



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND TOURISM**

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2018-2019](#))

Members:

**MR J HANSON (Chair)
MR M PETERSSON (Deputy Chair)
MR D GUPTA**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2019

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr H Finlay (Ph: 620 50129)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

WITNESSES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate 1

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.14 am.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Social Inclusion and Equality, Minister for Tertiary Education, Minister for Tourism and Special Events and Minister for Trade, Industry and Investment

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Leigh, Ms Kathy, Head of Service

Nicol, Mr David, Under Treasurer

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Colussi, Mr David, Executive Branch Manager, Digital Experience, Office of the Chief Digital Officer

Croke, Ms Leesa, Deputy Director-General, Policy and Cabinet

Engele, Mr Sam, Executive Group Manager, Policy and Cabinet

Perkins, Ms Anita, Executive Group Manager, Communications and Engagement

Bain, Mr Glenn, Executive Group Manager, Procurement ACT, Commercial Services and Infrastructure

Elkins, Mr Matthew, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Venues Canberra, Property and Venues

Saddler, Mr Scott, Senior Director, National Arboretum Canberra, Property and Venues

Asteraki, Mr David, Director, Infrastructure Finance, Infrastructure Finance and Reform

Clarke, Ms Liz, Executive Branch Manager, ACT Property Group, Property and Venues

Kelly, Mr Sean, Senior Director, Policy and Strategy, Innovation, Industry and Investment

Starick, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Strategy and Policy

Kobus, Mr Jonathan, Executive Branch Manager, VisitCanberra

Verden, Ms Jo, Executive Branch Manager, Events ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism inquiry into annual and financial reports 2018-19. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Chief Minister, and your officials for attending today. Today we will be examining the annual report of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate. Can I make sure that you have read the privilege statement?

Ms Leigh: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. You do not have an opening statement, Chief Minister?

Mr Barr: No, I do not.

THE CHAIR: We will go straight to questions. Can you tell me a little bit about the

wellbeing indicator framework that has been developed?

Mr Barr: We certainly can.

Ms Croke: The wellbeing framework is a project on which we are consulting closely with the Canberra community to develop a set of indicators that Canberrans would feel as though they own, and that would resonate with them in terms of things that they would put forward as being indicators of their wellbeing. At the moment we are consulting widely, and there are 12 domains and a set of draft indicators that we are consulting on. I am happy to run through the 12 domains that we are currently testing in the community.

THE CHAIR: That would be good.

Ms Croke: Living standards, housing and home, education and lifelong learning, physical and mental health, social connection, belonging and cultural identity, time use, governance and institutions, economy and the region, environment, mobility and accessibility, and safety.

THE CHAIR: Assuming you get the indications and some sort of traffic light process or whatever it is going to show us, what is the point of this? What do you then do with that data? Does it inform government policy?

Mr Barr: It will become part of the annual reporting framework associated with the budget. The budget will have some of these benchmark indicators. Some of them are contained within budget documents and annual reports at the moment. It will extend considerably beyond what we currently do, and it would then inform the assessment of new policy proposals or new budgetary expense capacity to improve one or more of those wellbeing indicators.

THE CHAIR: Some of this could be a bit esoteric; how do you separate the vibe regarding how you feel, in terms of wellbeing, from the actual ACT government deliverables? There are a lot of things that factor into people's wellbeing that go beyond the remit of the ACT government.

Mr Barr: Yes. The indicators will have a mixture of data that is collected locally and that is sourced from national datasets. Some would be self-assessed. In the context of asking broader questions around wellbeing, it is not uncommon, in terms of surveying public opinion, to gather overall assessments of wellbeing, and assessments against particular criteria. ACT policies can shift the dial on some, obviously, more so than others, and there will be various indicators that will be impacted by national events as well as local. We think that it is important, nevertheless, particularly where there are existing national datasets and it is easy to make the information available as part of an overall dashboard of how the community is faring.

Exactly the same situation has been in existence for the history of the territory in relation to economic data, for example. Hypothetically speaking, we have an economic indicator that is impacted by both territory policy and federal policy. If that indicator is performing better than the national average, you would argue that is all about the federal government, and nothing to do with the ACT government, and

conversely—

THE CHAIR: You might argue the other way.

Mr Barr: Indeed; I might argue the other way. Certainly, we do not hear a lot of talk at the moment about unemployment, for example, because our unemployment rate is the lowest in the country, and we have more job vacancies in the ACT than we have unemployed people. If the situation was like it is in South Australia, where unemployment is significantly above the national average, rightly, the question would be: what is South Australia doing or not doing?

THE CHAIR: I do recall that you used to blame the feds a lot, but now you seem to claim the credit.

Mr Barr: We look at where the employment is coming from, and it is not coming from the largest employer, being the commonwealth, because, as you know, your colleagues very proudly state they have a cap on public sector employment federally.

THE CHAIR: I think the situation is a little bit more complex, but rather than getting into—

Mr Barr: But there is one very practical example—

THE CHAIR: this particular debate, which could go on for a while, I will move to Mr Pettersson.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could I ask a supp on this?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MS LE COUTEUR: My first question was going to be about this. How are you going to implement this in terms of budget cabinet, in terms of decision-making? Will policy proposals say, “We meet blah, blah and blah”? Will it be done as part of the cabinet budget process?

Mr Barr: The expectation in business case development would be that it would be a quite significant extension on what would currently be described as triple-bottom-line assessments of new proposals. It is up to the government and the cabinet of the day to determine funding priorities. In other jurisdictions where this approach has been adopted, principally last year in New Zealand, they took a particular policy approach to their budget that they would be funding new initiatives in priority areas that were identified as a result of their work in developing the wellbeing indicators, with a view to only supporting proposals that would improve outcomes against the set of priority areas of wellbeing that they were seeking to improve.

Ultimately, these things rely on the decisions of a cabinet, so it is entirely about who sits around the cabinet table. But this will at least provide a framework for the assessment of new policy proposals as they come through government. I note that a degree of cynicism has already been expressed by the alternative government in this jurisdiction around this approach. We will enact it for the first budget, but it will

likely only continue if the government is re-elected.

MS LE COUTEUR: When you publish the million budget papers, will you publish information about how the proposals stack up on the wellbeing indicators?

Mr Barr: Certainly, when we bring forward the descriptor for an initiative, as we currently do now, we indicate what we are seeking to achieve, and it would make a lot of sense, in a communications context, to tie that back to the wellbeing indicators and the areas that we are seeking to shift the dial on.

MS LE COUTEUR: We would be able to say, “X million dollars is going to this indicator and \$1 million to another,” while appreciating that some things might go to multiple indicators?

Mr Barr: I am not necessarily sure that we would aggregate it in that way. For example, with a new initiative that aims to improve a number of wellbeing indicators, we would seek to highlight that that is the intent. It would also be a way of evaluating over time the success of particular initiatives.

You would be aware, as others are, that in public policy debate ideas are put forward with a view that, “If you do this, it will have a range of consequential flow-ons.” We would then have a way of being able to test that in the assessment phase before committing to funding a new policy initiative; also, over time, we would be able to measure it.

Some policy is long-run. Early childhood education has a long time frame in terms of community benefit and individual benefits; similarly, that is the case with investment in preventive health over, say, acute health treatment. There are countless examples of policies that would have longer term impacts. This would be a way of assessing those over time. There are others where currently there is almost no data collection, and we take it on faith, in large part, that particular initiatives are achieving the outcomes.

MR PETTERSSON: I have some questions about online community engagement panels. Could you tell me how many people have signed up.

Mr Barr: It is about two thousand—

Ms Perkins: It is 2,666.

MR PETTERSSON: Could you give us a breakdown of that number, the composition?

Ms Perkins: Sorry, I may have given you a not quite accurate figure; it is 2,633. I was 33 out; I am sorry.

In terms of the composition, we are looking really closely at that because we want to make sure that we are, as closely as possible, matching the demographic spread of the population. We are really pleased that since we started on 1 July we are pretty well matching the bell curve of Canberrans against the ABS statistics that are provided with the census.

In relation to the areas where we have relatively more people subscribed than would match the population, the inner north is a bit oversubscribed. We need to do a bit more work in the areas of Gungahlin and Tuggeranong.

For the age groups, the hardest age group that we were looking to subscribe people from was the 16 to 17-year-olds. They are very busy: they are at school; they are starting to work. But we have matched the demographic representation of Canberrans. We have three per cent of the panel matching three per cent of the population of 16 to 17-year-olds. We have a bit of work to do to get some more people in the 18 to 24-year-old bracket, but it is not far off the demographic example. And we have a bit of work to do with the 25 to 34-year-olds. We are doing very well with 35s up to 74-year-olds. We are getting a really nice representation of Canberrans.

MR PETTERSSON: What exactly do you do to engage the groupings that are not currently engaging?

Ms Perkins: To recruit specific groups, we have undertaken a fairly targeted campaign to younger people. We have been doing that predominantly digitally through social media, with targeted ads to people in that 16 to 24-year-old age group. When we did that advertising, we saw an immediate spike in the numbers of people there.

We have allocated a bit of money each year for recruitment and incentives. We provide incentives to participants; we want to value people's time. Every panel member who participates in the surveys goes into a draw, and once a month five \$100 gift vouchers are provided to those people. We allocate about \$25,000 per year for both little targeted campaigns for recruitment and the incentives. For the campaign that we did not long after the launch to get those young people, I think we spent about \$8,000 or \$9,000 on a very targeted social media campaign.

MR PETTERSSON: Is there any rhyme or reason as to the types of issues that get consulted on through these online engagement panels?

Ms Perkins: It is two things. The issues that the government wants community input into to support decision-making are the number one driver. We work very closely with all of our colleagues across government to make sure that they are considering the panel as an important way that they can get a broad representation of the community's input to inform decision-making. We also ask the members of the panel what they are most interested in so that we have a good understanding of the topics that they want to speak to us about. The main topics of interest that the current panel members have told us about are climate change, local transport, planning and development.

MR GUPTA: My only question is on event and business coordination. How many businesses has Access Canberra's business and event coordination team helped in 2018 and 2019?

Mr Barr: That might be for a separate appearance, not this one.

MR GUPTA: Okay. Continuing with the digital account, is the government looking at how digital technology can make the inner working of the government more efficient?

Mr Barr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Did you email them the wrong question?

Mr Barr: There might be a whole lot of questions to ask.

Mr Colussi: Sorry, could I have the question again?

MR GUPTA: Is the government looking at how digital technology can make the inner working of government more efficient?

Mr Colussi: Yes, absolutely; it is a central tenet of the digital strategy. The basic premise of the digital strategy is that the potential for digital is to ease the burden of effort for citizens and customers who are using a service and also the public service and how we develop and do our processes internally within government. We are looking to drive that through the digital strategy. We have a number of key focus areas in that digital strategy that talk to services: how we use data, how we do our civic planning, how we engage with industry, and how we reshape our service delivery within government.

The digital strategy outlines a number of initiatives that illustrate the direction that we are headed in. Fundamentally, all those initiatives are underpinned by a design methodology. That is how we will take where we are today in terms of service delivery and how we run the public service to where we want to be in the future, around connected, inclusive and progressive use of technology. Our job in the OCDO is to support directors to do that.

MS LE COUTEUR: I want to continue with digital. I have just been on the open data portal. How do you decide what datasets get up there? I am particularly thinking about public transport. We have had the unfortunate situation where the only information publicly available on boardings from different districts and buses with network 19 has been on the basis of the question on notice I asked. There clearly is significant interest in a lot of things that are not here. How do you decide what goes there?

Mr Colussi: That is a good question. The work that we have undertaken in the past financial year around the data analytics centre is looking to build out the government's framework around data management: how we build the knowledge, skills and abilities of our public service to be able to use data better and develop the data lake so that we can start sharing information better. Fundamentally, it is an element of what data we have, what the quality of that data is, how we put it into a format that is reusable, and how we share data in a privacy sensitive way. That is not a trivial exercise. That needs to be done with eyes wide open and very sensitively. And we need to balance that with the quality of the system that we have in terms of our legacy systems and bringing that forward into more modern technologies. That is part of the question that was asked before: what is the framework for lifting the performance of the public service in terms of ICT and how we do that right across the

board?

We are working through a progressive approach to bringing more datasets into the data lake for sharing and getting those out to the community where industry can use those datasets to build better services for a community and get better outcomes for citizens.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am concerned that most of the emphasis seems to be looking inward. There is a huge amount of demand from outside, particularly with buses in the last few months, to get the data to know what is happening. I think that needs to be a higher priority. Some of what you have here is really interesting and is obviously well used. The cyclist crashes heat map would appear to be one; that is great.

THE CHAIR: Can I ask if you have a question, Ms Le Couteur, rather than giving a sort of monologue.

MS LE COUTEUR: I was hoping to get more about how you decided what went up, but I will cease at this point.

MR COE: I have a question about the Chief Minister's charitable fund. I was wondering whether you could, please, give an update as to what interaction you and your directorate have with the managers of that fund.

Mr Engele: We meet pretty regularly, maybe once every two months or so, with the CEO of the charitable fund mainly to work through forthcoming budgeting issues—recently, the amount of funding that was provided through the gaming machine revenues, the increase that we are currently in discussion about, how that would affect their budgeting position and also we have discussions in relation to their business plan going forward.

MR COE: Who actually determines who receives what funds through the gaming revenue?

Mr Engele: The gaming revenue grants have not yet been decided but for last year's grants, which were based on a \$5 million grant from the government, the process was that the Chief Minister wrote to some very high level areas of interest—I think there were four areas—and then the further decision-making was all done by the board after that. It is an independent process. The aim of the fund itself is to build capability within the sectors. They have run a number of workshops with proponents to get the best proposals to be put forward and they also work with other charitable organisations. I think the Snow Foundation was one that they partnered with recently.

MR COE: Who made the call to give money to the CFMEU's community arm?

Mr Engele: That is an independent decision by the board.

MR COE: Is it possible that they were trying to second guess what the government might want?

Mr Barr: No.

MR COE: But you did give them instructions though?

Mr Barr: I set priorities for impact areas that we wanted the fund to focus on, being mental health and wellbeing, education and employment, belonging, and reducing the risk of homelessness. In terms of improved wellbeing and mental health, the focus was to be on domestic violence survivors and perpetrator programs, children and young people, and transgender, diverse and intersex people; in terms of education and employment, to improve the employment outcomes and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with disability, variously employed individuals, refugees and migrants, and transgender, diverse and intersex people, with a particular focus on prevention and post-prison release support for young people and their families; quality of life improvements for all Canberrans, with a focus on initiatives, services and activation in outer suburban areas; and working with children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and young people and families, to strengthen their engagement and belonging; in relation to homelessness, a particular focus on reducing the risk of older women becoming homeless, effective interventions for children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and support for Aboriginal and Torres and Strait Islander housing organisations. They were the priorities—

MR COE: In which case, what category does their construction travel work fall in?

Mr Barr: I will take that on notice, I have no role in the assessment of individual applications. I set the priorities though.

MR COE: Perhaps your advisers or your department officials might be able to answer the question then. What role—

Mr Barr: We will take that on notice. I need to get advice from the—

MR COE: You are going to get advice from the people that are here, surely?

Mr Barr: We will get advice from those who were involved in the—

THE CHAIR: If the staff are here who can answer that question—

Mr Barr: They are not on the panel who undertake—

MR COE: I just do not think it is a good look to be evasive when you are talking about money going to the CFMEU's community arm.

Mr Barr: I am very happy to take the question on notice. I will seek the information from the charitable fund. No-one in this room was involved in the assessment of individual applications.

MR COE: What reporting takes place, following decisions being made to the directorate, about the recipients and what made them worthy recipients?

Mr Barr: The trust provides a report, which will be publicly released, or else you

would not be asking these questions. I hasten to add that this attack on the CFMEU is typical of your approach to anything that relates to the work of a union movement and—

MR COE: Have I said anything negative about the CFMEU?

Mr Barr: You just have. The implication of this line of questioning is that there is somehow something wrong with their involvement—

THE CHAIR: Gents, if we can just stick to—both sides—the line of questioning.

MR COE: But can you please advise—

Mr Barr: And it is the sort of thing—

MR COE: Can you please tell me what information—

Mr Barr: It is the sort of thing that is why people think and know that you are the most conservative—

MR COE: has the fund provided to the government about the travel work?

Mr Barr: right-wing leader of the Liberal Party ever in this territory—

THE CHAIR: Mr Barr!

MR COE: Can you please answer that question?

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, just hold on a second.

MR COE: Can you please tell me that or not?

THE CHAIR: Just hold on a second, please. Gents, if you can both just stick to the line of questioning, rather than trying to broaden it out into some broader—

Mr Barr: I am trying to answer a question and an implication from the Leader of the Opposition—

THE CHAIR: Specifically answer the question if you could, Mr Barr, on the—

MR COE: The specific question is—

Mr Barr: I am endeavouring to but he keeps on talking over me.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MR COE: The specific question—

THE CHAIR: And I have asked him to be quiet. On the specific line of questioning, just stick to the answer, not some broader political—

MR COE: The specific question is: what information has been provided to the government about what made construction travel work eligible for funding through the Chief Minister's charitable fund?

Mr Barr: The government would have no role in the assessment of individual—

MR COE: I simply said: what information has been provided?

Mr Barr: The outcome of the independent panel's assessment was publicly released and there were clearly public statements and information made available around the successful recipients. And then there are annual reporting requirements.

MR COE: No other information had been provided—

Mr Barr: They do not need to justify to government the decisions they make as an independent panel—

MR COE: Actually I think they do. I think they do—

Mr Barr: No, I do not think they do—

MR COE: We have got governance—

Mr Barr: It is a—

MR COE: What are the governance arrangements to make sure that the money is going out according to appropriate guidelines?

Mr Barr: The guidelines are set. There is a reporting process required to government and it is publicly released. So that—

MR COE: It is a pretty serious issue if—

Mr Barr: No, no—

MR COE: If there are no governance arrangements to ensure—

Mr Barr: There are governance arrangements in place, and you are—

MR COE: What are they?

Mr Barr: And you are—

MR COE: What are they?

Mr Barr: We will provide the full information in relation to that. I have just read out all the priorities, all the requirements that the government has put in place. There is a governance arrangement around the operation of funding. But your approach here is a despicable, disgraceful, denigration of an organisation that does not deserve this sort

of gross, baseless political attack—

MR COE: You have got that out of your system now—

Mr Barr: it is typical of you and typical of your approach—

MR COE: I hope you have got that out of your system—

Mr Barr: to anything to do with the union—

MR COE: because you obviously came in with these rehearsed lines that you wanted to use as quickly as possible—

THE CHAIR: Gents!

Mr Barr: And you come in with your usual rehearsed lines—

MR COE: Can you—

THE CHAIR: Back in your corners!

MR COE: Can you—

Mr Barr: attacking the union movement—

THE CHAIR: Back in your corners!

MR COE: Can you please tell me—

THE CHAIR: Come on!

MR COE: Can you tell me what issues have been discussed in these bimonthly meetings and what governance arrangements are in place to ensure that the funds are going out according to the rules of the fund, the constitution of the company limited by guarantee and the directions issued by the Chief Minister?

Mr Barr: The grants program is assessed according to the criteria outlined—

MR COE: But how do you know that?

Mr Barr: It is publicly reported upon—

MR COE: But how do you know that?

Mr Barr: and there is no suggestion, Mr Coe, from anyone, other than yourself, that anything improper has occurred.

MR COE: I think it is reasonable to ask: what are the ongoing governance arrangements in place to ensure that the funds are disbursed appropriately? Can you answer that question?

Mr Barr: Yes, we will provide that information in detail for the committee.

MR COE: Can I please hear from the person who is in these meetings with the Chief Minister's charitable fund managers about the governance arrangements in place?

Mr Engele: I just add that it is a regulated charity. It is under the requirements of the Corporations Act and also the federal Charities Act—I cannot remember the exact legislation—to ensure that the use of all of the funds is for charitable purposes. In relation to the actual decision on whether an individual line item of grants is in line with those priorities, at the end of the day those priorities are not binding. They are set as a guidance. But the intention is not that every single one of the grants would be 100 per cent in alignment with that. I think on that particular one it came under the mental health and wellbeing line item.

MR COE: So they do report?

Mr Engele: We receive a list of the decided grant recipients once the board has made its decision—

THE CHAIR: One more question, Mr Coe. Make it a good one.

MR COE: With regard to the administrative funding for the Chief Minister's charitable fund, how much money has been spent? How much has been committed to? What governance arrangements are in place to ensure that that administrative funding is being spent appropriately?

Mr Engele: Sorry, could you clarify “administrative funding”?

MR COE: The managers of the fund are being paid by the ACT government, are they not, to administer the Chief Minister's charitable fund? How much has been spent so far? What does it get spent on? What has been committed to in the future? How do you ensure that the money is spent appropriately?

Mr Engele: The ongoing cost of administering the fund was capped at \$125,000. With the first year there was an additional \$100,000 provided to the fund to allow it to set up new systems; to buy the relevant grant software and the like. That was for the first year. We are currently in negotiations on the forward-looking amounts. They have not been set yet. It is really about recognising that there will be an increase in the number of grants that are provided. So that will have some additional administrative burden on the fund.

MR COE: In terms of the governance, what reporting is there on how that administrative money is spent?

Mr Engele: They have an audit, which is either taking place or will be undertaken by an independent auditor. They will audit that in relation to the use of the funds to ensure that their accounts are in an acceptable condition and also that the funding deed is in line with the funding deed requirements.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, can you give me an update on where you are at in respect of Jervis Bay in terms of various discussions with the federal government and the New South Wales government? Is there any particular view that we should be stepping away from our various responsibilities? What is the government's thinking on that?

Mr Barr: The New South Wales government have walked away. The Australian government has principal responsibility. We continue to provide a small number of contracted services. I think that there has been a new territories minister nearly every six months over the past 24 months. So there has been no further engagement directly with me from the Prime Minister or from any minister in relation to this matter. Kathy, has there been anything bureaucratic on it?

Ms Leigh: No, we continue to work with the commonwealth, as the Chief Minister said. Our view is that the services would be more effectively provided by the New South Wales government because they are collocated. However, as long as we are responsible, the ACT public service continues to work very hard to provide those services and to cooperate with the commonwealth to provide them as effectively as possible.

THE CHAIR: So we are basically in a holding pattern until—

Mr Barr: Yes, there is no change and I do not think any change is likely.

MR PETTERSSON: I was hoping you could tell me a little more about the first government LGBTIQ strategy, capital of equality.

Mr Barr: Certainly. The strategy was released earlier this year. The first action plan was released over the weekend. The action plan contains around 20 specific items that will be pursued through 2019-2020. It is available in both written form and online. The forms are extensive. The high-profile ones have attracted a degree of public interest. They include the conversion therapy ban and the changes that are proposed, linked with a digital project around the birth of a child. That is information processes around simplifying the birth certificate program, contestability changes and having a single form available for seeking both a change of sex and a change of name registration.

There are a number of other initiatives within the first action plan that go to fostering understanding and awareness. We are seeking to remove barriers to equality and raising visibility. Service improvements are also an element of the action plan across different areas of ACT government responsibility, as well as providing support for community organisations to undertake specific targeted programs.

An example of this policy theme in action relates to some of the initiatives and priorities we have outlined in the guidance I gave the Chief Minister's charitable fund, for example, the work to improve outcomes and inclusion for particularly marginalised groups in the community. That is important work. It needs to be undertaken and it is one of the priorities outlined in the action plan.

MR PETTERSSON: You mentioned the proposed conversion therapy ban. What are

some of the complexities in trying to address that issue?

Mr Barr: I think this would ideally best be dealt with at a national level. But the Prime Minister indicated earlier in the year that whilst he was supportive of banning the practices, he believed that it was the responsibility of the states and territories to move in this area. So that is what states and territories are now doing. Victoria and the ACT have been the first to announce an intention to legislate. We will work closely with Victoria. My view is that as much as possible, nationally consistent legislation would be important because the sorts of individuals and organisations that are seeking to undertake conversion therapy are operating at a national, and sometimes international, level.

Part of our thinking will also need to be around ensuring that there are criminal sanctions for taking people overseas in order to put them through this type of therapy. This is particularly the concern for children—people under 18 years of age—where I think this sort of practice has its greatest harm. Its manifestations in the 21st century fortunately appear to have been moving away from barbaric physical interventions such as chemical castration, electro-shock therapy, nausea treatment and the like to seek to link same-sex attraction with various physical harms inflicted upon individuals.

It is moving more into the space of organisations seeking, in shorthand, to pray the gay away: that sort of activity that manifests itself within certain religious organisations mostly, but not exclusively. The principal issues of concern relate to individuals obviously being forced into this against their will. That is most likely to occur in a current context with parents pushing children into that context.

There is an interesting question of the overlap of our current child protection laws and child abuse and what would be reportable conduct. It is arguable that some of this sort of behaviour would already fall under reportable conduct schemes but I think we need to test that more extensively.

Also, there is simply the fact that there could be, and would be, a criminal sanction and a way for an individual who has been put through this sort of quackery to mount a legal case. People could go to jail for these sorts of outrageous, outdated, thoroughly discredited practices. I think that that will act as a pretty significant deterrent. But I do not want this to be something that in 20 years we have to have royal commissions into because governments did not act to ban this outrageous practice.

I think the starting point for all of this is a very basic statement of principle: that gay people are not broken, they are not sinful, they are not disordered, and they do not need to be healed, to be changed. There is nothing wrong with you if you are gay and anyone who seeks to change a person in that way should be the subject of criminal sanctions. I think that it is unfortunate that we have to be at this point in terms of outlawing this practice. But having been given the green light by the Prime Minister that this is an issue that he believes requires a legislative response, but one that he believes should be undertaken at the state and territory level, we will certainly be doing so.

MR PETTERSSON: How do you engage with the LGBTIQ community in informing a strategy like this and an action plan?

Mr Barr: I think it is obviously very important on the specific issue around conversion therapy and then more broadly to hear from individuals who have been subjected to these sorts of practices. On the broader issues, obviously we have an advisory council that provides direct input to government. Let me say that there is no shortage of engagement on these issues, not just from the LGBTIQ community but also from parents, families, allies, all of whom recognise decades, if not centuries, of appalling treatment by society at large, who want to do something and be part of a process that will seek to address that significant history of appalling treatment.

Certainly we are not the only minority group in society that has been the subject of this sort of behaviour. But as in a number of other areas, for example, victims of child sexual abuse, there are many historic practices, appalling practices, that have no place in a modern society. Systemically, in this jurisdiction, in this nation and, indeed, globally, change is afoot. It cannot undo the appalling treatment of the past, but it can make things better in the future. That is certainly what we are endeavouring to do.

MR GUPTA: What initiatives have been supported under the capital equality grants program?

Mr Barr: A number of programs and projects have been supported, from regional pride initiatives like Tugger's Pride, a curated program of events in Tuggeranong through this month, to assistance particularly for young people. The YWCA is running the Canberra sexuality and gender diverse prom for young people 12 to 25 years of age. There has been support across the arts and sporting communities to seek to engage more people in community activities.

Some work has been commissioned through, for example, the Street Theatre and Ainslie and Gorman Arts Centres. Social inclusion projects have been funded through organisations like Intersex Human Rights Australia, the AIDS Action Council, the Canberra Roller Derby League in the sporting context and Tuggeranong Community Arts. So quite a diverse range of organisations have been supported.

MS LE COUTEUR: The annual report at page 125 says that the matter of the parliamentary budget officer is still being reviewed. What is happening as part of your review?

Mr Barr: The work that is underway certainly relates to election costings. There are processes associated with guidelines for—

MS LE COUTEUR: Election costings, I am aware of that. Are you doing any other work about the broader concept of a parliamentary budget officer, which has been around for—

Mr Barr: It has been around for a while. At the moment that is in the category of a solution looking for a problem. I do not think that we have any particular issues or concerns at this point around the costings process. Obviously the treasury will provide guidelines for the election year around how that process is undertaken. Certainly there are no plans to fund a parliamentary budget officer at this point.

MR COE: What progress has been made about the on-demand transport industry reforms?

Ms Croke: At the moment additional government taxi licence plates have been issued. Currently 408 taxi licences are available. We continue to work with Access Canberra to look at the take-up of those plates and then to monitor the wait list.

MR COE: What is happening with regard to the evaluation?

Mr Barr: Actually this area of policy is with Access Canberra and Minister Ramsay.

MR COE: Page 34, dot point 4.

Mr Barr: It is principally the responsibility of Minister Ramsay, but we will get some information for you. We will take that one on notice.

MR COE: That is a bit of a dead end. Previously the directorate had a health innovation component. When was that disbanded?

Ms Croke: Are you referring to the healthy active program that was within the former Economic Development division?

MR COE: It was branded as health innovation.

Ms Croke: With the announcement around the wellbeing project being established the healthy active living component work went back to the Health Directorate. The other whole-of-government piece of work around healthy active living and other initiatives has been subsumed into the wellbeing project, so that now sits within policy and cabinet. So we are taking on that whole-of-government approach, and it is a health and wellbeing focus now.

MR COE: As discussed earlier?

Ms Croke: Yes.

MR COE: So the healthy active living project that went across to Health, did any staff or resources go to Health?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Ms Croke: Resourcing definitely went back across; I am not certain about people.

MR COE: Are you able to advise how much was transferred?

Mr Barr: \$1.818 million.

MR COE: When was that?

Mr Barr: 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21.

MR COE: What was the reason for sending it back to Health? Or perhaps more pertinently, why was it ever in Chief Minister's?

Mr Barr: A whole-of-government project was the precursor to the wellbeing indicators, so the focus on wellbeing was part of the whole-of-government work. As that was further developed it then moved into both a more substantive piece of policy work—that is the wellbeing indicator work—and then some more specific health-related wellbeing projects that moved from a policy perspective into a delivery perspective within Health.

THE CHAIR: The *Our Canberra* newsletter goes out monthly I understand?

Mr Barr: Nearly; it is 10 times a year. There is no new year's edition; there is a December-January one.

THE CHAIR: Who makes the decision about what goes in that and who signs off on it?

Mr Barr: Under the legislation around government communications I am required to submit to the independent reviewer. I ultimately sign off on what is submitted and what finally goes out is signed off by the independent reviewer. The independent reviewer makes the final decision on what—

THE CHAIR: In terms of the process, do you provide guidance as to what should be in it and then that gets put together or does it come sort of bottom up?

Mr Barr: It is a combination of both. There is a section of the newsletter each month that is my section; there is a short message from the Chief Minister. Obviously we are involved in the writing of that, so that is top down. The other information largely comes from agencies seeking to promote their particular activities, programs or projects. As you will see from the newsletter, a range of community or government-run events is promoted. There are new initiatives and obviously government announcements.

THE CHAIR: It has been running for a while now. Has there been an evaluation in terms of its effectiveness?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Ms Perkins: The main evaluation is one of our accountability indicators in the budget statements on how well-informed Canberrans are. We have been asking that annually since the newsletter was first put in place in late 2015. Over that time the Canberra community has fairly steadily said that they are more informed on ACT government programs, policies and services. That is one component of how we measure that.

We also annually ask in our community views research specifically how Canberrans want to receive information. When we first asked this in 2015 I think about 23 or 24 per cent of the community said they wanted to receive a newsletter in their letterboxes, and when we asked that earlier this year it is now up in the 30s, I think about 33 per cent of the community have said that they want to receive the *Our*

Canberra newsletter. Quite interestingly that is across all age groups; it is not particularly focused on any one age group.

They are the formal ways we check in that it is still meeting the community's needs. We also get informal feedback regularly from members of the community, both writing directly to us through the websites and also through the Chief Minister's office.

THE CHAIR: So that has gone from a quarter to a third wanting a newsletter?

Ms Perkins: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I assume then the other two-thirds or three-quarters want it digitally?

Mr Barr: There are 51,000 digital subscribers and we have 80,000 households or thereabouts at the moment. So around a little more than a quarter want to receive the information digitally. Others express a preference for information through social media channels and people then have their preferences within the main social media channels.

The short story is that we have to be in all different communication channels. This is obviously a lot more cost-effective than large-scale mass media advising. So it is much cheaper to—

THE CHAIR: What is the cost of it?

Ms Perkins: The newsletter specifically costs us about \$54,000 a month, and we do that 11 times a year. That is the printing and the postage.

Mr Barr: Yes, so the delivery is the largest expense.

THE CHAIR: I assume that is Australia Post?

Ms Perkins: Yes, that is correct.

MR PETTERSSON: I am going to try my luck here. Chief Minister, you recently introduced legislation into the Assembly to create a communications allowance within the Office of the Legislative Assembly. Are you happy to take questions on that topic here?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR PETTERSSON: Under that proposal, where is the money coming from?

Mr Barr: I have raised, both in writing and verbally, with the Remuneration Tribunal that, given that the source of the previous communications allowance was rolled into members' salaries, this proposal would see that determination reversed. The simple answer is that this would be funded by an equivalent reduction in MLAs' salaries, and would have a zero net cost.

MR PETTERSSON: Under the current system, what happens if an MLA does not spend the supposed \$15,000 communications allowance?

Mr Barr: It is paid as part of salary, so it would be pocketed by the MLA.

MR PETTERSSON: How would that change under the new proposal?

Mr Barr: You would not be able to pocket any money that was related to communications. Salaries would be reduced by the equivalent amount, and the amount that was set aside for the communications allowance would only be able to be used in accordance with the legislation and the continuing resolution of the Assembly. There would be a series of quite strict controls placed upon that. It would not be able to be rolled over from one year to another. It would not be able to be used for electioneering purposes, to advocate for a vote. It would not be able to be used to comment on the performance of other members of the Legislative Assembly, other than in a very narrow confine that is outlined in the legislation.

It would give a great deal more accountability and transparency. I do not think it is well understood that, when the previous discretionary office allowance was abolished, it was simply rolled into salary, therefore there was a lack of accountability. The former allowance can now be used for election purposes. I do not think that that was the intent of the Remuneration Tribunal. They were clear that they felt, as is the case in every other parliament around the nation, that there should be an appropriate allowance for members to conduct their business.

I will give a practical example that this allowance could be utilised for. Given that members of the Assembly do not have electorate offices, unlike other parliaments around the nation, an entirely suitable use for such an allowance would be, for example, to pay for room hire for meetings with constituents in our own electorates. Rather than requiring everyone who wants to have a meeting with an MLA to come here, it would be a very sensible and entirely legitimate use of a member's communications allowance to both hire a facility that was accessible to the public and to indicate that they would be available for constituency meetings at that location.

That would not be the only thing that would be appropriate. Clearly, both the legislation and the continuing resolution of the Assembly should set out some very strict rules in relation to this. But it would give a much greater level of transparency and accountability over what is currently an entirely unregulated system.

I think that that was an unintended consequence of issues relating to the former discretionary office allowance and its intersection with the current Electoral Act. It is important to note that the legislation deals with the distinction between what is, effectively, an electorate allowance to undertake constituency engagement as opposed to what is party political material.

I will give one other example. I do not think that it would be appropriate to utilise party logos in an MLA electorate communications allowance. That is electioneering, and that is rightly subject to the Electoral Act and requirements around reporting expenditure in that regard. But writing a letter back to a constituent and engaging with a constituent in a public forum in your own electorate is doing the job of an elected

member.

I think it is appropriate that the distinction was drawn exactly where this concludes, in that the legislation I have introduced has a series of exclusions in relation to what the proposed allowance cannot be used for. It may also be useful, in the context either of a continuing resolution or of legislation, to give some examples of things that would be considered acceptable use, to give very clear guidance on the administration of the proposed allowance.

In this instance transparency, some regulation and accountability are the important priorities. That is something that should be pursued. I understand that the majority of Assembly members are of a mind to seek to introduce a degree of regulation around the use of a communications allowance. It is appropriate, as I said in the introductory speech, and I repeat it again today, that the legislation is quite clear about a whole range of things that it cannot be used for. At the moment the Remuneration Tribunal provides a communications allowance for a range of things that would be excluded in the legislation that I have introduced.

MR PETTERSSON: Why is the communications allowance set at \$15,000?

Mr Barr: I think that was a determination of the Remuneration Tribunal, based on the previous discretionary office allowance, with some indexation at that time. The amount has been fixed for a period of time. It is a question that the Assembly will need to consider as to whether it wishes to put in place an allowance at that level. My position is that, whatever the level of the allowance is, it will be paid for by a commensurate reduction in members' salaries. We were given the \$15,000 for the purposes of communication and we need to be true to that determination of the Remuneration Tribunal. This is a way to ensure that that is the case.

MS LE COUTEUR: You talked about meetings in electorates. Does that mean buying people cups of coffee or tea in cafes, which is what I principally do for meetings in electorates. Is that where we are going?

Mr Barr: I would not necessarily say that the purchase of a beverage is necessarily the greatest example of the use of it but if you were to hire a room rather than seeking to undertake such a meeting in a public place because I imagine some constituent meetings would be best undertaken with a degree of more privacy and fewer interruptions. But the point is: we do not have electorate offices and that is an issue for many MLAs, particularly those who are outside the Kurrajong electorate where obviously it is a little easier for constituents in Kurrajong to come to the CBD. It is just one practical example that I do not believe constitutes electioneering and that I do believe is a core element of an elected representative's role.

You and others undertaking meetings in coffee shops is fine. You can, of course, by all means do that but you should also have the option to be able to secure perhaps a meeting room either for the purposes of one-on-one constituent meetings or perhaps larger events that require outreach or engagement with a larger number of people. Then that would be an entirely legitimate use of the existing communications allowance. But equally, I think, it would be an important example of what should be done with the new arrangements that I am proposing. But I do not just limit it to that

and I think it would be a useful exercise for members to think in terms of things that should obviously be excluded because they are electioneering versus activities that are normal and typical of the day-to-day work of an elected representative.

That is something that other parliaments manage to do with varying degrees of regulation, I think. I note that there are many concerns raised about interpretation and who decides what. In my view, the more information, the more that is ruled in and out through both the legislative process and the continuing resolution process, will certainly guide both members and those who will be charged with the administration of the proposed scheme. The more that is done there, I think, the better. But what it will need obviously is a greater degree of accountability and you must of course undertake the activities in order to be reimbursed for them, as opposed to just pocketing the money as salary.

MR GUPTA: Has the government written to the Remuneration Tribunal about it?

Mr Barr: Yes. I have obviously written to and spoken with the tribunal on a number of occasions. Obviously this issue has been flagged for some time and it has been raised. The tribunal have had months and months notice of the intent in relation to putting in place a regulated framework, and they are obviously aware of government's intent in relation to reducing salaries in order to effectively roll back the communications allowance process that was granted several years ago into a more regulated system, and they agree with that approach.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is this where we talk about deliberative democracy, citizen juries and that?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: In that case, I would like, I guess, an output. Where are we up to with it, and have we done an evaluation?

Mr Barr: There has obviously been a move into the digital space in the context of the online community panel, as a very practical example of more direct community engagement. We go from groups of 50 or 100 into the thousands now as a result of that initiative. And our target by the middle of next year, the end of this financial year, is to get that community panel from the 2,633 that it was last week to about 3,000 over the next seven or eight months, and we will undertake some further work to increase the size of that panel. That is one example.

In relation to other specific projects, there are of course a number of different areas of government projects either concluded or in the evaluation phase—I see the most high profile of those being the CTP citizens jury process—and then there are some other options for the future. But one of the objectives of the community panel was to enable that process to move online. That does not mean that we will not necessarily undertake further deliberative democracy processes around particular issues, if and when they emerge, in a format not dissimilar to the CTP process. For example the City Renewal Authority undertook such a process in relation to their precinct, particularly the Acton waterfront—a recent example. We can talk more about that when CRA appear later this week. Anita, have I missed anything?

Ms Perkins: No. We do not have any specific deliberative democracy projects currently underway but I think that the main thing is that we have embedded deliberative processes into all our engagements now, as we have evolved our understanding of how to have the most participatory engagement activities. They are conducted differently now. We do not conduct them in the same way as perhaps we used to in the past. In the past there was very much the town hall-style meeting. And now we make sure that we set up any public-facing events where it is far more deliberative, in that all the issues are put forward and different viewpoints are put forward for broader conversation.

I think the difference with the panel too is a good example of how we are embedding more deliberative processes to support decision-making. We still see with the your say website—the traditional website that we first had that was launched a number of years ago—the people who go to the your say website to have their say on an issue are very motivated to have their say on that particular issue. They do not typically go to your say just to generally have their say on a number of different initiatives that the government is currently seeking feedback on. The difference with the panel then that makes it far more deliberative is that we go to large numbers of people on all sorts of topics, not just the individual topic that they have identified that they want to speak to.

MS LE COUTEUR: One of the things about the your say panel from our point of view of course—we have been excluded from the universality of it; so we have no idea what happens with it—and one of the interesting things with deliberative democracy like the CTP one was that there was a large education component. I thought that that was one of the most important things if you really want to have an informed opinion, not a random opinion. Is that part of your new process, given that of course we are not able to see what a new process does?

Ms Perkins: Whilst members of the Legislative Assembly are not eligible, your staff and your family members are eligible.

MS LE COUTEUR: No, they are not.

Ms Perkins: I believe they are.

MS LE COUTEUR: No.

Ms Perkins: They are. We can clarify it.

MS LE COUTEUR: We have been told otherwise.

Ms Perkins: They are not eligible to receive incentives. That is the difference. They will not go in the draw to get prizes but they certainly are eligible.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. We will try to change. Members of my staff have tried and have been told, “You are working for an MLA, you cannot do it.”

Ms Perkins: No, they can. They just will not be eligible to receive incentives.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. That is very interesting. But given that we have not been aware, would you be able to let us know what information—

Ms Perkins: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: How you do it. Do you provide a bunch of information that people have to navigate through or—

Ms Perkins: Yes. With any call-out for members to participate in the panel there is a quite simple, straightforward introduction about what the topic is, why the government is asking the questions, and then what the government is going to do with the responses. We then publish the responses to each set of questions that has been put forward. That information is publicly available as well through the your say website, and it is very important that we close the loop and report back to the people who have given us their time.

MS LE COUTEUR: The other part of deliberative democracy, which we saw particularly with the CTP process, was that the government would do something as a result of deliberation; the deliberation would actually change what the government was going to do, or potentially change. Obviously the government might be planning to do what the citizens agreed with. Is that a feature of your new deliberative processes, that there is a commitment to change what—

Mr Barr: It certainly can be. Obviously it will depend on the topic that is put forward. Obviously some of the initial processes around the community panel were, I guess, more in the initial testing perhaps in a fun way. For example, finding out things like pet ownership and which football teams people go for and the like are not things that are going to be the subject of a change in government policy or leading to that.

But in time, yes, I think the technology gives us the capacity to undertake a process or a program of activity such that we might say, for example, in the way that we did with CTP, “Here is a particular issue. The government is interested in feedback on that, and future policy will be determined by that.” It will obviously depend on the issue.

I guess the best way to summarise this is to say that none of us comes into this place as empty vessels with no particular views on any subject, and obviously people through the democratic process seek to vote for people and elect people who outline a particular platform or course of action or particular policy priorities. Most issues that are dealt with in this place we do come with our positions on, because we have taken that to an election or otherwise.

But there are obviously from time to time circumstances whereby an issue will come up that you identify as needing change or, “We are going to have think about this,” and there are a number of possible policy pathways that may not necessarily be either ideological or otherwise, and those sorts of things would be appropriate issues to seek quite detailed community engagement on.

CTP was one of them, where there were a number of different pathways and a number of different competing priorities that needed to be weighed up. And the issue was not a party-political, ideological one. You look across Australia and you see that

governments of all political persuasions have implemented a variety of different schemes, but a lot of them are very similar to where the ACT ended up, and they were implemented by conservative governments in New South Wales and other jurisdictions. That is a good example of why it was chosen, in fact.

But there are, and will be, others. The better suburbs program is another such example where there obviously will be competing views and priorities around which parts of infrastructure at a suburban level should be prioritised.

Ms Croke: The other example, one of the first things that the community panel survey was used for, was to establish the wellbeing framework. We had 1,200 respondents to that first survey, and that helped to actually shape what is now out there for broader consultation. It has been used to start these ideas.

THE CHAIR: We might have to hold it there, because we have run out of time unfortunately. Mr Coe, we will start with you when we get back. We will break now and reconvene at 10.45, and we will be looking at construction finance and capital works and venues.

Hearing suspended from 10.30 to 10.46 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back, Chief Minister. You are here as Treasurer now. We will be looking at infrastructure, finance and capital works and venues. I promised Mr Coe the first question.

MR COE: Thank you. With regard to the notifiable invoices register, firstly, is that managed by this area of the department?

Mr Nicol: Yes, I believe it is.

MR COE: Is there a reason why it is now several months out of date, in contravention of the legislation?

Mr Bain: Procurement ACT administers this on behalf of the territory. The invoice register is part of our Tenders ACT platform. The responsibility for notifying those invoices, as with much of the procurement activity across the territory, sits with the responsible executives of the various directorates and agencies. We do the collation and the publication of the invoices.

MR COE: When you say “the publication”, what do you mean?

Mr Bain: Notification on our Tenders ACT website.

MR COE: The notifiable invoices register at procurement.act.gov.au is missing September already. October is going to be due soon. I am wondering why September still would not be up despite the fact that it is now five weeks since the end of September.

Mr Bain: I do not have an answer for that at this point. I will look into that and get back to you as soon as possible.

MR COE: Is the information provided in the notifiable invoices register accessible on the data website, that is, through CSV or Excel?

Mr Bain: I will check what formats it can be downloaded in; I am not sure.

MR COE: Thank you. If it is not available in CSV or Excel, will the government commit to publishing it from now on in that format?

Mr Nicol: Yes, subject to the technical ability to do so, which I expect would not be a problem. Yes, we can do that.

MR COE: It looks as though it is an Excel sheet that has been converted to a PDF so it should be an easy process.

Mr Nicol: We will look into that.

MR COE: There is no reason you know of as to why September would not be published?

Mr Bain: I am not aware of any at the moment, no.

MR COE: Are all invoices are published on the register? Are there ever some that are excluded due to sensitivity issues?

Mr Bain: Certainly not due to sensitivity issues. The notifiable invoice regulations are such that anything over \$25,000 that is not an internal invoice is published with a reasonable explanation of what that invoice is for, what services were received.

Mr Nicol: We would occasionally not publish the purpose of an invoice to an individual for a certain reason, but the invoice itself is published.

MR MILLIGAN: My question is in relation to venues. I am referring to GIO Stadium. In 2016-17, it was recorded as having 29 major events; in 2017-18, 27; and in 2018-19, 21. Can you explain the reason behind the reduction in the number of events that have been held at GIO?

Mr Barr: It will depend on how many finals games our teams appear in. That is one factor. It also depends on whether any games are played interstate. The Raiders took a game to Wagga, so that would be one. The other variances will be about whether we host any international content, for example, the Wallabies, Kangaroos, Socceroos, Matildas, any of those. That will vary from year to year. The other variable will be any major concerts or other activities that the stadium will host. That is the reason for the variance from year to year.

MR MILLIGAN: Being in effect the venue manager of GIO, what is the government doing to attract more events there?

Mr Barr: There has been significant investment in the infrastructure in order to support a wider range of events and activities. The venue features as a large outdoor

concert venue, during the summer period in particular. That is somewhat contingent on who is touring and whether they wish to bring content to Canberra. There are other outdoor concert venues in the city that may or may not be preferable, depending on the requirements of the artist and promoters.

The venue undertakes outreach and engagement with the major concert tour promoters. We also engage with the major sports that use a rectangular facility. A recent example of that was the work with the Football Federation to bring the world cup qualifier, Australia versus Nepal, to the venue. We talk with Rugby Union and Rugby League around opportunities for national level and international level fixtures in that regard.

More broadly, there has been some innovation. Stadium golf is a new innovation at the venue. Matthew, is there anything I have missed?

Mr Elkins: That was pretty comprehensive. We look to engage with promoters, but we are also looking at development we can manage internally. Stadium golf, which will be commencing this year, is an example.

MR MILLIGAN: Is there any limit to the number of events that you can hold at GIO Stadium?

Mr Elkins: It is not a limit, but there are certain logistical constraints around the use of GIO Stadium. During the winter months we have a considerable number of frosts, which limits the amount of activity we can do on the field of play.

MR MILLIGAN: That would not restrict concerts, would it?

Mr Barr: There is not so much demand for outdoor winter concerts at night-time in Canberra, but clearly the primary purpose for the venue is for major consistent hirers, so the team would have to be conscious of any activities that would damage the playing surface, for example, or lead to a risk of something being left. Often one of the reasons why there is not a lot of public access to the playing surface is that in a Rugby League or Rugby Union match, you would not want there to be something that may have fallen out of someone's pocket or been inadvertently or perhaps more maliciously left on the venue. They need to be very conscious of those sorts of issues. That said, the venue has been utilised for activities that do not require access to the playing surface. As a backdrop for functions and events, it is quite popular.

MR MILLIGAN: That is a great segue into my next question: how many corporate events have been held over the past 12-month period at the venue, and can you give a breakdown on the costs to hire the venue and what is involved in opening it up to the private sector to hold events or conferences?

Mr Elkins: I would have to take the exact numbers on notice, but we do work hard to have a wide range of functions and events at GIO Stadium and to make sure that we are competitive in the market. Being such a large space, the considerations will be around making sure that we have the appropriate opening and closing arrangements and safety and security arrangements for people coming into the venue.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to government leases, for \$350,000 a year, the government is investing quite a bit of money into upgrades and other facilities at the GIO Stadium, including a second screen. Has the government done any costing on the break-even point for the number of events and functions that you need to hold to cover the costs on the investment you have done and what you have installed in GIO?

Mr Barr: Over what time frame?

MR MILLIGAN: Over the 12-month period.

Mr Barr: We can provide the information, but the longer term reality is that none of these venues is commercially viable. The sunk capital cost is extraordinary. You never make the money back, given the nature of the venue, the utilisation and the costs associated with it. It is not a commercial venture. That is why the private sector does not provide stadiums in this country. None of them could meet the capital costs of the infrastructure as an ongoing venture, let alone generate sufficient revenue. They have all been publicly funded to one degree or another.

Canberra Stadium, over its history, in 2019 dollars, has had hundreds of millions of dollars invested in it, and there is no way that it has generated at return, let alone covered its ongoing maintenance costs and the like. These are not revenue generating assets by any means.

MR MILLIGAN: That being said, though, you would think the government would do everything they can to bring as much content as possible to this stadium. I was at Parramatta stadium not long ago. They hold 47 matches a year as well as three concerts. That brings in considerable revenue for the local economy there.

Mr Barr: Yes. Obviously, that is a larger city with more football franchises. I think that stadium has at least three football codes that play there, and often more than one team in the context of the NRL.

The concerts are an opportunity to generate some additional revenue. Canberra Stadium hosted a Keith Urban concert in the reporting period. In the past, it has hosted Elton John and Dire Straits. There have been any number of shows held there. A factor, though, for Canberra, is that the touring artist needs to be attracting crowds of probably at least 10,000 in order to make Canberra Stadium the most logical venue. There are other venues, within our portfolio and available within Canberra, that can meet crowd numbers a bit smaller than that, which tends to be where most touring artists, other than big international ones, are at this point in time.

MR MILLIGAN: You said—

THE CHAIR: You said one more, Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Sorry; I will share the last one.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is about the infrastructure plan. On page 23 you say that the community should have a chance to participate. My question is: how would the community have a chance to participate, particularly given that, in general,

there are no alternatives provided?

Mr Barr: For what?

MS LE COUTEUR: The different bits of infrastructure. You say, “We’ll build this, this and this.” You do not say that there are multiple ways that you might achieve whatever the result is. On page 23 it says that the community should have a chance to participate.

Mr Barr: Page 23 of the infrastructure plan?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Mr Barr: We are not talking about the annual report; we are talking about the infrastructure plan?

MS LE COUTEUR: No, we are not talking about the annual report; we are talking about the infrastructure plan. It says here “infrastructure”. It is not page 23 of the annual report; it is much more interesting.

Mr Barr: Let me find the relevant page of the infrastructure plan.

MS LE COUTEUR: It is at the bottom of the page.

Mr Barr: As the sentence reads, there will be a need to both prioritise investment according to the community’s needs and tailor the capital works program to the funding envelope available through each annual budget. In some cases this will mean giving priority to infrastructure that supports essential service delivery like health, education, transport and waste management over other types of projects. These are not easy choices to make, and the Canberra community should have an opportunity to participate in discussions about the necessary trade-offs. The infrastructure plan aims to give Canberrans a better understanding of our city’s current and future needs to inform this conversation.

Not everyone will have the plan in front of them; officials may not have it. I am just being clear about what we are talking about. That discussion will take place in a range of different contexts. Obviously, it manifests itself most particularly within the Assembly, as the Assembly will be asked to appropriate funds for particular infrastructure projects and priorities.

There will be opportunities for community engagement in relation to individual projects. I note that in the period since the release of the plan there have been quite lively discussions about the order of priorities in relation to what might be considered to be social infrastructure: stadiums, convention centres, arts and cultural precincts and the like. That will always lead to a variety of different views. There has been no shortage of media articles, discussions on radio and debate about the different priorities. There will be strongly held views in favour of or against almost every aspect of infrastructure delivery.

We have the opportunity, through those debates, through debates in the Assembly,

through the use of the online community panel and through targeted consultations within particular regions on specific infrastructure priorities, to ascertain broad community views. In some instances, though, the result will be entirely inconclusive.

MS LE COUTEUR: Chief Minister, my question was specifically about how people would get information to enable them to look at different ways of doing things. All of these projects are not just about construction, I am sure.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: There will always be different ways that you could possibly do it. I assume that the government has had some consideration of that. Those sorts of things are playing out most, of course, in the transport sphere, but they could play out in other areas. We could have new hospital infrastructure at Canberra Hospital or elsewhere, for instance. How does that sort of debate happen?

Mr Barr: At the highest level, that is informed by Territory Plan work that clearly identifies particular zones and activities. If you are talking about the potential location, for example, of infrastructure projects, that is a high-level discussion and debate that intersects with the planning system.

Equally, there is the debate that can and will be had around the territory's fiscal capacity. One of the questions that is often asked is: how does the territory fund its infrastructure? How has it done so historically, and how would it do so in the future? The short answer is that it has historically funded its infrastructure through asset sales or commonwealth grants, cash and borrowings. Those four methods will continue into the future. That has been the process under which all infrastructure in the city of Canberra has been financed—through one or other of those streams combined.

That is one element of the discussion. In terms of individual projects and information, most information these days is communicated to the community in significant detail through online and digital means, but not exclusively. There is printed material. There are the usual processes of community debate and engagement on particular issues that are brought forward from time to time as infrastructure projects go through feasibility, forward design and more detailed design phases.

Probably the biggest challenge, Ms Le Couteur, is that the level of information for people is often overwhelming. In some instances it is just impossible, unless you are a professional or you are tasked with the work associated with delivering an infrastructure project, to be fully across every possible issue that relates to that project. I am realistic about not expecting members of the community to have undertaken 10 years worth of work in relation to an infrastructure project or be subject matter experts in relation to how one might go about delivering, financing and procuring, or otherwise, a project.

We have to be realistic about exactly what we are expecting from the community in relation to engagement, but there are clearly ways in which, in between elections, those of us who are engaged, as our full-time professional job, in making these determinations will put forward propositions and seek to argue the case for them in a democracy.

Beyond that, there are opportunities, I would say most principally through online forms, for people to garner more information about projects and to express an opinion. Ultimately, there will be as many opinions as there are people in relation to what should be a priority and what should not be, and it is almost as impossible to form a community consensus on any issue anymore than perhaps it ever was. Ultimately, those of us who run for public office and who get elected have to make a call at some point or else nothing would ever get done. But we seek to do so against a backdrop of saying, “What did we undertake to deliver?” and seek a mandate for that through an election process. Light rail was a very good example of that. There was a clear choice in 2012 and 2016; the community voted on it, and an infrastructure project was delivered.

THE CHAIR: Talking about the rationale for instigating major capital works, the instigation of the SPIRE project, what was your directorate’s involvement in that as opposed to Health?

Mr Nicol: In what way? The original conception of it?

THE CHAIR: In the estimates hearings of 2016 the then health minister said there would be no major capital works in terms of a rebuild of the tower block for a decade and that the asset would basically be crisis-managed for a decade. That was the position for several months afterwards.

Mr Barr: The tower block, as opposed to accident and emergency?

THE CHAIR: The accident and emergency or the tower block. In terms of major infrastructure, it was made very clear that there would be no significant capital injection and that the current asset would be managed. Then shortly before the election there was essentially a backflip and millions of dollars of new capital works was announced. Who instigated that? Did that come from Health or from your directorate?

Mr Nicol: I would have to go back and look at the record as to exactly who asked for what. My recollection is the government asked the bureaucracy for information prior to the 2016 election on a possible new development at the Woden Valley campus.

THE CHAIR: Can you identify that when you find this information? The health minister was saying one thing and then something very different was announced. Who instigated the request of the bureaucracy? Did it come out of Chief Minister’s or treasury or Health?

Mr Nicol: I would have to take that on notice, unless you can recall, Chief Minister?

Mr Barr: Obviously certain decisions were taken around particular assets on the campus both in terms of their useful life—the financial implications of, for example, an early write-off of an asset that still had a useful life—and assessments of future expansion opportunities and needs, balancing north side and south side. At the time there was still quite some considerable discussion and negotiation with Calvary and the Little Company of Mary in relation to both their future infrastructure requirements

and the balance of health system provision.

Decisions were also taken in that context around the funding and construction of the University of Canberra Hospital and an assessment against the health infrastructure plan of particular competing priorities and needs. There were then demographic assessments and further discussions around cross-border funding in terms of both recurrent and capital engagement with the commonwealth on particular infrastructure funding priorities and whether that would or would not attract any commonwealth funding.

There were further discussions with the Commonwealth Grants Commission in relation to GST methodologies, particularly as they related to cross-border health payments. There were further discussions with the New South Wales government in relation to the potential capital contribution to infrastructure that New South Wales residents use let alone the southern area health network planning and decisions they may or may not have made in relation to health infrastructure in the broader Canberra region. There were then the strategic asset management plan assessments together with the updated information coming through from the ABS ahead of the 2016 census data.

Other factors considered at that time included the provision of community-based health infrastructure, for example, decisions around the expansion of nurse-led walk-in centres and work related to other diversionary health programs that would assist to free up capacity within the hospital. An example which is still pertinent in light of the aged-care royal commission is around young people with disabilities or people needing to be moved out of the hospital into more appropriate long-term care and the prospects of reform in that regard to free up capacity within the existing hospital infrastructure. There were also flow-on implications of the move out of the Woden Valley campus of some of the services that are now provided in the new University of Canberra public hospital.

There were about 40 moving parts in the context of both capital and recurrent decision-making at that time. But one obvious feature is the costs associated with the demolition of particular pieces of infrastructure that were not fully depreciated. That would have had significant implications in terms of the operation of the campus and the hospital as well as significant financial implications at that time.

The conclusion of all of those assessments and work was that the tower building would not be demolished early and that there would be alternative ways to proceed with expanding health services across UCH, Calvary, community-based health care and projects and programs, including an expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children and the work around the SPIRE centre.

As with everything in health, there are many complex moving parts that relate to the Australian government, the New South Wales government, the ACT government and to non-government health provision, all of which intersect and require decisions that at points in time will also need to be assessed against previous decisions and future demand.

THE CHAIR: Mr Nicol, when you provide that answer to the committee can you

provide the details of when that request was made by government to the bureaucracy to deliver the plan that was the SPIRE announcement?

Mr Nicol: I will endeavour to do so. I will have to consult with my Health colleagues because it will be across both directorates I imagine.

MR PETTERSSON: I have some questions about the arboretum. I note the recent announcement of formalising the overflow car park. How often is the overflow car park used at the moment?

Mr Saddler: That is a good question because sometimes there could be two or three different layers of the car park that are used and other times only probably one. But normally on a Sunday the numbers are increasing, and that is why we need to asphalt that overflow car park.

MR PETTERSSON: How often is the current main car park full?

Mr Saddler: Just about every weekend.

MR PETTERSSON: Weekdays as well?

Mr Saddler: Weekdays as well. It is very popular. We were supposed to have a million people in five years; we are just about to tick over 4 million through the front door. The overflow car park is used on a regular basis.

MR PETTERSSON: I note the recent announcements around investigating an amphitheatre and a hotel. Do we think this proposed new car parking will be able to accommodate the future growth?

Mr Barr: There are a couple of issues there. First and foremost—and we have been working on this—is a second access road. At the moment pretty much all of the traffic has to come in and out at that one access point off Parkes Way and Tuggeranong Parkway past the Glenloch Interchange. It will be necessary for that process to be completed before the amphitheatre project would then be scaled up.

I do not think that the onsite accommodation would generate sufficient traffic in and of itself to not be able to proceed in the context we have outlined but if you are wanting to bring in 10,000 people for events, undoubtedly a second access point is critical to that being a viable long-term proposition.

Mr Saddler: As part of the onsite accommodation there will also be 73 car parks.

MR PETTERSSON: Where would a possible alternative access point to the arboretum be?

Mr Barr: There are a couple of options to look at: either to the south of the current entrance, effectively a slip road off Tuggeranong Parkway, or to the north, an access point to the west of the Glenloch Interchange.

MR PETTERSSON: How much of the site is still unpurposed? Has every parcel of

land on the site been assigned a purpose?

Mr Barr: The original concept and the further master planning work have largely allocated the areas for particular activities. I guess there always remains a little flexibility in these things, but it has pretty well largely been allocated.

Mr Saddler: I would say probably 95 per cent of the land is used at this point.

Mr Nicol: Although I add that there is still scope for future growth in gardens and those sort of features, but they are small rather than large forests.

Mr Saddler: There are a number of parcels of ACT government land which surround the National Arboretum as well.

MS CHEYNE: At the end of last year there was a major event held that I think had people like John Farnham and others, and—speaking of access—there were some quite considerable challenges in terms of getting that number of people in and out. I know that those who held that event talked about holding it again this year, but that does not seem to have come to pass. What has happened since last year in terms of the lessons learnt for the Arboretum? Notwithstanding more access, are there going to be fewer events at the Arboretum until that issue is resolved?

Mr Saddler: Yes, there will be fewer events until it is solved. As the Chief Minister said earlier, the stage will be put on hold until we get our second entry and exit. There were lessons learnt from that. Obviously we let too many cars into the site. We needed to bus more people in and out. A number of issues have been resolved internally. When we have another concert, things will be better.

MS CHEYNE: You mentioned issues internally. Is that just in terms of events of that scale and making sure that everyone knows what the limitations are?

Mr Saddler: Yes, exactly.

MS LAWDER: Continuing on the Arboretum, there was, at the time of the original planting, some suggestion that the ground had not been prepared sufficiently for the trees being planted. Have you seen any evidence of that? Do the trees perhaps have a stunted form?

Mr Saddler: No, I have not seen that. With the new water strategy project, we now have the whole irrigation; every single tree has a drip tube. There are 44,000 trees. With the water strategy project we have a bore at the front of the Arboretum which pumps up to a holding tank on top of Dairy Farmers Hill, which holds 1.9 million litres of water. Then that is gravity fed to the forest through a computerised system. My mobile phone can turn off and turn on the system. We know how much water is going to each tree. We now have soil moisture sensors from the University of Canberra. We can now see the percolation of moisture through the soil. All these are helping the growth of the tree. We have fertilisation programs. The end result, as people will see, is that the trees almost doubled in size in the last 18 months. So we do not have a problem with that.

Mr Nicol: The tree losses have been very moderate. We expected some. We have a plan to replace them as they are lost. I have heard stories about how they are destroyed by kangaroos on occasion.

Mr Saddler: The odd kangaroo, yes. They sit there and have a bit of a punch-around with the tree.

Mr Nicol: We are learning about what trees suit the climate, as well, and that is being fed through into our planning strategy.

MS LAWDER: You probably had an estimated failure rate of the trees, where they died or had to be replaced. You would have had a figure in mind. What has the actual result been like, compared to your expectation?

Mr Saddler: In the forestry industry there is a normal loss of about four per cent. The National Arboretum has had way less than that. We are probably less than two per cent. Of the 44,000 trees there has been a loss, leading up to the new water strategy project, of about 400 trees.

MS LAWDER: Has the water supply failed at any point?

Mr Saddler: No. We have been very successful in acquiring another 200 meg from the lake. We have a 66-meg allocation. That allocation is just enough. We are adding more grass and we are adding more gardens. We are adding to the aesthetics of the National Arboretum. The 200 meg of water from the lake will be a game changer. That will probably save the National Arboretum—not save: that will probably help the National Arboretum for the next 20 or 30 years. That allocation of water will never be used for the next 20 years, but it is there for us if we need it.

MS LAWDER: Are there any particular forests that have suffered more than others—types of trees?

Mr Saddler: Yes: about five forests. We have two failed forests currently and we have three forests where we are on about our third try. At the National Arboretum the horticulturists and arborists do not give up. We have tried different techniques to have those trees at their best, but there are three forests that are struggling and two that have failed. That is not too bad out of 100 forests, with the diversity of the selection from the selection committee.

MS LAWDER: Is there a proposal, or any thought for the future, to move Floriade to the Arboretum?

Mr Barr: No.

MR COE: With regard to light rail stage 2, what role did Infrastructure and Capital Works have in the decision to split stage 2 into two parts?

Mr Nicol: I will start on that. As I think I have said before, I am on the oversight committee for light rail. That committee considered this issue and gave advice to the government on the most appropriate way forward for delivering stage 2. We did have

a significant role, I think, in providing that advice to government. That advice basically went to things such as risk and time lines in terms of getting across the lake, and NCA approvals and engineering approvals.

At the time the advice was provided to government, the commonwealth also announced it was going to do an engineering study on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, which in our minds created a little more uncertainty and risk as to when and where that crossing could be made from the light rail stage 2 perspective. I can take on notice the detail of the exact dates when advice was provided.

However, the broad summary, I think, was that the government considered the option of either proceeding with stage 2A to the lake, which could have been delivered, in our view, more rapidly, or taking stage 2 as one project, which would have meant that issues of crossing the lake and going through the parliamentary triangle would have had to be solved before work could have commenced on the project. I will ask Mr Asteraki whether he has any other recollections of the process.

Mr Asteraki: No, I think you have covered it completely.

MR COE: What factors did you consider with regard to whether stage 2A stacked up?

Mr Nicol: Can you elaborate what you mean by “stacked up”?

MR COE: In order for you to provide advice to the government, what was the scope? How did you make an informed decision? What were the factors?

Mr Nicol: It was discussed in the committee. We certainly got engineering advice as to the feasibility of rolling out stage 2A. Through TCCS, we got costings as to how much stage 2A would likely cost. We developed processes for how we might approach the market and acquire stage 2A in a commercial sense, in a contracting sense. We looked at what impact it would have on stage 1 in terms of running and operations. We looked at workforce issues, whether the workforce could be acquired. We considered the integration issues with stage 1, as I said. We provided that as packaged advice to the government: should they wish to undertake stage 2A, these were the implications, risks, costs and benefits.

MR COE: Was patronage a consideration for you?

Mr Nicol: Patronage was part of the assessment, yes.

MR COE: What modelling did you have at your disposal to determine whether stage 2A stacked up? What was your threshold? How did you actually assess whether that was reasonable?

Mr Nicol: Stage 2A, in a sense, is not a pure patronage play. It is a necessary link in providing what the government has announced as a spine down to Woden. It was more assessed—not that patronage was not taken into account—as a necessary, feasible way or option of delivering on that government commitment. But I can take on notice details of the exact patronage modelling which was led by TCCS.

MR COE: Right, but was there any level of patronage that would have led you to advise the government not to proceed, or was patronage really irrelevant?

Mr Nicol: I think that is a hypothetical question. I suspect the answer is no, but I think the patronage question more closely revolves around going through to Woden and the patronage that that generated. Stage 2A is the first stage of delivering that project. Yes, stage 2A will have a patronage lift. But it is really stage 2 that we focus on in terms of long-term patronage.

MR COE: I think the BCR, as published by the government, includes 0.4, or 0.6 if you include some wider economic benefits. Was there a BCR that you deemed to be essential in order to advise that the project go ahead?

Mr Nicol: That is a question for government in terms of their decision to go ahead. The BCR is one important element, but it is not the only element. As I said, to get to Woden you have to build this stage. So taking a BCR on a short stage is not necessarily most indicative of the BCR for the entire project. I think a more important way to look at this project is to take the BCR for the entire project.

MR COE: Going back to the overall question on this, why did you advise to go ahead with stage 2A rather than wait and do the whole thing as one standalone contract?

Mr Nicol: Stage 2A was presented as an option to government that we advised—if the government went with 2A—it could get work underway on more quickly than going with stage 2.

MR COE: When you say “presented to government”, who presented to government?

Mr Nicol: The option was presented to government in a cabinet submission, which was, I think, endorsed by the committee and was formally the responsibility of the Minister for Transport.

MR COE: Did the consortium suggest going ahead with 2A?

Mr Nicol: I was not involved in every discussion with the consortium, but not to my knowledge. I can ask my colleagues in TCCS.

MR COE: So 2A has its genesis in the government, not in the consortium?

Mr Barr: It has genesis also in advice and discussions with the National Capital Authority and the commonwealth in respect of fast-tracking infrastructure projects. That has been a pretty clear directive from the commonwealth to states and territories. The Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the cities minister have all pretty clearly stated on the public record that they are looking for states and territories to look at ways to bring forward infrastructure projects.

The Prime Minister obviously gave a clear commitment, when I raised this at COAG, that the commonwealth would not be standing in the way of the ACT delivering this project, noting that the principal advantage of splitting the project into two stages is

that the approvals process in relation to the parliamentary triangle is the responsibility not just of the government but also of the parliament. Although the government has a narrow majority of the House of Representatives, it does not have a majority in the Senate; so any approval for the next stage of the project will require at the very least bipartisanship, and preferably the unanimous view of the parliament that this is a worthy project.

There are significant reasons to be optimistic about that in light of the success of stage 1. Certainly, this is the feedback from the parliamentarians on both sides of the fence that I have spoken to. More to the point, parliamentarians who need to solicit people's views on light rail normally get told how good it is, even by federal Liberal politicians, which is very pleasing to see.

MR COE: Are there any claims, variations or disputes from stage 1 that will be resolved by entering into stage 2A?

Mr Nicol: No.

MR COE: Are there any unresolved variations, disputes or financial issues with stage 1?

Mr Nicol: There are a number of small issues. We still have to get to formal completion and acceptance. There are a number of matters which are still outstanding. One example that I can recall off the top of my head is the bollards. We have gone through a fairly substantial process of design. This has involved the NCA and we have to have the approval of the NCA. Formal completion of the project, for example, requires that the bollards be completed. That is still outstanding.

There are a number of other matters outstanding as well related to asset acceptance by TCCS. That is part of the acceptance of the asset to the territory. As a part of the commercial arrangements, we entered into—as part of the contractual arrangements—Canberra Metro is due a sum on completion and we have withheld that sum until completion occurs.

MR COE: That is not the \$375 million; that is a separate amount.

Mr Nicol: That is a separate amount. These are relatively minor matters in the context of the project. Several of the matters go to ensuring to our satisfaction that the asset will remain in good stead for its whole operating life. That takes some process to go through. I have been informed that this is not unusual for a project of this scale. The project is operating, obviously, and operating well, in our view. These are matters, essentially, to resolve minor technical issues. That is the way I would describe it. Mr Asteraki, did you want to add to that?

Mr Asteraki: Yes, I agree.

MR COE: There are no outstanding contract variations?

Mr Nicol: On stage 1? I do not think so, but can I take it on notice?

Mr Asteraki: On the Mitchell stop, my understanding is that the modification notice for that is imminent. It may have been issued. I am not completely up to date with that. That is more a matter for TCCS and they—

Mr Nicol: I guess it is whether that is a stage 1 issue or a contractual adjustment.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe and Mr Milligan, with that segue, we will defer to TCCS for further questions on that.

MR MILLIGAN: You may need to take this on notice. How many elite, semi-professional and amateur games were held at Manuka Oval over the last 12 months?

Mr Barr: We can do that.

MR MILLIGAN: Did GWS, as outlined in their contract, hold any pre-season matches and/or women's matches at Manuka Oval over the past 12 months?

Mr Barr: Over the annual reporting period, yes, they did.

MR MILLIGAN: Were they pre-season and women's matches?

Mr Barr: I believe so.

Mr Elkins: Yes. Last season we hosted AFLW and a pre-season match.

MR MILLIGAN: Do you know the attendance for either the pre-season or the AFLW match?

Mr Elkins: The exact numbers I will take on notice, but it was around 5,000 for the pre-season and around 3,000 for AFLW.

MR MILLIGAN: Has the government done any study on the economic benefit to the territory by bringing these matches in?

Mr Barr: The pre-season and the women's?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, pre-season and women's.

Mr Barr: I am not sure that there is specific research on those. There is on games for the season.

MR MILLIGAN: On main season games?

Mr Barr: I am not sure whether it is broken down into each of those individual ones. I think it would be fair to observe that the attendance at the premierships matches combined is somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000, and the attendance at those two would be somewhere between five and 10. The quantum and the benefit are most specifically around the premierships games, but these are part of an overall package.

MR MILLIGAN: Is the economic benefit that this brings to the territory published information? Who has conducted that analysis?

Mr Barr: We undertake a survey.

Mr Elkins: We do various research on events hosted at venues, in conjunction with economic development. We have not done anything specific around AFLW or the pre-season matches.

MR MILLIGAN: I am referring to the main season.

Mr Elkins: Around the main season?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes.

Mr Elkins: We would be able to provide some information around the main season.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you.

Mr Elkins: I can give numbers around local football. We hosted the four preliminary finals for local football, senior men, senior women, div 2 and div 3. There are the Rising Stars. We hosted local finals as well, for the same. We also hosted 20 local AFL games, including NEAFL. We can give a breakdown of what those were. There were two school comps as well.

MR MILLIGAN: At Manuka Oval?

Mr Elkins: At Manuka Oval.

MR MILLIGAN: That would be appreciated; thank you.

MS CHEYNE: While we are on venues, do you deal with Exhibition Park in Canberra, EPIC?

Mr Elkins: That is me.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you for staying. There were 124 major events. Is it possible in future annual reports to do a breakdown of that list? I am conscious that the Capital Region Farmers Market is probably held more than 40 times a year, so it makes up a significant proportion of those 124. I am not asking for it now, because I can probably work it out, but in terms of that breakdown, can you say what is bringing the most?

Mr Elkins: Absolutely.

MS CHEYNE: Is that list on page 105 in the order of what gets the most attraction to it? I assume that Summernats is still the most well attended event at EPIC?

Mr Elkins: Summernats is a very well attended event. Also, we hosted Groovin the Moo for the first time this year. There were the Royal Canberra Show and the National Folk Festival.

MS CHEYNE: Is Groovin the Moo going to continue to be hosted at EPIC?

Mr Elkins: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Did you get feedback from people who attended about how they found the venue, compared to the University of Canberra?

Mr Elkins: We did not get specific feedback in comparison to that venue, but we worked closely with the promoter and they were very happy with how EPIC performed as a venue.

MS CHEYNE: How many people does the Craft & Quilt Fair usually get?

Mr Elkins: I would have to take that on notice.

MS CHEYNE: I am keen to know if it is a real drawcard. Ms Clarke, please enlighten me.

Ms Clarke: I am the executive branch manager of property services, but I can answer that question as the former executive branch manager of Venues Canberra. The Handmade markets over the weekend usually attract around 12,000 attendees, but that attendance is growing. It is one of the key events that we have at EPIC.

MS CHEYNE: That is the Handmade markets. I am interested in that growing and whether EPIC can continue to hold it, given that it is taking up a lot of space at EPIC. It is very well done. My question was about the Craft & Quilt Fair.

Ms Clarke: Sorry, the Craft & Quilt Fair. The attraction—

MS CHEYNE: I am not sure that has been on the list in previous years.

Ms Clarke: It usually attracts around about 25,000 over the four days.

MS CHEYNE: Really?

Ms Clarke: Yes. One of the attractions for the Craft & Quilt Fair is that they also hold a lot of learning sessions, if you want to know how to knit or learn how to sew. They have a lot of seminars as well.

MS CHEYNE: So it is comparable to Groovin the Moo in terms of attendance.

THE CHAIR: A different crowd, though, Ms Cheyne.

MS CHEYNE: Are you sure?

THE CHAIR: I am pretty confident there is not much crossover.

Mr Barr: You never know.

Ms Clarke: The numbers are because of the days. It is longer than just one day.

MS CHEYNE: I am just trying to get a sense of EPIC's suitability for a range of different events and demographics. From that list, it seems to be very strong in terms of catering to all types and demographics.

Ms Clarke: Yes. That is the important thing about Exhibition Park: it has the opportunity to provide a diverse range of events, from farmers markets, as you mentioned previously, to the craft and quilt show, and Handmade, which is hugely successful, as well as addressing a lot of the external outdoor events such as Groovin the Moo, Summernats and the Canberra show.

MS CHEYNE: Are any of the regular events trending down in terms of the numbers of people going to them?

Ms Clarke: It is an interesting question. A lot of times it is to do with the weather. For example, two years ago there was catastrophic weather for the Canberra show, so on the Sunday numbers were down. I would say that each year it depends on the time of year as to whether an event has increased patronage or not. For example, Handmade markets is trending up; that is why Exhibition Park is working closely with the event organiser and looking at opportunities for growing space for that growth.

MS CHEYNE: Could you take on notice which, if any, of the events are trending down over time? I am particularly interested in recent patronage at the Capital Region Farmers Market, which seems to be shrinking a bit in terms of stallholders, though perhaps not in terms of people. I am interested to see if there is a correlation there.

Ms Clarke: We are working with the Rotary Club of Hall, which has had the farmers markets since inception. Interestingly, that was created because of the drought, providing support to farmers and providing an opportunity for local produce to come to the market. Our information coming forward is that there is still increased patronage there. Obviously during winter and the colder months it is low, but coming into the warmer months it increases. The Rotary Club controls the number of stallholders. There is a certain number, that I am aware of, that they keep, and there has always been a waiting list. I am more than happy to have a discussion with the event organiser, the Rotary Club, and ask if they would be willing to provide that information.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you; I appreciate that very much.

THE CHAIR: We are now looking at innovation, trade and investments.

MS LE COUTEUR: I would like to talk about the government's support for the defence industry. A Canberra-based weapons company, EOS, had a question raised about it previously this year about whether its products that were being used to kill people in the Yemen civil war. Does the ACT government provide any support for EOS?

Mr Barr: Yes, the government has provided support, principally for its space industry related activity. EOS participated in Canberra's presence at the international

aeronautical conference that was held in Adelaide about two years ago, from memory. That was the event where the Australian government announced that it would salvage the Australian Space Agency. EOS's activities are broad, inasmuch as they also include defence-related activities, largely under Australian government programs. As part of an incentive to relocate a range of activities into the ACT, EOS were granted a time period limited payroll tax exemption.

MS LE COUTEUR: That would be for all their activities, obviously, for payroll tax exemption?

Mr Barr: I think it was in terms of adding additional capability here in the ACT.

MS LE COUTEUR: But it was not distinguishing between space and defence in terms of the support, so—

Mr Barr: No. But within defence they have a number of different activities that go beyond just the example that featured in the ABC reporting. That particular export project is largely supported by the commonwealth, through their defence industry export program. But we are not black-banning them. Undertaking legal defence export activities under the auspices of an Australian government program does not make them ineligible for ACT government support for other projects.

MS LE COUTEUR: You said “for other projects”. Does that imply that you would not be supporting defence-related projects?

Mr Barr: No, it does not. A reference was made at that time to an award that they won. That was for their space industry related work. But we do not seek to distinguish in terms of their activities, and there is certainly no suggestion that any activities that they have undertaken are in breach of any Australian law and/or in breach of any territory law.

MS LE COUTEUR: If they are not in breach of any law, do you have any concern about whether the products could in fact be used for killing children and civilians and whether they comply with the United Nations arms trade treaty?

Mr Barr: I am not in a position to make an assessment in relation to that. As I understand it, they provide a platform; they do not manufacture weapons. They provide, effectively, a guidance platform; hence its application outside defence as it relates to, for example, the space industry or others, but they are not a weapons manufacturer. In the example you are seeking to highlight, someone else's weapon would be mounted on that guidance platform.

To the extent that that is all part of a supply and production integrated platform, that would in theory enable such activity, but ultimately the end user of the product would be the one who would be accountable or otherwise for those United Nations requirements. We are not in a position to assess that, but I am not aware of any evidence that supports that assertion. If I were, it would be a matter of concern but ultimately not a matter that can be regulated by the ACT government. It is a matter for the Australian government. We are not in a position to determine, for example, the use of those particular platforms once they are in an export context.

MS LE COUTEUR: But you are in a position to determine who you give support to. Clearly it is in your gift as to where it goes, so that part of it is the government's responsibility. I am not suggesting that you personally would have done any of this evaluation, but I am wondering whether the ACT government program would have. It appears that the answer is no.

Mr Barr: No. The export licensing is undertaken by the Australian government.

MS LE COUTEUR: If it is legal, it is fine, basically, as far as the ACT government is concerned?

Mr Barr: Yes. We are not in a position to undertake our own licensing framework for defence exports. We require adherence with the Australian government's—

MS LE COUTEUR: Are there any companies that the ACT government has declined to support on the basis of non-financial issues: issues such as the one I am talking about? I think the answer is no. From what you are saying, it would be no.

Ms Arthy: I am not aware of any, certainly in the time that I have been in the agency. I do not think my staff are aware of anything either.

MS LE COUTEUR: What industries are specifically supported by the priority investment program?

Ms Arthy: We are very happy to answer that question, because it is a fairly important program. As you are probably aware, we stipulated quite a few years ago that we have a number of areas of key capability, particularly around defence, space, cyber, renewables, allied health—and there is always one I forget, which I am sure Mr Kelly will remind me of. This is now the next generation. When it comes to priority investment, the linkage between the higher education, research and innovation sectors and business is really what sets Canberra apart with our strategy. We have a very deliberate strategy to target our priority investment programs to that capability and really encourage that interface between business and higher education. Mr Kelly can take you through more specifics about what industries have been supported so far.

Mr Kelly: The priority investment program does focus on a number of priority sectors, and they include space, cyber, defence, agri-technology, renewable energy and health, but it is not only limited to those sectors. Where we see emerging priorities in other sectors, we will also focus on those opportunities through that program.

In the first completed funding round of the program, four projects were awarded funding across space, renewable energy and agri-technology. They include projects such as a quantum optical ground station at Mount Stromlo; funding to a UNSW Canberra spin-off called Skykraft, to collaborate with local and international partners to design and manufacture small satellite constellations; and the delivery of space-based air traffic management services.

In the renewable energy sector, ITP Renewables is working with ANU to deliver a distributed energy resource laboratory to provide an interface with the energy grid to

test devices and data about how energy networks function. In the agri-technology sector we awarded funding to ANU and CSIRO to build on a previous investment in the Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-technology.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could you provide us with a list of the grants over the last four years, including the grant amount, the grant period and the industry sector?

Mr Barr: Under PIP?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Mr Barr: It has not been around for four years.

MS LE COUTEUR: This was the first year, was it?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: In that case, for the first year. He said there were only four, but I think you should take it on notice rather than—

Mr Kelly: Yes, we can do that.

MR GUPTA: We know tertiary education is one of the largest drivers of the local economy. Are we still seeing some growth in this sector? If yes, from which region and what localities?

Ms Arthy: Tertiary education is one of our big drivers, as you correctly say. We have a hearing later this week in which we can go into a lot more detail with the right people around the table. But, in very general terms, tertiary education is now our largest export sector. It is our first ever billion-dollar export sector, and we cracked that mark with the last statistics that came out. Recent research says the tertiary education sector contributes more than \$3 billion to the economy and employs approximately 20,000 people. So it is very, very strong.

The thing we do in government is work with all the different universities to look at how we can support their growth. It is not just about growing the number of students or the number of research people within institutions; it is also about building the connections to the innovation, the venture capital and the entrepreneurial sectors. We work very closely with the CBR Innovation Network. The founding members on the board are the government and the education institutions, Data61 and CSIRO, so between us we have a very large network when it comes to innovation.

A lot of our growth is targeted at the application of the products or the outputs of the tertiary education sector. We also work very closely with the educational institutions on further development, either on their campuses or with their offerings. It is a very significant focus for us.

MR GUPTA: Are you seeing any growth from a particular region or is it mainly just coming from China, India and South-East Asia?

Ms Arthy: We have a fairly stable base. I do not have those numbers in front of me, but I can certainly take it on notice or revisit it when we talk about tertiary education later in the week. In general terms, people are coming from China—that is a fairly stable base for us—and from South-East Asia increasingly. We are beginning work in the Indian market because we see that as one of the growth areas. One of the things we are working on very closely with our university partners is how we attract university partners.

We also are working very closely with Austrade. They are currently looking at their international education strategy. It is about how all of the states and territories can work together to go into new markets and present as Australia. Once students are interested in coming to Australia, it is then about how we differentiate between jurisdictions for them to come to Canberra. It is a work in progress, but we are putting a lot of effort into it because we need to ensure that we have a good student base to sustain and grow the sector.

Mr Barr: The domestic market is also important. The region is a significant source of students coming into Canberra from surrounding New South Wales, and other parts of Australia as well. Domestic students will always be a big part of the market for us. In the context of exports, obviously it is the international student base, but for the higher education sector overall our domestic student intake is important too.

Ms Arthy: We have 43,000 students engaged in higher education in Canberra—12,500 are international and 13,000 are interstate students. They are a very important market for us.

MR PETTERSSON: Can you provide an update on the proposed UNSW city campus? Where is that up to?

Mr Barr: We are well advanced in the negotiations with the university. The in-principle agreements have been struck and we are now working through various elements of detail in relation to, for example, the educational offerings and the speed at which UNSW Canberra would increase its enrolments.

We have within our higher education sector—that is, universities and TAFE—a need for more opportunities in certain areas where our economy is growing and where there is clearly demand for skills. Cyber and ICT-related industries are growing rapidly, and demand for students with qualifications in those areas is very significant. UNSW Canberra, together with the CIT, for example, have some significant collaborative opportunities and potential to address some of the skill shortages there. That is one of the priorities around the projects underway in terms of both CIT's modernisation and the UNSW expansion.

I think it is progressing well. We will have some more to say when we have completed that work, but the university council has approved the next phase of that work, as has the ACT cabinet. Kareena and her team are working through the fine detail at the moment. Anything else to add to that?

Ms Arthy: That basically summarises it. It is a very large and complex project and we are hopefully in the final stages of negotiating the detail. So far we are working very

cooperatively and it has been a good process to date.

MR PETTERSSON: Do you have an eye to when construction might start or when students might first set foot on campus?

Mr Barr: The initial proposals are for UNSW Canberra to take up some surplus space within current buildings in Reid so that they can commence programs quite quickly. That is obviously when construction starts and finishes. Construction is the subject of more detailed negotiations. We are not yet in a position to outline all of that, because agreements have not been finalised. Suffice to say there is quite a lot of appetite from UNSW to move quickly and a very strong appetite from the government to see some important partnerships struck between the institutions.

This is collaboration between the university and the CIT, as well as between UNSW and other higher education providers in the city. They have pretty strong and established relationships with ANU in relation to the space industry, for example, but there are opportunities across the ACT higher education system for further partnerships to be struck as part of this process.

We are aware of where demand is rapidly emerging from both students and employers in relation to cyber and ICT skills, so we are looking for some quick outcomes from our education providers to meet that need.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have read that Chinese interest in our education has been stabilising or decreasing. Will that make any difference to the plans to expand the amount of education provided by Canberra?

Mr Barr: No. Obviously China is a factor for one or two institutions particularly, but the demand is growing locally, regionally, nationally and in markets other than China. So I do not think so. Frankly, the diversification this will bring is an important signal for both the sector more broadly but, importantly, for Canberra.

If we were to retain the status quo there would be a risk that it is too narrowly based and that certain skills needed in our economy are not provided through higher education providers in the territory at the moment. We are endeavouring to expand the range of courses on offer to meet particular emerging needs. That is within both the Institute of Technology and within the higher education network.

This applies to UNSW Canberra, as it does to the University of Canberra, the ANU and, to a certain extent, the Australian Catholic University, as it relates to particular needs in STEM teaching, for example. I think there are opportunities across the sector both for diversification of students coming into the ACT and also to stop an outflow of students from the territory who have to go elsewhere to study in particular disciplines.

MR PETTERSSON: What work has been done across government to prepare for 5G?

Mr Barr: We have a whole-of-government approach that is addressing both the policy and regulatory roadblocks to the implementation of 5G. We want to encourage

the rollout in a manner that helps Canberra as a digital city, that encourages economic development, that takes account of social equity and citizens' privacy but also provides for market competition and consumer choice. That is the headline.

The next level of detail has involved discussion with the major telcos in the nation. I have met recently with Telstra CEO Andy Penn and his team in relation to 5G and a bunch of other Canberra issues. We have a good policy framework in place and we are now well placed to support the rollout of the new network. Its capacity is obviously significantly greater than the 4G or 3G networks that we have become used to.

Ms Starick: As people are aware, 5G is a constellation of technologies and there have already been some upgrades by the telecommunications companies to some of their existing infrastructure. In addition to the items the Chief Minister mentioned, the ACT government has also enabled Telstra to undertake a small trial in Wright, where they have installed six small cell antennas which are part of the infrastructure required for the higher frequencies, but they are using the existing frequencies at about 3.6 gigahertz. The work we are doing across government is to learn from that trial about the different aspects we need to support the telecommunications companies to roll out 5G in an efficient way across the territory.

MS CHEYNE: A number of members here have received considerable correspondence about perceived health risks from electromagnetic radiation. I am not suggesting that you are a scientist in this area, but is there any light that you are able to shed on this issue? Is it a genuine one and, if it is, are there steps that can be taken to minimise the effect on people?

Ms Starick: Thank you for that question. We have also received some correspondence from people, particularly about the health concerns about the higher frequency, higher gigahertz. The ACT takes advice from the national regulator, or the national safety organisation responsible for safety standards, which is ARPANSA, which is a commonwealth entity. The Department of Communications and the Arts is responsible for the Telecommunications Act, which is around the regulation of infrastructure. ARPANSA—

MS CHEYNE: The feedback that we get from these people who are writing to us, though, is that they do not trust ARPANSA, particularly given how that works and the standards ARPANSA is setting compared to worldwide standards. Is there any view on that or do we just do what we are told?

Ms Starick: We have not set up separate research in regard to the safety of the new technology. ARPANSA, in their information that they have provided broadly and to us, link with the international standards and coordinate internationally. The safety standards that they have set are below, I guess, what would be considered any at-risk level of exposure. We take our guidance from the national regulator in this instance. We have also fed into them and to the Department of Communications and the Arts the concerns that people have raised with us. So we are continually communicating and exchanging information.

MS CHEYNE: Has that department responded to you with further views or

information when you have provided that feedback to them?

Ms Starick: Nothing that would be different from or not in line with the information that is out publicly.

MS CHEYNE: Really, this quite squarely sits more at that federal level in terms of the lobbying and relationship with that?

Ms Starick: Yes.

Mr Barr: I think there is a useful article by one of our best science communicators, Dr Karl, in relation to 5G radiation health risks. The article states:

5G radiation health risks have been hyped, but Dr Karl explains why you don't need to worry.

He goes through it in some detail. The article highlights that some of the agenda that has been pushed in relation to 5G has been pushed by the same people who are anti-technology, anti-vaccine and anti-sunscreen—the same people who are found peddling anti-5G hysteria. I guess the take-home thing for me here is a particular quote from the article:

In terms of cancer, it's worth considering that if non-ionizing radiation does turn out to be carcinogenic—and this still has not been proven—it will almost certainly be a less effective carcinogen than sunlight and alcohol, which are proven cancer-causing agents that we interact with on a daily basis.

The science, I think, is reasonably clear. I am quoting from Dr Karl's article on the ABC website, in the science section, and I provide the committee with that.

THE CHAIR: Authoritative government advice.

MR COE: Well googled, yes. I have got a question about the innovation, trade investment area and particularly the culture there amongst the staff. Are there any reasons why the culture there might not be as productive or as healthy as in other parts of the directorate?

Ms Arthy: First of all, I would like to understand on what basis you are making those statements. Certainly the team has gone through change, because, as you know, several longstanding members have resigned for various reasons, whether it is retirement or to change jobs. And we have just had another person resign to take up another incredible opportunity in Victoria. It is fairly safe to say that the team is going through quite a bit of change and adjustment.

On issues around culture, we know that we have had a staff survey which has highlighted that there are issues around how that team is working at the moment. But in terms of its performance, in terms of what it is delivering and in terms of how the team is operating, it is a highly effective team. It is evidenced by the fact that we have the priority investment program operating well. We are now moving into new areas around tradestart and tradeready, and the team is actively engaged, as is the whole division, in how we improve, how we work together as a high-performing team.

MR COE: What strategies are in place to support people's self-esteem and tackle any mental health or any actual or perceived bullying issues?

Ms Arthy: In terms of mental health, I can certainly talk about that because I am the mental health champion for the Chief Minister's directorate. We work one on one with our people. If we detect that our people are struggling then we would work with them to get them the help they need. I will not go into talking about individuals or even individual strategies, because it depends on the situation.

I want to take issue with the bullying because I do not want it even implied that we have a bullying issue or a bullying culture. Certainly we have got no evidence that that is the case. And certainly, if there was, it would be handled extremely quickly and swiftly, because we do not tolerate that sort of work environment.

At a general level we, across the division, are working on how we ensure that workloads are evenly balanced, that we have the ability for staff to interact with each other, to try to improve our communication channels so that people understand what is happening. Certainly I know that the managers in that team put a lot of effort into working with individual staff during a period of change. It is like everything in a change period. Some people cope well; others do not. We do what we can to support people as we change.

MR COE: But when 30 per cent of people say that they have witnessed bullying and 22 per cent say that they have been subject to bullying, what are the very specific things that need to take place in that particular area to address these concerns?

Ms Arthy: I do not mean to come across that we are not taking this seriously. Of course we are. It is just that it is very difficult to talk about issues like that without revealing information that might identify people. So I am trying to generalise. In general, what we are doing at an executive level—and I can turn to Ms Starick and Mr Hassett and others to elaborate—is working with each individual, through their performance discussions, to make sure that they have very clear work expectations, that if there are issues then there is a safe environment within which to raise the issues. We, certainly as the senior leadership team, take people's safety very importantly, rate it very highly, and we will do what it takes to make sure that these people are supported. Ms Starick, do you have anything you would like to add, because you are working more closely with the people?

Ms Starick: The only other thing I would add is that we are working closely with the branches in economic development, with each branch, to identify those priorities and actions that actually for the teams are important and that would make a difference. Those actions are reported up through not just the PDPs but also individual team meetings. Then we are prioritising actions. That is in train at the moment. But our commitment was to implement actions that were important for those teams.

MR COE: Obviously I am not expecting the detail, but are you confident that you know what the source of that bullying or perceived bullying might be?

Ms Arthy: That one is actually a very difficult question to answer because it is not the

sort of thing that you can go up to someone and just ask them straight out. Firstly, in terms of the survey, we do not know who reported that. We have got no way of actually going to a potential source to find out what triggered—

MR COE: True, but it is 22 per cent of a pretty small team. We are still talking five people or so that are citing this.

Ms Arthy: Yes, but again it is how you actually deal with that with individuals without breaching privacy. The issue comes back to the environment within which we seek to operate. One of the things that we have been doing a lot on within the entire division is looking at making sure we have a safe place for people to operate. Of course we are concerned if there are perceptions around bullying. But to be able to get to a potential source—and again I am going on the fact that the results are around perceived bullying primarily—is actually quite difficult to do.

But what we are looking to do is make sure that whatever support mechanisms are there, if someone does experience it, there are ways for them to report it. The expectation on managers and others, not just necessarily line managers but anyone in the division, is to provide them with the support they need.

MR COE: But if people do not feel confident that their opinion counts or they do not feel confident that any action is actually going to be taken as a result of these findings, surely there is a need for some externalities or some circuit breaker in order to actually provide some support and an outlet for some people that are obviously feeling pretty disenfranchised?

Ms Arthy: Perhaps if I go back a step, in terms of process. As Ms Starick said, we are going through them at the moment, working with each individual team, looking at what are the matters that come out of the staff survey that are important. I actually have not seen the ones that have come out from this particular area, in terms of what has been identified. We are having staff self-identify what is important. I would assume that, once we get to the point of when it gets briefed to me and we decide what we do, then that should address part of the issue.

The second one is around, of course, my wanting to make sure that everyone in my team feels supported and has the ability to put their hand up. If there is a need to provide an intervention then I will do so, but I need to make sure it is going to be the right intervention at the right time.

The third thing I just want to just clarify, in terms of the belief and the statistics around not believing that things will be acted on, is that that was a very generic question. It was not necessarily related just to the odd matters you have raised. Of course it is a concern to me that people do not think that we will follow through, but I can assure you that as the senior leadership team we are determined to make sure that we act on the findings.

MR COE: But that question was asked somewhat specifically in other ways: 26 per cent felt informed about what the organisation was doing, 30 per cent felt safe to speak up and challenge the way that things are done in the organisation, 26 per cent felt they had the opportunity for growth and development in the organisation and then

26 per cent felt action would be taken as a result of the survey.

Ms Arthy: I want to go back to my first answer. Yes, those results are not very good but they are from a team that is in a significant amount of change. If you do any staff survey in any organisation undergoing a lot of change, you expect to see similar types of results. Of course I am concerned about anything to do with bullying or people feeling that they are not supported. That is something that we will deal with. But it is also important to provide the context that this team is undergoing change. I totally accept that, and that it is uncomfortable. In any organisation undergoing significant change, you would rarely get high satisfaction rates.

In terms of the issues you raised specifically around communication, we have taken many steps to improve how communication happens within the division, through both personal meetings as well as a new intranet and just being much more high profile about explaining what it is that we are doing to staff.

MR COE: What mental health supports are provided to staff, especially given that some of them are obviously struggling?

Ms Arthy: Mental health, as you know, is not an easy issue and there is not a cookie-cutter approach. There is a range of things. First of all, we need to understand what the actual issues are. We provide support from managers, and we also support the managers in knowing how to deal with people who have mental health issues. We have the employee assistance program that we work with. We also work very closely with the corporate HR area. Again it comes back to what type of issues are being explored. In other areas we have worked very hard at helping people to get the professional help they need, including helping people to take time off, if that is the right approach. We also work very closely with people in terms of return to work. Again we have to tailor it to the circumstance. As I said I can assure you that we place very high stock on the mental health of our people.

THE CHAIR: We will move now to VisitCanberra and events.

MR WALL: What work is being done to improve the average nightly spend for tourism in the ACT? The statistics that have been published by government show that there has been a slight tailing off in the average spend, despite the visitation numbers increasing.

Mr Kobus: With the average spend, the work that we do to increase that occurs across a range of different areas. That is both domestically and internationally. Our main KPI is based around increasing overnight spends. We have a goal of increasing the overnight spend to \$2.5 billion by 2020. Therefore all of the activity that we undertake is designed to—

MR WALL: That is the headline number. As our tourism catchment increases, that is trending there. But the spend per visitation has actually seen a decrease. What has that been attributed to and what is being done to address that, on an average?

Mr Kobus: The total overnight spend has seen an increase over a period of time. Since 2012 it has grown by nearly a billion dollars over that period.

MR WALL: But if that is divided by the number of visitors who—

MS CHEYNE: Spend per capita.

MR WALL: Yes.

Mr Kobus: With the per capita spend, one of the things that influences any decrease would be length of stay. From an international market perspective, it is also influenced by the numbers of international students who come. Different types of markets bring different types of visitors who spend a commensurately different amount of money in the market during that period.

Our main aim is to ensure that we have, on a per visitor basis, the greatest amount of yield that we can generate for each person. Specifically, the programs that we implement target high-value visitors and seek to attract those to the city. For example, with our major event fund and the partnerships that we do with our major national attractions, we implement campaign activity, together with those national institutions, to bring people who are going to stay longer and spend more when they are here.

One of the other things that influences the trend that you are talking about is what we have seen over the past number of years, in terms of a significant increase in the amount of investment that has occurred in the hotel sector. Over the past seven years, we have probably seen net growth of about 2,000 hotel rooms in the city, from a base of about 5,000 to just over 7,000 hotel rooms. That puts more competition into the marketplace and makes it an environment that forces hotels to put prices out there to remain competitive and attract the market, which then commensurately leads to a spend per person that may decrease as a result of the amount that they spend on a room during that period.

Canberra also has a fairly cyclical environment when it comes to visitation. During periods of parliamentary sittings, you might see very high frequencies; outside parliamentary sitting periods, that might taper off, and in the hotel room environment that I outlined. Room rates do fluctuate throughout the year, on a per person basis.

MS CHEYNE: Are children captured in your per capita visitation rates?

Mr Kobus: Yes, schoolkids—

MS CHEYNE: How much are they spending? If you are attracting a heap of families, and let us say that every family has between one and 10 kids, and we are getting more and more families, wouldn't that also account for a drop in overall per capita spend, if there are a lot of kids?

Mr Kobus: Yes. That mix all comes into it. Over 160,000 schoolkids travel to Canberra every year—domestic schoolkids—to learn about civics and citizenship.

MS CHEYNE: That would impact on nightly spend. I do not see many kids under 18 at Mooseheads.

Mr Kobus: They stay in commensurately lower cost accommodation while they are here during those stays. Also, their length of stay is quite long. Schoolkids will come for three, four or five nights, as part of a visit to the territory, as opposed to our average length of stay for a domestic overnight visitor, which is about 2.7 nights for that period. That combination of international students, schoolkids, fluctuations in investment and increase in hotel rooms has an impact. But our objective is to ensure that we continue to do things and attract the right people to the market. So it is about finding the right balance in the mix of all of those things.

MS CHEYNE: With Floriade and NightFest, this year seems to have been quite a bumper year. What was behind that? 2019 was great; 2018 seemed to be much better; 2017 seemed to be our not-great year. I am wondering why the experience has improved and what is attracting people there.

Mr Barr: There are a number which we can go into in some detail. The headlines are really about negotiating a better arrangement around the use of the park with the NCA. In 2017 we did have some difficulties in relation to the venue. Also, there was an issue in relation to the food and beverage offerings; that period might best be categorised as being more of a catering experience than a gourmet experience. We have endeavoured, as part of a shift in approach to the event, to look to both localise and diversify the types of food and beverage offerings that are available, to make it more distinctly Canberra, and to both encourage diversity of offerings and move it from a large-scale catered event experience to a more personalised and localised one.

The feedback on that has been positive. It is also about addressing some of the practical issues that people have raised around ensuring the easy flow of people through the venue, and entertainment options of the right kind at the right time. There are some other very tangible and practical things, like some more shaded spots to sit in and enjoy the entertainment and the food and beverage offerings. Jo might want to add something.

Ms Verden: The Chief Minister has covered most things. Importantly, in making those changes and enhancements to the events, it is about taking into consideration the research that we conduct each year and really listening to what the consumer is looking for. A lot of effort has gone into the design of the site and how people engage and interact with the site: the placement of the market stalls, the introduction of the local elements through food and catering experiences and the location of where we place the garden beds around the park. It is really about listening to what our visitors are saying, as well as listening to what the people who work with us are saying, the traders, the food and catering vendors, and their experience and the feedback that they receive from visitors to the event.

MS CHEYNE: Is dogs day out growing?

Ms Verden: It is fair to say that it is growing. We had about 5,600 dogs attend dogs day out this year.

MS CHEYNE: How on earth did you capture that data—through pats?

Ms Verden: We did actually click dogs coming through the gate this year. Just as we

count people coming through the gates, we focused this year on counting how many dogs attended. It is a popular feature for the event and it is something that people look forward to on the last day of the event. It is growing in popularity. It is good to know numbers so that we can better plan and organise for a continuation of that.

MS CHEYNE: Has any consideration been given to expanding the number of days on which dogs can attend? I appreciate that there are risks associated with that, but given the popularity—

Ms Verden: Not at this stage. It is fair to say that the number of dogs that attended Floriade on the last day this year was manageable. We did not have any issues; the dogs were well behaved. The owners of dogs were well behaved and tidied up after their dogs, so we did not have any issues. At this stage we will continue it for the last day and see how it goes over the next few years.

MS CHEYNE: How much did it cost to secure The Veronicas for NightFest?

Ms Verden: The cost of The Veronicas was \$50,000. That was all inclusive. Their flights and accommodation arrangements were included in part of that package. In terms of how The Veronicas performed, it was our highest attended night for NightFest. It is fair to say that attracting headline artists like The Veronicas does add value to NightFest. Obviously, it attracts good numbers if you do have a headliner that appeals to the audiences that we are targeting for NightFest. It also adds credibility to the event, enabling us to grow the awareness of NightFest and grow the appeal of NightFest, by having headliners. We saw that replicated on the Sunday night when we had headline comedians. That was our second largest night for NightFest. It does pay to invest a little bit more to get those headliners, to get the outcomes that we are looking for.

MS CHEYNE: Do we go out to tender? How do we choose The Veronicas?

Ms Verden: We have a process where we sit down and look at the options, and we consider that in the context of the budget as well. We cannot tender for The Veronicas, because there is only one. We do run a single select process to enable us to procure—

MS CHEYNE: Do you as a team sit down and brainstorm, “Who’s cool but affordable”? I am really curious.

Mr Barr: Mr Hanson and I definitely meet those criteria!

MS CHEYNE: I am very interested in the demographics.

THE CHAIR: Affordable; maybe not cool!

Ms Verden: We sit down and brainstorm what might be appealing to the audience and what we are trying to achieve for NightFest. Yes, cool perhaps; affordable, absolutely. It is about what we feel will attract good audiences, and we did see a good result and a good uplift in numbers this year.

MS CHEYNE: The Veronicas attracted some media attention with a Qantas flight—

THE CHAIR: Tara is a fan.

MS CHEYNE: No, it was on *The Project*. Given that we paid for their flights, I assume that these were two separate flights and that this was nothing to do with us, the incident that they had on a Qantas flight. It had nothing to do with them coming to Canberra?

Ms Verden: Yes, your perception is correct. They were two completely separate incidents.

THE CHAIR: I received some very positive feedback about you personally recently, from the people involved in Floriade on the front line. I thought I would pass that on.

Ms Verden: Thank you.

MR GUPTA: On the visitor numbers, do we have a breakdown of visitors coming internationally and nationally for Floriade?

Ms Verden: Not at this stage. We will do. We are still completing the evaluation of the event. What we capture, and what we have at the moment, is the total number of attendances. That is 507,550. Once the evaluation is complete we will have a better understanding of the breakdown of interstate and international versus local. Historically, it has sat at around 50 per cent local versus 50 per cent interstate and international.

I do have a breakdown of the NightFest numbers, because we capture that data at the point that people purchase their tickets. We get their postcode data, and we can tell straightaway. With NightFest about 75 per cent of attendees were local and the remainder were interstate and international; and some people choose not to nominate their postcode.

MR GUPTA: We now have an officer stationed in Singapore to support international tourism growth. Are you getting any help from that officer or position in Singapore to promote festivals in Canberra?

Mr Kobus: We have had a full-time person based in Singapore since January this year. Since the Singapore Airlines flights started, we went from a four-day a week service, and within 15 months that went to a daily service. It quickly highlighted the need to ensure that we were paying greater attention to how we were servicing that market, to maximise the opportunity that the inbound and international visitation from that whole region presented.

Our activity in the international market probably consists of four main areas. There is the partnership with Singapore Airlines, as the main carrier into that region, and the partnership with Tourism Australia. We do a big effort in educating the travel trade market. We also do a whole range of things in terms of encouraging media and trade to come here. We were not servicing all of those opportunities effectively by trying to do it from Canberra. We had to ensure that we had someone in the market doing that 365 days of the year, to ensure that those relationships were built, and we could

ensure that we were taking advantage of opportunities that were presented, as they came.

The feedback that we got very quickly, when the flights started, was that we needed to be visible and we needed to be communicating and raising awareness of the destination. Canberra opened up on the global stage. Even though it is Australia's capital city, with respect to awareness of Canberra as a place to visit and the experiences here, there was work to do to ensure that we could grow that. That in-market representative has started to make a big difference in terms of elevating an understanding of the diversity of experiences available in this city, and ensuring that any number of people have the confidence to sell the destination.

MR PETTERSSON: Chief Minister, Telstra Tower is an iconic sight in Canberra, but seemingly under-utilised. Has any thought been given to activating this space?

Mr Barr: Thank you for asking, Mr Pettersson. As I alluded to earlier, I had the opportunity to catch up with Telstra's CEO, Andy Penn, and we discussed options for the revitalisation of this iconic Canberra institution. Telstra and the ACT government are open to ideas, innovations, for the use of the facilities at the tower. There are a number of tourist activities that already take place there, but there is considerable scope for innovation and new ideas to come forward, in terms of both the commercial use of some of the spaces within the tower and coordinated activities that are supported by the government, Telstra and other community and private sector partners.

We are very happy to act as a conduit between the people of Canberra, Canberra's entrepreneurs, businesses and community organisations, and Telstra to seek to better activate the space. The overall observation is that it is still a very significantly visited icon within the Canberra tourism scene, but there is an opportunity for some innovation. Unsolicited proposals around how to utilise the facility are welcome. The government is also giving some thought to how we can leverage our particular programs and activities to work in partnership with Telstra and the broader community.

Particularly, I think this is an opportunity for small and medium sized businesses—those who might wish to revitalise the revolving restaurant, and to undertake a range of other interesting activities within the tower. It is not just the viewing platforms that are available for use; there is quite a lot more within the precinct and the buildings. It would be great to see this Canberra icon given a new lease of life. Telstra are very open to that and want to work with us and the broader community to achieve that outcome. So we are open to ideas.

THE CHAIR: Maybe it is the venue for “quilting the moo”.

Mr Barr: It could be “quilting the moo”, yes.

THE CHAIR: That completes the hearing. I remind you that you have five days after the receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript.

The committee adjourned at 12.48 pm.