an online application that ESA duty public information coordination centre officers use to write and send out emergency alerts, updates and warnings to multiple platforms at the push of a button.

The full text of each message is published on the ESA website homepage within seconds of the send button being hit. The message title is simultaneously published to the ESA Twitter and Facebook accounts with hyperlinks back to the full message on the ESA website.

The full message text is also sent to email and SMS recipients. The SPOT app has gained national and international interest from the emergency services and wider government sector. The SPOT app was also awarded the overall top national prize in the Resilient Australia Awards in December 2012, equivalent to the Gold Logies. It cost \$500,000 to develop plus ongoing charges. The SPOT online application backup is exactly the same as the main app but is replicated on completely separate infrastructure for redundancy purposes.

The ESA website that I was talking about, which is the third component of the SPOT technology architecture, was developed in 2011 as the ACT government single point of truth for information during emergencies. This site was developed using open source software and features all emergency alerts, updates and warnings on the homepage, a live current incidents feed overlaid on the top of a Google map, a fire danger meter, and a range of preparedness information and general advice.

The ESA website has recorded almost 1.5 million unique visits and almost three million page views since it went live in September 2011. During this time around half of the visits have come from people directly typing esa.act.gov.au into their browser. Massive spikes have been recorded during major emergency situations. 150,000 unique visits were recorded in less than 24 hours during the elevated fire danger conditions in January 2013.

Another way that our government supports innovation in ICT is through our support of National ICT Australia or NICTA. As my colleagues have noted, National ICT Australia is the country's information communications technology research centre of excellence. It is Australia's largest organisation dedicated to ICT research. Based here in Canberra, NICTA was developed in partnership between the commonwealth government, a number of state and territory governments, including the ACT government, and some of Australia's leading universities.

Another example of the work that NICTA has done in collaboration with the ACT government was in the development of the mobile Canberra app, which Mr Rattenbury has already referred to. The mobile Canberra app provides mobile access to government data such as car parks, parks and playgrounds, public toilets and bus stops. This innovative program is, in some ways, an experiment into the best ways that government can provide information to its citizens. I doubt whether applications such as mobile Canberra would have been developed without partnering with an organisation such as NICTA.

I know that in my community where I live, the electorate of Ginninderra, I encourage people to use the app. I have had very positive feedback from people who live in my community and, indeed, across Canberra when they have accessed the app on their phone and have been able to log where they have found a crack in their footpath or where there is a tree that has been in need of watering or care. They have had an instant response as a result of logging that through the app. They receive an email telling them that their issue has been received and will be addressed.

That is one of the ways that NICTA has supported the ACT community. It is more than just developing an app; it is actually making a difference to people's lives because it is not something that they have to dwell on forever. They can actually do something about it by going to the app.

NICTA as an educational institution also stands as an inspiration to young people who are considering studies in IT. As has been pointed out to me and my colleagues Ms Porter and Dr Bourke, Hawker College in our electorate strongly invests in ICT courses. In recent years they have benefited from a donation from an alumnus who,

maybe taking some inspiration from NICTA, understands the important role that ICT skills are playing in transforming how our society works.

I am concerned for all of the reasons that I have mentioned that the incoming commonwealth government plans to cut millions of dollars out of the funding of NICTA. This is worrying because it tells me that they do not see the benefits that come to the government and for all of our community here in Canberra from ICT innovation in improving the delivery of services, to make communications to citizens more effective and to enhance infrastructure. I commend Mr Gentleman's motion to the Assembly.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (12.22): This motion is important, very important, not just to the future of—

Mr Doszpot: It is, Chris. I agree with you. For the first time I agree with you.

DR BOURKE: I am sure there must have been other times when you have agreed with me, Steve.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot and Dr Bourke, please address your comments through the chair.

DR BOURKE: Madam Deputy Speaker, this motion is important, very important, not just to the future of Canberra and NICTA—Australia's Information Communications Technology Research Centre of Excellence. I know, from the new federal government's pre-election Canberra bashing, that it cares nothing for the fate of this city or pulling resources to the tune of \$42 million from NICTA, affecting enterprises and researchers based here but serving the nation.

This motion is important because it is about Australia's future as a leading, sophisticated, First World economy, relying on the innovation, intelligence and industriousness of Australians. Our national economy is a diverse mix of industries—agriculture, mining, manufacturing, services, education and more. We are blessed with abundant land to farm and resources to exploit, but more and more our advantage, in all our industries, is our skilled workforce, our knowledge base and our advanced technology developed with assistance from NICTA.

Ending or ignoring the needed investment in advanced technology targeted at Australian industry is short-sighted. Just as Australia's economy once rode on the sheep's back, until markets changed, the coalition short-sightedly believes our economy will ride forever on the back of a Haulpak truck carting ore for China.

Again, markets change. Markets and demands for what we have are hard to predict. About the only things we can be sure of is that the future involves information and communications technology, and the technology our industries rely on is constantly advancing in many directions. Unless we continue to support research and development through NICTA, staying at the forefront of advances and spinning them into new industries, we will be condemned to being followers in technology, not leaders. I want our future to be as ICT producers, not consumers; producers, not

consumers. We should be supporting NICTA and backing our best minds to create new opportunities for Australian industry, not just buying old technology from overseas.

The federal Liberals, in their desperation to find “cuts, cuts, cuts”, might dismiss the \$42 million for NICTA as going to lab-coated pointy heads in ivory towers. This is completely wrong. NICTA states that it focuses on wealth creation opportunities that draw on and exploit its areas of research excellence. These take the form of funded industry partnerships, start-up companies or research outcomes which have major social impacts. NICTA’s four business teams drive commercial outcomes in these recognised domains for ICT, broadband and the digital economy, health, infrastructure, transport and logistics, security and environment.

NICTA seems entirely switched on to the markets, business and the opportunities to grow our economy. This is in contrast to the scientific dark ages the coalition seems to want to usher in. The Liberals might not be greatly concerned about what a Labor politician says about them. But what are the Liberals saying about cuts to NICTA and the Liberals’ priorities when it comes to science? Firstly, we know that Mr Smyth believes NICTA is doing a good job. He said so in the Assembly.

Here is what a re-elected federal Liberal MP with a PhD in materials science and physics and who was a research scientist at the CSIRO before entering parliament had to say about the incoming Liberal government’s attitude to science. Dr Jensen, the member for the Western Australian seat of Tangney, told the ABC, “I mean, we’ve got a minister for sport for God’s sake, but we don’t have a minister for Science.”

Now, the new Prime Minister said, “Happy the country which is more interested in sport than in politics.” This is somewhat ironic given he has spent the last three years ramming politics down our throats. Like Dr Jensen, he has also spent that time ignoring climate science. Happy we may be following sport but it only pays the bills for a few.

We need the vision of and investment in science and ICT through NICTA to build and maintain our economic future. I am proud that the ACT government is backing innovation in ICT throughout the services we deliver and in the ACT community. In this centenary year our government is asking Canberrans to imagine our digital future through the digital Canberra initiative. The ACT government will work in partnership with businesses and the community to build on our expertise and opportunities in the digital economy. We can become a world-leading digital city. Already 10 per cent of our workforce are in the vibrant local ICT sector.

Just a few of the local NICTA projects supporting this vitality are NICTA’s ehealth living laboratory, currently being built at the University of Canberra, which will have exciting benefits for the people of Canberra. The lab is developing technology and business processes to enable healthcare providers to deliver more and better accessible services, open new opportunities for businesses and promote future models of health care through mobile technologies.

A key focus for NICTA in Canberra is e-government. The Australian e-government cluster, a combined initiative of the ACT government and NICTA, together with support from the Canberra Business Council and local industry, promotes collaboration between government, industry and research in finding ICT solutions to complex government problems.

NICTA's Canberra laboratory is teaming up with solar energy experts from the ANU, ActewAGL and local ACT companies Armada Solar and LAROS Technologies to develop ways of predicting the expected power output from rooftop solar energy systems.

Canberra researchers are developing advanced technology to improve the efficiency of off-peak public transport in the ACT with the potential of a dial a ride-type service being offered in the off-peak period. This could have the potential to save millions of dollars in direct costs, as well as reduce carbon emissions. The system could also be helpful to transport disabled, frail and aged persons.

The Canberra-based spectroscopy scheme is exploring ways to help speed up the quarantine process for plant inspection without compromising outcomes by developing new image processing techniques to identify unique plant types, diseases and pests. Last but not least, NICTA's Canberra researchers are playing an integral part in the development of the first Australian bionic eye through computer vision processing. This project has the potential to replicate the success achieved by the bionic ear.

What Canberra and Australia needs is for the new federal government to also embrace the digital future of Australia and the digital future of our economy. The federal government cannot do that by cutting funding to NICTA, by cutting its visionary and innovative programs that are targeted with a hard-edged business focus. That is small government, small vision and short-sighted government at its worst. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.31 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice Canberra Hospital—emergency categories

MR HANSON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, can you inform the Assembly whether the Canberra Hospital has declared any emergencies known as code yellow or bypass, or other emergency categories, during the Canberra winter?

MS GALLAGHER: They will definitely call different codes throughout the Canberra winter. There is a range of different operational codes that are used from time to time. For example, when the hospital emergency department gets very full and the hospital is full, there are a variety of different responses. They are largely operational, but they certainly will have been used during the winter.

I will have to go and check around bypass. I have not seen any reports of bypass being used specifically, although again it is used from time to time for operational reasons when either Calvary or Canberra emergency departments, for one reason or another, need to go on bypass.

Because there are so many different codes, I would need to go back and, over a three-month period, have a look at those different arrangements that are put in place.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Thanks, minister. When you do so, could you clarify if any patients have been turned away from Canberra Hospital or referred to other health facilities as a consequence of any such emergencies?

MS GALLAGHER: Patients will be referred to other health services from time to time. I am not sure that it would be worth the—

Mr Hanson: As a result of the emergencies.

MS GALLAGHER: As a result of different codes. I can say that no person who needed attention at a hospital would have been turned away due to a code, even on bypass. All bypass stands for is that ambulances will be redirected to the hospital that is not on bypass. It does not actually turn away individual patients. I will certainly check the record, but it would be very, very unusual for hospitals to turn people away if they were requiring hospital treatment.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, what are the risks to the Canberra community if these events do occur or have occurred?

MS GALLAGHER: It is a bit hypothetical, in the sense that I am not sure what events we are talking about. There are different codes put in place for different reasons across the hospital. It is usually the way of alerting hospital staff that there may be a problem. In the sense that you are raising it today, it is around capacity issues. Those are managed, as they should be, on an hour-by-hour basis by the hospital. They do that very well. The hospital staff do that very well.

But the hospital has been incredibly busy. As to its occupancy rate, the last figure I saw yesterday was that Canberra Hospital has been operating at 96 per cent capacity through the winter period. So we have been experiencing very high demands for services.

If you were in Victoria, of course, they would welcome that because I think they have to operate their beds at 95 per cent occupancy under activity-based funding. That is how they ensure funding efficiencies. But we have set ourselves a lower target here, and the hospital is operating above that, based on the nature of a very busy winter period.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Are there long-term plans to reduce such events in the future?

MS GALLAGHER: All of the planning around ensuring appropriate access to the hospital is done. But having said that, find me a hospital in the world that does not have periods of capacity constraint that has to be managed through operational responses. It is just the nature of hospitals. For example, the food poisoning outbreak presented a particular challenge. That was called a code brown, actually, under the different Health emergency management responses.

So there will be times when hospitals experience capacity constraints and no matter what planning you do around that, it does not stop the number of patients coming through the door. The hospital's challenge is to manage that on an hour-by-hour basis. I would say that we are very well served by both Calvary and Canberra and the dedication of staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week to manage these issues when they arise.

There are different responses. I know that in the winter there was a period when both hospitals were struggling for bed capacity. So a process went through around looking at discharge, looking at ramping up hospital in the home, looking at presentations through the emergency department and even on a couple of days looking at the elective surgery load in order to manage the presentations that were coming through. This is not peculiar to Canberra. It happens at every single hospital.

Education—preschools

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Minister, ACT Labor made an election commitment of \$400,000 over four years for a preschool matters program, with \$100,000 to be spent in 2013-14. The budget has an allocation of only \$45,000 this financial year, and the program has been reduced to \$318,000 over the four years. Exactly what will the \$45,000 be spent on?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Doszpot for his interest. The moneys will be spent on a number of things. It is about supporting the ongoing grant we provide to the preschool association. Not every activity we do around preschools and supporting enrolments in preschools and informing families about the importance of those early years is an individual budget line, and a number of those activities will be absorbed within the Education and Training Directorate. But there is work about informing parents about the importance of early years, about the enrolment process and about what schools are within area for families. It is also about recognising the national quality framework and, indeed, how we on this side of the room fully support the importance of early years.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: That is very good to hear, Ms Burch. What consultations were held with the Canberra Preschool Society on involvement with this program—as I

understand it, brochures were part of it and some of the other things you mentioned—given the society currently delivers these services, and at a considerably cheaper cost?

MS BURCH: I think the question is: what consultation was with the Preschool Society. The Education and Training Directorate talk regularly with the Preschool Society. We will utilise them where it is appropriate to do so, but we will also utilise our own internal networks and communications where it is appropriate to do so.

MR GENTLEMAN: Supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how important is it to support early learning in preschool?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his interest in preschool and early years education. We have always been very strongly committed to recognising the value of early education, not only in long day care but also in family day care and particularly in our preschool environment. We have supported the training and supported the professionalisation of that sector as well through CIT training, not only through certificate III but through a diploma in early education and care.

Recognising that, I think it is disappointing that the new incoming federal government is looking to unpack the work of the national quality framework and appears to have little regard for the importance of those early years, and indeed little regard for the early education workforce and the significant work that was undertaken through the big steps campaign to make sure that this workforce, which does an incredibly important job for our community, makes sure that our little ones get the best start to life—because we know that a good start to life will set them up for workforce participation and other opportunities in the years ahead.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, when will a preschool matters centralised online information resource be established, as per the election commitment?

MS BURCH: I refer you to the My School website that has a lot of information, and the Education and Training Directorate will particularly focus on early education given that the early education care, or the CPRU, has been transferred over to that directorate. Over time there will increasingly be a more centralised approach to this, but that information already exists. We produce a booklet now on children's services that covers the breadth of opportunities for families in children services in the ACT. We currently do that.

Higher education—study Canberra initiative

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Higher Education. Chief Minister, in your role as Minister for Higher Education can you outline to the Assembly the importance of the government's study Canberra initiative and how your recent visit to China will help deliver the government's higher education objectives?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for the question. The recent study delegation to China was a great opportunity to travel with the vice-chancellors of both ANU and UC and hear firsthand from partner universities, alumni, business leaders and also education agents about their views of Canberra and ideas on how to support further growth in our higher education sector.

As well as visits to universities in Beijing and Shanghai, the delegation also visited the Huawei Technologies research facility. I met with Zhenfa, a Chinese company involved with the solar farm at Mugga Lane, and also the mayor of Beijing.

I would like to thank all of our Chinese hosts for their warm hospitality and many productive meetings which highlighted opportunities for us to build on existing education and business links.

Our delegation was a show of unity from the ACT community, both government and universities working together to cement Canberra's place as a learning capital. Our partnership in this goal is the founding principle of study Canberra and through this collaboration we will continue to promote Canberra with a strong and coordinated campaign.

The China visit was an opportunity for me as Chief Minister and Minister for Higher Education to promote the city overseas and show our strong commitment to growing our international student market, the unique experience Canberra offers for studying and living, the significance of the higher education sector to our city and new possibilities as part of our relationship with our sister city Beijing, which has been in operation now for over 12 years. It was also an opportunity to spread the word that Canberra is a place where people come to learn, to exchange ideas, to invest, to undertake research and to discover solutions and reach their potential.

Through study Canberra we have taken an important step in sharing this message abroad, and it has resulted in a number of outcomes and also future opportunities—certainly strengthening the relationship and development of new initiatives between the ACT's two main universities and universities in Beijing and Shanghai, exploring possible partnerships between universities and our school system, a new undergraduate work experience program and academic exchange program with Huawei Technologies in Shanghai for local students and academics—giving them exposure to one of the largest research and development companies in the world—renewal of our sister city relationship with Beijing, including opportunities to strengthen ties in the fields of business, culture, education, recreation and sport, and strengthening of strategic relationships with businesses in China such as the Zhenfa New Energy Group.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Chief Minister, what were the key messages that you took away from your meetings with Beijing universities, particularly in terms of promoting and further developing Canberra as the first-choice destination for study?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for her supplementary. The two areas where study Canberra will play a significant role are in raising the destination awareness of Canberra as an education city and in improving the student experience of living and studying in Canberra. For the people I met who knew about or had studied in Canberra, their views were very positive about the experience. Our campaign of destination awareness will target those who do not know about Canberra and the unique experience of living and studying here. The trip certainly highlighted the need to raise awareness of Canberra in China and to promote the many features the city has to offer.

Alongside this campaign, we will need to continue to work on making the Canberra study experience one of the world's best in setting ourselves apart from other cities. This can occur in a number of areas, as was suggested to me on the trip, including looking at how we could provide work experience or internship arrangements for students—and one of the things that are very important to Chinese parents is the fact that their children will be employable following study—looking at accommodation and home-stay arrangements which are very popular with Chinese families and also looking at, in terms of the links from school education to university, whether there is an opportunity to provide international students who are attending our higher school system the opportunity of a guaranteed entrance into university should they meet certain entrance criteria. Again, that is very popular in a country where there are often six adults supporting one child, and one of their top focuses or top priorities is ensuring that their children get a first-class and a world-class education, which they are certainly able to do in Canberra.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Chief Minister, with the prospect of significant job losses in the federal public service—

MADAM SPEAKER: Preamble.

DR BOURKE: how important are the plans—

MADAM SPEAKER: Preamble, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Chief Minister, how important are the plans by our major universities in growing the international student market?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Dr Bourke for the question. Growing the international student market is a key priority for the ACT government. We announced it as part of our agenda in the election campaign but it also forms part of the work that has been done around and through economic diversification. The ACT currently has approximately 9,000 international students studying at our universities. We also have an additional 1,000 or so international students studying at our VET institution and around 470 within our high school and college school system.

According to our latest state of the cities report, each international student is estimated to contribute an average of \$42,500 per annum to the Australian economy. So we do know that it makes sense to be looking at ways that we can support the growth of the higher education sector of our economy and both universities—certainly the ANU and the UC, which were the universities I travelled with on this delegation—are very keen to do so.

One of the other things I would say, though, in terms of my trip to China is that there is a growing expectation in the Asian century that students in Australia would also avail themselves of the opportunity to be educated in China. Certainly the flow of students at the moment is much greater in terms of Chinese students coming to Australia rather than Australian students going to China. I think that will change over time as Australians and Australian families understand the importance of engaging positively with China and the rest of Asia as they go through their transformative processes.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how does our sister city relationship with Beijing help us grow our higher education sector in attracting more international students from China and in promoting Canberra as a visitor destination?

MS GALLAGHER: As the Chief Minister with an existing sister city relationship with Beijing, which I am very happy to respect and uphold on behalf of the people of Canberra, I was able during my visit to meet with the mayor of the people's government of the Beijing municipality. It was an opportunity to discuss using the sister city relationship as vehicle for raising the destination awareness of Canberra as an educational capital amongst students in Beijing. At the meeting we discussed the mutual benefits in extending international education relationships and academic and business exchanges, also strengthening cultural networks between Canberra and Beijing and increasing our bilateral investment.

A documentary being made by our local company Bearcage, *The City of Emperors and the Bush Capital*, will show that, despite the vastly different sizes of the cities, there are many similarities. Indeed, over lunch with the mayor of Beijing, the issue of air quality was probably the only one where there were not huge similarities in the demand pressures that are being placed on our cities, despite the incredibly different scale of the population.

I think the meeting went very well. I think, overall, the trip went very well. I hope it delivers results for the ACT, certainly in terms of the work that we put in and the unified position that the delegation took at all of the meetings. I am sure it will pay off well for the people of Canberra.

Housing—students

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Higher Education. Minister, in June this year, organisations such as ACT Shelter were noting:

We've heard from a few sources there are students, mostly international students, who are sleeping around campuses at the universities in the 24-hour areas, like the computer labs and the libraries ...

That was quoted in the *Canberra Times* on 4 June this year. And a survey by Anglicare found:

... 87 per cent of students living independently in Canberra are suffering housing stress, while almost one quarter have experienced some level of homelessness.

Again that was quoted in the *Canberra Times*, on 24 June this year.

Minister, why are 87 per cent of students living independently suffering housing stress?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. Student accommodation, and ensuring that there is an appropriate supply, is incredibly important in the area of higher education. In fact, both universities, ANU and UC, are at the point now where they are offering an accommodation guarantee for students to come and study because of the working partnerships that the ACT government has developed with them—for example, all of the student accommodation in City West and the work that the University of Canberra have been doing on their different developments. They have a number on their campus and off their campus in Belconnen near the Belconnen mall that the ACT government has worked with them on.

We do not stand here and pretend that there may not be issues for students in affordability of housing. I remember being a student in this town myself, and I bet you that I qualified as someone under housing stress at that time. I would be surprised if there were many students living independently in any city who would not be doing it tough, because that is the nature of being a student.

I am not dismissing it and I am not saying that there is an easy solution to make sure that everyone lives comfortably or without housing stress when they are a student, but I would say that the programs we have been putting in place have paid off, to the point now where accommodation guarantees are being offered for students to come and study in Canberra. That is a good place to be.

I will also say that some of the measures that we have been putting in place through our own tax reform efforts are also encouraging a supply of affordable rental stock. We are already seeing that, Mr Coe. You can laugh your head off but the fact that we are seeing improvements in the vacancy rate and the availability of tenancies—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: You only have to drive around this city and you will see, for the first time in many years, signs up saying “For lease”, for different properties. Progress is being made. It is not the answer to everything. We will continue to work with all of the non-government sector and the universities to make sure that we stay on top of the pressures around student accommodation.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why have nearly a quarter of students living independently experienced some level of homelessness as recently as three months ago, according to the Anglicare report?

MS GALLAGHER: Again, I am not sure I can answer why that would be the case. The focus of the government is on making sure that, where we can provide support for student accommodation and greater accommodation, and the availability of more affordable housing, we are doing that. And that is what we are doing. We have been clear about that now for several years.

The affordable housing action plan set the priorities, and we have been demonstrating that through the partnerships that we have with the universities. And we are making good progress. But that is not to say that we will be able to alleviate some of the pressures students operate under right across Canberra. I think there has to be some acknowledgement that we are much better placed now than we have been in previous years.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what concerns have been raised with you about housing stress faced by local, interstate and overseas students? What action have you taken to ascertain what was said in the report by Anglicare about homelessness among overseas students?

MS GALLAGHER: I would have to check my records but I certainly do not recall—I may have received a letter—any specific approach about housing stress for students. I have certainly met with the non-government sector in my role as Chief Minister where housing affordability as a general issue comes up. But I do not recall it being specifically raised with me.

Again, in terms of my role as Minister for Higher Education, I have convened the vice-chancellors group, which is composed of the vice-chancellors of all the universities represented in this town. We talk about the priorities for encouraging and supporting students to study in this town. Again, I think housing affordability comes up as a general issue. But the government has a proven track record of working with the universities to assist them to solve some of those pressures and we will continue to do so.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: What impact are the current problems with student accommodation having on our ability to attract students from elsewhere, and since the publication of the comments from ACT Shelter and the survey from Anglicare, what action have you taken to address the issues raised?

MS GALLAGHER: I think I have answered that question in the previous supplementary, because it is really the same question asked another way. Where we can, we will continue to work with universities, whether that be giving them a line of credit or through a land and deed agreement reached between the government and the universities. We will work with them around ensuring an appropriate supply of student accommodation for their students.

Mr Smyth: So you haven't done anything since the survey?

MS GALLAGHER: The vice-chancellors are not raising it as an issue for me that student accommodation is so hard that it is affecting their ability to attract students. The issue of housing affordability more generally in Canberra certainly has been raised from time to time, but it is not the top issue that the vice-chancellors are raising with me.

MR SMYTH: So you haven't spoken to Anglicare?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not think I have specifically spoken with Anglicare. I see them at different functions from time to time, but I have not had a specific request from them around this matter either.

Crime—car tyre slashing

MRS JONES: My question is to the minister for police. Minister, for well over a decade a 'tyre slasher' has roamed Narrabundah and Griffith slashing car tyres of vehicles parked on the streets and driveways during the night, causing many, many thousands of dollars worth of damage. Minister, what has been done to stop this longstanding criminal behaviour and nuisance?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Jones for the question. I agree that this behaviour purportedly by one individual is a real menace and has a detrimental impact on people's lives and property. Police do undertake detailed investigations into each report arising from the activities of this apparent individual, although that cannot be certain. Regrettably, police have not been able to find the identity of this individual to date. I know that police continue to work on this matter and I would be very happy to provide a briefing to Mrs Jones from the police, if that would be of further assistance to her.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES: Yes. Thank you, minister. Minister, given the fear and apprehension good people in Narrabundah and Griffith live with, with their property—

MADAM SPEAKER: Preamble, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Sorry. What actions have been taken to find and apprehend the perpetrators of these crimes? Have there been ops to observe or seek out the tyre slasher?

MR CORBELL: The police deploy all reasonable investigative methodologies to try and ascertain the identity of the individual. I think one of the difficulties police face is that no-one has ever actually been able to identify the individual or provide any witness statements to the acts. Therefore, it is very difficult, but I know police continue to work to try and address these unsolved crimes.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, how should the public report suspicious behaviour they may observe or if they have any concerns about behaviour that has been reported to them?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for the supplementary. Members of the public do have a range of avenues open to them if they suspect or see any suspicious activity or wish to report any particular matters to police. Obviously they can contact police directly if it is a non-emergency situation, using the 131 number. Alternatively, if they suspect, know or have some information that they believe would be of benefit to police in apprehending a person who may have committed a crime, that information can also be provided anonymously via Crime Stoppers.

Certainly in relation to the incidents that Mrs Jones asked me about in her earlier question, I would say that if members of the public do have information and they do not wish to have their own identity revealed, they can report that information anonymously via Crime Stoppers.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what resources have been allocated to apprehend the perpetrator?

MR CORBELL: Appropriate resources, Madam Speaker.

Planning—land banking

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Minister for Planning. At an industry body event in June last year, the Treasurer promised that he would abolish commence and completion fees and fines. Minister, what is your position on this and what consultation have you had with the Treasurer over the matter?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mr Smyth for the question. Of course, there has been consultation within the government in relation to that matter and a range of steps have been taken to alleviate some elements that the government agrees are of concern in relation to commence and complete fees. As a result of that, the government has changed the structure that applies in relation to commence and complete fees.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: The allegation was that they are there to stop commercial land banking—

MADAM SPEAKER: Preamble, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what evidence has the government of commercial land banking in the ACT?

MR CORBELL: There are a number of instances around the city centre where we see commercial land that has been purchased from the government not being developed. Those sites are well known. For example, there is a very large site off London Circuit adjacent to Edinburgh Avenue.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, given that you said land banking is taking place, what impact are the commence and complete fees having?

MR CORBELL: Commence and complete fees are having an impact in encouraging developers to develop their land in a timely manner. The government receives many complaints from members of the community who are concerned about undeveloped land. Indeed, we have, of course, had a number of instances where members of the opposition have raised concerns about undeveloped residential land in Gungahlin. Mrs Jones has been one of those members. The existence of commence and complete fees acts as a spur to those property owners to realise that they need to develop their land. It is not fair for everyone else in the suburb to do the hard work financially and physically of developing land in a new suburb only to have a block opposite sit vacant because the person, for whatever reason, is not willing to develop their site. It has an impact on the rest of the neighbourhood amenity in those new suburbs, and it is the subject of regular complaint to the government.

The provision of commence and complete fees in those circumstances acts as an incentive by signalling that there is a financial disadvantage to a leaseholder if they fail to complete or commence development on their land in the time frames set out in their lease.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, when the Treasurer made his comments last year, was he speaking on behalf of the government or was he simply wrong?

Mr Corbell: I do not know whether I can answer a question for the Treasurer.

MR BARR: I will answer the question, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Okay.

MR BARR: I was at that particular event and made a commitment in relation to changes to commence and complete fees that was enacted.

Business—export market

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Economic Development. Can the Minister for Economic Development inform the Assembly what activities the ACT government has undertaken to promote exports and investments since the launch of the ACT business development strategy in 2012?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Berry for the question and for her ongoing interest in jobs in the ACT economy. The ACT government is taking a strong and proactive role in promoting exports, investment and jobs in our economy. It is worth noting why it is that exports and investment are so important to our economy. It is quite simply that for this economy and for a city of this size to grow, we must be outward looking. Relying on a market of 380,000 people is not enough in a modern, globalised world.

We must look to our region, the rest of Australia and the rest of the world for our ongoing prosperity, jobs in our community and ongoing economic growth. That is why the business development strategy that I launched last year contains numerous initiatives and programs to help local firms to begin, to boost their exporting efforts and to encourage firms and organisations from outside our city to invest in Canberra.

The good news is that the ACT business community is becoming more export focused. I am pleased to report to the Assembly that the value of goods and services exports from the ACT increased by 9.4 per cent in the 2011-12 fiscal year to \$1.3 billion. This growth rate of 9.4 per cent was well above the national average of 6.3 per cent. I note that it was well above the national average during a mining boom. So it is an excellent effort from the ACT business community.

The ACT had the country's highest year-on-year growth rate in 2011-12 and the five-year trend growth rate in ACT exports is 6.8 per cent. Through the business development strategy, the government is doing everything it can to ensure that this growth continues. The two key elements of this strategy are Global Connect and InvestACT. The government committed funding in last year's budget for Global Connect, which consists of a range of programs to raise awareness among territory businesses about exporting opportunities, to promote collaboration amongst local exporters and to increase the number of local exporters to help them engage in new markets.

Global Connect provides a single interface for various trade development-related activities, including Trade Connect, which is a competitive grants program that provides funding to emerging exporters. Twenty-nine businesses received Trade Connect funding in the 2012-13 fiscal year. A trade mission program has been developed in the outyears providing opportunities for exporters in new markets.

The Centre for Exporting Government Solutions program was launched in March this year. The ACT Exporters Network, which is a collaborative group of ACT region exporters who provide leadership and share practical exporting advice, has been supported. The Chief Minister hosts annual export awards, which will be presented next week. And we have the ACT international student ambassador program.

Meanwhile, InvestACT has been established to promote business and investment opportunities in the region to overseas investors. InvestACT is developing an ACT investment strategy that will guide our approach to investment promotion, building upon evidence of what works in similar cities to Canberra around the world.

InvestACT is developing a web presence and marketing material to raise awareness of Canberra's value proposition and to increase the invest in Canberra message. To highlight a practical example of InvestACT's role, it played a key role in facilitating interest in auctions for solar facilities in the territory. These facilities will foster new investment and new jobs in a burgeoning industry for our community.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, are the trade and investment promotion activities in the business development strategy helping to diversify and grow the ACT economy?

MR BARR: Yes, they are. The government's work to support exports and investments is creating new jobs and diversifying our economy. Global Connect and InvestACT are delivering on their objectives of creating new jobs and diversifying the territory economy.

To highlight just a few examples of the significant successes over the last 12 months: Aspen Medical, whose revenue has grown from \$32 million to \$95 million over 2012. Seeing Machines, which emerged from the ANU research and development area, signed a significant strategic agreement with Caterpillar Global Mining for its in-cab fatigue monitoring systems. Bearcage Productions—as the Chief Minister mentioned earlier in question time—has signed the first ever formal co-production agreement for a documentary television series between Australia and China Central Television. Datapod has exported its innovative data units to Papua New Guinea and Sweden during the 2012-13 fiscal year.

These are just a few examples of the excellent work that is occurring across the ACT economy. It is a more diverse economy than it was in 1996 and more resilient to the threats that come down the pipeline from a federal Liberal government.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, are there any other components of the business development strategy that are helping to promote exports and investments in the ACT?

MR BARR: The business development strategy, indeed, contains numerous policies and programs to support exports and investment. Study Canberra, which the Chief Minister talked about in question time today, is just one of these initiatives. The ACT government's \$2.4 million investment in study Canberra recognises the importance of education exports in helping our local universities to attract more students to the territory. The education sector has played a major role in the growth of ACT exports, and the government is committed to working with the sector to achieve further growth.

The government has also raised the payroll tax threshold to \$1.75 million. This is the highest threshold in the nation, and we are the lowest taxing jurisdiction for small and medium sized businesses in this country. We will progressively raise the threshold to \$2 million over the course of this parliamentary term to further remove 80 businesses from paying any payroll tax at all.

The government is developing a new brand Canberra to create a platform for people to better understand and engage with Canberra as a place to live, work, invest or visit. It will have a particular focus on tourism.

It is disappointing that, for the first time since 1966, there is no federal minister for tourism in the new federal government. The portfolio has been split in half, into international and domestic components, and sits across two different ministers. And there is no minister in the new commonwealth government who holds the title of minister for tourism. Tourism has lost its focus as a result of these changes. It will be to the detriment of the industry nationally and internationally, and it is a retrograde step to not have a tourism minister in the federal government.

MR SMYTH: Supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, if all is as well as you say, why did the CIE report to the budget say that jobs were at risk in the ACT due to a lack of diversification in the ACT economy?

MR BARR: Because the incoming federal government has a plan to slash 12,000 jobs. That is why jobs are at risk. Jobs have been growing at an above national average rate. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the country. The only risk to that—the only risk—is the decision of the Liberal Party to send this economy into reverse as a result of their policies to cut jobs, to cut funding to NICTA, to cut funding to those areas that will contribute to jobs growth.

The shadow Treasurer may not like to hear it, but his party is the only party and the only group of people responsible for reducing employment in this city. The Liberal Party stands condemned for cutting jobs in this city. They are responsible for the downturn in employment and the downturn in our economy, and they stand condemned for that. They will hear about this time and time again. The hypocrisy of the shadow Treasurer is there for all to see and we are seeing it here. He will be reminded of this time and time again. The Liberal Party are cutting jobs in this city.

Disability services—respite care

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Young People. Minister on 12 September you released a media statement outlining changes to ACT respite services. Some of these changes include the closure of the government run respite house Elouera. When were families who use this facility first informed of the closure?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Wall for his question. They were informed, it is my understanding, on the 12th. I know contact was made on the 12th. Over 60 families were contacted on the Thursday, and the remaining client base we were aware of were contacted on the Friday. So it is my understanding that staff from Disability ACT have made contact with those families by phone, and that has been followed up by a letter. We have put information out through the Disability ACT website and we have also put information out to the staff that provide services to the broad range of respite services.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, will you be taking up Mike Welsh's invitation to host a function for you to personally meet with families and consult with them firsthand on the impact that this closure will have?

MS BURCH: I will say to you, as I said to Mr Welsh, that any one of these clients is more than welcome to come to me and I will meet with them and listen to their concerns. The decision has been made about the closure. We have already put back the closure of Elouera by one week to accommodate a booking that was put into there. We have been very clear from the outset that we will now work over the next six months with the users of the service about what is the implementation, how can they be involved, and I have been very clear that I want the clients of these services—

Mr Smyth interjecting—

MS BURCH: This is about the broader change to move to community providers across the respite services. I am very clear that I do want the client base to have a role and a say about what that implementation looks like.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what is stopping you from taking initiative for personal communication with these people, and will you now take any personal action with those who are affected by this closure?

MS BURCH: I do not know if Mr Doszpot has any idea really what he is saying. Is he saying I should personally get on the phone and ring 150 people? It is just a nonsense. As I have replied to Mr Wall—

Mr Doszpot: It's called a meeting with some of the people who are disaffected, Ms Burch. That's what it means.

MS BURCH: If you could stop interjecting, as I have said to Mr Wall and to anyone, if anyone has a concern with this, I am more than happy to meet with them and talk it through. The decision to close one of the adult services has been made, but there is a bigger picture ahead about the transfer of the service provision of that to community providers.

I remind people of those community providers that we have in town. I think it is very wrong to infer that because the service will go to the private sector the quality will be poor. These are the community providers that are providing services now: Marymead, Hartley and Tandem. If anyone can stand in this place to say those services do not do well by our community, then I ask them to do that. I think you will find that flies in the face of the respect and regard those services have in this community.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how important is it to support and help innovate respite services across the territory?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his question. It is indeed important that we make sure that, as we transition to DisabilityCare, which is about choice and control for people with a disability in Canberra, we look to how those services are provided. I stood here yesterday and provided an update. It must be understood that service provision in this community between now and full rollout in 2019 will look different. It is rather naive to say that it will not look different from what it is now. That is over six years. Are you itchy there, Mr Doszpot?

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, Minister Burch! You will address the chair, not Mr Doszpot.

MS BURCH: It is a little game being played over there.

MADAM SPEAKER: It does not matter whether there is a little game being played or not. You address the chair, not Mr Doszpot.

MS BURCH: Through you, then, Madam Chair, I just hope that his itchy ears settle down. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr Doszpot interjecting—

MS BURCH: I will go back to Mr Gentleman's question and say that it is important that we prepare for the change. As I have said, if we can stand here and say that there will not be changes to any service provision over the next six years, that is quite naive. I have made the decision, through Disability ACT, that we will close one of those adult respite units. That is a sound decision and it reflects the declining use of those services. We have also said that we will work with the community about what that transition and implementation will look like.

We have also made a commitment in the most recent budget to look at some renovation and reconfiguration of the respite centres. I think I have said through estimates that I have an interest in focusing on Kese in the first instance, because those that have been to Kese would understand that it is certainly not purpose built. I think that we as a community can offer better to our kids in respite.

That is part of the package of reform that has started now through respite services.

Environment—conservation

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, it is well known that Canberrans are passionate about their environment. Can you advise the Assembly as to some of the ways the government supports this grassroots enthusiasm for environmental protection?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for the question. The ACT government has been providing financial assistance for community-based environmental projects every year since 1997. As we move into our second century, the government will continue to provide support to all those wonderful volunteers in our community who do an enormous body of work to help maintain, protect and restore the territory's natural environment.

This year around \$170,000 worth of grants has been allocated to community groups that help protect our environment, and each project has an upper limit of funding of approximately \$50,000. Since I have become minister I have given priority to projects that support strong, on-the-ground outcomes in environmental conservation, as well as stimulating on-ground works or actions and engaging the community in developing issues and solutions.

Earlier this month I announced \$176,000 in grants to six successful applicants, allowing six important, on-the-ground projects to proceed. Amongst the recipients this year were Greening Australia Capital Region for a project which involves a world first in relocation of the endangered plant the Ginninderra peppercress, to prevent its extinction and increase its population in the Canberra environment. Greening Australia were also successful in gaining funding for another important project, to establish groundcover species to assist in the restoration of our beautiful native grasslands and provide habitat linkages for flora and fauna.

I was also pleased to see that the community group Friends of Grasslands were successful in receiving funding for the project to restore grassy ecosystems in key portions of Scrivener's hut, Stirling Park and Yarramundi Reach in central Canberra. These areas have large remnants of native grassy woodlands and temperate grassland communities and are listed as endangered. The Friends of Grasslands are a great group of individuals banding together to help protect these valuable ecosystems.

The Molonglo Catchment Group has been granted over \$43,000 to revegetate areas in the lower Molonglo nature reserve. They will work closely with the Parks and Conservation Service to assist with the next steps required after an extensive woody weed removal program, and revegetating these areas will help protect the slopes from erosion and, in turn, help improve water quality in the Molonglo River.

The Ginninderra Catchment Group has received \$24,000 for its frog watch ephemeral zone project, and this project targets water bodies, especially dams, ponds and urban waterways, to improve the aquatic environment and, in particular, will focus on bank

revegetation. These revegetated areas will create new habitat for a variety of species and ecosystems, particularly frogs, and will sustain nationally listed, threatened species and ecosystems.

Finally, \$43,000 was given to the Southern ACT Catchment Group for weed control assistance to rural leaseholders in the Paddy's River-Tharwa region. This enhances previous work already undertaken and will continue to help preserve the natural yellow box red gum grassy woodland and native grasslands in these areas.

I congratulate all of the groups that have received funding under the latest environment grants program. I was also pleased to be present at a breakfast the other morning, hosted by Greening Australia, recognising the efforts made by our volunteers in helping to restore and protect our native environment. Without them, our efforts would be nowhere near as extensive and as successful as they have been, and I congratulate everyone involved. *(Time expired.)*

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, can you tell the Assembly a bit more about the Ginninderra peppergrass project and its importance?

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for the supplementary. The Ginninderra peppergrass is one of six local environment programs receiving funding under the grants program. The Ginninderra peppergrass, for members information, is a perennial herb. It is a member of the mustard family. It grows to a height of about 20 centimetres and it is a component of the natural temperate grassland ecosystem of lowland ACT. It is listed as a vulnerable species nationally and an endangered species locally. Indeed, there are only two existing populations of these species. Both of them are in the north of the ACT—one at the old Belconnen naval transmission station site in Lawson and another smaller patch in an area of grassland in Mitchell. The species is not known outside of the ACT. So we have a very special responsibility to try and sustain it here in Canberra.

Since 2009 the government has provided funding to the Australian National Botanic Gardens for seed collection and propagation of threatened plants. The Ginninderra peppergrass is one of these. Using seed collected from the Lawson colony between 2002 and 2008, 1,000 peppergrass plants have now been propagated. I was very pleased to go out to the Crace nature reserve last week to join with volunteers in the planting of the peppergrass at these new locations. There is also another planting having occurred in Dunlop.

We have now effectively doubled the coverage of this endangered plant across the ACT. Through the efforts of the National Botanic Gardens, the Australian government, Greening Australia, the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate and TAMS, as well as of course the enthusiastic work of volunteers, the translocation program has been a success and we now see more opportunities for this endangered plant to survive and thrive in our natural environment.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, how else does the government support community initiatives in environmental management?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Berry for the supplementary. The government continues to support a range of other activities. A great example of this is the well-known Landcare organisation. Land carers, park carers and other volunteers are community members working in local parks and reserves. We have seen up to 10,000 hours of unpaid work by our environmental volunteers each year. I know Mr Gentleman spoke about Landcare in the Assembly, I think during the adjournment. The government supports Landcare through the environment grants program and also through the heritage grants program, both of which provide additional funding for on-ground work to protect natural and cultural heritage sites and promote innovation.

I mentioned the ACT Landcare awards in my previous answer, and I would just like to highlight some of the great work done by the Landcare volunteers, in particular, the joint winners of the quiet achiever award, Dr Ken Hodgkinson and Dr John Fitzgerald, highlighting the very significant work they do on behalf of Friends of Grasslands. Anne McGrath of Majura Free Range Eggs also received an award for innovation in sustainable farming practices and in recognition of her work in implementing good Landcare practices on her property.

This is just another way in which the government combines with volunteer and community-based organisations to strengthen our custodianship and care and restoration of our beautiful natural environment.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, how important is it to continually support local groups such as the Friends of Aranda Bushland? And when you visit these volunteer groups, what do they tell you?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for the question. Groups like the Friends of Aranda Bushland do an outstanding job in maintaining and protecting what are very valuable remnant pieces of the natural environment that were extensive across the area that we now know as our city. It is difficult to overestimate the extent and scale of the grassy woodland communities that existed across the area that we now know as the city of Canberra. These were beautiful natural landscapes.

Regrettably, much of them has been lost to European settlement and urban development. The patches that remain deserve protection and enhancement. Groups like Friends of Aranda Bushland make a very significant contribution. Obviously they are out there doing the hard work—woody weed removal, erosion control—but they also have the enjoyment of planting and seeing the restoration of landscapes. So whether they are Friends of Aranda Bushland, Friends of Grasslands, Friends of the Pinnacle or one of a whole range of other groups right across the ACT, I commend them for their work, I thank them for their efforts, and the government will continue to collaborate with them wherever possible, to improve and enhance the native environment of the ACT.

Government—executive contracts

MR COE: My question is to the Chief Minister. On 8 and 15 August you tabled 57 long-term executive contracts with a total value of over \$60 million. About 45 of these executives commenced work prior to signing a contract and the average time between starting work and signing a contract was over six months. Were these executives paid for the period prior to signing their contract?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, they were, and I covered the reasons around that in the previous question time. Agreeing to the employment of those individuals is not just dependent on the executive contract being signed, and that is advice we have had from the Government Solicitor.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Given these executives were paid, under what financial arrangements were these uncontracted payments authorised?

MS GALLAGHER: Again, I covered this last question time and I have taken advice on it. There are no concerns in relation to the Financial Management Act. It is around the fact that there are other processes for agreeing to conditions of employment outside of an executive contract.

However, I would say that I have made it very clear to the directorates, and indeed to all the ministers, that the tabling of these executive contracts is an important accountability measure to the Assembly and it needs to be kept up to date. I am advised that that is the case to date. So there is no concern around any unauthorised payments. Agreements are reached around employment and are not just dependent on an executive contract being signed.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, do you think it is acceptable or appropriate that taxpayers' money is spent before written contracts are signed?

MS GALLAGHER: I do not think it is acceptable that this accountability measure to the Assembly has not been met. In terms of people being paid for work they have done when they have entered into terms on good faith with their employers, yes, I do think it is appropriate that they get paid. But they need to work for it, and they have. There has been no suggestion that they have not.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: If there are no contracts, who has provided the authorisation of the relevant documentation to the payroll to actually pay these employees?

MS GALLAGHER: My understanding is there would be a series of correspondence from the point of view of appropriate selection processes, authorisation from

supervisors and payroll forms being signed. What I am telling you is the executive contract is not the only way of formally establishing the employment arrangement. That indeed is covered, I think, in the Public Sector Management Act. I cannot think of the relevant clause off the top of my head, but it is expressly stated there.

Schools—Taylor Primary School

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, could you update the Assembly on the current status of the refurbishment of the Taylor Primary School and childcare centre and the community consultation process and how this is being reflected in enrolments for 2014?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman for his interest in Taylor Primary School. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the rectification and upgrade work at the Taylor Primary School is progressing on schedule for the school and childcare centre to be operational from the start of 2014. The rectification and upgrade work at Taylor Primary School can largely be considered in two parts: firstly, the repair of the building structure and services and, secondly, the modernisation and upgrade of the school and childcare facilities.

The rectification upgrade work includes complete removal of the external asbestos facade, a complete upgrade of the early childhood facilities, a new roof, rectification of the sewer and stormwater system, installation of larger windows and doors, expansion of the school hall, upgrade of the administration area, upgrade of the car parks, and landscaping of the entire school site. Mr Wall does not have any interest in Taylor Primary School, it would seem.

In addition to the important structural repair work, I am very pleased to advise the Assembly that we are creating a school that caters for children from birth to 12 years of age. I inform members that the school's information communication technology is being upgraded and that the school building will allow higher levels of natural light and ventilation into the building.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! I cannot hear Minister Burch.

MS BURCH: New furniture and interactive whiteboards will also be provided as part of the project.

I am very pleased at the level of consultation that has taken place with the school community. The Taylor Primary School community and Communities@Work have been extensively consulted as part of the design process of the rectification and upgrade of the Taylor Primary School. A Taylor Primary School design working group was established as part of the design process. This group included the school executive as well as reps from the school board, P&C and staff and parents.

Enrolments for Taylor Primary School are very healthy for the start of next year. Preschool enrolments are up to 50 for next year, and primary school enrolments are

also increasing with at least eight and possibly nine mainstream classes expected for next year. This is an increase from the seven mainstream classes which have been operating at the school this year through Namadgi. I am also advised that the childcare centre is reporting a healthy demand, with 65 places being filled.

I am very encouraged at the engagement and support shown by the Tuggeranong community for that project to revitalise Taylor Primary School. The project provides a new model for delivering education services to children from birth to 12 years of age. I very much look forward to the school opening once again for the families of the Taylor community for the start of next year's schooling.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, how will the expansion of the childcare centre on the site enhance the school and benefit the local community?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Gentleman again. I know that the member has a long interest in ensuring that our community has access to affordable and quality child care, in stark contrast to some others in this place. The inclusion of the education and care centre on this site will provide the community with a one-stop facility with a pathway from birth through to year 6.

It also forms part of the government's longstanding policy of expanding the number of childcare places. Since 2001 the number of centre-based places across the ACT has more than doubled. We took to the last election our plan to continue this expansion, including expanding places in Tuggeranong. We are well on our way to meeting those commitments.

As part of the refurbishment and upgrade, this project has increased the capacity of the education and care centre at the school from 24 places to 65 places. The school and education care provider, Communities@Work, have established a partnership and are working closely to develop protocols and procedures for sharing across the facilities. The principal has already met with Communities@Work to begin the work on marketing this exciting new partnership to the community.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what innovations have been trialled as part of this refurbishment?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Porter again for her interest in Taylor Primary School. As I have said, it will be reopened for the start of the next school year. I am particularly pleased that the project includes a number of innovations in childcare service delivery and in modern education provision for the residents of Tuggeranong. I am proud to inform members that Taylor Primary School will provide services from birth to 12 years of age. In terms of innovation in childcare service delivery, the opportunity has been taken to integrate the childcare centre within the school, and particularly with the early childhood years.

I believe the Taylor Primary School and the childcare centre will provide high levels of service and convenience for the local families. I am also pleased to have observed the high level of cooperation already evident between Communities@Work and the primary school in terms of future children's programs and the use of facilities and services.

Innovation is also occurring during the Taylor preschool rectification project, to provide a 21st century learning environment which includes updated classroom configurations in the early education area of the school. We are also providing a media-rich flexible learning environment which includes interactive whiteboard technology. These innovations build on already successful models in our new schools, particularly our early childhood schools.

As with the recently opened early childhood school at Franklin, all innovation in regard to learning environments is based on research and consultation with educational experts and community stakeholders. I very much look forward to the opening of the school and very much look forward to the open day that is being planned so that all people in the community can come and be part of the celebration for a welcome back to Taylor Primary School for the local community.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, is the department providing financial support to parents at Taylor Primary School who currently have to send their children to other schools?

MS BURCH: It is my understanding that all the support offered to families once Taylor school was closed—to support the families in those decisions—has been maintained. I do look forward, as I said, to welcoming all those families back to Taylor Primary School at the beginning of the 2014 school term.

Ms Gallagher: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

ICT research—funding

Debate resumed.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (3.42): I thank Mr Gentleman for moving this motion today. It is hard to overstate the importance of digital technology and innovation. They go to every single function of government and every service we deliver to the Canberra community. They reach deep into business, health, education, transport, environmental management and community services.

Canberrans know this more than most. We are a highly innovative and connected city. The digital expertise in our community is one of our major economic advantages and one of the reasons the ACT government has a committed approach to encouraging technological innovation. This commitment is why we have supported NICTA for a decade as a major player in our innovation ecosystem and why we have begun the process of creating a truly digital Canberra.

It is also why we strongly disagree with the new federal government's decision to cut funding to NICTA by \$42 million over two years. The ACT government is a founding member of NICTA, in partnership with the ANU, the University of New South Wales and the New South Wales government. Our government's strong relationship with NICTA dates back to 2001, with funding of \$26.35 million over the period 2002 to 2012. Further, an increase in funding of \$12 million for the period 2012 to 2016 was provided for in the 2012-13 budget.

Our long-term commitment to NICTA recognises the important contribution it makes to the ACT and the national economy. NICTA is a critical player in the ACT innovation system and a key partner in the ACT government's drive to establish Canberra as a centre for world-class ICT research, business development and usage. The outcome of the new federal government removing funding from NICTA will be far reaching both across the ACT economy and the community.

The health portfolio is one area where the sheer volume of digital technology activity shows why pulling investment from ICT is a bad idea. The ACT government's healthy future initiative has a budget of \$90 million. This investment has been directed at building our e-health capacity and providing patients with a greater say in how their personal health information can be used. We have already seen a reduction in waste of time associated with multiple paper-based systems and important improvements to safety and quality of health care.

The healthy future program incorporates a large range of innovative ICT projects all designed to make efficiencies and improvements in patient care. They include find a health service, which provides easy, online access to information about health services in Canberra and the surrounding region; clinical information systems within ACT intensive care units, the Capital Region Cancer Service, the ACT Renal Service and community-based services; integration of the ACT with the national e-health initiatives, including the national e-health record system, common patient administration and support systems across ACT public hospitals; improved electronic order entry for medical imaging at Canberra Hospital; new ICT infrastructure and free wi-fi in areas of the hospital—and I see that that was turned on for the public recently in the emergency department, I think yesterday or maybe the day before—better tools for the management of referrals with community-based services, systems for the electronic management of pathology orders, medications and specimen collection; and better systems for management of clinical records across the portfolio.

Separate to these initiatives, the government is also supporting the \$3.1 million identity access and management initiative, allowing clinicians, nurses and staff to move around the hospital campus and enter data or check records with minimal delay, and the \$5.7 million digital mammography project providing higher quality images, less radiation exposure for patients and less risk for staff.

The common denominator in all of these projects is the need for highly skilled software engineers, programmers, web developers and designers, privacy and security experts. To cut funding to one of Australia's major breeding grounds for these critical skills is to undermine our ability to carry out these improvements with local expertise.

Digital capabilities will be one of the hallmarks of successful cities in the future. ICT infrastructure is one part of it, but converting that into amenity and connectedness is the other. Our digital Canberra strategy is an action plan to target these priorities and to drive further growth and innovation across the ACT. It represents a partnership between the government, business and community sectors and we are seeing strong engagement through the digital Canberra challenge.

Digital Canberra will help realise the city's and the community's potential, and the digital Canberra action plan will be the roadmap we use to achieve important milestones. Digital Canberra is being formed by consultation with other cities and jurisdictions, and the digital Canberra round table I held earlier in the year has also helped consolidate many of the opportunities and challenges in the area and also set down a pathway and a program of priorities.

Our industry consultations on digital Canberra emphasised the need to benchmark current digital usage and as a result we are conducting a digital capacity survey in partnership with the Canberra Business Council and CollabIT which will provide personal advice to businesses and non-profits in the form of a digital scorecard. The digital agenda is all encompassing. In an economy fuelled by knowledge and innovation, as ours is, it is one of those areas we have to keep building on and indeed protect.

The ACT government has sustained a long-term commitment to NICTA when our budget has been under stress, as it has been in 2012-13 where we still found room for \$12 million to provide further and continued support to the work NICTA are doing, the jobs they are creating and the research they are bringing to Canberra. This is in both our interests and the national interest because of its great contribution to innovation across Australia but importantly here in Canberra.

It would be short-sighted and another hit to the ACT economy for the incoming federal government to follow through with its announced policy of cutting funding to NICTA by \$42 million over two years. I add my strong support for this motion for us as an Assembly to lobby the commonwealth in a united way against this decision.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Children and Young People, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Women, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (3.49): I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion to the Assembly. Digital education, or ICT, is the way education systems are meeting the 21st century communication challenges. It is important that our students are equipped with the skills to respond to changes in our economy, with ICT skills being an essential driver of our ongoing economic prosperity. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* recognises the need for students to be highly skilled in the use of ICT as rapid and continuing advances in technology are changing the way people share and communicate.

The ACT has some of the best schools in the nation, as the 2013 NAPLAN results so clearly demonstrate. And technology is giving us the edge when it comes to the future.

Technology is not a substitute for quality teachers, the essential human element that makes our schools such great places for learning. Rather, technology is a key tool in increasing access to education, in enriching the system, in making learning both more challenging and exciting and in complementing and enhancing what the dedicated teacher does in the classroom.

ACT public schools will continue to develop the necessary skills and confidence in our students' use of technology to enable them to thrive in a knowledge-based economy. The performance of our ACT students is a testament to our strong investment history in ICT in education. Since 2006 we have invested \$35 million in ICT in schools. A large proportion of this funding has been dedicated to our infrastructure and connectivity and introducing high speed internet and a reliable network for all students and teachers. The system is delivered across high speed fibre, the fastest, most effective way for schools to access online content. High speed connectivity, much of it wireless, allows our students and teachers to take part in video conferences, watch podcasts, movies and documentaries and access embedded documents, sound files and flash games to enhance teaching and learning.

At Harrison School students use iPads to access learning resources, online learning, video conferencing, novels and subject information. Students can use their iPads before school and during classes. Three ACT public schools have been selected for the Microsoft innovative schools program which each year identifies 20 schools across Australia which demonstrate exceptional practice in ICT in education. Gungahlin College and the Namadgi and Neville Bonner schools exemplify best practice in learning space design combined with high availability of ICT. ICT underpins teaching and learning at these new schools and gives students access to anywhere, anytime learning.

Schools have embraced social media and have created Facebook pages as communication tools, along with traditional newsletters for parents and carers providing updates and opportunities for comment and feedback. I note that just this week many schools have used this to remind parents they can provide their feedback on the school as part of the annual school satisfaction survey. Duffy Primary School also told parents about how they used Skype this week to have Dr Karl talk to the year 2 students, and their school site carried great photos of Dr Karl projected onto the electronic whiteboard taking questions from students.

I am reminded of David Reeson, a teacher at Alfred Deakin High School, who developed an iPad app to help with assessing students. His Assessmate is now popular with teachers as well as students, who now have a better understanding of the criteria teachers use for assessment. Alfred Deakin is trialling a program where students bring their own devices such as iPads, laptops and Google Chromebooks and connect to the school's wireless networks. Student engagement has increased as they are able to use the device of their choice.

Malkara School has been recognised nationally as an early adopter in the use of iPads to assist students with disabilities in their learning. Using iPads, the students have a far greater capacity to demonstrate their learning through voice recording, video and

speech applications. On 23 August I had the pleasure to launch the virtual learning environment at Melba Copland Secondary School. Since 2011 the government has invested approximately \$800,000 in VLEs in 13 schools. The VLEs allow teachers and students from across the country and internationally to collaborate as part of their learning program.

An additional \$7.1 million is also committed in the 2013-14 financial year to underpin the continued success of ICT in our schools. This investment will allow us to deliver curriculum, assessment and professional development of our teachers and students. It will enable the pooling and sharing of knowledge and resources to promote learning across all our public schools.

The ACT Education and Training Directorate is currently implementing a project to connect the separate networks of all our schools together into a single centralised network. The ACT will be the first jurisdiction to digitally connect all schools together on a single high speed fibre network, and high speed broadband is critical to providing conditions to foster ICT in our schools and the broader community.

The government continues to drive innovation and change through the way we educate our young people and the access to ICT we provide in our schools. This government will continue to encourage student engagement, participation and access to digital tools and ensure that all students graduate with the skills required to prosper, to drive growth and to innovate in our future.

This motion notes the work of NICTA, a very fine organisation that was established in 2002. I think it has been mentioned today that the new federal government sworn in today has been criticised by many, including from within its own party, for being “schizophrenic on science” and having no minister for science. Mr Doszpot, indeed, you have declared here this morning your support for NICTA. I hope when you next meet Mr Seselja you let him know your views and that you ask the man on the hill who you are so friendly with to speak up and to denounce the cuts to NICTA.

I will reflect on some of the Liberal Party’s views on NICTA.

Members interjecting—

MS BURCH: Mr Assistant Speaker, are you controlling the chamber, or are you just amusing yourself?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Doszpot): Excuse me. Sit down, please, Ms Burch. Sit down, please.

MS BURCH: Can we stop the clock?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Please stop the clock. I do not need instructions from you, Ms Burch. Can members please refrain from any further interjection for the moment? Carry on.

MS BURCH: Thank you. I will just recap a bit of the history of the Liberal Party’s views on NICTA. In December last year Harrison Polites said:

Australian ICT research firm, NICTA may look to expand into South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania after having its funding axed by the Queensland government.

According to the *Australian*, research funding cuts from Queensland's Newman government will see NICTA shed 20 of its staff.

That is a good vote of confidence! Also, a report by Jake Sturmer headed "Coalition to slash funding for top technology institute NICTA" states:

The Coalition has revealed if it wins government it will slash funding for one of Australia's top technology research institutions.

NICTA ... is one of the key partners of the bionic eye project, building the electronics and developing vision processing techniques ... The Coalition revealed through its costings it would axe the Federal Government's share, despite the Opposition's communications spokesman Malcolm Turnbull visiting the Sydney site several times.

But was it not Mr Turnbull who overturned something that he did not know was happening in federal politics at one point there?

It is understood the proposed cuts came as a surprise to the institution, which employs 580 researchers, technical and professional staff ... Dr John Parker is the CEO of Saluda Medical, one of NICTA's spin-off companies.

He believes without the institution, its devices to relieve chronic pain would never have been developed.

It is absolute hypocrisy for those opposite to say they support NICTA yet under a Liberal government in Queensland we have seen jobs slashed and we have seen the incoming federal government within less than 48 hours of going to the polls seeking to do that as well.

Mr Assistant Speaker, an amendment has been circulated in my name, and I now move:

Add new paragraph (4):

"(4) calls on the Leader of the Opposition to adopt a bipartisan position by issuing a public statement which unequivocally condemns the proposed cuts to NICTA as a short-sighted measure likely to slow productivity growth and cost jobs."

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (3.59): I thank Ms Burch for moving this amendment, because I think it is important that we do get a position from the Canberra Liberals on the funding situation at NICTA. It was not that long ago that the shadow treasurer was asking me questions about NICTA's future funding. I was very pleased to be able to get back to the Assembly within 24 hours with information on—

Mr Smyth: The quickest corrigendum in the history of Australia.

MR BARR: That is right. It was there and it was delivered, and the funding was announced.

Mr Smyth: It was out.

MR BARR: If it is out, then how can Joe Hockey claim it as a saving? The funding was there. The funding was announced, and it has now been cut. I understand that the first the NICTA board knew about this was on 5 September, two days before the federal election. They have a signed deed of funding from the commonwealth government that is now apparently to be dishonoured by the new government. That is a disgraceful situation.

For someone who spoke not too long ago—and I quote Mr Smyth who said that NICTA is worthy of all the support that it gets—who did not contribute at all to this debate today and who had nothing to say about his federal colleagues' position in relation to funding for NICTA, it is a disgrace. And it is a disgrace that the Leader of the Opposition is silent on this issue as well. There has been no leadership, no contribution at all from anyone other than you, Mr Assistant Speaker. If the Leader of the Opposition, in response to this amendment, would like to put on the record his disagreement with the position of his federal counterparts, that would be a most welcome development.

I note that in your contribution, Mr Assistant Speaker, although you indicated support for NICTA, you made no comment at all about and sought to deny the reality of the funding cut. I would hope that you would at least acknowledge that Joe Hockey was not lying on 5 September when he outlined a \$42 million cut to NICTA. Everyone agrees that Joe Hockey was not lying when he said that the commonwealth government would cut \$42 million from NICTA. I presume that that issue is not contested.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Could you resume your seat. Thank you, Mr Barr. Just before you resume, the standing orders refer to offensive words in this way:

A Member may not use offensive words against the Assembly or any Member thereof or against any member of the judiciary.

I would like you to keep that in mind. Technically you are outside the bounds but—

MR BARR: Mr Hockey is not a member of this place nor is he a member of the judiciary.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: You could use a little decorum. He is a member of parliament, Mr Barr, and I ask you to use a certain amount of decorum. Thank you. Please resume.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. I think it would be clear that Mr Hockey is not a member of this place nor is he a member of the judiciary. And I was indicating that I did not believe he was lying on 5 September. I take him at his word, that he is making a \$42 million saving and cutting \$42 million worth of funding from NICTA, an organisation that is valuable to this economy.

It is a further example of the approach of the incoming federal government to this city. And it is not just in the public sector now that they are wielding the axe. It is now into the private sector and into an organisation that it would appear there is tripartisan support for in this chamber. People have been on the public record on a number of occasions seeking to prosecute a particular case in support of NICTA, most recently, only in the last few months, from the shadow treasurer. And now, when we have got this issue before us—we are debating it today, and we are calling for a bipartisan approach—we get absolutely nothing from the opposition, absolute silence from the shadow treasurer on an issue that was so important that he had to ask me in question time about another government's funding.

But when it comes to opposing the position of the incoming federal government, there is silence, absolute silence from the shadow treasurer. There was no contribution to this debate from anyone else from the Liberal Party. There was plenty of opportunity to speak on it. Hopefully we might have just goaded the Leader of the Opposition into responding, into putting a position on the public record.

We are very keen to put positions on the public record today, are we not? We have had a few speeches from a few people opposite this morning about having a position and being prepared to state it. Here is your chance. What is your position on NICTA funding? Do you support the federal government's position to cut \$42 million from NICTA? Do you think that is a good thing for this economy? Do you think it is a good thing for the ICT sector? They are the challenges that are out there. That is the opportunity. We have been debating this for a couple of hours now and there has been no contribution on that point.

We hope, through this amendment, that we might get the Leader of the Opposition or the shadow treasurer to make a comment on a matter that is of significant importance to this economy, which we all appeared to be in agreement on a few hours ago. Even you, in your contribution, Mr Assistant Speaker, recognised it and said it on a couple of occasions but you would not make any negative comment in relation to the funding cut. The Liberals were prepared to have a go, through your shadow treasurer, when there was an erratum in the last budget but when the funding was announced—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr, are you addressing the actual amendment as well?

MR BARR: I am. I am addressing the amendment. When the funding was announced, there was silence, no recognition that the commonwealth government was providing ongoing funding. That deed was signed. NICTA had that funding. Now it is going to be taken off them by the incoming federal Liberal government and, again, we have got silence from those opposite. So here is your chance. You have got, in a couple of minutes time—

Mr Coe: On a point of order—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Please stop the clock. Sit down please, Mr Barr. Yes, Mr Coe.

Mr Coe: I ask whether the minister is being tedious and repetitious. He has harped on about the same point for the last eight minutes.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr, what I am saying is: will you please confine yourself to the actual motion or the amendment to the motion at the moment. Thank you.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. I am speaking to the amendment which is calling for a bipartisan position and asking for a public statement—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Excuse me, Mr Barr. You have repeated yourself a number of times now, three or four times. Please stick to the point.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. The amendment that I am speaking to is calling for a bipartisan position and the issuing of a public statement which unequivocally condemns the proposed cuts to NICTA as a short-sighted measure that will slow productivity growth and cost jobs in our economy. And that should not be too big an ask, given everything that has been put on the public record.

Mr Hanson: Why don't you just shut up and we will get on with it.

Ms Burch: Mr Assistant Speaker, I do not think “shut up” is parliamentary language.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Ms Burch, thank you. I was about to talk to Mr Hanson. Mr Hanson, would you please withdraw that.

Mr Hanson: I withdraw, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you and let us allow Mr Barr to continue his narrative.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. You know you are getting under their skin when you illicit a response like that. It was very unparliamentary and not appropriate behaviour from an alternative chief minister. Telling people to shut up is entirely unparliamentary, and I am pleased that you called him to order and he has withdrawn, because it is not the sort of behaviour you would expect from the Leader of the Opposition.

He has a chance in a moment to make a clear statement about his view on the federal Liberals' cuts to NICTA. I hope he makes the right statement and we can have a bipartisan approach condemning this short-sighted move from the federal Liberal government.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (4.10): Finally—after what can only be described as a tedious and repetitious speech where Mr Barr probably said the same thing about 20 times: “When are the Liberals going to say something?” Of course, the problem was that it was very difficult for me to say anything when I am required to sit here and listen to the rubbish that I just heard from those opposite.

I am very happy to stand up and explain to members what has happened in this place. Mr Gentleman brought a motion into this place. They thought: “This is a bit of a wedge. Let’s wedge the Canberra Liberals. Let’s talk about NICTA funding and see where they go with it.” They have brought in a motion talking about NICTA and the federal government funding. Mr Doszpot, who is our shadow minister for ICT—we do take it seriously: we have created a shadow minister for ICT, and I would welcome the government doing something similar and providing the same level of support for our ICT community as the opposition does—spoke to the motion. We have indicated that we will be supporting the motion. We indicated that we would be supporting Mr Gentleman’s motion.

That caused the government a bit of a problem, so they scurried upstairs and said: “Hang on; this is meant to be a wedge. This is meant to be a wedge. We had better try and get the Canberra Liberals not to support this. What are we going to do? This is not working. This was not our plan.” So they all cooked up something over lunch. They said: “What we will do is this. Joy, you come back down and have some motion which will be just impossible for the opposition to support. We have got to get them to vote no against it. We need them to vote no against something.” So they have drawn up this nonsense amendment that clearly we are not going to support.

What we have done, and what we have expressed, through the support that we will provide to Mr Gentleman’s motion, is clearly an expression of bipartisan support for NICTA. Quite evidently that is the case.

If you got your motion wrong when you wrote it—if you do not think it was wedge-worthy enough, if it was not strong enough, if it did not do what you were trying to achieve from it, Mr Gentleman, which was play partisan politics—and that is clearly what it is—and it has backfired on you, that is not my problem. The fact is that you have come in here with a motion seeking our support. We have said we will give you our support. You have then decided that the wedge has failed and said, “Let’s come up with something else to try and wedge them.” That is what is happening here. It is amateur hour, Mr Assistant Speaker.

This is really an attack on the federal coalition, I suppose. I do not know if it is meant to be a wedge on us in part, but it is an attack on the federal coalition. I would remind members opposite that the election has been fought. I know that in this place sometimes—we have seen it from Mr Rattenbury and from the government—there is an attempt to raise issues in this place that people think might garner support in the community to try and help influence the vote in the ACT.

I remind you that there is now a coalition government, and it has been sworn in. The people of Australia have spoken loud and clear, and we now have a federal coalition

government. I would suggest to you that if this is meant to be a bit of a wedge on us, it has backfired in your face. And if it is meant to be an attack on the coalition, I would remind you that they just won government convincingly.

I reiterate that we said that we would be supporting Mr Gentleman's motion. We indeed have a view of standing up for NICTA. Correct me if I am wrong, Mr Smyth, but when was NICTA established?

Mr Smyth: The work started in 2000.

MR HANSON: It started in 2000. That was under the former Liberal government, I believe. NICTA is something that has enjoyed bipartisan support in the ACT for well over a decade, but what we are seeing here is those opposite with their grubby politics trying to bring a wedge. It has backfired.

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR HANSON: The problem is that the government is there saying this. Mr Barr is interjecting. He is saying, "What is your position?" Supporting the motion. We are supporting the motion. Now they want me to do something.

Members interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, just sit down for a second.

MR HANSON: Sure. Can you stop the clocks, please?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Please stop the clocks. Ms Burch, you were very quick to point out the interjections that were coming your way.

Ms Burch: Yes, but you did not—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: We did stop it. I am asking you to also refrain from the constant interjections and let the member speak. Thank you. Mr Hanson, please resume.

MR HANSON: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. The amendment from Ms Burch is trying to take away from what is, I think, a reasonable motion from Mr Gentleman that we can support—trying to elevate it into the realm of the political wedge, the political slap. That is what she is trying to do.

It is similar to when the former Prime Minister—it was either Rudd or Gillard, and it does become confusing with the Labor Party as to which one it was, but I think it was Gillard—cut the universities. Remember that? Remember the tens of millions of dollars of cuts to our universities here? They were particularly damaging to the ANU and University of Canberra. I cannot remember the Chief Minister putting out a statement of outrage condemning the Prime Minister then. Do you remember such a thing? Anyone here?

Members interjecting—

MR HANSON: No? I certainly do not remember something like that. If we had tried to move something in this place calling on the Chief Minister to write condemning the Prime Minister, those opposite would have rightly dismissed that as just playing politics, because that is what it would have been.

Then we saw Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard collectively cutting thousands of public sector jobs. Don't take our figures for that; listen to the affiliated union, the CPSU. They will tell you that there were thousands of jobs being cut. Does anybody recall—Mr Assistant Speaker, you might be able to help me, or those opposite might be able to table it—a statement from the Chief Minister condemning the Prime Minister? Does anyone remember that? No. I do not. So it is nonsense. This is a nonsense amendment. It is a high political amendment.

What has happened here is that in this place we were at a point in this debate where we had bipartisan support for Mr Gentleman's motion; we had bipartisan support for NICTA. Now Ms Burch has come trampling down here, trying to get her political point scoring, and has taken this out of the bipartisan realm and put it into the abjectly political realm. I do not know whether to be disappointed, slightly amused—

Mr Smyth: Bemused.

MR HANSON: Probably more than bemused. What we are seeing here is now an attempt for—for what I do not know. Those opposite seem to want to find who is going to be their person to attack the opposition. Who is going to lead the charge attacking us? We have seen Dr Bourke have a go, haven't we? The problem is that that has not worked. We have seen Mr Gentleman try it as well, and we have seen that come crashing down. Now Ms Burch has been given the job, and she has just botched this as well. We saw her with her snide little comments during question time as well.

Members interjecting—

MR HANSON: I would suggest to the minister, through you, Mr Assistant Speaker, that she is far better when she reads the speeches that have been prepared for her by her department and by her advisers. I suggest to the minister that when she does strike—

Ms Burch interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, take a seat. Ms Burch, you are warned as of now.

Ms Burch: Can I just, by way of explanation, say that I responded to an interjection from Mr Coe.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Ms Burch—

Ms Burch: If you are going to discipline me, I ask that you also apply the same to Mr Coe.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Ms Burch, I had spoken to you before that. You are warned. Carry on, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Thank you very much, Mr Assistant Speaker. It is disappointing that someone who is a minister in this place has decided today to behave in such a way, to come down to question time and make snide, nasty remarks when the opposition is required to remain largely silent—to make those snide remarks, to interject constantly through speeches and to bring such a nonsense partisan amendment before this place when we had reached bipartisan support for NICTA.

Now what is going to happen is that, instead of this place drawing together for its support of NICTA, we will risk it. What is going to happen is that instead of bipartisan support for the motion, hopefully with the support of the Greens as well, we are going to have a political squabble over this. That is disappointing, but that is clearly what the Labor Party want. They want to play politics with this issue.

Mr Assistant Speaker, we will not be supporting the amendment. I hope that this amendment goes down. I hope that Mr Rattenbury sees it for what it is and does not support it. Then, hopefully, we can get back to the debate, to the substance of the issue, and I can indicate to you that the opposition, as Mr Doszpot has already expressed, will be supporting the motion.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (4.20): Mr Assistant Speaker, in speaking to the amendment, I just want to reflect on your comments earlier in the primary part of the debate. You talked about NICTA and said that in my opening speech I did not have a lot to say about NICTA. So I thought I might take this opportunity to increase your knowledge, as well as the knowledge of other members of the Assembly, on NICTA.

On broadband and the digital economy, NICTA say that they use technology to increase the productivity of the physical economy and grow markets for digital goods and services. The key drivers are faster broadband, more powerful devices and access to almost infinite storage and computing, with more integrated connectivity as next generation networks are rolled out globally.

Through the broadband and digital economy—BaDE—team, NICTA develops and applies technologies to deliver improved lifestyle, economic and commercial outcomes for Australians, underpinned by the increased capacity for the national broadband network. Visitors can experience these initiatives at the digital productivity showcase, which displays NICTA's research in cloud computing, e-government and e-business, data management, networking and mobile applications. Advances in these fields are laying the foundation for new markets and improved delivery of government and industry services. The digital productivity showcase is an Australian-first space designed to be—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman, could you just hold it for a bit. Could you just stop the clock for a moment? I thought you said you were addressing the amendment.

MR GENTLEMAN: Indeed, the amendment to my motion.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Okay. I have yet to hear anything—

MR GENTLEMAN: You mentioned earlier in your comments, Mr Assistant Speaker, that I did not speak enough about NICTA so I am increasing our knowledge base.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Without trying to conduct a conversation with you, Mr Gentleman, I do not think there was any reference to this amendment during my talk.

MR GENTLEMAN: The amendment was not moved when you were speaking earlier on.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Correct. So how can you be addressing the amendment if you are talking about my speech?

MR GENTLEMAN: That is the question to the floor of the Assembly at the moment. We are speaking to the amendment. It is relevant. We are speaking about NICTA.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Okay. Stick to the amendment, please.

MR GENTLEMAN: The amendment is the amendment to my motion, which talks about NICTA. I am talking about NICTA. I will continue on with the digital productivity showcase. It is an Australian-first space designed to be a neutral intersection point—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. Mr Hanson.

Mr Hanson: You are absolutely right, Mr Assistant Speaker, that the member is not being relevant. He is using this opportunity to talk about and litigate issues from earlier this morning. There is an amendment before the Assembly which is quite clearly a separate issue, and it is about calling on the Leader of the Opposition to make a statement. He should address his comments to that rather than trying to re-litigate arguments from this morning and comments which were made by you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr Barr: On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Barr.

Mr Barr: During my speech the Leader of the Opposition and others made a series of frivolous points of order in relation to me apparently over-addressing the substance of—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER Mr Barr, can you please sit down. Mr Barr, during your address, it was repetition. You repeated the same thing over and over and over again. That was the issue with you. Dr Bourke.

Dr Bourke: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. On the point of order, as I heard Mr Gentleman speaking, he was talking about productivity growth. The amendment clearly says “measure likely to slow productivity growth and cost jobs”. That is what this amendment is talking about. That is what Mr Gentleman was talking about. His speech directly addresses the amendment.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, thank you for your comments. Mr Gentleman, can you please stick to the—

MR GENTLEMAN: On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: I am directly addressing NICTA, which is directly addressed in the amendment. The position is that should these cuts go ahead which are mentioned in this amendment then those services that I am talking about that NICTA provide will no longer be there. So it is directly relevant.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Could you read the first sentence of the motion, Mr Gentleman?

MR GENTLEMAN: Of the motion? Yes, certainly.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Of the amendment.

MR GENTLEMAN: Of the amendment? Certainly. It calls on the Leader of the Opposition to “adopt a bipartisan position by issuing a public statement which unequivocally condemns the proposed cuts to NICTA as a short-sighted measure likely to slow productivity growth and cost jobs”. I have just been talking about productivity growth and the work that NICTA does, which will not be there if these cuts go ahead.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman, resume. Please stick to the amendment.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you. Another thing that NICTA provides that may not go ahead if these cuts go through is the digital productivity showcase. As I said, it is an Australian-first space designed to be a neutral intersection point for government, researchers, companies and users of digital productivity tools. If you have a look through the showcase, it is a hands-on experience of the latest digital tools and services and helps visitors identify gaps and opportunities relevant to their industry and organisation. So you can see it is directly assisting industries and organisations, particularly in the ACT. We would like the Leader of the Opposition, as we have

called for in this amendment, to adopt a bipartisan position and issue a public statement saying he supports the work that NICTA is doing and does not want to see the job cuts.

Some of the other work they do, of course, is very important. Some of the projects on broadband and the digital economy are underpinned by research in the areas of enterprise and cloud architectures, mobile content distribution, business process analysis and automation, machine learning, software systems and advanced networking. The project on business adaptation and interoperation focuses on cloud enterprise architectures and vocabulary management to enable organisations to effectively work together at both business and technical levels. This is another service that NICTA provide that we may lose if these funding cuts go ahead. ePASA is performance modelling and simulation for enterprise systems for large organisations such as financial institutions and major government departments.

Of course, there are also the social activities that NICTA help support. On games they utilise decentralised techniques to deliver complex applications including massive multiplayer online games over the internet quickly and cheaply. Should these cuts go ahead, it will be gamers out there that are affected as well.

There is the Goanna software bug detection which NICTA says keeps product launch timetables on track and saves money using a fast, scalable and precise software solution that detects bugs and other software vulnerabilities automatically during the development process. There is mobile content distribution. Smart phones, rich media and online social networks are—

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Take your seat, please, Mr Gentleman.

Mr Smyth: Under standing order 62, irrelevance or tedious repetition, is it appropriate for the member just to reread his speech from this morning?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Smyth.

MR GENTLEMAN: On the point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman, before you get to that, there is an awful amount of repetition going on. If you have not got the content, please do not cut your speech short but—

MR GENTLEMAN: Mr Assistant Speaker, on the point of order, I have not repeated anything out of these notes. They are all new. The only repetition is the rereading of the amendment we have put that calls on the Leader of the Opposition to adopt a bipartisan position by issuing a public statement which unequivocally condemns the proposed cuts to NICTA as a short-sighted measure likely to slow—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Gentleman, could you hang on for a second. You have got an interruption.

Ms Burch: Mr Assistant Speaker, given that I have been warned—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Have you got a point of order on Mr Gentleman?

Ms Burch: No, I am just bringing to your attention the interjections from that side of the room. I just wanted to bring it to your attention, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Ms Burch. Gentlemen, let us just cut it down a little bit. Let us give Mr Gentleman an opportunity to continue. Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Some of the other work that NICTA does that is also under threat is on capabilities in health. Some of the key themes there are bioinformatics, medical devices, biomedical informatics, bio-imaging technology systems and biology—all threatened should this funding be taken away. These themes reflect the global biological revolution currently taking place, popularly referred to as the “new biology”. This discipline transformation is well articulated in *A New Biology for the 21st Century*.

In bioinformatics, NICTA develop the foundations and practical techniques for filtering information from the large volumes of data produced by emerging high-throughput biomedical technologies, in particular high throughput sequencing technologies, often referred to as next generation sequencing, but also a range of other, more cost-effective technologies. Their aim is to develop information technology which uses molecular biology data from the improvement of health. So you can see there that the work they are doing that is under threat is really key in our ehealth systems and support for our medical systems in the ACT.

Some of the other work they do in biomedical informatics is developing techniques to provide easier and faster access to valuable information buried in biomedical texts, saving time and cost for biomedical researchers and clinicians, and potentially enabling new insights and discoveries. With so much health data now being collected and stored electronically, there are huge opportunities to provide new innovations to health care via biomedical informatics research. The biomedical informatics team at NICTA is developing strategies for knowledge-based analysis of biometric data. The knowledge-based methods take advantage of background information available in relevant databases, structured resources such as ontologies and in textual sources, such as the published literature on clinical records, to provide context for the interpretation and understanding of biomedical data.

Their research, which is under threat, is both direct analysis of biomedical textual data sources, to provide easier and faster access to the valuable information buried in those texts, and the use of that information in analysis and modelling of non-textual biomedical data. They take advantage of a variety of underlying technologies, including clustering, pattern recognition, natural language processing and general data

mining to query, summarise and discover relationships between biomedical datasets. So it is very important work that NICTA do. I urge all members to support the amendment.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (4.32): Mr Assistant Speaker, much as we spend time in this place concentrating on our differences, I know the members opposite also have strongly held views about the future of our city and our country. This is a chance for the opposition to work with the government members to achieve something better for this city by supporting this amendment. This amendment calls on the Leader of the Opposition to adopt a bipartisan policy by issuing a public statement which unequivocally condemns the proposed cuts to NICTA as a short-sighted measure likely to slow productivity growth and cost jobs.

NICTA's future, as has become clear today, is tied up with Australia's economic future and Canberra's future. We have heard from Mr Smyth previously about the value of NICTA. This morning you, Mr Assistant Speaker, also spoke glowingly of NICTA's role. You highlighted the role of the Howard government in establishing NICTA in 2002 as part of the backing Australia's ability initiative. The national support for NICTA is reflected in the partnerships behind it, including the Australian Research Council, the ACT government, the Australian National University, the New South Wales government, the University of New South Wales, the Victorian government, the University of Melbourne, the Queensland government, the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, the University of Sydney and Monash University. It has created 11 new companies and worked with businesses across the nation fostering high-tech innovation and invention with a commercial focus.

I spoke this morning of the e-health living lab being built at the University of Canberra opening up new business opportunities and health benefits for Canberrans and all Australians. It is one example of NICTA's work that is under threat. NICTA, as I said, is working on solar technology and solar economy with companies here in Canberra, including ActewAGL as well as with the ANU.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, resume your seat for a second, please. Please stop the clock. Dr Bourke, we have had a number of repetitions, and, as you quite rightly keep saying, "I spoke", "I spoke", "I spoke". You spoke about all those points, and you are repeating them yet again. Please stick to the point of the amendment.

DR BOURKE: In our ACT special schools, for example, we are using world-leading technology to assist children who are disabled to communicate, sometimes for the first time. I am sure you, as well as I, have seen children with severe disabilities overcoming the barriers to communicate with the latest technology allowing them to learn, joke and be cheeky in ways they could not before.

Other members today have shown just some of the vast array of new technology in use and under development in Canberra, including in the ACT government. The minister last year in this place said the ACT government's involvement in NICTA will bring considerable benefits for the government, for local businesses and for the

Canberra community. Not only does NICTA provide jobs and training in highly skilled and specialised fields but it provides research and development that will help governments and citizens in Canberra and around Australia and will also attract research and develop funding for the territory. He also said the ACT government regards NICTA as a key partner in our desire to establish Canberra as a centre for world-class ICT research, commercialisation, business development and usage. Integral to the government's vision are the research capabilities at our universities, the business acumen of our locally grown and ACT-based multinational ICT firms and the buying in of our national and local government agencies.

On 21 February the minister was pleased to announce that the ACT government has made the in-principle decision to enter into a new four-year funding agreement with NICTA. That proposed arrangement was \$12 million in funding. It consisted of grants and payroll tax waivers over a four-year period, a direct investment in the territory's economic future and delivering excellence in ICT research to create future wealth and commercial outcomes for Australia.

NICTA has five major research laboratories. One is in Canberra, supporting our local economy and growing jobs in Canberra. The proposed funding increase was \$1.8 million over the current funding arrangement. It builds significantly on the significant support the ACT has already provided to NICTA. It is perhaps worth reminding members that, as the minister said at the time, we are a founding member of NICTA, and the government's contribution has been a total of \$26.35 million over the past decade.

We are doing things using technology that could not have been dreamed of when NICTA was set up over a decade ago. That is the beauty of NICTA. It ensures we foster the vision and expertise in world-beating ICT here in Australia. It is creating new career paths and new industries for Australians that will keep our economy punching above our weight—the Australian economy and the Canberra economy.

That is why the members on the other side should support this amendment. That is why the Leader of the Opposition should make a public statement unequivocally condemning the proposed cuts to NICTA.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

DR BOURKE: Do you think they are funny?

Mr Hanson: I think you're funny.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Dr Bourke, sit down for a second. Members of the opposition, next one to speak will get warned.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. The members on the other side should support this motion. They should use their influence with their former leader and the federal branch of their party for the good of this country and for the good of Canberra. We are calling on the new federal government to embrace the digital future of Australia and the digital future of our economy. We should send a unanimous

message from our parliament calling on the federal government to commit to maintaining NICTA funding and its visionary and innovative programs. I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Mrs Jones
Dr Bourke	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Rattenbury
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth
Mr Corbell		Mr Hanson	Mr Wall

Question so resolved in the negative.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (4.43), in reply: I will just list a few more things that are under threat if funding is taken away from NICTA. One of their other important jobs is cyber security and, as we have heard, that is a key national security and economic priority for Australia and many countries around the world. The emergence of advanced persistent threats and increasing cyber crime enabled by pervasive connectivity has resulted in a dangerous, complex and fast-evolving threat environment. In collaboration with academia and the research community, government stakeholders and industry more broadly, NICTA will apply its advanced capabilities in software systems, machine learning, networks and optimisation to tackle key research problems to address both the current threat landscape and adopt a long-term approach to the development of systems that are inherently more robust and resilient to emergent cyber threats.

NICTA is creating new software components and tools for the design and implementation of critical systems to make them safer, more reliable and more secure. The security for critical systems is funded by the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA.

Another project is the verified real-time operating system. NICTA is working together with the Australian company Breakaway Consulting to develop and verify a small real-time operating system, or RTOS. The RTOS is an order of magnitude smaller than seL4 and suitable for embedded devices with severely constrained resources and strong safety requirements.

One of their other projects in this field is the robust control systems design. By developing a deeper understanding of differing types of cyber attacks and their possible effects, this project is developing methods and tools that can be used in the design of network control systems to reduce the likelihood and severity of deliberate cyber attack, all under threat should this funding cut go through.

One of the other important things we have heard a little bit about is the work NICTA have been doing on renewable energy. They have been working with governments around the world looking at mandating fast adoption of renewable energy generation to secure future energy supplies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. Reducing uncertainty in renewable energy systems development and deployment is the key focus of this NICTA research.

NICTA has been working with the Australian government and industry in developing a world-leading geothermal resource characterisation capability. The platform brings together extremely large and disparate data sets from a variety of remote sensing technologies and, through advanced machine learning techniques, is attempting to de-risk geothermal exploration to make it more commercially competitive with existing technologies. Even in the ACT geothermal has been used in commercial buildings from the work that NICTA has been providing.

In closing, I want to refer to some of our earlier speakers. From Dr Bourke we had a very important line—we will be condemned as ICT followers and not leaders should these cuts go ahead. He said NICTA is entirely switched on and driving innovation. And of course, we heard that under the new arrangements for the federal government cabinet there is no federal minister for science in the first time since 1931.

From Minister Barr we heard about information communication technology, innovation, prosperity and social inclusion. We heard tourism is keenly integrated through ICT giving visitors more enticement to come to Canberra. And government is supporting a wide range of digital technologies.

From Minister Rattenbury we heard about the Canberra Connect app and the fix my street opportunity where you can get potholes, footpaths and those sorts of things repaired through the application being developed by NICTA. We heard about NXTBUS and the real-time information digital displays at bus stops and the availability of real-time information on your PC and mobile devices thanks to the work that NICTA has done.

The Chief Minister talked on digital Canberra and our partnerships with the Business Council. Minister Burch informed us on the digital systems in the ACT school education programs and highlighted the work of Malkara School and its work in helping students with particular needs skilling up on iPad technology. The government is encouraging all students to innovate and make use of digital technologies, all thanks to the work NICTA has been doing.

Mr Hanson said the Canberra Liberals would support this motion, but he has made it very clear that any action we would ask him to take on it will not be supported. We have seen that in the vote on the amendment earlier on. I think we are at risk of not seeing the Liberals do much on this at all.

My final comments are on those of Mr Doszpot who, of course, spoke about my original speech. I am glad Mr Doszpot supports NICTA and the growth of the ACT's economy, but I am very sad that he made no comment on his party's plans to slash \$42 million from the organisation. Mr Doszpot gave us a litany of great work and

programs that NICTA continues to promote, but he failed to explain how many of these programs his party will slash. I urge all members to support this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Bushfires—preparedness

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.49): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) section 72(3) of the Emergencies Act 2004 requires the minister must make a Strategic Bushfire Management Plan for the ACT after considering a draft plan from the Commissioner;
- (b) section 74(2)(k) of the Emergencies Act 2004 states that the plan must have “a statement of resources needed to meet the objectives of the plan”;
- (c) Recommendation 2 (Chapter 3) in the Auditor-General’s Bushfire Preparedness Report No. 5 /2013, identified the government’s failure to comply with the Emergencies Act 2004 to explicitly state all resources to meet the objectives of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan;
- (d) the Justice and Community Safety Directorate’s agreement to Recommendation 2 (Chapter 3) of the Bushfire Preparedness report;
- (e) the minister’s reaffirmation on 8 August 2013 regarding Recommendation 2 (Chapter 3) of the Bushfire Preparedness report that the “government will not be releasing these papers”; and
- (f) the government’s repeated refusal to disclose the territory’s requirement and capability for bushfire management—citing that such information is “not considered appropriate for public release”—in direct contradiction to the Emergencies Act 2004; and

(2) calls on the government to release and make explicit all resources needed to meet the objectives of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan as per the Emergencies Act 2004 by the last sitting day of November 2013.

This is a very simple motion. This motion looks at the requirements of the Emergencies Act 2004 and how they have been implemented by this minister.

It is a very important motion, and I do not think any of us who saw the footage last week of the fires that sprung up so quickly in Sydney and saw the way that they moved and the devastation that they caused would not be concerned about the coming fire season. In fact, the announcement is that we can expect worse than average conditions in south-eastern Australia. That should put everyone on alert that the fire season is now just days away, and if you have not prepared your home and cleared all the debris and done the things that you should do around your house, then you should be doing it this weekend.

We have not had any significant fires in the ACT since 2003. So we have a build-up of 10 years of fuel. And whilst there has been considerable controlled burning, if the fire season starts we have to always be wary and prepared for the season.

Part of the requirement, under the Emergencies Act, of the strategic bushfire management plan is to of course detail what resources are required to meet the bushfire threat. For many years now—and probably the first time I asked the question was in estimates for the 2008-09 budget—we have asked what the NRFS believed was an appropriate list of resources that they needed to do the job properly. Initially those questions were stalled. We had a minister who played dumb, who claimed not to know what had been done. But I understand that all of the heads of service were asked to prepare what they thought was required to carry out their roles and that these were forwarded to the government.

Now we do know they exist, because the minister has plainly admitted that such things have existed, although for years he denied their actual existence. And we know they exist because he answered so to a question on notice. The question on notice and the answer came out of, again, the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates. The question was:

Have there been internal reviews conducted by either ESA as a headquarters or the four services as to their requirements and capability, say, in the last five or six years? If you find such reviews—and I am aware of a couple of documents—could you please provide the committee with copies of those reviews?

What was the minister's answer? He said that there had been a number of reviews: the strategic bushfire management plan version 2, the government response to the McLeod recommendations, the Ambulance Service review called the Lennox review, an ESA expenditure review, an ESA financial review, a fleet and procurement review, sustainable resource modelling work and on-call ESA duty officer arrangements. There were a number of other reviews.

Then the final line in the answer was that the other reviews were considered financial, budget or commercial in-confidence or of an internal operational nature—yes, I am sure they are of an internal operational nature—and were not considered appropriate for public release. So it does raise the question: what have the minister and the government been hiding for the last four or five years?

Now that we know that such reviews have been done, that the services have said, “We know exactly what we'd like to have,” it all comes to a head when of course the Auditor-General drops the bushfire preparedness report No 5 of 2013, where she says on page 24, in the summary:

The Emergency Services Agency should comply with the Emergencies Act 2004 requirements for the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan by including in this Plan an explicit statement of all resources needed to meet the objectives of the Plan.

Strategic bushfire management plan version 2 does not contain that list. You would have thought it was important the minister ensured that a document he has presented to this place complied with the law. “Comply with the law” is polite speak from the Auditor-General that you have broken the law. You have not complied.

When you go to the chapter about it on page 55, in the key findings, this is a key finding:

The Emergencies Act 2004 provides for the preparation of five-year Strategic Bushfire Management Plans by the Emergency Services Agency. The first Plan was implemented in January 2005. Following a review of its operation, the second Plan was approved in October 2009.

So one would assume, if they are five-year plans, the next one will be in 2014 or thereafter. The report continues:

The processes for the preparation of the 2009 Strategic Bushfire Plan met the requirements of legislation.

The processes did. The outcome did not. The report continues:

Subsection 72(2) of the Emergencies Act 2004 provides a comprehensive list of requirements for the content of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan. The Strategic Bushfire Management Plan meets the majority of these requirements, except for a statement of resources needed to meet the objectives of the plan and the inclusion of a list of privately-owned assets of public interest that are vulnerable to bushfires.

The Emergency Services Agency established an inter-agency Strategic Bushfire Management Plan Implementation Working Group to monitor the implementation of the plan. Recently the group has met infrequently, and its meetings have been poorly attended. The Group has had limited effect.

The Emergency Services Agency’s reporting on the Plan has not been based on required audit and compliance activity, and has not been coordinated with the ACT Bushfire Council or communicated to the ACT community as originally intended.

These are very serious paragraphs. It goes on at page 59 of the report at paragraph 3.8:

Statement of Resources for the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

3.8 The Strategic Bushfire Management Plan does not include a statement of resources needed to meet the objectives of the Plan. Chapter 6 of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan does, however, outline an intent—

and we would all be very grateful, when the next bushfire hits, for the intent—

by the Emergency Services Agency to consider the resources required over the life of the Plan. It notes ‘the resourcing of this Plan may require additional funding and will be determined in the context of whole-of-government budget considerations over the life of the Plan.’

Paragraph 3.9 states:

Section 76 of the Emergencies Act 2004 provides that, after the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan is approved by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the Emergency Services Agency must conduct an assessment, based on the Plan, of available resources and capabilities for bushfire prevention and preparedness. This assessment must be given to the ACT Bushfire Council and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Paragraph 3.10 states:

The Emergency Services Agency conducted an assessment of additional resources it required—

so we know they have got it—

to implement specific activities in the Plan. This assessment did not include an assessment of all resources needed, including existing resources, and the assessment was not provided to the ACT Bushfire Council.

And then recommendation 2 states:

The Emergency Services Agency should comply with the *Emergencies Act 2004* requirements for the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan by including in this Plan an explicit statement of all resources needed to meet the objectives of the Plan.

This very serious allegation, or very serious words from the Auditor-General, does follow up on the years of questions that I have asked in successive annual reports hearings and in estimates as to when these documents will be made public.

It is interesting when you actually go to the strategic bushfire management plan that on page 51, part 6, under the heading “Resource Requirements”—so the minister knew that it had to be there—it states:

The resourcing of this Plan may require additional funding and will be determined in the context of whole-of-government budget considerations over the life of the Plan.

The various elements and aspects of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan will generate demands on the agencies and individuals ... In some cases these may be significant across the life of the plan and will require specific calculation and procuring.

It goes on to say:

Hence the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan is for 10 years.

So we have a situation where we have a law, and it is actually a law this government passed. It is their own Emergencies Act 2004. In it is the requirement that the resources that are needed to fight a bushfire be listed, and it is to be in the management plan. It is not.

An audit is to be done after the plan is published, and that is to be handed to the minister and the Bushfire Council. It has not. And this has all happened on Mr Corbell's watch as minister. There is a problem here, because people of the ACT, after 2003, deserve to know with some degree of certainty that they have got the resources in place to be protected should another fire occur.

The minister, in dismissing most of this report, has said, "The Auditor-General has said we have got a robust framework." A robust framework is not going to put the fire out. The permanent officers and the volunteers and the equipment provided will. And if you have not done the assessment, you have not provided the equipment and you have not got the volunteers to take those units into the field, then you are not meeting your responsibility.

In that, this minister has been negligent. He has been negligent by allowing the law to be broken. He has been negligent by not ensuring that the Bushfire Council received, according to the Auditor-General, the audit and the assessment which have to be provided. He has been negligent for years in hiding the reports that I have asked for. And I think we know why he has hidden the reports that have been requested: because it involves expenditure, expenditure this government has not been willing to put into making sure the RFS has what it needs to do its job.

No doubt, the minister will stand up and say, "The budget has gone up over the years." Yes, it has. I am not aware of a budget of a government department that does not go up annually. Very few of them ever go backwards. "We're building a few fire stations." That is probably a good thing. But in the context of meeting the fire season, when will the minister tell us what is required, according to the determination?

Remember, for years the minister initially played dumb and said there were no such reports. Now he is saying they are financial, budget, commercial-in-confidence or not considered appropriate for public release. That is slightly different to what the department said. The department has realised it has now been caught out by the Auditor-General, and on page 24 of the response, where the auditor says it should be in the management plan, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate states:

Agreed. This will be included as part of the development of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan Version 3 which has commenced.

That is admirable, and I am sure having highlighted the fact that you have not complied with the law, you will have it in the next one. But what about the existing one?

There is no reason for this list not to be made available today. The minister could have brought it down today. But what the motion calls for is that—and we will give the minister some time—by the last sitting day in November this year the minister table the list. Part (2) of my motion calls on the government to release and make explicit all resources needed to meet the objectives of the strategic bushfire management plan as per the Emergencies Act 2004 by the last sitting day of November 2013.

I do not think that is such a big request. The work, if it has not been done, should be done. If the audit is not complete, then complete it. If you have got a requirement under the law to do something, then you should do it. And there is an explicit acknowledgement in the plan that was brought out in 2009 that it requires additional funding. Then you need to get the funding.

The report states:

The resourcing of this Plan may require additional funding and will be determined in the context of the whole-of-government budget considerations over the life of the Plan.

If this is a five-year plan and it finishes next year, then, obviously, it has not been done. And so it calls into doubt the minister's will or the minister's ability to be a proper minister for emergency services.

These are important issues. There are still people who bear the scars, physical and psychological, of what happened 10 years ago. And on days when there is smoke in the air I still get phone calls from people saying, "What's going on? What's happening?" I know people who are very nervous still about what happened in 2003. And I think it is important that they can look at the service and say that the government has given the service what is required.

I acknowledge the service, I acknowledge the full-time professional officers and the work they do, and particularly I acknowledge the volunteers. I note Minister Corbell is coming to the Guises Creek bushfire brigade's 20th anniversary celebration on 12 October this year. There are a lot of volunteers out there who know what is required. We have got a council who knows what is required. And I would ask members to look at this motion and say it is not unreasonable to ask the government to comply with the law and do so in a timely fashion.

Their self-acknowledgement in their own plan is from 2009, four years ago, that they would have to do this, and it has not been done. It is not unreasonable that the minister comply with this over the next two months, particularly, I think, given the fire season that we are facing, with the warm winter that we have had and the lack of rain—although the last couple of days has put a dint in the lack of rain. If the rain does not continue, all that will have done is promoted some spring growth and added to the fuel burden.

This is a reasonable motion. It is a reasonable request. It brings the government into compliance with the law. And I ask the Assembly for their support.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (5.05): While I acknowledge the issues that Mr Smyth raises in his motion today, the motion is, from the government's perspective, completely unnecessary. Indeed, as Mr Smyth has outlined in his own motion, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate has already agreed to the

recommendation to include an explicit statement of resources needed to meet the objectives of the plan at the time. As has been outlined in the Auditor-General's report, the directorate stated that this explicit statement of resources would be included as part of the development of the next strategic bushfire management plan.

The government has welcomed the release of the Auditor-General's report because it praises the framework that the government has in place for bushfire preparedness. The government has welcomed the Auditor-General's conclusion that the government has in place a robust governance and planning framework for its bushfire management activities.

I have already on several occasions responded to Mr Smyth's call to release the emergency services requirements and capability data. Following the estimates hearing for the ESA on 19 June this year, I provided a detailed response to Mr Smyth regarding the provision of internal reviews conduct by the ESA over the past six years. I provided that response to the select committee on estimates. I also provided further information in response to inquiries from the *Canberra Times* in relation to Mr Smyth's media release on the issue earlier this year.

The Auditor-General recommended that the ESA should comply with the requirements of the act for the strategic bushfire management plan by including in the plan an explicit statement of all resources needed. The auditor went on to say that the ESA conducted an assessment of additional resources it required to implement specific activities in the plan but concluded that the plan did not provide an explicit statement of resources.

As I have indicated earlier, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate has accepted this recommendation and is moving forward to include it in the new version 3 of the SBMP. However, Mr Smyth's request that this be done during the life of the current plan, a plan that is coming to an end, is really not a good use of the government's resources, financial or otherwise, at this time. The plan will come to an end in October next year. Any provision of resources to support it will need to be considered in the forthcoming budget cycle.

The directorate agreed that recommendation 2 of the audit report is an area for improvement. The ESA and my directorate have stated in the response to this recommendation that a statement of resources:

... will be included as part of the development of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan version 3 ...

Furthermore, the statement of resources will be required to deliver each element of version 3 of the plan under the framework of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. This statement of resources will also be able to identify the necessary functions, capability, equipment and infrastructure that the government and its directorates require to deliver version 3 of the plan.

So Mr Smyth's assertions that the government failed to comply with the act by not explicitly stating all resources to meet the objectives of the plan is a gross overstatement of what has actually been concluded by the Auditor-General.

With respect to Mr Smyth's assertion that he or the select committee on estimates were not provided with certain documents, I say that after the estimates hearing in June this year the government provided copies of a range of bushfire management related reviews conducted by the ESA. These reviews comprehensively address a broad range of issues around bushfire management and response capability, including, in the SBMP version 2, the government's agreed recommendations from the McLeod and Doogan coronial inquiries and associated implementation reports.

There is plenty of evidence on the public record that demonstrates the work and the significant financial commitment this government has made to increasing bushfire preparedness in the ACT.

As everyone in this place is very much aware, Mr Assistant Speaker, an extensive performance audit was conducted by the Auditor-General. I thank her for this work. The final audit report, released in July this year and tabled in the Assembly, outlines a range of largely administrative recommendations designed to further improve and enhance the governance arrangements in relation to bushfires. The government is finally concluding its overall submission to the public accounts inquiry in response to this latest audit report. I am, though, very pleased that the Auditor-General concluded that the government's prevention and preparedness activities position the community to meet the challenges of living in the bush capital. The Auditor-General found that the legislation the government has in place, the strategic bushfire management plan and its operational plans provide the framework needed to manage the risk of bushfires in the ACT.

The audit report will certainly contribute to further strengthening bushfire management and preparedness governance in the territory, and it provides us with an assurance that ESA staff and volunteers are working well to ensure they are ready to respond to, and the community is prepared for, major bushfires. The audit report provides the government with the opportunity to respond to change and seek to continually improve the provision and management of bushfire activities in the prevention, preparedness and response spaces.

The government will take the next steps to build on the current planning framework, compliance and operational capability. We will be seeking to strengthen our relationship further with the community to promote resilience, understanding and managing the risks associated with living in the bush capital. The approach of shared responsibility has been a constant theme for the past decade. The Auditor-General's report and recommendations support the government's commitment to building further on that shared responsibility through the resilience and capacity of both the community and the government's agencies.

We can all listen to the words and the reports, but the most telling demonstration of the government's work and the work of our emergency services to learn the lessons of 2003 can be seen in actions rather than words. The elevated bushfire conditions earlier in January this year, with fires in and around the ACT and New South Wales, resulted in the successful activation and implementation of a number of plans demonstrating their effectiveness across the ESA and whole of government. We saw multiple

lightning strikes in Namadgi national park, and we knew we only had about 48 hours before a very dangerous north-westerly wind change and elevated very high temperature conditions arrived. If those fires were not extinguished, we had every reason to believe they would spread and become a major fire heading towards the western interface of the ACT.

Because of the dedicated work of our fire and other emergency services, both paid and volunteer personnel, we were able to extinguish those fires using some of the technologies that this government has invested in since 2003—mechanisms like automatic lightning detection so that we know where lightning hits the ground and we can send the crews to a precise location to ensure that if there has been an ignition it is able to be rapidly addressed. We saw the deployment of remote area firefighting teams and a dedicated capability now in place because of the investments this government made after the 2003 fires. We also saw vehicles and crews on the ground responding with the appropriate weight of response for the significance of the event. The fires were put out. The ignitions were dealt with, and they were dealt with before those very dangerous high fire danger conditions arrived.

Actions speak louder than words, Mr Assistant Speaker. I think that tells us everything we need to know about the lessons we have learnt since 2003.

The Auditor-General made 24 recommendations in the performance audit report on the ACT's bushfire preparedness. The directorate agreed or agreed in part to all of those recommendations, and the details of these responses are stated in the audit report. The audit report identified "some areas of improvement", which my directorate will address in consultation and cooperation with other ACT government agencies.

Turning to the strategic bushfire management plan itself, version 2 of the plan was released in October 2009. The development of version 2 included consideration of the interim findings of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the coronial inquiry into the 2003 Canberra firestorm and the national framework for scaled bushfire advice and bushfire warnings released in 2009. The plan identifies a wide range of activities for bushfire prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, which required additional funding to undertake key programs identified in the plan. The ESA and the government as a whole continue to implement the strategies in the SBMP.

Further, under the Emergencies Act some land managers are required to prepare bushfire operational plans that are consistent with the policies and strategies in the SBMP. These plans identify the detailed actions, such as hazard reduction, trail maintenance and grazing, that land managers must undertake to meet bushfire management requirements.

I am pleased to advise members of the Assembly that work on the review and development of the new SBMP version 3 has commenced in compliance with section 80 of the act, which states that I, as the minister, must, in consultation with the ACT Bushfire Council, comprehensively review the plan at intervals of not more than five years. Version 3 of the plan is anticipated to be completed by the end of October 2014.

In addition to the SBMP, a series of important emergency plans have been developed or updated since 2003. From a whole of government perspective, the ACT emergency plan describes the responsibilities, authorities and mechanisms to prevent or, if they occur, manage emergencies and their consequences consistent with the Emergencies Act.

The community communication and information plan is an approved subplan of the ACT emergency plan and outlines how the government will communicate with the public when there is a threat of or an actual emergency in the territory. It details the processes for all communications staff across government to come together to work as one with emergency services media teams to ensure a single point of truth for the dissemination of all public information during a major incident. We saw this plan activated during the heightened fire conditions last summer, and I think we demonstrated the worth of those arrangements at that time.

As part of the ESA's continued efforts to improve governance arrangements in fighting bushfires between operational services such as the ACT RFS and ACT Fire & Rescue, a *Concept of operations* document for bush and grass fires in the ACT commissioner's guidelines has been created. *Concept of operations* is a capstone document that establishes, at the strategic level, the principles for managing bush and grass fires occurring on any fire danger rated day from low through to catastrophic. In addition to *Concept of operations*, we recognised the need to ensure that the territory is sufficiently prepared to manage bush and grass fires under the worst possible conditions. In recognition that the factors, such as fuel state and climate variables, that drive these worst possible outcomes vary from year to year, the fire services will jointly advise the commissioner prior to each fire season on the key risk factors and the most likely worst-case scenario for the coming season.

All this demonstrates that the government has undertaken an extensive and ongoing reform agenda to strengthen the capability and the government's framework for managing bushfires in the ACT. The audit report is an important contribution to this ongoing effort. We need to continually see improvement, enhancement and refinement of our bushfire operational planning and response capabilities. The audit report is a significant assistance in that regard, but it is also a strong endorsement of the governance and planning arrangements that are in place and the fact that, as a government and as a community, we have clearly and comprehensively learned the lessons of the 2003 disaster.

The government will not be supporting this motion today, for the reasons that I have outlined in my comments.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (5.18): Mr Smyth's motion, of course, comes at a time when the ACT is facing a potentially very hazardous bushfire season. Members may have seen the report in the *Canberra Times* published on 3 September in which the Emergency Services Commissioner, Dominic Lane, outlined that there is potential for a very high fire danger this season with above average rainfall over the

previous three months, coupled with more forecast rain that would build up the fuel. He went on to say that if there is a significant drying out period the ACT will face a significant grassland problem, as we did last summer, as well as potential for forested areas. Basically, we are looking at a very significant season. To my mind, that is the important context that frames the discussion we are having today.

In his remarks—and I might paraphrase slightly—Mr Smyth talked about the important measure being about what is actually being done; essentially, what you do is what matters. From a TAMS perspective, I know that TAMS takes its responsibilities for both bushfire preparation and bushfire fighting extremely seriously. Certainly, through last season I had just become the minister and I took some fairly regular briefings, given the heightened threat last season. The staff in TAMS take their responsibilities incredibly seriously. A number of them, of course, as members will know, were around in 2003 and they remember it very vividly. I think their experience has brought considerable improvement in the agency, and certainly there is no question about their focus.

In terms of what TAMS has been doing, earlier this year I released some information about the work that had been going on, including the ACT's largest hazard reduction program in 40 years being successfully completed as part of the 2012-13 bushfire operations plan, which was undertaken in close collaboration with the Rural Fire Service. The information I released included the fact that 96 per cent of the bushfire operation plan had been completed, which included 42 controlled burns, 8,000 hectares of slashing, 7,000 hectares of grazing, 74 hectares of physical fuel removal and over 650 kilometres of fire trail maintenance and upgrade. Part of that included the very significant controlled burn in Namadgi National Park, which was actually the biggest in the ACT in over 30 years. It took 13 days to complete, after several months of planning, and covered an area of 6,000 hectares.

There are many more examples of what TAMS has been doing. To that end, I will table a document entitled "Territory and Municipal Services—Bush Fire Operational Plan—Final full year report—June 2013". This outlines in rather more detail than I will give through this speech—members can read it if they are interested—some of the work that TAMS has been doing. This document has been given to the Emergency Services Agency and the Bushfire Council. I would note that, in giving it to the ESA commissioner, the ESA will review it and there may be further commentary and advice back to TAMS. Therefore, I table the document with the note that there may still be some changes or additional information in light of that review process. This is the document that TAMS has provided. It outlines the very significant amount of work that has been undertaken. In some areas where there has not been 100 per cent completion it includes explanations as to why, and it also outlines unforeseen and additional tasks that were undertaken. For the information of members, I present the following paper:

Territory and Municipal Services—Bush Fire Operational Plan—Final full year report—June 2013, dated 1 July 2013

I have, of course, taken note, as the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, of the Auditor-General's report. I have asked TAMS to provide me with an update—and

I expect to have that in the near future—around the detailed responses to those recommendations made by the Auditor-General. Overall, the Auditor-General's comments were that there has been a lot of improvement in the way things are done. I think there are some findings in there which obviously require a level of follow-up. I certainly expect my agency to take those findings very seriously and keep me updated on the implementation of that.

In terms of Mr Smyth's specific motion, I personally think this is fairly non-contentious in that, on my reading of the Auditor-General's report, JACS has agreed to exactly the request that Mr Smyth has made. So on that basis I have no qualms with supporting the motion in the sense that the commitment is already there to provide that information.

I think the question that does stand is whether the end of November is the relevant time frame. I did not gather from Mr Corbell's comments whether that time frame is a specific issue or not. I am certainly open to that time frame being amended should that be unsuitable. Given that JACS has agreed to provide this information, I do not see any reason not to support the motion.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.24), in reply: It is curious the approach of both the ministers that now that it has been brought to their attention by the Auditor-General they will do something 12 months from now. If Mr Rattenbury thinks that that is acceptable, good luck to him, because a lot can happen in 12 months. Recall that in 2009 when the plan was dropped they have had four years in which to comply with the law. I think this curious, perhaps, juxtaposition of the Attorney-General saying, "Non-compliance with the law has been brought to my attention, but I'll let it go on for another 12 months" is most unfortunate.

To say that the department has now agreed to comply with the law and will do it 12 months from now is not to honour the act. It is not to enforce the act and it is not to enforce the resourcing of chapter 6 in strategic management bushfire plan 2 which said that it will be done over the life of this plan. It is unfortunate that the minister for emergency services is going to take that approach. He has these documents. He has been told by his officers what is required. He knows what that requirement is. My understanding is that it was not just for the Rural Fire Service. It was for the Ambulance Service and the SES, as well as the fire and rescue service. If the minister has had something brought to his attention—this is where ministerial responsibility kicks in—and he does not act on it and something untoward happens, it will be on that minister's head.

Remember, this is the minister that wanted, for instance, to get rid of the fire management unit. It was almost done, and I give the Greens credit for their support when I moved the motion to save the fire management unit. That unit is working incredibly well. It had the support of everyone from the Volunteer Brigades Association through to the comms council. Everyone agreed, except for this minister. His judgement was flawed then and his response today is flawed. He has a requirement to fulfil the law and to ensure that his agencies fulfil the law. He has had a number of documents over a number of years now that tell him what is required, but he has suppressed those documents. He refuses now to comply and is being aided and abetted by you, Mr Rattenbury.

I acknowledge the good work. I congratulate the ESA and I extend these congratulations to the officers from TAMS, who have done a good job as well. But if we want them to continue to do a good job then we need to give them the tools.

Mr Rattenbury: You can't help yourself. I just agreed to support your motion.

MR SMYTH: Sorry?

Mr Rattenbury: I agreed to support your motion and you're still having a go at me. You cannot help yourself.

MR SMYTH: I thought you said you were not supporting the motion.

Mr Rattenbury: No, I said I'm supporting your motion. You can't help yourself.

MR SMYTH: If you are going to support the motion, thank you. Thank you for that.

Mr Corbell: You weren't paying attention. You're just absolutely hopeless.

MR SMYTH: I apologise. He is going to vote for it. That is lovely. Thank you, Mr Rattenbury. Thank you. But it is a shame that the minister has taken this approach. It is a shame that Mr Corbell—

Mr Corbell: Well done, Brendan; well done.

MR SMYTH: I have apologised, Simon. You lack grace; you lack grace.

Mr Corbell: You lack attention.

MR SMYTH: No, I think it was ambiguous. I questioned him when he finished whether he was supporting it or not. But the problem for us is that we have an Attorney-General who acts as a minister for emergency services who does not want to do this. I thank Mr Rattenbury for his support. I compliment the staff of TAMS. They know they have my support as a former minister and they know from some of the work before the last election in saving the fire management unit that I believe in and support the work that they do. They know that.

I would thank Mr Rattenbury for his support. I would say to Mr Corbell that I think he needs to have a serious think about his approach to these issues. It is interesting there is a press release out—"Corbell accuses Liberals of 'point scoring' on bushfire management"—reported on the ABC. It is not point scoring when, one, you have not complied with the law. It is not point scoring when it would be hard now for the public to understand whether or not you actually are prepared for the fire season. It is impossible for the public to determine whether or not they have enough equipment and the resources to meet the season's requirements.

It is interesting that Mr Corbell said that somehow I had grossly overstated what the Auditor-General had said. I will just finish with what the Auditor-General said:

The Emergency Services Agency should comply with the *Emergencies Act 2004* requirements for the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan by including in this Plan an explicit statement of all resources needed to meet the objectives of the Plan.

It is not a year from now. It is not in the next one. It is now. You should comply with the law now. I thank Mr Rattenbury for his support.

Motion agreed to.

Planning

MR COE (Ginninderra) (5.29): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government has taken an ad hoc approach to planning;
- (b) the Territory Plan is excessively complex and is stifling appropriate development, innovation and investment in Canberra;
- (c) there is a lack of confidence in the planning system by residents, builders, planners and industry groups;
- (d) Variation 306 has been destructive for the building and property sectors;
- (e) there has been a lack of planning clarity with regard to development in the city such that the city is being drawn in all directions:
 - (i) to the west with City West, New Acton and the ANU Exchange developments;
 - (ii) to the north with redevelopment in Braddon;
 - (iii) to the south with the City to the Lake proposal; and
 - (iv) to the east with Draft Variation 308;
- (f) funding has been provided through the Commonwealth Government's "Liveable Cities Program" to develop a City Plan yet significant planning decisions have been made in the interim; and
- (g) the ACT Government failed to sell Denman Prospect and as such, the ACT Government will be developing the site; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) undertake a thorough review of the Territory Plan with a view to simplifying the document and making the Plan more accessible and comprehensible;

- (b) delay any implementation of Draft Variation 308 until after the City Plan has been completed;
- (c) undertake a thorough review into the impact of Variation 306 with the intention of rectifying the significant problems the changes have brought about for industry, and subsequently, the ACT economy; and
- (d) investigate the reasons for the failure to sell Denman Prospect and make any necessary revisions, such as sub-dividing the site and removing the restrictions imposed by Variation 306.

I rise today to call for certainty, confidence and rationality in the territory's planning system. Quite frankly, each of these is missing in the documentation and implementation of the policies of this government.

For too long, we have had an ad hoc planning system that does not serve our city well. I do not think you would say that anyone involved or impacted by the planning system would be satisfied, be it planners, architects, engineers, builders, developers, property agents, certifiers, proponents, banks, neighbours or residents. Something is going wrong when there are seemingly no winners in the system. Now, the government may say that this is a badge of honour, that everyone is making sacrifices. This might be true if what was being achieved was in fact for the common good or the best-case scenario. However, instead what we are getting is the worst of all worlds. We are in a position where symptom after symptom is being treated, with patch after patch, policy after policy, but there is no consistency or common message.

As it stands, the planning system in the ACT indicates that we are closed for business, that people should invest elsewhere.

Of course, in competitive federalism, jurisdictions are able to compete, and that is exactly what the New South Wales government and Queanbeyan City Council are doing. I commend them for their competitive and aggressive approach of trying to attract investment into and around Queanbeyan. However, it seems that in this bidding war, the Queanbeyan City Council is the only one bidding. The ACT government has all but surrendered future investment to across the border. I think it is time for the ACT government to fight back and make our territory more conducive to investment in the property sector.

The story of Denman Prospect is a sorry saga. On 7 May, the day before the scheduled auction date, I said:

The question of yield is going to come up tomorrow when Denman Prospect is auctioned. Now, \$100 million was touted as being the figure the government might get for Denman Prospect. It will be very interesting to see what they do get tomorrow. I think we might see a tangible impact to the territory's bottom line for taxpayers tomorrow when Denman Prospect is auctioned. That will not have anything to do with the quality of land or the quality of marketing; it will be because of the reduced yield that DV306 will generate.

Unfortunately, I was spot on. The auction was delayed a couple of times and negotiations fell through. Now the government is going to be going it alone and skewing the market. Property is one of the most competitive sectors of our economy, yet this government arrogantly thinks it can do a better job than the professional private sector.

When Denman Prospect failed to sell, the message to government should have been: "What can we do to make this more attractive? How can we remove the obstacles?" Instead, the ACT Labor government took it as an opportunity to further taint the market.

The issue of the redevelopment of the ABC flats and the territory plan variation is a sorry saga. Of course, yesterday the Speaker ruled that the document that Mr Gentleman had tried to ram through the planning committee and Assembly and claim was a committee report was questionable. The Assembly sent the questionable report back to the planning committee for proper process and consideration. However, on the more substantial issue, the government is seeking to do an ad hoc territory plan variation for a key part of inner Canberra at the same time that the government is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on a city plan with commonwealth funds. It seems bizarre that during the time in which a city plan is taking place, the government will be seeking to undertake a major rezoning of part of the city.

There is no coordination of planning in and around the city. The city is being pulled in every direction. It is being pulled to the west with the City West, New Acton and ANU Exchange developments; to the north with redevelopment in Braddon; to the south with City to the Lake; and now, with draft variation 308, to the east.

Independently, each of these may be a good thing, but there needs to be some coordination, something which actually links the plans together. That is why the city plan is a good idea, and I am glad that the commonwealth government is funding it. However, it seems a slap in the face to that plan when the government goes and announces draft variation 308 at the same time that city planning process is being undertaken.

Further to this, the government states that the redeveloped ABC site will house hundreds of dwellings with only 10 per cent to remain as social housing. This means that the government will be acting as a developer by selling 90 per cent of the units to the private market. Therefore, the government will be interfering in a competitive market at a time when the property sector is struggling. Further to this, given that the government would not be paying for the land, or the lease variation charge, the government would have the ability to deliver units to the market at a considerably lower price than the private sector. This means that the government could undercut other sellers' units. Further, as a contingency, if the government fails to sell units it is likely that Housing ACT would retain ownership of apartments for use as social housing stock.

There is no other developer in Canberra, or anywhere, that has the luxury of not paying for land, not paying the lease variation charge, and then being able to self-

insure by retaining units that they do not sell simply because they have got access to public funds, to taxpayers' money. The government, acting as a property developer, may skew the market and erode confidence in construction and the ACT economy.

The territory plan is simply too complex, and the rules are almost impossible to comply with. This is not good for governance and transparency, and it certainly is not good for the building sector, which is already doing it tough. Of course, variation 306 was a significant blow for Canberra's economy. It has placed unnecessary burdens on all concerned and is not delivering good planning outcomes.

It seems that the government is determined for everyone to suffer equally, rather than to have a situation where everyone wins. It seems that the rules are now so complex that if ACTPLA wants to stop any development they can. All the power rests with the government when it comes to stopping developments. That is not a good thing for certainty, it is not a good thing for confidence, it is not a good thing for investment and it is not a good thing for our economy. It is wrong when the government has the kind of power and the kind of influence on every single minuscule planning decision that they have at the moment.

We need a planning system that encourages investment, institutes certainty, encourages innovation and creativity, empowers industry and gives confidence for neighbourhoods. At present, the Labor government is failing.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney—General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (5.37): How extraordinary! How extraordinary to hear from the Liberal Party that they believe that when it comes to development, Canberra is closed for business. Did they for even a moment before standing up to make their arguments on this motion tonight reflect on what they were arguing in this place this morning? In this place this morning they were arguing, one, for a complete circumvention of the planning and development process and, two, for the government to reject a development proposal unilaterally, using the call-in powers without a development application having even been lodged.

Who in this case is arguing that Canberra is closed for business? It is those opposite, the same people who argue for development proposals to be unilaterally rejected without any development assessment process. What hypocrisy on the part of those opposite, Madam Deputy Speaker. What two-faced, bald-faced arrogance from those opposite that they have the gall to stand up and say that apparently Canberra is closed for business when this morning they were quite happy to argue against development that was worth tens of millions of dollars because they felt that that development was flawed.

They cannot have it both ways. But it shows the lack of any fundamental understanding of how planning law and development assessment should occur in this town for them to fall into such a basic and fundamental contradiction, as we have seen from Mr Coe today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this motion is about the future planning and development of our city. This government has a comprehensive strategic planning framework to guide the future pattern and form of development in our city to make our city more sustainable, to make our city more liveable, to make housing more affordable, and to make it easier for people to move around our city without being overly reliant on the private motor vehicle.

These are the challenges that any city's strategic plan needs to take into account: sustainable population growth, climate change, energy use, liveability. These are the key issues that a planning system must address. The ACT planning strategy came into effect on 1 September last year and it outlines clear directions under nine strategies to deliver five key outcomes. It will guide development across our city over the next 20 years. It will focus on creating and delivering a more compact city that will come from higher densities in established areas and along key transport corridors. This will help to reduce our urban footprint.

It will maximise public and active transport investment and it will provide greater connectivity across the city. It means more intense development in our city centre, like the ABC flats. It means more people living close to where they work, where they shop, where there are cultural, recreational and commercial services. It is a very real and meaningful strategic planning framework to deliver strong outcomes. As I have said, it will deliver higher densities in established areas and more people bringing more activity to areas, creating economic, recreational and cultural opportunities.

It is about broadening the range of housing available for a wider spectrum of the housing market and improving affordability. It is about connecting people easily and simply to services, to facilities, and to recreational opportunities, and it is about putting people in touch with the services, facilities and opportunities they need. It is also about rejuvenating and modernising areas of the city where people want to be and want to live.

The city plan that has been part-funded through the commonwealth government's living cities program will help to deliver the strategic framework for the detailed future of our city centre and build on our strategic planning framework. It is not proposed that the city plan be a statutory document, but it will help to reinforce the strategic framework and directions for growth and change in the city centre.

It is expected to put in context the kind of developments and proposals that Mr Coe claims are drawing the city in all directions. While the city plan is yet to be finalised, it is expected to set a direction for increased residential growth and density in and around the city centre—growth and redevelopment like the ABC flats in Reid and Braddon; redevelopment like we see in the new Acton precinct; and the development of new commercial facilities in the city centre, such as on London Circuit.

These are the kind of activities that will bring commercial and residential activity into our city centre and allow more people to live close to the city centre. The government has outlined what this growth could mean. It could mean up to a further 5,000 dwellings in the city centre over the next 20 years. It could mean close to another

10,000 people living in the city centre over that time frame. These are the drivers for growth that we have to respond to and why we are doing the work through a detailed planning framework set out in an overarching way through the ACT planning strategy, and in a detailed way for the city centre through the city plan and the city-to-the-lake initiatives.

City to the lake, of course, is about connecting the city with its best address, Lake Burley Griffin, and overcoming the barrier that has been put in the way of the city meeting the lake, which is of course the Parkes Way road network. This city to the lake initiative should give us great opportunity to encourage growth and investment in and around our city centre and change the way people perceive the role of the city.

I was delighted to see that the city to the lake initiative won an Australian design award, established by former Prime Minister Paul Keating. The awards go to projects that exemplify urban design excellence. It is a great endorsement of the planning work being done by this government to drive, revitalise and transform our city centre.

Transforming our city centre is not just about where buildings go and what types of uses they accommodate. It is also about improving transport connections. That is why the government is driving the capital metro project. This is about transforming travel options, about giving access to city centre amenities for people travelling from the suburbs of Gungahlin and the north side of Canberra.

As the project moves from concept and design to reality, we are planning a number of stages to bring this initiative to fruition. Initial engineering investigations and transport planning, along with further economic and financial aspects, are all currently under detailed development. The first stage of this project is a critical step in marking the commencement of the initiative and opening our city centre to people who live on the northern side of the lake.

But, of course, the government is committed not just to the north side, but to right across our city. That is why we are investing in a Canberra-wide light rail network master plan, to plan future stages of the capital metro connections. We have to recognise that whilst there will be many more people living in our city centre and along the Gungahlin-to-city corridor over the next 20 years, there will also be many, many more people working in that corridor. The estimates suggest up to a further 20,000 to 25,000 people every working day will be travelling in and out of the city centre and the corridor to and from work.

Do we seriously think that buses or the existing transport arrangements are going to meet that demand or do we have to seriously plan for our city's future and give commuters the choices they need and deserve to enable them to move quickly and conveniently to and from their places of work and also help to reduce congestion on our roads, which will only continue to grow over time?

These are the choices and the decisions that this government is making now because we recognise without the strategic planning effort our city will be caught short and we will start to face the problems that other cities see every day: congestion, overcrowding and lack of good transport choices.

The standing committee's report into draft variation 308 has been circulated. But I note, of course, that this Assembly has resolved that some other procedural matters in relation to that report need to be addressed. Draft variation 308, however, is consistent with the current strategies and planning guidelines for our city. The site adjoins the commercial heart of Canberra. It includes former public housing accommodation that is in desperate need of rejuvenation.

The broad direction of this draft variation will see a tired part of the city redeveloped and modernised. It will provide people with a choice of housing products and the opportunity to live close to the city centre. Bringing more residents into the city centre is entirely consistent with the strategic planning objectives of the government. It will mean that people can live close to services, facilities and recreational opportunities, and it will create investment across a range of retail, dining, recreational and business activities to support the city's ongoing viability, development and rejuvenation.

Redevelopment of land in close proximity to the city is consistent with our overarching planning directions. It will deliver real benefits for the city centre. Again, I find it extraordinary that the Liberal Party, the party that claims to be concerned about Canberra being closed for business, is opposing this draft variation. It is just extraordinary. They say one thing, but they do another.

Mr Coe in his motion also talks about review of the territory plan. In case Mr Coe had not noticed, the government has already agreed to review the territory plan to ensure that it is consistent with our overarching strategy to achieve reductions in the city's greenhouse gas emissions. This commitment for a restructured territory plan commenced with the return of the government last year. We will undertake a detailed review of the plan to ensure that it meets the objectives of our greenhouse gas reduction strategy and legislation.

The challenges faced by a modern city are well known. As a responsive and responsible government, we are taking action through our planning system and planning activities to respond to the challenges of a growing city and a growing community. We do not take the pessimistic view of those opposite and nor do we take the contradictory and hypocritical positions that we have seen from those opposite.

We have a planning and development system for a reason—to test, mitigate and manage often conflicting and contested perspectives on how developments should occur in our city. We should let that system do its work—unlike those opposite who sought to override it this morning and to stop development, the same development that they say they want to welcome into our city.

The planning system needs to be allowed to do its job and the government will do its job of establishing, reinforcing and implementing the strategic planning framework needed to guide growth for our city as we enter our second century.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have circulated an amendment to Mr Coe's motion. I now move that amendment circulated in my name. I move:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“notes:

- (1) that the ACT Government has established a strategic framework for the long term future of our city as articulated in the ACT Planning Strategy and Transport for Canberra, both adopted and released last year, and guiding growth and development through to 2030;
- (2) that comprehensive shorter and medium term development actions are being developed through a co-ordinated framework of plans and strategies such as the City Plan and City to the Lake;
- (3) that the Government has begun the process of progressing our city towards a sustainable future by undertaking such transformative projects as the Capital Metro light rail;
- (4) that the Government has already undertaken to review the Territory Plan so that it is consistent with our 40% greenhouse gas reduction target; and
- (5) that the redevelopment proposed through DV308 is consistent with the intentions of the ACT Planning Strategy.”.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.51): In broad, I will be supporting Mr Corbell’s amendment today, and I do not agree with the sentiments of Mr Coe’s motion. I will speak to some of the matters in detail, but I fundamentally see it differently to the way Mr Coe has described it in his motion today. I do not believe the community has lost confidence in the planning system. That is not to say there are not people who have disagreements and there are not areas that can be improved, but to go as far as Mr Coe has is really stretching it. Nobody would argue that it is not complex. Certainly all of us at times struggle with the planning system and the intricacy of the rules that have been put in place to try and draw that fair balance between the competing interests in the planning system. But I do not think that it is ad hoc. I think some clear strategic directions are being developed here in the ACT, and, no doubt, those will continue to be refined and improved. It is far from the situation Mr Coe has described. In some ways it reads as though Mr Coe is arguing for more comprehensive regulations. If there are areas where he would like to consider further changes, I would certainly be open to that conversation.

Let me turn to some of the specifics outlined in Mr Coe’s motion. When it comes to the ACT planning system, a lot of work has been done in recent years to establish the strategic framework of the development of our city. At a big-picture level, the ACT planning strategy and transport for Canberra have been developed to guide the direction of growth and development and to steer us on the path towards a more sustainable future.

There has also been a process of reforming the planning regulations through the development of the Planning and Development Act, which was finalised in 2007 with the changes in the territory plan to incorporate codes and guidelines and then the review of the various zoning types. So I think a lot of work has been done, and

particularly when you overlay other documents, such as the climate change strategies, the greenhouse gas emissions targets that have been adopted, the stated intention of the government to develop light rail and the work being done on projects such as city to the lake and the government's commitment to increasing urban density across the city, one can see a very clear direction there. I do not think there is uncertainty in some of that. There are details still to be fleshed out, no doubt about it.

When it comes to draft variation 306, we debated the merits of that here in the Assembly back in May so I do not want to go over that old ground too much today. However, a number of positive changes have come about from draft variation 306, including the solar fence requirements to protect neighbours from being overshadowed by their northern neighbours, block size and aspect requirements to better ensure solar access for individual houses, removing restrictions on who can live in secondary residences or granny flats—which has now come into effect—increased diversity of dwelling sizes in multi-unit developments, better protection of neighbourhood character in RZ2 developments, an increased dwelling allowance for adaptable dwellings, ensuring that consolidated block developments have adequate street frontage and restricting the overall scale and distribution. This will ensure that local neighbours are happier with the developments as well as creating more efficient dwellings.

I understand that the new requirements have had some teething problems, and that is understandable. We need a fundamental shift in perspective to start to design and build all our new homes in sympathy with the place and climate in which they are situated. We know that it can be done, and it will get easier over time as architects and builders get used to the new requirements.

Last time we debated this issue the government committed to further consultation with the industry and stakeholders on technical amendments to iron out some inconsistencies and make the transition smoother. I look forward to hearing more from the planning minister about progress in this area. But I think it is right for government to provide the standards it expects the industry to adopt and provide a level of push, because, unfortunately, otherwise the transition to the new standards and the meeting of more modern criteria will simply not be rapid enough for the imperatives we face.

When it comes to draft variation 308 we have the planning framework and processes in place to assess individual development proposals against strategic objectives. In the case of the proposed redevelopment of the ABC flats, I believe there is no reason to hold off on the assessment of this proposal while the city plan is developed. I am not going to go into the whys and wherefores of the committee report; that was well prosecuted in here yesterday. But I certainly believe the site is prime for redevelopment, and I believe that for two reasons: one is that the existing structures are in need of replacement. They are simply not the buildings this city needs. The second is that it is a prime site capable of having a much higher level of development on it than is currently the case. It is right on the edge of the city within walking distance for many people of an enormous array of amenities and facilities and work locations. The site should be strategically used to help increase the density of the city.

This is important in the context of the view I hold that, while many people in Canberra want to retain single-family dwellings as their preferred place to live and their preferred neighbourhood, a location such as the site on Cooyong Street is a place where high density redevelopment is highly appropriate. So I disagree with the notion that Mr Coe has put in his motion that any implementation of draft variation 308 should be deferred. It is quite clear that this is an appropriate site for that higher level of development.

One thing I agree with Mr Coe on in his motion is the need to review the territory plan. This policy was included in the 2012 Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement to ensure that the plan is consistent with the 40 per cent greenhouse gas reduction target, and the government is committed to doing this as part of action plan 2. I think this will be a very beneficial outcome because, again, it will tie together a number of the strategic strands put in place both by the previous government and the current government to put Canberra on a pathway to a more sustainable future. The review of the territory plan will simply reinforce that.

Let me simply conclude by saying I think there are still improvements to be made in our planning system. Anybody who suggests it is perfect is really kidding themselves. One of the things I am particularly keen to see is the completion of the program to develop master plans for all the town centres and, ultimately, for these master plans to be reflected in precinct codes in the territory plan to provide certainty about what kind of development will be allowed in these areas.

The process is yet to begin for Belconnen and Woden town centres, and I know the communities in these areas are keen to be engaged in a conversation about how their town centres develop and to talk through issues such as building heights and for these issues to be resolved. Of course, we are in the middle of the process of developing a master plan for the city centre—the city plan and city to lake—which will provide further direction for the heart of the city. The Greens have argued for more levers to improve sustainability in the outcomes of planning decisions, such as remissions on the lease variation charge to provide incentives to drive more sustainable developments. Financial incentives are an important lever in the planning tool kit to give support to proponents who want to retrofit, re-purpose or build more energy-efficient buildings, for example.

Overall, I believe we are moving forward on the path to sustainability and better neighbourhoods. Sadly, too many of Canberra's existing suburbs were built without consideration of modern design principles, making it harder to build energy efficient homes and to provide public transport. The Canberra of the future has to be designed in a smart and sustainable way with an awareness of the challenges we are facing from our changing environment.

At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (6.00): I will speak briefly on a particular aspect of the motion in relation to Denman Prospect. Denman Prospect is the first of two suburbs to be developed in stage 2 of the Molonglo valley. In October last year, after considering the risks and benefits of several different options, the Land Development Agency sought to release Denman Prospect as an englobo site in a single offering. This single englobo parcel was around 100 hectares and would accommodate around 1,700 dwellings of single residential blocks and multi-unit high density dwellings to be delivered over a 12-year period.

This option was chosen to ensure an integrated development across the suburb with a consistent treatment of streetscape, landscape and open space. This would reduce the risk of different englobo developers waiting on others for the completion of works. The englobo site was released to potential purchasers in March of 2013 with a restricted auction planned for June this year.

After conducting appropriate market research, the sales agent provided an expectation that four to six national developers and two to three local developers would register to bid at auction. Three organisations registered, however, only one provided sufficient information to be admitted to the auction. Therefore, after appropriate legal and probity advice, the LDA changed the process of the auction to a tender, as an auction with only one bidder obviously was not going to provide the best outcome. The tender evaluation process was completed and negotiation began in June with the only tenderer. Negotiations concluded with the final offer from the tenderer not considered to meet the overall value-for-money test for the project.

In February the LDA identified options for the site if the sale did not yield a buyer. One of the options was that the LDA would develop the suburb itself rather than sell it as an englobo parcel. The LDA has now begun the planning for the development of the southern portion of the Denman Prospect site as an LDA estate. This portion is around 500 dwellings, including single residential blocks and multi-unit dwellings. The time frame for this first phase is over the next four years. The LDA development of the suburb has no impact on the government's indicative land release program.

The decision to develop Denman Prospect as an LDA estate will produce integrated development. The development of the site by the LDA enables them to engage with local contractors to deliver the estate development plan and to provide the civil works. The LDA will also draw on the expertise of local consultants and local firms, meaning the level of activity in this part of the economy will not be affected at all by an alternate approach to development.

The LDA, by retaining control of the sales process, will now ensure a range of single lots and super lots are sold to builders and/or individuals. Super lots are a new type of product proposed by the LDA which will enable a developer to purchase larger parcels of land rather than individual blocks. The developer will then be able to consider market demand and subdivide the parcel to meet demand. These super lots

will be similar in nature to smaller englobo offerings that have the advantage of being contained within an approved planned estate, and super lots may provide a product that may suit smaller developers.

Discussions between the LDA, the Master Builders Association and the Housing Industry Association have been positive, and both industry bodies will work with the LDA on developing super lot products in Denman Prospect. With the LDA managing the development of the suburb, it is able to work directly with local builders to create opportunities for a variety of lot sizes to suit a wide range of local builders. In addition to super lots, the LDA will continue to provide serviced blocks available to purchasers other than builders.

The LDA is working closely with ESDD and TAMS on the implementation of the changes required by variation 306 in all new estates, including Denman Prospect and the broader Molonglo valley. Solar access requirements have considerable advantages for residents. They ensure new homes receive sunlight without being overshadowed by neighbours. This has a range of benefits, including more viable and sustainable solar passive housing designs as well as improved amenity for residents.

The LDA has trialled solar access principles in Wright and Coombs prior to their formal implementation in the territory plan. A home sustainability adviser was on hand in these suburbs to provide advice to residents about building sustainable homes. Residents in these estates have given positive feedback and appreciate that they can build a solar passive house without worrying about being overshadowed by neighbours to the north.

Building on the lessons learned in these estates, the LDA is preparing a working document to assist with the implementation of solar access requirements in the design of new estates. Titled “Block Design: a guide to solar access”—a very clear description—this document will provide additional certainty to buyers and to builders about what types of dwellings particular blocks can accommodate. It will enable a greater level of standardisation and increase efficiency and affordability. Industry consultation on this document has had positive feedback, and suggestions and comments from the consultation process have been incorporated.

Further, through the work undertaken so far with the building industry and the community, the LDA is assisting the market to take advantage of the flexibility offered in variation 306 through integrated developments. In an integrated development groups of houses are designed in a coordinated way rather than focusing on individual houses.

In closing, Denman Prospect will be an integrated development that will closely involve the local construction sector and provide high quality housing options for Canberrans. I commend Mr Corbell’s amendment to the Assembly, noting that the issues contained within that amendment have been canvassed extensively. It is certainly worth noting that the government’s agenda through both the city to the lake project and the city plan work is to ensure a more vibrant and more active city centre, and the ESD and ED directorates are working closely together to achieve this vision.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Mr Coe	Ms Lawder
Ms Berry	Mr Gentleman	Mr Doszpot	Mr Smyth
Dr Bourke	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Wall
Ms Burch	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson	
Mr Corbell		Mrs Jones	

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Children and young people—Boundless Canberra playground

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (6.12): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the importance of ensuring that all children, regardless of the challenges they face, can fully participate in society;
- (b) the development of *Boundless Canberra*, the ACT's first inclusive playground, as a Centenary project driven by the commitment and enthusiasm of ACT Government public sector employees;
- (c) that many public servants have signed up to workplace-giving schemes to donate a proportion of their salary to the project;
- (d) that the ACT government is supporting the project through a \$1 million loan, and that business and construction industry cash and in-kind support is now worth over \$500,000; and
- (e) that Stage 1 works are expected to be ready to open early in 2014;

(2) acknowledges the significant leadership of the ACT Government's public sector employees in working to make *Boundless Canberra* a reality; and

(3) calls on the Government and all Members of the Assembly to promote *Boundless Canberra* at every opportunity and encourage further donations to ensure it can be delivered as a significant Centenary gift to the ACT community.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about Boundless Canberra, the national children's playground. The support for Boundless Canberra over the past 12 months has been amazing. Canberrans have been motivated by the vision of this project to create a place where all children can experience the joy of playing, regardless of their abilities.

As the ACT's first inclusive playground, Boundless will cater for children with hearing, vision and mobility impairments, as well as children with a spectrum disorder. It will be a place where children with disabilities can play in the same space and with the same equipment as all other children. It will be a place where families can play, socialise, be challenged and have lots of fun without having any of the barriers in usual playgrounds or lack of inclusion.

I am sure that we would all agree that childhood is a time to explore, to develop imagination and creativity, to challenge limits and to make new friends. Boundless will be a place where this is afforded to all children.

Boundless is an ambitious project initiated by our public servants as a legacy gift for our centenary year. It incorporates innovations from playgrounds in Australia and internationally. Boundless will include swings, a maze, a giant slide, sandpits, water play, forts and climbing equipment. It will be fully fenced, and it will have picnic and barbecue facilities and many other amenities that you would expect for families to have a good day out.

Importantly, it will also include equipment that can be easily accessed by children of all ability levels and is easily identified as disabled access equipment; zoned spaces to cater to a range of difference age and developmental levels; and a kiosk to be run as a social enterprise providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Boundless will also include a wireless network, opening up possibilities for interactive play within the playground.

The design for Boundless was informed by parents and children with a disability, and the specialists that work with them. It has been peer reviewed and meets the principles of inclusive play developed by the Touched by Olivia Foundation. It will become a shining example within the inclusive play space national network.

I know Canberrans have been inspired by stories from children who are currently denied this right to play but so desperately want to. Lily Sharrock is one of the many children looking forward to the boundless playground. Lily is eight years old and has cerebral palsy. She is in a wheelchair and is unable to access playgrounds on her own. Lily has told us what Boundless will mean for her. She said:

I can't wait to see Boundless finished. I love playgrounds but often I have difficulty playing—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! There is so much conversation going on in the chamber that I cannot hear Ms Berry. It is disrespectful to Ms Berry and to the sentiments of the motion. Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just talking about what Lily was saying the Boundless playground would mean for her. She said:

I can't wait to see Boundless finished. I love playgrounds but often have difficulty playing on them, sometimes I can only watch. Usually I rely on Mum or Dad to get me out of my wheelchair and into a swing and then they have to make sure I don't fall off.

I am most looking forward to having birthday parties at Boundless when it is built. I have lots of friends and family that don't need wheelchairs and it will be great to play with them, and other kids in wheelchairs, so everyone can have fun.

Lily and her family cannot wait for the Boundless playground to be built so that Lily can explore on her own without having to rely on her parents.

At the heart of these hopes for Boundless is inclusion—inclusion for all children regardless of their ability, a place where children with disabilities can play alongside their siblings in equipment that accommodates them all, a place where children like Lily are on a level playing field when it comes to play.

I am extremely proud that we will have a legacy such as Boundless that promotes inclusion in the heart of the nation's capital. Lyle Dahms is the father of nine-year-old Alex, who has Jacobsen syndrome and has not yet learned to walk or talk. Lyle was one of the parents who provided design advice on Boundless and has revealed how hard it is for Alex to access playgrounds currently. Despite his limitations, Alex loves playgrounds. When they visit playgrounds, Lyle helps Alex navigate his way and Alex invariably finds his way to the highest possible slide and, in his own way, asks to be sent hurtling down. When other people express surprise about Alex's fearlessness in a playground, Lyle reminds them that he is first and foremost a nine-year-old boy. Lyle has explained that Alex's enjoyment of playgrounds is usually limited by the design of playgrounds rather than Alex's limitations.

Boundless will be a place where there are no limitations for children such as Alex, or any other child with a disability. Boundless will be a place children and families will enjoy for years to come. It will be a destination of choice for families and schools visiting the national capital over the next century. Most importantly, it will be a place for all children where there will be no barrier to play or inclusion.

We have only just begun to think of the possibilities that this playground will provide for the community of Canberra. Boundless will no doubt become a favourite recreational place for Canberra families. It will also be a child-friendly site where we can take services to children and families directly. For example, the playground can be used as a site to run an outdoor education and health program for inclusive play and development.

As we prepare to become the first jurisdiction to transition our full population of people with a disability into the national disability insurance scheme commencing in 2014, Boundless will be a very public demonstration of the value that we place on people with a disability in our community.

Madam Speaker, Boundless has come about as a result of a broader community commitment and the generosity of individuals. It marks the value of our community coming together to achieve important things. I encourage all members to get behind Boundless. Anyone who helps build Boundless will also be helping us to build a better Canberra.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (6.19): I thank Ms Berry for bringing this motion here today. Boundless Canberra is a project worthy of bipartisan support, and I am very pleased to speak to this motion today.

Canberrans are by nature a generous community. We recognise a good idea and a worthy cause, and when we do, we embrace it. This is very well illustrated by the support already provided to the Boundless Canberra project from the original design and skills donated through the cash fundraising efforts initiated by Canberra-based public servants and employees from both the commonwealth and ACT public services.

This truly is a community effort. Boundless is going to bring a new form of entertainment and a new form of inclusiveness for children that have a disability. It will be the first opportunity that Canberra families will have to have their children that suffer from a disability play with able-bodied children and will truly enrich and add value to their lives.

I would like to acknowledge the benefits that public-private partnerships bring in order to ensure that the delivery of projects such as Boundless Canberra is made possible. Ms Berry's motion provides a great opportunity to acknowledge the support that has been provided thus far. To name a few, the following organisations have supported the project significantly: Koomarri; Greening Australia; Cre8ive; Talkforce Media; Scenic Landscape Architecture; Philip Leeson Architects; Harris Hobbs Landscapes; Fundraising Institute Australia; Delene visual design; Nicky Vance Consulting; Colliers International; Anthony Symes Photographer; Loqium; AECOM; Jim Laity and Steve Thomas; Norman Disney & Young; Touched by Olivia; PricewaterhouseCoopers; Ashurst; Melanie Birt, photographer; contentgroup; RedHub; Tender Edge; and Woden Community Service.

Mention must also go to the numerous public service departments who have come up with many initiatives, often thinking outside the square, to raise substantial amounts of funds to go towards the project. I would like to make special mention of the top teams in the fundraising—the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Community Services Directorate, the Australian Public Service Commission, the Commerce and Works Directorate, the Department of Health and Ageing and the Attorney-General's Department. These departments combined have raised over \$20,000 for Boundless and should be commended for their efforts. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the recent support of the Brindabella Women's Group, who donated the proceeds of their photographic exhibition *My Bella Life* to the project.

There is a great need for a facility such as this in Canberra. Boundless Canberra will provide a safe and, most importantly, free community asset to the Canberra

community—and, most of all, a much-needed resource and family respite option for parents and carers of children with a disability.

While we are not the first jurisdiction in Australia to have such facilities, the play space here in the ACT will take the best designs and ideas from similar projects around the country, adapt them and bring them to the best and most innovative all-abilities play space in the nation.

I note with interest that 17 all-abilities playgrounds have been built recently throughout Queensland. These have been funded by the state government and local councils together. These playgrounds have been built under the Queensland all-abilities playground project, and they have been built with strong community involvement in the design process. This means that users of the playgrounds are involved in the planning, design, development and construction components of each play area. This community involvement does not end at the design phase. There is ongoing involvement from the users right up to the construction phase. By engaging community all the way through, there is truly community ownership of the project. I hope these aspects are evident in Boundless Canberra as it is developed.

Once again, I would like to thank Ms Berry for bringing this motion here today. I speak for all my colleagues when I say that we are happy to promote Boundless Canberra and the benefits it brings to the ACT community and support any further gifts or donations in kind that will ensure that this project, which is certainly much needed, is delivered by the community.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.24): I also welcome the fact that Ms Berry has brought this motion on today. It is an opportunity to reflect on what really is a visionary idea—a vision of inclusion which will be a wonderful addition to the fabric of our city. One only needs to look at the recent success and popularity of the new playground at the Arboretum—which has been inundated; I gather you can barely squeeze your child into it because of the number of children in there—to see how popular a good playground can be.

That is where the real beauty of Boundless lies. Whilst it will be an all-abilities playground, it can be easily accessed by children of all ability levels without being readily identified as disabled access equipment. That is part of the beauty of this design: it is a very inclusive model. I expect to see kids of all abilities out there having a wonderful time together and doing what kids do best—seeing past some of the things that we as adults see and simply getting in and having a great time together.

This will be an excellent legacy of our centenary year, one that will be enjoyed by children and young people for many years to come.

I am particularly impressed by the involvement of the public servants in pledging both time and money to make this playground their gift to the Canberra community for 2013—supported by valuable in-kind contributions from the ACT private sector. I do not want to get into naming individuals, because I know this is an enormous team effort, but some of the public servants that I work with through my portfolio have been strong advocates and heavily involved in pushing this project to where it has got

to. That has been through everything from selling raffle tickets in the crowd out at the multicultural festival this year, as I have seen them do, to all the other efforts that they have put in.

I simply want to take this brief opportunity to congratulate those involved. As I said, this will be a tremendous legacy of the centenary year, one that will be appreciated by the Canberra community for many years down the line. I look forward to seeing the ribbon cut somewhere down the line and seeing children start to populate what will be a terrific facility.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Burch**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Adjournment

Motion by **Ms Burch** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australia-Thailand Association

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (6.27): On Saturday, 27 July I had the pleasure of attending the Australia-Thailand Association of Canberra midwinter dinner held at the Lemon Grass Thai Restaurant in Woden. The Australia-Thailand Association of Canberra was established in July 1974 for the purpose of fostering cultural and social relationships between Australians and Thais and Australian Thais. The ATA usually holds a number of functions throughout the year, including talks on Thai topics, social tennis, picnics, the annual midwinter dinner and celebrations of Loi Krathong—the festival of floating crowns—in November.

I was pleased to have been invited and would like to thank the ATA members and those who attended for making it a wonderful evening: John Milne, President of the ATA; Brian O’Keeffe, Vice—President of the ATA; Nok Jarussongkiti, the owner of the Lemon Grass restaurant, who I must commend for the truly wonderful food; John and Delphine Moyle; Chaveng and Radavee Ruanglek; Lorraine Ovington; Pramonda and Mary Ann Bandharangshi; Steven Colbourne; Isaac Lane; Eileen Dillon and all others present.

I particularly think Annette Ellis for the silk scarf and bag that she donated and I won from the raffle. I think she was surprised to be dressing a Liberal MLA, but I have been enjoying the scarf anyway. Anyone wanting to know more about the Australia-Thailand Association Canberra should visit their website at www.austhaicanberra.org.au.

St Mary MacKillop College

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (6.28): I am delighted to inform you and our fellow members that St Mary MacKillop College, Wanniasa, has won a beverage container recycling grant. The grants are an initiative of Keep Australia Beautiful, and Keep Australia Beautiful is able to offer financial assistance for local communities wishing

to improve beverage container recycling. This financial assistance is made possible thanks to the Coca-Cola Foundation community recycling grant. In larger communities this may mean infrastructure for events or for special venues such as large retail centres or education centres. In smaller communities it may mean assistance with transport or processing to overcome remote location or dispersed population. The focus of the grants is recycling away from home, practical projects that leave a legacy, projects that do not duplicate existing recycling activities, and projects that result in measurable volumes of recycled materials.

The project name of St Mary MacKillop College, Isabella Plains, is “Managing waste sustainably”, and they received \$10,000. The aim of the project is:

To set up co-mingled recycling facilities, giving our community the opportunity to recycle—Develop trained Wastewise team at school to inform students and staff about how to recycle well—Implementation of measures to monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the project (scheduling regular waste audits etc.)—To reduce the overall volume of waste generated by the college through the implementation of classroom teaching and learning surrounding issues of waste at the College.

Well done to the students and staff of St Mary MacKillop College. Well done to Mr Lee, the principal. It is a very community-minded school, and this is an indication of the success of the school. The grants are available, and, again, I will quote:

This is through Keep Australia Beautiful’s Beverage Container Recycling Grant funded by Coca-Cola Foundation and Coca-Cola South Pacific. This grants program has now been running for four years and has funded almost 200 community recycling projects across Australia to a total of \$1.25 Million. This year’s program announced 71 projects to a total value of \$441,000 and this will lead to the recovery of a combined 450 tonnes of recyclables.

Again, well done to Mr Lee and his staff. Well done to the students, and here is to a much more sustainable Tuggeranong and electorate of Brindabella.

ACT Chamber of Women in Business

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (6.31): I rise this afternoon to speak about the ACT Chamber of Women in Business, a not-for-profit association which has been operating in the ACT since 1992. It was created by, and is run by, women to provide support and opportunities to professional women in and around the ACT. On 21 August the Chamber of Women in Business award winners were announced. Today I would like to congratulate these hardworking, motivated and talented women and tell you a little bit about them and their businesses.

The business woman of the year was awarded to Karen Groves, the principal of Successful Alliances. Her business helps small to medium sized businesses and not-for-profit organisations grow through high quality consulting and bookkeeping services. Having started as a one-woman operation, she has expanded to six staff and is operating from a commercial space with various national clients. Karen has built Successful Alliances in a manner that always ensures they are at the forefront of new technology.

The young business woman of the year was awarded to Claire Naidu from Claire Naidu & Co Lawyers. Claire is an accredited family law specialist with a master of laws majoring in dispute resolution. She completed a bachelor of commerce and bachelor of laws at the Australian National University and has also received accreditation in mediation through Bond University.

The young business woman of the year highly commended was awarded to Stacy Cave who is the manager of the Griffin Legal's mortgage settlement practice.

The best new business award went to Karen Murphy for her local lending business, Resi Canberra Southern. Karen set up Resi Canberra Southern to ensure there was a lending service where you could receive good old-fashioned customer service.

The best new business highly commended was awarded to Samantha Gibbs of the Landlords Club, a business which is created for property investors and the management of their rental properties. Sam provides her clients with exceptional service and has been successful as a result of her thorough knowledge of tenancy legislation and always making sure she is looking out for her clients.

Karen Coe of Ray White Canberra was awarded the outstanding community spirit award. Karen is the manager of corporate services for the Ray White Canberra group. She has a diploma in interior design and is studying to complete her bachelor of business and professional communication.

Fiona Allardyce of Hamper Art was awarded the highly commended in the community spirit award. Fiona owns and runs Hamper Art in Canberra, a business that creates luxury hampers. They are designed with an artistic look with each hamper having a personal touch. Fiona is a working mother and enjoys being creative and experimenting with new ideas.

All of these women are very deserving of their awards. Running a business, especially in Canberra, is always a big task. These women are stars in their chosen field and deserve to be congratulated for their dedication and hard work to our private sector in the ACT. Congratulations to all the winners, as well as all nominees. They too must have been doing an exceptional job just to be nominated. Congratulations also to the ACT Chamber of Women in Business for organising these awards.

Vietnam veterans

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.34): I rise tonight to talk about an event I attended on 20 August, where I was privileged to be able to represent the Chief Minister at the unveiling of the Iroquois rotor blades and the dedication of a plaque commemorating all who have paid the supreme sacrifice serving Australia in the Vietnam War. The ceremony in Page provided an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifices made by service men and women of Australia. It was followed by a wonderful lunch that enabled us to hear stories from the vets and the support the association provides for vets and their families in Canberra.

Part of the ceremony was the unveiling of the original 1966 B model Iroquois main rotor blades that are set up as the plaque. These were spare blades intended to be used during the Vietnam War on Iroquois helicopters but never went into action. These plates were kindly donated by the Australian War Memorial. Thanks also go to RF Gee who wrote a wonderful description of the work which the 9th Squadron conducted during the war.

In recognition of the event and the importance of the Iroquois to the servicemen, I want to speak a little bit about this machine. The Iroquois helicopter, or the Huey, that was in service during the Vietnam War arrived on 14 June 1966. Before being able to take part in operations in the field, there were several modifications which needed to be carried out. The people that provided the blades and did the work here in the ACT were actually air fitters on these machines.

The No 9 Squadron became fully operational in early June 1966 after two weeks of modifications and fit-outs. By the time the 9th Squadron arrived in Vietnam the US Air Force was using a newer and larger version of the Iroquois, the D model of the Iroquois as opposed to the B model of the aircraft, so much larger. The D model was used to transport American troops, to resupply and for airborne command and medical evacuations because of its greater carrying capacity and ease of access for troops and supplies. Despite this, the RAAF continued to use the B model for all these roles until 1968 when the RAAF B models were replaced by the larger and better powered H model Iroquois.

One of the B model Iroquois helicopters used during the war is currently on display in whole at the Australian War Memorial. The A2-1019 was in Vietnam for two years and four months, of which it was damaged and unserviceable for approximately 5½ months. During its serviceable period, the A2-1019 flew missions every day while in operation, which equates to thousands of sorties during its time in Vietnam.

As the B model increasingly became replaced by bigger and faster aircraft during the war, some began to be sent back to Australia. Any that remained were generally tasked with admin flights around South Vietnam. The 1019's last flight was on 24 September 1968.

Having met some of the personnel who flew the A2-1019, I thought it appropriate to go and have another look at the display within the Australian War Memorial. It is a truly exceptional opportunity to see a significant part of our military history. It is so well displayed and explained at the War Memorial. It is set amongst the scene that replicates situations in which the A2-1019 operated and projects the light and sounds.

The ceremony which saw the unveiling of these blades was also a service of remembrance, recognition of the service of the fine men and women who served their country, including those who made the sacrifice in losing their lives. A number of Vietnam War veterans and their families were in attendance at the ceremony.

The important thing that came across in conversations was the actual remembrance of the aircraft flying and the noise that it made. All of the vets found that this noise was a

particularly comforting noise, in that the aircraft only flew in when it was providing supplies, picking up people that were wounded or laying some cover fire to allow people to move forward.

Also in attendance at the ceremony was the former Chief of the Defence Force, Angus Houston, and Jeremy Hanson. I would just like to close with congratulating the Vietnam vets in the ACT for all their support for their colleagues.

Engineers Australia

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.40): Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to speak about the work of Engineers Australia. Engineers Australia is a national forum for the advancement of engineering and the professional development of its members. Engineers Australia has over 100,000 members in Australia. Its members include engineers from all engineering disciplines. Engineers Australia is responsible for the accreditation of undergraduate programs in Australia. Graduates of accredited programs are eligible for membership of Engineers Australia and their qualifications are also internationally recognised.

Engineers Australia also has an important advocacy role. It is regularly involved in inquiries and government initiatives, and it strives to make the views of practising engineers known to governments and the community. Engineers Australia provides professional development opportunities to its members, including four pathways to becoming a chartered member of Engineers Australia. Continued professional development is a requirement of being a chartered member and Engineers Australia provides its members with numerous opportunities to develop their skills.

The Canberra division of Engineers Australia is actively involved with the engineering community in the ACT and surrounding areas. The division has technical presentations and workshops throughout the year for its members. It also hosts the Engineering Games, a competition for school students as well as adults. Teams can compete in many different engineering categories, including the straw tower, spaghetti bridge, robo greyhound, geodesic dome, mousetrap racer and hovercraft.

The Canberra division has many interest groups for its members including Engineering Heritage Canberra, the Centre for Engineering Leadership and Management, the Retired Engineers Group, Women in Engineering and the Canberra branch of Young Engineers Australia.

Last Thursday I was pleased to attend the 2013 Canberra Engineering Excellence Awards at the Australian War Memorial. I would like to place on the record my congratulations to all award recipients and nominees that were presented on that evening.

I would also like to place on the record my congratulations and thanks to the division's committee. They are the president, Andrew Montgomery; the deputy president, Andrew McLarty; the vice-president, Neil Greet; the past president, Doug Mitchell; and the congress representative, Jennifer Murray. The committee members include Glenn Alcock, Jeff Bollard, Adrian Piani, Alan Thompson and Christina West. The general manager is Vesna Strika and the deputy director is Colleen Mays.

For more information about the work of Engineers Australia, I recommend members visit their website at www.engineersaustralia.org.au.

Hackett—birthday

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (6.42): This weekend Hackett will be celebrating its 50th birthday. For those who have not had the pleasure of visiting Hackett, it is a delightful suburb nestled into the hillside of Mount Ainslie. Certainly for walkers it can be a fitness course, with some good heart-pumping stretches, but it is also a suburb full of delightful gardens, pleasant streetscapes and a great community spirit. It is one of Canberra's smallest suburbs by population and that probably is why it has such a strong community feel.

It has tremendous community connections and some residents have lived there for the entire life of the suburb. I have met many others who have lived there nearly as long. Hackett Oval was where, as a young newcomer to Canberra in 1973, I coached Theo Moulis's north Canberra Jets junior soccer team, and where the Canberra city Old Boys with Johnny Warren and Charlie Perkins played their early matches.

Hackett was first populated primarily by staff working at CSIRO, ANU and Defence, although I also know of Italian families who moved there after working on the Snowy Mountains scheme. It was probably why the strong sense of community first developed, with people being relocated to Canberra for work. So neighbours had much in common, and that continues through to today.

This weekend's celebrations are being driven by the Hackett Community Association. The association's deputy chair and birthday committee convenor, James Walker, who himself has been a resident for around 32 years but regards himself as a newcomer, rang my office early this year to ensure that the date be reserved in my diary, and he promised lots of activity. I certainly have reserved it in my diary and Mr Walker is quite correct; there are lots of activities for everyone.

There are fetes, reunions and a variety of performances. The Canberra City Band, which used to do all its rehearsals in Hackett, will be performing. Folk Dance Australia is also putting on a display and the Saturday night's entertainment includes local bands Hit and Glide, the King Hits and Rafe Morris. These are all local to the area and it is great to see that the Hackett Community Association has resisted the temptation to import entertainment.

There is also a Hackett Primary School reunion. Former students are being encouraged to get in touch with the school, which can direct them to the reunion coordinator. There will be a reunion photo taken at 2 pm on Saturday; so all former pupils should make every effort to be there.

The weekend celebrations will officially start at 10 am on Saturday at the Hackett shopping centre. I congratulate the Hackett Community Association, its chair Greg Haughey, members Terry de Luca, Dorothy Mackenzie and, of course, James Walker for their enthusiasm and pride in their local suburb. I wish Hackett a happy 50th birthday.

Giralang Primary School

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Disability, Children and Young People, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Women, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Racing and Gaming) (6.45): I want to bring to the attention of the Assembly an article in this week's *Chronicle* about a wartime link earning an Anzac award for Giralang Primary School. The article notes:

Giralang Primary School received a 2013 ANZAC Day Schools' Award last week.

A plaque, certificate and cheque were presented to the school as the ACT winner of the 2013 Anzac Day Schools Award. The school won the award for its continued strong relationship with the ACT Rats of Tobruk Association.

The relationship has allowed students to learn more about the significance of Anzac Day and the Rats of Tobruk themselves.

Year 5 and 6 students organised an Anzac Day ceremony which involved the whole school from preschool upwards. Each class made a wreath of poppies and class representatives laid these during the ceremony.

Students also baked Anzac biscuits for their invited guests, including members of the ACT Rats of Tobruk Association and their families, a retired senior Royal Australian Air Force officer, and numerous parents and carers. Giralang Primary School's entry also included evidence of a four week unit of work on World War II. The program allowed students to learn more about the significance of Anzac Day before their commemorative assembly. It also gave students a chance to learn more about the Rats of Tobruk and the significance of their visitors' actions during the war.

Giralang's entry also included colour photographs of the students' creative artworks. This included examination of the significance of the Poppy and 3D dioramas and clay sculpture.

That is a fantastic opportunity for our students in a public school, Giralang Primary School, to have that very significant and long link with the ACT Rats of Tobruk. I honour the gentlemen and all involved in the Rats of Tobruk, particularly the ACT section. I thank the principal and the executive of Giralang Primary School for making a fine connection.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.47 pm.