



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2017-2018**

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2017-2018 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2017-2018](#))

**Members:**

**MR A WALL (Chair)**  
**MS B CODY (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR A COE**  
**MS C LE COUTEUR**  
**MR M PETTERSSON**

**PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 28 JUNE 2017**

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**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mrs N Kosseck (Ph 620 50435)**

**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**

<b>Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate .....</b>	<b>747</b>
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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.47 am.**

Appearances:

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment  
Auty, Professor Kate, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment  
Dickson, Ms Kirilly, Executive Officer

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate  
Tetley, Ms Melissa, Senior Manager, Strategic Finance, Finance and Operational Support

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to day nine of the public hearings for the Select Committee on Estimates 2017-2018. Today's proceedings will be examining the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate which specifically relate to budget statements E.

If you take any questions on notice, please state, "I will take that question on notice." It makes it easier to note in the minutes. Before we kick off, could you confirm that you are familiar with the pink privilege statement in front of you and are aware of its implications? Thank you. Professor Auty, I will hand over to you.

**Prof Auty:** Thanks for the invitation to be here, and thanks for the invitation to begin with an opening statement. There is an "opening" opening statement, and I will ask Melissa Tetley, who is a chartered accountant and senior finance manager with EPSDD, to give you an indication of an error that has occurred in the budget papers at page 16.

**Ms Tetley:** On page 16 of budget statements E we have, in table 14, "Total cost—payment for expenses on behalf of the territory". For the estimated outcome we have \$2,102,000 and in the 2017-18 budget it is shown as \$2,367,000. The numbers for the estimated outcome should be \$1,341,000 instead of \$2,102,000 and \$1,842,000 instead of \$2,367,000. I accidentally included the heritage and environmental grants in this number, which is also included in our EBT accounts, and that is not part of the commissioner's area.

**Prof Auty:** Thank you; if that could be noted. As an opening statement, I would like to acquaint the committee with the work that the office is currently undertaking. You are, of course, familiar with the act and the guidance that that gives us about functions. The office is currently working, as you would expect, on the state of the environment report, which is due in December 2019. The correspondence that needs to set that date has gone to the minister, and that date is now formalised. The state of the environment report will be a document that builds on the previous indicators, and it will be a document that also elaborates on environmental accounts more broadly.

The other work that the office is doing involves a number of ministerial-directed reports. These have now been formalised, and they include the implementation status review No 2. That is due on 30 September 2017, and we are tracking well on time in

respect of that. The direction in respect of that comes out of action 18 in AP2, and the terms of reference for that ISR were received from the minister on 27 February this year.

The other work that the office is currently engaging in involves the lower Cotter evaluation. You will be aware that this came to the office through recommendation 12 of the Auditor-General's report No 3 of 2015. The direction is to evaluate the restoration of the lower Cotter against the management goals of the reserve management plan, previously the strategic management plan. That report has a due date of 30 December 2018. We have scoped that project but we are putting together a steering committee in respect of that, and that will be done in due course.

Another of the ministerial-directed reports that we have received is in respect of Gungahlin, the strategic environmental assessment. This report will be completed by June 2018. We received the direction to undertake this report initially from commonwealth commitment 19 in the plan to engage a third party to undertake an independent audit of the plan's implementation. That was to do with the Gungahlin strategic assessment biodiversity plan. Subsequently, that has resulted in terms of reference which we have received from our minister. They were received finally on 20 June 2017.

It is important to note that this is one of the first of its kind, and it is one of the ways in which the office is building its strategic capacity and its expertise. What has flowed from that is an assessment of what is also happening in relation to strategic environmental assessments here in the ACT. We have in fact been asked to undertake a strategic environmental assessment on the Molonglo issue. That came through to us as a request, but at this stage we are waiting for the ministerial direction, pursuant to the legislation, to formally ask us to do that work.

The Gungahlin strategic assessment involves 38 commitments. The Molonglo strategic assessment involves 82 commitments. So you can see that the work is in fact escalating, and, pending the ministerial direction in relation to the Molonglo work, we will have formalised some expertise through the Gungahlin strategic environmental assessment and believe we will be very well placed to continue to do that work ongoing.

I am advised by my team that there are a couple of other potential strategic environmental assessments that might come to the office over time. This is just an anticipation. They involve the eastern broadacre strategic assessment and the Ginninderry strategic assessment. They are, of course, still under planning approvals. They are not imminent, but it is important to note that they may in fact come to us at some stage.

On the previous occasions on which I have appeared here, I have indicated that the office receives some additional funding in relation to these particular works. I can advise you that in relation to the ISR2 we received \$50,000 to assist us, from EPSDD. I can advise you that in relation to the Gungahlin strategic environmental assessment we received an additional \$20,000 to assist us with that, from the EPSDD. They are figures that are on top of the ordinary budget that you have just heard about from Ms Tetley, having seen the correction.

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I would like to take you through what we are doing apart from that. The state of the environment report is, of course, a major piece of work, and it is a piece of work that, as I have said, will come to fruition in December 2019. I have been asked in the past whether we have some involvement with the regions on this, because that has been one of the pieces of work that the office has done over time.

We recently fielded an inquiry from the Palerang-Queanbeyan council. We have had that initial discussion with them and have provided them with some input for a report that they are producing in November this year. Their state of the environment report, I am advised, will come in some time after that, but we are actively involved in conversations with them about how we can assist them with the work that we are doing, as we have in the past with the regional state of the environment reports. As recently as yesterday I spoke to some people at the catchment management meeting, and it seems that one of the Snowy councils will also want to speak to us about their state of the environment reporting efforts.

To undertake the environmental accounting that we are examining for the purposes of that state of the environment report, we have employed Dr David Summers as a casual employee. He is a geospatial expert, and at least half of the accounts that we are working on have spatial components that need to be analysed. Those environmental accounts, the ones that we have in train at the moment, are currently before a review panel that involves Carl Obst and Mark Eigenraam. Carl Obst is the person who did the work bringing together the United Nations environmental accounting, and Mark Eigenraam is a person with experience in this from the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment in the past.

The situation for us in respect of the implementation status review is that that is currently being put together by the office. In relation to the terms of reference that we received, we have taken on some consultants, Endeavour, to do the greenhouse gas auditing. They need to be accredited, and they are doing auditing under NGERs, which is the national greenhouse and energy reporting requirement, and under NCOS. They are also accredited under that national carbon offset standard.

The other work that has gone into that has involved a very small piece of work from the Monash sustainability institute in respect of the performance audit. We have brought to that review a number of experts, including Dr Sophie Lewis, who is a DECRA, a discovery early career scholar from ANU on climate change; Dr Liz Hanna, who will be known to you from her work with health and climate change; Professor Ian Falconer; and Romilly Madew from the Green Building Council to provide us with some commentary about the ISR. We have also asked Catherine Townsend, who is the ACT chief architect, and she has provided us with some commentary as well.

The broad range of matters which we are considering in the implementation status review includes climate change in key sectors, which range from building and natural environment through to transport and emerging risks. We are having a look at some scope 3 questions for the purposes of that review.

The lower Cotter restoration management plan, as I said, is coming together, and we

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will be looking at what the steering committee brings to that. The steering committee will be an expert reference group and will cover a range of disciplines, including ecology, hydrology, ecological restoration assessment and fire ecology.

The office provided a comprehensive submission on the draft reserve management plan, which was in fact sought just recently, and we have had some ongoing conversations with the directorate about that. In fact, I am aware that our comments led to some changes in the draft management plan, and we have had some conversations about whether we should be thinking about how that management plan might be structured in the future. We were part of that conversation.

We have also, as I said, engaged with the review of the Gungahlin strategic assessment, and that is coming together. That will be a five-year turnover. That will require the office, over the next five years, the five years after that and the five years after that to be involved in continuing that assessment. That involved also some consultants, which we brought on as qualified environmental auditors. They are not skills that we have in the office, although I am trying to make sure that the office does develop those skills. The Molonglo strategic environmental assessment, as I said, is waiting for the ministerial direction.

With respect to complaints, we very recently received a complaint. The complaint is in relation to the little eagle and also in respect of the development application for the west Belconnen area. That was received as recently as last week, and we are beginning the investigation of that.

The other thing that the office has been very involved in is advocacy and community engagement. You will be aware, I think, that we have been quite active in trying to bring young professionals into our conversations so that we find a different sort of cohort for the work that we are doing. That has resulted in some work with the Fenner association, with the Bruce Hall sustainability table, and we have brought those young professionals in on discussions about biodiversity and digital technology. Also, Haig Park was one of the things that they came on board and discussed with us before we put in our Haig Park response.

The submissions that the office has been involved in putting in to the government have involved the west Greenway neighbourhood proposal—Anketell, Gartside, Kambah. We put in a submission in respect of Ginini Flats. We have also submitted on the pink-tailed worm-lizard draft action plan. The other submissions that we have made, as I said, have been on the lower Cotter catchment draft reserve management plan and the follow-up that came from that, and the Haig Park redevelopment and follow-up.

Amongst the conversations about Haig Park, I have been pleased to be able to assist by providing some links to some work that has come out of the future forests work that has been done in Victoria. I am aware that that work is circulating widely now. It is interesting, because while Victoria is not the ACT, the work that we have circulated talks about what trees you might want to plant for a two-degree future and what trees you might want to plant for a four-degree future. While we do not want to get alarmist about four degrees, it is certainly appropriate that we think about what the future will look like. That work is now circulating widely, as I understand it. We also responded

to the EEIS consultation on the PHT target, and in respect of the ACT native grassland conservation strategy and action plans.

Lastly, and I will stop now, before I come to answer any questions—and I am sorry to have taken your time up with all the work that we have been doing—we have also put in a response to the Conservation Council’s nomination on the loss of native hollow-bearing trees. We used for that a range of experts who we were aware of and cited them in the work that we have produced. I am happy to take questions. I am sorry to have taken so long to talk about what we are doing.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS LEE:** Thank you, commissioner, for that very comprehensive opening statement. I would like to ask a question about waste management. At page 468 of the state of the environment report you state that the resource recovery rate has stabilised at around 70 to 75 per cent since 2005-06, which is actually a little short of the ACT waste management strategy of more than 80 per cent. The report states:

Meeting this target and making progress towards a carbon-neutral waste sector will be difficult.

What strategies do you propose that the ACT needs to undertake to improve this percentage?

**Prof Auty:** Thank you for that question. I do not have with me today the officer who was involved in the preparation of the state of the environment report. She is having conversations about the review of the environmental accounts, and that is taking place in Victoria. Could I take that question on notice and we will respond to it? And could I ask you, so that we know what question we are explicitly responding to, to have that question framed in such a way that there can be no confusion about it?

**MS LEE:** No problem. I have a follow-up on that. The plastic bag ban came into effect in the ACT in 2011. I understand there have been a few reviews since then, but not since, from what I can see, 2014. What impact in the last three years has that had on our waste management strategy?

**Prof Auty:** Could I also take that question on notice, and, if it is explicit, we will respond to that as soon as we possibly can.

**MS LEE:** No worries. I have one final follow-up. I am not sure if you are familiar with the proposed waste to fuel plant at Hume, the Foy proposal. Did your office have any involvement at all in relation to an investigation, feedback or consultation?

**Prof Auty:** We did not. We did receive correspondence, and we received nothing subsequent to that, from a person who was already corresponding with the government on that matter. We do not have any explicit involvement with that and we have not had any ongoing complaints provided to us, or any complaints provided to us.

**MS LEE:** Thank you.



**MS LE COUTEUR:** Can I follow up on that? You said you did not have any explicit role. But do you provide advice of your own volition? I guess that is the word I am trying to find. You are not statutorily required to, clearly, but would it be normal practice for something like this, or something else that could be environmentally controversial, to be provided at the EIS or the DA stage?

**Prof Auty:** I cannot speak for previous commissioners about that. I can say that the correspondence we received was from a member of the public. We did not then involve ourselves in the processes. The correspondence was basically a copy of correspondence that had been provided to the minister. It is certainly the case that the commissioner can activate investigations, as you would be aware from the legislation. I have not done that in respect of this matter and I have not been invited to proffer or have not proffered advice in relation to that particular development. That is not to say that is not a role the office could adopt. We have not done it in this case.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** And you have not done it in the past, to your knowledge?

**Prof Auty:** Without speaking for other commissioners, I am not aware that we have done it in the past.

**MR PETTERSSON:** You mentioned the Gungahlin strategic assessment. I was wondering if you could tell me about the offset areas in the district.

**Ms Dickson:** What was your question?

**Prof Auty:** It was a question about the offsets. Can you be more explicit, Mr Pettersson?

**MR PETTERSSON:** Are you planning any new ones?

**Ms Dickson:** Our role in the Gungahlin strategic assessment is one of an independent audit function every five years. We are currently looking at commitments and the biodiversity plan and assessing whether they have been adequately addressed in those commitments as well as in terms of appropriate science and environmental expertise. We have been onsite and we understand the offsets involved. Those offsets have been agreed through the commonwealth planning approval process. Our role is to check that the commitments have been applied appropriately.

**Prof Auty:** In response to your question, we are not planning any additional offsets. We will be reporting on the strategic environmental assessment.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I have just learnt something new; thank you. Can you outline what the offset areas are in Gungahlin at the moment?

**Ms Dickson:** There are several of them. I would have to take that on notice. I am happy to get you those exact details, but I cannot recall them exactly off the top of my head.

**Prof Auty:** The question is to provide you with an outline of the offsets in Gungahlin?

**MR PETTERSON:** Thank you.

**Prof Auty:** We will make sure we get accurate information.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Talking about submissions again, did you provide a submission to the consultation on the eastern grey kangaroo controlled native species management plan earlier this year?

**Prof Auty:** No, we did not.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Do you generally have a policy of not providing submissions or did you provide any advice to the conservator on this?

**Prof Auty:** No, we did not. We do not have a policy on that. Generally speaking, I would be advised that there is a requirement for submissions by way of public submissions. We were not asked for a submission in respect of the management plan and we did not provide one. We did deal with a number of complaints that came through the office in respect of the eastern grey kangaroo over time. You would be familiar with the fact that Commissioner Bob Neil had held a watching brief in relation to some of those complaints.

When I arrived, I went through the material that was available to me, including the recent PhD from Brett Harlan and the material that had been expanded on in the administrative tribunal. I took the view that the complaints that we received about the eastern grey kangaroo in the past and the cull would not be the subject of ongoing investigation or a continuing watching brief. But we have not provided a submission to the management plan.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** And the reason it is no longer a watching brief or continuing investigation is?

**Prof Auty:** In looking at the legislation I took the view that I did not have a role as a watching brief and that it was incumbent upon me to deal with a complaint and arrive at a decision. That is what I have done. That does not preclude people formulating an ongoing complaint or a new complaint. The legislation is not clear on this point but it struck me, as a lawyer, that in interpreting what the legislation did in fact provide by way of guidance there really was not a role as a watching, open-ended brief and it needed to be the subject of a decision based on what was available to me at the time.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** And you did not provide advice to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna on this?

**Prof Auty:** We did not. I did not. We have got a lot of work on in the office. It is a small office and it is staffed by few people. To meet the ministerial reporting requirements that we are in fact already charged with is onerous and I note my team is working very hard to meet those requirements. To the extent that we were not asked to involve ourselves in it, I did not take the view that we ought to volunteer at that time.

**MR COE:** Commissioner, have you had any involvement with the development of

the Kinlyside nature reserve?

**Prof Auty:** No, I have not.

**MR COE:** What would your office's role be in the development of new nature reserves?

**Prof Auty:** Can I answer that in a couple of ways? I was recently invited to chair the reference group in relation to the proposed national park, as a non-voting chairperson, and that was my first meeting with the Kinlyside party, Mr Swan. That has been the involvement I have had in relation to national parks or nature reserves. I have not been invited to be involved in the Kinlyside work—and I probably should take this on notice—and I am not aware of other commissioners having been involved in those processes. But I will take that on notice and respond on whether other commissioners have.

**MR COE:** I am by no means an expert in this space. What would need to happen in order for a nature reserve to be established? Are you across any of that detail or should that be put to the minister later today?

**Prof Auty:** It is probably better put to the minister. Can I make this observation: Kinlyside is part of the Gungahlin strategic environmental assessment and we will be looking at that. I thank Ms Dickson for the observation about that.

**THE CHAIR:** That brings to a close the time we have with you, commissioner. There are four points for clarification. I will throw back to Ms Lee and she will clarify exactly what her two questions on notice were so that they are on the *Hansard* record. We can give you a note as well.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the questions that you took on notice, commissioner, page 468 of the state of the environment report refers to the resource recovery rate being stabilised now at between 70 and 75 per cent since 2005-06, which is short of the target of more than 80 per cent of the ACT waste management strategy. What strategy does the ACT government need to undertake to improve that figure?

The second question, which actually was a supplementary to that, was: what impact has the plastic bag ban had against that performance target, noting that there does not seem to be a review since 2014 that I could find?

**Prof Auty:** Thank you. Was there a question on notice from Mr Pettersson?

**MR PETERSSON:** Do not worry about it. That is fine.

**Prof Auty:** From Mr Coe?

**MR COE:** I do not think so, no.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, commissioner.

Appearances:

Gentleman, Mr Mick, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Ponton, Mr Ben, Director-General

Rake, Mr Gary, Deputy Director-General

Kefford, Mr Andrew, Head, Asbestos Response Taskforce

Phillips, Mr Brett, Executive Director, Planning Delivery Division

Iglesias, Mr Daniel, Director, ACT Parks and Conservation Service

O'Connell, Ms Jennifer, Manager, ACT Heritage

Kendall, Mr Matthew, Executive Manager, Catchment Management and Water Policy

Sibley, Mr Jon, Director, Energy and Waste Policy

Bygrave, Mr Stephen, Executive Director, Sustainability and Climate Change

Malouf, Ms Ros, Senior Manager, Sustainability Programs

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Peffer, Mr Dave, Deputy Director-General, Access Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** We now welcome the Minister for Planning and Land Management. In this session we will be looking at output class 1.1. Could everyone acknowledge that they are familiar with the pink privilege statement that is in front of them and are aware of its implications?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Minister, I will throw to you for an opening statement.

**Mr Gentleman:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman and committee members, for the opportunity this morning to discuss with this committee the work that the ACT government is doing to grow a vibrant and livable city in the planning space. Our budget places an emphasis on building a better city through high-quality planning, and the asbestos task force continues to contribute to the improvement of our city as well. The 2017-18 ACT budget delivers on the government's commitment to make Canberra an even better city. The budget establishes the new City Renewal Authority to breathe new life into the CBD and Dickson, support the development of new buildings and public spaces around Northbourne Avenue and create a lakeside precinct in West Basin.

At the same time as the City Renewal Authority delivers a better CBD, the new Suburban Land Agency will release land in new greenfield residential estates and provide renewal in our existing suburbs. The new agency, under the governance of a board, will have a strong focus on affordable housing. To support the establishment of these two new entities, the budget invests more than \$3.3 million over four years to employ additional staff in the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to provide stronger governance, financial and non-financial performance

advice to the Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority.

Canberra is expected to grow to 421,000 people by 2020, and half a million people by 2031. To ensure we grow as a compact, sustainable city, it is important to plan for our future transport needs as well. The ACT budget provides \$750,000 to undertake a comprehensive review of transport for Canberra to guide future transport planning, infrastructure and services. This work will support the development of a new policy to keep Canberra moving as the city grows.

Another important element of achieving our vision for Canberra as a healthy and vibrant city is to provide opportunities for people to lead more active lifestyles. While the concept of active living is already included in policy and planning decisions across the government, this year community feedback was invited on a proposal to include six active living principles in the Territory Plan.

The way we plan and design our city plays a major role in how much active living we undertake. A draft variation to the Territory Plan will ensure future developments consider these active living principles. Feedback on the proposed draft variation is currently being compiled by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development directorate, which I look forward to reviewing.

In 2016 I announced the wide-reaching improving the ACT building regulatory system program, which includes reforms ranging from improving the initial design and documentation of buildings to reducing post-occupancy problems and disputes. The ACT government has confirmed its commitment to fully implement the reform program over the next four years. Work started immediately, with the Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill passed last year.

As outlined in the budget, these reforms will be funded from a small temporary increase in the building levy. Every dollar in the levy increase will be directly invested in building reforms, including increased industry education, auditing and inspection. Investing in a relatively small amount over the next four years will build a firm foundation for the ACT's building regulatory system and will lead to lasting reform and reduce unnecessary costs to building owners and industry in the long term.

I would like to turn now to the work of the asbestos response task force, which continues to work safely and efficiently. 1,006 affected or eligible impacted home owners are participating in the loose-fill asbestos eradication scheme, and 28 home owners are opting not to be involved in the scheme. The demolition program continues to be rolled out well ahead of the original schedule. As of 21 June this year, 729 affected properties have been safely demolished by head contractors, working closely with licensed asbestos assessors and under the supervision of WorkSafe ACT.

The safety of workers, neighbours and the broader community remains a priority, with no significant safety incidences reported. There has also been steady progress with deregistration of remediated blocks, which can then be offered through the first right of refusal process to former home owners, or through the public sales program. These blocks have attracted strong interest from families, downsizers in particular, and builders looking to buy and build in established suburbs. As of 21 June this year, 346 blocks have sold through the first right of refusal and public sales process,

enabling the rebuilding of homes in communities to commence across Canberra.

Targeted assistance for affected and impacted home owners remains a major focus of the scheme. Assisting those still in the buyback phase, keeping former home owners and neighbours informed of demolitions, working closely with those looking to repurchase through the first right of refusal process and providing advice on assistance for those needing personal support remain key activities for the task force. As the work of the task force gradually winds down, case closures are commencing for affected home owners who have completed their involvement in the scheme. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I will be pleased to answer your questions.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, could you tell us about the new DA finder app?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, certainly. It is phase 2 of the DA app and it allows people to electronically look at applications that are of interest to them. If they are nearby or if they are of particular interest to them, they can go to the app, they can look at the details of the development application and at whether it might affect them. In turn, they can make comment through that process, too. They can go from the app through to the EPSDD website and make comment on a particular application.

**MR PETTERSSON:** What were the shortcomings with the previous app, such that you needed a new one?

**Mr Gentleman:** I do not know that there were shortcomings. We simply developed more opportunity and more access through the DA app finder in phase 2. You can broaden the reach of DAs, you can look at jurisdictions, for example, and then there is the reporting back from individuals as well.

**MR PETTERSSON:** When was it launched? It was a couple of days ago?

**Mr Gentleman:** Just the other week, yes.

**MR PETTERSSON:** When do you expect you will get some feedback on take-up, on numbers?

**Mr Ponton:** The app allows us to monitor the take-up of those people who are upgrading to the new version and also the interactions with our data. I would expect that we would want to give it a few weeks, Mr Pettersson, before we were able to provide any substantive data. We will certainly be monitoring the take-up over time.

**Mr Gentleman:** I think we had roughly 2,000 downloads of the first DA finder app, and we expect that, because of more information being available on this one, and because more DAs will come through as we progress, there will be more than that downloading the DA app phase 2.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Add one to the tally, because I am about to download it.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes.

**MS CODY:** I just have, Mr Gentleman. I have just downloaded the app.

**Mr Gentleman:** Good.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have not downloaded it.

**MS CHEYNE:** I have. I have been spending quite a bit of time on it during estimates hearings over the past few days.

**THE CHAIR:** You need to get out more!

**MS CHEYNE:** In preparation for today. Excuse me for the preamble, but something that we talked about in annual reports hearings was updating the website, particularly the storage of past development applications, which was quite difficult. Something that I think is quite pleasing about the app is that it has both live development applications and past development applications.

There is a development application that closed in April, and I do not think it has had a decision on it yet, for block 20 section 86, 7 Beissel Street in Belconnen. It is very helpful to see where it is, but if I go to “view plans online”, what comes up is “documents associated with this DA are not available”, because they are either out of date or there are no documents available to be notified.

I love the app, and I want to really love the app, but in terms of its utility, I think it is limited by that question of updating the website. I apologise for the long preamble. I hope that makes sense. My question is: is there money in the budget to update the website? I think Ms Ekelund said that it was quite an expensive endeavour to do so. With respect particularly to DAs that have only recently closed, there is not a decision and the community is still interested in where it is up to and what is planned; that is where the utility really is. I know this was a recommendation in our report on the annual reports hearings.

**Mr Ponton:** That is a really useful piece of information. With respect to the previous comments around the storage of DAs that have closed and that go back many years, that is certainly problematic. It should be quite reasonable for us to continue to have access to the plans that relate to DAs where the notification has closed but a decision has not yet been made. That is something that I will certainly talk to my team about to see what we can do there. That is really useful feedback; thank you.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You said storage for old DAs is problematic, but surely you do have storage for them?

**Mr Ponton:** We do, but it is—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** So it is only a question of working out how to link that storage to the public, surely?

**Mr Ponton:** That is the issue. You are absolutely right, Ms Le Couteur. With respect to the storage of our electronic document management system, we have that, but the storage capacity for the website is located in a different area, on a different server. It

is a case of working through that linking. Again, we are more than happy to look at what we can do there.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I would think for the older ones that maybe the solution involves a non-instantaneous response. If the DA was lodged some time ago, I think members of the public would be fairly happy and understanding if a request is put in and in some time frame—24 hours, 48 hours; whatever your time frame is—it is sent to them, rather than having everything immediately available on the website.

**Mr Ponton:** Sure. These are all things that I am more than happy to look into. As I said, it is really useful to get feedback. We do ask the community who are using the app to provide us with feedback, and we will look at opportunities to improve access.

**MR COE:** I have a supplementary. What are the requirements for keeping copies of plans available for public inspection?

**Mr Ponton:** I might refer that question to my colleague Mr Phillips. My understanding is that the documents remain on the public register; therefore, if a request is made to view those documents, they are publicly available. People do not need to go through the freedom of information process; they can simply ask for a copy of the documents that are on the public register. That would be for the period under the records management act that we need to keep our records. I might ask Mr Phillips, if I have got that wrong, to correct me.

**Mr Phillips:** The advice that Mr Ponton has given is, to the best of my knowledge, correct. The notices of decision and the documentation that supports a development application remain publicly available. It is just not publicly accessible when people want it. Normally, what happens is that when development applications close for public comment, they remain on the website for a short period of time and then they are removed and replaced by the next development application that comes in.

**MS CHEYNE:** If I rang the directorate and asked to see an old DA for, say, Altitude in Belconnen, would I have to physically walk into the directorate to see it in hard copy or could you email that to me?

**Mr Ponton:** We could email that to you.

**Mr Phillips:** We could email it, yes.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** While we are talking about DAs, are you able to give the committee any indication of what the processing time has been for DAs on the remediated Fluffy blocks, separate from the statistics that are in the budget statements? I had a number of concerns raised that the processing time on the DAs on those sites has been considerably longer than is normal.

**Mr Phillips:** Thanks for the question, Mr Wall. I can give you some advice that the number of public representations that we are getting from notification for Fluffy blocks in RZ1 zones has increased. We get more public responses on notification than



we do in other areas. That will increase the length of time we take, because we will need to consider the public notification. As to the average time for Fluffy blocks, I will take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Is there any aspect that is more complicated, other than the number of public submissions that have been received in relation to those applications?

**Mr Phillips:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Phillips:** We do work with developers, not only on Fluffy blocks but on all blocks in relation to dual occupancy in residential areas, to be able to appropriately fit what people want to do on blocks. That can involve a bit of toing and froing when somebody is wedded to a particular idea about what they want to fit on their block and then there are discussions around whether what they want to do complies with the Territory Plan and various things like that.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you able to give an indication of what the processing time is for amendments to DAs that have already been approved? When the amendment does not go through the building certifier but instead has to go back to ACTPLA, what is the processing time for those amendments? Say there is a change in a wall, a window needs to be moved or there is a height change.

**Mr Gentleman:** You raise a very important question, Mr Wall, with regard to some contentious developer applications. Sometimes, and we have talked about this, the directorate goes to work with the applicant where a DA, in its original form, may not fit in with the Territory Plan.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, just to clarify. It has been through the DA process, plans are stamped, construction has started, and something happens on site that requires a change to the building.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And it gets resubmitted as an amendment. What is that processing time?

**Mr Phillips:** There is no statutory time frame for those processes, and the time frame can vary, depending upon the complexity of the amendment. Some amendments that we see significantly change the nature of the development, and the authority decides that, in relation to those amendments, the developer should go through a notification process again. Others are simpler. The actual time frame will depend upon the nature of the amendment.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you satisfied with the performance in the time that it is currently taking to process applications? I note that the median processing time target is 30 working days, but the expected outcome for this financial year is 36, which means that in excess of half the DAs that are being submitted to the directorate are taking

over the target processing time.

**Mr Gentleman:** It is better if we can get it on target, of course, and that is what we are working to. This budget provides more funding for EPSD overall in its new capacity as well, with the two new agencies, so I expect that we will pick that performance up.

**THE CHAIR:** Is the target achievable, minister?

**Mr Ponton:** It certainly is, and in previous years, as I understand, we have met that. The nature of the development applications that we receive also can impact on that median processing time, if they are more complex or if there are a greater number of DAs for a particular year. As Mr Phillips said, if we receive more DAs that have community interest, that can start to have an impact on our median processing times. Certainly our target is 30. We believe that that is achievable. It has been achieved in the past. We will do our very best to get that back on track.

**Mr Phillips:** My understanding is that the time frame has also improved over the last three years.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. It is coming from a very low base.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes, but it has been—

**THE CHAIR:** It is still missing the mark.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, my question is about master plans and the master planning process. In the budget papers, on page 6 of budget statements E, in one of the sub-points, it talks about completing the master plan program for centres to provide direction for future change and growth, including sustainable design outcomes. How is it providing for growth when the process takes so long and so much can have changed in the ensuing time period?

We have seen some recent examples—for example, Curtin—of it taking quite a long time for the master plan. I have read recently about Pialligo. There was, I believe, a master plan five years ago, and now there is talk of doing another one. Nothing happened in the intervening period. I am basing that on something that was in the newspaper recently. There was a master plan for Tuggeranong town centre, but you announced a proposed or possible new suburb of Thompson, which was not in that master plan.

It is a question about what value master plans bring when they take such a long time, when what is in a master plan often never gets funded or achieved, and when the government can announce things that are completely outside that whole master plan consultation process.

**Mr Gentleman:** Master plans are a very important part of our planning process, of course. They do give us direction on future planning for the areas that are being

looked at. I will say that they do take some time, and that is because the community shows interest in them. While we might set a time frame for master planning in a particular area, once the community has input and sees the opportunity that it has to influence planning for the future, the time line does take longer. I encourage that. I think it is a great opportunity for the community to have their say and guide future direction for the area.

If you take the Tuggeranong one, for example, there was a great deal of community input into that. The idea for a possible new suburb happened after the master planning process. That occurs as well. We have ideas coming from the community and from business after the master planning process occurs. With regard to funding, certainly for the components that the government looks after, we look forward to funding those and getting those positions into place. But quite often, in the majority of cases for master plans, it is about business and the community coming on board to share that opportunity.

**MS LAWDER:** For example, that did not appear to take place at Curtin, where the business or the owner had quite a different view, as opposed to what the community said during the master planning process. Also, perhaps a lot of the consultation for some of these master plans took place, for example, before light rail was talked about for Woden. Emerging issues can have quite a big impact on what might take place in some of these centres, issues that were not discussed during the master plan process. How do you accommodate those issues?

**Mr Gentleman:** Again, with involvement from the community. I might just go to Mr Ponton to talk to you about how we set up the community panels and the work that occurs through those, through the master planning process.

**Mr Ponton:** Thank you, minister. Ms Lawder, in relation to some of the issues that you have raised, particularly around timing, the minister has quite rightly pointed out that, as we embark on a master plan process, we would like to complete these as quickly as we possibly can, but it is important that we make sure that all voices are heard.

In the case of Curtin, there was some very strong community response to the master planning process. That is certainly to be encouraged. As you have also pointed out, the majority landholder there had a different view from what the community wanted. We have looked at how we can make sure that we capture as many voices as possible and understand what is the best outcome for that site. The minister has very recently agreed to establish a community panel. We are in the process of settling the date for the first meeting of that panel and inviting people to participate on that panel. That, by its very nature, is going to slow down the process, but with a better outcome, we hope.

Certainly in terms of master planning—I am going to use Gungahlin as an example, where we are talking about a refresh—we are always looking at new and innovative ways in which to engage with the community to see if we can undertake our master planning processes differently, to make them more contemporary in terms of when we start the process to when we complete the process. We are ensuring that they are still relevant and we do not have, as has happened in the past, new people moving into the community and not necessarily agreeing with what a previous engagement process

has resulted in or resolved. We are very keen to look at ways that we can speed things up, but we do not want to lose the opportunity to capture as many voices as possible.

Picking up on the minister's earlier comment around investment, and the government's investment, it is important to note that master plans are not a plan for the government, necessarily. There are things that the government needs to invest in, and it needs to prioritise that investment in accordance with other priorities that the government has. But, importantly, a master plan is a framework to guide future investment, particularly by the private sector. It is a facilitator. It will identify opportunities for further development. We would hope and expect that the private sector will pick up those opportunities and not rely entirely on the government to implement the master plan.

**MS LAWDER:** I guess Curtin is an example of that. The majority landholder was keen to invest in that area, but, as we have said, it did not align with the community expectation at that time, a few years ago, when the consultation took place, which, as I reiterate, was prior to light rail expectations down that corridor. What do you see is the lifespan of a master plan?

**Mr Ponton:** It depends on the way the master plan is framed. Usually what we identify in a master planning process is short, medium and long term. The nature of the centre can depend on what short, medium and long term are. I would expect that the short term really should be 12 months, the medium three years and the longer term five to 10 years, but in some centres a master plan can last for longer, because it is going to take longer to get the investment that is required to achieve all of the outcomes in a master plan. It really depends on the particular circumstances of the centre.

**MS LAWDER:** What is your optimal time frame for completing a master plan?

**Mr Ponton:** I believe that, with proper engagement processes from start to finish, I would not want to see a master plan take any more than 12 months. I think that we can do it faster than that. I think that a really good process, an engaged process, within six months is possible. But, again, it really depends on the particular circumstances. With a small centre, it is quite easy to run a process in that time frame, but a larger centre, particularly a larger centre that has a lot of interest, could take longer.

I would be concerned if we could not reinvigorate our master planning processes to achieve master plans within a 12-month time frame. I acknowledge that there have been master plans in the past that have taken longer than that, but in the conversations that I have had with the minister, having taken up this role recently, the minister is quite keen for us to do a number of things. One is to ensure that we hear as many voices as possible in the process but also make sure that our processes are timely and relevant.

**MS LAWDER:** You mentioned some smaller centres, and one example of that is the Calwell master plan, and encouraging investment in that area. I know that many of the business owners in that area were keen to ensure, with the surrounding Calwell playing fields, connections and pathways, that work encouraging people from the playing fields to come to Calwell was included in that master planning. That was quite

strongly resisted by the directorate—to incorporate some of that larger planning into it. The business owners there thought there was a great opportunity to encourage greater usage of the shopping centre, which in turn encourages greater investment in the area. I think there are potentially some other areas where the master plan focuses on a particular space without considering the connections to the wider area.

**Mr Gentleman:** In relation to Calwell, we took on board the comments from business owners at the shopping centre, but you have to have some sort of geographical border as well. Indeed, in relation to the comments brought from the shopping centre and other business owners there, we have made some other announcements about sporting field upgrades, parking and that sort of thing around the Calwell playing fields. I noticed that you were there just the other day for the netball challenge.

**MS LAWDER:** As were you.

**Mr Gentleman:** That was fantastic. I was not dressed as elegantly as you, Ms Lawder, but it was a fun day. So we certainly do. While we do have to have that geographical border sometimes, we try to take in as much of the comment as we can.

**MS CODY:** Ms Lawder was talking a lot about the Curtin master plan. Where are we up to with that? Obviously I have a keen interest.

**Mr Ponton:** The minister has very recently, only in the last few days, agreed to establish a community panel, and we are currently in the process of establishing the date for the first meeting of that panel and to seek interest from people to participate. I will ask my colleague Mr Rake, who will be chairing those panel meetings, to talk a bit more about where we are at and what we hope to get out of that exercise.

**Mr Rake:** The aim of the panel will be to in one cohesive process reconcile the development aspirations of the building owner and the community's vision for their centre. The aim is that at the end of the community panel process we will have an agreed form of master plan that we can take forward into a Territory Plan variation, if necessary, that will enable investment in the centre and renewal of the centre and that the property owner will have a DA that he could submit and know that it is compliant with the master plan and the future Territory Plan, if it is to change as a result of that.

To get to that space we need to make sure we have all of the voices and all of the perspectives at the table really quickly. The challenge will be to draw out from the property owners, the community and other interested organisational stakeholders their aspirations for the area and to ask them not to presume a particular outcome as the only way to fulfil their aspiration.

We will be asking the building owner to keep an open mind about the form of development that will be economically viable for him. That is a very important part of the process. We need businesses to be financially viable. We would also like the community to keep an open mind about the form of development adjacent to public spaces that could complement and enhance and certainly not denigrate a public space but to not presume that particular heights or particular built footprints will or will not have a positive impact.

Working through the process, in the first meeting we are aiming to draw out as many questions as we can. If I were to simply explain the aim of the panel, it is to make sure that all of the right questions are asked, that all of the right voices are heard, that all of those questions are answered, and that all of those answers are robust. If we can get to that point I think we will be in a positive space.

I have had introductory discussions with property owners and with representatives of the community. I believe they are all going to come into this process in very good faith. They have given me personal commitments that they will come ready to find solutions. We are looking forward to getting into that process and hopefully drawing it to a close within a pretty reasonable time frame. This is not something we want to drag out for months and months; nobody is interested in that.

Noting that we are in this space because views were presented in the public domain after a master plan process closed, it is really important that this time we get all of the views. I have been knocking on the doors of other property owners in the area and saying, "If you have a view, now is the time to bring it forward." We need to have one discussion that draws out all of the issues.

**MS CODY:** So any other people in the area contemplating new developments would also come through that process?

**Mr Rake:** Yes. There are a couple of major property owners at the Curtin shops. We are reaching out to each of them and saying, "If you've been thinking about the future of your property and the contribution it can make to having a great local centre at Curtin, now is the time to draw this out; now is the time to come to the table. We will make a space in the community panel." I would rather that the community were able to look at at least a medium-term redevelopment plan and say, "I understand that might change. What does that mean for the space in between? What does that mean for the overall feel of the centre?"

**MS LEE:** Minister, is there a master plan for the Dickson block 25 section 72? What are the government's plans or intentions for that area?

**Mr Gentleman:** We have been looking at block 72 for some time now. The planning process is looking at whether we can do some community facility work in Dickson. I will go to Mr Rake for the details on Dickson; he is the expert in that area.

**Mr Rake:** Thank you for the question, Ms Lee. Section 72 is an area that the community has a really strong interest in. Through discussions with our new director-general and the minister, there is an opportunity for us to think about a new way of engaging with the community there. The North Canberra Community Council are very keen to take community leadership in the discussion, and that is something we have just started exploring. I think there is potential for us to look at new models and to have a space where residents are engaged in the conversation about the way an area might change rather than a discussion about the way an area might not change. It is very, very early days, but it could be an exciting development for the discussion around renewal of our city.

**MS LEE:** There are also other groups, like residents action groups, that have a keen

interest in what happens to that area. Is the government committed to engaging and consulting with those groups—the Downer residents and the Dickson residents?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, certainly, and we do it on a regular basis. In fact, Mr Rake meets with them more than anybody else.

**Mr Rake:** Well, it is a great way to find out what people are thinking about their city. We do not sit in the planning function planning for our own sake; we are thinking about how to make the city better for residents. For us to sit and have discussions with people about their home area is the best way to understand the challenges and opportunities ahead of us. So we engage formally and informally. Our doors are very, very open.

In the sort of process we would use for section 72 there is an opportunity for the peak body, the North Canberra Community Council, to draw in both resident and user stakeholder groups. Some of the sporting clubs and community groups will have slightly different takes on the opportunities than residents. We want the community to help us have the discussion about different perspectives and reconcile ambitions and challenges. The idea that people might fight for change rather than against change is a really exciting prospect. We have some very willing voices in the north Canberra community and we are keen to help enable them to lead that discussion.

**MS LEE:** In terms of that area, there has been talk about Common Ground 2 going in there? Where is that up to in discussions?

**Mr Rake:** I would have to take that question on notice to get a precise progress report.

**MS LAWDER:** You mentioned Downer residents and Dickson residents. I think Ms Lee was referring to some groups who may not be part of the North Canberra Community Council—not just the residents but the action groups or the residents groups. Is that who you are talking with?

**Mr Rake:** Yes. I also had a meeting with some from Watson. They are very tightly focused groups, sometimes on particular parts of their suburb and not even their whole suburb.

**MS LEE:** Dickson and Downer were not exclusive groups.

**Mr Rake:** No.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Is there any funding for more master plans?

**Mr Gentleman:** Not directly in that sense, but more funding for EPSD means we can allocate more staff to those resources if they are needed.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** So there are no direct funds. I have heard a few times that master plans are all over; we have done them and we are not doing any more. You are saying that that is not the case and that there will be ongoing master plans?

**Mr Ponton:** Within the broader function of the directorate. We do not have a master

plan program. Previously we had a program that was funded that identified a series of centres. In terms of the priority areas, we believe we have completed the master plans that need to be done. But, as the minister said, we have resources that allow us to plan for the city, whatever form that may take. If the government were to decide that a particular centre needed a master plan then certainly we would undertake that work within our existing resources. But, as I said earlier, we are also looking at new and innovative ways to undertake these processes, so it will not be the same way we have always done it.

**Mr Gentleman:** In terms of consultation with the community we are looking at better opportunities to reach more deeply into the community about planning for the future. We have tended to deal with particular groups in the past, so community councils directly. But we want to go broader than that and touch base with people of all different demographics as we go forward, planning for the future, particularly younger people because they are the people who will be living and working in the city in the future. It is important that we broaden the opportunity to consult with a broad base of the community.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Specifically for Curtin, are you going past the square as far as the hotel and the church and the block of land which the Uniting Church or the Anglicans own—I cannot remember which one it is—on the other side? I am sure you know which block I mean even if I am not sure which religious group owns it. Are you broadening out that far and not just within the square?

**Mr Rake:** Yes, we are. We are working to the original study area for the master plan, so it will include the hotel site in particular. Certainly the catalyst for this discussion is the development immediately adjacent to the square, but in the spirit of making sure we have one group discussion that enables the master plan to come to a close, the Territory Plan variation and certainty for property owners and residents, we are looking at the original study footprint.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You said you were trying to have everything on the table. In that spirit, I appreciate it is private ownership, but have you suggested that not evicting the tenants would be conducive to having everything on the table? I guess you probably cannot comment on that, but that certainly is an issue.

**Mr Gentleman:** Discussions of that sense might have taken place, Ms Le Couteur.

**Mr Rake:** There is a point at which the planning system ceases to exert control, and commercial decisions for property owners are for them.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My substantive question will deal more with that. Finally, you used the phrase “master plan” just for section 72. Are you looking at—maybe “master plan” is not the word—planning exercises for smaller areas like the suburban shopping centres? In my electorate there are a number of shopping centres which very strongly feel they want a nice playground. Everyone wants Chifley’s playground basically; that seems to be universal in south Canberra.

**Mr Gentleman:** That was a great success, yes.



**MS LE COUTEUR:** It is a great playground; I have to totally agree with everyone. I can understand everyone's ambitions, but my question is: you have done the group centres; are you going to be moving down to a planning process, be it called master plans or whatever, for smaller local areas such as section 72 or such as local shops?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, certainly we will be looking at those opportunities as we go forward, particularly with urban renewal being more focused in the directorate. As you would be aware, during the statement of planning intent workshops the community said to us they would like to see a greater emphasis on urban renewal and densification rather than greenfields development. They would like our policy to shift from fifty-fifty to 60 per cent urban renewal and only 40 per cent greenfields development. We have not changed policy at this stage, but we are certainly thinking about the comments made. With that, of course, there will be increased interest in what we do in the urban setting.

**MR COE:** I have a supplementary on section 72. What is actually up for grabs in section 72 in terms of the master planning there? If it has to stay as CFZ, other than a precinct plan within the CFZ, what else could you be doing there?

**Mr Gentleman:** We did not raise the issue of master planning for section 72. That was a question to the directorate. I will go to Mr Rake again, as the expert on Dickson.

**Mr Rake:** I must emphasise that we are in very early discussions, but the views I am hearing from the community are that the community does not like the idea of section 72 sitting barren and uncertain either and that there is an appetite in the community to lead a discussion with the people about the future of that area. The scope for change will be driven by that discussion, so it may well be that uses in addition to community can exist in that place. We would need to hear that from the community, but we certainly are not aspiring to dive in and change something there.

**MR COE:** The government has already said that the current zoning will remain, which will ensure that the existing community facilities on section 72 are not affected. If section 72 is staying as CFZ, that certainly does frame the discussion that you are having, and it pretty much means the only residential that can happen in that space is a social housing form—nothing else.

**Mr Rake:** There are a broad range of uses available within the community facility—

**MR COE:** That is right, but the only residential that is permitted under CFZ is social housing.

**Mr Gentleman:** I do not think the community has raised that discussion point.

**MR COE:** What do you mean—they have not raised that discussion point?

**Mr Gentleman:** Of having social housing in 72, apart from—

**MR COE:** No, I am saying that, if it is staying as CFZ, there are no other residential purposes. In terms of enlivening this area, if that enlivening included residential, that would not be possible.

**Mr Rake:** I am not sure where the presumption that it is about enlivening the area came from. Place making can mean a number of things. The first thing that we want to hear is—

**MR COE:** It says, “Neglected spaces will become active and vibrant and public safety and connections across the site improved.”

**Mr Rake:** Yes, active and vibrant. The discussion that we are entering into is one that the community has opened with us, and they must have some ideas about things that they think would be valuable. We have not yet moved into those discussions.

**MR COE:** It was actually the government that opened this some time ago, when the government sprung a surprise on them. Ms Le Couteur was on the TV news on this very issue, saying, “We were shocked and we got misled.”

**Mr Rake:** The information I have just given you is about a far more recent approach from the community, to try to talk about a positive next step in the area.

**Mr Ponton:** That stems from me being appointed to the role of chief planning executive and the conversations that I have had with the planning minister about his desire for us to think about new ways of engaging. You would have heard me talk about this in previous sessions and publicly. I know that some of you have been to some events where I have talked about this. The minister has made it very clear that we need to think about new ways of engaging. Mr Rake has, to his credit, reached out to the community to explore what that new way might be for Dickson and the broader community—landowners, residents and industry. It is a really positive step, in my view.

**MR COE:** What are the plans for the CFMEU site, or the Tradies site?

**Mr Ponton:** Again, as Mr Rake said, Mr Coe, we are in very early discussions to frame what this essentially community panel might look at and what the sites may result in.

**MR COE:** Did the planning directorate have a view on what to do with this site prior to the government acquiring the site? It is a funny time to buy a site and now to be going through a planning process.

**Mr Ponton:** As I said, it is early days in the new way of undertaking engagement with the community. We are quite excited about the opportunity to frame this up with the Dickson community.

**MR COE:** I understand that is the process you are going through, but what were the plans for this area at the time of acquisition?

**Mr Ponton:** It would be disingenuous, given that we have just made it very clear that we want to move into this process, this new way of engaging with the community, to have a preconceived view on what the site—

**MR COE:** But you must have a preconceived view; otherwise the government would not have bought the site.

**Mr Ponton:** From a planning perspective, we want to work very closely with the community, and the minister has made it abundantly clear to us that we need to rethink the way that we engage.

**MR COE:** So if there is no preconceived view, why was the site acquired?

**Mr Ponton:** That would be a matter for our colleagues in economic development.

**Mr Gentleman:** We will take that question on notice and I will get a response from our colleagues in—

**MR COE:** Great; thanks, minister.

**THE CHAIR:** It being just after 11 o'clock, the committee will adjourn for 15 minutes for a morning tea break. Minister, before we do so, a number of members of the committee want to ask further questions on this output class. When we come back from the break, is it possible to have questions for output class 1.1, which is planning delivery, as well as output class 1.2, planning policy?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes.

#### **Hearing suspended from 11.02 to 11.17 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back to the second session. We will continue taking questions for output class 1.1, planning delivery, up until 12.15 pm, before we move to the asbestos coordinator-general functions. We will also take questions on output class 1.2, planning policy, including parking policy. Minister, before we kick off, I seek some clarification. There was a bit of uncertainty about what the intent of section 72 in Dickson was. Is residential use still a consideration for that section?

**Mr Gentleman:** No, we said earlier that it was not; so in the sense of residential use, it is a community facility zone.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Rake:** There is also some commercial zoning there. There is CZ6, accommodation and leisure, but that is commercial accommodation. But I would like to emphasise again that we have had a request from the community to talk about a process that the community could lead. I think it is important for us to leave space for the community to help us shape that vision. We are not going in pressing for particular outcomes or changes. We will talk about government policy objectives but the community will help us shape a view for the future.

**THE CHAIR:** So there is not a desire to have residential use as the outcome?

**Mr Rake:** That is not our ambition. That is not—

**THE CHAIR:** The intention is to see community use?

**Mr Rake:** Our intention is to go in and have a discussion with the community and that—

**Mr Gentleman:** This is the process that I have outlined to the directorate, that in future planning for Canberra we must engage with the community, understand their views and work with them on what they would like to see for the future. That is why we are changing that engagement policy to involve all demographics in the Canberra region.

**THE CHAIR:** As I say, there is some significant concern that it will just simply be unit-type accommodation and that there will be a missed opportunity for the community. So unequivocally that is not the intent?

**MS CHEYNE:** My questions are about DAs, everyone's favourite topic. In respect of DA processes, I know that the minister has previously talked about improvements in signage and also the DA finder app. I am interested in any other initiatives being explored. I guess where my question is coming from is that with the DA finder app one of the best things about it is that you can physically see where it is and it is not just, for example, section 2, block 200.

I was wondering whether there were any improvements underway with notification letters—for example, “Here is the actual block we are talking about,” on a Google map, drawn from the DA finder app. Other examples include, I think, New South Wales and countries around the world. In respect of vacant land, they have to map out with sticks or something how high a development is going to be. I was wondering whether there are any other initiatives underway in those areas.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, there certainly are. We have listened to the community about development applications and how we communicate and engage with the community on those. As you said, the now updated DA app is a great way of doing that. We have also changed the way we do some of the signage for DAs as well on the site itself. Of course, Canberrans are very visual people, so we are trying to look at drawings and that sort of thing to explain to people what is occurring. Writing to neighbouring properties has been successful at some level, but quite often people say, “I did not get that in the mail.” So we need to ensure that we are able to spread that communication. Mr Ponton has some more detail for you on that as well.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you.

**Mr Ponton:** Thank you, minister. Ms Cheyne, one of the key things that I hear in this role and that I heard in previous roles, when I was with the Planning and Land Authority and the previous directorate, is that it is the pre-DA consultation that citizens are most concerned about. By the time we get to a letter being sent from the directorate to a next-door neighbour, I think the opportunity to really influence substantive change in terms of the developers' or the proponents' mind is probably past.

We are very keen to ensure that there is greater pre-DA consultation. I was not quite

ready to make any broad statements but I will since we are here. I did just check with the minister that I could do this. The Planning and Development Act does provide for the chief planning executive to prepare pre-DA consultation guidelines for certain types of development. There are currently no such guidelines, and we do rely very much on the developers. Whilst there is a requirement for them to engage, we rely on them to determine the best way to ensure that a broad cross-section of the community has been engaged.

Again, I hark back to what I was saying earlier about being new in this role and the minister making abundantly clear to me his expectations of a new way of engaging with the community. I have made public statements—many of you have been at those sessions—where I have talked about the need to be sure that we have a citizen focus in the work that we do. I am working with the minister with a view to release for consultation very soon some draft consultation guidelines for pre-DA engagement. That will specify to proponents exactly what they need to do and demonstrate to the Planning and Land Authority and, for that matter, to the broader community what they have done and the number of voices and diversities they have achieved in their engagement activities.

I am quite excited that we will be in that position fairly soon, once I have a number of further conversations with the minister in relation to the detail of that. But I think it is a demonstration of the overall commitment that I made in my first few days in this role and responding to the very clear direction and expectation of the minister about, as I said, a new way of doing things.

**Mr Gentleman:** I should mention, too, the most recent meeting with our Planning and Construction Industry Chief Minister's Reference Group—PCICRG, we call it. It is a great acronym, isn't it?

**MS CHEYNE:** It is. Say it again.

**Mr Gentleman:** I advised all the players, stakeholders, there in the room that we really do want to engage better at the pre-DA consultation process but also with industry to talk to the community about what they want to do first. Rather than just putting it out there and asking government to then defend the application, which sometimes seems to be what occurs, we want to talk to the community, understand what the community wants and bring them on board first. I think it will be much better for everybody if that occurs.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you. That is very interesting and I am keen to see that, when it is at the stage that it is able to be released. I have to say that sometimes when I have gone through a DA and have seen what consultation has occurred with the community—people who have been engaged with and what people write—it is very interesting.

**Mr Ponton:** Can I jump in there, Ms Cheyne, and say that where we are heading with this is to make it clear that if you engage early enough in what we are expecting proponents to do it becomes real engagement, as opposed to, at the later stage, being consultation and notification. I think there is a significant difference in those terms. If we get in early before one has too many preconceived ideas about what they want for

the site, it may be that they can actually still make the return they are looking for but accommodate much of what the community is also expecting for a particular site. We are quite encouraged by this turn of events in terms of what we hope to announce fairly soon.

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, thank you. Going back to my question, I am particularly interested in the DA notification letter. I certainly take on board all of your points about the pre-DA process being probably the most critical process. But I guess I am thinking of neighbours, people who are not really across developments, if they suddenly have one appearing next to them and they get this. I have received quite a few of these letters recently due to some development happening in the town centre. The letters are kind of intimidating, even for me, and have a lot of reference numbers and things that I think people cannot immediately relate to. They cannot relate to the property that is being spoken about. Is there anything underway to improve those letters?

**Mr Ponton:** There is nothing that I am aware of that is specifically underway, but, having heard that feedback, what I will commit to is to talk with my colleagues in Access Canberra who manage that function for the directorate and look at ways of addressing it. Certainly, there are some legal requirements in the legislation in terms of what information we need to provide to people when we notify of a development application. But what I am hearing is that it is perhaps a bit bureaucratic and legalistic, that we can still get that information and deliver it in a way that is much more easily consumed.

**MS CHEYNE:** Even if you had an attachment that had a picture of the block.

**Mr Ponton:** This is what I am thinking. Certainly, I will talk to my colleagues in Access Canberra and see what we can do. I had not actually got to that level in my own thinking, but going back to my earlier comments with respect to the minister's expectation about a new way of engaging, that is certainly part of it. We need to make sure that our information is accessible to as many people as possible. If people are getting a two-page letter that is full of words and numbers and, as you said, quite daunting—

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes.

**Mr Ponton:** The other risk is that people may not actually think it is something they need to read because it is so long; so let us try to capture their attention early on in the correspondence.

**MS CHEYNE:** I think that is why we are getting that feedback. I have had it as well in reference to the Republic development. People I know have received letters. They open them and think, "It's not a fine or a bill; I do not have to do anything with it."

**Mr Gentleman:** We do not want to change that either, by the way.

**MS CHEYNE:** Indeed, but it is just not computing in their minds. Thank you. That is very helpful.

**Mr Gentleman:** We are looking at the opportunities in new technology as well. Whilst we talk about the application of the DA finder app, I have had a look at an application, LIDAR technology, where it does a three-dimensional picture of what is in place at the moment and what can occur.

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, right.

**Mr Gentleman:** You get a much more representative opportunity to look at what can occur on a particular site. It is quite detailed. You can actually look at a street view, for example, Northbourne Avenue. You can fly down Northbourne Avenue, look at the buildings as they are now and the vegetation, the trees as well, and see what can be done within—

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, not quite so many as there used to be.

**THE CHAIR:** There are not many there now.

**Mr Gentleman:** There are not many left, no. Within the scope of the planning regulations you can see what can be built there too.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you. Relating to DAs, I know that you have quite a few accountability indicators under output 1.1 in terms of processing time and things like that. There have been two developments that I am aware of particularly, again in the Belconnen town centre, that I understand had quite a lot of public feedback or where representations have been made. I am interested to know if, for example, five people make a representation how much that impacts your time frames? If it is 50, is that then multiplied by a factor of X, or if it is 1,000 does that have a real impact? How much do things really blow out for you guys?

**Mr Ponton:** It certainly can have an impact, Ms Cheyne, but it does depend on the nature of the submissions. If we were to receive 1,000 submissions but they were all form letters, then certainly—

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes, or a petition?

**Mr Ponton:** Or a petition, it is certainly not going to impact as significantly as if we received 20 submissions that were all individually drafted. If they all raise variously different issues that certainly means that our people need to apply more time to appropriately respond to all of those issues. Again, it really comes down to the particular circumstances. But in reality, for those large developments, when we get more submissions they do tend to be individual submissions. We do not often receive petitions or form letters. That does mean that we do end up having to spend more time on a proposal. But that is not the only reason it may take more time. For example, the Republic development that you referred to is a very substantial proposal. Therefore, we necessarily need to spend more time going through that in detail to ensure that it fully complies. It is going to take much more time than if we had a single residential development or a small multi-unit development.

**MS CHEYNE:** I guess the other example I referred to is the KFC, which is small, but is on a pretty interesting block. That proposal was in December last year. I appreciate

that you cannot reveal the processes, but I assume there were a few public representations made about that. There were also perhaps a range of other considerations.

**Mr Ponton:** Indeed, and in that circumstance, as I understand it, the proponent is currently responding to the issues that were raised. That also takes time. While a proposal may be in our system for an extended period of time, a large proportion of that may well be allowing the proponent to respond to issues that have been raised by the planning authority, other government entities or the community.

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you.

**MS LAWDER:** On the development application, you mentioned that if submissions are received it may take a bit longer. I note that you have failed to meet your average and median process compliance, I think for the second year in a row. Surely you have a bit of a formula that you apply to show, on average, how long things will take. Does it mean that you are not adequately resourced to assess these applications?

**Mr Ponton:** No, not at all, Ms Lawder. In terms of our resources, I am comfortable that we have both the skill set and the capability to undertake the work that we need to. It really does come down to the fact that we cannot necessarily anticipate the nature of the work. It may be that we have many more three and four-unit developments in a particular year than we have large multi-unit developments. Then the next year, we may have a shift. It really depends on the market and the like.

I am not overly concerned if we do not reach the targets, provided we are close. I think that it is okay to set yourself a target and do everything you possibly can to reach the target. I think the worst thing is not to have a target at all. I would like that target to be a stretch target to really ensure that we do our utmost to deliver in a timely way so that the proponents, and the community for that matter, have some certainty in relation to the time that things will take. But it is also, as I said earlier, quite often outside our control. It may be that the proponent simply needs an extended period of time to adequately respond to issues that have been raised in relation to a proposal. It may look as though it is sitting in our system for nine months, but, in reality, six months of that may well be a proponent working through their responses to issues.

**MS LAWDER:** Exactly what does the indicator relate to? Is it the processing times? There is another one about decisions made within statutory deadlines, and over 25 per cent are not made. So these indicators are not referring solely to the time that is your responsibility?

**Mr Ponton:** In terms of the statutory time frames, we do have the ability to stop the clock in certain circumstances. What that means is that, to answer the question, with 75 per cent within time, if there is a period of time that it is not in our system we can stop the clock up to a point. But there are other circumstances where we cannot stop the clock and it is still outside our control. There is a mixture there.

**MS CODY:** Mr Ponton, what weight do you place on the public submissions as part of the DA process?



**Mr Ponton:** We greatly value the submissions that we receive. But, again, to answer the question specifically, in terms of the weight that we apply, if it is a 1,000-signature petition that does not really have a great deal of substance, with two or three lines just saying, “We do not like it,” it is difficult for us to understand what the real issues are, whereas if we have a submission that goes into some more detail about the nature of the concerns, that allows us greater capacity to respond to the community. In saying that, it is important to note that as we work through the particular issues, we do not expect the community to work through the Territory Plan and identify every rule or criterion that they think the proposal does not meet. We have experts who can do that for the community.

What is important to us is understanding the nature of the concerns. Is it traffic that is concerning a particular individual? We will have our experts look at the traffic concerns and look at the relevant standards. We do not expect our community to have to engage people, to engage a traffic engineer, to fully understand. If they think that there is going to be an issue, they can tell us that that is the concern that they have got. If they are concerned about the potential height of a building, an overshadowing, we do not expect them to draw a shadow diagram to demonstrate their concerns. They can simply raise that for us and our expert people will go through and respond to those particular issues. That in turn can add time to the processing times as we do that.

**MS LAWDER:** If no-one raises those issues, does that mean you do not look at them?

**Mr Ponton:** Not at all.

**MS LAWDER:** In effect, would it not be fair to say that if no-one made a submission you would look at all those issues anyway?

**Mr Ponton:** We apply the Territory Plan. If somebody is raising a particular concern, we will certainly look at how we can respond to those concerns. It may be that, in relation to a criterion, on face value we believe that it clearly complies, but a submission is raised about a certain aspect and the proponent, or for that matter the planning authority, might impose a condition to address that concern within the bounds of flexibility that the Territory Plan gives us.

**MS LAWDER:** If one person writes a submission that raises entirely valid and substantiated concerns about traffic, for example, is that treated in the same way as 50? You might reject the DA based on that one submission?

**Mr Ponton:** Yes. Whether we get one submission or 400 submissions, it comes down to the issues that have been raised.

**MS LAWDER:** And if no-one made that submission, that one submission?

**Mr Gentleman:** You would take the engineer’s report, I imagine, on traffic, for example.

**Mr Ponton:** And our expert team would apply their professional judgement in relation to assessing the application against the Territory Plan. It has been known, more often than you might think, for the planning authority to refuse a development

application where there are no submissions simply because our professional judgement is that it does not comply.

**MS CODY:** I was about to ask whether you ever get DAs that do not get any submissions.

**Mr Ponton:** Quite often, yes. Some are approved; some are approved with conditions; some are refused.

**MS CODY:** Okay.

**MRS DUNNE:** My question relates to a couple of constituency issues relating to roads in north Belconnen and the interaction with the proposed development on the CSIRO experimental station. It relates particularly to future plans. I know that I will probably have to raise some of this with Transport as well. It relates to Kuringa Drive and Copland Drive. I have had lots of discussions with constituents over the years about Kuringa Drive, and I have had discussions with the CSIRO and constituents who are concerned with the CSIRO development about the alignment of Kuringa Drive. I am sure that you have had the same conversations, Ms Cheyne?

**MS CHEYNE:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I was wondering what is the thinking, particularly about the alignment of Kuringa Drive. At one stage I saw some planning that indicated that there might be an extension of Copland Drive all the way up to the Barton Highway, which would be a disaster. I was wondering what your thinking about that would be.

**Mr Gentleman:** Overarchingly, we are quite concerned with regard to the CSIRO proposal. We wanted to work and engage with them on that. They have chosen to go through a process now. The Territory Plan was amended by technical amendment. We had to do that to bring it into line with the new plans from the national capital plan. CSIRO has made clear its intention to develop that land now. I think there has to be a lot of work, as you have indicated, Mrs Dunne, with the CSIRO and with transport planning for the future of that area, to ensure that they can be responsible, too, for some of the engineering costs that are going to be borne.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am thinking not about the practicalities of who pays for what but more about the high-level issues of what Kuringa Drive is going to look like in five or 10 years time and whether there has been any thought put into that. The interfaces between Owen Dixon Drive and Kuringa Drive and Kingsford Smith Drive and Kuringa Drive are a problem now. If you are going to accept this as a fait accompli and there is going to be a large amount of development in that space, would you not get your act together to make those interfaces better? And how might we do that?

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Rake has some information for you on that, too. The directorate has been working with Transport Canberra as well. I will ask Mr Rake to give you some detail on the work that he has been doing.

**Mr Rake:** The first thing for me to note is that we have a coordinated approach across the ACT government for working with CSIRO in as productive a way as we can to

make sure we understand their development intentions, their development time frames and the likely outcomes on that site. It is important that we understand that to shape things like Kuringa Drive and its future we need to have more clarity about the rate at which the site will develop so that we understand whether the time, population and traffic pressures are two, five, 10 or 20 years away. The CSIRO has—

**MRS DUNNE:** Also the phasing is important in that space.

**Mr Rake:** That is right. That will shape connections to and from the site, augmentation of existing roads, potential realignments or reconfigurations. We are still at a very early stage of those discussions. The CSIRO have not yet selected their commercial partner. The selection of that commercial partner will shape their estate development planning and their project phasing. We are working as closely as we can and we are ready to respond quickly to understand what pressure that will transfer to our services, our roads and our other infrastructure and how we will then quickly build up a plan to respond to it.

At this point, the best I can give you is that we are coordinated, ready and having the discussions. But we need some more information from the CSIRO to help us frame that. The partnership, the forum that we have with the CSIRO for discussing these is a strong forum. We are confident that they will provide the information. We are not worried about them holding that back, but, as I said, we do not have it yet.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Rake, can you just outline for me the approval process. There have been some technical changes to the Territory Plan. What is the involvement of the territory and what is the involvement of the commonwealth in the final approval of this?

**Mr Rake:** At the moment, the approval is entirely within the remit of the commonwealth. The commonwealth can, by its own hand, regardless of ACT views, change the use of the land. That is being done through an amendment to the national capital plan. We have had to vary the Territory Plan, through a technical amendment, to ensure that it is not inconsistent with the national capital plan. That is a legislative requirement. The estate development planning could be done entirely under the review of the National Capital Authority at the moment.

Taken to its extreme, development could occur entirely under the commonwealth planning framework. Houses could be built under the commonwealth planning framework if they so wished. The agreement that we have with the CSIRO is that they will transition that land into the territory's planning framework before houses are built. It will probably occur after the initial estate development planning is done, but, again, that will be determined in discussion with CSIRO and their commercial partner.

**MRS DUNNE:** There is no commercial partner—

**Mr Rake:** At the moment, there is no commercial partner, but the commonwealth could go all the way through under their framework if they wished.

**MRS DUNNE:** If they wished, but that is not the agreement.

**Mr Rake:** That is not the agreement that we have. We do not believe that is their intent. CSIRO's stated public intent is to bring it across to the territory planning system as early as they feasibly can. Their view is that that would occur fairly soon after selection of a commercial partner and the early estate planning.

**MRS DUNNE:** Kuringa Drive is already under pressure because it has been extended with Clarrie Hermes Drive, which puts pressure on Kingsford Smith Drive. Irrespective of what is going on with the CSIRO land, is there thinking about any upgrade or realignment of Kuringa Drive?

**Mr Rake:** That would be a question for Transport Canberra and City Services in understanding road capacity and our road planning, in the absence of other projects.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**Mr Gentleman:** I am happy to take that question on notice in this hearing and go to our colleagues in transport.

**MRS DUNNE:** So I do not have to come back tomorrow and ask the same question?

**Mr Gentleman:** Correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** The other thing that goes with that is that there has been—I do not think I dreamed this; I have seen it somewhere—some planning that indicated that Copland Drive might be extended. What would the territory's thinking be on the extension of Copland Drive to the Barton Highway? It is my personal view that it would be a disaster, because it is not a wide enough road.

**Mr Gentleman:** I have not seen an engineering study on the extension of Copland, but there are some geographical issues there. There is quite a large dam. If you look directly from Copland across to Barton, for example, there is quite a large dam in the way; there would be an issue with that, I would imagine. But I have not seen an engineering study.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** If you are going to be looking at all these issues, can you go a bit further out? Glenloch interchange, which is already horrible, would potentially be affected.

**Mr Rake:** With the effect of the CSIRO?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes. I am saying: if you are going to look at the traffic impacts, can you not restrict it just to the immediate roads. Obviously, I can understand Mrs Dunne's interest there, but my point is that it is bigger than that.

**Mr Rake:** Correct. Our transport modelling does take account of driver behaviours. We know that if intersection A reaches a potential congestion point, the incentive to rat run and use intersection B or route B will increase. The model does allow for that. Yes, that work will be done.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a couple of questions relating to table 16 on page 17 of budget statements E. We heard about the completion and publication of master plans. We spoke a little about master plans earlier. You have completed two of the three targets and discontinued, so how will we ever know the status of the one that is not yet completed? When will that be reported on?

**Mr Gentleman:** I think the only outstanding one in regard to that is Tharwa village. It is almost ready to go, I should say. In the next month or so, I imagine we will be able to release that master plan.

**MS LAWDER:** Is the Curtin one included in that?

**Mr Rake:** It is not included in that because we had released a final draft master plan. We will have to come back and report on progress.

**MS LAWDER:** So it is not completed and published, as the indicator says?

**Mr Rake:** No, I think that—

**Mr Gentleman:** Can we take that on notice, Ms Lawder? I think we need to get some—

**Mr Rake:** Get a reconciliation on it.

**MS LAWDER:** Sure. I have a couple more relating to that same table, if you could take it on notice. On the number of environment and planning forums held, there were six. What does that mean? Who attends these forums?

**Mr Ponton:** I can answer that one, Ms Lawder. The environment and planning forum consists of representatives of each community council. It also consists of representatives of the Master Builders Association, the Housing Industry Association and a number of professional associations. We find it a particularly useful group to engage with. The minister mentioned PCICRG earlier. That is very much focused on the industry. This is a similar, complementary group that is very much focused on the community. We use those sessions to provide advance notice to the community and professional associations with respect to the work that we are undertaking.

After my recent appointment, in the first meeting I engaged with that group to look at ways that we can improve our interactions. We are now looking at making those discussions a little more strategic than they have been in the past. We will be posing a series of questions and ideas very early in the formulation—again, coming back to my earlier comment about a new way of engaging—and that has been very well received so far by the environment and planning forum.

At the last meeting I also put the offer out to all the community councils to come and meet with us, to talk about where we are heading with our engagement activities in particular. The Woden Valley Community Council and the Tuggeranong Community Council have both taken me up on that offer. I will be meeting with that group again next week and I will be putting the offer to them again. As I said, it is a very valuable

opportunity for us to engage with those community representatives.

**MS LAWDER:** When you said Woden Valley and Tuggeranong took you up, does that count as one consultation or two?

**Mr Ponton:** That is completely separate from this table. We have our set meetings per year with all of the groups, but I have offered to attend the actual council meetings that they hold themselves to talk to their broader membership.

**Mr Gentleman:** There are many other opportunities that we have in consultation with community groups. Just last week I met with Tuggeranong Community Council in my office, looking at opportunities for Tuggeranong. I know Mr Pettersson and Ms Cody had a roundtable at Woden which was very well attended. A lot of issues were discussed at that roundtable. Ms Le Couteur was there as well. Whilst this is an indicator here, it does not really show how much we do engage with the community.

**MS LAWDER:** The next one, item (d), is to “prepare policy advice to inform executive consideration of the requirement to review the ACT planning strategy”. It is a new indicator. Does it mean that a review of the planning strategy will take place in 2017?

**Mr Ponton:** That decision is yet to be taken by the government, Ms Lawder. That indicator is making reference to the fact that there is a requirement for the government to make a decision every five years as to whether or not it will undertake a further review. We are currently in the process of settling our advice to the minister, and, in turn, to the government, for the government to make a decision as to whether or not it would like the directorate, on its behalf, to undertake a review. I can say that, on face value—and keeping in mind that the government is yet to make a decision in relation to the matter—there have been changes to the city and the policy settings in the city since the 2012 planning strategy, so there are certainly some opportunities for us to revisit certain aspects of the strategy.

**MS LAWDER:** The review is legislated; it is a requirement?

**Mr Ponton:** A decision needs to be taken as to whether or not, yes.

**MS LAWDER:** That is right, but looking at where the review is in the legislation, I am interested in why it is an accountability indicator. It is a requirement of the department to provide that policy advice, whether the review takes place or not.

**Mr Ponton:** Certainly. It is really about highlighting the fact that it may be that many within the community would not necessarily know that that is a legislative requirement. We are hoping to highlight to as many people as possible that this work is potentially going to—

**MS LAWDER:** Who reads these budget papers?

**Mr Ponton:** You would be surprised. If there is any opportunity that we have to highlight the work of the directorate, we will certainly take that opportunity.

**MS LAWDER:** I find it interesting; I would have thought it is kind of your job to provide that policy advice.

**Mr Ponton:** Absolutely, we will be providing that advice. It is our job, but this really is an opportunity, as I said, for us to highlight, in a different way, that this work needs to be undertaken.

**MS LAWDER:** What about item (f)? Can you explain to me what that one means? What does the “6” relate to in the targets?

**Mr Ponton:** I will ask Mr Rake to provide some further details, given that I was not involved in the setting of these, having only recently commenced with the directorate.

**Mr Rake:** It is something that we prepared earlier for you.

**Mr Ponton:** Thank you. It relates to the ACT planning strategy, the transport for Canberra review and also a review of our climate change policies. It is identifying the need to undertake a coordinated and joined-up review of each of those policies, because, whilst separate, they interact with one another, and that is what that is relating to. In relation to the figure 6, I will defer to Mr Rake to provide some further details.

**MS LAWDER:** Is it different to the previous one, on community consultation? You do not undertake them at the same time as those for item (c)? It is not a similar process?

**Mr Ponton:** We would certainly take that to the—

**MS LAWDER:** So you might have six meetings with the community councils and a different six meetings on the different topics?

**Mr Ponton:** These may not necessarily be meetings. I need to clarify with Mr Rake what the figure relates to.

**MS LAWDER:** Will you take that on notice?

**Mr Ponton:** No, Mr Rake has an answer.

**Mr Rake:** I will answer that one for you now. Item (c) relates to very particular meetings, as the director-general has already explained. Item (f) is to set a new target for ourselves to have large, meaningful policy discussions about the future of our city. With respect to the six, we already know what some of those are. The transport for Canberra strategy is due for review this year, and, subject to a decision from government, as the director-general said, we anticipate that the planning strategy will need to be reviewed. But there are a range of other discussions in the community about change. We are in a space where we are renewing our city and the figure 6 leaves room for new discussions to emerge. We have not identified exactly what all of those will be.

**MS LAWDER:** In a way, it is six policies or strategies that you are reviewing, not six

events?

**Mr Rake:** Not six particular meetings, no. These will be six major discussions, major pieces of work with the community.

**MS LAWDER:** Was the ACT planning strategy one of those six?

**Mr Rake:** Subject to the decision of government. If government decides to review it and, as the director-general said, there have been a lot of changes in the drivers—

**MS LAWDER:** I am just trying to understand the difference between (d) and (f). If you are already engaging on that one, are you counting it again in the—

**Mr Rake:** Item (d) is the advice that we give government about the need to review the planning strategy. Item (f) could include the review of the planning strategy itself.

**MS LAWDER:** Sorry, I meant (c), not (d)—the community forums one.

**Mr Rake:** The community forums are meetings that occur six times a year that could talk about any aspect of our work. In fact, it is also an opportunity for the community to talk about issues that they have an interest in.

**MS LAWDER:** So you might have those six meetings and then you might engage once more with the community councils on six different things; so in fact there are 12 meetings with community councils?

**Mr Ponton:** Not necessarily. I do not believe item (f) relates to meetings; it relates to engagement activities. If we were engaged on, let us say, transport for Canberra, that is one engagement activity. But the way that we engage with the community and industry—

**MS LAWDER:** It might be an email?

**Mr Gentleman:** It could be several emails. It could be several meetings.

**Mr Ponton:** I would like to think that we can do better on engaging with the community than through email, but that would be one engagement activity.

**MS LAWDER:** So it could be a meeting?

**Mr Ponton:** It could be. Again, I think town hall meetings are not particularly useful ways to engage with communities. We are looking at new, improved and innovative ways to engage. We are looking at online opportunities. As I mentioned at a session earlier this week in this room, we are looking at IAP2 in particular as a framework to apply in the way that we engage—looking at a range of different tools and opportunities to engage with the community. Do not think of that as a meeting; think of that as an engagement process. The exact form that that will take is yet to be determined. I can assure you—and I will come back to what I said earlier—that the minister has made it abundantly clear to me that we need to think about new ways of engaging.



**MS CODY:** Minister, you mentioned in response to Ms Lawder's questions the Woden roundtable that both Ms Le Couteur and I attended, as well as Mr Steel, and a whole bunch of other people. Can you tell me where the outcomes of that are up to? What did we do with the feedback received at that roundtable?

**Mr Gentleman:** The directorate is working up its advice to me with regard to outcomes from the Woden roundtable. I might ask Mr Rake to give you some of the details that came up during the process.

**Mr Rake:** The first thing to say is that all of the contributions at that roundtable were given the same weight as a submission for us. We are interested in hearing views and shaping the best Territory Plan variation, responding to the master plan and the needs of the community. We are currently finalising advice for government, through the minister, about the status of the draft Territory Plan variation that we put out. We know that there are community members, property owners and investors who are ready to see Woden move into its next positive stage. So we are keen to progress that work.

Some of the themes that came out involved the importance of protecting public space and ensuring that the ways we express the outcomes that we are after in the Territory Plan really focus on a walkable area, good solar access in public spaces and good activation, and that we are thinking carefully about the future needs of people who live, work, shop and recreate in that town centre. In the broad, the community have a high appetite for renewal there. They want to see the place better than it currently is. We are seeing pretty positive signs. We expect to wrap up our response in the next couple of weeks, to be feeding advice through to the minister, through to government, and to be getting information back out to the community about how we can put it in place.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have a follow-up on the planning strategy. Mr Ponton, you indicated that at this stage you are providing advice to the government as to whether or not you would be doing that review this year. Am I correct?

**Mr Ponton:** Yes.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am really confused. Annual reports hearings were held earlier this year, and I have gone through the transcript. Ms Ekelund said that in 2017 we are "commencing a review of the planning strategy". You commenced one and then stopped to consider whether you were going to do it, or—

**Mr Ponton:** I cannot say why Ms Ekelund would have provided that advice. I suspect what Ms Ekelund was referring to was the work that was being undertaken by the directorate to frame up whether or not we should be undertaking that review. The government needs to make that decision, and the minister also needs to make a decision as to whether or not we review the Territory Plan. There is a five-year requirement on that.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Coe calls for that frequently; so we will be looking at a review of the Territory Plan.

**Mr Ponton:** In short, if I could just say that I suspect that Ms Ekelund was referring to the gathering of information to determine what has changed—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I should not have closed my computer. I closed it so that I could better pay attention. I should probably read you the quote again. She certainly gave the impression—

**Mr Rake:** I was at the hearing. It was a clear statement.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It was a fairly clear statement that you were planning to do something, not consider whether you were going to do something.

**Mr Rake:** It probably conflated a couple of elements, such as the fact that there have been a number of changes in the city since 2012. It probably hinted at our advice that a review of the strategy should be undertaken and it probably presumed that government would respond and say, “Yes, please do it.”

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It did more.

**Mr Rake:** I know the statement was very, very clear.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It was a very clear statement.

**Mr Rake:** But procedurally we must go through the step of giving advice about whether a review should be undertaken. We do need to wait for a decision from government, and then we will do that work.

**Mr Ponton:** And substantial work has been undertaken to inform that advice.

**Mr Gentleman:** As soon as that decision is made, I will certainly inform you.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Can I talk a bit more about it? I am really stunned that it may not be happening. In the event that it does happen, what will be on the table? Thinking back, I was one of the community people involved in 2003. I do not know if anyone else remembers back then. I would say it was one of the best consultations I went to because there were a number of scenarios presented to the community: these are the things that are actually happening and these are the different directions we could go in. There was a large amount of information provided to the community. In the hopefully likely event that you decide to do this planning strategy, will you be looking at an information session like that?

**Mr Gentleman:** It will be quite broad, I imagine, if that decision is made but, as the directorate officials have said, they are working up that information to provide me with the best opportunity to make that decision.

**Mr Ponton:** And if I may, given that I am harping on about this—and it is important to note that the minister has made it very clear that we need to think about our engagement activities—I would like to say, confidently, that it will be better than 2003.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I would like to hope that it is at least as good, because I have to say I do not know that there have been any since then that have been better. I will not ask more questions about it, because if you have not decided you are going to do it you probably cannot really tell me much about it. I was going to.

**Mr Gentleman:** We are happy to take your input at any time, and that can guide whether we make that decision or not.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Climate change, biodiversity and making sure it is not just rubber-stamping what the LDA has already gone out and purchased would appear to be very limited, to be polite planning advice and stopping sprawl, as you suggested, because the public are happy to have more infill. It would be good if this—

**Mr Gentleman:** They made it very clear in the statement of planning intent workshops that that is what they wanted to see. But I will say that, whilst in all respects of planning I think it is a good policy to see more urban renewal and more densification rather than urban sprawl—certainly for our environment it is a good position—it does come with its challenges. Some people do not like change, and you have to make sure that you take all of their views into account when you are making those decisions.

**MR COE:** But, given your acquisition of rural leases and what is happening in Denman, in Whitlam, in Taylor and elsewhere, how can you possibly say that you are limiting sprawl?

**Mr Gentleman:** The policy is fifty-fifty at the moment: 50 per cent urban renewal and densification to 50 per cent greenfields.

**MR COE:** But where you have been acquiring rural leases, that would suggest that there is a lot more sprawl to come?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes.

**Mr Ponton:** That assumes that all of that land would be developed.

**MR COE:** Yes, it does.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It does.

**MR COE:** It begs the question: why all the purchases if not for that?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** We have had this conversation, yes.

**Mr Ponton:** It is not for me to speculate. I was not involved in those land acquisitions, but certainly some of that land could well be related to offsets. It could be for other opportunities related to urban development but not necessarily urban development.

**Mr Gentleman:** Even infrastructure usage, future linkages to the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre, road infrastructure—all of those things need to be

taken into account.

**Mr Rake:** The other important point, of course, is that the split of greenfield and infill is a proportionate one, and we have a city that is growing, that is facing strong economic growth. We have still had strong population growth. And to the extent that there is development anywhere on a greenfield, we need to remember that there are also still very strong infill targets and strong demand for infill projects across the city.

We have seen some of that in the city. We have seen a lot of it in Gungahlin. Over the next little while we will see more in the Northbourne corridor. Through work like the Woden master plan we hope to see infill development reinvigorating town centres like Woden and making those even better places.

**MS CODY:** I note that our parking policy is included in planning policy. I have some questions about parking policy because I find it quite interesting. How does the government determine which parking rules apply where?

**Mr Gentleman:** There are a couple of different regulations with regard to parking. Firstly, there are regulations with regard to parking in apartment complexes or normal residential properties, the allocation of parking positions there. Then there are regulations in a broader sense, for parking across the city, to ensure that we have enough parking for people who commute and work in the city, but also carefully responding to pressures on climate change to ensure that we can encourage people to take public transport and take up more active transport options for cycling and walking as well. I might ask Mr Rake to tell you some details, particularly in the planning sense and in the regulatory sense, about parking for developments.

**Mr Rake:** Thank you for the question, and I apologise that sometimes explanations around parking policy and frameworks can be as confusing as a covfefe tweet. We will try to keep it sensible. In setting parking policy, we are guided by a vehicular parking and access code that describes parking provision rates based on the different kinds of development that we would have within the city. The generation of parking for a childcare centre will be different to that for a hotel, a residential house, a residential apartment or an office. We have a flexible framework that enables us to change the parking needs based on the development.

When it comes to assigning parking regulation in individual places, we start from the perspective: do not put a regulation in place unless it is necessary. In many quiet suburban streets, parking on the roadside is unrestricted. Once we start moving to residential areas that are close to employment centres, we will quite often find workers who are commuting to their workplace are parking in a suburb to avoid paying for parking or to find a park that is in other ways more convenient for them. If that parking becomes a problem for residents, we will talk to local residents about ways to change the parking.

Our most common solution is to put some sort of restriction on the on-street parking. It might be that we restrict parking on one side of the road and leave the other side unrestricted. We do that during working hours if it is a commuter-driven problem. We might have time-limited parking on both sides of the street. There are a range of tools that we use, and we talk to residents to work out the best way to deal with that.

When it comes to setting regulation in and around office and retail centres, we will typically have the shortest stay parking closest to the places that people are using—retail or cafes or hospitality. That encourages easy access and churn, high turnover rates of vehicles. Parking a little further and around the periphery would be longer stay, perhaps all day, and that would suit employees who are in the area. We try to target that.

We work really closely with our colleagues in Access Canberra to understand on-ground intelligence. One of the most useful experiences I have had as coordinator-general of parking is to go for a walk around Dickson with parking enforcement officers and hear from them about the on-ground habits that they observe. They are able to tell me where the parking regulations are not quite achieving the outcome or where a small change could markedly improve the outcome for people who are using, in that case, the Dickson group centre.

**MS CODY:** You or Minister Gentleman mentioned parking in residential and apartment complexes. How is that parking policy decided? What is the parking policy for those sorts of things?

**Mr Rake:** There is a prescribed rate in the parking and vehicular access code for apartment buildings but there is also an opportunity for the developer to seek a lower rate if the transport generation needs of that site are likely to be lower. A good example would be: an apartment building in a town centre is unlikely to have any minimum mandatory parking requirements because it has great access to public transport. We undertake that same sort of assessment elsewhere on major transit corridors, particularly our rapid routes, and that is designed to recognise modal shift.

We are already starting to see a change in driver rates in the ACT, and that follows trends that are experienced worldwide. We know that in big cities like Vancouver they are now seeing fewer than 50 per cent of young drivers who are entitled to hold a drivers licence actually going ahead and getting their licence and buying a car. We are starting to see some of that occurring even here in the ACT. If the future requires less ownership of cars, we need to think about what that means in the development cycle. Reducing the number of car parks, particularly if they are underground car parks, can improve housing affordability outcomes. We are looking very carefully at that in residential areas and group centres, in town centres, particularly for multi-unit developments.

With on-street parking, where we can we enable that to remain for the public good. On-street parking is owned by the public and should be shared among the public. We try to minimise permanent use of that by residents where we can. We try and encourage developers to manage their parking on their site primarily.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Rake and I have had discussions, too, about where we see challenges that arise from urban renewal. Braddon is a really good example of where we see some fantastic cafes and opportunities for people to go and do some dining. At the moment there is still quite a bit of tradie activity occurring. You see tradies parking in the allocated parking spots.

We have had a discussion internally at this stage about whether or not there is an opportunity to make Lonsdale Street a one-way street and provide more parking either side and in the centre of Lonsdale Street, and how it would then work with the adjoining streets: whether or not you could do a circuit of Lonsdale and Mort streets one way. At the moment, of course, our public transport policy is that buses can go both ways on Mort Street. There might be an opportunity for a trial on Lonsdale Street. Indeed, the Tuggeranong Community Council the other day mentioned they would like to see something similar on Anketell Street in Tuggeranong, bring it down to a more pedestrian-friendly street. We will see whether or not that could go ahead.

**MS CODY:** I have one last question. You mentioned looking at developments on transport corridors. Will we see new developments with no parking provisions in the future?

**Mr Rake:** We can already see that in town centres, but I believe elsewhere in the city we will. Certainly other Australian cities are already doing that, and it is a case of densification. That is a word that describes a change in built habitat. Let us talk about the way people are changing the way they live their lives. More of the jobs of the future are being created in and around city centres, and increasingly there are large numbers of people who want to live in inner city areas.

If you are living and working in the same area, there is a question about whether the cost of owning a motor vehicle is worth while. If it is not worth owning a car, it is probably not worth paying the extra for a car park either. I do believe we will see developments primarily in public transport and active travel, cycling and pedestrian corridors that will not have car parks. In the City might encourage people first to rethink the second car. Start with just one and go down from there.

**Mr Gentleman:** We saw, as Mr Rake mentioned, the change in what is occurring in Vancouver, where fewer than 50 per cent of that younger demographic are actually get a drivers licence now. That frees up, we were advised, about \$13,000 a year, which means that they can then spend that on better opportunities for purchasing a home or an apartment or on going out or on recreation. So it can be quite a difference.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Le Couteur, did you have a question in this area or is the committee happy to move to the asbestos task force?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have got three pages of questions on the nature of planning. The big question might be: does anyone have any substantive questions for asbestos?

**MS CODY:** Absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Do a planning question if that is your preference. Are there different officials, minister, that will be looking to head back to the office if we move to the asbestos task force or are you happy for questions to be free flowing?

**Mr Gentleman:** We can stay for a little while.

**THE CHAIR:** All right.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You said you were going to be looking at introducing a parking offset fund. What is happening with that?

**Mr Ponton:** We are still working on initial policy formulation there. Some of the key questions are around the need for an offset fund. One of the things that that would do is enable developers to buy out of their obligation to provide parking. There is an earlier question: do we need to put that obligation on them in the first place? There is a piece of policy work underway at the moment and it will answer that question. But we are in the early stages.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You implied that there had been some developments with zero car parking already approved in the ACT. Was that a correct inference? It sounded like you said that.

**Mr Ponton:** There is provision within the Territory Plan not to provide parking.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I appreciate you do not have to.

**Mr Ponton:** But nobody has actually taken that up.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That was what I thought.

**Mr Ponton:** The only development that I am aware of is a proposal in Woden. In fact, you were at the community council meeting where the proponent presented that particular one, where they are looking to produce a significantly smaller number of car parking spaces than otherwise would be provided. I think that is where we are starting to see the shift. Mr Rake was talking about a shift in behaviour. We are not going to see an immediate shift. What I expect we will see is a reluctance by proponents to go straight to no parking. We will start to see over time a reduction in the amount of parking, which is what we are seeing in Woden at the moment. But certainly in my time, working in various roles in the territory, I am not aware of any proposal that has actually applied the ability to not provide parking.

**Mr Gentleman:** We have heard anecdotally that some people are leasing out their car spaces in apartment complexes. It would be interesting to gather that information and see how many of those are occurring, to get some sort of trend.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Do you have any idea what the average cost of basement parking is for a developer? You mentioned affordability.

**Mr Ponton:** It does depend on how deep the basement is. We can get some fairly general figures for you, depending on whether it is one, two or three levels of basement. But it does depend on the particular circumstances.

**MR COE:** Are you taking this one on notice?

**Mr Ponton:** Of course.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** And have you had people, not in town centres, ask you for significantly reduced car parking? I have had developers come to talk to me and

I have told them what I felt the issues would be, which would primarily be their neighbours. They have also not been compliant with the codes. Has this come to you?

**Mr Phillips:** Not that I am aware of. The developers that I speak to normally do their homework in relation to the practicalities of selling units and townhouses without car parking, and they seem to then defer at the present time actually putting them in, yes.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have met developers who think that there is—and I think they are right—a small market in the ACT of people who will be close to a light rail stop and who would seriously consider something that did not include a car.

**Mr Ponton:** What we are seeing in those areas where the car parking is not required, town centres essentially, is parking being provided. Normally a two-bedroom apartment might have two car parking spaces, but you can choose to have one. We are starting to see that. The parking is still being provided, but in a three-bedroom apartment they might purchase three car parks. I think we are yet to see that significant shift where there is a degree of comfort by developers to not provide any parking. If you are aware of proponents, I think it would be great if we could facilitate in the right location a development where there was a significant reduction in car parking. In terms of policy position, I think that is certainly something that we would like to encourage. But I think we should start with town centres and corridors where we know the infrastructure is in place.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have another policy question. What can you do where there are highly visible buildings which have been basically abandoned? They are unsafe; they are still owned by somebody. What, if anything, can your directorate do? Things have been built there; they have gone through their first round. For example, in Woden the Alexander and Albemarle buildings are at such a level that the police now say they will not go there.

**Mr Ponton:** Thank you for the question. It is a difficult area, and I know that our colleagues in Access Canberra, particularly in relation to the example that you have just referred to, are very keen to work with the proponent to achieve an outcome on that particular site. As to the substantive nature of your question, it really does depend on what the lease provides for. Often the covenant around use of land, as I understand it, is where there are some legal difficulties. If there is a requirement to use the land, it may be that the land is not used for a period but a proponent might go in and use it for a day. Therefore it is difficult in terms of a compliance action. In relation to the particular matter you are referring to, I do know that our colleagues in Access Canberra are in very close contact with the lessee to achieve an outcome on that site. Certainly we, the directorate, Access Canberra—and, I am sure, the government—are very keen to see something occur on that site to improve the area.

**Mr Gentleman:** You will most likely remember the conversation we had with proponents at the roundtable meeting with regard to the economic challenge that they have with LVC, for example. I have had discussions with the Chief Minister on whether we can stagger the LVC payments to ensure that there is a viability in the way they go forward with those rebuilding opportunities in Woden.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** In Woden it would appear bleedingly obvious that the buildings



have not been used for many years. You were talking about the lease purpose clauses and that they could be gotten around, as it were, by intermittent use.

**Mr Ponton:** I would never use those words!

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I cannot remember exactly what words you did use. They were much more technically correct words than I used. I am summarising here rather than attempting to quote or verbal you. But I have had this discussion. I just mention those because they are particularly obvious. But there are many shopping centres with vacant shops et cetera. I have had this conversation with members of the community about umpteen buildings.

**Mr Ponton:** It really does depend on the nature of the lease. Not all leases are the same, as I am sure you would appreciate. The difficulty that I have in answering that particular question is that our colleagues in Access Canberra do undertake compliance activities on behalf of the directorate, which manages the Planning and Development Act. I do not want to put my colleague on the spot, but I do have a representative from Access Canberra here. He is on the witness list. He may wish to provide some comments on that. Mr Peffer.

**Mr Peffer:** As Mr Ponton has said, we do undertake some compliance activity in this space. It really depends on the actions that we can take on a case-by-case basis. As you might appreciate, the particular regulatory tool that we can use is to resume the lease, which, if we were to go down that path, would be quite a significant step. It is a decision that is subject to appeal. In terms of our compliance framework base, which is a risk-based framework looking very closely at proportionality in responding to noncompliance, it would not satisfy.

What I will talk about is an example where we have had some success. This is in Campbell, at the service station site that committee members may be aware was not used as a service station for many, many years. It caused the community some level of concern in terms of the state of that block. Rather than considering resumption of a lease, which would be quite a dramatic response, we partnered with the owner of that parcel of land, a local street artist and the local school to put up a hoarding around that block and paint it in a way that depicts caricatures of local shop owners, many of whom have been there for some time and have quite a close affiliation with the community and with those shops.

I guess what we attempted to do was deal with the harm or, in that case, the nuisance that presented itself to the community rather than seek to employ quite a dramatic regulatory response in terms of resuming a lease. I understand that there are some strong views now in that community about whether that site should be redeveloped in time, notwithstanding the previous views that were promoting a quick redevelopment. But that response on that occasion was proven to be quite successful.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Have you ever resumed a lease?

**Mr Peffer:** My understanding is that no lease has been resumed.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** If a complaint comes to you that a shop or a commercial

building of some sort has been vacant for a long period, years, what would you do?

**Mr Peffer:** We look at these issues that do come in from time to time. It is always on a case-by-case basis. Generally, what we find is that there is a story that sits behind it. And it is not always just about commercial reality. It could be about a small business owner who has had some sort of family breakdown and finds they are in a position where they simply cannot afford to rebuild or to refit a shop or to finish building a house, which is something that commonly occurs. It gets partially built and then ceases. Often there is a story sitting behind it. Wherever possible, we will engage with the lessee and work towards an outcome that is appropriate and proportional and that satisfies the concerns of those who have complained about it.

**MS LAWDER:** We spoke a little about parking earlier. Ms Cody asked about parking. Do you play any role in parking at the universities?

**Mr Rake:** No. The universities set their own parking policies as part of their land management. Are you looking at parking provision rates or time limiting or—

**MS LAWDER:** Provision of parking and, for example, what impact the University of Canberra public hospital might have on parking in the area. Is that a matter for the University of Canberra?

**Mr Rake:** I have not had direct involvement in that, but I will take the question on notice and come back to you with a very clear explanation of how all of those arrangements will work.

**MS LAWDER:** What about park and ride facilities? Is that your directorate?

**Mr Rake:** Yes, it is.

**MS LAWDER:** Do you have any expansion plans or new park and ride facilities in the pipeline?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. The Wanniasa park and ride is being constructed now. It is not too far away. Just on park and ride, we talked about Calwell a little earlier. The Calwell proponents called for a park and ride there to encourage more people to park and shop at Calwell during part of their transport process. And it was not used very much. There were only a couple of cars there most days, until the federal government introduced paid parking in the parliamentary triangle. I can say now that it is normally 50 per cent to three-quarters full each day. It is encouraging to see people taking public transport.

**Mr Rake:** Minister, you have spoken about the one under construction in Wanniasa. We work very closely with our colleagues in Transport Canberra and City Services to map trends between activities as diverse as our master planning exercise. That might look at a group centre and the potential to incorporate a park and ride site with their network planning, both the road network and the public transport network, to understand where the congestion is and where their changing trends in patronage are, particularly an increase in patronage on particular routes.

**MS LAWDER:** Are there any instances of overflow that you are aware of, where there is excess demand for parking at park and ride facilities and they are overflowing into the surrounding shopping centres?

**Mr Rake:** Not that it has been drawn to our attention as a problem, but we do see some park and rides that are very, very popular. Mawson is one of our most highly utilised. The parking closest to the shops in Mawson still has time limitations on it. That would not be suitable for people to use as an alternative. Where we have facilities that are succeeding and getting full or close to full, we also look at opportunities to expand them, whether through long-term planning or short-term augmentation.

**MS LAWDER:** Finally, on the renewal or refurbishment of the Erindale bus station, which has been completed, originally the plans were to have the bus interchange further down, near Ricardo Street. Why was it decided that it should go there? Is that the end of it now? Will there be a park and ride in that area?

**Mr Gentleman:** It was a Transport Canberra decision, but, from memory, it was in response to the community consultation that occurred. They wanted to see that area used closer to the shopping centre. Indeed, as you say, in Ricardo Street there was a place put aside for buses to pull up, but the opportunity for an extended bus stop was better on the street where it is now. Indeed, we used local artists to do that artistic work. I think it has gone down very well.

**MS LAWDER:** I am mindful of the fact that there was a proposal for a new supermarket on part of the existing parking area. I think there was a proposal for parking underneath. Would that create additional demand, do you think, for the bus services there?

**Mr Gentleman:** I imagine it would.

**MS LAWDER:** And do you think what has been completed there will provide appropriate capacity for the bus services into the future?

**Mr Gentleman:** I think we need to review them as the opportunity grows. If more people want to use park and ride and there is more opportunity for people to use public transport from that location, then we certainly need to review those policies as we go forward. The master plan process for Erindale had a look at that originally. There is an opportunity for that later.

**THE ACTING CHAIR (Ms Cody):** Mr Pettersson, do you have a substantive question or would you like to move on to asbestos?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I would.

**Short suspension.**

**THE CHAIR:** We now welcome the asbestos task force. Minister, do you have an opening statement with regard to this program?

PROOF

**Mr Gentleman:** No, I mentioned the work of the task force in my statement earlier, so we are ready for questions.

**THE CHAIR:** For Mr Kefford's benefit, if you can acknowledge the pink privilege statement, which I am sure you are familiar with, and we can then move on to Mr Pettersson for a substantive question.

**Mr Kefford:** Yes.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, what is the status of the demolition program under the loose-fill asbestos eradication scheme?

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Pettersson, it is going very well. I would say it is in front of where we initially thought we would be at this time. I am very pleased with the work the task force has been doing. I will ask Mr Kefford to give you the details of where we are up to.

**Mr Kefford:** So far we have completed the demolition of 736 of the affected houses, which is more or less three-quarters of the task. As the minister has indicated, we are well ahead of where we thought we might be when we first published the indicative demolition schedule. Practically, by the end of this calendar year, apart from a small number of more complex townhouse or unit title properties or those properties where there is an agreed deferred settlement under the scheme, we expect the bulk of the demolition activity to be complete.

**MR PETTERSSON:** The last demolition would expect to be finished when?

**Mr Kefford:** It is possible under the scheme to defer settlement until June 2020. So the demolition activity will not be entirely finished until that time, but the bulk of the program will be finished this calendar year. So 989 have accepted the government's offer and we have taken possession of about 950 of the properties. Those in the task force's possession, apart from a relatively small number where they are properties inside a townhouse or unit complex where the demolition is a little more complicated, the process of demolishing the freestanding houses will be completed this calendar year.

**MR PETTERSSON:** What other difficulties do you face when it is a townhouse complex? What happens to the residents in the surrounding townhouses?

**Mr Kefford:** Towards the second half of 2015 the government extended the original scheme announcement to include what are called eligible impacted properties. Essentially what we have done in working with our colleagues in Access Canberra and asbestos assessors is undertake a review of those properties that are on the list that are part of a townhouse complex. In some cases the assessment has been made that it is necessary to acquire the neighbouring properties. There are 11 where the government has acquired the neighbouring property as well to facilitate the safe demolition of the affected property. Generally that is necessary where there are structural dependencies between the two.

There are some freestanding townhouses where there is no structural dependency or

connection of the roof spaces where it is possible, but much more complicated, to demolish just the affected property. Clearly, when we are demolishing the whole of a house on a block, we are able to do that with large machines. It is a much more delicate process, but nevertheless possible, when we are removing one from a group of town houses.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Can you give me an update on the status of the sales program?

**Mr Gentleman:** We certainly can.

**Mr Kefford:** At this point, of the 736 we have demolished, 686 have been removed from the affected residential premises register and, therefore, available for sale. To date, we have exchanged contracts on 346 remediated blocks and settled on 301.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a couple of supplementaries. In instances of unit title properties, once the affected dwelling has been removed, what happens with that land going forward given that there are normally some fairly strict criteria around rebuilding and the nature of bodies corporate?

**Mr Kefford:** One of the reasons we have left these to the end is that there are a series of complexities in terms of the approval for demolition where we have to work through the owners corporations as well as the practicalities that you outlined. This is a piece of work we are doing at the moment with our colleagues in the rest of the directorate.

The general starting principle would be that inside a unit complex where it is a unit title—the freestanding ones have a little more scope—we replace what is there. But we are obviously going to have to also negotiate then potential changes in the building codes and other legislative requirements that might have come in since because, by definition, these properties are old. That piece of work is not yet complete.

Because we are the owner in the unit complexes, we attend the meetings of the owners corporations. One of the options is to go that next stage to commission the rebuilding of the properties. While it is relatively straightforward and unremarkable to sell a remediated block with no house on it, to try to do that in the middle of a unit title complex is much more problematic. There is one I can think of—there may be more—that is a separately titled townhouse so, again, another set of issues comes into that. The more straightforward unit title ones are the more traditional duplex blocks where, in effect, once we have completed the demolition, we are able to sell the whole of the block.

**THE CHAIR:** With the traditional duplexes that you see around the inner north, inner south, in those instances both dwellings are coming down?

**Mr Kefford:** Where it is the front and back separate dwellings, not necessarily. It turns on whether there is a structural connection. If we take one step back, the fundamental policy principle that underpins the whole of the scheme is that if any part of the original affected house is part of the structure, the whole of the structure is being removed. So if the duplex has been done by adding on to the old house—there is one I am thinking of at the moment where the discussion is live—in effect both

dwellings, the eligible impacted property and the affected property, will be demolished. We will bring back to the market a cleared block. There is one in the inner south where we have demolished the front. The old house was in the front and a new property was built in the back. There was no structural dependence so we took only the affected property in that case.

**THE CHAIR:** How many owners are going it alone and what is the time line for them at this point to remediate?

**Mr Kefford:** Talking of the affected properties, 28 of the 1,023 have declined to participate in the scheme. They are obliged now and have been for some time to have in place asbestos management plan arrangements to protect both themselves and people coming to work in or on the houses. We are aware of around ten of those that have been demolished privately, but the remainder are being occupied, subject to the asbestos management plan arrangements, which are regulated by our colleagues in WorkSafe.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there an expectation of those properties coming down at some point?

**Mr Gentleman:** We said at the beginning that demolition is really the only secure way forward to ensure that this terrible situation does not affect other people in the future. That work with the task force and people in government with those home owners is important as we go forward.

**THE CHAIR:** On page 395 of budget paper 3 there is an average direct cost to government of \$275,000 per block for the first 150 completed sales. Given that almost double that number have now completed, is there an updated average cost you are able to provide?

**Mr Kefford:** This figure was done, obviously, at the time we were preparing the budget papers, which was some time ago. We can take the figure as of today on notice, but it has not moved materially from that range.

**THE CHAIR:** For how much longer is it expected that the task force as it is currently composed will continue to operate?

**Mr Kefford:** The expectation at the moment is that there will be a task force in its current structure for this coming financial year. We have been having discussions with Mr Ponton as we further integrate into the directorate, including in the context of the other changes happening in the land space. But, as I was describing before, there is still a very significant task in front of us to continue to safely manage the demolition program through to the end of this calendar year and then dealing with these more complex ones. While there are fewer of them, that will take a greater effort in one sense.

Of course, the sales program will continue to lag behind the demolition process, as it has done. The expectation at the moment, and it is reflected in the budget papers, is a task force that looks quite like what we have now until, in effect, this time next year, at which point we would provide further advice to the government about our ongoing

structure, recognising that this scheme itself does not conclude until at least June 2020 because a number of settlements have been deferred to that date.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of commercial properties, is it only the two units at the Ainslie shops that have been discovered to have had loose-fill asbestos?

**Mr Kefford:** There are two commercial buildings: one is the Ainslie shops building you referred to and the other is the former Goodstart childcare centre in Aranda. That block has recently been sold on the open market privately. It was listed as a childcare site in Aranda with a building in need of demolition. That was sold only in the past couple of weeks.

**THE CHAIR:** And the way forward at Ainslie is still looking like a demolition?

**Mr Kefford:** As the minister has already said, it remains the government's view that that is the only way to deal with the issue in the long run. Although the immediate dealing with this sits with our colleagues in WorkSafe because it is a commercial building, my understanding is that the advice from the assessors was that bulk loose-fill asbestos, which has not been remediated at all, needed to be dealt with within three to six months, and we are about three months through that window.

**MS CODY:** You mentioned the multiunit dwellings. How many of the 1,023 make up that?

**Mr Kefford:** I will ask my colleagues to remind me of the exact number of affected properties. There is a handful; three or four are in unit-titled developments. A larger number are the more traditional duplex developments. Essentially where we have those properties and we have bought either side, we have bought a total of 11, so it is three or four that are in the townhouse unit complex mould.

**MS CODY:** As to soil validation, can you expand on (a), the process you are undertaking and (b), how that adds to the demolition process?

**Mr Kefford:** Without going all the way back into the demolition process, it is important to keep in mind that throughout the process it is conducted under the supervision of the independent and licensed asbestos assessors. In effect, three documents are required to remove a property from the affected residential premises. The first one is the clearance that the asbestos assessor provides on the demolition process itself. The second is the building approval, which is the certifier's certification of the demolition work. The third is one the government has imposed on itself in this process, and that is the soil validation process.

In effect, that means—somewhat crudely—wherever we have been with the big excavators, wherever we have disturbed the site, we conduct soil sampling on a grid twice the intensity of the national leading guidelines for testing for asbestos in soil. These are the guidelines that came out of Western Australia some time ago. In effect, we test on a five-metre grid of the footprint of the house but also anywhere where we have had waste areas where we have been moving the machinery on and off the site. That literally involves marking out the grid and taking a sample that is then examined under a microscope.

If there are any sorts of asbestos fibres—not just the brown or blue that have been in the house but in some cases we have found chrysotile white asbestos fibres that have come in from a Super Six fence or whatever—we go back and do further removal of soil. That involves taking a machine back; it is not just going back with a bucket. We go back and take away more dirt and retest until we get a clear sample across the whole of the site.

At that point a formal document comes to me with those three pieces of evidence. The certification at the end of that soil testing process is that the remediation has been conducted properly and the site is ready for residential use and rebuilding. That is when I formally remove the property from the register and it is available to be sold either as first right of refusal or on the private market.

In the ordinary course of events it is taking about four or five weeks after the demolition of the house to work through that process. There have been some that have taken much longer, including where, for example—it has not happened so much this winter yet—last winter we had significant rain and holes filled up with water. We had to work up a procedure that had to be approved and licensed by the EPA to remove the water as contaminated waste and dispose of the contaminated water at West Belconnen so that we could dry the site out so that we could do the soil testing. But, as I say, we have done that process nearly 700 times, and it is taking us about four or five weeks post demolition of the house.

**MS LAWDER:** My question goes back a while to the original appropriation bill for the loose-fill asbestos eradication scheme. There was an amount in there for remediation for the possible extension of Nudurr Drive.

**Mr Gentleman:** In Palmerston, yes.

**MS LAWDER:** Between Crace and Palmerston, where some of the original Mr Fluffy clean-up material had been dumped. Has that amount been completely expended? What was it used for?

**Mr Gentleman:** I can touch on that. It was used to determine whether or not a road extension could occur from Crace to Palmerston and whether or not that would be affected by the previous issue of asbestos dumping in the area. A study was done which showed that it would not affect the—

**MS LAWDER:** I am aware of the study; it was tabled in April last year. I was just wondering what amount of money was allocated; and was there any actual remediation that took place?

**Mr Kefford:** I think, Ms Lawder, those particular questions might be better addressed to our colleagues in Transport Canberra and City Services, because they are responsible for that space. We became involved in the initial study as part of the discussions we were having with the commonwealth before the scheme was announced about the overall remediation costs. At the point that study was concluded, it was handed back to TCCS. We will take on notice the amount that was actually spent on that site.



**MS LAWDER:** I will move to missed houses. I think in December last year there was a missed house identified.

**Mr Kefford:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I guess you have had the question before: how confident are you that all houses have now been identified?

**Mr Kefford:** There can be high levels of confidence in the community that there are not lots of missed houses around. The maths works this way. The original program surveyed 65,000 houses, which were the 65,000 houses standing in Canberra in 1980, which is the point at which the original supply was known to have finished. There were 1,089 properties identified as containing the product in that original remediation program survey. Since then, there have been seven missed, seven in 65,000. Essentially what we say to people when we are asked this question is: if it is not already known to be an issue, it is most unlikely that the loose-fill insulation—and there are other forms, including rock wool and other things—in the roof is asbestos. The advice remains that the only way to be certain that it is not asbestos is to have a test done now. In terms of confidence, as I say, it is seven in 65,000.

**Mr Gentleman:** I think for those people listening, too, I would say that if you have a concern that you may have any of that product, you should phone Access Canberra on 132281; we will certainly arrange some testing for you.

**MS LAWDER:** Sure. How would the finance of the scheme work if additional premises were identified? Would the same offer be open to new homes identified?

**Mr Kefford:** The provisions that the government made in 2014 and that we applied last December were that if a house is identified as being a missed house, an offer that is equivalent to the 2014 offer is made in terms of acquisition, ignoring the fact that it is an affected house—stamp duty concessions and so on. The only difference is the reference date for the valuation, which is still conducted on the same basis as all the others. The reference date for the valuation is the date on which the minister, as he did last year, determines that it needs to be added to the register and become eligible for the scheme.

**MS LAWDER:** Will those people, if they wish, still have the option to go it alone?

**Mr Kefford:** At the point they come into the scheme, the only difference is that valuation point. All of the other options remain in terms of time and deferred settlement. The only other difference would be—in the case of the December one, we still put a 2020 settlement on it so that we did not have multiple shutdown points for the scheme, given that we are in the middle of the demolition program at the moment.

**MS LAWDER:** Thanks.

**MS CODY:** I was wondering if you could expand for me—you have mentioned it a few times—on how the Asbestos Response Taskforce works with WorkSafe ACT to ensure that the demolition program is carried out safely both for workers and for the

community.

**Mr Gentleman:** That is a very important question. We started that work with the training arm and the need to ensure that all people that were going to work with asbestos in the ACT had the appropriate qualifications to do so. Mr Kefford will give you the details there.

**Mr Kefford:** Thank you, minister. Ms Cody, we have worked collaboratively with our colleagues in WorkSafe since before the task force was formed, while always respecting the independence that they have. While at different points in 2014, for example, WorkSafe were collocated with the task force, they have never been part of the task force, to preserve that independence. The commissioner and I regularly have conversations where this is one of the issues where we are very keen not to cross those streams.

The involvement of WorkSafe is really on two levels. In each case, the work health and safety regulations require the asbestos removal control plan for each of our sites to be lodged with WorkSafe five days ahead of the work. So there is an ongoing program of review. You would be aware that the government has funded, from the appropriation that Ms Lawder was referring to a short while ago, additional and dedicated resources within WorkSafe who are working very closely with us and with the contractors. So we have had a degree of consistency across that program but also the opportunity to share insights and new approaches, and we have seen those spread across the different contractors.

The other area where we have involved WorkSafe colleagues in the discussions has been to look at our overarching risk review and risk assessment and management processes. We have involved them not so much in their regulatory function overseeing our works but in dealing with our planning and our approach to managing risk on the sites. On several occasions, we have hosted contractor briefings where we have spoken, our procurement colleagues have spoken and WorkSafe have raised issues that are common to the whole of the program.

As I say, what we have sought to do, and I think have succeeded in doing, is deliver the program safely, not only for those who are most at risk, the workers doing the asbestos removal work inside the bags inside the contaminated areas, but also the neighbours and the rest of the community.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Chairman, can I say something before we go to the break. The discussion we have had in the past 30 minutes has been quite technical, but really what the task force has been doing is working with people, with the affected home owners, to ensure the best outcomes for them, working on issues such as health, financial issues and those sorts of things. I want to thank Mr Kefford and the task force for the work that they have done in this area.

**Mr Kefford:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr Gentleman:** It is very important. Mr Kefford has done a very good job of dealing with this. He deals with it personally. He really does put people first as well as professionally, and I want to thank him for the work he has done.

**Mr Kefford:** Thank you, minister. I appreciate that very much.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee will adjourn for lunch.

**Mr Kefford:** Chair, I am sorry to intervene. Can I just come back on the multi-unit question that I did not quite have the details for before?

**MS CODY:** Yes.

**Mr Kefford:** There are three complexes, with five affected properties.

**MS CODY:** Fantastic.

**Mr Kefford:** So it is a relatively contained but nevertheless complicated issue.

**MS CODY:** Absolutely, yes. Thank you so much for that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Hearing suspended from 1.01 to 2.19 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back to the afternoon session of day nine of estimates. In the afternoon session we will be looking at output class 1, planning; output class 1.3, heritage; as well as output class 2, environment, including water and the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, as well as 2.3, conservation and land management.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Wall, I did not make a statement earlier on environment, so I might do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Over to you.

**Mr Gentleman:** Prior to making the statement, can I clarify something from our earlier meeting, in regard to home owners who might be affected by insulation. I gave a contact number with Access Canberra. That contact number will certainly put them in touch with somebody to come and have a look at their house, but there could be a charge if it is a private person having a look at that house.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks for the opportunity to discuss with the committee this afternoon the work the government is doing in the environment and heritage space. High quality management of our natural and historical assets is a feature of the budget. I would like to begin by acknowledging that this Saturday marks the first year since the creation of the single conservation agency. On 1 July 2016 the ACT parks and conservation service joined with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate. The merge of the government functions has strengthened the ACT government's ability to deliver good environmental outcomes for our parks and reserves, our water catchments, softwood plantations and rural lands. It has also enabled better integration of biodiversity policy, planning, research and management.

The single conservation agency has achieved a significant amount of work over the past year to conserve and protect our environment. The ACT parks and conservation service undertook extensive fire management activities to protect our city from the threat of bushfires. Those included 6,041 hectares of grazing, 4,733 hectares of slashing, 516 hectares of prescribed burning, 171 kilometres of vegetation control and 243 kilometres of fire trails access maintenance.

The 2017-18 ACT budget provides \$3.1 million over three years to further improve our capacity to fight bushfires. This will include widening the existing fire trail network to provide access for the heavy tankers and earth moving machinery required for fire suppression and hazard reduction. Specifically, this funding will allow for the construction to expand the Northern Clear Range and Naas Valley fire trails within Namadgi National Park.

We will continue to protect native species and their habitats through environmental improvement work. The ACT budget provides \$2.3 million in measures to tackle environmental issues and protect nature reserves in the ACT, including the eradication of exotic pests and diseases and the protection of our native species through initiatives such as weed control. To further guard against the spread of pests and disease, the ACT government is improving biosecurity controls at the Canberra international airport. A total of \$576,000 has been provided to develop enhanced capacity and capability to respond to the high risk of exotic pests and disease incursions following the introduction of international flights to the ACT.

In 2017-18 the government will continue our conservation program. Last year 14 eastern quolls were released into the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary in Gungahlin. This marked the first time in over 80 years that eastern quolls have been seen on mainland Australia. In December 2016 footage from research cameras at Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary confirmed that the quolls had bred. The success of this project to date is testament to the work of all partners involved and is also a positive sign for introduction programs for future species in the ACT.

Surrounded by the predator-proof fence, the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary provides a safe haven where healthy box gum woodland and native species such as eastern quolls and bettongs can thrive. To promote the importance of the sanctuary and enhance visitor experience, the ACT budget provides \$162,000 as a grant to the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust to enable them to plan for a dedicated Mulligans Flat ecotourism visitors centre. The centre will become a gateway to one of Australia's unique and threatened woodlands and provides a focal point for tourists, the local community, land managers and scientists across multiple organisations to work together to learn about and restore woodlands.

The government is also committed to improving the health of our waterways in Canberra and its surrounding region. Construction began earlier this year on Isabella Pond wetlands in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment. This was the first project to be constructed as part of the healthy waterways program. It is a joint initiative of the ACT and Australian governments. The ACT healthy waterways project invests more than \$80 million to construct water quality infrastructure, including new wetlands, rain gardens and channel naturalisation in six priority catchment areas across the

ACT. To complement this work, a comprehensive regional education program known as H2OK: Keeping our waterways healthy was launched earlier this year.

The government continues to support our local heritage. I am proud to report that we ran another hugely successful Canberra and Region Heritage Festival this year. The festival, which was held over 20 days in April and May, had 164 events and attracted more than 20,000 people to that program. The festival marks the 50th anniversary of the 1967 constitutional referendum that saw Indigenous Australians finally included in the census and thus recognised as Australian citizens. In recognition of this milestone, the 2017 festival theme, “questions & change”, focused on commemorating this historic event by continuing the national conversation around Indigenous inclusion and celebrating our unique cultural heritage.

In March this year I opened applications for the annual heritage grants, a program that is essential in supporting a wide range of community projects that protect our heritage places and objects. It is a primary source of funding that helps individuals and community organisations to record, conserve and celebrate the history and heritage of the ACT. More than \$350,000 is available for this year’s heritage grants, which will be announced in September.

In the 2017-18 budget the government will continue our conservation programs. Last year 14 quolls, as I said earlier, were released. Having said that, we can now go to questions.

**MS LAWDER:** I have some questions about table 17 on page 18, the accountability indicators for output 1.3, heritage. Minister, earlier this year we had some debate in the Assembly about the backlog of heritage registration applications.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I note, for example, that it appears from this table that 100 per cent of heritage registrations by the ACT Heritage Council are made within the statutory time frame targets for the current year. The estimated outcome is 100 per cent, and the target for the coming year is 100 per cent. Could you explain how that is the case?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. We certainly want to improve the way we do heritage considerations with the council. I will get somebody from the directorate to give you some more detail on that.

**Ms O’Connell:** The statutory time frames outlined in the outputs are time frames that are legislated. I think the discussions you and the minister have had have been about nominations, which do not have a time frame under the legislation. However, once a provisional registration decision is made, there are time frames for public consultation. That is a five-month provisional registration time frame. Those time frames have been met.

**MS LAWDER:** Is that outlined in the Heritage Act?

**Ms O’Connell:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** And it is five months?

**Ms O'Connell:** Five months for an individual place and nine months for a precinct.

**MS LAWDER:** There are no accountability indicators relating to the earlier part of the process? We heard about some being there, for example, for 16 years.

**Mr Rake:** We do not have a performance measure for nominations, largely because the number of nominations we receive are driven by outside parties and are matters that are difficult for us to control. We have talked in previous committee hearings about the items that are on the nomination assessment list. The team has made further improvement in reducing the size of that list, and we are now down to 81. I believe the last time I gave evidence on the list the number was close to 130. That exhibits further progress from a peak, after a large number of nominations, when there were more than 300 items awaiting assessment.

**MS LAWDER:** Earlier today we spoke about another process: development applications which are lodged, and accountability indicators for them, because sometimes there are more than at other times. It does not appear to be an issue in other areas of the directorate. Why is it that we cannot have accountability indicators in this area?

**Mr Gentleman:** As Mr Rake said, there are two processes here. One is that once a nomination has been accepted, there is a time line for delivering on that nomination. But in regard to the number of nominations that may be put forward, that is not up to government.

**MS LAWDER:** Isn't that like with DAs? It is not up to government how many DAs are put forward either.

**Mr Ponton:** With respect to the comparison with development applications, the performance measure that you are referring to, the 75 per cent, still relates to a statutory time frame within the legislation. The nomination for heritage is essentially before we kick into that statutory process. A similar circumstance might be pre-DA consultation or pre-DA—

**MS LAWDER:** You have a processing time as well as the statutory—

**Mr Ponton:** What I am saying, Ms Lawder, is that if you make a direct comparison, apples with apples, it would be—

**MS LAWDER:** It was just an example.

**Mr Ponton:** development applications pre-lodgement. There is no performance indicator in relation to our processes there, because there are no statutory time frames associated with it.

**MS LAWDER:** Without any kind of transparency around indicators in this area, we may have the same 16 or 10-year time frame that we spoke about in the Assembly earlier this year. How are we going to ensure transparency of this process and improve

the process going forward?

**Mr Gentleman:** It is transparent in that we make sure the nominations are available for comment, of course, and that the work that the council does is quite apparent. It is reported quite regularly. I do not see any issue with that. In regard to the number of nominations, I imagine they will continue.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to follow on from your answer to Ms Lawder about the development application phase where, pre-lodgement, there is no statutory time, ultimately, the threshold between pre-lodgement and that formal lodgement, where the statutory time clock starts ticking, is on the proponent that is looking to do the work; whereas, in this instance, it is in the hands of government and the Heritage Council to determine yea or nay as to whether they are going to approve its heritage status before the time frame begins. What would be the reason for the Heritage Council wanting to drag their heels—in some instances, for over a decade—on making a decision on whether or not something qualifies for heritage listing?

**Mr Ponton:** In terms of dragging their heels, I do not know that that is something I would want to comment on, not being familiar with the particular circumstances.

**Mr Gentleman:** They work fairly hard.

**MS LAWDER:** Sixteen years: do you think that is an acceptable time frame?

**THE CHAIR:** In excess of a decade to make a decision is a long time in anyone's book.

**Mr Ponton:** What I am saying, if I may—

**THE CHAIR:** Longer than most of our careers, possibly.

**Mr Ponton:** I do not know the circumstances of the particular issue, given that it was before my time as director-general but, in terms of what I am hearing, we would report on nominations in the annual report. Certainly, in this place, I am aware that there has been some airing of the number of nominations and the backlog. Mr Rake has talked about the improvement that has been made in that space, but there is certainly no reason, I would expect—and I will certainly take advice from the minister—why we could not, for next year, consider a performance measure. We are currently reviewing our output indicators ready for next year, so I am certainly happy to take that on board and see what we can do for next time.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you. My point is that, without some form of accountability indicators, what we may see in the annual report could vary from year to year. It is up to you what you put in there, whereas this is a more formalised approach. I note that there are no accountability indicators relating to the heritage festival that Minister Gentleman referred to in his opening statement. With the 20,000 people that Minister Gentleman mentioned that attended, is that individuals or registrations to attend? For example, I attended about half-a-dozen events. Am I counted six times or once?

**Mr Gentleman:** Those are reported back to the heritage part of EPSDD from each of

the contributors to the heritage festival. For example, the Majura bush festival was part of it this year, and the organisers of that were the ones who reported back to the directorate on the numbers that attended. We take that as a fairly close approximation of the numbers that attended. I attended that once. You may have gone more than once to the bush festival. I think I went to about 14 or 15 events this year, so I would have been counted each time I went to an event.

**MS LAWDER:** My point remains about whether you may consider in the future additional accountability indicators for the work in the heritage area, output 1.3, to provide more visibility. There is quite a bit of community interest in the output.

**Mr Gentleman:** There is, I am sure.

**MS LAWDER:** Having a bit more visibility of what is there would be appropriate.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Cody?

**MS CODY:** Are we sticking to heritage?

**THE CHAIR:** Are you happy, minister, to take questions on the three output classes that are scheduled for this session?

**Mr Gentleman:** Sure.

**MS CODY:** I wanted to check before I asked. I have got lots of them.

**Mr Gentleman:** We might have to move some directorate staff around as we answer.

**MS CODY:** I noticed that in this year's budget there is funding set aside for managing native wildlife. I am interested to understand the kangaroo fertility trial. Can you give me some more information about that?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. It is a trial looking at how we can perhaps manage the population of eastern grey kangaroos in the territory in regard to the resources that we have to support them and the environmental impact they have in the territory. I will ask Mr Iglesias to give us some more detail.

**Mr Iglesias:** This is an interesting topic in that we are the only jurisdiction that has committed funds to testing a theory, and that is that we may be able to control the fertility of female eastern grey kangaroos. There is a drug that comes out of North America called GonaCon. It has been successfully used in deer. It has been shown over a number of years that it controls fertility in deer, deer being one of their key herbivores. An overabundance of deer in North America causes all sorts of problems in their environments.

They have tested GonaCon in the field and it has been shown to give good results for up to seven or eight years. Working with the CSIRO since 2015, we have been able to start clinical trials of GonaCon in selected groups of eastern grey kangaroos right here in Canberra. What we have been able to show is that it also works in kangaroos. Over 80 per cent of females that are injected with the drug become infertile. What we are



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now in the process of doing is actually trying to get an operational response to that. We are trying to operationalise it.

It is one thing to be able to inject an animal but it is another thing to be able to deliver the agent remotely, say, from a dart gun. If we are able to show that we can do that safely and humanely, that opens up another tool in our toolbox for managing eastern grey kangaroo overpopulation.

We are in that process now. In some small areas that we have worked in we have shown it can work. The next step will be to try to expand the delivery method and the testing to, say, a small nature reserve. It might be one of the nature reserves on the culling operation program.

At this stage I think it is true to say that I cannot see, at least in the short term, that we would be able to replace culling with darting. It would be a tool in the toolbox. It would be one of the things that we would use as part of a suite of tools available to us. That is simply because the process of delivering the chemical introduces a lot of complexity if we are going to do it right. But it is something that I think shows more promise than even we ourselves had originally thought it might offer. As I say, we are the only ones trialling it.

**MS CODY:** Speaking of doing research, particularly animal-related research, can you provide me with an update on some of the other research that is going on, for example, the bettong release program, which the minister mentioned in his opening statement, and the quoll release program? I noted recently we were also talking about the corroboree frog.

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes.

**MS CODY:** Can you give me an update on those, please?

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, there are about four or five species that we focus on in the ACT as key threatened species in respect of which we believe we have the skills experience, but also the community around us, to be able to really make a difference in the environment. You mentioned the bettongs. That is a good example of a species that effectively did not exist on the mainland before we were able to partner with the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust before the government was able to dedicate funds to build a predator-free fence.

We would not even be able to contemplate doing anything with this animal, because basically it has gone extinct. It gets eaten by foxes and the foxes are still out there. By creating a predator-proof fence and by drawing on the expertise that is in this town in the ANU and also the CSIRO, we have been able to convince the land managers in Tasmania to give up some of their bettongs. That was hard. But I think that was because we were able to demonstrate that we had a group of people who knew what they were doing and had a good chance of success.

Most reintroductions like the bettongs fail. In fact, I think the number is around 60 per cent. It is fraught with difficulty to bring animals back that have become locally extinct. The fact that the bettongs have done so well is not purely based on

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government initiative. It is based on partnership. That is the real thing that we have going here with the bettongs and the quolls. It is that government is able to involve the community and the people around us to get a really good result.

What we have out there at the moment is, we believe, over 200 eastern bettongs that are free ranging at Mulligans Flat. They are all breeding. In fact, the extension to the Mulligans Flat fence is probably a good planning step to start to bring in, because we are starting to get a lot of them. They are digging up the truffles, which they rely on. Of course, the absence of foxes means that they can do really well.

Our monitoring is regularly demonstrating young in the pouch. Way back in the 1800s, these things were just killed habitually by the first settlers because they dug up their potatoes. You can see that they have the capacity to really take off if the conditions are right.

Quolls are a little more complicated. We did not think they would take to this environment as well. We know that our fence was susceptible to quolls, because these things climb. It was interesting. The team made a specific decision to still go ahead and bring them in because we thought we could make some amendments to our fence. That has worked but there are still some animals that are getting out. The Woodlands and Wetlands Trust are saying, "Do you know what? That is part of the story because these things belong in the ACT landscape."

It is actually a bit of a model that we have copied from New Zealand where their predator-proof fence is leaky to certain species. The reason they do that is so they can expose a community to the fact that these animals are amongst the landscape. If they are to remain and to thrive outside the fence, it needs a community to get involved.

What we have found is that the local Gungahlin population has really taken these animals to heart. A couple of the quolls got away. We got phone calls from people telling us, "Come and get it. I would really like you to leave it, because I love it, but I know you have got to come and get it."

It is a learning process. It is based on good scientific evidence. There is a whole series of scientific processes that we have in place and that we had to determine prior to these animals arriving. For example, we had to determine that we were not going to introduce new diseases. We had to determine that the food was here for these animals. They had not been here for so long; how would we know that the food would be here for them to survive and thrive? That meant that small research projects all along the way were able to inform us and tick off progressively to a point where we made the call to bring them in.

I might close by mentioning what we are doing with bettongs at the lower Cotter catchment. That again is a natural progression beyond the fence. What we are saying is, "Okay, what if we could reintroduce these animals outside a protected area? What if we could control the predator to the point where these things might still be able to survive?"

What we are finding out at the lower Cotter catchment is that the animals are surviving. Some are being taken by foxes, sure, but what we are finding is that they

are breeding. All the females have got young ones in them. If we can find a sweet spot where we can sustainably control the pest, the fox, maybe one day we can consider that this animal could survive without the protective confines of a fence.

Now, the jury is out on that. We still need to be convinced that that is the case. It has been going for a year now. We are still not convinced that they could survive on their own, and over the course of the next six months we will probably form a view on that.

**MS CODY:** And the corroboree frog?

**Mr Iglesias:** We are talking about the northern corroboree frog. It used to live in its thousands up in the high hills in Namadgi. In fact, you would know that there were frogs there, because you would yell out and they would respond. They would croak. They have that interesting feature.

In the last 10, 15 years their population plummeted. What we did at Tidbinbilla is pioneer a process basically of getting a huge big shipping container. We fitted it out so that we could basically hatch the eggs that we took out of the wild and brought into captivity. Over a number of years we determined the processes by which that worked the best.

Recently, in the past two to three years, we have reintroduced hundreds of frogs back out into the high wetlands of Namadgi National Park. Going out last year, and again this year, we have actually detected them, not in huge numbers, but we are suspicious that there is a proportion of the animals that we are releasing that are surviving in the conditions that are there now.

Some of you may have heard of chytrid fungus, which has killed frogs all over the world. We are suspicious that that might be what caused the crash in numbers in the first place. But over time these critters may be developing a resistance. We are hoping that the animals we have got up there might have that in them. Again, it is a long-term process and we will learn more as the years go on.

**Mr Gentleman:** The directorate is doing some fantastic work in looking after endangered species. We should congratulate, of course, the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust on the work they have done too. Of course, their MOU with Zealandia provides the other opportunity in New Zealand. Just to touch on some of the other work they are doing, they have got the brush-tailed wallabies at Tidbinbilla that have surrogate mothers. They have yellow-footed wallabies that actually mother the brush-tailed wallaby joeys.

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, that is right.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I go back to the control of the eastern grey kangaroo population. How many animals are scheduled to be culled this year as part of the government's population management strategy?

**Mr Gentleman:** We have those details for you. Mr Iglesias.

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, it is 2,606. I will confirm that number but I am pretty sure that is

the number that was set out there.

**THE CHAIR:** How many permits, if any, does the government issue to rural leaseholders around the ACT?

**Mr Iglesias:** I could not tell you the exact number of permits. We will take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Iglesias:** But typically it can be between 80 and 100 permits yearly.

**THE CHAIR:** It is in that range—80 to 100 head or—

**Mr Iglesias:** Eighty to 100 permits.

**THE CHAIR:** Permits; how many animals does each permit then allow?

**Mr Iglesias:** It varies. It varies on the nature of the application, the size of the holding, but typically it could be hundreds of animals per holding.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; per holding?

**Mr Iglesias:** Per holding, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** There is a question that often comes up every year when the cull starts in the ACT. People often raise with me that they are supportive of the cull but particularly people that have come off the land look at it and say, “What a waste of the carcasses at the end.” Is there a reason why still we have not been able to find a use for the carcasses once they have been shot? It seems for a lot of people that it is a missed opportunity for industry. It is a waste of a life and surely we should be thinking more broadly about some innovative use for them.

**Mr Gentleman** Well, we really have looked for opportunities in industry to pick those carcasses up but we have not had much success. There does not seem to be a lot of interest.

**THE CHAIR:** What work has the government done to try to establish that?

**Mr Gentleman** Garner interest?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Iglesias:** In the past few years, Mr Wall, we have had the capacity to use between about 12 and 15 per cent of all the carcasses. What we do is we butcher some of the carcasses and use them in our feral animal control program. We use them as baits. We have made some inquiries with our New South Wales colleagues. The situation is that in New South Wales the quota for the sustainable harvest of kangaroos is in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. So when you look at the rationale for our cull, which is purely conservation—it is not to drive a sustainable industry; it is to drive

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conservation outcomes—what we are yielding is very small numbers. This year it is 2,600. I think the highest quota we ever had was about three and a half thousand.

**THE CHAIR:** But I am surprised that, in conjunction with what is happening in New South Wales, operators there have not said, “Actually, we will come and take them.”

**Mr Iglesias:** The issue is about the logistics. If you are culling for conservation purposes, it is a different set of operating parameters than if you are culling for meat for the pet trade or for human consumption overseas. That carries with it a degree of regulation and a degree of expertise that is needed to be brought to bear.

Whilst there are people undertaking exactly those activities across the border, there is no push, if you like, to get those extra couple of thousand from the ACT. Quite frankly, New South Wales never meets its quota. There is not a driver in the first instance. The second point would be that currently the policy is all about conservation; it is not about feeding an industry, at least in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** Certainly in the conservation sense, simply killing an animal purely for conservation needs and not doing anything with it goes against the grain in so much of what farming and agriculture practice has always been and even in the way that Indigenous Australians have looked after the land, making good use of it where possible. It just seems to me to be a wanton waste. Ms Le Couteur.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have got some more questions on kangaroos. You said it was complex to use vaccination as a total replacement for shooting. Can you tell us a bit more about the complexities and how much of those complexities might be financial?

**Mr Iglesias:** When you are trying to drive the population down to a sustainable level, the key issue is that you are always limited by resourcing. You are looking to find a mode of operation that will give you the best result on the ground. We focus every year on about a dozen nature reserves where we undertake culling, and they are the highest conservation value reserves that we operate in. It would be better if we culled fewer and over our whole conservation estate but again it is a resource limitation.

What we find is that the way that we cull kangaroos now with firearms is accepted worldwide as being the most effective, the most sustainable and the most humane way to deal with overpopulations. What we think we might be able to do is rely on firearms to bring them to a sustainable level and then introduce the fertility control to keep them at sustainable levels. And that is what I meant before about a tool in the toolbox. Presumably at some time in the future we could have a situation where we would just be using fertility control, if you accept that firearms have brought you to that sustainable level and then subsequently over years you rely on the fertility to keep it at that level. And that is because you are having to deal with fewer animals. So it becomes more effective to do it.

At the moment the way that we are doing it, to deliver one dose to a female requires two operators—one to deliver the agent and another to mark the animal so that we know that it has had a dose of the agent—whereas with firearms you just need one operator. It has introduced a complexity that we currently do not have. It allows us to get across a lot more space. At the present moment we could not use fertility control

at all, but down the track I can see a use for it in the way I described.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You talked about your toolbox. Have you anything else in the toolbox apart from vaccinations and shooting? You implied this was top edge.

**Mr Iglesias:** It is pretty restricted. If we have got small, contained populations we can do other things. We can go in and do veterinary operations on the animals. But as far as free-ranging populations are concerned, it is pretty restricted. There is not much we can do. We have looked at translocation. That has been looked at over a number of years in Australia, and there is little, if any, published evidence to suggest that for free-ranging populations catching them and moving them somewhere else is going to be effective, on a number of grounds.

When you think about it, these animals are plentiful all across the eastern seaboard. What is the logic in moving them from a place where they are plentiful to a place where they are plentiful? It just does not make any sense. And it introduces all sorts of risks in relation to capture myopathy. These things can die just from being caught and transported.

Putting fences around them can work in some instances and we have seen, I think, some good results locally. But we have to be careful how we use that because putting up barriers also puts barriers up for other animals and can impact other animals, their movements and their wellbeing. It is about looking at the situation and looking into that bag of tricks and saying, “What works best for this?” As far as free-ranging populations are concerned, firearms is really the only option at the moment.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have a substantive question. In budget paper 3, page 100, it talks about improving efficiency in biodiversity management, which is, in other words, reducing the funding. Can you explain what you will actually be doing to improve the efficiency?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. Can you give us the page number again, my apologies?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Page 100. It is called “Smarter government spending—Improving efficiency in biodiversity management”. But if you look at it, they all have minuses, they are achieving savings. It is reducing the funding for biodiversity.

**Mr Gentleman:** What efficiencies can we achieve?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** What efficiencies, what were we doing that now we are not doing? Tell me more, basically.

**Mr Rake:** Could I start by confessing to a typographical error. It should say “Improving efficiency in biosecurity management”, not “biodiversity management”. The text below does correctly refer to biosecurity.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It does say “biosecurity” but—

**Mr Rake:** The published heading should say “biosecurity” not “biodiversity”.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** We are not actually reducing funding in biodiversity?

**Mr Rake:** No, we are improving efficiency in biosecurity.

**Mr Gentleman:** It is biosecurity.

**Mr Rake:** Our apologies for that; it is a typo. Would you like an explanation about what that involves?

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I do not know if I would. I suppose so. I was asking a totally different question but what biosecurity do we not need anymore? What exotic diseases are we not likely to get?

**Mr Rake:** We now have an international airport.

**Mr Iglesias:** This is more a reflection of the fact that as a directorate we think that there are efficiency gains to be had because we were able to develop a biosecurity strategy that was released by the minister, I think it was, last year. What that did was garner all the experiences that were brought to bear in other jurisdictions. As a small jurisdiction it makes no sense for us to reinvent the wheel in relation to biosecurity but it makes more sense to form partnerships and relationships with our neighbours in New South Wales and, indeed, the commonwealth government to help us deliver biosecurity outcomes.

The biggest issue, of course, is the international airport that we have now that we did not have before. Our colleagues in New South Wales and the commonwealth have been able, if you like, to come to the party and help us significantly in the provision of resources and, in fact, in making some of their staff available and some of their intellectual property available. Hence, we think we can deliver a saving.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I did look enough to find on the page before, page 99, “More and better jobs—Canberra International Airport—Guarding against the spread of pests and diseases”. This says “biosecurity control”. I did not twig that we were doing biosecurity twice. Actually, we are taking it away on one page and adding it in on the other page, just to confuse us.

**Mr Iglesias:** We are identifying a need on one element and we are identifying a saving, granted within the same context but slightly different.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** While we are on budget paper 3, if we move to page 96, under “Better services in your community—Protecting our native species and environment” the last sentence says that funding from 2019-20 onwards will be continued in the context of future budgets. In other words, weed control funding is secured only for two years. Why is it only for two years? I am confident that the weeds will still be there.

**Mr Gentleman:** Usually it is a program. We fund a program until its completion and then we will start another program. That is why we do it in these clumps, if you like.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I think we can all be confident that in two years time we will

not have eradicated all the weeds in the ACT. Why is it only two-year funded? We have all had, I am sure, representations from people about the need for continuous, ongoing weed management.

**Mr Gentleman:** Certainly. I think, though, that it is wise to look at programs that you can implement and get through. As we see new technologies available, those programs can change over time. There is an opportunity there to learn from the program that we are introducing now and running through and to introduce a new program with new technologies. It might need more funding or less funding as we go through a second program later.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am disappointed it is not four-year funding because, as I said, they will be there.

**Mr Gentleman:** You can be assured that we will still be fighting weeds in four years time.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Good.

**MS LEE:** I ask a supplementary. How is the program delivered? Is it tendered out on a contract to an external service provider or is it done in house? How is that done?

**Mr Iglesias:** It is a combination of those things. What we do is that we go out regularly and prequalify a number of contractors. Within the ACT and region there are a number of contractors who have the capacity. They have set themselves up as a business to be able to deliver this sort of work. We prequalify that list. Over the course of the year we just use them job by job. That would be the overwhelming majority, I would suggest, of our budget. It would probably be upwards of 75 maybe even 80 per cent that is managed in that way.

Then there is a smaller proportion of weed control that our rangers will deliver as part of their work. It might be more specific. It might be in areas that are hard to get to and would cost the territory a lot more if we were to go to contract on than if we did it ourselves. The majority is contracted work.

**MS LEE:** And that is through a tender process?

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes.

**Mr Gentleman:** I might be able to clear up a little in regard to the program that I was talking about and for that funding period. Of course, we have the ACT weed strategy which is running from 2009 to 2019. The funding is sitting alongside that program, that weed strategy. And there will be a new strategy from that period onwards. Funding will be guided by that new strategy from that period onwards.

**MS LAWDER:** Minister, I wonder if you would be able to give us an update on the ACT government's position about the national heritage listing of Canberra and the commonwealth heritage listing of Lake Burley Griffin and adjacent lands.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes we certainly can. We will have heritage come back to you once



again but Mr Rake has quite a bit of detail and some history on this, I understand.

**Mr Rake:** The first thing to note is that both of those decisions are matters for the commonwealth government and the commonwealth minister to engage in. The ACT government position in relation to the listing of Canberra on the national heritage list is that we recognise the symbolic importance of this place but we are very conscious that a national heritage listing could introduce a new level of red tape on the development of our city. We are keen to work with the commonwealth to find a way to recognise the heritage significance of Canberra, the planning of Canberra as the national capital, but in a way that minimises the risk of undue impost. At a bare minimum, a listing on the national heritage list would bring in a new level of assessment and approval for development proposals.

The Chief Minister has identified a model and proposed it to the commonwealth that is based on the national heritage listed citation for the city of Adelaide. It covers the inner city grid, the original Colonel Light grid and surrounding parklands. It recognises the importance of that design, it protects the geometry, it protects the roads and the road reserves, it does not place any burden on privately held property within that grid.

The Chief Minister has proposed that a model like that could be an acceptable one to look at for the heritage listing of Canberra and could pull out some of the important elements of Walter Burley Griffin's architecture or alignment of key streets and avenues, protect some of the key vistas but still allow for renewal, economic development and growth of our city and the spaces in between.

**MS LAWDER:** Has the ACT government made a submission about that to the federal government in the—

**Mr Gentleman:** We have written to the federal government along those lines that Mr Rake described.

**MS LAWDER:** And have you had any response from the federal government?

**Mr Rake:** No. The workings of the federal government in considering that are tightly held to themselves.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you for the update.

**MR PETERSSON:** Minister, I was wondering if you could tell me how the directorate incorporates Indigenous knowledge into conservation?

**Mr Gentleman:** That is a very important question, I think, and one that is certainly embedded in our policy on how we deal with conservation across the territory—both at a policy level in talking to Indigenous people about their culture and how they went about living in the area prior and what we can learn from them, of course, about how we provide further environmental controls in dealing with our land to actually embedding them in the directorate as well. We have some fantastic Indigenous rangers who provide a great deal of information for the directorate but also for the public. I will ask Mr Iglesias to give us some details.

**Mr Iglesias:** The minister is making reference to our Murumbung Yurung Murra staff. That means strong, healthy pathways. Within the ACT government there are a number of Aboriginal staff members and within this directorate we are, if you like, the group that brings them together. The majority are operating out of this directorate. At last count it would be eight or nine parks and conservation staff that identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This last year we have appointed our first senior Aboriginal officer, if you like a leader of the group, healthy country manager, Ms Mary Mudford. She is a Ngunnawal-Wiradjuri woman. What she is doing is bringing together our efforts on the ground under the one title of healthy country manager.

What we are finding is that the demand is incredible. There has been a great take-up both from the public and from our colleagues in other directorates for advice, for engagement from our team of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. A good example might be the literally hundreds of interpretive activities that these staff members deliver at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi national park: many, many school visits as well as policy advice at quite ground level, back to the policy writers, about things like management plans and plans that relate to the management of country.

We did not have that before. That is something unique that we have been able to develop in the past two or three years, which I think has added immeasurably to our capacity to reflect the Aboriginal community of the ACT in the way that we manage our protected areas.

**Mr Gentleman:** It is really interesting too to see how this sort of Aboriginal interaction can help in the heritage sense as well as in the environment sense. During Heritage Week this year we had conversations with Indigenous groups, particularly one with Matilda House who was here as a young person in the ACT and used to help out a group of people who lived around a park that has now been set aside in Red Hill. She described the way that they lived in those days and the rich amount of flora and fauna that was in the ACT before European settlement. The riverways, for example the Molonglo River, had a lot of food for Aboriginal people. There were freshwater mussels, crayfish and native fish as well that they would feed on. While we still have crayfish and, of course, native fish in our waterways here in Canberra, we have not seen freshwater mussels in that time. They are good learning opportunities.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a few quick questions relating to page 71 of budget paper 3. The first one is about sustainably managing our forests. Is that the issue that we have heard about recently which has upset some of our mountain bike riders?

**Mr Gentleman:** It is associated, I think, yes. What we are doing is looking at how we can manage our softwood plantations in the sense that they “wash their own face”—the term we use—basically, that they pay for themselves. We are looking at an opportunity to work with our off-road mountain bike people and our forestry harvesting operations so that we can ensure good outcomes for our forests and recreational use of forests in the territory. I have most recently met with the group from Majura Pines, but also, through the directorate, we are having meetings with Kowen and the other forest near Kowen. What is its name?

**Mr Rake:** Sparrow.

**Mr Gentleman:** The Sparrow forest people, too.

**MS LAWDER:** Has it already started at Sparrow forest?

**Mr Gentleman:** The Majura one is the first one that is due to start. Harvesting is planned, of course. What we are trying to do is harvest in a strategic way that provides an income. Of course, the trees reach a level of maturity that we need to be cautious with, too. In particular, in Majura, some of the trees have fallen over in wind events, and we are concerned for the safety of the cyclists. Meeting with these particular groups has been successful so far in ensuring that we can stagger the way we do the harvesting so that we do not ruin the opportunity for them to recreate in those forests. Mr Rake has been doing a fair bit of that work, and Mr Iglesias as well, if you would like them to provide some more detail.

**Mr Rake:** Would you like to talk about the 500,000 as well as the partnerships?

**Mr Iglesias:** Sure. The minister is absolutely correct. We have 8,000 hectares of softwood plantation in the ACT. We are one of the few jurisdictions that allow recreation to be part of that plantation investment. That has been really successful in the ACT. We have a model where we work with the groups and make them aware of what our intentions are.

A couple of years ago now, we undertook a program where we strategically looked at our softwood plantation estate and determined that we could get a better result for the territory by shifting to a different model. Basically, that meant that we tested the market and were able to go to market for our harvesting and for the marketing of our softwood plantation. In other words, we used the New South Wales Forestry Corporation, which does this on a much bigger scale, to leverage those benefits to the territory. That meant that we were able to harvest a bit more timber at a better price, and hence we were able to return a dividend to the territory, which is the reference that I think you are making, Ms Lawder, from the paper.

**MS LAWDER:** I have had some emails about it. Let me read one: “Can we help save the mountain bike trails at Sparrow Hill? I would like to add, ‘Is Kowen? However, harvesting there has already commenced.”

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I note Mr Gentleman often talks about active travel and healthy lifestyles. This particular correspondent points out in the email: “The government is short sighted if they think a few million dollars they will make from harvesting is anywhere near the health and economic benefits to be gained from retaining mountain bike trails in their current format at Sparrow Hill and Kowen Forest.” I just wanted to pass that on.

**Mr Gentleman:** I agree with your correspondent in regard to the benefit that we see in mountain bike riding in the territory, both as a health benefit, if you like, but also for tourism. We see some fantastic opportunities and events that occur in our forests in relation to mountain bike riding. People come from interstate to Canberra even for

a day's ride because the trails are so good.

The instruction I have given to the directorate is to work with these particular groups to ensure that we can retain the current tracks as much as possible; that if some of the tracks get damaged during harvesting, we get them into repair or renew tracks; and that we go through a plan, a strategic process, with them to ensure that this continues.

I have also said to the directorate that I would like to see this grow. There is an opportunity for us in some of the areas that have been left after the 2003 fires. Ingledene forest to the south of Canberra is a good example where we may be able to do softwood plantation again, because it is paying for itself, and provide an even bigger recreational facility for the off-road cyclists.

**MS LAWDER:** I have one other question. I do not want to soak up too much time, but it is about the next point on that table about a Googong foreshore access gate upgrade. My understanding from anglers is that there are two gates maybe 10 kilometres apart at Googong and there is a ranger house at one of them. Is the intention to remove the ranger from that location?

**Mr Iglesias:** No. The saving there would look at that southern gate. Instead of having our staff opening and closing that southern gate, we are going to maintain it closed. We will still service the car park so that people can get access at that point. It is just at a point further along the road. Instead of getting access right up close, their access is going to be a bit more removed. But we are talking about that southern access point, which gets very little access.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to clarify, that is what is commonly termed "London Bridge"?

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes. A small proportion of total visitation to Googong comes in that way. We think that if we can keep that gate closed and encourage people to still use it but walk a bit further, that gives us a sustainable saving.

**MS LAWDER:** Is the electronic gate up at the other end?

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes. That is the other element. Currently the way that we run our personnel is basically driven around opening and closing a gate. If we can be a bit more creative about how we do that, we can find savings in our personnel as well, not in—

**MS LAWDER:** But if the ranger is located pretty much near where that first gate is—

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, but what happens is that it can close quite late at night.

**MS LAWDER:** I think it is 6 pm in winter and 8 pm in summer or something?

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, that is right. That means that we have to stagger the shift times. By being creative in the way that we open and close, we can free an FTE up to be much more productive.

**MS LAWDER:** But the ranger will remain there?

**Mr Iglesias:** The FTE count at Googong will reduce by one but, basically, if you look at the whole park service, that provides opportunities elsewhere.

**MS LAWDER:** So it is not a reduction in the number of rangers?

**Mr Iglesias:** I have not looked at the number of rangers for this financial year. I would have to take that on notice.

**Mr Gentleman:** We will take that on notice.

**MS LAWDER:** Did you have any discussion with anglers groups or anything about the closing of the gate?

**Mr Iglesias:** We have not specifically spoken to them about this particular issue, but we have spoken over a number of years about access: how do you get access; where do you come in from; do you use the southern entry; do you use the northern entry. The reason most people use the northern entry is that it gives them access to the boat ramp. The overwhelming majority of anglers are coming in from that entry.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**MS LEE:** Minister, I have a question in relation to water management. The ACT water strategy says that it wants to improve water conservation and water sensitive urban design to reduce water use by 25 per cent, and 40 per cent in new developments, extensions and refurbishments. Is this target being met, and how is it being monitored?

**Mr Gentleman:** It is very important that we look at our water management. We met with ministers most recently to discuss the Murray-Darling Basin plan. Today, we have the water matters conference occurring at CSIRO Discovery Centre. So we are looking at how we can manage our water. With the meeting with water ministers, we were pleased to see an in-principle agreement for water trading between New South Wales and the ACT. When the agreement takes place, if we have extra water that is going in, New South Wales can purchase that. Later on, when the ACT grows even further, we may need to purchase water from New South Wales. That is in principle at this stage, but I am pretty sure that we will have that in place fairly shortly. I will ask Mr Kendall to provide more details.

**Mr Kendall:** Just to follow on from the comments the minister has made, the ACT water strategy, released in August 2014, is now approaching the halfway point of its first implementation strategy. We are looking at progress and achievement of the targets under the strategy, the water reduction target being one of those. It is a real good news story in terms of per capita water reduction. Certainly we are well ahead of our time frames for achieving those targets. That puts us in a very good position.

The sustainable diversion limit that we have under the Murray-Darling Basin plan is 42½ gegalitres for surface water. We are using only about half of that at present. So we are well placed. We still need to be watchful and mindful of our water use, and continue to promote water efficiency and the wise use of water. The water trading that

the minister alluded to is one of the long-term water resource options that can allow for population growth up to and then beyond that sustainable diversion limit that we have in place.

**MS LEE:** Just to follow up, in the strategy you refer to striking a balance. It says that the ACT government will review agreed levels of service for water utilities of the ACT and monitor their performance. It goes on to talk about agreement on levels of service to allow the community to understand how seasonal variability and climate change will impact on their supply. Can you give us a bit more information about how this occurs and what projects or strategies the ACT government puts in place to ensure that the community is informed?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. The H2OK program is a good way of explaining it, I suppose, as to the way that we treat our water as well. We are running through that educational program now about only water down the drain and engaging people at different demographics on how to ensure that our waterways are clean. I will ask Mr Kendall to speak in regard to consumption.

**Mr Kendall:** As part of the national water reform efforts, the ACT is an active contributor in a range of activities. When it comes to the performance reporting of our urban water utility, Icon Water, the ACT participates in what is known as the national performance report. That is a national report of all urban utilities across the capital cities of Australia and other large urban centres. That is published each year by the Bureau of Meteorology. We facilitate the provision of information from the ACT and from Icon Water into that process, and it shows the relative performance of Icon against all of the other large water providers in Australia.

**MS LEE:** Minister, you mentioned the H2OK program. I suppose it is a little premature to get an insight into how well that is working, but can you give us an insight into how many grant applications have been made for that program?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. I have not got the detail here. We have the ACT healthy waterways program, a total of \$93.5 million. That is the joint initiative between the ACT and the commonwealth.

**MS LEE:** Yes.

**Mr Kendall:** In terms of the demonstration grants program, it has only recently closed, and we are going through a process at the moment of evaluating the grants. I do not have the exact figure here with me, but we certainly have been oversubscribed, which is a positive thing, to generate some competition and some good quality applications.

**MS LEE:** When will the successful applicants be announced?

**Mr Kendall:** Again, I could take that on notice, along with the numbers of applications that we have received.

**MS LEE:** That would be great. Thank you. Finally, while we are on water, are there any other projects that you have not mentioned that the ACT government is engaged

in to reduce pollutants entering our waterways?

**Mr Gentleman:** In the healthy waterways program there are six of the major catchment areas that are receiving funding for it: Lake Tuggeranong catchment, Fyshwick catchment, Yarralumla Creek, west Belconnen, upper Molonglo and lower Molonglo catchment. Each of those is receiving funding for programs for healthy waterways. They include things like rain gardens; doing better water quality control in regard to where water flows go; and removing some of the old-style waterways projects, like the old concrete style of water drains, so that we allow water to go into the aquifer. That occurs at rain gardens as well, which is a good way of treating the water before it flows down into the aquifer. There is quite a bit going on in that space.

**MS LEE:** Does that take into consideration—I think we have previously talked about this in the annual reports hearings—the issues with carp and blue-green algae in our lakes.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. The two are a bit different. It certainly will be dealing with blue-green algae in providing healthier waterways. The carp project is a slightly different. We used some of that initiative when we were doing Isabella weir in that we removed two tonnes of carp, so it was a very successful program, whilst the weir was being upgraded, to get rid of that species from that area.

With the meeting with agriculture ministers across Australia late last year in New Zealand, the federal government announced that it would fund a program for carp eradication with a virus. That is moving forward. We do not know the time line quite yet for introduction into the ACT. One of the real concerns we have is about the biomass that will occur. It is very successful, apparently; it will eradicate the carp. But there is a biomass that occurs when the carp die, and we are still struggling to get from the government how much support they are going to give us to remove that biomass. It has to happen fairly quickly. There could be tonnes and tonnes of biomass to remove from, for example, Lake Burley Griffin. We are working through that process now with the federal government to see what can be done to remove that biomass when it occurs.

**MS LEE:** Can we just ask a clarification question? Minister, you mentioned two tonnes. I think the directorate's Facebook says four tonnes.

**Mr Rake:** The four tonnes is an aggregate across the upper Stranger and Isabella ponds, so it is two ponds.

**MS LEE:** Yes.

**Mr Gentleman:** Double the fun with carp.

**Mr Rake:** Carpageddon.

**THE CHAIR:** You have been working on that one all week.

**Mr Rake:** I will spell it for *Hansard* later.

**MS LEE:** I was going to say that I wondered how that is going to be captured in *Hansard*. Thank you, Mr Rake.

**MR STEEL:** My questions were also about the healthy waterways projects. Originally when there was consultation on the projects under the five different areas there were a range of priority projects and some reserve projects. What projects are going ahead and what is the time line for the construction of those projects?

**Mr Gentleman:** That is right; there is a priority schedule for the projects. I am very pleased to see Tuggeranong is receiving the first treatment. I am very happy with that. I will ask Matthew to give you some more detail on how they are playing through.

**Mr Kendall:** As you may be aware, the ACT healthy waterways project is being delivered in two phases. Phase 1, which was finalised in May 2016, focused on water quality, monitoring and assessment, investigation of sites for priority intervention, and the development of an integrated water quality framework. A supplementary business case was submitted to the commonwealth at that time along with the list of projects, and stage 2 is now underway. As the minister outlined, we have commenced construction on the Isabella weir wetlands work. We have also progressed procurement of the contract administrator and the managing contractor for those works, and we are now in a stage of doing detailed design for the assets.

The commonwealth in approving the supplementary business case had a number of due diligence criteria, so we have revised the funding schedule to reflect those due diligence criteria. Basically the detailed design and costing will determine which projects and the quantum of projects that will go ahead. We would expect that the distribution would roughly match what has been put out previously: certainly a focus on Lake Tuggeranong but also projects to improve the quality of Lake Burley Griffin and also projects to improve the quality of the Murrumbidgee River as well.

**MR STEEL:** In relation to the Yarralumla Creek catchment projects, I understand that one of those proposed priority projects in Curtin is now not going ahead. Is there an opportunity to potentially fund a reserve project as a result of that saving?

**Mr Kendall:** There is, and that was one of the due diligence criteria the commonwealth put forward, that is, if a project did not go ahead a preference should be put on a replacement project from the West Belconnen catchment, which is one of the six catchments. That is what we are looking at as part of the detailed design now to determine the best projects to go forward.

**MR STEEL:** Is there an idea about which areas will move forward sooner, particularly with Yarralumla Creek catchment but also in relation to the Molonglo catchment? What time line are we expecting on those?

**Mr Kendall:** The work we are doing currently on the detailed design is also looking at the tranching of projects. That really brings in issues around logistics and the most cost-effective way to move forward in bundling the projects going out to market. Given that the work is progressing already on Isabella weir, it is possible that some of the projects close to there may be amongst the first stage, but that will be settled through this detailed design element of the project.



**MS CODY:** I have a supplementary on that. As a keen triathlete I often access Lake Burley Griffin for swimming. You mentioned there were plans afoot for Lake Burley Griffin as well. Can you expand on that?

**Mr Kendall:** Certainly. The project includes six priority catchments. In relation to Lake Burley Griffin, the Fyshwick catchment, which includes Jerrabomberra Creek, is one of those six, as is the upper Molonglo catchment, which extends up into Queanbeyan. There are a number of projects identified in that part of the ACT and into New South Wales. That includes a range of asset types: rain gardens, which effectively are like subsurface beds of sand and gravel that filter the stormwater before it enters the waterways, as well as the more traditional ponds and wetlands. They are being assessed and certainly would help to contribute to a reduction of the nitrogen and phosphorous, the key nutrients driving algal blooms in Lake Burley Griffin. We expect the project to contribute to an improvement in the water quality and a reduction in the amount of time that Lake Burley Griffin as well as other lakes like Lake Tuggeranong are closed due to blue-green algae.

**MS CODY:** My next question is about Lake Tuggeranong. With the work that is going on at the Isabella pond/weir, whatever you would like to call it, hopefully that will contribute to less blue-green algae blooms in Lake Tuggeranong

**Mr Kendall:** Certainly. Lake Tuggeranong is about one-tenth of the size of Lake Burley Griffin so we expect to see the response more quickly and of a more significant magnitude. Certainly Lake Tuggeranong, Lake Burley Griffin as well as the downstream Murrumbidgee River and broader Murray Darling Basin will be the beneficiaries in terms of better water quality.

**MS CODY:** Would that see opportunities for swimming in Lake Tuggeranong?

**Mr Kendall:** That is certainly the hope.

**MS CODY:** Again, as a keen triathlete, it is very important to be able to access some of our lakes for these sorts of sports. Canberra is very difficult.

**Mr Kendall:** Exactly. The commissioner for sustainability back in 2012 put some dollars on the disruption of closures due to blue-green algae. It is certainly in the tens of millions of dollars in terms of Lake Burley Griffin, and the disruption with regard to Lake Tuggeranong would be similar.

**Mr Rake:** Our aim is to return the health of waterways to the state that many of us who grew up this city will recall: swimming in Lake Burley Griffin or in the rivers during summer and doing that regularly. The education campaign the minister talked about earlier emphasises the importance of the role that citizens can play in making sure we hold nutrients on our own properties. Having just come through autumn, one of the most useful things Canberrans can do is not to sweep leaves from their lawn into the gutter or push them down the drain, particularly in Lake Burley Griffin or waterways that are surrounded by suburbs with deciduous trees. That is one of the biggest sources of nutrients. The leaves that go down the drain this autumn and this winter will be there to haunt us for several summers to come in nutrients.

**MS LEE:** My question is in relation to the national Landcare program. Are you able to give us some insight into how that program is delivered in the ACT and how the funds are determined?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, very pleased to be able to work with rural properties and Landcare around the ACT. I did some work with them a number of years ago with plantings. Some of the programs the federal government has run out have been absolutely fantastic in helping ensure we get the right environmental outcomes from that work.

Landcare do a fair bit of work for us in the territory. One of their programs I want to touch on—I cannot remember the name of it—was looking at riparian zones, so ensuring that areas alongside creeks and rivers were looked after. The federal government provided money for our rural lessees in particular to fence the riparian zones and do planting so that the associated soil did not wash away into the creek. It was a fantastic program. I will ask Mr Iglesias to give you some more detail.

**Mr Iglesias:** This program is always extremely popular in the community. We find that in making this money available every year it is about working with the expertise that is in our community. Often times the parks service is able to say, “You know what? We need to do this, but there is this group over here that has expressed an interest. We’ll partner with them so they might put in an application, hopefully get an environment grant and leverage their expertise in the community to complement what we’re doing in the park service.”

A good example is the wombat mange work that was done last year where a group of ACT wildlife carers saw a need. Wombats are quite common in the south of the ACT, not so much in the north. In recent years we have noticed a lot of them have been affected by this bug that basically runs them down and can kill them. Through the environment grants we were able to fund some work so they could work with some vets and help them out.

The sort of work that tends to be funded by these grants is very much hands-on. It is the sort of thing communities can see results from in the short term, and we learn from it ourselves as a park agency. Sometimes community groups draw our attention to something through their initiatives that we can then work into our own priority for the year and complement their work.

**MS LEE:** When you said earlier, Mr Iglesias, about working with our local expertise, do you include the catchment groups?

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, absolutely. We have an amazing conservation community. I think it is unique to Canberra, and it is probably the quality of the environment we have in this place that has bred this love and passion for the environment. We see it in so many different ways, and it is incumbent on us to be able to provide a forum and facilitate that in our community. It is to everyone’s advantage.

**Mr Gentleman:** A good example of those forums was the Tidbinbilla open day where we had Landcare care groups and parks and cons. People were giving demonstrations

of what is in our waterways, bugs and that sort of thing for the kids to have a look at, and some nature play as well. At the wetlands open day at Jerra a group of stalls were set up where, again, people could show youngsters in particular what was occurring in our waterways. There were some Indigenous learnings too on what used to happen before the land was colonised by Europeans. The interaction between the community and these particular groups is absolutely fantastic, and the learnings we get out of it are great as well.

**MS LEE:** How many Landcare projects are there in the ACT at the moment?

**Mr Iglesias:** I would have to get back to you on that one to give you an accurate number.

**Mr Gentleman:** Dozens.

**Mr Iglesias:** Yes, there are so many.

**MS LEE:** How are they selected? I assume that with so much interest from the community a lot of people put in their own ideas. How does the selection process work?

**Mr Iglesias:** It is obviously a competitive process. What we are looking for is a strong submission in the way it has considered the challenge it wants to deal with. We want to see that there is a commitment from the community, that thinking has been brought to bear in what they want to do and that they have partners that might leverage a little extra and not just what we might be able to give them as a government. Also particular activities hit a few of the key issues that government has identified as being important for the Canberra community.

We sometimes like to take a bit of a risk and help out groups that are looking at something that is a little bit left field and out of the ordinary. For example, the Indian myna work in the territory has benefited from these grants, as have the wombats, as I mentioned.

**THE CHAIR:** We will adjourn for an afternoon tea break.

**Hearing suspended from 3.41 to 4.03 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** We are into the home stretch for today's hearings. The final output class that we are examining is output class 2, environment, specifically 2.2, looking at climate change and sustainability, continuing in this session with Minister Gentleman acting on behalf of Mr Rattenbury. Minister, is there an opening statement for this portion?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, I do have one, Mr Chairman. Thanks for the opportunity to discuss with the committee the work the government is doing to respond to climate change and ensure that Canberra continues to grow as a modern and sustainable city.

The 2017-18 budget provides funding to support a number of policies and programs that will ensure that the ACT remains a world leader in its response to climate change.

As we know, our climate is already changing. In our region, we are experiencing higher temperatures, heatwaves and more variable rainfall, with intense summer storms. Climate change impacts can threaten human health, our infrastructure and property and also the natural environment and agricultural productivity.

To address these challenges, the ACT government is developing and implementing climate change policy. *ACT climate change adaptation strategy: living with a warming climate July 2016* sets out short-term actions for the ACT government between now and 2020 to help our city prepare for the impacts of climate change, reduce our vulnerability to climate risks, and increase our resilience to extreme weather and climate-induced events.

Through the 2017-18 budget, the government is investing \$1.9 million to continue to deliver priority actions through the ACT climate change adaptation strategy. A total of \$845,000 will also see the development of the ACT government's next climate change strategy, the development of which is already underway. To be titled "Blueprint for a zero emissions territory: the ACT's climate change strategy to 2050", the new strategy will set the ACT on a pathway to achieving its legislative target of net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest, including setting firm interim targets for 2030 and 2040.

As the risks of climate change become increasingly clear, it is vital that the Canberra community works together to reduce our contribution to global warming and ensure that Canberra grows into a modern, livable and sustainable city. The budget is investing \$555,000 over four years in the new ACT community zero emissions grants program. This program will deliver grants of up to \$25,000 each, with a total pool of \$150,000 available in 2017-18. The grants program will support individuals and community groups to run engagement programs and deliver on-ground projects to contribute towards meeting the ACT's zero net emissions target and help improve the sustainability of the wider community.

The ACT public service is also working towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2020. To help achieve this target, staff are encouraged to use electric fleet vehicles and electric bikes to travel to meetings. The eight electric bikes located at four government buildings have been incredibly popular, with staff having now travelled over 3,200 kilometres on them, encouraging active travel and the health benefits of exercise. The use of e-bikes helps reduce costs such as taxi fares, car parking, bus fares and fleet running costs as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The carbon neutral government loan fund also continues to provide support for energy efficiency and emission reduction projects across government. Over \$13 million has been provided to projects to date, including providing \$650,000 for the upgrade of an efficient electric heating and cooling system for the north building in Civic.

The ACT is leading the nation in our commitment to move towards a more sustainable future, and the ACT government continues to make significant progress towards our goal of 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2020. In August 2016 the ACT government announced the outcome of the next generation renewables option, awarding feed-in tariffs to Crookwell 2 and Hornsdale 3 wind farms. These contracts secure the achievement of our 100 per cent target.

In 2016-17 the percentage of renewable energy electricity in the ACT grew from 20 per cent to 32 per cent. With the Hornsdale 1 and Ararat wind farms, which I opened yesterday, and Mugga Lane and Williamsdale solar farms all coming online—all remaining renewable energy projects that have reached financial close or commenced construction—the ACT's renewable electricity percentage will rapidly increase to 100 per cent by 2020 as the remaining large-scale wind and solar farms are completed. We will record, too, 40 per cent renewable electricity in the 2017 calendar year.

This has been supported by significant industry investment which is positioning Canberra as a centre for renewable energy innovation, both nationally and internationally. Key initiatives include national and international renewable energy companies such as Neoen, Union Fenosa Wind Australia, CWP Renewables, Windlab and Maoneng Australia establishing a strong presence in Canberra. These companies are increasingly using Canberra as their base for managing assets across Australia as well as their Asia-Pacific operations.

The \$12 million industry-funded renewable energy innovation fund, the REIF, is financing a range of exciting activities to support the local renewable energy innovation ecosystem. This includes Canberra's renewables innovation hub, which is a flexible, collaborative co-working office space located in Canberra's renewable energy precinct, city west. The hub, which was launched in November 2016, brings together innovative start-ups, researchers and businesses across Australia's clean tech sector, working with leading industry players such as Neoen, Union Fenosa, Simons and Hyundai to develop innovative technology demonstration projects in new areas such as zero carbon hydrogen transport and hydrogen power storage. This week we are meeting with Hyundai to look at electric vehicles as well. This helps leverage the ACT in a national and international leadership position as a centre of excellence in renewable energy policy and program delivery, to explore new export opportunities in priority markets and attract inbound investment.

The \$25 million next generation energy storage grants program will support the rollout of more than 5,000 solar battery storage systems to 2020 in Canberra homes and businesses. These systems will also collect critical data to inform industry research and development. The number of systems installed will soon surpass 200; a further 100 have been sold for installation in coming months.

Last month the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission released its final determination of electricity prices and the price direction for the next three years. The government is following this national determination of prices with interest and is keen to keep the cost to consumers as low as possible. Other states have already announced commensurate price increases.

The ACT government has established the office of the energy consumer advocate to provide the community with a voice in decision-making processes like the ICRC retail electricity price direction. The ACT government also has an existing range of measures in place to support ACT households and businesses with their electricity and water costs, with a particular focus on vulnerable consumers. The discounts of up to \$600 per year are available to eligible concession card holders.

The budget provides \$865,000 in funding to provide continued support for Actsmart programs, which provide free information, tools and advice to assist households, schools and businesses improve their sustainability. Last year, businesses that are signed up to Actsmart diverted more than 33,000 cubic metres of waste from landfill to recycling, which equates to over 137,000 domestic recycling bins.

In addition to Actsmart, our energy efficiency improvement scheme is helping households and businesses cut their energy bills. The scheme is saving participating households up to \$5 a week and has a particular focus on energy savings in low income priority households. Since the scheme started in 2013, more than 76,000 households have participated, with over 19,000 being low income priority households, which is something we can be particularly proud of.

With energy prices on the rise, it is now more important than ever to help people reduce their energy costs through energy efficiency. An extension of the scheme to 2020 is expected to generate net present savings of over \$40 million to households and small businesses. By the end of the first quarter of this year, the scheme had installed over 1.1 million energy saving items, saving over 690,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions, a staggering achievement for a small jurisdiction.

Earlier this year the ACT government announced that the energy efficiency improvement scheme will now offer lighting upgrades to help ACT businesses. These new lighting upgrades for eligible businesses replace inefficient light globes with more efficient LED lighting, allowing businesses to reduce their energy consumption, reduce lighting energy bills by up to 60 per cent and improve the quality and lifespan of their light globes. In the first quarter of this year, about 300 Canberra businesses received lighting upgrades, with over 19,500 lights installed and more than 5,200 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions avoided. The installed items have the potential to save around \$8 million over 10 years.

The government can be proud of its contribution to the global challenge to address climate change. Our actions are leading, are effective and benefit both the environment and consumers. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. We are ready and able to take your questions.

**MS CODY:** Minister, can you outline how the energy efficiency improvement scheme works?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, certainly, I touched on it a little in the opening speech, but it is an opportunity to help people across the ACT improve the efficiency of their households and their businesses. I will go to the directorate for some more detail.

**Mr Bygrave:** The EIS program is an energy efficiency program. It is an obligation on the retailers to implement a range of energy savings activities. We work with the retailers to implement the activities, but primarily they have been installing LEDs, low energy efficient lighting. That has been expanded from households to commercial lighting this year.

They have also been implementing improvements such as high efficiency gas heaters. There are many gas heaters in Canberra homes that are inefficient. They were

installed 10, 15 years ago. They have leaky duct systems; so some of the activities relate to improving the efficiency of those heaters.

We also just released a consultation paper around whether insulation should come into the list of activities that retailers can implement. There has been some sensitivity about insulation, given the activities at the federal level. We have been mindful of the royal commission into insulation activities. Therefore, we have been holding off because of the royal commission before moving in this space. But we have also been working with other jurisdictions around Australia—Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales—to see what they are doing on insulation.

Essentially, it has been very effective. About 76,000 households have participated. Those participating households can achieve savings of up to \$5 per household per week. This is a very important complementary program to the renewable energy target, the 100 per cent renewable energy target, because the 100 per cent renewable electricity target by 2020 will involve costs to our households of about \$5 per household per week. So the energy efficiency improvement scheme essentially offsets those increases in costs.

**MS CODY:** You mentioned that you have started to move into assisting businesses as well; is that correct?

**Mr Bygrave:** Yes.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, 297 businesses, I think, were assisted in the past 12 months.

**Mr Bygrave:** That is right. Yes, 297 businesses and they have been looking primarily at LED lighting, more efficient lighting upgrades. About 19,500 lights have been installed, saving about 5,200 tonnes of CO2 equivalent emissions. It is not just about reducing emissions, but also about reducing energy costs for those businesses. It is a very popular update.

**MS CODY:** I do not know if this question also falls under it. Is the Actsmart sustainable home advice service part of this program?

**Mr Bygrave:** It is different, but it is complementary in the sense that we are providing advice to households on improvements they can make in their homes, but also in businesses. If you want more detail on that, Ros is available to answer questions.

**MS CODY:** Sure, including the business side of that program?

**Mr Bygrave:** Yes.

**Ms Malouf:** I understand you are seeking information on the Actsmart home energy advice.

**MS CODY:** Home advice, yes.

**Ms Malouf:** That is a phone call and an email service available to all ACT residents to be able to ring up and find some information about what they can do to make their

home not only more energy efficient, but also more comfortable; warmer. We have had about a 300 per cent increase in calls and emails to the hotline. That is a lot of people asking how they can do something themselves, how they can take their own action.

**MS CODY:** That is great. Do you also do the business energy and water program?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes, the business energy and water program is available to small businesses with less than a \$20,000-energy spend per year or fewer than 10 FTEs. That was a very successful program last year. We have done more than 200 assessments in the past 12 months, which has kept our assessor very busy. We send out a technical assessor into a small business to give advice and to suggest energy or water improvements that a business can make. That business can then get a rebate of up to \$5,000 on a cost sharing basis.

**Mr Bygrave:** You might talk about some of the low income programs.

**Ms Malouf:** I can also talk about the low income program.

**MS CODY:** Yes.

**Mr Bygrave:** I think some of those would be really useful.

**Ms Malouf:** Yes, our low income program is for our most vulnerable members of the community. It is run through a contract through St Vincent de Paul. We have assisted more than 1,200 households in the past 12 months but almost 10,000 since the program started. Again, that is a program where St Vincent de Paul have an energy efficiency officer to identify the best ways to heat a home to get the maximum efficiency out of it for the lowest cost.

It has levels of support. Some of those can be replacing inefficient appliances, including fridges, and draught-proofing. Every visit comes with education on how to actually do a better job of warming your home. It is coupled with a curtain program, which is also run through St Vincent de Paul. It is a volunteer program. Volunteers from St Vincent de Paul make curtains for households. There is a dual win in that space. The householders not only get the warmth from the curtains; they also get the privacy. It is great for people's dignity to be able to be to be nice and warm as well.

**MS CODY:** Yes, I have the most ugly and revolting curtains in my house but gosh they are good to keep the cold air out; so I keep them. There is also a school-based—

**Ms Malouf:** Yes, the Actsmart schools program.

**MS CODY:** Yes.

**Ms Malouf:** We are very proud of the schools program. It has 100 per cent sign-up by every Canberra school: public, private and independent. We believe that we are the only jurisdiction in the world that has done that. The schools program works with schools to become accredited in five key areas: water, waste, energy, biodiversity and curriculum. We encourage sustainability in the classroom to be taught and we also



encourage it in their operations at the school.

It is not just something you learn in the classroom. It is something you actually put into play when you are in the playground, in the library or wherever else you are in the school. We have 14 schools that are five-star accredited. That is about a five-to-eight year commitment by the school. Many of the children who were part of that original sign-up are not even there anymore, which is great.

**MS CODY:** Yes, absolutely. Hopefully they are taking that knowledge into their new schools.

**Ms Malouf:** Taking that message home, yes, and into their workplaces.

**MS CODY:** And in the workplaces, yes, absolutely. Obviously all these money saving things are great for people's pockets—

**Ms Malouf:** Yes.

**MS CODY:** but also great for the environment because we are putting less pollution into the—

**Ms Malouf:** We know some numbers. A school that is accredited in the waste program sends 22 per cent less waste to landfill. A school that is accredited in the energy side of the program uses 21 per cent less energy. There are cost savings that go directly back into the school's pocket.

**MS CODY:** That is a great initiative, thank you.

**MS LEE:** You mentioned that the Actsmart low income home energy efficiency program is delivered by St Vincent de Paul.

**Ms Malouf:** Correct.

**MS LEE:** Can you give us details of the contract in terms of how it was awarded to St Vincent de Paul? What is the length of the contract and how much is it worth?

**Ms Malouf:** The contract is split. There are two components to the low income program. The low income program, which is that home energy component where the officers go in, is the St Vincent de Paul's contract. The other half of the contract is the split system install where we replace split systems in identified low income households to replace an inefficient heating system in the home. The split system program has installed 72 split systems to date.

To answer your question, it is St Vincent de Paul. The contract was awarded through a procurement process. There were five service providers in the previous round of contracts. There were some challenges. Those organisations get a lot of strain on their services, not just in the energy efficiency space but in loads of spaces. Some had challenges delivering that service. St Vincent de Paul won that contract going forward and they have referral pathways through a full government procurement process. They have referral pathways back to those five organisations and other organisations that

can identify those in need.

**MS LEE:** What is the length of the contract?

**Ms Malouf:** The contract is a three-year contract.

**MS LEE:** When is it due to expire?

**Ms Malouf:** End of June 2018.

**MS LEE:** What accountability or success measures are in place to keep reviewing how it is working and the fact that we are getting some good results?

**Ms Malouf:** We have done an evaluation of the program. There are some real challenges with evaluating behaviour change programs. It is a little like a “how long is a piece of string?” evaluation. There are some big challenges we learned from that evaluation process. In a business we can go in and say that energy efficiency changes have resulted in X amount of change. I can tell you that on average it is \$2,500 per year saved by business.

In a low income household there are other factors we need to consider. Some weeks there is one person living in the home; some weeks there are five people living in the home. There are other mental health and health issues that need to come into play as well, which can make it a really hard one to evaluate. Certainly, we would like to do ourselves out of having to run a program like this but unfortunately the need is great.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the Actsmart energy advice program, I understand it is Cool Planet that was the provider of that service from 2013 to 2016.

**Ms Malouf:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** We are in 2017 now. Is there a new provider or is it still Cool Planet again?

**Ms Malouf:** Again, an evaluation was done on that program to evaluate the value for money of that program and the value to the ACT clients. It was decided that the best course of action for that program was to bring it in house. We have had some great success, including the 300 per cent increase in calls. So we think we have ticked the box there.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have a couple of quick supplementaries on the low income, energy efficiency scheme. Have you looked at doing some of that work in community languages, particularly an information leaflet in community languages? I have tried to explain things to some people and I am sure they could understand. Their English is not good. We do not have a language in common. They must be a particularly hard market to reach.

**Ms Malouf:** We have done some education with different groups and we have done some with the Somali community, speaking in a group situation where we can have an interpreter there if need be to try to simplify that information. St Vinnies have also got an energy efficiency officer that speaks fluent Russian. She has delivered it to the

Russian community. I think I would like to see what that is like.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Have you worked with MARSS at all?

**Ms Malouf:** That is how we got onto the Somali group, yes. Yes we have. That is how we got onto that group. We are happy to run individual ones in a home but equally in a group situation, depending on what the needs are. But that is again all run through St Vincent De Paul.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I would say that, based on my limited experience with MARSS, there is a huge need. They have come from an entirely different climate and entirely different lifestyle and they just do not understand how to run a house in Canberra basically.

**Ms Malouf:** Yes.

**Mr Rake:** We can touch base again.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Google Translate is a challenging way of doing it, let us put it that way. I am not sure it is the most efficient way. I am glad you mentioned the curtain program. It was something I was involved in in a past life. Is that fully funded going on?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes. That has got another 12 months of funding in this budget period. Sometimes St Vincent De Paul have a challenge getting the volunteers but they certainly are meeting that demand now. Yes, that is fully funded for the next 12 months.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Hopefully it will be longer than that.

**Ms Malouf:** Yes.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My next question is about the energy rating disclosure scheme, which is probably not you.

**Ms Malouf:** No, not me.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Mr Rake?

**Mr Rake:** No. I suspect we will have to take this question on notice. It is managed by our building policy team.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I understood it was in your bailiwick or I would have asked—

**Mr Gentleman:** Put the question to us and we will see if we can answer it for you.

**Mr Rake:** Put it and see.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** If you look at page 96 of BP3 there has been money put towards the energy rating disclosure scheme review. My first question is: what is the scope of

this? Are we looking purely at the disclosure program that we have in the ACT to update that to use modern software, which clearly would be a very good thing to do? Are we looking at the integrity of the energy efficiency rating, which again would be a very good thing to do? My understanding is that COAG have some processes to look at the scheme as a whole. Is that part of our contribution to it? Is there anything else under the possible things it could be?

**Mr Gentleman:** Can I start by saying that we have certainly learnt some lessons in regard to the rating scheme over the years. In particular it was organised so that we would get a really good outcome for homebuyers. They would be able to understand what the costs would be to run their house in an energy efficient way but sometimes, as you have identified I think, there are issues in regard to whether curtains were actually fitted at the time, with the rating scheme, et cetera. It is the longest running, of course, rating scheme that we have had in Australia and it helps those households.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am aware of all the good things about it.

**Mr Gentleman:** Where we are going to, though, I will ask Mr Rake to—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** But where are we going with the review?

**Mr Rake:** Yes, we will be reviewing the overall effectiveness of the scheme. We will be looking at everything from comparison and compatibility with other schemes across the country and trying to make sure that we have the best and most modern scheme but also some comparability with other schemes in the country. We will be looking at options to have rental disclosure for energy efficiency and disclosure for rental properties. And we will be linking that to the broader policy agenda around climate as well as building comfort and habitability. It will be a broad review but as to the detail on the exact work program I would have to have the building policy people here. They were all here this morning, I am sorry, rather than this afternoon.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Sorry, I thought this was part of energy efficiency.

**Mr Rake:** No, it sits within building policy and reports through to the minister.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I will put it as a question on notice.

**Mr Rake:** Yes. We can bring back the innovation plan.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I really thought it was here as energy efficiency. Minister, you started off talking about how we are on track for 100 per cent renewable electricity. Presumably if we are successful with significantly reducing the demand for liquid fuels in our transport system and in our new developments—and I understand that the new developments in Ginninderry and Denmark Prospect are both going to be optional gas or possibly not gas in some cases but certainly a significant reduction in the use of gas in households—we might have an increased demand for renewable electricity going further as we reduce our overall emissions. How are we set to procure that, particularly given the current uncertainty in the overall energy market?

**Mr Gentleman:** I think you have touched on something very important. The Finkel

report talks about certainty for the future and the importance of certainty. We discussed yesterday renewables and the option for storage. I think there is going to be a great new opportunity for some innovative industry thinking on storage for renewable electricity to ensure that you are able to access it at all times during the day. Interestingly, of course, the best time for solar is about 3 pm on a summer's day and that is the same time that we have the biggest drain by air conditioners in the territory. These are the challenges I think that are going to really be put to us over this period. We will certainly get to that 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2020 but then the transport sector is going to be the hardest.

Some of that work is with key industry players like Hyundai that I mentioned earlier in regard to electric vehicles or hydrogen test vehicles in some cases. I have been approached also by a number of people looking at further opportunities for battery charging here in the city in parking areas and our giving incentives for industry to come and provide that for the ACT. In the learning curve that we have had until this time, to be able to get a target of 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2020 we can well take the learnings and continue on with reducing emissions in the transport sector after that.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Are you looking for a further program for procuring renewable electricity, given the likely increase due to transport and other substitution of fuels?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. I will ask Mr Bygrave to give you some more detail.

**Mr Bygrave:** Certainly the 100 per cent renewable electricity target by 2020 represents an opportunity to electrify remaining energy uses including, as you suggest, transport, transitioning away from natural gas. The current policy position of government is to have a target of 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2020. There is no policy commitment beyond 2020. We have started modelling likely scenarios as part of the blueprint work, the blueprint for zero emissions in the territory by 2050, and we have started modelling projections around increases in population, for example, likely increases in energy demand as we electrify transport and as we shift away from natural gas to electrification of homes for heating, for cooking, for hot-water services. That modelling shows that there will be an increase in energy demand that may require a change or at least a new policy position around renewal electricity post 2020. We will be seeking, obviously, guidance of ministers in developing a process to clarify that policy position.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It is not quite the answer I expected. Given the lead times, 2020 is not that long away and hopefully the policy continuing will lead to 100 per cent renewable electricity.

**Mr Rake:** I think it is important to emphasise that the base projection through to 2020 allows for growth between now and 2020 and allows for some of that transition that we already anticipate will occur. There is a watching brief over the other forms of transition. In regard to liquid fuels, if the hydrogen fuel trial were to succeed, for example, that starts to demonstrate another option for transition in the transport space that need not directly call on the electricity production load.

**Mr Gentleman:** And whilst government is working on these programs and policy

positions as well, industry is already acting. If you look at the transport sector already in the ACT, many of the courier companies now have hybrid trucks. They run on the base load of charged electricity from the evening before and when that runs out the engine cuts in and starts to charge the batteries up from there. I think we will see with new technology a lot more of industry coming to the fore and presenting answers for us as we go forward.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That is my point from the transport point of view. Everything you read suggests there is going to be more electric transport. Where is the electricity coming from?

**Mr Gentleman:** We have to provide the electricity.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That is my—

**Mr Gentleman:** There are some innovative ideas. We talked a little about storage before. Normally when we talk about storage we think of battery storage but of course there are other opportunities. The federal government has talked about Snowy 2 with hydro storage. Indeed at our youth sustainability parliament, which we held at the Manning Clark lecture theatre a couple of weeks ago, a 14-year-old lad from a Canberra school came up with the idea of doing the same thing for us between Bendora and Corin dams. There is some pretty good thinking out there I think.

**Mr Rake:** The final thing I would say is that having proven the success of our reverse option process, where we are ready to re-enter the market on quite short notice to procure additional renewable electricity if we need to, we have demonstrated that the scheme works. We have demonstrated that it will bring down the price of renewable electricity. We have demonstrated that we can attract an additional industry and economic investment as a side benefit to that. We have got a model that is ready to go. We have got a team that are able to watch the demand and supply forecasts. I do not think we need to worry and we certainly do not have cause for panic. We are in the best place of any jurisdiction in the country and probably well placed in the world to respond to that demand change.

**MS LEE:** I have got a supplementary. Minister, I understand the ACT government's commitment to 100 per cent renewable energy. You mentioned earlier that there is a move away from gas. How does the government explain the plans to build a gas power station in Dalton, New South Wales?

**Mr Gentleman:** We will get some more information.

**Mr Sibley:** We see it as an AGL proposal which has no involvement from the ACT government.

**MS LEE:** Sorry, can you repeat that? Did you say it has no involvement with the ACT government?

**Mr Sibley:** That is correct, to the best of my knowledge anyway.

**MR COE:** And no participation by ActewAGL, either?

**Mr Sibley:** By AGL, which is—

**MR COE:** No participation by ActewAGL in any way?

**Mr Sibley:** AGL and ActewAGL are obviously related corporate entities.

**MR COE:** I understand that but ActewAGL, as a stand-alone entity, do not have a specific stake in this?

**Mr Rake:** We could not answer on the contractual arrangements that they might have in that project. From our policy perspective, from our energy policy and program perspective, we do not have an ACT government involvement in that project.

**MR COE:** I would like to go to electricity prices in general. Before going ahead, I would like to ask about the Gungahlin power issues. Minister, what briefings have you received as to the cause of those outages?

**Mr Gentleman:** I have not received a briefing, Mr Coe. Mr Rattenbury would have received the briefing. But directorate officials should be able to provide the answer for you in regard to that.

**Mr Bygrave:** The ACT government was aware of various electricity supply outages that occurred in Canberra's north. The suburbs of Gungahlin, Bonner, Amaroo, Forde and Jacka were affected by those outages. The largest of those occurred on 2 June, impacting around 2,300 customers.

The majority of those outages, we were advised, occurred as a result of isolated faults or incidents and were not related to each other. ActewAGL Distribution has advised the government that the cause of the outages included cable faults and, in one instance, it was a result of damage of the network of a third party to the network. ActewAGL Distribution also advised us at the time that they prioritised the restoration of the electricity supply as soon as possible and worked to ensure that the outages do not reoccur, particularly during the peak winter period, which we are entering. It has also advised that it will consider claims for compensation on a case-by-case basis where consumers can demonstrate actual financial loss as a result of the outages. That is a preliminary answer.

**MR COE:** What is the government's role in this space?

**Mr Gentleman:** In energy policy? In reliability?

**MR COE:** With regard to, say, energy reliability. I appreciate that answer, but in what capacity does the ACT government have an interest in this, given that it is a private supplier and it is, in effect, federally regulated?

**Mr Gentleman:** We have a direct interest in that we represent the community and we want to provide as much energy security as possible for Canberra.

**MR COE:** I appreciate that goodwill or good intention, but I am just wondering what

actually is the ACT government's skin in the game.

**Mr Bygrave:** Obviously, electricity in the ACT is provided by the private provider. Our role is to set reliability standards for the provider and to continually monitor and assess the situation. We meet with ActewAGL Distribution on a regular basis to ensure that we have a reliable electricity supply into the ACT. We set those reliability standards and then monitor and review on a case-by-case basis.

**MR COE:** In that context, what concerns does the government have for base load power going forward, especially for this coming summer?

**Mr Gentleman:** Reliability is the key. That is the work and conversations that we have been having with the federal government at the COAG level as well. We need to ensure as much as possible that the suppliers can continue to provide that reliable energy source. Through that, we have the regulations in place to do that.

**MR COE:** But what concerns do you have for this coming summer? There was talk last summer about possible load shedding. Are we going to see regular load shedding this coming summer?

**Mr Rake:** That would depend on some elements of security in the national grid. The biggest concern that we have is the lack of cohesive energy policy across the country. The impact is felt on the national grid and in reliability and energy security.

At this level, we are working very hard to make our own portion of the network more resilient. Localised storage is a big part of that. The distributed battery storage programs that we are running will help protect households from instability in the national grid in the energy market. The issues of base load stability and reliability are quite different from the localised network problems that were experienced in Gungahlin. We think both are important.

We talked about the service standards. We do see, in straight-out evidence, that the ACT has more secure and reliable electricity provision than any other jurisdiction. Our customers experience an average of less than 100 minutes of outage per year. The national average is closer to 200 minutes of outage per year. But we do have concerns at that base load level as well. The ACT has advocated, through ministerial councils, for a stronger national policy setting. That would help create the right environment for investment in our national energy grid, and that will result in better security and better prices.

**Mr Gentleman:** Of course, through the Finkel report there were the four key outcomes looking at increased security, future reliability, rewarding consumers and lower emissions. It all fits in with our policy. The challenge is, of course, that as we see more coal-fired stations actually closing down because of cost and the cheaper cost of renewables, as they close down we need to be able to replace them with renewable generation in the national network.

**Mr Bygrave:** The other thing I would add is this: just yesterday I participated in a new working group, with the New South Wales government, the commonwealth and the ACT government. The working group's terms of reference are specifically to look



at security of supply, in particular in the lead-up to the summer period coming up at the end of this year. A working group has been established. We are discussing initiatives like desktop exercises and also energy practices so that we are prepared. In the heatwave that we had in February—

**MR COE:** What are desktop exercises?

**Mr Bygrave:** It is a like a scenario where you are planning for an event and you are actually running through that scenario. In the heatwave that occurred on 10 February, we had literally just run an exercise like that through AEMO, the Australian Energy Market Operator. We had become familiar about how to prepare for that kind of events. We are also looking at the role of the consumer in load shedding as well as large energy users in Canberra being able to rapidly shed load, which will ease any supply pressures as well as demand pressures in the event of future heatwaves.

**MR COE:** Are you able to load shed for lower priority customers and keep the power to higher priority customers? I am thinking about even, for instance, retail as opposed to a residence next door, something as isolated as that. Or is it mainly at the more regional level?

**Mr Bygrave:** We work very closely with ActewAGL on different priorities. There are three priorities. High priority customers include things like hospitals and schools. ActewAGL has a very clear guidance around which areas of the ACT to shed first in the event of demand pressures.

**MR COE:** But can that actually be done dynamically? Can you actually say, “That property will switch off; that one will not.”

**Mr Rake:** Not to property A or property B in a residential area. But ActewAGL does maintain close contact with clients who have particular special needs, particularly those with life preserving medical needs, for example. They have alternative mechanisms in place to protect them. A backup power supply is the typical arrangement there. That is a very important program. We also have community information campaigns ready to go to help people understand how to deal with extended periods of heat and power uncertainty if we were to reach those extreme levels.

**Mr Bygrave:** Yes, and AEMO estimates that in the 10 February event, actions from consumers in New South Wales and the ACT reduced demand by about 300 megawatts. Now 300 megawatts is half a coal-fired power station, so it is a very big impact that consumer actions can make.

**Mr Rake:** And these can be quite user-friendly activities like turning off the swimming pool pump for the day, an activity that will not really harm the health of the pool. If it is off for a day or two, it can be easily recovered, but it can be quite a large load that is removed from the network.

**MR COE:** Finally, with regard to electricity prices, do you have a prediction of where prices are going in the mid-term, perhaps, say, three to five years?

**Mr Bygrave:** Electricity prices and gas prices are both rising. The ICRC's recent decision will involve a price increase in electricity of about \$333 on the average electricity bill, taking it to about \$2,089, on average, per household for the year. Gas prices are expected to rise in the order of 17 per cent, involving an increase of about \$250 per annum per year. These price increases are largely due to the electricity market nationally. The Hazelwood coal-fired power station closing took 1,600 megawatts out of the market.

**MR COE:** I am particularly looking to three to five years away, because of the policy that the ACT government has in place with regard to hedging against prices, in one way, by locking in some of the feed-in tariff prices. What does that mean for ACT prices relative to the rest of the country in, say, three to five years once all the wind is online?

**Mr Gentleman:** I would imagine that if we look at trend and recent history, we would see the ACT still competing at a much lower cost in electricity prices than other jurisdictions. We are quite a bit lower than even our neighbours in New South Wales.

**MR COE:** In five years time?

**Mr Gentleman:** I expect it will still be cheaper, yes.

**Mr Bygrave:** Yes; that is certainly the case. As I mentioned in an earlier answer, the impact of the 100 per cent renewable electricity target by 2020 would involve electricity price rises of about \$5 per household per week by 2020. That still leaves the ACT with much lower electricity prices than many other jurisdictions around Australia. As I mentioned earlier, too, the benefits of the energy efficiency improvement scheme actually balance out a lot of those cost increases from renewables.

**MR COE:** With these prices—megawatt hours, say, for Ararat are \$87? Is that correct?

**Mr Bygrave:** The feed-in tariff, yes.

**MR COE:** The feed-in tariff?

**Mr Bygrave:** That is correct.

**MR COE:** Is the price that the territory is going to be paying for that power actually locked in, or is there an element in addition to the feed-in tariff?

**Mr Bygrave:** That price is locked in for a 20-year period, because that was put in place to enable the contracts to proceed and provide certainty for the industry. These kinds of lengths of contract are not unusual.

**MR COE:** So we are going to be paying \$87 in 19 years time still?

**Mr Bygrave:** Jon, do you want to answer this one?

**Mr Sibley:** Just building on the earlier comments, those prices with that wind farm are locked in for the 20-year contract period.

**MR COE:** Locked in at \$87 or is there an escalation?

**Mr Sibley:** No, there is no escalation. That is nominal pricing so that will decrease in real terms over the 20 years.

**MR COE:** Yes.

**Mr Sibley:** What the territory actually pays is the difference between the \$87 and whatever the floating spot market price is. We pay a top-up amount to the generator through ActewAGL Distribution to ensure that the generator receives fixed \$87 per megawatt hour. When the wholesale market is under \$87, say at \$60, they get a top-up payment of \$17. If the wholesale market is \$100—

**THE CHAIR:** It is \$27.

**Mr Sibley:** Sorry 27.

**THE CHAIR:** Seventeen would be good for the taxpayer.

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, that is right. If the wholesale market is \$100, they actually reimburse the territory with the difference through ActewAGL Distribution. That provides them with revenue certainty, which reduces their finance costs and means that they can bid lower prices in our auction.

**MR COE:** Are they restricted to only selling power, in effect, to the territory? Is there any capacity—obviously it goes into the grid—to have any other contracts with anybody else?

**Mr Gentleman:** Ararat is a good example. There were 75 turbines there, and only 27 of them produced the fit for the ACT. So within the wind farm itself there is another—

**MR COE:** Sure, but are those 27 actually the 27? Is it only those 27, or is it, in effect, 27 seventy-fifths, if there are 75—

**Mr Sibley:** It is separately metered.

**Mr Gentleman:** They are separately metered. The ones that we are using produce a better output per rotation than some of the other ones.

**MR COE:** Is there a minimum amount of power that they have to generate?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes. Our deeds with those generators specify a minimum amount of power. That minimum is set quite low. It is mainly about ensuring that they are up and running effectively. Wind production will vary from year to year, so if it is not a windy year, they are allowed to produce less, but over our whole fleet of generation, that tends to balance out.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that the same arrangement for the large-scale solar installations that we have around the territory as well, that we pay the gap price between the spot price and the wholesale, and for anything over, they reimburse the territory?

**Mr Sibley:** That is correct.

**THE CHAIR:** So that applies to all the large-scale fits?

**Mr Sibley:** Let me give you a bit of context. The wholesale market price in Victoria, for example, where Ararat is, has traditionally bounced between \$30 a megawatt hour and \$50 a megawatt hour. Currently it is bouncing around between \$60 a megawatt hour and \$120 a megawatt hour. The closure of Hazelwood power station has really lifted the prices right across the market. As a result of that, our fit pass-through cost will be reduced.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I have a supplementary. This is probably going to be the two parts of EPSD. You said load shedding may well be needed next summer. That may be putting it more clearly than you put it, but it is certainly a possibility at the very least.

**Mr Rake:** It is one of the risks.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** It may or may not be needed, but it is at least a possibility that you will be entertaining. Have you looked at the buildings within Canberra and how many of them will be habitable if, for a long period, there is no air-conditioning? I refer particularly to some studies done in Melbourne on one bunch of apartments where they said at least 25 per cent of them were not going to be habitable if there was no air-conditioning.

**Mr Rake:** No, we have not done that sort of study, but it would be useful for us to do as part of our general approach to improving energy efficiency and, therefore, susceptibility to energy uncertainty.

**Mr Gentleman:** It would be interesting to see how they perform outside the 100 minutes. If the load sharing sits at around 100 minutes in the ACT at those critical times, how does a building perform in that time? Gary is right; we need to do that work, I think.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I want to go back to Alistair's questioning on the Gungahlin blackouts. You mentioned that ACT had roughly 100 minutes of downtime. What was New South Wales?

**Mr Rake:** Sorry, the national comparison is 200. I do not have a New South Wales-specific figure handy.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Are there targets and goals for service levels set out in legislation?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, there are. The Utilities Act, which is administered by the utilities

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technical regulator and who reports through to Minister Rattenbury, sets out reliability targets for the network operator. They are set at the jurisdictional level, and quality-of-supply standards are also set. The network's job is to meet those standards at the lowest cost under national pricing regulation for it.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I will be impressed if you can tell me this off the top of your head, but do you know what those supply levels are?

**Mr Sibley:** I would have to take that on notice, just noting that a different part of the directorate is responsible for that.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I am actually unsure of this myself: is there a mechanism in place if they beat those targets or fall short of them?

**Mr Sibley:** I do not believe there is an incentive for exceeding it, but they have traditionally always exceeded it in the ACT. ActewAGL Distribution is one of the most reliable networks in the country. In recent years—as long as I have been around anyway—there have never been any issues with not meeting those targets.

**Mr Rake:** We will include that in the answer for you, though, with the information about the penalties and compliance arrangements.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I want to bring a few points together here. You said Canberra experienced roughly about 100 minutes of downtime.

**Mr Gentleman:** In a load shedding situation.

**Mr Rake:** No, sorry, that is in energy reliability.

**Mr Gentleman:** Right, sorry.

**THE CHAIR:** It is 100 minutes per household per year.

**Mr Rake:** That is our average loss of power, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** So some houses do not have any and some are getting potentially considerably more.

**MR PETTERSSON:** If the average across Canberra is 100 minutes, the residents of Gungahlin may be making up the lion's share of that 100 minutes?

**Mr Gentleman:** I look forward to Gungahlin's contribution into the ACT energy market. I think they do a fantastic job for us—no, I am just being smart.

**Mr Rake:** Certainly the events through May and early June this year were disproportionately borne in Gungahlin, yes.

**MR PETTERSSON:** So when is the assessment made of whether they have met those targets for the year? Is that done at the end of the year?

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**Mr Rake:** We will need to take that on notice, but we will take it on notice in the spirit of the question you are asking, and the essence is: if Gungahlin has copped it unfairly, is someone going to have a stern word or something better with the network operator?

**Mr Gentleman:** They are getting more roads money than the rest of Canberra though, I must say.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Our traffic is also the worst, Mick. I keep hearing that ActewAGL says that people can apply for compensation, but there are 2,000 households out there. I guarantee you that 2,000 households are not going to put in an application for compensation.

**Mr Rake:** The compensation would be on demonstrated loss. So if the power was out for long enough that the frozen goods in your freezer spoiled and you had to throw them, that is the sort of thing they are looking at rather than, "I was cold for a couple of hours and I value being warm at 100 bucks an hour. Give me \$200."

**MR PETTERSSON:** Which is a very fair point, but if the lights have gone out six times in four weeks for a lot of these people, I would say that the reliability for them has not been there. They are not of the view that Canberra has one of the most reliable electricity networks.

**Mr Rake:** We will bring back an answer to a question on notice and, as I said, we will take that in the full spirit of the question you have asked. You will not have to overly define that; we will bring you back a complete answer.

**MR PETTERSSON:** You are very helpful. On a slightly nicer topic, can you tell me how the money budgeted for the implementation of the ACT climate change adaptation strategy will be used?

**Mr Bygrave:** Thank you for the question. In the budget this year we have received \$1.928 million over four years to implement the adaptation strategy. This has been unfunded work to date. This allows us now to implement the 27 actions highlighted in the strategy. Some of the funding goes to allow us to recruit a few positions to complement the staff currently there. We have 27 actions across things like living infrastructure strategy, working on urban forest canopy and a range of other initiatives, including the ones that have been identified around buildings.

The adaptation strategy was released in July last year. We formed an adaptation steering committee which is chaired by the director-general, Ben Ponton. This is a cross-directorate working group because adaptation, as we all know, is very much a whole-of-government exercise. I also chair an adaptation working group, again, across the different directorates. Each of the directorates involved in the working group and the steering committee have responsibility for implementing one or more of those 27 actions under the strategy.

**MR PETTERSSON:** You mentioned it had previously been unfunded. I am assuming that means that the work was being undertaken and just being covered under different line items?

**Mr Bygrave:** Yes. We were funding that out of our broader climate change funding. But this allows us to really ramp up and meet the commitments we have to implement the strategy on a fulsome basis.

**Mr Gentleman:** I have an update in regard to electricity prices across to New South Wales. Last week Energy Australia announced Sydney power prices would rise by 19 per cent, the same as the ACT. This will take the bill for 7,500 kilowatts of consumption—which is the Canberra average—to \$2,643 in New South Wales and, by comparison, Canberra customers will be paying \$1,891 for the same energy usage.

**MS LEE:** I have a few questions in relation to investment in renewable electricity, most notably, the wind farms and the solar farms. My understanding is that the New South Wales government has recently reduced the number of windmills allowed for construction on the Crookwell wind farm. How will that impact the ACT's wind energy supply?

**Mr Sibley:** The Crookwell stage 2 wind farm is supported under our reverse auction policy. Prior to that being proposed to us, there was a former proposal at that site which had a greater number of turbines. However, the proposal that came through our auction process had a reduced number of turbines. They were taller turbines, and the output was roughly the same. But, to the best of our knowledge—and I think we would know about it—there has been no variation to the proposal that has been submitted to us and, in fact, it is moving into construction.

**MS LEE:** In relation to solar farms, can you give us an update on where the Royalla solar farm is at?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes. The Royalla solar farm was completed in 2012, from memory, so that is fully operational at 20 megawatts AC. Yes, it is going very nicely.

**MS LEE:** What is the cost for that per megawatt hour?

**Mr Sibley:** The feed-in tariff price is \$186 a megawatt hour, and the cost to the ACT is that top-up component from the floating wholesale price.

**MS LEE:** Obviously the feed-in tariff cost for wind farms is so much less than solar farms. Does the government have any plans in relation to, “Hey, moving forward let's only invest in wind,” or is there any discussion along those lines?

**Mr Gentleman:** We feel we need more renewable options; as we go forward we need a suite of options to power the ACT, and they all need to be renewable. The reverse auction has shown, of course, that wind energy is cheaper to construct now than before, but solar energy prices are coming down as photovoltaic panels and inverters come down in cost. Of course, ACT is in a very good position for solar in comparison to other jurisdictions around the world. When I looked at solar and the feed-in tariff operation in Germany the panels are literally on their side to catch the sun. In the ACT, of course, we get that opportunity of the sun moving right across the top of the panel depending on its location. In most cases it gets a lot more energy production from the location.

**MS LEE:** In relation to the solar farm at Majura, what is the current status of the private investment proposal?

**Mr Gentleman:** The first Majura one was turned on a little while ago; we had an official opening there. I am not sure of the rate they get at Majura.

**Mr Sibley:** The Majura solar farm was not part of our large-scale auction process. The Majura solar farm benefits from our former medium-scale feed-in tariff scheme. Effectively a number of entitlements under the medium scheme have been collocated together to form what looks like a utility-scale solar farm but is actually a series of separately metered 200-kilowatt installations.

**MS LEE:** Did the Majura solar farm attract any government grants or subsidies?

**Mr Sibley:** No direct funding from the government, but it has been a beneficiary of the now closed medium-scale feed-in tariff scheme.

**MS CODY:** I have a quick supplementary. Minister, you spoke about the fact that in Canberra we are quite lucky because the sun generally goes across the whole of the panels. I often drive past the solar farm on Mugga Lane and notice that some panels move while some panels do not. Can you outline the differences?

**Mr Gentleman:** They are supposed to be tracking panels. There are a number of solar farms that track the sun and get more energy response from that operation. I am unaware as to why some would not move, but there might be some fixed ones.

**Mr Sibley:** The proposal submitted by Zhenfa Australia, as it was at the time, was primarily a fixed plate. Through discussions with them they agreed to have a component of tracking panels for demonstration purposes and to link in with the research and development and education outcomes we were trying to achieve. At that time and at that particular site it was determined that the fixed-plate panels were more cost effective for them, but they agreed to put some trackers on for demonstration. At Majura there are obviously different economics for that site and they have decided to go for trackers for the entire array.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I have a few questions relating to the business energy and water program. What is the current status of the program? Is it continuing and how exactly is it funded? Is it through a government appropriation or is it through the energy retailer?

**Ms Malouf:** The business energy and water program is funded through the energy efficiency improvement scheme. Tier 2 retailers pay into a fund; so non-CTEW energy retailers pay into a fund. That is how the program is funded. The current funding period finishes June 2018.

**THE CHAIR:** What proportion of the funds raised through that levy has been used in administering the program?

**Ms Malouf:** We would have to take that one on notice.



**THE CHAIR:** No problem. How many businesses have been through the program to date?

**Ms Malouf:** The total to date, we have just hit the 202 mark this year. Let me get to the exact number for you. We have had to date 143 in 2015-16. We have just hit 202 this week.

**THE CHAIR:** That is 202 for this financial year?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is around 350-ish mark?

**Ms Malouf:** That mark, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** In total. Have there been specifically targeted types of businesses or industry that the program has been aimed at?

**Ms Malouf:** The smaller scale; so the under \$20,000 energy spend per year and/or fewer than 10 FTE. That is the mark but, as far as industry goes, we have worked across all industries: hairdressers, panelbeaters, small cafes, smaller supermarkets—the array of client base is quite broad.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the goal of the program? How many businesses is it intended to get to and assist?

**Ms Malouf:** The target, the benchmark, has been set at 200 a year. It is to try to access that many. We know that the average rebate is about \$2,300, depending on the cash flow of the business. Often businesses will come back for a second dip. They will get their cash flow moving and come back and actually apply for a second lot of grants up to that \$5,000. The average saving for a small business is \$2,500 per year on their energy bills.

**THE CHAIR:** How is the rebate calculated? Is it based on a percentage of the modifications or alterations that are made?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes, it is a 50-50 cost share; so the government pays 50 per cent and the business pays 50 per cent. It is only on eligible items that our energy assessor deems energy improvement.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess, for instance, that if a business has, off its own bat, put relatively energy-efficient lighting into their premises and then gets the program in, there may not be much of a saving?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes, we have to identify that there was old lighting there. Some businesses do go down that road. They say, “We did it six months ago. Can we have the rebate now?” Unfortunately, we need to see that there was inefficient lighting in there to determine the savings and make sure it meets the guidelines.

**THE CHAIR:** Who is currently running the program in businesses? Who is on the ground changing lights, taps and those sorts of things?

**Ms Malouf:** Which electrician—is that what you are asking me? Which electrical companies?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Malouf:** Our technical assessor is an in-house assessor. But each individual business can contract their own—

**THE CHAIR:** Their own electrical contractor.

**Ms Malouf:** electrical contractor, yes.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question relates to page 95 of BP3, better services in your community—improving sustainability through innovative financing. It is a bit unclear. Are you talking about just financing the ACT government or are you in fact financing the rest of Canberra for energy efficiency? You talk about Actsmart business energy. Is this for government or for everyone?

**Mr Rake:** The aim is to develop policy options for innovative financing schemes that could support the private sector as well. In some other jurisdictions there are environmental upgrade agreement schemes available that can attach the investment made in upgrading an office building, for example, to the rate base that the landlord can collect from tenants. That debt can be underpinned through the ratings system through different owners on the property. It takes away some of the short-term investment bias that might occur to retrofit older buildings. That is one example of such a scheme. We will look at a range of options. So it could benefit government, private consumers as investors and corporates.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** So you are actively considering this. I have read about them elsewhere and I—

**Mr Rake:** I used that one as an example of something that exists in other jurisdictions, not to say that that is the model we will zero in on here. But it is an example of one that we would analyse and try to determine its suitability for this jurisdiction.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Okay.

**Mr Bygrave:** The funding is essentially to do research and to assess options, not to implement them. But we would be working with our Treasury colleagues to do the research, to investigate and come back to government on what might be implemented.

**Mr Rake:** What I would say is that we have already had very large private sector property owners come to us and say that if a scheme like an environmental upgrade agreement scheme existed in the ACT, they would be willing to utilise it. They already have private financiers available. Their perception is that the risk to the ACT community would be quite low in supporting that sort of scheme. We want to sit back and do some proper policy analysis. But if it is that good, we would be keen to

be on board.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You said they were saying that they already had private financiers available. If that is the case, what is the government's role? Sorry, I did not quite understand that.

**Mr Rake:** In an environmental upgrade what they essentially do is allow the repayment of that private debt to be treated as an outgoing, almost as a line item on a rates bill. The landlord has an opportunity to pass that through to tenants through the commercial tenancy agreement.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Okay.

**Mr Rake:** That means that it has long-term collectability over the life of a building, not just over the life of that owner.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Okay; it passes through to the tenant part. I thought it was just the long-term nature—that you were borrowing it over 10 years, not over two years—

**Mr Rake:** That is right, so that—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** and that the government, wherever, is always in a good position to collect rates. They have a fairly—

**Mr Rake:** Yes. What they need is—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** No, I did not see the pass-through—

**Mr Rake:** government endorsement that the privately-held debt is collectible through the statutory system in that particular model. There is a range of others that might not require that.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I was aware of the statutory collection of an effectively private debt. But I was not aware of the pass-through to the tenant. That could be regarded as nice or not; whichever. Although the tenant would usually get the benefit of the savings.

**Mr Rake:** That is right. If the environmental upgrades provide a lower cost operating environment for the tenant, it should still stack up. There would be disclosure schemes about the outgoings as we have for other rental properties.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Have you any idea how much it would reduce the financing cost? You have not got a specific policy, but is there anything in particular? Are you expecting to get only a couple of percentage points off?

**Mr Rake:** I am not sure it is so much about targeting directly financing cost, but about changing the investment horizon that property owners might think about in trying to improve the sustainability of their investments in their buildings. At the moment it might be sensible to recover some investments over a 30-year life but a property owner is not yet ready to make an investment when they might divest in five

years. So we need to try to stabilise that. That is the same here.

**Mr Bygrave:** That is right. I think it is very much about the up-front capital costs, which are often the barrier. It is about smoothing over the funding profile. They are the main barriers, the up-front costs.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** You are not anticipating that the ACT government itself would become a lender?

**Mr Rake:** I do not have—

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Have you talked to your treasury colleagues on whether that would be a good investment?

**Mr Rake:** I do not anticipate that. What we are hearing is that there are seen to be private financiers ready to play. So that would seem to fail the test of government need to intervene if there are adequate private players there.

**Mr Bygrave:** Yes, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation has been playing quite a major role here, as well as the major banks already in other jurisdictions.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Although we have a superannuation fund which, hopefully, is always looking for a good investment.

**Mr Rake:** That one I will leave for my treasury colleagues.

**MR COE:** Or a bad one, in fact.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** That is me for the questions.

**MS LEE:** In respect of the renewable energy skill centre for excellence at CIT, are you able to provide some information about the courses that are conducted over there, the total number of students who have graduated and what industries they are employed in? If employed, are they in the ACT or have they left us?

**Mr Gentleman:** We might be able to give you a little information, but it would be more, I think, for my colleague in the education sector. If there is some knowledge that the directorate has, we will provide that.

**Mr Bygrave:** I will start an answer on that one. We have been working very closely with CIT to build a skills and trades training capability in the ACT. As you know, we are leading Australia in a range of areas, including wind, solar and battery rollout. In order to implement these different industry activities, we need to have skilled technicians, trained technicians. So we are working with the CIT. We are actually funding them through the renewable energy innovation fund and through some of the funding coming from Hornsdale 1, I think it is, to provide \$5 million to them over 20 years to work on wind training, battery training and other activities. That is a preliminary answer.

**Mr Gentleman:** CIT has been, I think, forthright in looking at new opportunities for

training in this regard but also we talked earlier on about electric vehicles. They were the first ones to pick up an opportunity from Toyota and look at training their mechanics, or technicians I should say, from all over Australia. They come to the ACT for training on electric vehicles.

**MS LEE:** Staying with the theme of education and training, have you any information on the ANU masters course in wind development?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, the ANU is offering a masters course in wind energy. It is the only such course of its kind in Australia. It has been developed in collaboration with Canberra company Windlab. It is a commitment that Windlab made in their Coonooer Bridge wind farm proposal, which was successful through the auction process. I believe that course has been run at least once. I will have to check, but it has actually been very popular.

**MS LEE:** Have you got the numbers of students that were enrolled?

**Mr Sibley:** We would happily come back with numbers for you.

**MS LEE:** Thank you. Can you give us a bit more information on energy research partnerships, like the research projects?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, this is a very important initiative which is closely aligned with the battery rollout under the next gen battery program. Through the industry contributions to the renewable energy innovation fund, about \$5 million is being provided to ANU, who are also contributing their own funding to establish what will be a world-leading research program in distributive energy storage.

A global recruitment process has been underway to recruit a program leader for that. That is being finalised at the moment with a very exciting outcome we believe in terms of a very high profile candidate coming through. As a first stage, the program leader will come on and establish the program, recruit post-doctoral researchers and develop education programs for the university. We will make available data through our battery rollout program, which will also then be available for more applied research around the technology development, the marketing and the commercial development of distributed energy storage, which is a very important economic opportunity for the territory, given our leadership positioning on this.

**MS LEE:** Is this research funded by the government, by ANU, a combination or from elsewhere?

**Mr Sibley:** The money comes from the renewable energy innovation fund, which is provided by Hornsdale wind farm associated with the Hornsdale stages 2 and 3 wind farm proposal—sorry, it is the stages 1 and 2 wind farm proposal at Hornsdale. That is industry money. We have established a business advisory board to provide advice to the minister on expenditure of funding to ensure value for money and to ensure optimal outcomes from the business industry development perspective. They considered a proposal for ANU and the government accepted ultimately that proposal from ANU to fund this battery storage research program.

**MS LEE:** That fund had a budget of \$12 million to run over five years; is that right?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** And how much has been expended to date?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, I will have to bring up those numbers, which I left over there.

**MS LEE:** Thank you.

**Mr Sibley:** Would someone else like to address this—no?

**MS LEE:** You are on your own.

**Mr Sibley:** Of the \$12 million that has been expended, around \$5.05 million is allocated to the ANU. That is the biggest program so far for this battery research integration program. There is \$2 million allocated for the renewable energy innovation hub, which is located on Moore Street in Turner. That \$2 million is a sort of worst-case scenario budget envelope, if you like. A lot of that will be recovered through the tenancy fees paid by businesses that are using that hub, the event space and things like that.

There has been \$2 million notionally allocated to direct grants for businesses. These are primarily start-up business that are looking for funding to take products to the next level through demonstration or through research partnerships. We have conducted one round of funding under that. I believe that just over \$1 million has been allocated through that, the details of which are just being finalised at the moment. We have also partnered with Chief Minister's directorate. It has its innovation connect—the Icons grants program—to fund a renewable stream under that program. That is currently being finalised at the moment as well.

**MS LEE:** In respect of the start-up businesses that you were referring to, I know it is early days yet but are they businesses that are ACT based or that have intentions to come to the ACT?

**Mr Sibley:** They are very much ACT-based start-up businesses. The ACT actually has a thriving start-up community around energy innovation, which connects closely to the ICT capability at ANU, also from the CSIRO and from other kinds of research groups where smart people have developed new ideas and have backed themselves to go out and commercialise them. That is really the principal audience for this grant funding.

**MS LEE:** To wrap up, out of the \$12 million, you talked about the \$5.5 million to ANU, the \$2 million for the hub and the \$1 million for the start-up businesses?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, \$2 million notionally allocated for direct grants, although that has not been fully committed yet. Then there is \$360,000 for the innovation connect grants, which is notionally allocated but has not been fully committed yet. Then there are some administration costs associated with managing the fund—administering payments and all those kinds of things.

PROOF

**MS LEE:** My maths are not great but about \$7 million is left. What is it?

**Mr Sibley:** Yes, that takes you to around about—I think that takes it to just over \$10 million.

**THE CHAIR:** That concludes today's hearing. On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Gentleman for appearing in both his ministerial capacity and on behalf of others. I also thank Professor Kate Auty who appeared before the committee earlier this morning and all of the officials that have given up their time to appear today.

The secretary will provide a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearings when it is prepared. In respect of answers to any questions that have been taken on notice, the request is that they are made available back to the committee secretary within five working days; day one is tomorrow. That adjourns today's hearing. We will see you all again tomorrow.

**The committee adjourned at 5.31 pm.**