



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2017-2018](#))

Members:

MS S ORR (Chair)
MISS C BURCH (Deputy Chair)
MR J MILLIGAN

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2018

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Secretary to the committee:
Ms B McGill (Ph: 620 50124)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1, 42
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 10.02 am.

Appearances:

Ramsay, Mr Gordon, Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
Peffer, Mr Dave, Deputy Director-General, Access Canberra
Sargent, Ms Narelle, Deputy Director, Environment Regulation and Protection, Access Canberra

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2017-18. Before we begin, on behalf of the committee I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that we are meeting on. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and its region.

During the first session we will examine the section of the 2017-18 annual report of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate relating to the environment protection authority. On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Ramsay and officials for attending this morning. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Can you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement? I see nodding by everyone. Thank you.

We have no opening statements at this annual report hearing, so we will jump straight into questions. Minister, you launched Operation Scrap. Can you explain what this initiative is?

Ms Sargent: Operation Scrap was a proactive campaign that was enacted because we received several reports of food businesses illegally discharging wastewater and food scraps into the stormwater system. The areas reported included Phillip, Dickson and Braddon. Under the Environment Protection Act, it is an offence to pollute a waterway, and that includes the stormwater system.

In response to those reports, we decided to work together with health protection services. We undertook a joint proactive education and compliance operation on 31 May. We did that in the evening, from about 6 pm till 9 pm. We inspected 25 premises. We looked at businesses in Belconnen, Hawker, O'Connor, Manuka, Kingston, Civic, Braddon and Dickson. The operation focused on the kitchen maintenance and cleaning facilities and areas at the rear of the food business, particularly around the points of entry to the stormwater system.

Officers found evidence of kitchen waste in the stormwater sumps at the rear of three businesses. The businesses were provided with information about the correct way to

manage their wastewater and food scraps, and they were given a verbal warning about not doing it again and complying with the legislation in terms of not polluting waters. Health protection services identified some minor maintenance issues at three businesses, which included cooking oil bins being full and small areas of flooring which required resealing.

The general response from the businesses were that they were surprised to see officers out at that point in time. It was nice to actually show that, yes, we do operate and do audits and inspections at any point in time. The results indicated that the number of restaurants disposing of kitchen waste and wastewater down the stormwater system was generally low. It highlighted that restaurant staff were generally aware of what their obligations were in terms of health protection services and the Environment Protection Act, and of the need to prevent the pollution of waters and dispose of their waste correctly.

Following that up, we went back to the premises where we noticed the noncompliance. We did not find any follow-up evidence of the wrong thing going into the stormwater system. Following the success of this campaign, we have undertaken a second program, called Operation Spring Clean, which we did on 1 November. I am happy to provide information about that one, if you would like.

THE CHAIR: Yes, because I did have a question about whether there will be follow-ups.

Ms Sargent: Operation Spring Clean focused on the fact that we are going into summer and more people have dining outside, overlooking the lakes. We were linking in with the environment protection and sustainability development directions H2OK program—that the drain is only for rain—and with health protection services. We targeted restaurants around the major lakes in Belconnen, Tuggeranong and the city area.

The results are not in yet in terms of what health protection services found; however, under the environment protection authority we issued a few warnings. Again, the level of noncompliance was very low. At the premises that we did inspect, people were really obliging about the fact that we had gone in and were able to give them advice about what they should be doing. Again, it was an engagement and education program, particularly leading up to summer, about the linkage and how it impacts on the waterways and people wanting to use the water across summer.

MS LEE: Were the 25 restaurants that were chosen for the program chosen based on complaint or were they random?

Ms Sargent: No, they were random. For Kingston, we just walked along the Kingston foreshore. The larger sites were linked to being near waterways, for Operation Spring Clean. With the first one, again, it was just going into that precinct. In Dickson it was just all the food operators in Dickson.

MS LEE: You mentioned that when there was a follow-up there were no scraps going into the waterway. Was that the three that were found to be in breach?

Ms Sargent: Sorry, what was the question?

MS LEE: You mentioned, I think, in your original answer, that when you did a follow-up there were no scraps going into—

Ms Sargent: No, that is right. No noncompliance.

MS LEE: And that refers to the three that were in breach?

Ms Sargent: Yes. That is correct.

MS CHEYNE: I know you said you went across a wide range of suburbs, but what were the locations where those businesses were found to be in breach?

Ms Sargent: I would have to take that on notice.

MS CHEYNE: Please do; thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to the Lakes Act, which was changed not so long ago, has the government received any complaints in relation about the changes to the Lakes Act and the restrictions that are applied to powerboats on our waterways here?

Ms Sargent: We have not had any complaints, because the restrictions on powerboats have been around for quite a long time. However, we have noticed an increase in applications for powerboat licences. We do issue powerboat licences, but they have to be issued under special conditions, in compliance with the legislation.

MR MILLIGAN: In the annual report it states that there are now 14 powerboat licences.

Ms Sargent: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Can you give a breakdown as to what those licences are for, the restrictions that apply to those and what waterways they are applied to?

Mr Peffer: I might start and perhaps Ms Sargent can add a greater level of detail. The use of those powerboat licences is quite specific; it is not a broad general recreational use. In terms of what they are currently used for, it is for maintenance activities on the lakes, water sampling, and training support for sports activities, for sailing, canoeing and rowing.

MR MILLIGAN: The Molonglo River was closed during most of 2017-18 due to debris. What remedial work has been done to ensure the cleanliness of that stretch of water so that it can be operated and used for waterskiing?

Ms Sargent: I would have to take that on notice. It has also been closed due to blue-green algae in the past.

MR MILLIGAN: What is the government doing in response to combating the blue-green algae issue there?

Ms Sargent: In terms of the blue-green algae impact, that is one of the things that Operation Scrap and Operation Spring Clean were targeting. You get sediment and erosion run-off going into the waterways; you get other forms of pollution going in there. Blue-green algae are naturally occurring bacteria, so when you have low water levels, high temperatures and a range of climatic conditions, that is when blue-green algae occurs. It is a bit like saying that when the numbers all line up, that is when blue-green algae occurs. It is usually in summer, when the water levels are lower, there is a lack of rain for flushing and there is no movement of the water. In terms of doing things about it, I think we would have to take that on notice.

Mr Peffer: There have been a range of activities that the environment protection authority, along with other agencies, has been engaging in. One of the key focuses at the moment for the EPA is sediment and erosion control run-off from building sites. If you step outside and look around the city, you see tower cranes up everywhere, and of course we are in the midst of a building boom. With around 4,000 to 6,000 building approvals issued each year, there is a lot of activity that can potentially impact the waterways of the territory, contributing to things like blue-green algae.

Poorly managed building sites can cause these issues, so the EPA has had a particular focus in recent months on activities, both engagement and enforcement, on these sites. In previous years I think the focus has been on larger construction sites, but more recently, recognising the volume of greenfield development that has occurred, the EPA and its inspectors have been looking at some of the smaller residential sites. There is a compliance program that is being run at the moment, for example, out at Denman Prospect. It has been framed in a collaborative way with industry, with Master Builders and the HIA, for instance. I might ask Narelle to talk a bit about that.

Ms Sargent: It also focuses on Taylor and Ginninderry, which are being rolled out by the Riverview Group. As Dave said, the focus previously has been on the large building sites; however, you will see that there is a lot of growth in the building blocks, the small residential blocks, and they do have large impacts if they do not have the sediment and erosion control structures in place. We are working with Transport Canberra and City Services because they administer the Litter Act. You have probably seen a lot of information in regard to the waffle packs that are going offsite. WorkCover also has a role on those sites in making sure they are safe sites.

We are all working together. We go out and have joint inspections whereby we look at the sediment and erosion control, WorkSafe look at their areas of concern, and Transport Canberra and City Services look at theirs. We have also engaged with the relevant staff at Denman Prospect and also Ginninderry and the Suburban Land Agency so that we are all working together to have the common goal of making sure we have compliance on those sites, but doing joint inspections so that the builders are educated on the whole range of things they need to comply with and also working with the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association so that we can get in with them.

We are using some other things, what they might consider to be triggers when they do the buildings, to encourage the mum and dad builders to make sure they have a sediment and erosion control plan in place. We are looking at some best examples so

that we can go out and show the Housing Industry Association and Master Builders: “This is an example of a really good site with stabilised access points, waste management and those types of things.”

MR MILLIGAN: Looking at the issue of blue-green algae occurring in waterways, has the government had any discussions with New South Wales maritime on how they manage blue-green algae in their waterways throughout New South Wales, to see if the ACT can adopt any of the practices that they use to combat this issue? The Molonglo River is a flowing river, and you can avoid blue-green algae from occurring there with proper maintenance on the banks, when you look at where sediment is occurring, and do proper dredging and clearing. Has the ACT government spoken with anyone interstate in relation to what best practices they use to combat blue-green algae, in the real, practical sense, actually working on the waterway itself?

Ms Sargent: In terms of working on the waterways, that is not the jurisdiction of the environment protection authority because that is what the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate do under their remit. However, in terms of working across the border, we do have an ACT and New South Wales memorandum of understanding for regional collaboration, so there is that cross-border sharing of information. Regarding the particular matter you have raised, I would have to seek advice on that.

MS LEE: One of the objectives of the act is to achieve effective integration of environmental, economic and social considerations in decision-making processes. What role did the EPA have, if any, or what consultation, discussions or advice were sought from the EPA in relation to the planning minister’s decision to exempt Ginninderry from an EIS process?

Mr Peffer: The EPA is part of the planning process as one of the mandatory referral agencies. It performs a role alongside a number of other regulators and utilities, for example. As DAs are lodged, there is consideration and advice given back to the planning agency from an environmental perspective. That balances a range of concerns that we would have a look at.

Certainly, the EPA has been involved as part of that process. The minister’s decision to exempt is done off the back of advice that comes from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. As a referral entity, it is not our decision on planning matters. We provide input into those planning matters and certainly we work very collaboratively with the team in planning and delivery within EPSDD. There is ongoing dialogue about a range of developments that might occur, but ultimately the decision is not one for the EPA.

MS LEE: Sure. What was EPA’s feedback in that process on the decision to exempt Ginninderry?

Mr Peffer: I might need to take that on notice—

MS LEE: Sure.

Mr Peffer: just in terms of the specifics of the advice that we provided.

MS LEE: That would be great, thank you. I suppose there has been a bit of public—

Mr Peffer: Sorry, Ms Lee; I should add to that. We would not advise necessarily on a decision to pursue a path of exemption from an impact statement. I should clarify as well that often there is a belief that, if there is this exemption given, it is a fast track through no environmental approvals. Really, it is a recognition that there have been extensive studies that cover what is required and a range of environmental considerations that have already occurred. So to have it run through a second time, you are sort of doubling up on activity that has occurred, that has already been undertaken. From our perspective, we would look at it from the perspective of the responsibilities and functions we have under our act and we would simply provide advice to the planning directorate on that basis, not particularly on decisions that their minister may make.

MS LEE: Sure. My question, which you have taken on notice, still stands. What was the ambit of your advice and what were the considerations and factors that the EPA looked at and advised in that process?

Mr Peffer: We can take that on notice.

MS LEE: Thank you. Obviously, there has been in the public arena a bit of concern and discussion about some of the environmental factors that have arisen as a result of the exemption and the Ginninderry development itself. Does the EPA have anything further to add to that discussion in terms of allaying the concerns that have been raised by the public?

Mr Peffer: Ultimately, I think that the responsibility for that one lies with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. We provide input to that development, based on the experience of our officers, as we would with a range of other developments. In terms of the decisions that get taken, ultimately that is not a call for the EPA. We are simply a referral entity that provides input into that. In terms of additional advice that we have, there is none.

MS LEE: Okay. You mentioned that the EPA has been involved, I suppose because it is one of the referral entities. Does the EPA also get involved if there is an instance where publicly there has been considerable interest in certain environmental factors? Does the EPA get proactively involved in that regard?

Mr Peffer: I am not sure if you are referring to a particular development. But there is a process that is followed for many development applications. Some of them might be small; some of them are quite significant estate-sized developments. The EPA's advice will be sought on those developments. We have a liaison officer that works very closely with the planning and delivery team but also across other areas of government and the private sector when providing advice on those developments.

It is not necessarily a role for the EPA to proactively step in and make decisions as planning processes are being followed. That is really a matter that sits outside our control. But certainly I am very confident that the team provides sound advice on the environmental sciences behind our responsibilities for developments on the way

through.

MS LEE: Do you get members of the public or certain environmental groups that contact you direct about certain environmental concerns?

Ms Sargent: No, not generally.

MS LEE: So they do not use you for advocacy or sort of as a complaint or feedback body?

Mr Peffer: No.

MS LEE: Not in that way?

Mr Peffer: There might be a greater level of engagement from, say, the Conservator of Flora and Fauna directly with certain advocacy groups about concerns that might exist in the community about a particular development and the environmental impact that it is has.

MS LEE: But they do not see you in that way, no.

MS CHEYNE: I have some questions—I think this is the third year in a row—about complaints and enforcement actions taken under the act. I note that this year, and I believe every year, noise well and truly tops the list of complaints. I think there have been some good campaigns out there about making sure you have a little chat to your neighbour first, because they probably do not realise what they are doing or the impact they are having. Hopefully, we will see that decrease.

My first question relates to page 350. I like the table about the different enforcement actions that were taken. However, it would be helpful—I do not know whether you have it available to you now—to know what sorts of complaints these enforcement actions related to. For example, was everything in 2017-18 related to noise? I assume that if something gets to a prosecution point, some of the proceeding actions were probably related to the same complaint. Am I misinterpreting that?

Ms Sargent: In regard to the enforcement actions in the last financial year, we issued three infringement notices and two environment protection orders. The three infringement notices were for noise from amplified music above the noise standard. For the two environment orders, one was for excessive noise from an air-conditioning system and the other one was for the importation of soil on to land without an environmental authorisation. So the bulk were noise.

MS CHEYNE: And that prosecution, did it—

Ms Sargent: That was noise from a private residence.

MS CHEYNE: Yes. Is one of those first infringements and one of those final infringements also related to that prosecution as well?

Ms Sargent: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Even though there are eight prosecution actions, it is not eight separate complaints.

Ms Sargent: No; that is correct.

MS CHEYNE: What I would like to know, if you are able to take it on notice, is how many complaints had enforcement actions. My maths is shoddy, but was it five complaints, and had one escalated its actions?

Ms Sargent: That is five. There were three that had the noise—under the infringement notices—and then two environment protection orders.

MS CHEYNE: So it was five.

Ms Sargent: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: And one just escalated.

Ms Sargent: That is right, yes.

MS CHEYNE: That is very helpful. Are you able to tell us where those noise complaints were, particularly the one that resulted in a prosecution?

Ms Sargent: Besides being a private residence—

MS CHEYNE: Are you able to give a broad idea?

Ms Sargent: I would have to take that one on notice.

MS CHEYNE: Was it Belconnen, for example?

THE CHAIR: I doubt it. We are all very neighbourly.

Mr Ramsay: It is all very friendly out in Belconnen.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, that is right.

MS LEE: You know what they say. If you are not the one complaining, they must be complaining about you.

MS CHEYNE: That could well be the case.

Mr Peffer: Ms Cheyne, one of the activities that the team has been doing is looking at some of the richer data that we are now getting through our complaints management team, which you have heard me talk about before.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, and I like the change to the way that stuff is recorded.

Mr Peffer: We are attempting to make it much more simple and easy to follow. But

with the richness in data that is coming through, it is actually giving us a much greater geographic insight into the nature of complaints and where they are coming from. What we have identified is that there are certain suburbs that you might say are party suburbs, where we tend to get a lot of the amplified noise complaints.

There are other areas where, as you might expect, we get some complaints for things like construction activity. Then there are others where it might be for air-conditioning units or heaters—plant in peoples' dwellings. To take that information and then use it, the team has constructed a bit of a campaign. Postcards were produced based on the particular types of complaints we are getting.

If it is a party suburb, it is for the amplified noise complaints. It is actually providing a bit of guidance to people on what they should be aware of if they are intending to have a party or, if someone is having a party nearby, how you might respond and what you might think about doing in terms of engaging, if you are comfortable doing that. We have done localised targeting of engagement activities through letterbox drops to particular suburbs based on the noise complaints that have come through.

What we are able to do now, a year later, is look at a comparison to a baseline. Has that worked? Has that started to change how people are either generating noise or responding to it? If it has worked, we can figure out whether it is something that we can expand into other areas and other suburbs, depending on the nature of the complaints that we have received.

MS CHEYNE: I know the EPA also has a role that is non-enforcement, which is turning up and having a chat. Is it possible to add that into the table, not as an enforcement action but as a—

Ms Sargent: So just inspections and audits?

MS CHEYNE: Yes.

Ms Sargent: Yes, we could do that.

MS CHEYNE: Because the proportion of the number of enforcement actions versus number of complaints is miniscule. That suggests to me either people give up or the EPA does a very good job—I assume it is the latter—in having that educational chat or resolving it that way. So it would be useful to know how many visits the EPA is doing. Otherwise you could look at this table and think the EPA does not do much, but I know there is that level of going out and having a conversation.

Ms Sargent: For example, in the last financial year we undertook 775 inspections of development sites greater than 0.3 hectares. They are the large building sites. We did a lot of inspections in that area. We did 78 reviews of environmental authorisations. We undertake inspections of our environmental authorisation holders as well, so we could include that information so that it all fits together nicely as a package.

MS CHEYNE: Yes; that would be helpful. I have a specific case that relates to complaints about the odour emanating from the roaster at Two Before Ten in Aranda. It has been going on for years and involves both the team from the health protection

service as well as the EPA. I understand that this business has done considerable work in installing things like an afterburner to help disperse some of the smoke and odour. However, one of the public health officers referred a complaint to the EPA earlier this year due to the odour emitted during the investigation being considered potentially an environmental nuisance under the act.

The EPA responded, saying they had inspected the premises and that while they had detected an odour the business was still deemed to be compliant because the smoke was being dispersed within 10 metres of the flue. That met with the EPA's requirements, and because the business was taking all reasonable steps to mitigate the odour they were complying with their general duty. I understand that from a legal perspective, but how do we reconcile the fact that there are still some people in Aranda who are being affected by this odour? I am certainly not hunting down Two Before Ten; I appreciate that they are going to some lengths to try to do something here, but a number of constituents have raised with me the fact that they have to keep their windows shut. How do we reconcile the fact that just because you are doing everything you can does not mean the quality of life of some people is not affected?

Ms Sargent: That is one of the difficult things with odour, and it is the same with noise, in that what you find to be noisy other people may not find noisy. Some people are more sensitive to some types of odour impacts, as opposed to others. As you mentioned, EPA officers inspected the premises and found that the odour is compliant. However, that does not take away from the fact that some residents find the odour offensive. That is one of those fine edge things, because what you find offensive I may not and vice versa. In terms of meeting the general environmental duty and being compliant it is a hard one to manage because of the fact that they are compliant.

MS CHEYNE: What sort of test do you do? Is it like a sniff test?

Ms Sargent: It is a bit like that because it is very subjective.

MS CHEYNE: Is there any other recourse available under the act for people in the situation where it is that fine line and it depends on different people's sensitivities? Or is it simply that they would have to go through something like ACAT or a conflict resolution service—or we amend the law?

Ms Sargent: The odour is also impacted by the prevailing wind direction. So probably on some days it has more of an impact. However, if the constituents are still impacted, get them to call Access Canberra and we can look into it and give advice to ensure that the roaster is still operating within the conditions. We can have a look at the situation.

Mr Pepper: This is a broader challenge we have encountered within Access Canberra as the city has changed quite considerably over the last 10 years, and you have a lot of this commercial-type activity operating in close proximity to residential areas. Kingston Foreshore was an interesting experiment for us in terms of the nature of complaints that came through and people's expectations about moving into a large, mixed use precinct in regard to odour, noise and other things.

Some people have moved there; it has not turned out to be what they thought it would

be and so they have looked to move somewhere else. Other people move in and they love the activity and they love that you wake up in the morning and you can smell the coffee brewing and the bacon and egg roll downstairs. That is what they are looking for in a residence.

As the city grows and we see more and more of these residential-commercial mixed use precincts popping up everywhere, particularly out in the suburbs, this is something people will have to work through and figure out—that is, is that something I want in my life or is that something I would prefer to leave a few hundred metres away?

MS CHEYNE: The difference between Aranda and Kingston Foreshore is that at Kingston you bought knowing what was happening there whereas some residents in Aranda have been there a very long time. Yes, they wanted the shops to be revitalised and rejuvenated. The vast majority of feedback I get is how happy people are that it is not a derelict drug den anymore. But there are residents who abut that area, which is unusual. Cook has also gone through that rejuvenation but it does not have residences abutting it. So I think it is different in Aranda for those residents who did not have as much choice in the matter as, say, the residents have had in Kingston.

Mr Peffer: The challenge is in striking the right balance where you can encourage some of this economic growth and diversity out in the suburbs without placing too heavy a restriction on it. If the extent of the regulation around some of this activity and the restrictions grow then very quickly some of these businesses will not be able to operate in the way they are doing now. It will place quite heavy constraints on the activities they can undertake and whether they have to start doing certain things offsite and bringing things in.

MS CHEYNE: To be super specific, one of my constituents feels overwhelmed; she has made lots and lots of contact and this is genuinely having an impact on her health. If I got approval to contact Access Canberra on her behalf, would it be suitable for me to continue to make those representations and to keep liaising with Access Canberra?

Mr Peffer: Certainly. We are bound by the laws we regulate, so we cannot overstep them and provide a different outcome. But we can look at facilitating some conflict resolution. Often where parties feel they get the opportunity to at least be heard by the other side and can have that conversation, even though it might not resolve the issue, it at least provides some recognition that you have been heard. We can look into something like that.

MS LEE: How many noise complaints were received in respect of light rail, and what was the nature of those complaints?

Ms Sargent: In the past financial year Access Canberra introduced a complaints management team and a customer relationship management system, which is a bit like a database. The complaints management team received 2,716 complaints related to EPA matters, of which 2,177—about 80 per cent—related to noise. Of those, 230 cases were referred to the Environment Protection Authority.

A case may include more than one complaint. It might be that someone has

complained about the same premise on a number of occasions. That is why the number of cases is smaller. Some 124 of those cases were for noise complaints, and that again can be that someone complains about the same premise more than once. Does that answer your question?

MS LEE: No. I was asking specifically about noise complaints about light rail.

Ms Sargent: Sorry; 31 complaints have been received since August 2016. That is the earliest record of complaints received.

MS LEE: Are the exemptions for noise associated with the light rail works broad in that they cover anything at all related to light rail or are there only aspects of it that are exempt?

Ms Sargent: Schedule 2 of the regulation gives exemption to noise emitted in the course of constructing or maintaining a major road, a dedicated bus lane, a railway or light rail. So that exempts all noise in regard to light rail.

Mr Peffer: The Canberra Metro construction team has been very mindful of the potential noise impacts of construction operating 24 hours a day. I know the team has focused considerable effort and attention on how those noise impacts can be limited during the later hours of the evening and morning. They are also very quick to respond when information is provided to them that a noise complaint has been received.

MS LEE: How long will the exemption last for the light rail project?

Mr Peffer: The schedule provides the exemption for the construction of light rail.

MS LEE: So it is based on when the construction completes and not on an actual calendar date per se?

Mr Peffer: Correct.

MS LEE: In your very helpful pie chart on page 348 there are a couple of hues I am struggling to read. The big one, the 1208, is that air pollution odour or is that noise amplified?

Ms Sargent: I actually have a better one because that was a really tricky one to do.

Mr Peffer: We are happy to table for the committee the blown-up colour version.

MS LEE: Thank you. So is the big one air pollution or noise?

Mr Peffer: That is noise.

MS CHEYNE: Of those 31 light rail noise complaints, how many are from the same person?

Ms Sargent: I would have to take that on notice.

Mr Peffer: We could provide the number of complaints and the number of complainants.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, that would be perfect. I would love that; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Earlier this year residents in Moncrieff raised concerns with me about the rubbish from nearby construction sites being blown around their suburb. Can you outline what action you have taken to reduce and prevent this from occurring?

Ms Sargent: That actually links in with the proactive campaign we are doing on compliance on building sites. In terms of the Litter Act, which is administered by Transport Canberra and City Services, we are working with them so that the builders are educated about making sure they have a litter management plan for the building site. Those waffle pads are very light, and the cut-offs in the pads themselves blow away quite easily. We are saying, “You need to make sure that they’re actually tied down when they’re not fully together, that your waste management plan is in place and that they don’t blow offsite into a waterway because that pollutes the water.”

That is captured in the proactive sediment and erosion compliance campaign that I mentioned, working with the Suburban Land Agency, trialling in Taylor, Denman Prospect and Ginninderry, and linking in, in particular, with the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association to educate builders as to why we need to ensure that that litter is maintained on site and does not go offsite, in particular into the waterways.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to water licences and meters, 185 licences have been issued. I am keen to know how many of those licences are for sport and recreation.

Ms Sargent: I would have to take on notice how many are for sport and recreation.

MR MILLIGAN: Do you offer any outreach or educational programs to people with water licences as to best practices and how to best utilise them and get the most out of the green spaces and so forth?

Ms Sargent: In terms of the remit of the environment protection authority, we administer the actual legislation; we rely on our counterparts in the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to do any education. We do work together in managing the legislation, the policy and the education. We work together, for example, on the H2OK campaign, which is looking at water quality across the whole area, as well as at how to manage the water by using the water in the most sustainable way—not wasting water, and that type of thing.

MR MILLIGAN: Could the government explore opportunities to access bore water, particularly for all of our green spaces here in the ACT and/or other sports clubs and associations?

Mr Peffer: The way the EPA functions is that we respond to applications from individuals or parties that are seeking to access groundwater. We assess that based on a range of factors. It is not something that we proactively market. We respond when

we receive those applications, as the regulator. Having said that, and picking up on the comment from Ms Sargent, there is quite an extensive outreach program that the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate run, through the H2OK initiative, with a number of big-ticket investments that the government has made in the health of the waterways and the catchment area.

MR MILLIGAN: Does the department identify bore water anywhere? You mentioned that people come to you with an application to access water. Do you have a map or anything on how much bore water is available in the ACT and where it is located?

Ms Sargent: Yes, we do have a map. We have 184 bore extraction points.

MR MILLIGAN: How many?

Ms Sargent: 184 bores.

MR MILLIGAN: Where can we get that information from? Is it on your website?

Mr Peffer: We could look at providing a map to the committee, if that would be useful.

MR MILLIGAN: If you could, that would be great.

MS LEE: Who typically requires a licence? What are they usually for?

Ms Sargent: Are you referring to water?

MS LEE: Yes.

Ms Sargent: On page 352 there is a map showing the percentage of water. Icon Water has a licence to extract water; golf courses, Canturf, the National Capital Authority, horticulture, and Transport Canberra and City Services for ovals and parks—I just do not know how many. There are small businesses, backyard bores, farms and schools. There are a whole gamut of activities that have licences to extract water.

MS LEE: Where is the water allowed to be taken from? There must be a limit. Is there a map for that as well?

Ms Sargent: Yes. There are a number of catchments identified and there is an amount. A sustainable diversion limit for each catchment is identified so that we do not over-extract the water. We need to make sure that we have enough water to maintain our environmental health and to supply, in particular, drinking water to the community.

MS LEE: Is that information publicly available? Is that on the website somewhere?

Ms Sargent: In terms of the licences?

MS LEE: What the limits are in the catchments and that type of thing.

Ms Sargent: We can give that to you, yes.

MS LEE: That would be great. What costs or charges are involved for people who have the licence?

Ms Sargent: There is a water extraction charge.

MS LEE: How is that measured? Is that just based on how much water is used?

Ms Sargent: It is based on water usage. It is set on an amount per use.

MS LEE: Do we have any instances of water being taken from the ACT to nearby New South Wales rural land?

Ms Sargent: At the moment water trading is allowed to occur but it has not occurred.

MS LEE: I want to go to air quality. In terms of regulation of the sale or supply of firewood, how is that undertaken and what exactly is regulated in that environment?

Ms Sargent: Under the environment protection regulation, firewood merchants no longer require a licence but they are still required to comply with the standard conditions set out in that regulation. The conditions in the regulation are the same as those that were in an environmental authorisation. The real change is that the application of annual fees does not apply. However, there is a requirement to provide information to purchasers and provide a completed annual firewood report to us by 31 January each year. So we look at regulating the sale and supply of firewood.

MS LEE: Have there been any complaints specifically lodged with you about wood smoke from green timber or poor wood heater management?

Ms Sargent: Yes.

MS LEE: Does that form part of the—

Ms Sargent: If you look at the pie chart, that will show you how many complaints there are in regard to wood smoke. Yes, we have had some complaints. However, that is one of the things that we try to actively manage. We have the burn right tonight campaign and the wood fire replacement program. That is operated by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. We work together to make the community aware of burn right tonight: if possible, try not to burn overnight, the correct method for using your wood-burning heater with the flue, having the chimney working properly, and the correct maintenance of your wood-burning heater.

All heaters in the ACT have to be certified under the Australian standards. Higher emissions standards came into effect in August 2016. There will be tighter restrictions that commence in 2019, in terms of the efficiency of the wood burning heaters and what you can and cannot use. It is something we are trying to actively manage, particularly as we have that inversion layer down in the Tuggeranong Valley. You have the smoke staying in the valley and causing impacts.

MS LEE: On another aspect of air quality, with the pie chart showing air pollution odour, or any other category that it falls into, how much of that would be based on the complaints about the tip smell?

Ms Sargent: At Mugga Lane?

MS LEE: Yes.

Ms Sargent: That would have contributed. In terms of complaints about the Mugga Lane precinct, there were 14 in the last reporting period.

MS LEE: In terms of pesticide and herbicide use and complaints about that, are they largely about glyphosate? Is that what it is about? What is the impact of that? Has that been raised as a concern by the community?

Ms Sargent: There have been concerns raised where people drive past and they might see that someone is spraying and they do not have the appropriate protective clothing on, they are spraying in windy conditions or they might notice some over-drift. It is a small area that we have complaints about, but there can be a mix as to what the complaints are about. It is actually about having the signs in place, too, to notify that they are spraying.

MS LEE: Has any research or work been done to consider whether glyphosate is an acceptable herbicide for use in the ACT? Have you got that information?

Ms Sargent: We sit on a national committee that looks into that type of thing. Yes, there is ongoing research into all of the chemical usage and what is happening across Australia.

THE CHAIR: We have finished this section. Minister Ramsay and officials, thank you for your attendance this morning. We are asking that all questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. I would like to remind members that questions on notice, supplementary questions, should be lodged with the committee support office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. Responses to questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five business days after the questions are received. We will now have a short break for morning tea.

Hearing suspended from 10.57 to 11.16 am.

Appearances:

Rattenbury, Mr Shane, Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Ponton, Mr Ben, Director-General

Rutledge, Mr Geoffrey, Deputy Director-General, Sustainability and the Built Environment

McGlynn, Mr Gene, Executive Director, Climate Change and Sustainability

Harding, Mr Daniel, Acting Director, Energy Markets and Renewables

Malouf, Ms Ros, Senior Manager, Sustainability Programs

Sutton, Mr Paul, Acting Manager, Carbon Neutral Government Program

THE CHAIR: During this session we will examine the section of the 2017-18 annual report of the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate that relates to climate change and sustainability. On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Rattenbury and officials for attending. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Can you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I want to ask specifically about the straws suck campaign. Can you please provide an update on how it has been progressing?

Mr Rattenbury: We launched this campaign with an intention to actively work with both community members and business owners to encourage people not to take a single-use straw. As members would know, these have a long life in the environment. They last hundreds of years, often for only minutes of use. That is what we are trying to work for. We took an approach of going not for a ban but rather for a voluntary campaign to start with. As I have mentioned publicly, the thinking was that this would be a way to engage the community not on “the government’s going to ban this” but in a conversation about single-use plastics and the like. Ms Malouf will talk about the number of venues.

Ms Malouf: Thirty-four businesses have signed up to encourage their clients to say no to a plastic single-use straw. In some cases they are looking at alternatives, a cardboard straw or a re-useable metal straw. But 34 have made that commitment so far.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible for you to provide a list of the businesses that have signed up?

Ms Malouf: Absolutely, yes. We have a list.

THE CHAIR: You can take that on notice. In signing up the businesses, how did you

make the approach to the businesses for the program?

Ms Malouf: We have done some direct marketing to businesses. We have also got a radio campaign and we had the initial launch at BentSpoke earlier this year.

THE CHAIR: Can you clarify for me what the direct marketing was? Was that writing to businesses or was it—

Ms Malouf: Yes, it was directly writing businesses to encourage them to participate. We acknowledge that there are a lot of businesses that are participating anyway, having a no-straw campaign. Without being a part of the campaign they are still encouraging people to say no to a single-use plastic straw.

Mr Rattenbury: The contact list came from businesses that are often already engaged with ACTSmart in the various no waste programs we have. So it is engaging people through warm referrals, in a sense.

THE CHAIR: That is my next question. How did you identify the businesses? Was it a select list or was it—

Ms Malouf: We did both. We went to our current client list, as the minister said, which is about 1,000 businesses. And we also direct marketed through Yellow Pages to key high-density areas like Braddon.

Mr Rutledge: The straws suck campaign has been a really good campaign, but I think it captures what is almost a global phenomenon of the scourge of single-use plastics. A number of businesses are just doing small things like moving straws behind the bar. So they might not make the formal pledge, but just the act of making people have to ask for a straw means there is a great reduction.

I think just this week Collins Dictionary named as word of the year “single-use” because single-use has had so much use this year. And Canada, as president of the G7, has used the presidency of the G7 to lead a global awareness raising on the scourge of single-use plastics. The Canadian embassy here is doing a screening of the documentary *A Plastic Ocean*. So I think that, at a time when other jurisdictions were struggling with the single-use shopping bag, we tapped into another single use as another symbol of what is a global trend of trying to reduce the use of single-use plastics.

THE CHAIR: The annual report says that as of 30 June there were 17 businesses participating in the campaign. You have said 34. Is that growth since 30 June?

Ms Malouf: In total there are 34 now.

THE CHAIR: Ms Malouf or Minister Rattenbury said that this was part of a way to have a bigger conversation. Is there anything that you are looking at progressing off the back of this in the future? Are you growing the program in any way?

Mr Rattenbury: It certainly fits with the broader ACTSmart programs around recycling, the work that is done through schools and a range of other community

outreach programs that we have. In terms of a specific next single-use plastics target, no, not at this stage.

MR MILLIGAN: From the 34 businesses that are participating, what feedback have you received? And what feedback, if any, have you received from consumers?

Mr Rattenbury: Certainly the couple of businesses I have spoken to that are involved are very positive about it. They see it as something their customers want anyway. They have seen it as something they should do as good citizens. There has also been an invitation to members of the public to engage their favourite cafe. I think that has led to some quite interesting conversations. And I think some of the patrons of those venues have felt a bit empowered to go and have the conversation. They have some materials they can use and they have a mechanism to engage their favourite drinking hole.

MR MILLIGAN: It is optional, obviously, for businesses to participate in this. If they receive negative feedback or customers are saying that they prefer the plastic straw, they could certainly offer that still?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. We are really mindful that there are some people, perhaps with a disability or for a range of other reasons, who need a straw. That is why it has not been a case of: "Don't offer straws." It has been: "If you think you need to offer straws, look at some of the options." BentSpoke, who launched the campaign with us, bought several hundred stainless steel straws, which are just thrown in the dishwasher along with all the glasses and other things and come out clean. They just keep recycling them. In the early days of their getting them, I spoke to them and they had not had many stolen, so it was working quite well. People were not souveniring them.

MR MILLIGAN: Can you give some sort of indication as to the cost of this initiative that the government has outlaid now in terms of marketing, approach to businesses, directorate staff et cetera?

Ms Malouf: It is built into our ACTSmart business programs. Most of the resourcing is covered through that program. The biggest expense was the marketing collateral: the awareness stickers for patrons to know whether a cafe or a business is participating in the program, and the radio program as well. In total, about \$10,000 has been spent on this campaign.

MR MILLIGAN: The ACTSmart business recycling program is targeted at businesses, but I see that the directorate is participating in this too. Does having the directorate involved skew the results? Do you have a breakdown between the business and the directorate? Are there separate figures?

Ms Malouf: There are just over 1,000 businesses, including federal and ACT government sites, that are signed up to the program, including 167 ACT government-operated facilities. We operate under the exact same requirements for the directorate. Every business, including the directorate, needs to report exactly the same and meet the same standards to get accredited.

MS LEE: I have a couple of questions about the new emissions reductions targets.

You have some interim targets for 25, 30 and 40 before we reach the 45, the new target. How were those interim periods chosen? Were they just random or were they based on a specific calculation?

Mr Rattenbury: We sought advice from the ACT Climate Council, which is created under legislation. We have a range of experts on that group. I asked them to provide the government with advice on what suitable interim targets would be. They took an approach that was based on their understanding of both the carbon budget model and also available technology to make their suggestions to the government. That group includes Professor Will Steffen, Professor Barbara Norman, Professor Penny Sackett and Professor Frank Jotzo. These are all people who are quite expert in their field. There are some other members as well, but they are ones that you may know of.

So that was the basis, and the government adopted their recommendations. We took those recommendations out at the end of last year as part of the consultation process. In all the conversations about future targets, I do not think there was any feedback on the proposed interim targets, either positive or negative. I think people just sort of said, “That seems sensible.” I think the positive perception was about actually having interim targets so that we can measure how we are going as we go along.

MS LEE: I think you have previously said that, after electricity, the biggest concern is probably going to be transport. The other thing that has been coming up is the waste sector. What are some of the initiatives that the government is going to explore in bringing down emissions from transport, particularly with light rail coming on board very soon?

Mr Rattenbury: As I have flagged, transport emissions will be about 60 per cent of our emissions after 2020, give or take. There is some variance in the modelling there, but that gives you a sense of the magnitude. We are currently exploring a range of policy options. We undertook the consultation process on the targets and we asked people specifically about policies for particular sectors. The public gave us a whole lot of suggestions. We are now also working with Transport Canberra and City Services particularly, but right across government there are transport considerations. We have already launched our electric vehicle action plan as one specific initiative, and I expect to announce a full range of policy initiatives as part of the climate strategy when it is launched.

MS LEE: In terms of what the government will do to reduce emissions from private vehicles—not the government fleet; there is obviously work done there—what are some of the initiatives in that regard?

Mr Rattenbury: In broad terms there is obviously no single solution. To do that, we will need to look for both electrification of the fleet and also more fuel-efficient vehicles. Naturally, as people get new vehicles they are more fuel efficient, so there is a certain amount of that that goes on. Then it is improved and increased use of public transport and then alternatives: walking and cycling, active travel options. In broad terms, they are the areas we will need to work on. The specific initiatives and exactly how that will be achieved are not yet finalised.

MS LEE: Given that our energy source is statistically not actually renewable—we

feed into the national grid—when the light rail is up and running, what impact is that going to have, in actual terms, on our emissions target going forward?

Mr Rattenbury: What measure are you asking for, just so that I am clear?

MS LEE: Obviously with our renewable energy target, we measure it in terms of what we put into the national grid as opposed to us going “Hey, you know, we’re in this bubble and we use 100 per cent renewable energy.”

Mr Rattenbury: Sure.

MS LEE: In actual measurements, is there going to be an impact in relation to when the light rail comes on board?

Mr Rattenbury: Let me see if I understand your question. Firstly, light rail will obviously increase electricity demand, because it is fully electric powered.

MS LEE: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: In terms of emissions, I am trying to think whether we have some figures on that. Let me take that on notice, Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Okay.

Mr Rattenbury: In the broad, clearly the intent is for greater uptake of public transport and the substitution of travel types, but I cannot remember if there is specific modelling on that, so let me take that on notice and get back to you.

MS LEE: If there is, that would be great. Thank you. The annual report suggests that electricity generates up to 52 per cent of ACT emissions, but the website says 61 per cent, I think. Is that just an update? Has that increased by nine per cent?

Mr Rattenbury: It might be different periods.

MS LEE: Do we know what it is at the moment?

Mr Rattenbury: I will take that on notice. We will have a figure; I just cannot think off the top of my head.

MS LEE: Okay. In terms of electric buses—

Mr Rattenbury: Back on that previous question, clearly that figure is dropping over time as more renewables come onstream, so it is a moving figure, which is probably why you are seeing different numbers. But I will get you a figure for now.

MS LEE: That would be great. And the timetable for moving toward electric buses?

Mr Rattenbury: As I think you know, there is currently a trial of a hybrid and a fully electric bus being undertaken by Transport Canberra and City Services. They are coming to the end of that trial period. I think they will do an evaluation on it; I do not

know exactly, but that is what I am anticipating. The government is currently considering options for future fleet procurement, in the sense that there are electric buses around, but there is not large-scale production at this point in time. We are right at that cusp moment where the government would like to proceed to purchase more electric buses, but we need to test availability in the market. I am sure Minister Fitzharris will be able to go into some more detail when she appears.

MS LEE: The Finkel review points to a crucial role for natural gas as Australia moves toward more renewable energy. Why in the ACT are we actively discouraging the installation of natural gas in new developments like Ginninderry?

Mr Rattenbury: Let me take Ginninderry first of all. The push in Ginninderry came from the developers of Ginninderry. They made an analysis where they proposed to have an all-electric suburb. They did the economic case. It is available on their website; you can see it. They have formed a view that they can save their residents money over time by offering them an all-electric set-up. Basically the way that works is—don't quote me on the numbers, but they are on their website—that it is about \$5,000 up-front in additional cost and a saving of \$1,500 a year. So the payback is five years and then residents are better off through essentially devices being efficient and having come down in cost.

They approached government asking for an exemption. At the moment under ACT law it is mandatory to provide gas—we are the only jurisdiction that does that in the country—so they had to specifically seek an exemption. That is where the Ginninderry decision came from.

MS LEE: There is no concern for you as the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability in what Finkel has raised as gas playing that vital role?

Mr Rattenbury: If we reflect on that Finkel report, there were 50 recommendations. The federal government cherry-picked the ones it wanted to accept.

MS LEE: As any government does.

Mr Rattenbury: They ignored probably the biggest single recommendation in the Finkel review. I think that, going forward, gas will account for 21 per cent of the ACT's emissions after 2020. We need to deal with gas. The active debate is on how one does that. At this stage we have not taken a completely anti-gas position; gas will play a role for some time. But one of the cost-effective ways to reduce our emissions is to transition away, and certainly with the increasing efficiency of electrical devices, that becomes more cost effective and more attractive. For a household, simply cutting one of your connection fees—this comes through in the Ginninderry figures—not having to pay a gas connection fee every year, is a substantial difference. And also, with the price of gas in recent years, traditionally in Canberra gas has been promoted as a cost-effective alternative, and that is no longer a given. They are all the factors that we are weighing up.

MS LEE: There has been some suggestion that hydrogen, compared to batteries, releases more energy per unit of mass and therefore could be useful in, for example, electric cars going further without refuelling. Is that something that the

ACT government is looking at? If so, where is it up to?

Mr Rattenbury: We are very open to the question of hydrogen. In terms of, for example, our zero-emission vehicle strategy, it is very deliberately named a zero-emission vehicle strategy, not an electric vehicle strategy, because we want to keep hydrogen in the equation. It is contested amongst policy experts which way the car market is going to go. Probably the mainstream position at the moment is that both hydrogen and electric vehicles will play a role in the future and they will have different applications.

Similarly, there is talk of putting hydrogen into the gas network. That is a possibility. Most people think that you can put about 10 per cent to 15 per cent of hydrogen into the network, but then you have to go and change all the devices at the other end because hydrogen burns differently. We are at a stage where we are certainly not closing the door on hydrogen. We are talking with Evoenergy and ActewAGL about their ideas. Certainly Professor Finkel has started to talk about hydrogen as a big deal, but I think his discussion is much more as an export opportunity rather than for domestic application at this point in time.

MS LEE: Finally, in terms of emissions in the waste sector—

Mr Rattenbury: Sorry, I forgot that.

MS LEE: Do you actually measure the emission levels from landfill sitting idle at Mugga Lane and emissions emitted from burning methane at Mugga Lane in any capacity?

Mr Rattenbury: I am certain we would, through the greenhouse gas inventory.

Mr Rutledge: Yes, we do, Ms Lee, and we publish a greenhouse gas inventory every year.

MS LEE: And that is broken down into those?

Mr Rutledge: Yes, across those. We have seen a slight reduction in waste emissions over recent times. We think that is due to a reduction in waste to landfill but also an increase in landfill gas capture, as you talk about. Waste emissions are now sitting at probably less than two per cent of our profile. If we look at where we have to go next, as you outlined, transport is the big one. There is gas, which we have just talked about, and hydrogen may or may not have a decarbonising effect in that. And waste would be the next one after that.

MS LEE: There has been a lot of discussion about waste to energy proposals. Has there been any work done and are there any figures available on what the impact might be if the territory were to explore that option: what impact that option would have on our emissions?

Mr Rattenbury: I am not aware of any detailed analysis in the sense that the policy work that is being done at the moment is more high level, on the principle of it. I think, though, you could make an assumption that if you were to set up, for example, an

incineration process, it would produce emissions; and with 100 per cent renewable electricity, if you were to start using an incinerator to generate electricity, it would result in an increase in emissions for electricity production in the ACT. That is my understanding.

MS LEE: I understand that it has not been decided policy wise yet, so there is a lot of work to do.

Mr Rattenbury: Broadly that is my understanding of the implications of that approach.

MS LEE: Yes, of course. So that needs to be taken into consideration.

MS CHEYNE: Sorry, Ms Malouf, I have recycling and accreditation questions. I will try to get through them all, depending on the chair's indulgence. Then we can all be let off the hook. I should have asked this question before as a supplementary but I was too slow. It relates to the very good work taking place in terms of the number of sites across the territory participating in the business recycling program. I note that at the top of page 17 you mention that there are many businesses still working towards accreditation. They have not quite got there but they are working towards it and also doing fantastic stuff while they are on their way. Do we have any numbers relating to how many businesses are actively working towards accreditation?

Ms Malouf: We have 1,000 sites signed to the program in 2017-18 and 560 of those are accredited. Those remaining 450 are working towards accreditation.

MS CHEYNE: Do you track or have any kind of idea about when you expect more to get accredited? Are some pretty close and you really expect them to become accredited in this financial year?

Ms Malouf: Absolutely, I would expect several hundred of those would be accredited in this financial year. It depends on the size of the business. If it is quite a small business or if they are a significant way along their journey through their own initiatives, they will get to accreditation quicker. If they are a bigger organisation or a little more complex an organisation, they may take six to 12 months to put everything in play to meet the accreditation standard.

MS CHEYNE: While we are on accreditation, is it the case that 100 per cent of schools have joined Actsmart?

Ms Malouf: Correct, 100 per cent.

MS CHEYNE: And that five-star accreditation has now been received by 17 schools?

Ms Malouf: As of yesterday it was 19 schools—

MS CHEYNE: Excellent, even better.

Ms Malouf: that have reached five-star accreditation. That is accreditation in water, waste, energy, biodiversity, school grounds and curriculum.

MS CHEYNE: Great. Are any of those schools in Belconnen?

Ms Malouf: I have a list of the schools that I can supply. They are all primary schools at the moment.

MS CHEYNE: It is only 19; so that is quick.

Ms Malouf: Do you want me to read them all?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, could you?

THE CHAIR: My indulgence is getting a little—you can read them if you want. You can read that one list of 19 and after that that is your—

MS CHEYNE: I have no more lists for you to read.

Ms Malouf: So this one?

MS CHEYNE: Yes.

Ms Malouf: They are all primary schools; Ainslie, Aranda, Arawang, Chapman, Curtin, Duffy, Evatt, Farrer, Garran, Gilmore, Hawker, Isabella Plains early childhood, Kaleen, Maribyrnong, Mawson, Mount Rogers, O'Connor cooperative, Palmerston and St Judes.

MS CHEYNE: Excellent. Thanks for reading that quickly. You mentioned that when schools are five-star accredited they receive rewards for their achievements. What are these rewards?

Ms Malouf: The rewards are resources for the school. They can be home readers at the moment, because they are mostly primary schools; book packs; recycling games; resources for their library that the whole school can use. They also get a five-star accreditation trophy that is made out of recycled reclaimed timber.

MS CHEYNE: Excellent. Did that timber come from Northbourne?

Ms Malouf: No, it did not, actually. It came from a dockyard in Sydney.

MS CHEYNE: What a shame! I understand that timber on Northbourne is being recycled. While we are on schools, I foreshadow fetes. I have been to a lot of fetes. It is fete season at the moment. I see some schools really participating, lots of recycling opportunities and some schools—not just schools but also organisations—not doing that. I note that any community-based event is eligible. Do they have to approach you to have the variety of bins available on site? Do you approach them, for example, and have a calendar of fetes for the year? Do you ring them up and suggest, “Hey, you should have a bin for recycling?”

Ms Malouf: Schools are a little easier because mostly they have their recycling on the premises. It just does not connect sometimes. It is already at the school. We just need

to pull it out and have it empty and ready to go for fete day. That is what our team go out and do. There is a combination of direct marketing for any event. We approach some of the events that we know are coming up and we also include it in part of the school's accreditation in their waste component. They get accreditation points for having any of their events, festivals or fetes being part of the process. We have seen a significant increase in events—more than a 50 per cent increase—to 201 events in 2017-19 for the public event program.

MS CHEYNE: Is that 2017—

Ms Malouf: In 2017-18, 201 events were held through the public event program.

MS CHEYNE: I should probably look in the budget papers, but do you have aims like an accountability indicator or an outcome indicator—whatever it is called?

Ms Malouf: We are hoping to at least break that this year.

MS CHEYNE: Good. This is drawing a long bow but it is my last question. Do you have any relationship with McDonald's in terms of trying to talk to them about how their waste could be reduced? In the context of the straws suck campaign, McDonald's is not on board. We know that for sure, or at least they do not seem to be in Belconnen. And in terms of waste—

Mr Rattenbury: Is this a personal observation?

MS CHEYNE: Yes, I was walking around Lake Ginninderra this morning and thinking about who would be appearing today. McDonald's waste is by and large the waste that is very visible. I was wondering whether there is any work underway to get them to clean up their act or to encourage their customers to be more environmentally conscious.

Ms Malouf: Interestingly enough, we do have a relationship through our business program with McDonald's, all in the Belconnen area—

MS CHEYNE: Great.

Ms Malouf: or Gungahlin. Belconnen lake and Charnwood are signed up to the program. We have done some specific signage for those stores for their mixed recycling. A lot of their packaging falls into that mixed recycling component. The minister actually has written to the McDonald's franchises and encouraged them to be part of straws suck, but we have not heard back from them as yet.

MS CHEYNE: Are you saying that there are specific bins on site to encourage them to recycle?

Ms Malouf: For the waste to landfill and for the mixed recycling, which is predominantly the biggest amount of those two waste streams.

MS CHEYNE: Has there been any work with TCCS about potentially getting similar bins installed around Lake Ginninderra, given the proximity of the Belconnen

lakeside McDonald's—not lakeside, but almost—and given that Lake Ginninderra specifically has no recycling bins around it.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, that is currently being—

MS CHEYNE: Or any other bins.

Mr Rattenbury: It is currently being considered by the government. Mr Steel is the responsible minister for that one.

MS CHEYNE: I will ask him more questions tomorrow. That is it for me.

THE CHAIR: You might want to ask him on Thursday.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, Thursday; whatever day.

MR COE: Minister, now that it looks like the national energy guarantee is not going ahead, how does that change the government's strategy with regard to the large-scale generation certificates?

Mr Rattenbury: It has not at this point in time. Several things are happening. As we discussed, I think at estimates, they went into the budget this year as the accounting treatment that treasury advised us we needed to put in there. The government's policy has not changed. We are, however, still uncertain as to how the federal government is going to treat additionality. Our policy is to surrender them, but it is unclear how the federal government will treat that.

MR COE: Did you say how they will treat additionality?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR COE: In what sense?

Mr Rattenbury: If we surrender them, there are two possible pathways.

MR COE: Do you mean additional certificates, excess certificates?

Mr Rattenbury: No, we want to see those credits counted as part of the national accounting framework, but the federal government could choose not to do that and so they would just become—

MR COE: A write down?

Mr Rutledge: The ACT government's policy is that we would like to see a national effort equivalent to a 26 per cent target for emissions reduction across Australia. If that target were set and our renewable energy were in addition to that, it might take us from 26 to 29 per cent reduction. Over time, regardless of the national effort, would our ACT effort be viewed to be above that or would it be considered as part of it? So the additionality is that the renewable energy purchased on behalf of the community would be recognised by reducing Australia's emissions by greater than the level of

ambition the national government delivers.

MR COE: That is all very well for the commonwealth, but what is the impact on the ACT of all that?

Mr Rattenbury: The impact is we are waiting to see what the commonwealth does.

Mr Rutledge: Under current settings, because additionality is not being recognised by the commonwealth government, if we make more effort that would allow other states and territories to not reduce their emissions by as much because the ACT community has done the work.

MR COE: So you are saying that anything the ACT produces above 26 per cent should not be used as an offset against jurisdictions that produce less?

Mr Rutledge: Correct.

Mr Rattenbury: That is our preferred position.

MR COE: But how does that affect the strategy of surrendering them or not?

Mr Rutledge: If they were to be traded on the market then somebody else could make no effort to reduce their emissions and purchase those certificates and meet the 26 per cent. By surrendering them voluntarily, they are taken out of the market and therefore the cap is dropped.

MR COE: So there are two related issues: one is not selling them, but the other is not surrendering them such that they offset. Both have the same underlying concern about contributing to an underperforming state, but one option is surrendering and the other is selling, is that correct?

Mr Rutledge: Or the timing of surrender. That also plays a factor in that.

THE CHAIR: So it is the federal uncertainty that is creating the uncertainty around what we are going to do. Have I understood that correctly?

Mr Rattenbury: We have not changed our position; our position is to surrender them. But, as Mr Rutledge pointed out, there is a timing issue. Given the policy uncertainty we are just sitting still at the moment and waiting to see how that plays out.

MR COE: Are there any circumstances where the government would consider selling them?

Mr Rattenbury: No, that is not our policy position.

MR COE: Will the commonwealth government's proposed retail price cap, or possible price cap, have any impact on the LGCs?

Mr Rattenbury: No.

MR COE: No?

Mr Rattenbury: Not to my understanding. I think they are quite unrelated topics.

MR COE: Especially if the government is not in the market of selling them.

Mr Rattenbury: Even there I think they are quite separate policy levers.

MR COE: Yes, but I would imagine that a price cap could affect the value of a generation certificate given that the potential yield of electricity could be affected.

Mr Rattenbury: Maybe, but it has not been a big discussion at this point.

Mr Rutledge: It must be said, Mr Coe, that at the national level the implementation of the price cap is still not clear. The minister is correct that the renewable energy certificates are quite separate, but how the lever of the price cap would work remains unclear. But on any scenario we cannot see that affecting the treatment or the LGCs, the renewable energy certificates.

MR COE: My guess is that it could affect the accounting treatment if the price is affected by it, but it is indirect.

Mr Rattenbury: Potentially, yes.

THE CHAIR: On a different topic, the CSIRO land and water study of the effects of high urban heat and cold on the most vulnerable people was publically released in February. How has the ACT government responded to the findings of the study?

Mr Rattenbury: We are using that study for several purposes. I think it has provoked a very interesting public conversation. I think people found that a very interesting report overall. But we are using it as part of our adaptation work and as part of developing our living infrastructure strategy which is being developed as part of the overall climate strategy. It will inform that, as well as inform general public debate.

THE CHAIR: The living infrastructure policy or strategy, I believe it is, is already done. When are you looking to finalise that work?

Mr Rattenbury: Early in 2019.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate that you are still working through this but are there any insights that you are able to share with the committee today into areas that you might be focusing on?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, certainly. I think that the report identifies some really fascinating things. It highlights the obvious, in that areas with high amounts of concrete and low amounts of green infrastructure are hotter during the summer and they cool down much slower at night.

There is an interesting contrast. It was something like either an oval or an open grassland—that is the word I am after—gets extremely hot during the day because

there are no trees but it cools down much quicker at night because it release its heat, whereas concrete areas do not.

The report also highlights the very significant temperature difference between the older suburbs where there is a much more established tree canopy and the newer suburbs. It suggests differences of 11, 12, 13 degrees on a hot summer's day, which is an extraordinary difference. It points to the need to increase the green infrastructure, particularly in those areas.

Inevitably that will happen over time as the trees re-establish but I think it also points to the need to make some deliberate policy efforts. I think it is also worth recognising that it is not just about trees; it is a range of green infrastructure, whether that is green roofs, water bodies and a range of other possible measures.

THE CHAIR: You have mentioned that there was an 11 to 12-degree difference between some of the cooler and the hotter parts of Canberra. Just for the record, can you provide any information on what that actually means in real terms, what the impacts are and so forth, apart from it being a lot warmer when you are standing in those spots?

Mr Rattenbury: Without being overly dramatic about it, there is no doubt that higher temperatures, particularly over a sustained period, can have a significant health impact. It is particularly prevalent for older people, people with poor health and children. You have obviously seen the examples in heat waves of increased mortality of people in those groups in particular. To go to one end of the spectrum, it can have a significant health outcome if it is not addressed.

I think on a more day-to-day level it is things like simply comfort, use of air conditioning, which then impacts on how much electricity we need to generate. There is a whole range of impacts there as well but a lot of it just goes to comfort or lifestyle.

THE CHAIR: In your previous answer you used the words “more deliberate policy efforts in certain areas”. What sorts of things are you looking at? What are “more deliberate policy efforts”?

Mr Rattenbury: It is about thinking: how can we, for example, encourage the uptake of green roofs. We need to ensure, right back at the beginning—the planning policy allows for deep rooted and significant trees—adequate space on both the nature strip and also potentially in yard areas. They are the sorts of measures we will need to think through—whether the current policy settings are allowing for that or, if not, do we need to make adjustments?

MR MILLIGAN: I am looking at the program that you have got for solar for low income households and I notice that there were 221 households that took that program up during 2017-18. What are the eligibility criteria for low income households to participate in this program?

Ms Malouf: Participation in this program is for owner-occupied houses with people who have a pensioner concession card, the Australian government pensioner concession card.

MR MILLIGAN: How is this program advertised to the community? How do they find out about this?

Ms Malouf: We have not done a lot of advertising of this program. The first year of the program sold out in three weeks from the launch of the program and we have just been using word of mouth so far. We have not had the need to advertise.

MR MILLIGAN: I notice it states that participants can access a three-year interest free loan to pay off the remaining amount. Is that part of the no interest loan scheme?

Ms Malouf: The no interest loan scheme is a different program. It is more for appliance replacement: fridges, washing machines, those types of appliances. The loan is purely for the solar.

MR MILLIGAN: Who underwrites those loans?

Ms Malouf: We did a full government procurement service, and ACTEW were the contractor that won that service. The loans are procured through them and the payback is through the savings made from the householder.

MR MILLIGAN: Is there an annual amount that is budgeted on how much they can lend out each year potentially?

Ms Malouf: The loans are up to \$3,000 and usually that payback is within 18 months to two years.

MR MILLIGAN: And how many applicants? Can the 221 households that participated last year actually do that pay-off system as well?

Ms Malouf: Correct.

MR MILLIGAN: Has anyone defaulted on their loans? Have they had any situations—

Ms Malouf: Not at this stage.

MS LEE: I want to ask some questions about the feed-in tariff. What was the total cost of the scheme in 2017-18 and what is the projected cost for 2018-19? Have you got those figures?

Mr Rattenbury: I do not know if we have them to hand.

MS LEE: You would be surprised; officials are pretty good with figures.

Mr Rattenbury: They are. That is why I said I do not know. We will find out shortly.

MS LEE: I have been surprised. I have gone, “You might take this on notice,” and they have gone, “Whoop,” and whipped it out.

Mr Harding: The cost of our feed-in tariff schemes incorporates both the large-scale feed-in tariff and the small-scale feed-in tariff. Those costs are bundled together with the costs of the energy efficiency improvements scheme. The total cost for those three climate change policies for a typical household is about \$164 in 2018-19.

MR COE: Sorry, what is that amount?

Mr Harding: \$164. That incorporates the three schemes.

MS LEE: That was, sorry, in 2017-18?

Mr Harding: In 2018-19.

MS LEE: What was it in 2017-18?

Mr Harding: I do not have that figure in front of me but I am happy to take that one on notice for you.

MS LEE: Has the modelling of this changed at all or is that still using the same modelling?

Mr Harding: We are still using the same modelling. When the policy was first modelled back in 2012-13 the forecast would be that the cost of the large-scale component of the feed-in tariff would peak at \$4.90 per household per week in 2020. We are still confident that we are on track and that, if anything, the price will come in below what was modelled. That is partially given the effect of the contractor difference mechanism which the government has used as part of its feed-in tariff contracts.

If you are familiar with the mechanism, what the territory has agreed to pay the large-scale generators is the difference between whatever the prevailing wholesale market price is at the time and the agreed feed-in tariff price. If we have agreed an \$80 return to the project and the wholesale price at the time is \$60 then the territory will pay \$20 in return and, vice versa, if the price is \$100 then \$20 is returned to the pool. At the end of the year the overs and unders are calculated and the total cost of the scheme to support the large-scale projects is passed through to consumers' bills via the network cost.

Evoenergy is the network that manages the interactions with the different wind and solar farms. Given that we have had in recent years fairly high wholesale prices across the national electricity market, the forecast cost of the scheme has been a bit lower than was modelled. But obviously we pay pretty close attention to it and it is something that we are monitoring actively as we are progressing close to the 100 per cent renewables target in 2020.

MS LEE: No doubt we will get another update at estimates.

Mr Harding: Indeed. Look forward to it.

MR COE: I have got a supplementary. You mentioned that \$164 across the three

schemes. Are you able to break that \$164 down according—

Mr Harding: I do not have those figures in front of me, I am sorry, but I am happy to—we can break those numbers down for you—provide that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Yes, take that on notice.

MS LEE: In July the ACCC released a report talking about recommending perhaps the removal of the FIT on rooftop solar. Where does the ACT government sit on that recommendation?

Mr Rattenbury: That is not a recommendation we support from the ACCC.

MS LEE: So a decision has been made at the policy level by the government to not support that?

Mr Rattenbury: It is not a change we are entertaining at the moment, no. It is probably too early to say. We have already entered into long-term commitments with people. We do not intend to unpick those. And there is no active feed-in tariff being offered at the moment, so there is nothing to remove in that sense. We do not intend to unpick the previously made agreements.

MS LEE: What impact does the small and medium scale FIT program have on household power bills?

Mr Rattenbury: That would be part of the figures that you were just asking Mr Harding about. So when we provide you with the breakdown he just took on notice, it will be in that answer.

MS LEE: Okay, thank you.

MR COE: Is that \$164 figure per household, or per person?

Mr Harding: That is across a household, which is, in Canberra, the representative household. So it is representative electricity—

MR COE: So it is \$160-odd?

Mr Harding: Yes. If you use more electricity then that cost will be higher; if you use less then that cost will be less. We use a representative household to try to get a figure that we can use for indicative cost purposes.

MR COE: With regard to the CNG fund, how many projects will be lent money under that scheme in 2018-19?

Mr Rutledge: I will just give a bit more background on the CNG fund. The 2017-18 year has been a quieter year for the CNG fund. We expect to have a number of new projects come on board in 2018-19. The CNG fund is, in effect, a loan to other directorates to take energy-saving or cost-saving measures. Although the focus is on emission reduction, normally when the directorates come and talk to us their focus is

on electricity price reduction, largely, or gas bill reduction. Then they pay us back into a rolling fund from the savings they make.

In the early part of the CNG fund we did a lot of work on electricity reduction, light globe replacement and fairly simple approaches like that, which did see large emission reductions and large electricity price reductions for the various directorates. As with the climate change challenge across the rest of the community, once you take out the easy wins in LEDs, you run into harder projects that require a little more work and a little more thinking. So we have worked with our team and done a bit more due diligence earlier, using the expertise that we have seen, to build a better business case before people come and apply for a loan. Over the past 12 months we have done a lot more building of expertise, both within our own directorate and elsewhere.

We have also seen different new challenges. One that I will just mention briefly is at the Arboretum. There was a depot at the Arboretum that was entirely run by diesel generation and was a fairly high-cost, high-emission outlet. To run an electrical cable from the visitors centre down to the Arboretum was looking like a capital spend of \$100,000, just to run the cable down. Working with us through the CNG fund to add solar panels on the roof and batteries alongside has seen them move to an electrically-driven site office and depot. They have even embraced a number of electrically-driven tools rather than petrol-driven tools. The minister came out to the opening of that. It is interesting what people see. We were looking at the payback period, emission reduction and bill reduction. But the workers on site were just seeing the sound reduction: going to work without a whirring diesel generator in the background. They said, coming to work at the depot, "The depot's never been so quiet."

Now that we have done one depot and have proven to people who are used to diesel generation that you can do it once and the payback period is a three-year period, we can go, "Okay, where can we do it next?" I will ask Mr Sutton to give a couple more examples and give the number for how many we expect in 2018-19.

Mr Sutton: At the moment, we have an energy project officer team within our larger team. Their job is to go out and work with directorates to identify these projects and build them into business cases to get funding. They develop the pipeline for these projects, which have to demonstrate viability and appropriate payback periods. We are gaining three more of these energy project officers in the coming weeks. That will expand that team so we can have greater focus with the directorates. The pipeline at the moment has four to eight projects for the coming year, but we hope that that will expand in the coming months.

Mr Rutledge: I think so. Further to Mr Sutton's comment, the oversight and governance is quite strong. I and Stephen Miners, the Deputy Under Treasurer, keep a close eye on this because we want the projects to run for emission reduction. We have had success because we do this due diligence at the beginning and, with the oversight of the Deputy Under Treasurer and me, there are not going to be any flippant loans or flippant expenditure once it gets through the two of us.

Mr Rattenbury: That sounded like a threat, Mr Rutledge.

Mr Rutledge: Just in case any of the other directorates are thinking I am going to redo all their depots for them.

Mr Sutton: I think it is worth mentioning that the largest loan fund year has been four or five applications. That is the largest year we have had to date. We will be trying to exceed that.

MR COE: Is this program mentioned in the annual report somewhere?

Mr Rattenbury: The CNG loan fund?

MR COE: Yes.

Mr Rutledge: I do not think it is in the annual report. But we will provide the committee with a program update. I will take that on notice.

MR COE: You mentioned that 2017-18 was a slower year for the fund. Were there any projects in 2017-18, or was the one that you mentioned in 2016-17?

Mr Rutledge: That was finalised in 2017-18 but actually it started the previous year. But why do we not just give the committee an update for the previous three years?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Sutton: There is one section in the annual report. We have four projects that went out last financial year, worth \$1.8 million. That was for a range of energy efficiency and renewables projects. That is on page 76.

MR COE: Thank you. I imagine the usual procurement rules apply when the rubber hits the road with the actual project.

Mr Rutledge: Correct.

MR COE: This is really just an internal arrangement?

Mr Rutledge: Yes, it is an internal funding arrangement, for example, the money is provided to TCSS and then they still procure the depot work as required.

MR COE: And from an accounting point of view the appropriation is to—

Mr Rutledge: The appropriation is to us. We maintain the fund and the debt.

MR COE: So it remains an asset on your books?

Mr Rutledge: Correct.

MR COE: But it is a liability on theirs?

Mr Rutledge: The loan goes out and then they repay it to us.

MR COE: Is there any internal cost that you pass on to the other agency?

Mr Rutledge: No, there is not an internal cost in that sense. We have funding appropriated by government for the fund, and funding appropriated by government for a small support staff for that fund. That is not then passed on to other directorates. They access their cash for their project. But there is a cost to government as a whole.

MR COE: Is there a permanent team that works on this, or is it a project that comes together on demand?

Mr Rutledge: Our budget allocation to the carbon neutral government fund was renewed in the last budget, and a further 12 months of funding for staff has been put on board. They are contractual or permanent staff, depending on arrangements.

MR COE: What other day-to-day work would they be doing?

Mr Rutledge: There are two major things. One is working on the loan fund and the projects. The energy project officers, as Mr Sutton said, are working with directorates. The other one is through an enterprise-wide sustainability platform, working with directorates to work out how they report on their emissions—on their electricity use, waste use et cetera—and then reporting across government and to the Head of Service to ensure that there is accountability for directorates making emissions reductions at a quarterly level rather than just in the annual report. At the back of the annual report there are directorate-wide emissions and sustainability indicators. We provide quarterly updates to the director-general and the Head of Service on those.

MR COE: Based on that answer, it would seem that the actual work of the fund is relatively small compared to that other reporting.

Mr Rutledge: The reporting is well streamlined. And getting the sustainability platform up and operational and working has, over time, made the approach more streamlined and less administratively burdensome. The expertise that we bring to examining the projects and ensuring their viability is where we probably do our heavy lifting. In rough numbers, we probably have three energy project officers and two people doing the reporting and policy leadership. Those are rough figures.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask about the ANU Fenner school review into current tree species for Canberra.

Mr Rattenbury: I think that one sits over with TCCS.

THE CHAIR: It is in the sustainability section of the report.

Mr Rattenbury: It is not one that I am familiar with.

THE CHAIR: We can ask TCCS.

Mr Rattenbury: I am pretty sure you will find that city services—

Mr Rutledge: It was a report that we commissioned as part of our thinking for the

“Living Infrastructure” discussion paper. The report is looking at what tree species and habitation will be like in a climate-changed environment. That has provided us with some background work. You will see in our “Living Infrastructure” discussion paper and in what will be a future living infrastructure strategy and action plan that, in a drier, more extreme climate, we will need to plant different trees. We have shared that information across government, so that we know what trees to plant when we start replanting. That expertise comes from the Fenner school but there is a lot of expertise both within our own directorate and particularly within TCCS and at the arboretum.

THE CHAIR: In that study is there much consideration given to, say, natives versus deciduous?

Mr Rutledge: There is discussion and, if you will, it is species neutral, in that it is not anti-exotic or pro-native, as many foresters in the city are. It just talks about what species would hold up under a changing and more extreme climate.

THE CHAIR: What climate scenario was the report working towards?

Mr Rutledge: I will look at the report and get back to you on that. I do not have it in mind.

Mr McGlynn: Some work was done previously in looking at very detailed scientific data about what the likely impact of climate change will be in this region, down to reasonably small areas. That was part of the input to that study. As Mr Rutledge was saying, there is a lot of analysis of that in terms of how that will affect what trees can grow and how they can deal with a changing climate. It is also about the issue of which trees are best suited to deal with things like increased risk of bushfire. Some trees are particularly prone to fire and there are others which are quite robust against fire and therefore provide firebreaks. It is about trying to look at both sides of the equation, in terms of what can grow, as well as what can protect us against the likely impacts.

THE CHAIR: I will look forward to the answer on those.

Mr Rutledge: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Looking at the ACT Climate Change Council, I notice that you have quite a few members and that they all seem to be professors, academics and so forth. Is there any reason why the business sector was not approached to possibly join that council?

Mr Rattenbury: We do have a business representative on that. Toby Roxburgh is one member. Another member is Karen Jesson, who works for one of the leading community organisations in the city. I have a mental blank.

Mr Rutledge: Communities@Work.

Mr Rattenbury: Communities@ Work; thank you. There are requirements under the legislation as to the expertise that members should have. Many of those members are

the original members of the council and they are coming up to the expiry of their term; they will have served a maximum of two terms. I expect quite shortly to be advertising for new members to apply. We will be looking to getting a broadly representative input of different perspectives in the community.

Mr Ponton: As the minister said, their terms are up fairly soon. Importantly, the observation I want to make is that, with the representatives that we have, in terms of skill set, it was important to have that particular skill set at that point in time. As we were undertaking a range of policy work, having the scientific expertise was particularly useful. The expectation is that, as we move into the next phase, there will be a need for other skill sets.

MR MILLIGAN: Is that being reviewed at the moment, the other skill sets that you might want to include?

Mr Rattenbury: It is set out in the legislation. Mr Ponton is right; when we are moving into the next phase, it will be perhaps less about the science and a bit more about community engagement and how we implement some of the policies. So it may put a different emphasis on it. We still want to have a strong scientific basis. As Ms Lee asked me about earlier, having that group of people is excellent in terms of helping us to set the forward targets, but we will be moving on to a different focus with the next round of appointments.

MR MILLIGAN: Is there a particular focus, having regard to these new requirements or skill sets going forward, on attracting youth or the Indigenous community, as part of—

Mr Rattenbury: As with all government appointments to organisations, those are certainly considerations: looking for cultural and linguistic diversity, Indigenous representation and gender balance. All of those factors are weighed up in all appointments.

Mr Rutledge: In this space it is quite interesting, having regard to the eminent people that we have on that council. They have strongly engaged with local businesses. Talking to Robyn Hendry at the Business Chamber, her plea to us as climate change policy people, is to make it really practical for business. Canberra businesses know that climate change is happening and support actions to prevent climate change or reduce the effects of climate change. They just want to know what to do.

In June this year, at the suggestion of the Canberra Business Chamber, Toby Roxburgh did a workshop with small business people, hosted by the Canberra Business Chamber. There was a full room. Even at the end of that—and Toby is a very smart businessperson—the feedback that we got was, “Just tell us what to do. Just make it as practical as you can. We are busy people.”

It is about getting the right business leaders. In the other space, in the renewable energy space, we have some of the most entrepreneurial people in this city doing amazing things down at the renewable energies innovation hub. They are pursuing that as a renewable energies thing. Climate change is, of course, part of it. But when it comes to the climate science, which helped us to inform our interim targets, the

council has been invaluable. We are blessed to have former Chief Scientist Penny Sackett there. There is some expertise in Canberra that we are blessed to have. At the time that we were doing the policy thinking, we needed that scientific backing. I think we have the mix right at this point.

MR MILLIGAN: Have you provided that feedback on what we can do to contribute; what business can do? Have you provided feedback to that group who attended that—

Mr Rutledge: Yes, absolutely. As we have gone through ongoing engagement this year through the climate change policy, we have reached out regarding the effects on vulnerable Canberrans. People talk about a just transition, making it really practical for businesses regarding what they can do. The Actsmart program is one good example of that. We have provided that feedback. The Climate Change Council is meeting again this week, and the minister and Mr Ponton will attend. There is an ongoing discussion about engaging more than just the academic circle, because while the council might seem to be top-heavy scientifically, the work is much broader, and it needs to be.

MR MILLIGAN: What feedback did you receive from those businesses when you provided that feedback, those practical solutions that they could adopt? What was their feedback? Did they think there were good ideas going forward? Did they support it or were there still more questions?

Mr Rutledge: Yes, they did. We saw increased interest in the Actsmart sustainability programs. When the government is finalising the climate change strategy, we must be aware of all the sectors that need to play a role and make sure that there are practical programs that assist businesses, particularly.

MS LEE: Mr Rutledge, you mentioned the renewable energy innovation fund. What sort of businesses have worked at the fund over the past year, what work do they do in contributing to ACT policy, and how do you measure success, for want of a better word?

Mr Rutledge: The renewable energy innovation hub is in Turner and is where we allow people to keep tenancies to try to build an ecology of innovation, particularly around renewable energy. A couple of things go on there, and I encourage everyone to go to one of the events or just pop in.

MS LEE: I have been to one so I know what you are talking about.

Mr Rutledge: There is something great about having access to the smart people at the ANU, the CIT and in the business sector and the agglomeration benefits of being in the innovation hub and the broader innovation network. Often CBR Innovation Network hold events there. Not only is it a nice venue but a number of spin-offs have come out of it as well, and I will ask Mr Harding to talk to those.

Mr Harding: The renewable energy fund has a number of components to it and one part of that is a direct grants arrangement. Last year we undertook a direct grants round. Off the top of my head I think a bit over \$1 million in grants was provided, but we can clarify that.

To give you an example of the sorts of things that have been funded through those grants, there was a household battery controller, Reposit Power. That Canberra homegrown start-up business is doing great work in the household battery storage sector. It was initially funded through that grants arrangement to develop the next generation control system which is essentially the brains of the battery.

The controller sits in the meter board and has an algorithm that learns how you use energy in the household. It optimises the amount of storage in your battery but also plays the market for the householder. It can communicate with the energy market to see what the price of wholesale electricity is and decide that it is more valuable to sell the electricity out of the battery into the market and make money for the household rather than buy electricity from the grid. That is one fantastic technology that has been supported through the direct grants arrangement.

MS LEE: How does the application process work and who makes the decision about who gets grants? I am assuming people miss out.

Mr Harding: Yes, absolutely. It is the kind of grants round which has attracted a lot of interest. To guide and support the administration of the renewable energy innovation fund we have a business advisory board comprising a number of eminent local business people and entrepreneurs experienced in the start-up and technology space. That board considers the applications under the grants round and ultimately makes recommendations to the minister, and the minister makes the final decisions about the grant funds. The directorate manages those grants and we have a number of milestone and reporting obligations as per standard plan management arrangements.

MS LEE: The figures show 74 members, 25 businesses and 98 events in the reporting period. What is the difference between members and businesses? Is it a joining thing that you can be a separate part of?

Mr Harding: Yes, absolutely. There are different categories of membership, if you like. In the co-working space one person may come in for one day a week and they may just hot-desk and be part of their ecosystem. They get the spontaneous interactions with like-minded entrepreneurs, and that is the atmosphere that ultimately the hub is trying to create.

There are categories all the way through to small and medium sized businesses that may rent office space within the hub. You can have members who are physically located at the hub; members who attend on a part-time basis; members who are affiliate members only where they can come to events and their membership allows them to host events in the events space there. It is on a sliding scale of the amount of interaction businesses may like to have.

MS LEE: You said the grants are one aspect of what the hub does. Can you explain some of the others?

Mr Harding: Recognising as part of our renewable energy industry development strategy that we cannot focus on providing support to just one segment of the ecosystem—that is, support to start-ups and innovators—we are mindful that a

transition to a renewable-energy-led system requires tradespeople. So the fund is supporting the Canberra Institute of Technology and its trade training centre of excellence.

There is financial support there, and you may recently have noticed that CIT is running a Global Wind Organisation accredited wind training safety course. The minister has been out there and climbed up the working-at-heights tower. So instead of Australian-based wind farm development having to send technicians to Denmark or elsewhere to get their training they can do that here in Canberra.

CIT is also looking to running battery storage installation training later in the year. That is a complement to the range of solar skills already out in the local electrical occupations. We are seeing those opportunities for trades people to be part of the transition rather than just engineers and innovators.

One of the figurehead elements the fund is supporting is a \$5 million grant to the Australian National University from the \$12 million for a battery storage and integration research stream. We recently appointed Dr Lachlan Blackhall, a former Chief Technology Officer and one of the founders of Reposit Power—again, another Canberra local—who has now left the private sector and started a research group at ANU. The intent is to try to build research capability in Canberra and to optimise the amount of investment and opportunity that comes with distributive battery storage.

Obviously the government has a commitment to its next generation energy storage program so having that research element based here provides a living laboratory, if you like, in Canberra to identify new economic opportunities that come from those programs and the utilisation of battery storage.

MS LEE: Is that co-funded by ANU?

Mr Harding: Yes it is.

MS LEE: What is the amount that ANU—

Mr Harding: I do not have a number in front of me, but I am happy to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Rattenbury and officials, for attending today. We are asking that all answers to questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. I remind members that questions on notice should be lodged with the committee's support office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. Responses to questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five business days after the questions are received.

Hearing suspended from 12.34 to 2.01 pm.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
Kelley, Ms Rebecca, Director, Sport and Recreation

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate
Alegria, Mr Stephen, Acting Director, City Presentation

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into annual and financial reports 2017-18. During this session we will examine the section of the 2017-18 annual report of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate relating to sport and recreation and the section of the 2017-18 annual report of Transport Canberra and City Services relating to sportsgrounds.

On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Berry and her officials for attending this afternoon. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and I draw your attention to the pink-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. We do not have any opening statements during this annual report hearing; so we will move straight to questions. Minister, this report captured the first full year of the sport and recreation grants programs since the changes made under the government's election platform. Have these changes delivered the intended benefits, particularly in terms of greater gender equity?

Ms Berry: Yes, there have been a number of initiatives that have continued under this budget as we improve gender equity in sport in the ACT, particularly around previous funding provided to our women's elite teams Canberra United and the University of Canberra Capitals. This meant that they would be more secure in their ability to promote their teams to potential sponsors. It meant that they did not have to be as concerned with having additional funding provided.

Of course, there is funding around female-friendly or more inclusive sports facilities and some other funding grants changes as well. I will ask Rebecca Kelley to go into a bit more detail about those.

Ms Kelley: The women's participation and leadership grants were a key addition to the grants program in the previous year to address the gender equity objectives for the

grants program. There was \$100,000 put aside within the grants budget for that. We had a number of great programs funded through that program, including a women and girls basketball program, a grassroots female coaches development fund for football and a leadership empowerment program for Netball ACT, to name a few. There are some really great initiatives that have come out of that.

Further to that, we have also had \$50,000 provided to Cricket ACT as the leader of a group of nine sports or key participation groups that are looking at a women in sport initiative. They are working with key athletes on their skill building outside of their sport with the hope that they may take up leadership or governance roles as they progress out of their athletic careers. We are continuing that program into 2018-19. We look forward to its further initiatives.

THE CHAIR: Given that the government has put requirements on peak sporting bodies' boards that they meet 40 per cent women's representation, can you give an update on how that is progressing?

Ms Berry: It is progressing really well. Those clubs have been really positive in their approach to this and they have been improving diversity and gender representation on their boards. I think we are up to around 50 per cent of clubs meeting their targets. Of course, in the ACT we now have our diversity register. Clubs can access women and others on that diversity register who might the skills that they are specifically looking for on their boards.

From our perspective there is no excuse now. We have provided boards, including sports boards, with the opportunities through that diversity register to be able to move to that 40 per cent representation. Is there anything else we can add to that? That is pretty much it.

Ms Kelley: Other than that we are leading into our final year of our triennial agreements with the sports. We are working with the sports to ensure that they all have met that target leading into the 2020 funding round.

THE CHAIR: What does the participation data from this year suggest about the effectiveness of the government's support for participation-level sports in the ACT?

Ms Berry: This is interesting data. The data shows that for women and men in team sports, women's participation is lower. However, women's participation in sport or recreational activity lifts with inconsequential kinds of sporting activities or not team sports, for example, taking a jog at lunchtime because that is probably the only time that they can fit it into their day. But that is counted in their participation rate, which goes up for those kinds of less formal sporting and recreational activities. Have you got any more?

Ms Kelley: If we look at the most recent stats that came out of Ausplay, which is the national data collection around sport and recreation, we know that participation of females is slightly higher than for males if we are looking at a frequency of three times a week and above. Given most of our initiatives there, if we are looking 12 to 24 months in we are hoping that we will start to see the results come to fruition in the next three to five years of data collection.

We are also working really closely with Sport Australia, which is the custodian of that data, to try to get a greater sample size so that we can ensure the validity of our statistics around female participation, particularly when we get down to the lower age groups of between zero and 15 years. Our data is telling us the stories about how girls are participating. There are some concerns there at the moment that we have not really got enough numbers for us to have confidence in that. We want to have that confidence to tell us that the programs we are putting in place are doing what they are intended to do.

MR MILLIGAN: My question is in relation to the transitioning of sportsground operations and aquatic management to Transport Canberra and City Services and the ACT Property Group. What were the costs associated with that and what was the move for?

Ms Berry: No, there was not any cost. It was more just for a better coordination of services. I can ask Stephen Alegria to give you some more detail on that.

Mr Alegria: Certainly, my understanding is that all of the budget allocated to sport and rec facilities in the previous directorate was simply transferred across to TCCS. I guess the premise of that transfer was that in city presentation we undertake many similar functions to those undertaken by the facilities part of sport and recreation, for example, mowing, looking after facilities and clubhouses and so forth. Many of those functions were seen as being better grouped with a directorate that had that operational focus.

MR MILLIGAN: What is the process for Active Canberra to maintain responsibility for projects? The report mentions Narrabundah Ballpark and Stromlo Forest Park. What is the process for Active Canberra to maintain responsibility for those if everything was moved across to TCCS?

Mr Alegria: It is a partnership approach in terms of Active Canberra undertaking the policy work and doing a lot of that preparatory work to inform the budget bids and priorities that the sporting community has. TCCS's role is really in delivering those capital projects on the ground. We have our capital works team that is responsible for the detailed design, procurement and delivery of capital projects. Likewise for the Stromlo pool, that is being managed through ACT Property Group. It is a similar kind of relationship there. Property Group are the ones delivering that particular capital project.

MR MILLIGAN: In that same line reference is made to "Gungahlin future facility developments". What is that exactly? Is that part of the indoor sporting feasibility study?

Ms Kelley: I can talk to that. That relates to the policy work that Stephen referred to in terms of the background work that we have maintained in sport and recreation but that was formally Active Canberra. It is really to look at the developmental needs and to work with the sporting user groups to identify the supply and demand issues that we need to address in future planning. That work is undertaken. We would then work with the sports.

You mentioned the indoor sporting study there. That is an example of work that we are doing to identify those needs. Once it then progresses to budget identification and getting to a point of being a feasible project that government has invested in, we would pass that to TCCS to undertake the capital works component of it. Depending on the nature of that facility, it is then under the management of Transport Canberra and City Services through the sportsgrounds team. It is very much a partnership.

MR MILLIGAN: In terms of sporting codes, do you work directly with sporting associations to work out what the future development needs are for Gungahlin? Does that include associations like Netball ACT, basketball, tennis and so forth? What discussions have you had with them in relation to future development needs for Gungahlin?

Ms Berry: We have had a number of discussions with all sporting associations and groups about various things, including future needs for those organisations.

Ms Kelley: Specifically, we are working quite closely with netball and tennis at the moment, alongside the football codes, in respect of their facility needs in Gungahlin. Those discussions are ongoing and we have got some fairly positive developments that we hope will play out a bit further in due course.

MR MILLIGAN: The feedback I have received from Netball ACT, basketball and others is that there seems to be a problem in relation to facilities in growth areas across the whole of the ACT across a lot of sporting codes. What is the government doing to support providing these facilities in a timely manner to meet the demand of those sporting codes in these growth areas: for Netball ACT, for basketball, indoor sporting facilities? I understand there has not been an indoor basketball centre built for many years now, but it is a fast growing sport and participation is fast growing. When can the community expect to see some sort of reasonable development of facilities in Gungahlin and other fast growing areas?

Ms Berry: With respect to the indoor sports study, there has been considerable work and there have been conversations with a number of sporting groups with regard to the study to address the growth in those sports, particularly around growth in particular areas of Canberra in sports but also around where people are willing to travel to get to sports, how far, on what travel routes and all that sort of thing.

With basketball, for example, it is a pretty easy journey from Belconnen to Tuggeranong straight along the parkway. And then there is access to all of our halls and places within our public schools for training and for competition. I think they hold some junior competitions within some of the school halls.

With regard to Netball ACT, I have had, probably just as recently as you, conversations with Netball ACT about their aspirations for their sport and getting it to a place where they can start looking at expanding into different areas. I do not think they are quite ready for that yet, but we are having very honest conversations with them about where they are up to, when they will be ready and how we can make sure that we align our facilities when they are ready to start looking at exploring opening up more districts, opening up new districts for Netball ACT. The feasibility study is

currently with the sports groups that we were having conversations with as well as consultations with the community councils.

MR MILLIGAN: What groups have been involved with that, and when can we expect that final report to be tabled?

Ms Kelley: The draft report is just going out to the sports. The key sports who were consulted in that were Basketball ACT; Capital Football, for their indoor futsal needs; and Gymnastics ACT. To ensure clarity of information, that report has gone back out to those who were the key stakeholders, including the community councils. Once we receive that feedback, if there is any feedback—that was an addendum to the report—that will then put the government in a position to develop its response. We are hoping that that will be complete by the end of the year.

MS CHEYNE: I am going to ask everyone to bear with me; I ask some pretty basic questions. Please note that I am the least sporty person in the Assembly. What is the definition of a sportsground?

Ms Berry: It is a place where formalised sport takes place, basically.

MS CHEYNE: Does it include the ovals that we have decommissioned?

Ms Berry: No. They are decommissioned ovals that are described as neighbourhood ovals. There are about 30 of them. The history of those—for non-Canberrans who are now Canberrans, adopted Canberrans—is that during significant drought in the ACT and with lower activity on some neighbourhood ovals and some isolated ovals away from where people would normally easily travel to without facilities and things connected nearby, those ovals were decommissioned 10 or 15 years ago.

Mr Alegria: Or more, yes.

Ms Berry: Probably a bit more than that. Everybody was cutting back on water; water was very expensive; people in the community were making decisions about mulching grass instead of having grass. There were some turfed ovals—

Mr Alegria: The type of turf?

Ms Berry: There was the issue of the type of turf that would have been used on ovals as they have been restored. Some of those ovals have been restored after conversations with the sports communities and making sure that they meet the needs of the sports communities, that they are within the requirements of different clubs and also that we can maintain them to the level that they need to be for formalised sporting activity.

MS CHEYNE: This is also potentially a stupid question, but under the AAOs, minister, you are responsible for sportsgrounds but the Minister for City Services is responsible for public space amenity. Which minister do decommissioned ovals fall into? A bit of both?

Mr Alegria: We assume we operationally—

MS CHEYNE: It is the one directorate, so that helps.

Mr Alegria: Yes, it is one directorate. We report to Minister Berry in relation to the neighbourhood ovals. Just as city presentation in TCCS mows open space, we mow the neighbourhood ovals. We also mow the sportsgrounds. In fact, we have mowed sportsgrounds on behalf of sport and rec for many years so there is no duplication of all the mowing resources. Again it is a collaborative approach to management of those neighbourhood ovals.

As you say, there are 30-odd of them. There are about 880 irrigated ones, so it is a relatively small part of the estate, but it is pretty important that the community has access to that open space. As I say, we treat it like we do other parks and open spaces in the suburbs.

MS CHEYNE: So it is collaborative between the ministers?

Mr Alegria: Absolutely. Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Of the \$433-ish million that was transferred in terms of assets from CMTEDD to TCCS, is that just for sportsgrounds? We do not declare a decommissioned oval as an asset?

Mr Alegria: No; they would be classified as urban open space, to the best of my knowledge. It would also include the pavilions and that physical infrastructure associated with the sportsgrounds, which is obviously quite significant, for example, lighting.

MS CHEYNE: Yes. I know there has been—you touched on it before, minister—fantastic work with Higgins in terms of the restoration of that, and you mentioned working with the sporting community. How is demand for restoring ovals determined?

Ms Berry: Exactly that. We talk with the sports clubs about their growth in areas, what their participation rates are like and where they need their sports facilities. Higgins, for example, is very close to existing facilities. There are a number of pavilions there already, there is very good parking and there are active travel opportunities between sportsgrounds and the soon to be restored Higgins oval.

Restoration of those neighbourhood ovals is really based on growth areas. In west Belconnen, there is growth happening in that area through the new development out at Ginninderry. Newer suburbs, of course, get considerable investment, because they do not have anything yet. For example, at Taylor we are investing significant funds in your electorate, Mr Milligan, in Taylor.

THE CHAIR: Mine too.

Ms Berry: And yours too, Ms Orr, yes, with Taylor, Throsby and Nicholls all significantly funded out of this, and then Higgins.

On the neighbourhood ovals—this has been raised a couple of times—I know that they are very big open spaces and people would like to see lush green grass there, but people will also know that this spring has been a very dry spring. The decision the government made at the time to decommission those ovals was a very sensible decision; we have to be careful in making sure that if we do decide to restore neighbourhood ovals it is done—

MS CHEYNE: Sustainably.

Ms Berry: Sustainably, and it is going to be used in a sustainable way. For example, in this budget we have had to increase funding towards the irrigation costs of all our restored ovals of two point something million.

MS CHEYNE: Not insignificant.

Ms Berry: Which was increased because all of the forecasts were telling us that it was going to be drier, so we would need to access more funds to irrigate. We are not in control of how much the water costs, so we have to take that into context as well when we are making plans for irrigation and what it is going to cost. That is for the ovals we have now; that is not for the new ovals either.

MS CHEYNE: I have two final questions on this. You might be able to give me some detail, Mr Alegria. You mentioned the decommissioned ovals as urban open space and city presentation, that TCCS does do a level of maintenance. What is the standard that you provide to each oval? Does it vary depending on where it is, how stuffed up it is or how pretty it is?

Ms Berry: Just before Mr Alegria goes into a bit of detail there, they have been decommissioned for some time now, these ovals, and some of them have different weed growth and are quite dry and dusty. Particularly the weather this spring has meant that there is a different type of very hardy weed that is starting to take root on these ovals and that there is some deterioration. I have asked city services to have a look at what sort of work can be done on the decommissioned ovals to get them into a better state for community recreational use. Do you want to talk a bit about that?

Mr Alegria: Yes. We mow those ovals. That is the main maintenance activity, the mowing. We do them on the same cycle as the suburbs, roughly every month or thereabouts, depending on the season. In the course of the mowing we will look for any obvious safety risks there, particularly any kind of—

MS CHEYNE: Divots.

Mr Alegria: divots and holes that have appeared and arrange to get them filled. We also look at the surroundings, things like the safety of trees on the edges, the condition of the park benches if there are park benches there and that kind of thing. As the minister said, the condition of those sorts of places is very much dependent on the weather. When things are green, they will be green; when things are dry, they will be dry.

We are conscious of weeds as well. Given that these areas are in the urban area, there

is not necessarily a strong case to invest a lot of money in weed control for environmental reasons but we understand that the community expects a level of amenity there and we necessarily will—

MS CHEYNE: We do love our green spaces.

Mr Alegria: Yes, that is right. We will control those weeds. There certainly is—

MS CHEYNE: Is that the type of work that you are going to look into at the minister's request?

Mr Alegria: Yes, it is.

Ms Berry: Yes. I think one of the other things is that, because city services workers might not be on the ground walking their dog and seeing some of the things that the local community might see, we are happy for the community to tell us where they see things so that we can actually get on to it and make the repairs if they are required. If they are unsafe then we will get on to them as quickly as we can, if we know about them. We encourage people, if they see it, to let us know because sometimes it cannot always be seen from the top of a mower.

MS CHEYNE: That makes sense.

Mr Alegria: Yes. Likewise, if there are any ideas that the local people have about how to better use the space we are always happy to consider whether we can deliver that kind of thing, if people are—

MS CHEYNE: What you have both said is very encouraging. Based on feedback, that I am sure we are all receiving, it does make me wonder: is there some sort of midway point? I am very aware that the decision to restore an oval, as you very well highlighted, minister, is (1) very costly, (2) needs to be done sustainably and (3) our current conditions are not very exciting for that as an opportunity, and I completely appreciate that we can do some weeding and fix some of the spot fires—for lack of a better word—of making them look a little better if and when perhaps conditions improve?

Ms Berry: I think that is the issue, which is that water and irrigation are the biggest expense. That is right?

Mr Alegria: Yes.

Ms Berry: That is the biggest commitment, I suppose, the water and irrigation. As I said, the government does not control the cost of water. That also is significant when the government makes decisions about restoring ovals and is an example of the increased budget allocation for irrigation because of the climate change this summer and the forecast for a very dry summer and leading into winter. That is for sports clubs use. As I said, I have asked city services to have a look at what else we can do with our water. What is it that we can do to make those neighbourhood ovals, particularly when it is so dry, a little more user friendly?

MR MILLIGAN: Just as a supplementary on the decommissioned ovals, how many did you say have been decommissioned?

Mr Alegria: About 30 or 31.

Ms Berry: Currently. There were more than that but some have been restored. We can probably—

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Can you provide a list of those ovals, if possible?

Ms Berry: I think they have been restored in the past but we can probably do that.

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: You mentioned ovals and the demand and whether they should be restored and used and that you have spoken with sporting groups. I have got other information that would suggest that there is a lack of sporting ovals, particularly for basketball, grid iron, AFL and soccer.

Ms Berry: I am glad it is not basketball. It is generally not the surface that volleyball or basketball is played on.

MR MILLIGAN: Baseball, sorry. I have lost my train of thought.

Ms Berry: Basketball and grass just do not work.

MR MILLIGAN: Has the government consulted with the community and asked the community directly, particularly the community that is adjacent to and near those ovals? A lot of the feedback I have had from the community is that they want to see it restored. They would like the ovals to be maintained because at the moment they are in poor condition.

Ms Berry: They are maintained for recreational use. They are not maintained for formal use. Yes, if you compare them to an oval that has lush, green grass, that is watered regularly and fertilised and restored, the difference between a formal-use oval and a decommissioned neighbourhood oval is quite stark. However, the maintenance of neighbourhood ovals is for recreational use, not for formal sporting use. They are very different categories.

Higgins is a good example where the community was involved in the discussions and, I have to say, not everybody, not every single person, was completely enamoured with the idea of the oval being restored. They actually quite liked the informal use and did not really like the idea of more people coming into their suburb. But that was an example of the sort of conversation that we had, where you are trying to meet the needs, multiple needs, of lots of different people within the community.

Yes, it is important to be having that conversation with the community but government makes decisions based on how to spend community money in the most

sensible and sustainable way, and that is why when we are having conversations with sports groups it is about the spot that they believe is the best place for restoration of ovals. And Higgins is a good example of the conversations that we had with a number of clubs but particularly with rugby league, the CDRL, with cricket and others—

Ms Kelley: Oztag.

Ms Berry: and Oztag as well, about whether that was an appropriate place to restore an oval that had been previously decommissioned and is currently a neighbourhood oval.

There is an example of one oval that was restored based on considerable effort and a conversation with the community, the Belconnen Community Council as well as the sporting groups. It was on their advice that that oval was the best place for them, in their view, to be restored.

Ms Kelley: Perhaps if I can add to that also that the sports Canberra provision model that we reviewed a number of years ago looked at the issues around singular neighbourhood ovals as the traditional provision model in suburbs where we ended up with the small units that were frequent in most suburbs. However, from a practical sporting application use, with limited resources and volunteers, the advice that we heard from the sports was that the multi numbered grounds and district playing fields served their purpose better. And that is where we saw the emergence of community recreation parks that spoke to the needs of the community and the consult that was happening at the time.

We have now seen those delivered in Crace, Moncrieff and Franklin, where there is still some green space that serves that recreational use. It does not, perhaps, provide a full unit that would otherwise meet the need of a capital football Saturday morning match. However, that has been catered for in broader district playing fields. Yet we have got greater community outcomes with these green spaces that are adjacent to parks and family barbecues and things. It is ticking a different box, yet still within the same provision and continuum, if you like.

THE CHAIR: Minister, given that the Phillip Oval upgrade was effectively completed in this report period, what has been the feedback in the first month of its operation?

Ms Berry: Really positive. When we went to the actual launch, the Demons football club were so impressed and so happy with the restored grounds. It is somewhere they can proudly call their home ground. They had put up their banner very carefully before the opening, to make sure that everybody knew that it was their ground, even though it is used by more than just the Demons. Definitely, having regard to the feedback on football over this season, because it has been able to be used for the past football season, it has been very positive. Now, leading into summer, cricket will be using it as their second facility to Manuka; is that right?

Ms Kelley: Yes, it is a second tier.

Ms Berry: Yes, a second-tier facility to Manuka. It is a really high quality, great

facility. Some really fantastic upgrades have been done out there.

THE CHAIR: Does a co-contribution model like that have a long-term benefit for the community beyond the simple up-front savings?

Ms Berry: I think that that partnership was a good example of where those kinds of partnerships can be quite successful. We are always looking for ways that we can get support from different sporting groups who can partner up—cricket, AFL—with the government. Another example of that is with the Raiders, the New South Wales government and the ACT government at their new facility in Braddon. There are some good examples of where some joint funding can lead to some really positive outcomes.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to the twice-yearly ground maintenance and upkeep, it has been quite well documented that a lot of sporting codes have not had a training facility and have contacted Access Canberra to find a suitable venue. Some of the advice that has come through, both in written form and over the phone, has been that they go interstate or find an indoor gym or facility to train in. My question is: what is the government doing to address this, to ensure that, when it comes to finals seasons, sporting codes have a sporting oval or facility for training ?

Mr Alegria: If we know that clubs are in need of a facility in that shutdown period, we will always work with them to find something. We also go to all the clubs well in advance and flag that there is going to be a shutdown period. We can generally identify the vast majority of issues in advance and make plans to accommodate match play, in the case of, say, some of the Capital Football comps in autumn, and, as we have discovered this year, AFL finals being held in spring, beyond the usual end date for winter sport.

We can use synthetic pitches and we can use our enclosed ovals, if we really need to, to accommodate those special cases. The key thing for us is that we need to know that there is a demand and there is a need out there, in order for us to be able to work with those particular sporting groups. As I say, if they do come to us and ask, we will do our best to accommodate their needs.

You referred to interstate; I think you were referring mainly to Queanbeyan, in terms of a suggestion being made that there are some opportunities for training grounds there for the AFL. Now we know that their season extends, we can work around that next year, and make sure that those sorts of things are ironed out in advance, so that we are not trying to play catch-up.

MR MILLIGAN: Has the government considered staggering, not just during the two weeks but maybe over a four-week period, and maybe working even closer with the associations to have a list of teams that will be featuring in the finals, so that you can ensure that their local facility or oval will not be impacted, and they will be able to use the facility that they are used to? Is the government considering these alternatives?

Mr Alegria: As to the second part of your question, absolutely. A key thing is consultation and engagement with all the groups. Traditionally, in the past, sports have been winter and summer. There has always been that transition period, which is

the time when there is the minimal amount of impact on the most number of sports. Having regard to the growth and diversity in sport now, for example, gridiron goes across that kind of window that we have traditionally used, so we need to work with those groups and find a way to make sure that they can operate their sport.

From a practical, operational point of view, we do close the ovals all at once because we have a whole series of works that go through in a systematic fashion, which is obviously the most efficient way of doing it, rather than having a piecemeal approach. It is efficient to do it in that way, but we definitely recognise that we cannot just have a block period and not be open to consultation with other groups.

MR MILLIGAN: It is currently two weeks, isn't it?

Mr Alegria: Two and two.

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, but two weeks at any one given time.

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: To move to three weeks or four weeks, would that not become economically viable?

Mr Alegria: The main issue there—

MR MILLIGAN: You could probably restore some of the ovals that have been decommissioned at the same time.

Ms Berry: It is not just about having a break. It is more than just the ovals being left vacant for a couple of weeks. You fertilise, but you do not fertilise twice every four weeks; you do the fertilising, irrigation, spot weeding—whatever else you do.

Mr Alegria: Yes. It is also about changing sports, for example, putting out all of the football goalposts and getting ready for the summer sports. That kind of work has to happen in that period. It makes a lot of sense operationally. As you say, the challenge is just to make sure we can accommodate all of the users.

MS CHEYNE: It is well-documented that TCCS does a pretty outstanding job in terms of the ongoing maintenance of sportsgrounds. I very much appreciate that the ACT government funds the vast majority of that and that the remainder is generated from user fees. I guess there is a trade-off between trying to recoup some of the very expensive cost of maintaining ovals versus ensuring that kids and adults alike are active. I know for some junior sports the fee is half of the adult fee: specific example, Cook oval, Little Athletics, \$48.50 an hour, which ends up at a bit over four grand a year. How is half the adult fee determined to be the right user-generated cost, and is that policy ever reviewed?

Mr Alegria: That policy was put in place in 2013-14. I am not aware of the exact basis of that as a policy objective but it is obviously intended to encourage junior sport.

MS CHEYNE: Were we previously charging them the full fee?

Mr Alegria: In some cases I believe we were.

Ms Kelley: The primary reason was—if we look at a touch football field, as an example—the wear and tear the juniors have compared to the seniors. That is reflected within that policy. A number of factors went into the reasoning behind the halved fee. But as Stephen made the point there, the encouragement around junior sport is certainly a key to it.

MS CHEYNE: So that half fee came in a few years ago. What was happening before that?

Ms Kelley: Some were already half and some were not, so the policy objective was that they all reach that 50 per cent junior-senior threshold. It was really a consistency point; before that it was less consistent.

MS CHEYNE: So some were paying full adult fees or at least more than 50 per cent?

Ms Kelley: I would have to go check as to whether any were paying full adult fee, but it was the inconsistency that was being addressed.

MS CHEYNE: Is it an enormous burden for you to check?

Ms Berry: We will try to find out if we can.

MS CHEYNE: I will not keep pressing you, but I would appreciate it if you could have a cursory look. Is 50 per cent still too much, though, or is it too little?

Mr Alegria: That is probably a policy decision, but at the moment we get about 14 per cent of our revenue from user fees, so it is not a huge amount. It is obviously significant to the individual clubs and players involved, but it is a relatively small proportion of our revenue. If a policy decision were made about reducing junior fees that would impact on that and require additional resources from general revenue. That is obviously a decision for government.

MS CHEYNE: Do you get feedback from the junior clubs that it is an impost for them to pay that sort of fee?

Ms Berry: I do not think anybody likes paying a cost for anything, so there is a bit of that. But our sportsgrounds and facilities are pretty good. If you look at the 86 per cent subsidy of the government for the maintenance of those facilities and the contribution by the community through sports fees, that is a bit more generous than the 80-20 subsidies around the country.

I know that does not make a lot of difference when you are trying to figure out how to pay the sports fees for your child, but one of the other things the government looks at—it is not in this portfolio—is providing grants to families living in public housing so their kids can access sports. We have just partnered with Every Chance To Play and provided them with \$20,000 in addition to philanthropic support and funding

from other organisations. They provide vouchers and grants to families who might not otherwise have a chance to play. So we look at different ways that we can support people who need it.

MS CHEYNE: Against that 80-20 subsidy our 86-14 sounds pretty good. Is there a dollar figure comparison with other jurisdictions as to how much we charge clubs versus how much other jurisdictions charge?

Ms Berry: I am not sure what the dollar figure comparisons are or whether we could access them very easily. I note that the ACT does not have the kindest climate for sports facilities and grounds—as we have seen this year—and the \$2.8 million added to the budget for irrigation expense does not flow on automatically in charges to the clubs. Fees go up each year with indexation, but when the government has to increase funds as a result of a particularly warm and dry spring and summer that is not passed on to the players.

Mr Alegria: And that affects that split as clearly the costs are higher and we are not charging the fees.

MS CHEYNE: So you do not have that comparison?

Mr Alegria: The benchmarking we have indicates that we have a higher cost of maintenance for sportsgrounds because, as the minister said, we have a really challenging climate, we have cool climate grasses, et cetera.

MR MILLIGAN: Noting that a lot of clubs pay anything from \$20,000 to \$150,000 a year for ground hire, what feedback have you received from sporting clubs and associations about the affordability of ground hire?

Ms Berry: A lot clubs have relationships with sporting clubs—if you are talking about those sports clubs—so they are supported through the community contributions from some of the clubs in the ACT. Sports clubs themselves do a lot of fundraising, which is an important community-building activity within clubs. That is not just about raising money; that is about building a strong volunteering community with sports organisations.

Ms Kelley: It is also important to recognise that sportsground hire is only one component of what clubs might otherwise be charging their participants. They have levies for their clubs, levies for the state organisation, sometimes levies for national organisations, uniforms. A lot that goes into that, and we are certainly always mindful of it. Like everybody else, we want to see kids out there playing and do not want cost to be a barrier.

We work with sports to sometimes take a reality check around that as well. If you get down to the nitty-gritty of breaking down the \$48.50 as to the number of participants you could have on the field at any given point, per training session it is not that much. We try to put that layer of perspective on it when talking to the sports to ensure that we are being fairly holistic in the discussion and not just drilling down into the fact that sportsground fees are so expensive when sometimes it is all the other things in and around it that are increasing the cost of participation. But we certainly agree with

you that it is an important point.

THE CHAIR: Minister Berry and officials, thank you for your attendance this afternoon. We are asking that answers to questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. I remind members that questions on notice should be lodged with the committee support office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. Responses to questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five days after the questions are received.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Gentleman, Mr Mick, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Advanced Technology and Space Industries

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Ponton, Mr Ben, Director-General

Le, Ms Thao, Chief Financial Officer

Walker, Mr Ian, Executive Director, Environment

Tomlinson, Ms Heather, Senior Manager, Nature Conservation Policy

Kitchin, Dr Margaret, Manager, Conservation Research

Moore, Ms Fiona, Senior Manager, ACT Heritage

THE CHAIR: During the final session of today's hearing we will examine the section of the 2017-18 annual report of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate relating to environment and heritage, as well as the annual reports for the Conservator of Flora and Fauna and the ACT Heritage Council.

On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Gentleman and officials for attending this afternoon. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement before you on the table. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, we do, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live.

As we do not have opening statements for this annual report hearing, we will jump straight into questions. Minister, can you please provide an overview of the new opportunities available to volunteers as part of ParkCare's recent transformation?

Mr Gentleman: It is an exciting opportunity as we encourage more volunteers to come and assist in the environment of the ACT. They do a fantastic job in the park care area. That opportunity means that we get more bang for our buck, if you like, in rolling out opportunities across the ACT, and more knowledge and information come back to us as a directorate. I will ask directorate officials to give you details of the work happening with ParkCare at the moment.

Mr Ponton: The ACT Parks and Conservation Service facilitates volunteer involvement through the ParkCare initiative. Over the past year, I am pleased to say that ParkCare has diversified volunteer activities and now provides more opportunities for the community to work side by side with our rangers and other people within the Parks and Conservation Service.

Changes to the volunteer program have resulted in the registration of 280 new

volunteers. The program is attracting younger people, which is great to see, with the average age of new volunteers being 36. Over the 2017-18-year, ParkCare volunteers contributed 29,362 hours of their time towards the management, maintenance and interpretation of the ACT Parks and Conservation estate. The new cloud-based software which is being used to manage volunteer activities is successfully tracking registration and verification of qualifications, promoting and scheduling events, recording hours and reporting incidents.

Mr Gentleman: Can I just add a comment about the important opportunities for us, as members, to learn from the ParkCare group. Minister Rattenbury and I went out on National Tree Day to the Majura park care group, which is headed by Waltraud Pix. She has been doing this for quite a number of years. Through that process we were given the opportunity to see some of the degradation in the area and some of the work that needs to be done to try to protect the area from further degradation. At the same time, we were able to go to plant some trees and do a bit of hands-on work ourselves. It is really important that we recognise the work that they are doing and the feedback to us.

THE CHAIR: What opportunities are there across the ACT for the ParkCare groups?

Mr Ponton: I might ask Mr Walker to answer that question.

Mr Walker: ParkCare has been re-formed. The opportunities relate to a couple of key areas, and new opportunities continue to emerge. Those opportunities include wildlife care; clearly that is about getting people out to support wildlife recovery and wildlife restoration type activities. Additionally, we have ranger support or ranger care. This is about working hand in hand with rangers on particular initiatives where EPSDD and our staff have identified particular projects where we need a bit of extra volunteer capacity to deliver that sort of work.

I will extend that a bit further. You may be familiar with nature map, which is a product, a citizen science based program, where the community collect data that informs where our threatened species are, where our weeds are and where our pest animals are across the ACT. That is a demonstration of the sorts of activities that ParkCare and volunteer communities can do across the ACT. It is critical to note that nature mapper has been growing in use. We now have a million plus records associated with nature mapper. One of the key aspects is that the ACT community are actively involved in that. We are striving to reach a five per cent target of ACT community involved in nature mapper.

It is a really powerful tool because it enables us to respond to things like emerging pest plants or emerging pest animals, and quickly adapt and send out staff, rangers and biosecurity teams to jump on those new incursions before they spread or before they become a problem.

Additionally, if I use a simple example, we have previously relocated timber onto particular parks and reserves. As a consequence of that timber being relocated onto those reserves, we have had the occurrence of a coconut ant. It might not sound that sexy at this point in time, but the coconut ant has a relationship with a butterfly called a small ant-blue butterfly, and for the first time in recent history we have recorded

those populations of small ant-blue butterflies in a number of reserves across the ACT. That has been achieved by volunteers out there looking at what is happening in the environment and reporting those to us via nature map. It is a really simple example of the sorts of benefits that government, EPSDD, receives from volunteering activity, using that by way of illustration.

THE CHAIR: As well as the wildlife care and the ranger support, are there other opportunities within the ParkCare program?

Mr Walker: ParkCare is a broad umbrella for a range of opportunities. The program has built on a legacy of that engagement with community. Next year we talk about a 30-year celebration of ParkCare. That becomes a particularly important event to talk about the value of volunteering communities across the ACT. Those volunteers contribute to a whole range of different things, from planting trees—the minister highlighted the restoration-type activities—through to wildlife recovery activities. There is a range of different ways that volunteers can help. As I said, the citizen science based program is a good illustration.

THE CHAIR: I had a question on what knowledge you have had fed back from the ParkCare program, which you have answered, through the nature map. Is there anything you would like to add?

Mr Walker: One of the key points is the ability to identify new and emerging pest plants and pest animals. Having lots of eyes out looking and detecting new occurrences or new pest plants or pest animals emerging in the ACT means that the Parks and Conservation Service, our rangers, can respond when those new emergents, new pest plants or new pest animals are identified. That means that we can reduce the impact on biodiversity but also, importantly, the economic cost of pest plants and pest animals by early intervention. Those in the biosecurity world will tell you that it is very clear and very evident that if you jump on pest plants and pest animals quickly, before they become established, you have the best chance of success in terms of their total eradication.

THE CHAIR: You noted that the average age of participants is 36. This is a broad-ranging question, but what are you doing to get people involved, and how are you spreading the word that the program is out there? And where are the volunteers coming from?

Mr Walker: Thank you for the question. It is a broad-ranging question. Let us start with the demographic space. The ACT has a relatively young demographic. Reaching the ACT community at that younger demographic age has been through universities and engagement in discussions at universities or other forums where the community congregates. It is really reaching out to where communities and younger people interact and have available time, particularly those in the university education space; they can volunteer and bring their passion to explore and understand what is going on in the environment.

One of the things we have found in that space is that by partnering with older Canberrans you get this great marriage between young enthusiastic people and older people with a little more wisdom. They are able to bring a really good story together

about how this is cross-generational and how everyone has a stake in looking after the environment.

To answer your question around youth, it is very much about going to universities in particular, but to the education sector in general, to have that engagement.

THE CHAIR: Is there anywhere, even on the EPSDD website, where you can look at what ParkCare opportunities are coming up?

Mr Walker: Yes. All the volunteer opportunities within the ACT EPSDD space are clearly identified on our website. You can go to the website to find that information. I would highlight that you have asked the question specifically about ParkCare. There are other volunteer models that exist in the ACT, Landcare being the obvious one. There is a volunteer portal on our website that provides the link to not only ParkCare opportunities associated with parks and reserves, but Landcare opportunities and other volunteering opportunities associated with the environment.

THE CHAIR: You noted that it is the 30-year celebration of the program coming up. Are there any plans for the party?

Mr Gentleman: We certainly do want to celebrate 30 years. If we look at the number of volunteer hours, we see some 29,362 volunteer hours. We value that at about \$990,000 a year. It really is a celebration, as I said, of the involvement and the work that they do for us. It is a big bang for the dollar, if you like. We would like to celebrate next year, and we will be working through that process to recognise the 30 years of ParkCare.

MS LE COUTEUR: It is clearly a great program. What are we doing to ensure that longer term there is ongoing support for ParkCare?

Mr Gentleman: I think it is that work that Mr Walker was talking about earlier, that engagement between government and ParkCare and assisting them to get more volunteers in and, of course, that sharing of knowledge of and interest in ParkCare.

MS LE COUTEUR: From a funding point of view, are we still waiting for the federal government to provide more funding support? What is the situation?

Mr Walker: In relation to the funding from the federal government, you may well be aware that the national Landcare program phase two has been rolled out by the Australian government. That has seen an investment of funds into the ACT. We were one of a number of regional bodies across the country. It has been a competitive process with those regional bodies to attract funding to specific outputs and projects that are being delivered by ACT government but, importantly, in partnership with a range of bodies.

Whether they be the catchment groups or ParkCare groups, investment is now starting to flow from the Australian government through the national Landcare program to enable us to deliver particular outcomes associated with woodland recovery, work at Mulligans and at a number of other areas across the ACT. But it is very much targeted at delivering key outcomes. It is not just a core-based funding arrangement.

MS LE COUTEUR: There is no core-based funding. It is all project funding. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Gentleman: That is what the federal government is looking at.

Mr Walker: That is what the Australian government national Landcare program phase two is about. It is about delivering outcome-based funding, not delivering core-funding to support community groups.

Mr Gentleman: We will be working with those particular ACT community groups to look at how we can assist them to work up proposals for outcome-based funding.

MS LE COUTEUR: Will there be any non-outcome-based funding, any core admin funding, or is that something that the groups have to do for themselves?

Mr Walker: From the Australian government perspective, the focus is on outcome-based funding.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Mr Walker: That is the point there.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have got that, but is the ACT government?

Mr Walker: The ACT government have invested in supporting Landcare and catchment groups in a number of ways. That includes environment grants and recently supporting rural landholders with drought relief grants. That is really about building resilience for the future. We have also supported the catchment groups through the current budget with a program to build a transition arrangement for the three catchment groups to enable on-ground delivery to be expanded. That means looking at sustainable funding models by which the catchment groups can look to attract other funding from other areas, not just government. We have provided support to the three catchment groups this year to enable that to occur.

MS LE COUTEUR: But the question was specifically about ParkCare. I assume, given that you are answering about catchment groups, that the answer is that there is no support for ParkCare, or am I being too cynical here?

Mr Walker: No. I think the relationship between ParkCare and the catchment groups is a hand and glove relationship. Many ParkCare groups are not incorporated entities. Therefore, they cannot receive funding directly. By referencing the catchment groups, they are able to receive funding directly because they are incorporated through various processes as NGAs or as other entities. They then leverage those funds into working and supporting ParkCare groups who do not have that status and that ability to attract funds of that ilk.

MR MILLIGAN: I refer to questions about natural resource management. I am keen to know about the current employment and involvement of Indigenous people under that program, particularly the Aboriginal rangers and so forth.

Mr Gentleman: It really is an important question. EPSDD has been doing a fantastic job in working with our Indigenous community on rolling out that program. I have attended a number of events with our Indigenous rangers where they bring the Indigenous community into the bush and talk to them and to us about the history of how Indigenous people looked after the land in earlier times and, of course, how they continue to do that now in their current roles.

One of the really interesting ones was some clearing and burning of some of the Xanthorrhoea on block 33 in Pierces. I knew that Xanthorrhoea was a really important tree for Indigenous people, but I did not understand the relationship they had with it. It actually gives them a compass on navigation. It also provides a gum to be used to join materials together.

At that particular event, we gained a great understanding. It brought us up to speed, if you like, with how Indigenous people used to work with it. Also there were other Indigenous people from the community who were involved on the day. However, in relation to the actual program, I will let the directorate give you more details on how we are involving our Indigenous people.

Mr Ponton: I will make a few opening remarks and hand to my colleague Mr Walker. First, in relation to the work of our Indigenous people working within the directorate and Parks and Conservation, we work very closely particularly with Jacob Keed, who is our elected body representative for the directorate. I meet on a monthly basis with Mr Keed, as do my colleagues Dr Brady and Mr Walker. We run through with him our ideas about how we can further improve our work in terms of improving the cultural landscape. I will hand over to Mr Walker to talk more about what we are doing and also the numbers.

Mr Walker: Numbers currently sit at 22 FTEs across the directorate. That is a reasonable proportion of our staff. Importantly, a lot of our Indigenous staff work within the Parks and Conservation Service. I guess the reason for that is this relationship with country. There is a strong recognition that supporting Aboriginal opportunities on country gives the best result, not only for employment outcomes but also for the recognition and respect offered to traditional custodians.

We have been working with the traditional custodians through our Murrumbung network. We have a ranger network made up of our Indigenous rangers. They engage with the traditional custodians about how to care for country. There are a number of key areas that we have been involved in in that caring for country space.

We delivered a particularly impressive fire forum where representatives from communities—traditional custodians, traditional owners from across south-eastern Australia—participated in a fire forum where they expressed their views about how fire and the landscape should be managed. As you would appreciate, fire is a fundamental tool that traditional owners have been using for 20,000, 40,000 years. I guess that we are only now as white bureaucrats understanding the context of that use of fire and how best to use that.

We have a number of rangers who have been specifically tasked with improving

cultural burning. Those staff deliver cultural burning programs consistent with what the traditional owners, the traditional custodians, would look to do. The notion there is that they are establishing mosaic burns. Those mosaic burns would enable the landscape to change and adapt but also encourage the growth of particular plants or support for habitat for particular animal species. That fire forum, which is where I started the conversation, was particularly powerful in giving voice to the traditional custodians and giving them a sense of listening and understanding their needs. That was a very well received approach.

Turning from fire to water, we have a significant program around cultural water and, again, working with the traditional custodians to understand how they value and interact with water and what are their totemic values and propositions around water in the ACT. It is not dissimilar to fire. We have staff involved, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in developing an understanding of cultural water-based programs.

MR MILLIGAN: The report states that lend a hand received \$24,500 to bring in detainees and ex-detainees from AMC to collect seed and to propagate new vegetation, particularly at AMC. Is this program ongoing? Is it going to be continuing next year? What are the numbers? How many detainees are participating in this? Are they getting any sort of qualification, certificate or anything for participating in this?

Mr Walker: I have a couple of comments in response to that question. It is an important program that we have been running. We will look to continue that, assuming we can secure investment into the future. I also draw your attention, before going directly to that space, to our kickstart your career program. This program is really about helping disadvantaged members of the community connect back on country.

That program is specifically targeting Indigenous youth and encouraging them through the later part of their education but then also into the development of particular TAFE courses, agriculture training certificates and those sorts of things. Through support from the Australian government and through our NRM program, we have been able to deliver the kickstart program. That is one that we will be continuing into the future.

MR MILLIGAN: Is that the one run through CIT?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, it does. The facilitators include the CIT horticulture section, CIT Yurauna centre and Greening Australia. We had 69 students run through that course.

MR MILLIGAN: Are they all Indigenous students or is there a mix?

Mr Walker: The vast majority are Indigenous, but it is open to non-Indigenous students as well, particularly where there is a disadvantage focus around their future engagement in the education and employment space.

MS CHEYNE: I have a few questions about feral and invasive species, the first being about feral horses. I think it has been well publicised that a number of environment and conservation groups are becoming increasingly concerned about the threat. I do

not think anyone missed the pretty shocking footage at the end of October of those horses which had starved to death, taken by that man who runs those eco-tours. How many feral horses have we detected coming closer to the border than we would like?

Mr Gentleman: There are quite a number not too far away from the ACT border. I will ask directorate officials to give you the numbers, but I will give some context on this. We understand that, from an environmental point of view and looking after our catchment in particular, hoofed animals prove to be the biggest risk to our catchment area. They damage the soil and the subsoil and do not allow it to grow back. Some of those really interesting plants that we have in the top of the catchment, particularly the peat moss areas, are the ones that really clean the water before it goes into the catchment there.

We know that some hoofed animals—for example, deer, and sambar deer in particular—do a lot of damage and have a particular pattern of marking their territory which is pretty unpleasant. Some of their efforts actually allow that unpleasantness to flow into our water catchment. We have a process to look after that particular aspect of hoofed animals which has been successful, and we have funded that this year as well.

In regard to horses, they have a similar effect on the plant life around the catchment area. They do not defecate, as the feral deer do, but their hooves and the weight of horses damage the plant life in such a respect that the whole area around the catchment can become damaged and not be able to naturally treat our water system as it goes in to the top of the catchment. We are really concerned about the spread of feral horses, particularly those coming from the Kosciuszko National Park. We are likely to see an increase in horses within Kosciuszko with the determination that the New South Wales government has made.

I have written to the New South Wales environment minister and to the Deputy Premier, expressing my real concerns, and those of the Canberra community as well. A number of other people have written at the same time.

Mr Walker: Between 2007 and 2011 some 24 horses were removed from Namadgi National Park. In recent times we have not had any new incursions into the park. That is something that we are very conscious of, given the change in legislation in New South Wales. We have increased our surveillance and observations of change in the environment to see if we can detect horses if they are coming across into the ACT.

MS CHEYNE: What have the observations detected? Has there been a noticeable increase or evidence that there are horses coming closer?

Mr Walker: Our observations have been focused within the ACT but obviously you can see across the border. We have not noticed anything at this point, but we would expect that, like all animals, they will increase in numbers if they are not checked. We would expect to see growth in numbers occurring over the next one to five years.

MS CHEYNE: Particularly with the drought conditions and if they get hungry?

Mr Walker: Drought will play into that, but it is more in terms of population growth.

We will start to see more animals and they will be looking to find new areas to graze. Those are the areas that we will be concentrating on and they will be the focus of particular monitoring regimes to detect those horses coming in to the ACT.

The opportunity presents itself to deploy particular technologies as well, using things like, as odd as it sounds, remote-based cameras. They can be deployed to detect animal movement, particularly large animals. We use them routinely for detecting small critical-weight-range mammals. We can deploy those sorts of technologies in areas that we know horses would frequent, to detect any new occurrences. They would be able to detect those sorts of changes.

MS CHEYNE: I might be misremembering, but I believe, minister, that in one of the responses you received, there was going to be a cross-jurisdictional working group about how to protect the horses without culling them. Has that working group been established yet? Has there been any leadership from New South Wales?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, we have had our directorate officials working with New South Wales officials. Mr Walker will give you an update on that.

Mr Walker: Yes, New South Wales have engaged in a conversation about horse management. Mr Daniel Iglesias is the representative of ACT. Daniel will be the person engaging with New South Wales. We continue to have liaison across the border at an officer level. The ability to discuss the technical aspects is an area that the next meeting that is being scheduled will confirm and work through.

MS CHEYNE: How many meetings have been held?

Mr Walker: No meetings to date. The process is being set up and we are ready to participate in that process.

Mr Gentleman: At the higher level, I will continue to make representations to the New South Wales government on their legislation. We will also explore what other options may be available to challenge that legislation.

MS LEE: Minister, you mentioned that you have written to the New South Wales environment minister and the Deputy Premier.

Mr Gentleman: Yes.

MS LEE: Have you had a response from either of the ministers?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, I have had a response from the environment minister. We have written again regarding that response as well.

MS LEE: You mentioned that there are some other options to challenge that legislation; what are they?

Mr Gentleman: We are exploring what options we may have to challenge that legislation, whether it be federally under the EPBC Act or similar opportunities.

MS LEE: I want to talk about national parks. With Namadgi National Park, we all saw the YouTube clip that went a bit viral, with the four-wheel drive that was going a bit rogue in there. What is being done to ensure that our national parks are protected from man, in the broader sense of the word?

Mr Gentleman: There are a number of actions that we have taken to protect against damage, particularly from vehicular access to the park. Entrance into the parks is closed and there are very sturdy metal gates to stop vehicular access. There is an opportunity for people, of course, to walk and cycle. What we find is that these very keen people use modern machinery to actually remove the gates or the locks on the gates. They use very big petrol-powered angle grinders. The size of the metal structure for the gate is quite large. It would stop a large vehicle rolling over. But if you attack the pinch points, as we have seen on video, they can gain access to the parks with these four-wheel drives.

It is an offence, of course. Damaging ACT government property in regard to the fencing is an offence as well. In a number of areas we have put up CCTV cameras to gather footage of these actions and we have attempted some prosecutions. I am not sure of the outcomes of those at this time. Also, our rangers do regular patrols of the area and try to identify which parts are seen as interesting points for these particular people.

As you have seen from the video, they do quite a lot of damage. It takes a lot of work to recover from that, and it is a lot of work for our rangers to replace these large gates and fences as well. It is particularly sad because it is a great place to visit, whether you want to go in there and hike and camp or whether you just want to go in and have a quick look. The damage that the vehicles do is quite severe in a number of cases.

MS LEE: Has any thought been given to the possibility that we might be able to expand some of the vehicular access? Obviously, if people are wanting access, there are areas that might be suitable for vehicles. Has any thought been given to that? It may stop that—

Mr Gentleman: Not in regard to the national park but providing other areas. Kowen Forest has some areas for four-wheel driving that we have talked to the clubs about using. We have provided some opportunity there. The clubs are usually quite good in responding to our requests. Most of the time I would say that it is probably not the club members that are doing this particular operation.

MS LEE: No; you would think that they would know better.

Mr Gentleman: We are seeing if we can provide other opportunities for people to enjoy that sort of recreation without damaging the national park.

MS LEE: There has been a little bit of a push from the national parks to encourage glamping; the accommodation bookings in Tidbinbilla and Namadgi. For how long was the trial conducted? I noticed that the annual report reported a 120 per cent increase in revenue. I am wondering what that was actually measured against, given that it was a trial.

Mr Gentleman: One of the champions of this has been Daniel Iglesias. He is our head ranger. We have looked at some of the opportunities that other jurisdictions have used. The Grampians, in Victoria, has been a really good example of how you can provide that level of glamping, if you like, to eco-tourism. It provides the opportunity to be in the space for a couple of nights and stay there with a ranger, so that they can explain to you the history of the place and the environmental significance. In regard to visitor numbers—

Mr Walker: I will take that on notice and come back to you with some specific numbers.

MS LEE: And also how long the trial was—thank you. My specific question is this: the annual report stated that there was a 120 per cent increase. There must have been a target or something that that exceeded, or—

Mr Walker: Can do.

MS LEE: Thank you.

Mr Walker: We have been engaging an organisation called WILDfest. That organisation is providing the glamping opportunities at Tidbinbilla. That is an example of where we are partnering with a tour operator and jointly delivering products on the ground. The glamping experience, as the minister highlighted, occurs in Victoria and New South Wales, so we are building on knowledge from those other jurisdictions to enable the glamping opportunities at Tidbinbilla.

The discussions around that space are about what that looks like going forward, and how we can sustain a model of supporting community access to the natural environment to appreciate it and enjoy it while not impacting on the environment itself. Getting that balance right is pivotal in terms of how we are delivering this product.

Importantly, the feedback from the community about the glamping experience has been overwhelmingly positive. It has highlighted that the standout story there is the interaction the community have had with rangers. Because it is a joint partnership with WILDfest and the Parks and Conservation Service, the rangers have been the glue that has held that story together, because they can provide the cultural connection.

Going back to the previous commentary about Indigenous rangers, our Indigenous rangers have been able to tell a story about connection to country for visitors and guests to ACT at our WILDfest sites. They have also been able to then tell the story linking to the wildlife, about corroboree frogs and a range of wildlife that most people would not necessarily know. The feedback from the community has been astonishment. They did not know those things existed within the ACT context. It has been quite an eye-opening experience not just for people coming to the ACT but also for ACT residents.

Our experience with the program at Tidbinbilla is that in the glamping tents we have had good occupancy in the past year. We are looking to build new opportunities next year, outside the summer fire season.

MS LEE: The report says that the WILDfest at Tidbinbilla, A Wild Night Out, was due to take place in the spring 2018 school holidays, which have now passed. Do you have any feedback from that?

Mr Walker: That is the feedback I have just brought up.

MS LEE: That is the specific thing you were talking about?

Mr Walker: Yes.

MS LEE: Are you able to get those specific numbers as well, on notice?

Mr Walker: Yes.

MS LEE: Are the two properties, Nil Desperandum and Ready-Cut Cottage, marketed throughout Australia, or just internationally.

Mr Gentleman: They are on the EPSDD website, which goes nationally and internationally I suppose. But when we market through advertising I do not think we do. But we could learn from what we have been doing with WILDfest to see whether we could engage a different community, and also with our VisitCanberra people to see how they do that when they do their international communications.

MS LEE: It also mentions Airbnb. Was that the first time it was advertised on Airbnb? Did that go well? Was that successful?

Mr Walker: Yes. It was a trial to test whether products like Airbnb are useful in the context of a park manager. I guess the advantage of using tools, and Airbnb is a tool, is that they have good market reach already. Our work has been centred on the nature-based tourism and ensuring that we are partnering well across government to deliver nature-based tourism opportunities within the parks and reserves estate. Using Airbnb is a good example of innovative approaches to enable international reach as well as domestic reach for common product development. One of the opportunities to explore with Airbnb is a new product they are releasing called Airbnb experiences. It is an opportunity to go from a typical Airbnb scenario of a place to stay to a place to go and experience the environment.

Very much the focus of the work that the Parks and Conservation Service, and more broadly the environment division and EPSDD, have done is about how we can connect with more diverse people so that they can experience the environment we have, so that they can value the environment we have and ultimately how they can care for the environment we have. The opportunity in the ACT, because of such a well-educated community and a large intact natural environment, gives us the ability to reach out to those sectors—we spoke about volunteers—and to really enhance the experience that is given within the parks environment.

MS LEE: While you are taking the numbers of visitors on notice, are you able to provide, in those numbers, the breakdown of visitors who were from the ACT and beyond the ACT?

Mr Walker: Yes.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: What work is being done on looking at the effectiveness of the cat containment policy: impact on wildlife, deaths reported, how many cats have been contained by the ACT government et cetera?

Ms Tomlinson: Transport Canberra and City Services has portfolio responsibility for cat containment. Specific research is very difficult, because the cat containment policy is in certain suburbs, about eight to 10 per cent of our current suburbs, but there is also a lot of voluntary cat containment. It is increasing all the time with an understanding within the community about the importance of the safety and the health and wellbeing of the cat that often occurs when the cat is contained. So we have not done any specific research within the ACT.

However, I am also a participant in a cross-jurisdictional task force, the feral cat task force, chaired by the Australian Species Commissioner. More and more they are looking at cat management holistically. There are jurisdictional representatives on that as well as representatives from the research field and land management. So there is quite good cross-pollination of policy and land management practices, as well as a lot of the new research on feral cat control. There is a lot of sharing, from other jurisdictions in particular, about the impact of cats on threatened species or on wildlife. We are drawing on that knowledge. And there have been published research papers about the impacts. We could provide some of those documents.

MS LE COUTEUR: That would be great. As I understand the beginning of your answer, TCCS does the work but you do the policy. Am I correct? So I can continue asking policy-related questions?

Ms Tomlinson: We work across government on cat management. TCCS has responsibility for domestic cat management, and that includes cat containment. We have policy responsibility for nature conservation and feral cat management, for invasive animals.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you do not make decisions about which suburbs have cat containment?

Ms Tomlinson: No, that is not within our policy area.

MS LE COUTEUR: The environment commissioner, in the Gungahlin strategic assessment, recommended more compliance. That is TCCS?

Ms Tomlinson: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: And community engagement would be TCCS, from what you are saying.

Ms Tomlinson: Yes, and compliance and enforcement would be as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am in the wrong place.

MS CHEYNE: You were talking about great cross-jurisdictional work, sharing lessons. I understand that a robotic grooming trap has been developed that detects feral cats—and I am not talking about in the suburbs, I am talking about in our beautiful parks—and sprays their fur with, I think the poison is, 1080.

Ms Tomlinson: There are new poisons, I suppose, that are being developed.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, like a naturally occurring poison but then the cats lick themselves, basically licking themselves to death. I understand that has been introduced in south-western Queensland and elsewhere. Is that something that we are actively looking at and, if not, could we be? It sounds pretty good.

Ms Tomlinson: I would say we are wanting to learn from the other jurisdictions. It is interesting. They are using a new technology to identify a cat compared to a native animal and it is like cat recognition technology. In this case it is targeting feral cats but the importance is that it is not impacting on native animals. The actual characteristic is that cats have long legs and our native animals do not.

This idea is to spray it onto the fur. Again the cat's behaviour of grooming itself is not one that our native animals use. It has got promise. It has been mainly, I think, tested in more arid and remote areas. Also we need to take into account the cost effectiveness of these things. It is very good when other jurisdictions go through a lot of the testing.

MS CHEYNE: Do the work for us?

Ms Tomlinson: Do the work but also the clearances for using new poisons as well and testing a lot of the different methods. It is bringing together a lot of new technology. I think it is quite interesting.

MS CHEYNE: My specific question is: is it something that jurisdictions continue to report good feedback on and that we will chuck in a budget bid on?

Ms Tomlinson: We have indicated that we are willing to receive a request for trialling or demonstrations but we have not received that to date.

MS LAWDER: With regard to the heritage festival, for example, do you get a demographic breakdown of attendees: male, female, age group, that kind of thing?

Mr Gentleman: During all the events during the festival? Maybe Fiona.

Ms Moore: Annually we do not normally capture that data but last year we received one-off funds to conduct an external evaluation of the festival and that did produce some of that data that you are looking for. I might take it on notice to holistically answer it but I can give you a broad figure that a key finding that came back was that 75 per cent of our attendees were 50-plus age-wise. That was possibly not a surprise but will actually form how we start our planning for next year's.

We know that we need to engage that younger demographic and get them engaged, particularly families. We want to capture the kids and the young parents. If I can take that on notice to give you the reports from that finding.

MS LAWDER: That would be great. That is good information because it leads me to my next question, which is actually: could you explain to me please what geolocator pips are with regard to Canberra tracks on your phone?

Ms Moore: On your phone you have the app. How do I explain this? Have you used Canberra tracks app?

MS LAWDER: Yes.

Ms Moore: When you scan the app over one of the signs it comes up with sort of an augmented—

MS LAWDER: Like the QR code.

Ms Moore: Yes but it has now moved more forward than the QR codes. You can scan an image and it will come up with either a hologram or a video. A pip is one where you will hold up the phone or your iPad to the image. The augmented reality will start. How do I explain this really simply? On Regatta Point you scan your device over to the lake and it will pop up an information box about one of the buildings you are looking at in that scene. That is a pip.

Mr Walker: If I could add to that as well, what Fiona has highlighted there is the ability to use new technologies to bring heritage to life, whether that be augmented reality or holograms. Talking about using your phone, going out onto a site, connecting with the map or the sign enables people to get a new experience. We are talking about having—and we are—available images and stories from people, traditional custodians like Wally Bell, and Wally popping up into a hologram welcoming people to country or telling a particular story about why this place is important.

I guess the fantastic opportunity that that presents is the ability to connect more people with heritage and, as was illustrated, our cohort of people that are engaged in heritage tend to be older and what we are trying to do is use some new technology to connect a younger demographic with heritage and start to tell this story about why heritage is important to the ACT and bring that connection back.

I think it is a really powerful illustration of what can be done in an innovative way to bring new people the experience, the knowledge around heritage.

MS LAWDER: Sounds good. You said that the Canberra tracks brochures that you produced and printed are available at 110 tourism outlets. How many brochures were printed?

Ms Moore: I might take that one on notice if that is possible.

MS LAWDER: Do those people who do not use a smartphone or do not have the app and do not perhaps want to download the app have the option of finding the heritage tracks brochure somewhere? Will they get a similar experience?

Ms Moore: Absolutely. Together with the brochure we have over 170 physical signs around the ACT. They are both at heritage-registered and non-heritage-registered sites; historic places. On a lot of those signs we have the tracks, the map that people can follow so that they can engage with the walking trails or the self-drive trails. Through that mechanism and through outlets such as cafes and hotels in particular they can access the physical brochure to obtain the maps.

MS LAWDER: So that I understand, if you have got the sign with the QR code, is the geolocator pip part of the QR code or elsewhere on the sign? How do you—

Ms Moore: Depending what sign you are at. We have two types of signs in our Canberra tracks. We have the pedestal sign which is an information graphic that will look at the heritage place that you are at. Then we have a three-sided vertical triangular sign. On those ones, one of the panels will be a physical map. It will show the trails. The pip that you refer to is something that occurs when you are in the app and you have engaged the augmented reality and it pops up through the device. It is not physically on the phone.

MS LAWDER: Have you had much feedback about these geolocator pips?

Ms Moore: Not the pips specifically but the Canberra Tracks we do. We always receive, particularly from tourists, really good feedback—emailing us, commenting on how easy they had been to use, how informative they are, not too long—and also we do get a lot of ideas for where new signs should be.

We are currently working with the Manuka Traders Association. They are really keen to have one at the Manuka shops further explaining the history of the shops. It is really nice to see community buy in on this program.

MS LAWDER: As shadow minister for seniors I hear a lot of older people say that they are not as smartphone savvy as others. Have you had any specific information from older people about the reliance, if you like, on the app?

Ms Moore: I would not say specifically. They do not necessarily identify their age when they engage with us.

MS LAWDER: I will give it a try with my husband. He is not very good with that stuff. See if he can work it. Thank you for the feedback. It was very interesting. Thanks.

THE CHAIR: The ACT RLF program delivered three native bee and pollinator workshops in July 2017. Can you run me through what was involved in the workshops? Also, what about the bee hotels that were constructed? How are they supporting the local populations?

Mr Walker: Our program around bees is in a number of areas. Obviously, it is about

providing training for biosecurity staff across the ACT so that we understand how bees sit in the environment. We have to recognise that we have both invasive bees—pest bees—and native bees. We clearly have to manage those different demands for bees.

Bees play an important role in pollination for both native species and agricultural products. We have a number of sentinel locations across the ACT where bee homes and beehives are monitored for particular threats to honey bees. We have a program to actively monitor those locations and those sites across the ACT. Part of the training and workshops is about educating not just the biosecurity teams but the community about threats to bees.

We have also been working with one of the embassies in the ACT to facilitate activity around the celebration of bees. There have been a number of engagements around protecting local domestic bees, ensuring that threats to bees—in particular, viruses, pathogens and mites—do not transmit across bee populations in the ACT, and really showcasing what the value proposition of bees is, in terms of our agricultural support and agricultural production, recognising that our agricultural sector in the ACT is relatively small in comparison to other jurisdictions.

Mr Gentleman: We had a fantastic celebration for World Bee Day this year with the Slovenian, Swedish and Swiss embassies in Canberra, beginning at the Slovenian Embassy. People travelled from Melbourne to come to see the celebrations for World Bee Day there. Because of our particular stage in the time line, we were the first jurisdiction to celebrate World Bee Day, which was pretty fantastic. A number of beekeepers around Canberra were involved on the day and continue to be involved. We have been involved with the embassy in helping them to set up their beehives in the first place. It was a great opportunity.

THE CHAIR: Mr Walker, what are some of the threats that the bee populations face?

Mr Walker: There are a couple of particular mites. I will have to take that specific question on notice because it has gone out the back of my—

THE CHAIR: I am happy with mites; that is okay.

Mr Walker: Thank you. That is one of the key threats that we are monitoring against. The other threat relates to cross-fertilisation: cross-breeding between different bees. We need to try to ensure that the Australian native bees are protected from that, that the bees that produce honey are clearly contained in their hives and that we are supporting beekeepers in managing those hives.

THE CHAIR: Do we know how many beekeepers there are in Canberra? Is it growing?

Mr Walker: I do not know whether the number is growing. I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: I would be interested to know. With this work is it possible to say at this point in time, for lack of a better word, how healthy we feel that the bee

population in Canberra is? Do we have a gauge?

Mr Walker: We certainly do not have any presence of the mites that I indicated. From a quarantine perspective, we have kept those out of the ACT, and that is an important aspect. We do not want them spreading out into other jurisdictions. In that context, yes, we do have a healthy population of bees in the ACT.

MR MILLIGAN: My question is in relation to the Heritage Council. In the report, having regard to the advice that the council had given, there were 33 pieces of advice. Could I get a breakdown of that advice and decisions that the council have made? I am happy for you to take it on notice if you do not have those 33 decisions and advice that were supplied.

Ms Moore: Could you clarify what the 33 is referring to?

MR MILLIGAN: Thirty-three pieces of advice on applications for restricted information on Aboriginal places, page 49.

Ms Moore: Thirty-three applications for information on restricted information for Aboriginal places: that would relate largely to archaeologists working in the field who want to obtain information. They might be working on a block and it has been identified as heritage, for restricted purposes; in the public realm the whole block is flagged. They need to come to us and, under the Heritage Act, put that application in, and obtain the specifics of exactly where that Aboriginal place is, to inform the cultural heritage assessment that they are doing for proponents on that block.

MR MILLIGAN: Is it possible to get the advice that was given on those 33 applications?

Ms Moore: I may have to take that on notice. Due to the restricted nature of the information, that in and of itself may require a restricted information application.

Mr Gentleman: We want to continue to keep these heritage spots in place and look after them into the future. There is a concern that if we are to make public the particular heritage places there may be more visitation from non-Indigenous people that could cause some damage to the heritage places. That is why we have a restriction on the amount of information available.

MR MILLIGAN: Given that the Heritage Council does applications and provides advice and whatnot, the representative Aboriginal organisations also provide advice on specific Indigenous matters. What role does the Heritage Council play in relation to seeking advice from the representative Aboriginal organisations? What input do they have?

Ms Moore: Under the act the RAOs must be consulted on any works that may impact on an Aboriginal place or object. The council consults with them where they propose to register an Aboriginal place or object. Where works are occurring within the vicinity or at the location of an Aboriginal place or object, they are consulted and engaged. Also, proponents, developers, engage directly with RAOs. A requirement when council issues advice is that they must work with the RAOs directly as well.

MR MILLIGAN: Is it possible for the advice given by the RAOs to be overruled by the Heritage Council on Indigenous matters?

Ms Moore: No. The council seeks the advice from the RAOs and is guided by the RAOs as to their wishes and desires.

MR MILLIGAN: They will take that advice, act on that advice and not overrule it at all?

Ms Moore: Yes. In the time that I have worked with ACT Heritage, the council has not departed from RAO advice.

Mr Gentleman: There are quite a number of disciplines that our council members have. That includes Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal history, archaeology, architecture, engineering, history, landscape architecture, nature conservation, object conservation, town planning, and urban design. They have, in their own remit, quite a bit of knowledge of Aboriginal culture as well.

MS LAWDER: Has there been any discussion about reviewing the RAOs?

Mr Gentleman: There are still requests every now and again for organisations that would like to become registered Aboriginal organisations, and we have a look at that each time there is a request.

MS LAWDER: Have new ones been added in the past year or two?

Mr Gentleman: Not recently, no. Our position is that the RAOs that we currently have are providing a very good job for the ACT and there is no particular reason to increase that number at this stage.

Ms Moore: That is correct. The current four RAOs that we have were declared in 2006 and there has been no cause to review that at this point in time.

MS CHEYNE: I want to quickly touch on the staffing profile. The directorate, and particularly the environment area, on the ground is very lucky to have some pretty amazing female ambassadors in ranger and other roles. There are people who are pretty high profile, like Dr Melissa Snape, and Dr Kate Grarock, who, for the record, we can congratulate on being an ACT finalist for the Australian of the Year awards, among many other things this year. Probably almost singlehandedly, she has the credit for bringing Brian the bettong and Mulligans Flat to the world stage.

Mr Gentleman: I can brag that I bought one of her T-shirts.

MS CHEYNE: That is good to know, minister. Her reach is far and deep. What is the directorate doing to attract, develop and retain women in these roles? Obviously, promoting people like Dr Snape and Dr Grarock is part of that strategy, and I have seen some of the videos. Is there more that can be done more holistically to encourage women in STEM to come to the ACT as a great place to work?

Mr Ponton: In terms of the specific details, I am happy to take that on notice to providing you with some more information. I can say that, in terms of employment of both women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, through our HR team we are developing a range of strategies. That is being renewed. When the directorate came together as a new entity on 1 July 2017 we have recruited essentially an entirely new executive team, which I am pleased to say is also 50 per cent female.

Mr Gentleman: 51.8, I think.

Mr Ponton: Thank you, minister. We also now have a new chief operating officer and a new director of people and capability who have been tasked to further develop our strategies. In terms of the specific details, I am happy to take that on notice and provide you with the work that has been done. I would like to reassure you that in terms of both women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders we are doing quite a bit in this space. In terms of our profile not only for women but also for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and people with disabilities, we exceed all of the targets set for us by the government.

Mr Gentleman: When you said they do a fantastic job, they really do. They do more than what is required of them in the job. During the Pierces Creek fire—

MS CHEYNE: I am sure that Brian the bettong's establishment of a Twitter account was not necessarily part of Dr Garrock's remit, but look where it has taken things. It is pretty incredible.

Mr Gentleman: I just wanted to let the committee know that whilst they work hard on the ground, as well as rangers, they often do quite a bit of work outside that remit too. During the stand-up of the ESA emergency situation for the Pierces Creek fire, we had quite a number of women rangers who are employed by parks and cons but who came and worked at the ESA centre doing fire mapping and communications work. The work they do and the knowledge they have in a conservation sense on the ground can be used in other areas, and they provide that without charge. It is fantastic.

MS CHEYNE: Very lucky.

Mr Walker: Could I add to that? Part of the success of bringing women into the environment sector comes down to the leadership shown by individuals. The four women to my right are examples of the women that are providing the leadership in the directorate and encouraging more women to be involved, whether that be through conservation research or elsewhere. As you have highlighted, we have some excellent examples of young women who have exceptional skills and qualities and who are really starting to come to the fore in terms of their expertise and their abilities. But it is the leadership shown by the women here that is providing that impetus for new women to engage in the environment space.

MS CHEYNE: Just for the record, Mr Walker, and for Hansard, could you name these women?

Mr Walker: Heather Tomlinson, Margaret Kitchin, Fiona Moore and Helen McKeown.

MS CHEYNE: There is a very interesting table that I do not really understand on page 122 about attraction and retention initiatives as at 30 June 2018. It says that the total of ARInS at 30 June 2018 is 14 and refers to the number of new ARInS entered into during this period and the number of ARInS terminated. What is this? Are these people who are employed under a special program?

Mr Ponton: The short answer is yes. It is where a position has been identified at a particular level—let us say senior officer grade A—but in terms of going to market we have not been able to identify the right person for that role. It might be that the market is particularly tight in relation to that particular set of skills and expertise. The ARIn process allows us to provide for an additional salary over and above that senior officer grade A. It might be \$10,000 a year to attract that person to the organisation.

MS CHEYNE: What sort of roles? Could you give an example? I do not want you to identify these people but can you say more broadly?

Mr Ponton: In terms of where they exist, it is right through the organisation. I have to point out that they are reviewed annually: it is not a case that you get an ARIn and that is it; every 12 months we go through a review process. That is why we have seen that some have been cancelled, essentially because the particular market conditions or the change in duties that warranted the ARIn in the first place have not continued. We are quite clear when we enter into an ARIn that it is only for a 12-month period and there is that need for review every 12 months.

MS LAWDER: How many of the ARInS are to women?

Mr Ponton: I would need to take that on notice.

MS LEE: I want to talk about carp management. How many Canberrans have logged sightings of carp breeding within the ACT?

Mr Walker: At this point I think we would have to take that on notice.

MS LEE: Sure. Are you able to give us details on what impact that is having on carp management? Is it valuable that people are logging in?

Mr Gentleman: Certainly, yes. The information on the number of carp is certainly valuable in how we go about managing the species. We do encourage people to fish for carp and not put them back in the water at the end of their fishing contest, if you like, and that is quite successful. We have the big carp down at Tuggeranong with the Tuggeranong festival, which is always very good. We had a successful operation at upper Stranger Pond earlier this year when we removed some 2½ tonnes of carp from the pond, cleaned up the pond itself and then refilled it with water and restocked it. That was quite successful. And we have found a farmer just outside the ACT jurisdiction who will take that biomass and turn it into fertiliser so that it can be used appropriately in other areas.

At both the Murray-Darling Basin minco and environment ministers meetings, we have talked about future carp operations. There is a herpes virus that is being

developed to use on carp across Australia. We understand that it is successful; it is probably ready to go. The challenge we have with that is that it acts quite quickly, and once treated the carp will float to the surface very quickly. Then we have to remove that biomass. If we got 20 tonnes out of upper Stranger Pond, you can imagine the biomass numbers—

MS LEE: Sorry, did you say 2½ tonnes or 20 tonnes?

Mr Gentleman: My apologies; it was 2½. I was exaggerating. There would be more than 20 tonnes out of all of the other ponds, so we need to understand the implications of that. We feel that we can manage it here in the ACT, but there are other jurisdictions in the Murray-Darling Basin that are quite concerned that they might not have the tools or the resources to remove that biomass, and then it could float to the bottom of the water system and create more damage. We have not made the decision as to the timing of that release, but it is something for the near future.

MS LEE: You talked about the success you had with removing carp from upper Stranger Pond. Are there any plans to do similar draining in other ponds?

Mr Gentleman: When we have done the healthy waterways project, some ponds have been drained.

MS LEE: But not specifically to remove carp? Is that right?

Mr Walker: No.

Mr Gentleman: It is part of the whole project.

Mr Walker: It is part of the broader program. The strategy around carp is really a whole of Australian government process. We have been contributing to that. In all of these sorts of scenarios, we have representation on the Australian committee that is working through the potential release of the carp virus. As the minister said, one of the issues is that on release of the virus, carp biomass is large, and that results in water being deoxygenated in the system. That means there is no oxygen there, and that means that other things in the system that require the oxygen also perish as a result of that biomass of dead carp floating to the surface.

One of the key strategies that we need to work through is how to remove the quantum, the scale, of dead carp in a particular system. With ACT waterways that are lake and pond based, you can imagine a process to do that. I will not say it is relatively simple, but it can be achieved. In other areas, like the Murray or the Darling systems that are more remote and are longer in reach, the scale of removal could be quite significant. It is part of the thinking and the management process that we need to work through as to how we respond to a future release of any virus-type activity.

MS LEE: Is there a timetable, minister, that you are looking at in terms of making that decision about the herpesvirus?

Mr Gentleman: Yes. It is still within the Murray-Darling Basin group and environment ministers council. It is ready to go. It is just the concern from the smaller

jurisdictions about whether they have the resources and the tools to be able to remove the biomass.

MS LEE: If they were on board, then from the ACT perspective, we would have no issues with pulling the trigger?

Mr Gentleman: Yes. Of course, we have to involve—

MS LAWDER: What other smaller jurisdictions?

Mr Gentleman: I am sorry?

MS LAWDER: You said “other smaller jurisdictions”.

Mr Gentleman: Yes. Some of the councils that operate on that river system are quite concerned about the cost to them, in particular. The other group that we need to talk to is the National Capital Authority with Lake Burley Griffin.

MS LEE: When Canberrans log sightings of carp, what is the process as to how the directorate responds and deals with it? How do they deal with it, and how long does it take?

Mr Walker: The recording of where carp are is not a trigger for action; it is a trigger for knowing where sites are where they are breeding. That is the important aspect for when we need to activate a carp program, because they would be the targeted sites where you would go and undertake the particular clean-up exercises and/or carp fishing exercises, as the minister has highlighted.

There are a range of strategies beyond the virus that could be used to undertake control of carp, and knowing where carp are forms the foundation of the strategy.

MS LEE: Do we know how carp enter ACT waterways and how we can ensure that they do not cause a problem in the first place?

Mr Gentleman: The understanding is that it is from a European culture of collecting those sorts of fish. And there are some cultures that enjoy eating carp. They introduced them to the waterways quite a long time ago.

MS LEE: You are talking historically.

Mr Gentleman: Yes; it would be 50 or 60 years ago.

MS LE COUTEUR: When is the Molonglo River reserve plan of management going to be finalised?

Mr Walker: We have done a significant amount of work on the Molonglo River draft reserve management plan working with the community to inform the preparation of the management plan. We will be in a position to release that plan in the new year.

As I have said, the focus is ensuring that we understand the natural values, the cultural

values and the activity associated with the requirements under the Australian government. They have been incorporated into the management plan and our effort is about ensuring that the community understands the management plan per se.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you have any idea if it will be the first or second half of next year?

Mr Walker: We envisage it will be in the first half of next year.

MS LE COUTEUR: Over the past few years the ACT government has purchased several rural leases between Kama Nature Reserve and Stockdill Drive. Is there any active consideration of this land being converted into environmental offsets or nature reserves?

Mr Gentleman: EPSDD have kicked off investigation to look at the opportunity for those areas. Of course, we made a comment in 2008 that they would not be developed for residential into the future, but we need to start those investigations to see the opportunity for offsets and how to manage them into the future.

There are management plans with each farm and they interact, too, with the bushfire management plans and the BOP to ensure that fuel loads are kept down in preparedness for the bushfire season. The EPSDD has started that work now.

MS LE COUTEUR: So we are actively looking at that area as offsets?

Mr Gentleman: No. We started the investigation to understand the value of the areas and the environmental significance of the areas. A decision has not been made as to whether we use it for offsets or otherwise

MS LE COUTEUR: I did not suggest it had been. What else would we be considering it for?

Mr Gentleman: It could continue as a rural lot, for example.

Mr Ponton: A nature reserve. There is a range of options, but that is part of the planning work we need to undertake as part of the Weston broadacre study, identifying land that might be suitable for residential development but also, importantly, land that might be suitable for offsets, nature reserves, further rural leases.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, you mentioned the plans of management. Has the government organised plans of management for all the new rural leases?

Mr Gentleman: We are working through that at the moment. I am not sure if all of them are completed.

Mr Ponton: My understanding is that the Suburban Land Agency have submitted them all for consideration But I have to take on notice whether they are all finalised.

Mr Walker: The intent for the land management agreements with the rural leaseholders is that those that have been submitted by SLA will be considered prior to

the end of this year.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have they all been submitted by the SLA and none of them by anyone else?

Mr Walker: Every rural property is required to have a land management agreement. To answer your question: other land management agreements are submitted—

MS LE COUTEUR: Sorry, of the recent acquisitions of rural land by the ACT government, has the SLA been the entity that has submitted the management plan?

Mr Ponton: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: I know lots of other people apart from the SLA have to do it because the SLA does not own all the ACT.

Mr Ponton: In terms of those leases that were acquired by the Suburban Land Agency or its predecessor the Land Development Agency, the management plans have been submitted by the Suburban Land Agency. There were some, of course, that were in the name of the Land Development Agency given the timing.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am aware that some of them are being leased by rural lessees, basically.

Mr Ponton: Sub-leased.

MS LE COUTEUR: And it is not those people who have done it; it is the SLA?

Mr Ponton: That is correct, yes.

MS LAWDER: Can I confirm that you bought those leases without having a plan of what to do with them?

Mr Ponton: I think I have answered this question in previous hearings. The land was purchased with a view to future residential expansion, but you cannot say that all of that land is suitable for residential until you undertake further detailed analysis. During estimates—

MS LAWDER: When you answered Ms Le Couteur I do not think you mentioned residential.

MS LE COUTEUR: No, you did not mention residential; that is true.

Mr Ponton: I thought I did, but certainly during the estimates hearings I spent quite some time on this issue if members would like to reflect on the transcript from those hearings. I am happy to go through it again for clarity. The land was purchased with the expectation that it would provide for future expansion. But as I was saying, when you buy a parcel of land or you are looking at an area of land it is almost a given that it cannot all be developed.

Given the slope, topography, geological issues and environmental considerations you need to do the detailed analysis to determine exactly what land could be suitable for residential development and what land could be suitable for environmental offsets or nature reserves or remain in the rural lease estate. I think the question was specifically in relation to central Molonglo. So there is no—

MS LE COUTEUR: Specifically the land between the Kama Nature Reserve and Stockdill Drive.

Mr Ponton: The reason I did not mention residential for central Molonglo is that, as the minister said, the government has made it abundantly clear that there is no intention to develop that land for anything other than environmental considerations. But outside of that residential is very much a possibility.

MS LAWDER: The heritage emergency fund on page 48 of the annual report shows that \$17,155 was released for repairs at St John's schoolhouse. That is an admirable amount for an important building. Is that a grant of some sort? What are the governance arrangements for that?

Ms Moore: The heritage emergency fund is accessible outside the formal grant round. It is by application to the minister and it is at the minister's discretion.

MS LAWDER: Is there a set amount of funds in that fund?

Ms Moore: The fund comprises unspent moneys from the formal grant round. If there were not enough quality applications to deplete the money available for the grants, it goes into the emergency fund and is available throughout the year.

MS LAWDER: So does that carry over year on year?

Ms Moore: It carries on.

MS LAWDER: Does that sit as cash or is it invested?

Ms Moore: It sits as cash.

MS LAWDER: How much is currently in that fund?

Ms Moore: Can I take that on notice?

MS LAWDER: Sure. How do they apply for funds? Does your average heritage organisation know that there is such a thing or is it just if there is an emergency, "We need help in some way"?

Ms Moore: It would be the latter. Due to the unknown nature of the funds at any given time, it is not advertised as a source of ongoing revenue. Of course, in some years there might not be any money to put into that fund. How it plays out is that an organisation or an individual will contact us, usually not knowing about the funds, saying, "We've got this situation. What do we do?" They are looking for conservation

advice, and it is at that point that we guide them through the emergency grant fund application and recommend to the minister.

MS LAWDER: Is there a heritage recommendation or advice provided to the minister to assist the minister to make his decision?

Ms Moore: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Can you provide an update on the efforts to protect and recover the Canberra spider orchid?

Mr Gentleman: Indeed. I think we have some experts who can give that information.

Dr Kitchin: The Canberra spider orchid is one of our threatened orchids and it occurs on Mount Ainslie. We have been partnering with the Australian National Botanic Gardens to really look at how we can better translocate this plant. They have been growing some of the plants up. Orchids are notoriously difficult to grow. We particularly like the fact that this is the Canberra spider orchid. We are working with them to work out what are the cues, how we can actually regenerate it. Down the track, it will be a couple of years before we can actually get the benefits of that research. We will be looking at translocating that plant into one of the reserves in Canberra so that we can expand its population.

This is something we are trying to do with a few plant species—particularly our threatened species and particularly those that have small populations or that are fragmented—really working at how we can improve getting more of the plants and then getting them out into our reserves and improving that full biodiversity.

THE CHAIR: I was going to ask what locations you are looking at transferring it to, but given there are a few years—

Dr Kitchin: Part of the challenge with this species is with some of the insects that need to be in the area that we translocate to. It has a very specific relationship with this insect. We are actually bringing in some advice from Melbourne from a specialist in this area. We are going to have to do the surveys. We have got some possible areas but we will have to confirm that closer to the time.

THE CHAIR: As well as the orchid, what other plants are you looking at? You mentioned that there are some other threatened species plants that you are looking at doing translocations for.

Dr Kitchin: There are. One of the ones that we have worked on quite extensively is called the Ginninderra peppercress. This is a species that we have down along Ginninderra Creek. We also have it in the Mitchell grasslands. It is one which, again, we have worked with the Australian National Botanic Gardens on to look at how we can grow up plants. A couple of years ago we did translocate some of those species into the edge of Dunlop and some areas of the Crace grasslands, again to really try to improve the condition of those grasslands and try to bring some of these species back into the landscape.

Unfortunately, they were not successful. The conditions, being so dry, have not been conducive. We are looking at, down the track, whether we will trial that again. The thing with translocation is that it is something we have to keep trying, because we do learn a lot as we go. We collect that evidence and then refine our techniques.

We have also been partnering, again with the Botanic Gardens and the herbarium, on plants called *rutidosis* and *swainsona*—again they are two of our threatened species—and we have identified areas in the gardens where we are actually growing up the plants outside a laboratory. It is outside to try to harden them up a little more. Work is going on with them. Again, we really benefit from the expertise of the gardens and are privileged to have them in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Are the plants that are growing up in the gardens going to be translocated or are they there purely for research?

Dr Kitchin: Some of them will. Certainly with the *rutidosis* we will and *swainsona* we will, yes. At some stage, when we have enough plants and we are sure that we have got sites that we can translocate them to, yes.

THE CHAIR: The peppergrass that you are looking at potentially doing another trial for, is there any indication when that might occur?

Dr Kitchin: No, we have not scheduled that just as yet.

THE CHAIR: A bit of a broader question, looking at these threatened species, what role do they play in the biodiversity of the Canberra area?

Dr Kitchin: These are the most threatened. We have got 36 threatened species listed under the Nature Conservation Act of the ACT. We pay particular attention to them because they are the ones that need the conservation measures. But, having said that, we also work with commonwealth agencies because there are a number of commonwealth-listed species. They are, I guess, the ones that we really focus on. Like the grassland earless dragon, they become the iconic species in our grassland reserves that we want to protect and want to manage around so that we make sure that we are making the improvement in biodiversity but also that we are targeting our management programs with weed control and fire management.

It is all about improving biodiversity. We have recently released our new grassland conservation strategy and, while originally it was about protecting our areas and really ensuring that we have, say, those Gungahlin grasslands, we are really wanting to say, “We’ve protected the areas. How can we improve the condition of those areas from now into the future?” We are really looking forward.

THE CHAIR: On that note, what are some of the things you have identified or are potentially looking at putting in place to take those grasslands to the next step?

Dr Kitchin: We really are pursuing a very evidence-based program with our grasslands. We are trying to use some of the experience that we have gained from the offsets program, plus we have got a very strong history of doing a lot of evidence-based research in grasslands. We benefit from a grant that we had a couple of years

ago on grassland earless dragons and looking at how we can use restoration techniques to improve, again, grassland condition. It is things like small, patchy burning where we can actually utilise burning, which has been in the landscape for hundreds of thousands of years, to improve the habitat and hence get the flow-on effects for our threatened species, particularly in that case the grassland earless dragon.

That is where we are trying to improve the values of our threatened species because this will have a flow-on effect for the benefits to biodiversity generally but again targeting our management of those areas to make sure that we have got an alignment with appropriate fire regimes. Again, we are just doing some small, patch burning and making sure that weed control and any other grazing—grazing by our kangaroos—is in line with the values of those areas.

THE CHAIR: Can I clarify, are all the Gungahlin grasslands offset? I do not actually know the answer to this; I am just curious.

Dr Kitchin: No. There are the three main grassland reserves—Crace, Gungahlin and Mulanggari—that were actually reserved many years ago. There are some additional offset sites at the moment adjacent to some of those areas. No, they are not; they are reserves.

Mr Walker: Could I add to Dr Kitchin's commentary? Margaret has highlighted the partnerships, particularly with the Australian Botanic Gardens, and I think that is a key aspect of all our work around threatened species, that we are trying to partner with expertise from different jurisdictions so that we can build a greater knowledge around threatened species management.

In the case of the Australian Botanic Gardens, one of the strategies for managing plants and their conservation into the future is the establishment of seed banks. We have been fortunate that the Australian Botanic Gardens has an extensive seed bank, and some 80-plus per cent of ACT's plants, in a seed bank sense, are stored at the Botanic Gardens. That is unique in any jurisdiction, to have that level of security around our species.

Could I also add to that that we have a comprehensive conservation environmental monitoring program, particularly in our grasslands and woodlands areas, and that program, as Margaret has highlighted, helped us understand where these values are and what we need to improve and enhance those values. Things like weed control, grazing management, burning are all led through a science and an adaptive management process. What are we trying to achieve? What is our objective? Undertaking those actions and then monitoring to see whether we have an increase or a change in that space.

You also asked the question about why biodiversity or those particular plants are important. Those particular plants or those threatened species are, in some ways, the canaries in the mine. They are the indicators that this landscape has been under threat. Grasslands, we know, at a national level, have declined substantially. We are dealing with what remains of a once large ecosystem. It is now quite contained, and the ACT is in a unique space to be one of the national leaders in the conservation of grassy woodlands and grasslands.

Those plant species or those animal species form an integral part of ecosystem function, and understanding how they behave and react means that biodiversity on a much larger scale benefits. Our actions to protect and enhance those particular species have a much broader flow-on effect to other species who have a similar ecosystem niche or ecosystem requirement.

THE CHAIR: Are the 36 species that Dr Kitchin made reference to located in the grasslands, or are the majority of those located in the grasslands?

Dr Kitchin: No. That is a range of species. There are birds in woodlands. That includes fish, the crayfish, as well as our alpine northern corroboree frog. It is quite a range of species, yes.

MR MILLIGAN: I have a question in relation to the relocation of the Aboriginal cultural tree that was relocated back in May of this year from the Outward Bound property. It was relocated to Namadgi. What consultation was undertaken with regard to the relocation of this Aboriginal cultural tree?

Mr Walker: We worked extensively with the traditional custodians and the RAOs around the translocation of that tree to Namadgi. We worked hand in glove on that. That was led by our heritage team, our Parks and Conservation team, and our Murrumbung rangers to undertake that relocation.

MR MILLIGAN: You said that you consulted with the local Aboriginal community. Was that with particular families, was it through the elected body or was it directly with the community itself?

Mr Walker: There was engagement directly with the traditional custodians. Likewise in the discussions, as Mr Ponton indicated, we meet regularly with Jacob Keed on the elected body. We have a range of different levels of consultation associated with these activities. We certainly had representation on site at the process of relocating the tree.

MR MILLIGAN: Did the elected body take any part in the consultation? Did they take it to the community?

Mr Walker: I have to take that on notice as to whether—how the elected body was involved but recognising Jacob's involvement as a representative there—Jacob was part of that consultation process.

MR MILLIGAN: What was the cost associated with this relocation?

Mr Walker: I will take that on notice. As you would appreciate, relocating a tree, a scar tree, is a significant activity. There was a lot of work done by an archaeologist in how to lift effectively a dead tree from the ground on to the back of a truck and take it to Namadgi where it was then placed back down into a designated area. I think the costs are relative. I think the importance here is how we ensure the protections of culturally significant sites. The fact that it was relocated to that particular property means that we have now placed it in a space where the traditional custodians can both respect and celebrate that particular tree. It looks like Fiona is going to add some more

to that.

Ms Moore: I know the figure. It is \$76,000.

MR MILLIGAN: I go back to the traditional custodians that you consulted with. We have a number of different families here coming from different mobs. Did you consult with both the families, was it just the Ngunnawal Elders Council, was it with the House family or with the Bows family? When you say “traditional custodians,” who was it that you consulted with?

Mr Walker: As to the specific details to the level of whether it was the Bows or the Houses, unless you are able to assist with that, Fiona, I am happy to take that on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay.

Mr Walker: But I can assure you that there were direct conversations and consultations with a number of parties, including the elected body, including from the representative Aboriginal organisations. Whether it was the Houses or the Bows, or both, I would have to clarify.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you.

MS LEE: I have a few questions on some of the government contracts. The sixth entry on page 237 makes reference to veterinary services in Tidbinbilla for \$140,000 from 8 March to 19 March. How was that service selected? What was the need for that particular item if there is a permanent vet centre at Stromlo Veterinary Services?

Mr Walker: Yes, we have permanent vets within EPSDD, including the chief vet. The services that are provided at Tidbinbilla relate primarily to health checks of threatened species. There are routine health checks that are undertaken. The resources there would relate to additional needs where the services were not available at a particular time and/or where threatened species programs dictate a requirement to undertake additional work. To give you the specifics, again, I will take that on notice and come back with some specifics.

MS LEE: Thank you. How was the contractor selected? It refers to quotations. How many quotations would you have received?

Mr Walker: I will take that on notice, thank you.

MS LEE: Thank you. I go down to the next line item, Aboriginal and heritage consultation at Tidbinbilla. That one is a select. It is exempt from quotation. Can you explain why that was exempt from quotation?

Ms Le: I go back to that previous question in terms of the quotation. I can answer that. Obviously, we go out and get quotations from several suppliers and we do a cost analysis to make sure that that is the best provider for the service.

MS LEE: Do you know how many for that particular line item?

Ms Le: Sorry?

MS LEE: You do know how many quotations you received for that particular line item?

Ms Le: I can take that on notice.

MS LEE: Yes, sure.

Ms Le: Usually, we go out to at least three, but I can check that for you.

MS LEE: That is the usual practice?

Ms Le: Correct.

MS LEE: The question I have is: why was there an exemption for the Aboriginal and heritage consultation at Tidbinbilla contract?

Ms Le: Could you please point out which page is was on?

MS LEE: It is page 137, line item 7.

Ms Le: Where you asked that question, that was a select contract.

MS LEE: That one says that it was exempt from quotation. I am wondering about the reason.

Ms Le: Select for us is where for certain contracts we do not go out to quotation because, for example, of specialised skills or something we need in the directorate to perform our function. So we just go straight out to select the provider.

MS LEE: What was the specific in this specific instance?

Ms Le: That would be specialising, but I might have to take that on notice. It is a bit recent, but it would be in terms of there being requirement needs for that that we had to go specifically to that vendor.

MS LEE: Yes, I understood you said that that might have been one of the instances. But I wanted to know for the specific item. That contract itself is for a period of six weeks at a cost of almost \$200,000. Can you explain what the nature of that consultation was? What was that contract for?

Mr Ponton: I suspect we will need to take that on notice as well.

MS LEE: Yes. Finally, can I have some detail on the contract, the work involved, for the final line item, road and trailside mechanical vegetation services?

Mr Ponton: Unless Mr Walker has the answer handy, I think we will take that on

notice also.

MS LEE: Yes.

Ms Le: Sorry, can I go back to that one that you asked about regarding page 237, the Aboriginal and heritage consultation in Tidbinbilla? There was an error in our financial statement. In total in our financial statement we listed 11 contracts that were what we call “select”. We go out to select. That is incorrect; for that one we did go out to quotation, sorry.

MS LEE: Is this one that I am referring to?

Ms Le: Yes, the one that you went to: Aboriginal and heritage consultation. We did go out to quotation for that one.

MS LEE: You did?

Ms Le: Yes.

MS LEE: Can you take that on notice: about how many quotations?

Ms Le: Yes, we can do that and provide the information.

MS LEE: Thank you. Ms Le, did you get that last one? It related to the detail of the road and trailside mechanical vegetation service contract.

Ms Le: Yes, I will take that on notice.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: I want to go to threatened species. Can I start with inhabitants of the Molonglo Valley, the superb parrot and the brown treecreeper. We talked earlier about the reserve plan of management; I am not asking about that because we have already been there. Is there any other work being done to ensure that they have a secure future?

Mr Ponton: I think we will go straight to Dr Kitchin.

Dr Kitchin: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

MS LE COUTEUR: What work is being done to ensure the future of the superb parrot and the brown treecreeper? I have already asked about the plan of management in Molonglo Valley. Is there anything else?

Dr Kitchin: I will focus on the superb parrot initially. The superb parrot is one of the commonwealth and ACT listed species. It is listed on the EPBC Act as well as the Nature Conservation Act; hence it is an offset species. We have had some funding out of offsets that we have targeted to doing some work with the superb parrots which is really looking at the population across Gungahlin and Molonglo and doing quite extensive surveys.

We have another fantastic young ecologist, Laura Rayner, who has been looking at occupancy of nests, the timing when the superb parrot comes into the ACT and the dynamic, when she can, of populations in relation to New South Wales. We seem to get fluxes of superb parrots in the ACT. It might be in relation to their source of habitat and food in the west of New South Wales. That is quite a focus of research, and we will keep doing that. It is a monitoring focus for us for the next couple of years.

Going to the brown treecreeper, there was a trial reintroduction of brown treecreepers into the Mulligans Flat woodland sanctuary a number of years ago. It was not successful in the longer term: they were not able to be detected two to three years after the translocation. We will not be pursuing any more translocations around that species, particularly in the short term.

MS LE COUTEUR: With the superb parrots, you are doing a lot of monitoring and research, which obviously provide really important background, but is there any actual conservation work being done at this stage?

Dr Kitchin: The conservation work around that species is about protecting its habitat, which has been negotiated in the Gungahlin strategic assessment. That was part of protecting some of those areas of the Throsby neck, part of the original planning in that strategic assessment. There is other conservation in situ happening. We are looking at nest design. There seems to be some evidence that with superb parrots, if they come late to the ACT, their nest occupancy means that they cannot get into some of the nests. Some of the research might be looking at improving nest occupancy so that at the sites where they nest we might be able to get more of the breeding pairs actually successful. That is really early days; we have to look at that. But we are trying to boost the numbers through some of those types of conservation measures.

MS LE COUTEUR: What about the golden sun moth and the earless dragon? I understand that Ginninderry may be particularly relevant to them.

Dr Kitchin: Going to the grassland earless dragon, was the grassland earless dragon the second one you mentioned?

MS LE COUTEUR: No: the golden sun moth and the earless dragon, the perennial species in the ACT when we are developing. And the pink-tailed worm-lizard.

MS LAWDER: Let us not forget the pink-tailed worm-lizard.

Dr Kitchin: I will start with the grassland earless dragon, just because it is a fantastic, iconic little species. This is a highly concerning species for the whole of Australia, because the numbers are very low. ACT is a real stronghold. It is in the Jerrabomberra grasslands, though, not in Molonglo. Were you more interested in the pink-tailed worm-lizard?

MS LE COUTEUR: I was basically interested in the threatened species in the ACT. I started at Molonglo, but now I am moving around.

Dr Kitchin: With the grassland earless dragon, we really are trying to look at the species in a number of ways. We are partnering with Victoria to look at whether we can get some more captive breeding going of grassland earless dragons, because they have specialist expertise down there. We are looking at improving our ex situ populations, and in situ we are looking at the condition of the grasslands and whether we can use burning to improve the habitat. I know it is quite dry out there at the moment, but we have had a problem of too much biomass in some of those grassland reserves. What we are doing now is looking at whether burning can reduce some of that biomass and hence improve habitat for grassland earless dragons.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are we getting more or fewer of that species in the ACT? Is it declining?

Dr Kitchin: It is very hard. Those grassland species are highly erratic in numbers; the numbers do go up and down. They dropped quite significantly three or four years ago. That was partly because of the long grass. But also detection rates can be difficult. They have gone slightly up in the past couple of years. It is the same with the corroboree frog: some years will have better detection rates than others. We think that the numbers are increasing for the grassland earless dragon, and certainly the annual surveys have been improving this year. We monitor that species every year to just make sure that we are very clear on what we want to do.

MS LE COUTEUR: And the golden sun moth, which I also mentioned?

Dr Kitchin: Again, we have been looking at how we can improve the translocation of the golden sun moth, whether we can get it into some of the sites. It is a bit of a cryptic species. We did find that it could grow in Chilean needle grass, which, as you are probably aware, is actually a weed, and not a weed that we really want. So the challenge we have with the golden sun moth is that it is in some of these areas where we actually have weeds. Again, we are just looking at the sites where it occurs and enhancing some of the sites. But we are finding more sites of the golden sun moth. It is not quite like the grassland earless dragon, where we have very few sites. We have more sites for the golden sun moth, and we are managing them where we can.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is Ginninderry going to impact on any of these or other threatened species?

Dr Kitchin: We are partnering with Ginninderry with the little eagle. The little eagle is one of our threatened species. It is actually listed as vulnerable for the ACT, but it is not listed nationally. Research is notoriously lacking in the area of raptors in general, even for the wedge-tailed eagle, which is quite a common species. We have partnered with Ginninderry, the ACT government, the Australian National University and CSIRO to put trackers on some of the little eagles. We had this amazing male a couple of years ago that actually took flight and ended up in the middle of the Northern Territory. That was a fantastic outcome.

That group—I say “we” because it really is a consortium, and actually it involves a lot of volunteers—just recently, last year, put a tracker on a female. She raced up north and has been hanging around south-east Queensland. Just a week ago, maybe a week and a half ago, she did a flight back down to Victoria. We are tracking her now and

she has gone down to Victoria.

Why I reflect on this is that the information that we have gained from some of that research, knowing that this ACT species is occurring over the whole of Australia, is just adding to our knowledge and the information that we have to manage our threatened species.

We are putting more trackers on that little eagle. It does occur out on the western side near Ginninderry, near Strathnairn and it does utilise those woodlands and grasslands. But, as we know now, it utilises a lot of the woodlands and grasslands across extensive areas of Australia.

THE CHAIR: Minister Gentleman and officials, thank you for your attendance this afternoon. We are asking that answers to questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. I would like to remind members that questions on notice should be lodged with the committee support office within five business days of the uncorrected proof transcript becoming available. Responses to questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five business days after the questions are received.

The committee adjourned at 4.59 pm.