



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 21 February 2018

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Questions without notice

Light rail—WorkSafe ACT notices

MR COE: My question is to Minister Ramsay regarding regulatory services. Minister, what WorkSafe ACT notices have been issued to Canberra Metro or associated contractors in the past week, and have these notices resulted in the closure of all or part of the light rail site?

MR RAMSAY: I thank the member for his question. I can advise that on 15 February a prohibition notice was served as a result of service utilities restructuring excavation works. The prohibition notice prevents Canberra Metro constructions from carrying out any mechanical excavations on the site until they review, revise and implement an effective system of work to manage the risk associated with mechanical excavations.

MR COE: Minister, is this prohibition still in place, and how many improvement and prohibition notices have been issued to the consortium or their contractors for light rail works?

MR RAMSAY: Yes, those particular notices are in place. I am advised that since 24 November last year there have been six prohibition notices, four infringement notices and four improvement notices.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, are the three additional WorkSafe inspectors for light rail being funded through a Treasurer's advance?

MR RAMSAY: I thank the member for her question. No, those ones were funded in the budget of last year.

Planning—recycling facility

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for planning and urban renewal and relates to the planning processes for the proposed waste operations by Capital Recycling Solutions in Fyshwick. Can the minister explain what recycling or waste processing activities are currently proposed for this site and whether they include bringing in waste streams from outside the ACT or shipping out waste that would otherwise be processed in the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question with regard to this matter. There are a number of complex and interrelated processes afoot relating to this project. I have asked the directorate for a full briefing on it. I will take the question on notice and, once I have received the full briefing, come back to the Assembly with the details.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, how will you make sure that the EIS approval is for just a waste sorting facility and will not, in fact, be an approval for an incinerator by stealth?

MR GENTLEMAN: There are a number of statutory processes there. They will all be followed in time by ACTPLA as the independent authority, and I am confident in

the work that they do.

Light rail—infrastructure damage

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. On 16 February 2018 the *Canberra Times* reported that Northbourne Avenue was closed in both directions during peak hour after a gas leak at the intersection of Northbourne and Ipima Street following damage by machinery during excavation work associated with the light rail project. What risks to the community were posed by this gas-related safety breach?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Miss Burch for the question. I note that, in addition to the *Canberra Times*, notification was also provided by a number of government agencies. I think the *Canberra Times* was one of the last to report it in fact; it was certainly reported through Transport Canberra and to bus travellers throughout the territory.

It was a significant incident at a significant time in the day when people move around the city. The advice to me is that the actions taken by the contractor, although having been served an improvement notice, made the site safe as quickly as possible. Relevant agencies were on site to ensure both the safety of people in the region surrounding the incident and also that traffic and public transport flows could be redirected, because it was approaching peak hour.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, how could it be that your flagship infrastructure project with a union EBA has had such severe workplace safety problems resulting in serious injuries?

MS FITZHARRIS: If Miss Burch could back up her assertion about serious injuries, I would welcome that. Certainly, safety on the light rail site is a top priority for the government, for the board, for Transport Canberra and for Canberra Metro. It is a priority because it is a priority for our community. This major infrastructure project, which, as of today, has roughly 700 people working on site, is a significant project. There are multiple processes in place from the board level right through to the day-to-day operations on the site, in addition to the three light rail inspectors, which were quite clearly funded in last year's budget. This is a priority. If there are opportunities to improve—and clearly last week demonstrated opportunities to improve—the consortium is very clear that the government's priority is for safety on this site.

MR WALL: Minister, what other damage has been done to public infrastructure and/or utilities as a result of work associated with the light rail project? Is the project still expected to be delivered on time?

MS FITZHARRIS: Whatever damage has been done to infrastructure or utilities, it is the responsibility of the consortium to remediate it as quickly as possible. Yes, we do expect that the project will be delivered on time.

Mr Wall: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order.

Mr Wall: It is on relevance. Could the minister be directly relevant and actually outline what other damage has occurred, not what the process is should other damage occur?

MADAM SPEAKER: Does the minister have information on what damage has occurred?

MS FITZHARRIS: No.

Mr Wall: Take it on notice?

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her answer.

Light rail—workplace safety

MR WALL: My question is to the minister for transport, regarding light rail. Minister, why has a project in your portfolio suffered extreme safety breaches and injuries to workers and can you confirm that a worker's fingers were severed in a workplace injury on the capital metro project?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Wall for the question. As I indicated in my previous answer, safety remains a key priority for this project. It is certainly—

Mrs Jones: Has someone's fingers been severed?

MS FITZHARRIS: No, someone's fingers were not severed, is the advice that I have. Someone's fingers were injured in an incident but they were not severed.

MR WALL: Minister, why did you not anticipate such safety risks when you knew that light rail was a complex and dangerous construction project with tight time constraints?

MS FITZHARRIS: The government anticipated that, given such a large project, we needed to have safety at the forefront of our minds. That was essential during the planning and the procurement phases of the project. It was also very clear to the government that it would need to provide funding for three additional WorkSafe inspectors in last year's budget.

MISS C BURCH: Why does WorkCover need to assign additional inspectors to monitor a project in your portfolio, and when was the decision taken to take on such additional inspectors?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Miss Burch for the supplementary and refer her to the significant discussion regarding last year's budget, which her colleagues are well aware of.

Housing—affordability

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Chief Minister. How is the ACT government

working to boost housing affordability for first homebuyers through national and local reform?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. One of the government's ongoing reform priorities is the abolition of stamp duty. We have cut stamp duty every year since tax reform commenced in 2012. That means that the buyer of a \$500,000 home in the ACT now saves over \$7,000 in stamp duty compared to when reform began.

Stamp duty is a particularly unfair hurdle for people buying their first home. It can add tens of thousands of dollars to the already huge upfront cost of that purchase. That is why I am working for the states and territories to come together to agree to abolish all stamp duty for first homebuyers. Most jurisdictions have a range of concession or exemption schemes in place, but it is fair to observe that the eligibility thresholds often lag behind the real price of a home, particularly in the New South Wales and Victorian markets.

Scrapping stamp duty for all first homebuyers can be achieved in a way that is affordable by removing the first home owner grant scheme at the same time. These grants no longer serve the purpose for which they were created and arguably now make housing less affordable. By working to abolish first home owner stamp duty and grants across the nation we can deliver a far more effective form of support to Canberrans and, indeed, Australians.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how will cutting stamp duty, while ending the payment of special grants, make homebuyers better off?

MR BARR: It will end the money merry-go-round where state and territory governments, channelling a commonwealth policy, hand out grants and then take them straight back in stamp duty. The Productivity Commission and many economists have noted that first homebuyer grants fuel price growth by adding many times their dollar value to the borrowing power of purchasers and distorting decisions about where and what property people buy, channelling demand into particular segments of the market, which drives up prices further.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MR BARR: Instead of grants benefiting first homebuyers—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, you will have a chance to ask a question.

MR BARR: they simply end up being handed over to first home sellers. First homebuyers will be better off under the proposal I have put forward because they would receive an exemption from stamp duty no matter what kind of property they buy. They would not have to find additional funds to pay their stamp duty bill after buying and they would not face higher monthly mortgage repayments or a bigger lifetime cost of borrowing. This is a good reform that will build on the work that we are already undertaking here in the territory to abolish stamp duty for all buyers.

MS CODY: Chief Minister, what steps will the ACT government be taking to progress the removal of stamp duty for first homebuyers as a national reform?

MR BARR: The government is prepared to progress this reform in the ACT with the acceleration of removal of stamp duty specifically for first homebuyers ahead of our broader phase-out of the tax. I have written to each of my state and territory colleagues asking them to consider doing the same. We will be putting this on the agenda for the next meeting of the Board of Treasurers because this is an idea that would be best seeing all jurisdictions moving together.

At the moment the payment of the first home owners grant is a commonwealth requirement linked to the payment of GST to the states and territories. In order to progress this reform in a fiscally sustainable way, that requirement needs to be amended. I will work with my treasurer colleagues federally and at the state and territory level because we believe that, although the territory is relatively small nationally, we can have a big impact on reforming policy settings across the country to make them work better for first homebuyers.

Trade unions—memorandum of understanding

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, consultation is currently underway on the secure local jobs package, which outlines the government's intent to enshrine in legislation many aspects of the memorandum of understanding between UnionsACT and the ACT government on the procurement of goods and services, known as the MOU. How will the secure local jobs package coexist with the MOU?

MR BARR: It will not. The secure local jobs package would supersede the MOU.

MS LAWDER: Chief Minister, what role will UnionsACT continue to have in the ACT government procurement process once the secure local jobs package is enacted?

MR BARR: UnionsACT, together with all other stakeholders in the procurement process, will continue to have a role, both as a consultative body and under any statutory requirements that are put in place by the Assembly.

MR WALL: Minister, what have been the key successes of the MOU with UnionsACT?

MR BARR: A deep engagement with the representatives of working people in this city; a voice for working people in the procurement of goods and services; and a very important opportunity for advice to government, particularly around the bad behaviour, poor practice and illegal activity that have occurred in a small segment of the business community in this city who have sought to sidestep their legal obligations in relation to both national and territory law.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: The level and volume of interjection from those opposite are reflective of their dislike of the union movement and working people.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: We get a “Hear, hear” from those opposite. Yes, your dislike of the union movement and working people is well understood by the union movement and working people in this city and has been confirmed again by those interjections this afternoon.

Crime—robbery

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The most recent annual report of ACT Policing showed that robbery increased by 53.3 per cent in 2016-17 from the previous year. This includes an increase of 27.4 per cent in armed robbery. This comes as ACT Policing funding has not kept pace with inflation or population growth. Minister, why has the government seen robberies increase by over 50 per cent in 12 months?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mrs Jones for her question on ACT Policing. ACT Policing continues to enjoy the trust and confidence of the ACT community, with the report that she mentioned showing that Canberra has the highest levels of satisfaction with police services and the integrity of our police. ACT police recorded the lowest number of complaints from the public compared to other states, and the ACT is below the national average for road deaths, homicides and related offences, sexual assault, and unlawful entry with intent involving the taking of property.

The report also revealed that the vast majority of the ACT community feel safe at home, in their neighbourhood and on public transport. These results that Mrs Jones has indicated demonstrate the high level of confidence that our community continue to have in ACT police, and I commend our officers on the service and support that they continue to provide to the ACT.

Mrs Jones: A point of order on relevance.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order.

Mrs Jones: As the minister wrapped up his answer, we still did not have an answer as to why there has been an over 50 per cent increase in robberies in 12 months. I do not think the minister has any intention of putting that in, and that is not directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I ask the minister, in the 40 seconds you have left, to see if you can get to the point of Mrs Jones’s question.

MR GENTLEMAN: As we have mentioned before, crime statistics go up and down. The important part is being able to respond to that, and that is why we have invested more in ACT Policing, and those investments are showing results.

MRS JONES: Minister, what actions have you taken to address the scourge of robberies in Canberra?

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! The question has been asked and the minister is trying to get to his feet to answer.

MR GENTLEMAN: As I have said, we have invested heavily in ACT Policing in order for them to respond to these crimes.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the minister sat down because of the level of interjection. Minister, you have time to continue.

Mr Hanson: He's not very robust.

MADAM SPEAKER: That is not the point. Standing orders say that the minister should be heard in silence, as in no interjections. Minister.

MR GENTLEMAN: As I have said, we have invested heavily in ACT Policing, and they have responded. They are doing their very best to address crime in the territory, including robberies. As I have said, they are doing a fantastic job.

MR PARTON: Minister, for how much longer does the ACT government expect our police officers to do more and more work with fewer resources?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Parton for his question but his inference is incorrect. We are providing more resources for ACT police. You have heard the numbers in recent answers, Madam Speaker: \$6.4 million extra for Taskforce Nemesis, including extra funding for the beat squad on the ground—investment in our crime task force. And of course those investments are showing results. I have every confidence in ACT police and I certainly wish the opposition did too.

Citizens juries—impartiality

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. In Associate Professor Dr Ron Levy's independent report on the ACT citizens jury pilot he identified that "bias was evident in the official rhetoric surrounding the proceedings" and that "this framing undermined the objective of using the citizens jury to depoliticise contentious questions of reform". Treasurer, why did the government make political statements and frame information in a way that could undermine the impartiality and autonomy of the jurors?

MR BARR: We have not and if anyone is politicising this, it is the opposition.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please! Ms Lee with a supplementary.

MS LEE: Treasurer, what was the process to ensure that public statements and information were not biased or politicised and, if there was not a process, why was it

not considered necessary?

MR BARR: The process was according to the principles outlined in the procurement of this particular citizens jury and the government's broader principles around community engagement. I know why you are politicising this and anyone, any independent observer, would simply need to go and look at the single largest donation by an individual in ACT political history to understand why it is that those opposite hold the opinion they do. Follow the money!

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, what were the main findings of the CTP report about the merits of the process?

MR BARR: The reviewer was very positive about the process that the government has undertaken and the importance of such deliberative democracy. This is a very useful process. I know that those opposite oppose it. They will continue to do so, and they do so because of their significant financial donations from a particular—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: The single largest donation by an individual in ACT political history was made to those opposite on this issue.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Reconciliation Day

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs: can the minister update the Assembly about the recently announced Reconciliation Day grants?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cody for her question and her interest in Reconciliation Day. The Reconciliation Day public holiday on 28 May will be a nationally significant event, with the ACT being the first jurisdiction in Australia to gazette a public holiday recognising the culture and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and our collective responsibility for the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

I was pleased recently to join with the Chief Minister to announce funding of \$50,000 for community organisations through the 2018 Reconciliation Day grants program to enable grassroots organisations to participate fully in the celebrations, ensuring that Reconciliation Day has a strong community focus. These grants are available to assist organisations or individuals to conduct, coordinate or participate in Reconciliation Day events in the lead-up to or during the Reconciliation Day public holiday weekend.

The Reconciliation Day grants program aims to support community-organised events with a strong focus on: promoting understanding and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, for example, how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to their country, including through arts, music, languages and other cultural activities; promoting understanding of the impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of past policies and historical events, such as forced removal and the stolen generations; allowing opportunities for Canberrans of all ages

and backgrounds to be involved and have the ability to participate in community events and to have a voice about what reconciliation means to them; or, for example, holding seminars or panel discussions about the importance of reconciliation with the aim of raising the threshold of understanding collectively across the ACT.

Applications for these grants opened on Monday, 12 February and will close on Monday, 5 March. I encourage all members to spread the word about these grants and encourage community organisations in their electorates and across Canberra to apply.

MS CODY: Minister, what other celebrations are planned along with the grants to acknowledge Reconciliation Day?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cody for her supplementary question. EventsACT will engage an events coordinator to manage and deliver the Reconciliation Day public holiday event on Monday, 28 May. A Reconciliation Day council will work with EventsACT, the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the events coordinator to ensure that the event or events on the day are culturally strong and engage as many Canberrans as possible. Members of the council will also be ambassadors for Reconciliation Day, working to encourage widespread community participation.

It is envisaged that the Reconciliation Day public holiday event or events will include, for example, market stalls promoting public and private sector organisations' reconciliation action plans and local services and programs, as well as the work of artists and craftspeople; entertainment celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and artists who are walking the path of reconciliation with our first Australians; and an opportunity to engage in conversation, or to yarn, about a renewed ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice partnership refresh.

The Community Services Directorate is also engaging with other directorates and non-government organisations to develop a calendar of events in the lead-up to Reconciliation Day. Collaboration and partnership on projects is central to this planning. Early ideas for projects include a reconciliation garden, childcare centre activities, development and launch of reconciliation action plans, and various physical symbols of the territory's ongoing commitment to reconciliation.

MR STEEL: How will the ACT community benefit from Reconciliation Day celebrations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his supplementary question. Madam Speaker, I am sure you are aware that there are a number of national days of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural celebration and to mark significant historical events, from NAIDOC Week to Sorry Day. In fact, just last week we marked such a day, on the 10th anniversary of the national apology. The events organised by and for the community to mark that important anniversary were an important demonstration of the healing power that lies in coming together as a community to acknowledge the impact of past policies and to commit to a better future.

Reconciliation Day provides a practical example of a specific ACT government and ACT community commitment to reconciliation. That is why it is so important that the events and activities held in the lead-up to and on Reconciliation Day are inclusive of the whole community. As I am constantly reminded by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, reconciliation is everyone's business. It is not the responsibility of Indigenous Australians to make good the wrongs of the past.

Building a better understanding of the role each of us can play in the journey of reconciliation and continuing that dialogue is important. Using this improved understanding, we can make changes in the way we think, talk and make practical changes in service delivery, such as removing the deficit language that too often attaches itself to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs; implementing co-design, by giving a voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making, and by being transparent; resetting relationships; better understanding the need to implement culturally appropriate delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services; and building a shared understanding of our goal of strong families and strong communities, which is the fundamental underpinning of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement.

Multicultural affairs—mother languages

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Today we celebrate International Mother Language Day, which began in Bangladesh and commemorates the central role language plays in cultural and personal identity. On 13 September 2017 the Assembly passed a mother languages motion which in part called for the establishment of collections and displays, sometimes called an Ekushey corner, at ACT libraries to promote and protect mother languages. Minister, why have you since stated in correspondence to the Coe office that the government does not consider it necessary to establish these collections and displays despite the Assembly's resolution?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Kikkert for her question. In my correspondence, which I do not have with me, I explained that Libraries ACT undertakes a range of activities that already celebrate mother languages and other languages across the ACT and that that activity is being undertaken therefore in a different way.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, will you now adhere to the Assembly's motion to establish these Ekushey corners as a matter of priority and, if so, when will Canberrans see this promise honoured?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I do not have the words of the actual motion with me. I suspect, though I cannot say for sure, that the motion suggested that the ACT government would consider this activity. As I said, Libraries ACT undertakes a lot of activities that relate to other languages and celebrate the importance of diversity of languages. I am not the minister responsible for Libraries ACT. I will follow up to see if there is any more that can be done in relation to this particular matter but, as I said in response to the first question, the activities envisaged for this particular activity are, in my understanding, being progressed.

MS LEE: Minister, how can Canberrans now trust you to protect their multicultural identity given your disregard for the will of the Assembly?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I absolutely reject the assertion that I am disregarding the will of the Assembly.

Canberra Hospital—asbestos

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Welcome back. I refer to a report in the *Canberra Times* of 21 February about the Health Services Union raising concerns about the tearoom currently used by their members, who are wardsmen and ward clerks, having asbestos potentially present in the glue in the floor tiles. The union also raised concerns about their members being bullied by senior hospital staff. Minister, what actions have you taken to assure yourself that asbestos is not present in the tearoom at the Canberra Hospital used by HSU members or elsewhere on site at the Canberra Hospital?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. I am pleased to be back. Certainly there have been a number of discussions with both the union and the workforce at Canberra Hospital. The advice to me is that the room has been inspected recently by third-party experts and has been rated normal, with the likelihood of no exposure to airborne asbestos under normal building use.

MRS DUNNE: I note that the minister did not answer most of the question. Minister, what actions have you taken to assure yourself that union members and other staff are not being bullied at the hospital by senior staff?

MS FITZHARRIS: I have sought advice from the directorate. There is certainly an ongoing discussion between ACT Health and me around my very clear expectations that communication is open, transparent and frequent, not only with our external stakeholders but, even more importantly, with our own workforce.

I have asked ACT Health to follow up on this issue raised by the HSU. I was disappointed to see it in the first instance, but ACT Health have today met with the HSU. I am also advised that this relocation was first raised with staff on 7 November 2017. There were three follow-up meetings that took place and frequent dialogue with the relevant area, including the development of all staff communications throughout January leading up to relocation works in early February.

There appears to have been a gap. I have asked ACT Health to immediately follow up on that. There is no tolerance of bullying in ACT Health and I am confident that that is the view of ACT Health leadership. I have reiterated on a number of occasions that I expect all staff in ACT Health to adhere to a culture of zero bullying and also to build a very healthy culture within ACT Health, which is one of the territory's most significant employers.

MR PARTON: Minister, what impact do the poor physical condition of Canberra Hospital and the history of poor culture have on our ability to recruit staff?

MS FITZHARRIS: Indeed, as Mr Parton will know, earlier this week we announced

that there is significant work underway to attract even more health professionals to the territory. It is certainly the case, and it has been discussed in the chamber before, that there have been instances in certain departments around issues of bullying and workplace culture. There have been a number of processes put in place to remediate that, led by the director-general, and reinforced under consecutive ministers.

It has also been the case that there have been a number of discussions nationally, with relevant employee representatives and the various colleges and representatives of doctors, nurses and allied health staff, that the culture in hospitals around the country needs to improve. That is certainly a priority. I think that the culture, the investment, the connections between ACT Health and our higher education sector, and the general livability of Canberra are things that we would really like to stress to health professionals around the country, who can come here and work in a new facility like the University of Canberra hospital, and indeed in the future in other new and upgraded facilities like the Centenary hospital and also the new SPIRE centre at Canberra Hospital.

Health—meningococcal immunisation program

MR STEEL: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing: why is the ACT government rolling out a meningococcal ACWY immunisation program?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Steel very much for the question. As members will know, meningococcal disease is serious. It is caused by multiple strains of the meningococcal bacteria. Most illness in Australia is caused by the B, W and Y strains. Although it is uncommon, meningococcal disease can become life threatening very quickly. It can also cause significant disability, including from chronic pain, skin scarring and neurological impairment.

The ACT is pleased to be introducing a meningococcal ACYW vaccination program to protect young people and the community broadly from the emerging public health threat in Australia posed by meningococcal W. Since 2014 meningococcal W and Y cases have increased in numbers across Australia. Meningococcal W disease is associated with a higher chance of dying compared with disease from other strains circulating in Australia.

This important vaccination will be offered to students this year and is based on older teenagers and young adults being at increased risk of meningococcal disease as they are more likely to carry the bacteria in their nose and throat and more likely to spread the bacteria to others. The vaccination program aims to protect young people and reduce risks for the community as a whole by decreasing the number of people carrying the bacteria in their nose and throat. This is why we have taken the decision to respond to this issue proactively by providing a free immunisation to adolescents.

MR STEEL: Minister, could you outline how the program will be rolled out?

MS FITZHARRIS: ACT Health has begun rolling out this program just this week by introducing a funded meningococcal ACWY vaccination program into ACT high schools, given that adolescents face an increased risk. The school-based vaccination program will provide one dose of the MenACWY vaccine free to year 10 students on

an ongoing basis. This vaccine provides protection against these strains of the disease.

Visits by the schools health team to the initial schools have commenced this week and will continue through the semester. Families of high school students in year 10 will receive a letter outlining the program and their consent requirements. Students in year 10 who may miss being vaccinated through the school vaccination program will be able to receive it free through their GP in the same calendar year.

There will also be a free catch-up program in 2018 available to all young people aged between 16 and 19 years through their GP. As of the beginning of this month, ACT Health has delivered a base stock of the vaccine to all GPs along with promotional materials including posters and information pamphlets. The distribution of the vaccine is possible through current systems in place for vaccine deliveries across the ACT.

Anecdotal feedback from some GPs indicates that they already have a number of appointments booked to administer the vaccine. An education session for immunisation providers on meningococcal disease and the ACWY vaccination program was held last week. Additional promotional activities to ensure community awareness have also been launched, including via social and traditional media, as well as the program launched today at Kaleen high.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what are the benefits of establishing a program such as this for Canberra's young people?

MS FITZHARRIS: As I indicated, older teenagers and young adults are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to carry the bacteria in their nose and throat and more likely to spread the bacteria to others. This is due to social behaviours that result in the bacteria being transmitted through close physical contact and participating in other social activities.

National immunisation experts recommend a routinely scheduled dose of meningococcal ACWY vaccine at 15 years, accompanied by an introductory catch-up campaign to age 19 years. This is based on the evidence that older teenagers and young adults have an increased risk of meningococcal disease and are most likely to spread the disease.

Delivery through a school immunisation program is expected to achieve the highest coverage and effectiveness of the program for those in the 15-year-old age group. Introduction of the vaccination program through the schools health team enables the opportunity for high vaccination coverage by leveraging existing systems. This program will help keep Canberra's young people and our broader community protected from meningococcal W disease.

Light rail—Mitchell

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for transport. Minister, on 7 February your office was quoted in the *Canberra Times* stating that the government continued to engage with businesses in Mitchell and had recognised their demands by "future proofing" a stop at Mitchell. Minister, can you clarify what is meant by

“future proofing” to give business owners and employees certainty about public transport infrastructure in Mitchell?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am very happy to take Mr Milligan’s question, although I have answered it on a number of occasions before. Certainly there will continue to be public transport services to Mitchell. Indeed, Mitchell is reasonably well covered now by the provision of bus services. The bus services themselves may change but there will absolutely continue to be bus services available in Mitchell once light rail is operating.

By future proofing we meant that along the stage 1 light rail route there is only one additional stop that is currently being constructed underground for operationalising in the future. It is not currently programmed to be operationalised with the commencement of stage 1 of light rail but it is the only other stop along that route that has the necessary infrastructure and utility work that has been done underground to enable a future stop to be installed fairly simply.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, don’t you think that the traders in Mitchell deserve a light rail stop during stage 1 of production, given the rates and taxes that these businesses pay and the large number of people who work there?

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, would you like the question repeated?

MS FITZHARRIS: If Mr Milligan could read the question, that would be appreciated.

MR MILLIGAN: I will repeat the question: minister, don’t you think that traders in Mitchell deserve a light rail stop during stage 1 of production, given the rates and taxes that these businesses pay and the large number of people who work in Mitchell?

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly, having been asked for an opinion, my opinion is that Canberra deserves light rail. It is certainly the case that this side of the chamber was the only side of the chamber to give a guarantee to the Canberra community that, yes, we do deserve light rail. I do not recall once—not once, Madam Speaker—the Canberra Liberals ever discussing a light rail stop. We have been over it on a number of occasions in this chamber, with respect to how much consultation—indeed unprecedented consultation—on the light rail route was underway over the last 5½ years.

It was never the case that there was a confirmed light rail stop in Mitchell. I want to be very clear about that. It is very clearly on the record. It is certainly the case that we have discussions with the Mitchell traders. I welcome their contribution. We remain in discussion with them. The stop at Mitchell is indeed the only stop along stage 1 of light rail that is future proofed.

MR COE: Minister, will you guarantee in the absence of light rail that Mitchell will receive a single bus to the city and Gungahlin, as is currently the case, or will it be serviced by a shuttle bus to a light rail stop?

MS FITZHARRIS: There will be no absence of light rail: light rail will operate. As members of the opposition are well aware, there has already been stage 1 of our consultation on the broader bus network. Stage 2 consultation of the more detailed components of our bus network once light rail starts operating is due to open in the next six weeks or so. We will guarantee continued public transport services to Mitchell. We will do the necessary work to understand patronage to Mitchell, and we will continue to talk with Mitchell traders. They have had significant anti-light rail discussions from the opposition, who never once—I would like to repeat that—never once raised the issue of a stop in Mitchell until they lost the last election.

Government—veterans employment strategy

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Veterans and Seniors. Can the minister please update the Assembly on the government's veterans employment strategy?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. I am very pleased to update the Assembly on the government's work to build a city which is a great place to live for veterans transitioning to a civilian employment where they are welcomed and supported.

In the second half of last year, the ACT public service was surveyed to determine how many veterans are currently in the public service and what their experience of transitioning to it was. I am glad to say that we received 134 responses, which is particularly impressive given that when New South Wales undertook the same exercise, their much larger public service returned 150 responses.

Through December and January, a number of meetings have occurred between the ACT government and the Department of Defence, right up to the Head of Service and the secretary of the Department of Defence. As part of this, we have gained some useful insights as to how best to attract veterans to the ACT, and we have begun to work together to help achieve this goal.

Working with the Department of Defence, we are creating a matrix comparing ranks and skills in the ADF with the public service, to help those in the ADF translate defence speak into public service speak. We will also have a representative at the upcoming ADF transition seminars to answer questions and provide support to those who are looking at transitioning to the ACT public service.

Madam Speaker, these are just a few of the initiatives that we will be rolling out. I look forward to announcing more in the future.

MR PETTERSSON: Can the minister advise what data the survey provided about those veterans who have transitioned to the ACT public service?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. I would be delighted to provide this because we have obtained some very useful data. It shows that the ACT public service has attracted veterans from all three services of the ADF. They are spread across all areas of public service, with the largest numbers working in

JACS, Education and CMTED, filling a wide variety of positions including health professionals, teachers, emergency services personnel and IT professionals.

We have also attracted veterans who have served only a handful of years, right through to those who have served for 20 years or more. Interestingly, around 31 per cent of respondents were female, which is much higher than the proportion of women currently in the Defence Force which is around 17 per cent.

What the survey did point out is that we have some way to go in bridging the language gap between defence and civilian skill sets, with only 18 per cent of respondents finding it easy to translate their ADF skills and explain them to a civilian employing agency when they applied for a job. It is for this reason that we are working with the Department of Defence to help bridge the gap and to aid transitioning Defence Force members in better explaining their training and their skill sets.

MS ORR: Can the minister advise why it is important that we help Defence Force members transition to civilian life, including employment in the ACT?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Members of the ADF are some of the most highly trained and skilled workers available. Veterans have some significant training to be leaders in a wide variety of fields, often having to perform complex and often technical roles under intense pressure. They have a strong sense of service to their country, which is very compatible with public service values. We want to set up the public service to be a model employer of veterans. We also want to encourage the private sector to do the same.

We understand that the average age of separation from the Defence Force is around 31 years. These veterans have the potential to go on to apply the training and experience that they have received through the Australian Defence Force to the benefit of the local economy and community for their remaining decades of employment.

Assisting veterans to transition to civilian employment will provide a boost to the ACT's skilled workforce and will provide an overall net benefit to the ACT economy. Connecting and supporting veterans into compatible civilian roles not only makes good policy, it also makes very good sense.

Ministers—code of conduct

MR HANSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. The latest ministerial code of conduct dates from 2012. Why has the ACT government not updated the ministerial code of conduct since then?

MR BARR: It was a very comprehensive code of conduct issued at that time.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, will the government develop a new code of conduct; if so, when?

MR BARR: I am not aware of any urgent need to do so, but I will take the matter

under consideration.

MS LAWDER: Chief Minister, what changes will be made to the ministerial code of conduct following the governance issues that have arisen in the past few years?

MR BARR: The supplementary does not relate to the other questions.

Mrs Dunne: In your opinion. That is a ruling for the Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the connection was the code of conduct. I will give you an opportunity to add to your answer, Chief Minister.

MR BARR: There is no relation between the supplementary question and the previous two questions.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the Chief Minister has answered the question.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: When your colleagues settle down, Mr Parton, you will have a chance to ask your question.

Government—Fyshwick land sale

MR PARTON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, on 19 February the *Canberra Times* reported that you approved works for a heavy rail siding in Fyshwick on a block of land sold by the government to a waste management company. The report indicates this would enable waste transportation from Canberra to Tarago; I dare say, by a little red engine. Minister, what did you know about the purchaser's intentions for this block of land when it was sold by your government?

MR GENTLEMAN: As I mentioned earlier in my answer to Ms Le Couteur's question, there are a number of complex and interrelated processes regarding this particular project. I have asked the directorate for a full briefing. I will take the question on notice and I will come back with all of those details for the Assembly.

MR PARTON: Minister, if the works at Fyshwick have not been approved then what exactly has been approved in relation to this proposal?

MR GENTLEMAN: Again, I will take that on notice.

MS LEE: Minister, what are the government's plans in relation to transferring commercial and domestic waste to Tarago?

MR GENTLEMAN: As I understand it, there are no plans to transfer waste to Tarago.

Environment—aquatic and riparian strategy

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. Minister, the health of our rivers is crucial to the ongoing wellbeing of wildlife, the environment and humans. Can you outline to the Assembly the work currently underway to review the ACT government's aquatic and riparian strategy?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for her question and for her particular interest in the environment in our area. Conserving our rivers and the land alongside them, the riparian area, is crucial to the ongoing survival and wellbeing of wildlife that relies on them, the environment and our people.

The Conservator of Flora and Fauna is asking the community to comment on the draft 2018 aquatic and riparian conservation strategy, which looks at how we can best continue to manage and repair our precious waterways. The consultation includes associated action plans for five threatened fish and for two threatened plant species, the Tuggeranong lignum and the Murrumbidgee bossiaea, which are found only in the ACT.

Our waterways provide many critical ecosystem services. They are vital providers of water for consumption and habitat for plants and animals as well as being sought out as aesthetically beautiful places. But they are threatened by climate change, water extraction, overfishing, erosion and sedimentation, pest plants and animals, and disease.

This draft strategy builds on the achievements of the original 2007 strategy by providing a regional approach to conservation and management of these environments and addressing current and future issues with best practice conservation and management strategies. We are particularly keen to hear the community's views on how to improve and increase their engagement in river-based activities and projects, for example by supporting and promoting citizen science, increasing awareness, and engaging with local Indigenous communities on traditional ecological knowledge.

MS ORR: Minister, can you further outline to the Assembly the objectives of the aquatic and riparian strategy?

MR GENTLEMAN: The draft strategy provides the strategic context for the protection, management and rehabilitation of aquatic and riparian non-urban areas in the ACT. Specifically, the objectives are to provide conservation management guidelines for the protection and enhancement of aquatic and riparian areas; to identify threats to aquatic and riparian ecosystems and provide guidelines for threat management; to provide monitoring and research objectives for aquatic and riparian areas in the ACT; to provide strategies to increase engagement of the community in aquatic and riparian activities and projects; and to provide strategic context for action plans for threatened aquatic and riparian flora and fauna.

This strategy is intended to be a reference document on the aquatic and riparian areas for ACT and Australian government agencies with responsibilities for nature conservation, planning and land management; and for community and other stakeholders with an interest in aquatic and riparian area conservation. The

2007 aquatic species and riparian zone conservation strategy was highly successful in bringing together key stakeholders, the ACT government and the Australian government to achieve conservation of the aquatic and riparian ecosystems. The 2007 strategy contains a large amount of background information about these ecosystems in the ACT. The strategy is an overarching document that draws together information and provides guidance for the management and conservation of aquatic and riparian species and their habitat across a range of ecosystems.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, how can the community get involved in this work? What are the next steps the government will take to finalise the aquatic and riparian strategy?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cheyne for her question. As I have outlined, the ACT's waterways and rivers are valuable and fundamentally important components of our landscape. It is vital that we conserve these areas both now and for the future, and we are keen to hear the community's ideas on how we can do this.

The draft 2018 aquatic and riparian conservation strategy and action plans are open for comment until 11 March 2018 and are available on the your say website. Interested members of the community can make a submission via the website. Alternatively, anyone interested can respond to a survey also available on the your say website.

We are keen to hear from the community about the proposed conservation management guidelines for the protection and enhancement of aquatic and riparian areas; identified threats and guidelines to manage them; monitoring and research objectives; strategies to increase community awareness and involvement; and proposed action plans for threatened species.

The consultation includes action plans for the following threatened fish and riparian plants: the two-spined blackfish, the Macquarie perch, the Murray River crayfish, the silver perch, the trout cod, the Murrumbidgee bossiaea and the Tuggeranong lignum. All submission and survey responses will be considered in the final strategy and action plans.

Mr Barr: A fishy note will end question time. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.