



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE
CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the waste management of absorbent
hygiene products](#))

Members:

**DR M PATERSON (Chair)
MS J CLAY (Deputy Chair)
MR E COCKS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

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MONDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2022

**Acting secretary to the committee:
Ms M Ikeda (Ph: 620 50199)**

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.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.00 am.

WALLACE, MR CRAIG, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Advocacy for Inclusion
MOSS, MS ISABEL, Policy Officer, Advocacy for Inclusion
KILLEN, DR GEMMA, Head of Policy, ACTCOSS
DARUWALLA, MS AVAN, Policy Officer, ACTCOSS

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome, everyone. I declare open this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity's for its inquiry into the waste management of absorbent hygiene products. Before we begin, on behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge that today we meet on the lands of the Ngunnawal people. We respect the continuing culture and contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the life of this city and this region.

This is a self-referred inquiry that started on 2 August. The committee has received 18 submissions, which are available on the committee website. The committee will today hear from 10 different witness groups: ACTCOSS, Advocacy for Inclusion, the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Tackle Lab, Ms Emma Black, Ainslie Community Pantry, Conder House Laundry and Linen Services, Kuver Designs, Eenee Compostable Nappies, the City of Stonnington and the ACT government.

We will now move to the first witnesses appearing today: Dr Gemma Killen and Ms Avan Daruwalla from ACTCOSS, and Mr Craig Wallace and Ms Isabel Moss from Advocacy for Inclusion. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. When you first speak, can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

We will now kick off with questions. My first question arises from Advocacy for Inclusion's submission and the statement that says that any discussion on potentially limiting the use of absorbent hygiene products must begin with an understanding of the consequences and ramifications for people who are dependent on these products for their day-to-day lives. Could you speak to that statement with respect to absorbent hygiene waste?

Mr Wallace: I will invite my colleague Isabel Moss to address this question.

Ms Moss: I have understood the privilege statement. For people who use absorbent hygiene products in their day-to-day lives—people who have experienced either urinary or faecal incontinence—these products are a necessity. They rely on them the same way that you and I would rely on something like toilet paper, to be frank. These are essential products for accessibility and going about their day-to-day lives.

Changing the regulation of these products would cause a massive shift in the functioning of their day-to-day lives and potentially massively impact their ability to go about their day-to-day lives as they currently do. That is a very big cause for concern for Advocacy for Inclusion.

THE CHAIR: Do you think there is a balance that could be struck in terms of a shift away from disposable products?

Mr Wallace: I have read and understood the privileges statement. I might take this one if that is okay, but Izzy may want to chip in. Our advice is basically do not go there. In terms of the things that we could be having a just transition trade-off with, we would say that the level of threat to the dignity, the health, the wellbeing, the confidence and the independence of a really vulnerable group of people mean that this is not worth it. Continence affects around one in four Australians. If you do that sort of maths backwards on the number of people with disability in Australia and the ACT, we have potentially around 26,000 people who rely on these products.

Continence is also a highly stigmatised area of health and wellbeing for people with disabilities, both young people and also adults. It is often the thing that people actually mention as the greater impairment over, say, a physical impairment. Anything that makes it harder to manage and maintain your continence, like requiring people to wash non-disposable products, to use products that are not fully efficient or effective or imposing a price signal which means people cannot manage these products independently, might be the thing that tips a person out of independence and into nursing care. Our argument would be that the social costs for a group of people in a lot of logistical, financial and personal difficulty are too high. Again, my colleague might have something to add to that.

Ms Moss: I agree with everything that Craig has said. To add to that, we do not accept that there needs to be a trade-off between disability rights and climate action. I think the ACT needs to look across the range of climate action measures and take a broader and just transition approach.

We suggest the committee look at recommendations by the Conservation Council and the Environment and Sustainability Commissioner to expand the citywide FOGO processing infrastructure to accept certified compostable nappies, children's nappies, and continence aids, and look at end-of-life product management rather than impacting the lives of vulnerable people who already face a lot of stigma in their lives.

MS CLAY: Thank you. Craig and Izzy, thank you very much for your submission and your testimony. It is really, really helpful. We have had quite a lot of submissions and we have got mixed evidence. Right at this second I actually do not know if we will get to a point where compostable single-use nappies are something we can do, but there are certainly trials and things going on.

We have also had quite a lot of people making submissions suggesting that, whatever we do, we trial it in institutional settings, because they sort of feel like that might be easier. In the child nappy realm, that would be in childcare centres. But, in the adult nappy realm, that might be aged-care centres or disability institutions. If government comes up with a few options or something that they think might deal with this, do you think trials in aged-care and disability settings would be a good idea?

Mr Wallace: I might start off with this one. In terms of the quantum, around 75 per cent of people with disability living in shared accommodation use some kind of

products for managing incontinence, just to give you an idea of the scale.

We have been thinking about what it means for people in settings. On the one hand you can kind of argue that it is actually already being managed in settings and some of the work is being done by other people, so you do not have the logistical issues. However, there is a whole set of other various and unwanted outcomes that potentially come from changing the kind of product, the product management and contact with vulnerable people in settings that we would caution you about.

So anything that changes a person's quality or capacity to self-manage within a setting and to change themselves brings more people into contact with intimate areas of their lives in a setting. We are currently in the midst of a royal commission into violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with a disability where these kinds of issues are paramount. So, again, we urge caution in terms of changes to the ways that continence is managed within settings where people are highly vulnerable.

MS CLAY: I liked the tests you set out of fairness, effectiveness and equity as we make a just transition. I thought that was a really good way. If government is looking at something new, what is the best way to make sure that it meets those three tests? Is it consultation or is there something else that government needs to be doing to make sure that we meet those three tests?

Mr Wallace: Probably weighing the evidence. For instance, while we have issues with plastic straws, I actually think this one well and truly ticks over into the side of just do not go there, because of the multidimensional impacts on vulnerable and marginalised people.

You have a cost impact on people that are already behind \$800 a week just managing with utilities and health products and rents in Canberra if they are on a disability support pension. You have got a whole lot of issues around maintaining health by regularly disposing and changing those products when it is necessary. For people who are vulnerable, you have got perverse outcomes for people in terms of the potential issues I just talked about. You have also got potential impairment of dignity at risk for people when continence is the difference between them staying home and never going out and being confident in engaging in employment and other opportunities in community. So our messaging is that it is a balance of those principles, but something like this definitely does not meet that balance.

MR COCKS: I was very interested in your submission. It seems to be really clear from what I have read that you have got some serious concerns that regulations that limit access to any of these products could increase barriers and costs. I was particularly interested that that goes particularly to the stigma barriers. Isabel, it sounded like you had more to say in that space.

Ms Moss: We know that the stigma around continence, as Craig mentioned before, is a really huge barrier for people who face incontinence issues. As Craig said previously, it is a barrier that people cite over and beyond having a physical disability. It is one of the least spoken about and most uncomfortable to hear about for a lot of people around disabilities or symptoms of other disabilities that people may face.

Already, we have heard, just in the language used in this inquiry, that people are uncomfortable in the language and unsure about the language to use when talking about adults with incontinence. We have already heard the phrase today “nappies for adults”. While unintentional, I am sure, this language is hugely stigmatising. These are fully grown, competent and capable adults who are not using nappies. This is infantilising and uncomfortable language. That kind of thing is something that we hear all the time and that adults with incontinence hear all the time and it perpetuates that stigma that they already face.

So moves to ban these products or make them harder to access is only going to be a repeat of what we have seen with bans on plastic straws, which is a widespread social judgement on people who need to use these straws and discrimination against people who need to use these products, which is going to result in social isolation, loneliness and stigma and further discrimination against people with disabilities.

MS CLAY: Izzy, my apologies.

Ms Moss: That is okay. Thank you.

MR COCKS: It sounds like that you are also concerned that there could be economic impacts if we were talking about something that was limiting access as well.

Ms Moss: Yes, absolutely. As you will see cited in our submission, we had a white paper on income support. We did a lot of detailed research, which found that someone living on the DSP is about \$800 a fortnight behind when you add up all the costs of living with a disability. So we are really concerned that the upfront costs and the ongoing costs in terms of time, energy and labour, as well as the water and energy bills associated with reusable products, will be a real blow to the budget for people with disabilities. I think Craig may have something more to add to this.

Mr Wallace: Yes, I do. Izzy has put this across really well. We have also had some social costs and costs to productivity and employment. Deloitte actually did some work for, I think, the Continence Foundation on this and estimated that the average annual cost in productivity for a person living with incontinence is \$9,717 a year. What that is about is lost time at work. It is the extra work involved in managing a continence issue while you are working.

For people with disability in Canberra, as we have already pointed out, there are already really high costs of living. The analysis that we did left no contingency for emergencies or for changes in product regulation or use. So, if we were to impose a price signal on these products, it might be the thing that tips a person into homelessness, into debt or into crisis.

THE CHAIR: I will ask ACTCOSS a question on low-income families with little kids. Some of the submissions from councils have talked about incentive schemes or cashback types of incentives to help people transition to cloth nappies. Do you have any views about that?

Dr Killen: We are not opposed to those sorts of schemes, as long as they also take into account time costs as well. A lot of people who are on low incomes are very time

poor. So we want to make sure that they are not then exposed to a higher time burden washing and cleaning reusable products. But, otherwise, we would be supportive of the idea of the cloth nappy libraries, for example, and rebates for those products.

THE CHAIR: What about education? Do you think there is a role for education of the community broadly on this issue?

Dr Killen: I think so. While Craig and Izzy were speaking, I was thinking about the level of stigma attached to adult incontinence products and how there is very little information about the climate impact of those products. For example, with nappies for children, you can often find out whether they are ecologically sound. There are lots of products that are made with bamboo, for example, or do not use plastic packaging. But, for adult products, because there is such a significant stigma, there is much less information about the ecological impact of the way that the products are made, even when they are not disposable. So I think there is some education that can be had broadly in the community and with manufacturers about sharing that sort of information.

THE CHAIR: Do you think there is a line between education and sort of, I guess, putting the burden on adults who experience incontinence to feel guilty?

Dr Killen: Absolutely. You have to manage it really carefully because you do not want to add stigma. I think that is true, as well, of reusable menstrual products—that we do not want to add stigma or make people feel they need to hide the kinds of products that they need to use every day.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all of the witnesses very much for appearing today and for your contribution to the inquiry. A proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to provide you with an opportunity to check for any errors.

Short suspension.

LEWIS, DR SOPHIE, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
HERBERT, MS VICTORIA, Project Officer, Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

THE CHAIR: We will now move to the next witnesses appearing today, Dr Sophie Lewis, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, and Ms Victoria Herbert, from the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today.

Please be aware that these proceedings are being recorded and transcribed for *Hansard* and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement on the table. Can you confirm for the record that you have read and understood the privilege implications?

Dr Lewis: I have read and I understand the privilege statement.

Ms Herbert: I have read and understand the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will now proceed to questions. Ms Clay, would you like to go first?

MS CLAY: Yes; thank you. Thank you for your submission; it was great. We are hearing a lot of mixed evidence and mixed views here. There are a couple of things that I would love to touch on. We have heard that rebates for reusable products tend to reward people who were going to do it anyway. Also, some of the councils are not sure if they are genuinely effective at driving behaviour change or if they are just a bit of cash back to people who would have anyway. Do you have any views on whether any financial rebates are useful?

Dr Lewis: That is a really important question about how we go about implementing programs that support the outcomes that we want. Unfortunately, we do not have any specific guidance that we can provide in terms of that.

We are quite fortunate in terms of our office being able to focus on the environmental and sustainability aspects of this very important issue. In terms of those sustainability considerations, focusing on increasing the use of reusable products in this space is hugely important. But, as to how we go about that, it is a really difficult question as to whether rebates are going to actually improve the outcomes and increase the uptake or, as you said, whether it is possible that they are really rewarding people who are already on board and ready to make behavioural changes. Ms Herbert may be able to answer in terms of what we are seeing in other jurisdictions.

Ms Herbert: Yes, in terms of the city of Hobart. We do not have any specific information about the efficacy of whether that is appealing to new demographics or those who are already on side, but it was a successful scheme. They fully expended all of the finances that were available. That covered 50 per cent of the purchase price of the cloth nappies and reusable sanitary products. But I do not have the data or the information relevant to that question.

MS CLAY: The other one we have got really mixed views on and mixed evidence on is whether or not compostable products are going to work. Obviously they need specific facilities to process them and careful trials to look at the output. We have gotten really mixed evidence on this like, “It will not work”; “It is in progress”; “There are a few people doing it and it does work”; and “New South Wales EPA has already changed their minds.”

Dr Lewis: Again, this is a really complicated issue both in terms of how we achieve the outcomes we want in terms of the environmental and sustainability outcomes but also in terms of the technical approach and how we go about looking at the technical specifications and the processing of these products.

Underpinning our submission to this inquiry is the idea that we are likely going to need multiple approaches to reduce this huge volume of products that are going into landfill—the primarily disposable approach that we have got at the moment. There are multiple ways that we can achieve that reduction in the disposability of these hygiene products. So, in essence, our submission is essentially preferencing the reusable approaches in terms of achieving those sustainability outcomes.

What we can do to increase the usage, the uptake, the normalising of cloth nappies, of reusable products and sanitary products, is likely to be one of the best approaches for the sustainability outcome, but then also supplemented by looking at compostable products for nappies and continence aids. But that also has this hugely complicated technological aspect to it. We did see in our research examples of jurisdictions where that had been done effectively. I think you were speaking to the Hobart—

Ms Herbert: Yes. Again, Hobart City Council have actually been able to implement composting facilities for compostable nappies. Whereas, comparatively, in New South Wales, the only thing that they can compost is kitchen caddy liners. So there is a major discrepancy in the composting facilities, depending on the jurisdiction.

I think it is important to note that, with compostable products, the ACT currently do not have the composting capabilities and, therefore, they are single use. They do break down quicker and there is less plastic residue but, ultimately, they are a single use and they are ending up in landfill without those facilities.

Dr Lewis: That technological space is a broad space across multiple waste streams. So we are not just talking about composting nappies or continence or menstrual products. It is also about how we look at waste across the city as well and asking, “What do we want for our waste management across the whole sector?” Then, of course, there will likely always be the need for some disposable products for particular users—for hard to abate waste streams. We see that it is about prioritising the increase and uptake of reusable products, then looking at composting products or quicker to break down products and then understanding that disposable products will always have some place.

THE CHAIR: One of your recommendations is to expand the FOGO processing infrastructure to be able to address compostable nappies. Do you know what technology that needs to be? Did Hobart and New South Wales have different

composting technology or is it just one is saying no and one is doing it?

Dr Lewis: We would have to look into that in more detail. My understanding had been that they had used similar processing and that that was something that could be applied in other jurisdictions. But the specifics of the processing infrastructure, as I said, would depend on what is required for the totality of the waste streams for the territory—so not just what is able to process compostable nappies but also what is able to process other products, like food and organic waste. What else is going into that infrastructure and what is the goal of what is coming out really determines the capability of receiving these hygiene products.

MR COCKS: It sounds like there is more work needed before we can say exactly what improvements we need to make in order to manage those waste streams. Would that be right?

Dr Lewis: Yes. I would agree for the compostable products. As you will see in our recommendation that follows the one that Dr Paterson referred to, the ACT government should investigate whether other composting techniques may be viable in the ACT. That is considering some of the factors that Ms Clay and Dr Paterson raised in terms of potential concerns in New South Wales and their EPA around the end products of those compostable infrastructure plants.

So, yes, there certainly is further investigation that is required in terms of those products. But I will again emphasise that, in terms of the reusable products that underpinned the early part of our submission, there are many products for various uses. Whether we are talking about menstrual needs, nappies for infants or adult products, there are many of these available products that we can be using now and increasing the uptake of now.

MR COCKS: I found attachment 1 to your submission useful and helpful. I was wondering if you could speak a bit more to the difference in life-cycle environmental impacts between reusable products and disposable products.

Dr Lewis: Certainly. This attachment was included to demonstrate comparisons of the various products that are available for menstrual products, nappies and incontinence products and looking at some of the issues around manufacture, packaging usage and then also end of life and summarising some of the potential pros of a particular option and the considerations in terms of environmental impacts.

You can see from this attachment that this is hugely complicated to compare, because of the differences in manufacturing and end of life. You may have a product that has a larger environmental footprint in terms of the manufacture, but the usage of that product is over several years and then the end of life is a comparatively smaller environmental impact. So they are quite difficult to compare and particularly when we look across jurisdictions.

We may have a product where the largest environmental impact of that product is within the territory. For example, a reusable product may require more energy or water usage that is occurring within the ACT. For example, cloth nappies require frequent washing, but that washing and energy use is likely to be renewables and it is

held within the ACT, compared to a disposable product.

What we really wanted to emphasise from this attachment is that any changes or incentives in this space need to consider that they are not being done without any potential adverse environmental impacts. But we do note that really what stands out is that, when products end up in landfill, that has a huge environmental cost. One of the things that we note in the early part of our submission is that it is estimated that 15 million nappies go to the ACT's landfill each year. That is a hugely significant source of methane emissions for the territory. We do note that that huge staggering statistic is likely to be surpassed by adult continence aids as the demographics of the ACT change. Dr Lewis, did you have anything more to add to that?

Ms Herbert: I think you covered that submission well.

MR COCKS: On that 15 million number, do you know how that compares on a per capita basis to other jurisdictions?

Dr Lewis: No; I do not know off the top of my head. I would speculate that it would probably be proportionally similar; that we would probably have a similar proportion of people using disposable nappies as other comparable cities within Australia and we would probably have a similar number of children under three who are using nappies. So I expect that that would be fairly similar across jurisdictions.

THE CHAIR: Icon Water's submission talks about an introduction of a new standard to flushable products. Their concern is obviously the public health and environmental risks when the sewerage system gets clogged by non-flushable products. My concern would be that people would start to think that you could flush all products. So the education around that would have to be pretty robust. Can you speak to concerns around the environmental risks that comes from blocked sewerage systems, what we could be doing more to transition to flushable products and whether there any issues with that?

Dr Lewis: I have not read the Icon submission, but I understand that that is a specific concern of the water utilities that extends even beyond these products that we are talking about, the hygiene products. A lot of items that are sold as flushable should not be flushed—for example, baby wipes—and there is a real gap in communication and public understanding of what should be flushed and what can be processed in the sewerage treatment plants without causing major clogging. That is certainly something that could be part of the education programs that would have to support an increase in the uptake of reusable or compostable products.

For example, cloth nappies are often used with a bamboo or other material liner which can be sold as flushable. But they should not be flushed down a toilet, and our infrastructure in the ACT cannot support that. I would see that as part of the education that is required for people to feel comfortable with these products and see them as something that they could embed into their lives with really little substantial change.

MS CLAY: When I was looking at your recommendations for financial support and rebates, I was interested that you also popped in maybe a laundering service subsidy, which struck me as quite a useful recommendation—I do not think we have heard it

from any other places—because it deals with the time poor factor as well as the cost of products. Is that a standard sort of recommendation in environmental circles, or did you guys just come up with that?

Dr Lewis: I think we just came up with that.

MS CLAY: I think it sounds like a good idea.

Dr Lewis: There are private laundering services that are available already for particularly nappies. I am speaking mainly to nappies because I have so much lived experience with cloth nappies rather than continence aids. Our recommendation was trying to remove those barriers for some people who would find that a particular hurdle in adopting these products. We thought most particularly in terms of the continence aids that laundering could be a huge barrier for people.

Ms Herbert: It is definitely in line with other recommendations with other circular economy examples about how we create these services and essentially make it accessible to people who otherwise would not be able to access those services. It is being catered specifically to this inquiry, but there are examples of textiles and uniforms and having those supported services by government in order to make sure that it does have a circular economy principle embedded.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for appearing before us today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and identify any errors. Thank you very much for your time.

Ms Herbert: Thank you as well.

Short suspension.

MATA, MS JACQUELINE, Co-founder, Tackle Lab
CONNOR, MS MEGAN, Co-founder, Tackle Lab
BLACK, MS EMMA

THE CHAIR: We will move to our next witnesses appearing today, Ms Jacqueline Mata and Ms Megan Connor of Tackle Lab, and Ms Emma Black. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today and for your written submissions to the inquiry. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Mata: I do.

Ms Black: Yes, I do.

Ms Connor: Could I possibly make one brief personal statement? I work for Tackle Lab part time, but my other part-time employment is for a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council. There is no conflict of interest, but I just wanted to be transparent. That was all. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will start with some questions. Mr Cocks, do you want to go first?

MR COCKS: Absolutely. I was really interested in the nappy and wipe collection trial and how the relationship with other stakeholders is going. How has this been received?

Ms Connor: Tackle Lab, so far, has been going very well. We cannot believe the amount of support we have received whenever we bring it up, whether it be with childcare providers or people reading about it on social media and contacting us. Even the New South Wales EPA are supportive of the whole thing; it is being very well received. Lots of childcare centres want to roll it out in their service right now. It is great to have those conversations and share excitement in it. Yes, it has been very positive, very well received.

MR COCKS: For those childcare centres, are there particular aspects that make it attractive for them?

Ms Connor: Yes. In talking to the educators, they see the amount of waste they are producing every day. They are putting it in bins; they are taking those internal bins out. And they are big—not the single 240-litre bins but the big 660-litre bins that are getting collected—so they know the amount that their one childcare centre is producing. So for them to have an opportunity to not send that to landfill and send it somewhere else is what they are most excited about.

At the moment the only product that is available for a bin is a hybrid nappy. There is a fabric component that does not need to get washed every time; it can be used all day.

We thought that would be quite a barrier, but from our conversations with educators that extra step in the changing process for them is not a problem. From the conversations we have had with them, they are not worried about that, and it means that the waste is going to go somewhere else, not to landfill.

MR COCKS: Excellent. It sounds like there is a pretty strong social good drive there.

Ms Connor: Yes, definitely.

MR COCKS: That is great.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. In your submission you talk about incontinence products as well. We heard from Advocacy for Inclusion earlier, who basically said, “Leave it. Don’t go there. The stigma, the barriers around this are so significant. Just don’t go there.” What is your perspective on that view?

Ms Connor: We hear that. That is why we have not started there yet. We are starting with childcare centres first because that is, in our society, an area where nappies are seen to be commonplace and a disposal system for childcare centre nappies does not have a stigma. Our long-term vision is to go to the adult areas as well, but there would have to be so much work done so that it is done in an empathetic way and so that people use it. It could not be the big green FOGO sticker that we have for the childcare centres; it would have to be something completely different. We have got to get the childcare collection up and running first. We are focusing our efforts there first, before we move to the adult area, because we understand that there are issues with that.

Ms Mata: And just to continue from there, when we do go into incontinence for adults, we will be targeting the nursing homes. That is probably the best place to start. We will be educating the nurses and the carers who are assisting these people. So it is not going directly into the home, where there are more barriers and it is trickier.

MS CLAY: Emma, you have done a lot of really good work in education. We have a few lessons here, including about when you educate. Did I read in your submission some information about toilet training earlier? No? That might have been somebody else’s.

Ms Black: Possibly not mine, but there is some anecdotal conversation around that, yes.

MS CLAY: Yes, so it might have come up in somebody else’s. As part of the educational and cultural conversation it has been suggested that in Australia our kids are toilet trained quite late and a reduction method might be toilet training earlier. Can you talk us through some of what you have learned in your education?

Ms Black: Yes, absolutely. Anecdotally, I think it is very much about the child, rather than what they are wearing. If a kid is not ready, they are not ready. However, disposable products are designed to wick away the moisture straightaway. The kid may not even know that they have toileted, whereas with re-usable products, while we do aim to have the moisture wick away, it is not quite as quick, it is not quite as

instantaneous, so there is that feeling, there is that recognition. There is anecdotal evidence that it could be beneficial in teaching the child what it feels like and that kind of thing.

MS CLAY: You talked about educating people before the baby is here, because once the baby is here you are busy.

Ms Black: Yes.

MS CLAY: I have got one; I know. Is anyone doing that particularly well around Australia?

Ms Black: In the ACT there are the education sessions which I was doing with the Canberra Environment Centre. Primarily, it was pre parents having the child, but we did have some parents come along when they already had the baby there, which was nice as well, because we started doing demonstrations and helping them understand how to best fit the nappies, so it was a bit more hands on.

Also, I believe there is a local business which has started doing an introduction to modern cloth nappies. I think that is a little more targeted to the products they sell, but it is still an option for people to do. I know that there are several jurisdictions, particularly around Melbourne; I think that is where the most uptake is. There is an independent consultant who provides her services to different councils in the area and they will pay for her services to present the sessions on behalf of the council. She encourages parents with the children already there and parents who are expecting, or even grandparents and any other carers that may be interested.

I also had one childcare centre come along to a session because they were interested in learning more about it. I think it is very important to have that support there at the beginning so that it does not seem like such a big hurdle. Personally, I did not start using cloth nappies on my daughter until she was four months old and I had gotten over the biggest hurdle of getting my brain back, essentially, and having the capacity to understand and think about those kinds of things.

I think education is important throughout, because even if you are doing it before the baby arrives, it is all theoretical, really, at that point. When you start doing it, you go, “This is not quite what I imagined.” It is about having that support there to be able to continue and to be able to say to someone, “Look, this nappy was working last week and it is not working this week.” I think the education throughout is quite important.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Cloth nappies are an investment. What do you think is a good way to go about helping and supporting people to try these products?

Ms Black: There is a bit of a second-hand cloth nappy economy going on out there. Often people will donate their cloth nappies to Roundabout and often the clients of Roundabout are not in a position to be able to use those. Roundabout will often have to pass those nappies on again, because they need the space in their facilities for those things that are high turnover. Potentially, there is an opportunity for a library, for

people to trial. I think in Western Australia there was Switch Your Thinking, which had a library which people could borrow from for a period of four weeks. I personally did try to set up a library, but it is such a time impost; it is not something that someone who is volunteering and trying to do these things would be able to do. You would also need to do it in consultation with an approved barrier laundry. Something like Conder linen service would be able to facilitate that kind of thing.

Providing financial forms of assistance helps, whether it be a rebate or similar, or potentially even a temporary loan where the government pays for the up-front cost for a kit and then the individual can pay it back in increments of what they would be spending on disposables—you know, paying back \$10, \$20 a week, just so that they do not have that intense up-front cost. I saved money by using cloth nappies, but I was in a position of privilege where I could spend that money up front. However, I spent \$500 up front, whereas, over the life of a child using nappies—2½ years approximately—you are spending over \$1,000 on disposables, potentially.

Inevitably, those people who cannot afford the up-front cost end up paying more in the long run. I think that goes with everything. People who can afford solar save money in the long run. Those people who can insulate their homes can save money in the long run. It is those people who cannot afford that up-front cost that end up paying more in the long run, and it adds to that cost of living issue.

MR COCKS: This is exactly the area I wanted to go to. In your Facebook group, do you hear much from parents for whom that up-front cost is a barrier?

Ms Black: I think the people who have found our group are people who are already committed to going forward with that method. There is the opportunity there for people to do a random act of kindness and pass on their nappies for free. There are people who say, “Yes please. I do need to supplement my stash. Yes, I would love to do nappies; I just cannot afford to get into it.” I think, by and large, people who find our group are people who are already doing it. They have already made the commitment. They might have spent the money and gone, “I don’t know what to do,” and they are searching for help then. I do not think we are necessarily getting the market who are not able to commit financially because they have not put their thought to it. They look at the cost and go, “No,” and I think that is the end of the conversation for them at that point.

It is about being able to have the conversation with these parents and carers in environments where they are not already invested in using cloth nappies, like in the education classes in MACH clinics and as part of the hospital. It is about bringing a bit more normality into it and potentially saying, “Hey, it may be a bit of a financial cost, but I understand there is this incentive being provided by the government.” That might get their interest at that point; otherwise they might have just dismissed it out of hand. This is all anecdotal, of course. There is not a lot of study or money going into researching reusables. All the money is in disposables and compostable. Compostable is a big thing, which is very important.

Ms Connor: I can expand on what you were saying there. Going into the childcare centre is a very valuable way of providing parents with alternative nappy styles. They trust their educators; they are leaving their kids with them all day. If the educators are

using these compostable products or re-usable products, they are going to feel more confident using them at home, so it is a really great way of getting to a wide demographic of parents to make them switch to a greener product by going through day care as well.

THE CHAIR: This question is for Tackle Lab. On the compostable nappies, we are hearing from Eenee in the next couple of sessions. Are there other brands or companies coming through or are we very much talking about one product here?

Ms Connor: Yes. We hope with FOGO eventually to accept more products, but they have to compost to the standard that Eenee does. We have got all the data from the Bega Valley trial in 2019 that shows that they compost to the Australian standard. We know that Hobart has been doing it for 10 years. There is a facility in Queensland, NuGrow, that has been composting Eenees as well. The reason they are compostable is that they have no plastic tabs or elastic. They are used with a belt or pant. With any product that says it is biodegradable that still has plastic tabs, at the end of the process you still are going to be picking out those little tabs.

We are aware of some products coming onto the market. We cannot really speak to it because it is just composting scuttlebutt at the moment, but we know there have been trials of a new product. As soon as it has been proven that it can compost to the same standard as Eenees then we would accept it into the FOGO. At the moment it is only the Eenees.

Ms Mata: To elaborate, we are also aware that in the non-woven industry over in Europe and in America they are developing new compostable tabs and landing zones, so you will probably see on the market in the next maybe two to three years a complete compostable nappy. It would be great to have the infrastructure ready to go when they hit the market.

Ms Connor: Anecdotally, we also know that the big players at the moment in Australia do not have plans to change their design. They have been putting research and funding into their disposable methods, so they are not looking at changing the product. They are looking at how to divert from landfill, with some anaerobic sludge-type disposal methods.

THE CHAIR: What is the infrastructure? From reading other submissions on what different councils and different areas are doing, and in different ways, they all say yes or no to compostable nappies. Is there a particular infrastructure that needs to be implemented or purchased by the government to ensure that this does happen?

Ms Connor: The beautiful thing about the Bega Valley was that when they did their trial they used it with no equipment so that it could be the most basic form of composting: static pile. We are not composting experts, but the static pile essentially is just one big long pile that gets rotated so that it reaches the temperatures required. It essentially can be done in any place that is composting. They did it deliberately so that it could be easily replicated anywhere. It does not need fancy machines or anything like that to be done. They have just got to be allowed to accept that it is more about looking at licensing and things like that.

Ms Mata: With a dedicated collection system, most likely, to keep the compost in a separate bin so that it is not contaminated by other plastic nappies.

MS CLAY: It is the old adage of recycling: garbage in, garbage out. Reading your submission, it struck me that quite a lot of the easy stuff we have not done in this area, for any type of single use, whether it is disposable or compostable. I liked that you talked about product design and using less material. The Australian Packaging Covenant had a lot of success with packaging materials a while back. I am not sure we have actually done that effectively here. Probably picking which types of material would also help. Do you think Australia is in a good position to push some of that least harmful disposable product?

Ms Connor: I would not say we are in a good position now, but I am hoping that that is what we are working towards. I feel like there has been a momentum shift towards that. I think everyone is realising that that is what needs to happen. We are not manufacturers; we are just setting up the collection systems. But there is a recognition that it needs to change and shift and that is what we are advocating for. We do not want there to be systems setting up around the country where they are trying to mess up what we have got. That is not truly circular to us. We need to design it out, whether that be cloth or compostable. From talking to educators, we think the pad with the belt and eventually the compostable tabs is the way to go to scale. We have really got to design it out so that we can make it easier to return to the earth because it will compost easily.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you all very much for appearing today. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to provide an opportunity to check and make sure there are no errors. Thank you very much for your time and for your submissions.

Short suspension.

BLAIN, MS AMY, Leadership Team, Ainslie Community Pantry; Administration Team, Buy Nothing Ainslie; and Canberra Representative, Australian Parents for Climate Action

COSTA, MS CATHERINE, Director, Conder House Laundry and Linen Service Pty Ltd

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Amy Blain of the Ainslie Community Pantry, who wrote a joint submission with Red Flag Canberra and Zero Waste for Schools, and Ms Cathy Costa, Director of Conder House Laundry and Linen Service. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing. Please be aware that proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are being broadcast and webstreamed live.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement on the table. If I could ask you both to confirm that you understand the privilege implications of the statement, that would be great.

Ms Blain: I understand the privilege statement.

Ms Costa: I understand the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will now proceed to questions.

MR COCKS: Catherine, I am very interested in the business approach to this and that your business has really taken up the challenge off its own bat. I am keen to understand whether there are particular regulatory barriers that you have faced in getting set up and what the barriers would be to expanding from where you are now.

Ms Costa: Absolutely, there are standards that we need to achieve. We are termed as a barrier laundry, where we separate clean and dirty—that is, a physical barrier so that we do not cross-contaminate dirty and clean items, including with our transportation vehicles as well. We meet the same Australian standards that Capital Linen Service meet. It is just that we operate on a much smaller scale.

That is very important when you are providing a service to the public, and when the resource, being the nappies, is a shared item. People who are doing nappies at home do not need to meet the same sanitisation standards that we meet because they are putting the nappies back on their own child. When we are cross-using the resources we really need to be very careful with that. That is absolutely something that we do, and anybody else who comes into this market would need to achieve that as well.

There are certainly obstacles in terms of facilities, and that is something that we are beating our head up against a brick wall about at the moment. We have been trying for several years now to relocate to larger facilities and we continuously are having problems finding the right infrastructure. When I wrote my submission we had leased a property. Unfortunately, since then we have surrendered the property because of planning and development delays. It is not feasible for us to rent for over 12 months and not be able to earn any extra income from that space. That is the hurdle we are

facing now; I am back to square one again.

There was a property I put a deposit on in Hume, but its planning and development was delayed as well and then they had to redesign it, so the property I actually put a deposit on did not exist anymore. That property was due to be completed in November, but it has not even started, so that option went. That is why we went down the leasing option, and that has now proven to be unaffordable, difficult, whatever you want to call it. That is certainly the biggest challenge that we have and that is what is stopping us. We have a lot of people who are interested and we just cannot take them all on, to be quite frank.

MR COCKS: It sounds like you have reached capacity with what you have got and you need to expand your facilities.

Ms Costa: Yes, we do. We can take on a couple more early childhood education and care clients. We can certainly take on plenty of family clients. But, yes, it is the childcare centres, the education settings where the big numbers come through. Obviously, that is where we are more effective because we are saving a lot more nappies than, say, 40 nappies that get used at home by somebody who used to do them at home. So we are talking hundreds each week. We had one client that was using 1,200 a week, at one point, so it really was a high volume for them. It is really important for us to expand to be able to continue to offer them that service.

THE CHAIR: In terms of your clients, the childcare centres, is there a difference between those that are using re-usable nappies and those that are not? Is their infrastructure different? Are they more environmentally conscious childcare centres?

Ms Costa: They have made the step to work towards environmental goals. In quality management there are several ticks in the box that they can get, and environmental issues are the hardest because of all the single-use products that they use. Hospitals would be the same; they use a lot of single-use products. For instance, we have one particular chain who have decided that every centre that they have—the current ones that are operating and the ones that they are bringing online—will use cloth nappies.

There are obstacles in terms of laundry facilities. We do ask our clients to clean the solids out of the nappies before they return them to us. Sometimes that is difficult. The centres that are in older buildings tend to have issues with that. We lost a chain recently that had three centres—not all of their centres, but three of them—and they cited that it was because they did not have adequate laundry facilities to do that. Certainly, some centres could use some help with being able to upgrade their laundry facilities to be able to use them, for instance.

MS CLAY: Cathy, you have obviously been working with early childhood centres for a long time. You mentioned hospital waste. Have you ever looked at or are you aware of anybody working in aged-care settings at all?

Ms Costa: In terms of the aged-care and disability sector, I have a 26-year-old son who is severely autistic and intellectually delayed, so I have used nappies with him as an adult. He is now toilet trained. He was toilet trained and then lost it and then we got it back again. With disposable pads—they do not call them nappies in the

aged-care and disability sector—adult output is very different to children’s. It is actually a lot harder to clean. We do provide a linen service to the aged-care sector. A lot of home care clients use our service and we do provide bed pads. It is a pad that sits on the bed and absorbs anything that might leak out of a pad that is worn on the body. We have that as a re-usable option. We do have disability clients and aged-care clients that use those, so that is something that you could go towards—a re-usable bed pad, as such. I would not recommend reusable pads that are worn on the body.

THE CHAIR: Amy, I want to ask about sustainable period products, normalising and transitioning to these products. We have heard and seen in a lot of submissions that there is a need for disposable products in particular circumstances or that particular vulnerable groups may need them more than others. Can you speak to how you see a transition happening and in what way we should go about doing that?

Ms Blain: I think the government is ideally positioned to oversee that sort of transformation and culture shift. At the moment, we have so much tied up in period stigma and taboo. If we start to encourage and promote the sustainable and re-usable products you will start to see that shift in people’s responses to them. At the moment it is just like, “Oh no! It’s my period. We’ve just got pads and tampons.” But we see that the UK has done some great work on advertising menstrual cups and making the difference by saying that this is actually a really good product.

I think the cost of living aspect is huge. You see the difference in the cost of using a menstrual cup. It is nine cents per use, over its lifetime, compared to 50 cents over the single-use item. So you have that aspect. But I also think it is about normalising it. Any re-usable, sustainable item should come with education about how you use it, how you care for it. All of them are far more empowering because you do not need to have that anxiety about wearing your period pants or menstrual cup.

I only came to the menstrual cup in my 40s, and I was like, “Oh my god!” I did not want to, and then I tried it, and then I was like, “Oh my goodness! I wish I had done this 20 years earlier.” It is just so simple. Sometimes I am like, “Have I even got my cup in? I am not sure.” It is a real shift for people, to explain to people that it is not so much of an issue. It does also come to addressing people’s disgust about their own body. We do not have disgust in the same way about faeces, yet we deal with that every day, but we do around blood.

I also think education is important in schools, at a primary level and a secondary level, and for all genders. We do not separate people and say, “Let’s talk about periods over here.” We talk to everyone about it so that everyone knows what periods are, the impact of them and what products are available. That emphasis and education is something that I think is really key.

There is obviously going to be the choice to use single-use items, but it is about not making them the default. At the moment, it is the default. I think the government, with its emphasis on sustainable items and getting rid of single-use products generally, could include these. These all fit into that category of plastic generally. You are doing such an excellent job that it seems strange to not include this huge waste aspect.

MS CLAY: I might continue with that. I enjoyed your submission. I saw quite a lot of

interesting ideas in there about providing free pants, period undies. They are becoming quite popular, actually. I noted your suggestion that we include reusables in our period poverty work in government. I believe we are doing that.

Ms Blain: Absolutely.

MS CLAY: We made the same suggestion in our office. It will not suit everybody, but in terms of the cost this is actually quite good, isn't it?

Ms Blain: Yes.

MS CLAY: I was a bit concerned that you noted that some of the period poverty services are getting more requests for re-usable products than they are able to meet. Is that right? People are asking for these things and they cannot get them.

Ms Blain: Yes. I come from two aspects. I am on the Australian Parents of Climate Action Canberra team, so I am very focused on sustainability, but I run the Ainslie Community Pantry and I am constantly saying, "Can we get more products?" We get the re-usable items that I put in myself. I want them to have the menstrual cups. The minimum amount is 10 cups, so I always say, "Yes, I will have 10 menstrual cups and all the period pants and pads you can get," and I never get the full amount. They give me everything they have, but the donations are very low compared to demand. That is not just locally; that is nationally.

The problem is that cost is still a barrier. A cup will be maybe \$40 upwards, depending. There is a specific size that you need to have. But I think mainly it is just because it is easier not to change. You get huge sales on single-use items, so you get deals on those. Although Share the Dignity have partnered with things like JuJu Cup to say that you can donate a cup, the cost is prohibitive, so people are not donating them. Also, if you do not use those products then you will be like, "That's weird. That's a new thing. I didn't try that." People will not want that.

MS CLAY: But is that up-front cost compared to the long-term cost? The cost is prohibitive up front, but if they—

Ms Blain: I know, but if you are donating in a drive, you are not necessarily thinking about that. Also, there is a real push for the single-use items. I do not think we should ever be gatekeeping access. In our pantry, there is no way of monitoring what is happening. We just put the products in, people take them out and we make sure that these products are getting to the people who need them. But they are not meeting the demand that we have, and I run out of them because I have got to get food into the pantry.

MS CLAY: Right. I noticed the suggestion of period undies in schools.

Ms Blain: In school, yes. Paula McIntosh, whose evidence is in the submission, did that trial at the school that she was at with 60 girls who had six period pants that were given to them. When you look at the evidence from the girls, they felt far more comfortable. They did not have to wonder when they were going to go to the bathroom. You want kids to be focused on their education, not "Do I need to go and

change?”

It was hugely successful there. It was only for a small cohort. The ACT is perfect for a trial. We have a school in Kaleen that are quite keen to do that because they are experiencing period poverty, particularly for some of the Indigenous kids there. I really think it is worth exploring how that actually works, and the cost. ACT taxpayers' money would go further on the re-usable and sustainable items than it would with the single-use items. And then you have the environment impact and the waste aspect. I think it is the excitement around these new products and the benefits that they have to the individual as well that the government is ideally positioned to promote.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR COCKS: Amy, on menstrual products in particular, from your observations, do you see the barriers primarily in up-front cost or in the awareness and stigma space?

Ms Blain: Both. Definitely the up-front cost is a barrier to people donating and people purchasing, but there is also the whole stigma around periods and discussions. The education that we get about our periods is quite limited. People know, and their parents or whoever is raising them will have known, that there are single-use items and that is what you do. But we are not having that same explanation in schools. Generally, people have a real discomfort about talking about their periods. You see in the workplace people hiding their tampons as they go to the toilet,

There is a whole conversation to be had, but I also think this is a really exciting opportunity to do several things at once. Rather than going, “We’ve got a huge culture problem with periods and stigma,” we say, “Actually, we are going to make it a really open conversation about why we are saying we mustn’t talk about our periods.” You can do both things. If the government is trying to overcome that prohibitive cost aspect and you promote it as an option, you change the culture. You change the stigma and taboo, which is what we need to be doing all at once. I think it is a fantastic opportunity. You get to do so many things!

MR COCKS: And do you find that awareness issue with parents of young people as well as with young people?

Ms Blain: Yes. I was speaking to someone recently who said that she had a young daughter at primary level. We know menstruation is starting younger, so we do have to look at the primary school cohorts as well. She was saying, “I am really worried about talking to my daughter. All I know is pads. She is really funny about her body and doesn’t like the idea of doing pads or tampons. She doesn’t want to discuss it.” I said, “Have you heard about period pants?” She was like, “No, I don’t know about this.” I said to her, “They’re really easy. They’re just like undies. You put them on and there is not much of a shift from what you are currently doing.” She had not even heard of the product. To me, in that space, I was like, “You don’t know about the pants? They’re great. They are in the supermarkets now.” She was like, “I will try that,” because that, for her, was an easier thing to offer her child. People do not know that they are available, and they do not know how easy they are.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the laundry service, with the re-usable nappies, are they a particular type? Is there only one type that you can get?

Ms Costa: I should have brought them with me. I did not think to. I am so sorry. What we offer is what is called a modern cloth nappy. It is shaped, it has got elastic in the legs and it has got clips where you fasten it up, so it is adjustable. You can go from about six to eight weeks of age. Most children do not need to go out of that actual size nappy because it is adjustable for their toilet training journey. We are looking at buying larger ones. We have found that children are not being toilet trained as early as they used to be, so we are now looking at a larger size option.

Ms Blain: And you do get big babies. Mine was a big baby.

Ms Costa: You also get people with children with disability who are going to be in nappies for a bit longer. I know that from my own example. They are not waterproof; they are water resistant. You can only put them on for a couple of hours or so. You can get them in lots of pretty colours and patterns. I have even got some nappies with my logo on them. We generally just stick to the plain pastel colours, but we do novelty things like Halloween and Christmas and those kinds of things for our home clients. We do not do it for the early education settings.

There are the terry flats, the old ones, which is what I used on my children—a square, terry, flat nappy. They still do exist. It is not something we are currently providing because we do not get a great deal of interest in it. I imagine Capital Linen Service is probably doing those still. I am not sure if the hospitals in Canberra are. I have heard mixed responses on whether, when you are having a baby now, cloth nappies are an option. They certainly were when I was having babies here in Canberra. When I had children I was at Calvary and cloth nappies were just supplied. You used them and put them in the bucket and off they went in the laundry bag. Those are the two options that are available now, but modern cloth nappies seem to be the preferred product by the modern mother.

THE CHAIR: And so you supply those nappies to the childcare centres?

Ms Costa: Yes, we do.

THE CHAIR: Do they only do it for one room, for example, when they are starting out? For the babies room, do they say, “This is where we will trial it,” and then you supply enough nappies for that? Do they need to get parents’ permission? How does that work?

Ms Costa: They do not have to get parents’ permission. A lot that are switching like to engage with parents and say, “We are thinking of doing this. What are your feelings?” A lot of the new centres that have just opened up have used us. They just open up with cloth nappies. With the chain that has got five online now, with another three to come, it is just their policy: “We use cloth nappies and that’s that.” That is unless you can demonstrate an allergy, which is unlikely—I do not think I have ever had any children with allergies respond to our nappies—or there is another medical reason why they cannot. So they work in conjunction with them, if they can. It is always best to try and bring them on board than fight them.

How they bring the service into their centre is entirely up to them. Sometimes we just put it into the whole centre. Other centres have chosen, as you say, to start with one room and then build it up and implement it in another room and another room. Or those children move on from the nursery, they get to the next room and then that room has got the cloth nappies and they bring in the nursery again. It is flexible in terms of how we implement it, and we do what suits the centre.

We also provide training, which is another hurdle that they face. Early childhood educators are not being trained on the use of cloth nappies to the extent that they need to be to actually use them. A lot of educators have used them at home and they are very comfortable with it, whereas other educators have never seen them before and are really quite worried about using them. You do not just whack them on and they work. If you do not put them on correctly they leak. It is a fact. If you are not changing them regularly enough they will leak. If you have a child who is a heavy wetter, you will probably need to put some more boosting into it to make it a bit more effective—extra inserts and things like that for more absorbency.

So there is an element of training. Because of the cross-contamination standards that we need to abide by, we also train the staff at the education settings on how to do that. We provide them with an online training course which they can do over and over again, or as staff turn over. They can get the new educators to look at that. We also provide face-to-face training.

THE CHAIR: And when the child goes home, do they go home in a disposable?

Ms Costa: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so they take them off before they leave?

Ms Costa: Yes. Their last change of the day is a disposable, to send the children home in. I did speak to a few parents. A lot of the parents, whilst they were quite happy for their children to be in cloth during the day at the centre, did not want them coming home, so it was not really an option to send them home—plus you then have the issue of stock loss.

MS CLAY: On that, Cathy, you have had a good think about some of the regulatory barriers in child care. I appreciate your thoughts on that. You have mentioned that there might need to be financial assistance to allow educators to attend training. That is obviously a need that you have seen.

Ms Costa: Yes. It is about release time, getting them off the floor. For instance, in terms of the training that we currently provide, we do offer some training sessions for free but after a certain number they pay for them. So it is not just the cost of the training; it is mainly about the release time. Taking somebody off the floor to go and do some training affects their ratios, so they have to get somebody else to come in and replace that person while they are off the floor. So that certainly would help.

Again, that is why we developed the online course. We thought people could do it in their own time, or when they are ready. They can fit it in between whatever they are

doing. It was COVID time as well and the centres were not actually wanting us to visit. They just did not want that extra person coming that did not have to be there. So paying for the release time would be really beneficial.

MS CLAY: The other thing you mentioned is that if there were going to be any regulatory action for the childcare centres it could be a phase-out like the EVs, like a long tail with a long date.

Ms Costa: Yes.

MS CLAY: That struck me as quite a gentle way to signal. Do you think, if government looked at doing something like that, that would be likely to spark a lot more businesses and a lot more interest in providing the laundry services?

Ms Costa: It could. Competition is good. There is nothing wrong with competition.

MS CLAY: Yes. I did not mean against your interests. I thought it might actually help the local industries set up a bit.

Ms Costa: Yes, certainly. It would need to be longer term because the industry does not have the capacity right now. I am actually the only one that is doing it, apart from what you might get from Capital Linen Service. I am the only modern cloth nappy service in Canberra. The infrastructure issues that I have already highlighted are an issue. It definitely would have to be a longer term approach because I need to try and find a facility, for starters. Other people could set up, but it is not an easy process and that is probably why nobody is as silly as I was.

MS CLAY: Good on you.

Ms Costa: In terms of infrastructure and training, there is a lot that goes on behind the scenes that people would not realise in order to make sure that we are ticking the boxes to meet the Australian standards.

MS CLAY: That site that you mentioned down in Hume, was that in the Hume resource recovery estate or was that somewhere else? Was it down in the Mugga Lane area?

Ms Costa: No, it was not. It was actually on the main street in Hume. It was a unit of a larger complex; an industrial unit, as such.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR COCKS: Do you have any views on steps the government might be able to take to reduce those barriers that we have been talking about?

Ms Costa: In terms of the childcare centres or in terms of my barriers?

MR COCKS: Your barriers, and for anyone looking to get into the industry.

Ms Costa: Yes, money is the short answer. I am absolutely happy to, and really quite

interested in, working with the ACT government, if we could find a way of working together to make this happen. Planning and development delays are certainly an issue. The short answer is money. I would need to get a facility which actually meets all of our needs.

Another thing that the ACT government needs to consider is that gas is a component of any laundry. It is unviable to operate dryers on an electric system. It is far, far too expensive; it is unaffordable. If you were to put solar in, you could not get a large enough system. You would have to get a ginormous system. I have currently got a system that has 51 panels and it does our daytime electricity but we still have gas dryers. That is an obstacle, as well, that needs to be considered. I do understand that the ACT government does not want to do any new gas connections, but in the laundry sector gas is actually really, really important.

Also when you are looking for instance, the sheet ironers, they do not make them electric heated. They do have an electric component but the heating is always gas. They do not make them. The manufacturing sector actually has to change in order to meet that requirement for it not to be gas. The problem is that the electric does not get hot enough and it does not sustain the temperatures that we are looking for.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. That was very interesting. You will be sent a proof transcript to check for any errors. Thank you very much for your time and your considered submissions to our inquiry today.

Ms Costa: Thank you.

Ms Blain: Thank you.

Hearing suspended from 10.31 to 10.44 am.

CREESE, MR BENJAMIN, Marketing and Sales Manager, Kuver Designs Pty Ltd

THE CHAIR: We move to our next witness today, Mr Ben Creese, Marketing and Sales Manager for Kuver Designs, who manufacture Eenee compostable nappies. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today and for your written submission to the inquiry. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Could I ask you to confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Creese: Yes. I have read and understand the statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will get straight into questions. I will start. We are hearing a lot about your Eenee compostable nappies. Can you tell us where these are being composted and are they being successfully composted?

Mr Creese: They are currently composted through the City of Hobart, City of Glenorchy and Kingsborough councils in Tasmania, so they are all being composted at the one facility down here. They are being composted at NuGrow, as the Tackle Lab ladies mentioned, in Queensland. We have had them successfully composted in Victoria before. We won a Keep Australia Beautiful award but then the rules for composting changed. We have had them successfully composted in Adelaide, by major composters over the years, and also in Western Australia. Bunbury were composting them until a change of council guidelines.

THE CHAIR: So what is the problem? Why is there debate over these guidelines or whether or not they are compostable?

Mr Creese: I am trying to work out how to fit the last 20 years into 20 minutes without any questions. The biggest issue, I think, is the fact that we have never had a box to tick. Compostable nappies do not fit into a box. My Aunty Sue—she is overseas, so she could not be here today—started the company initially. She started it as a boxed nappy company and then, as the materials like compostable bioplastics became available, she created the disposable nappies. It was mainly for convenience and realising that the majority of people are probably never going to use cloth nappies—whether it is a time thing or perception or whatever it is.

The differences in regulations across the country and every state and every local council are a massive issue. For example, I saw the submission from Margaret River, where we were accepted by the people protesting there. We have had a lot of discussions with different councils in Western Australia, but their Local Government Association basically decided that they were trying to standardise what could go into FOGO, what could go into recycling. Compostable nappies were in the too-hard basket. That meant that none of the councils could then accept them because they wanted a standardised method.

In Adelaide we have had discussions with all the different government departments, and they have basically said, “Yes. We don’t have a problem with it, but you have to get someone else to sign off on it.” So we would go to the next person and they would

say, “We don’t have a problem with it, but you have to go to the next person.” That just turned into a loop, with no-one able to sign off that this was okay. We have to move past that in Adelaide.

We have got another issue. Things get confused a little bit. We are not a certified compostable nappy, simply because of the testing for certification for compostable plastics and compostable materials in Australia. Because our nappy is a composite of materials, the test does not work. If it is just a compostable coffee cup it is one layer of plastic, but all of the materials that we use are certified compostable. We do not have the plastic tabs that were mentioned. We do not have all the other parts that a regular nappy would have. All the materials that we use are suitable for commercial composting. We have never claimed to be certified compostable, but it is just one of those things. With bioplastics, microplastics and oxo-degradable there is so much confusion and greenwashing, unfortunately. It is such a difficult space. I commend you guys for trying to get ahead of it and getting your heads around it.

THE CHAIR: The ACT government is funding a new FOGO waste facility. I am interested to know what needs to be in place to allow your nappies or types of nappies like yours to be able to be processed in that facility?

Mr Creese: Again, I am learning; I have been doing it for a few years. Sue has a lot more detail. She has worked with all the different composters, trying to make this happen. At the City of Hobart there was literally a guy with a dump truck. They would just put them on the ground, he would run over the compostable bags to split them open and then he would put them into an open windrow that was already hot. The simpler the better. That was all it took.

The most recent example was in Victoria, on the negative side of things. Things take so long. I guess there is so much money involved and planning. The latest, biggest, greatest composting facility came online in Victoria. We were working with the person who was in charge of it and he was like, “Well, we are just going to make it work, whatever we need to do. We will take your nappies and we will keep playing with the process.” And then he left and was replaced.

The problem was that they had basically designed their system on what was set out in the specifications of the contract and the specifications of the contract were ten years old. The specifications were that they were not actually going to make finished compost, effectively. The aim was to try and compost as much stuff as quickly as possible, in as short a time frame as possible. They were not actually giving things enough time to break down and work through the system, and that was because they were just working to the tender. That was what the tender involved.

Another big part of it is that councils have to be very careful in what they write in their contracts, because you are working with businesses and businesses are going to try and be profitable. That is what we do: obviously, we have to try and be profitable. We understand that. If you do not specifically set out what you need and if you do not know what you need at the time, obviously, that is very hard to do. We did not make any progress there. It was just unfortunate that at that stage they made the system to do what was required and no more.

MS CLAY: Where it is working in Hobart, is that separated collection? Is that collection as part of FOGO?

Mr Creese: We initially set up a separate collection, working with Veolia, which was basically then turned into the City of Hobart's FOGO collection. We were told that the City of Hobart would never do FOGO because it would never be viable, so we set up our own collection service. Then, of course, that changed to green organic, garden organics, and it became food organics a few years later. Our nappies have just been allowed to continue in that

I think it is just about education. For our first few years we did not go out and shout it from the rooftops, but we were allowed in the FOGO bins because we were avoiding contamination. We understand that. For composters and the collections, their biggest issue is contamination. As you said before: garbage in, garbage out. We are trying to work with the composters, with the industry, with all the stakeholders to make sure that education is the biggest part of what happens.

MS CLAY: When you talk about that, what you mean is contamination if people accidentally put non-Eenee nappies into their FOGO.

Mr Creese: Yes.

MS CLAY: Have they done long-term testing on the compost that is coming out of the back end of that?

Mr Creese: The City of Hobart have had their compost tested to meet the Australian standard, which it does. The biggest thing about compost is that if you are composting to the Australian standard then that means it has to be pasteurised, so you are knocking out all the pathogens that you are worried about and it is safe to be used on land or for whatever purpose. We do not want human waste. They are worried about those sorts of things, but my understanding is that food waste and all those sorts of things are just as bad. Food waste off of the plate has to be pasteurised to the Australian standard because it contains things like Hep A and all those other things, which can be just as nasty as what you would find in a baby's nappy. Adult pads are obviously another ballgame. If you are still pasteurising and it has been composted to the Australian standard there should not be an issue.

One of the things that we have come across in the past is if the composter or the facility that is doing the composting is doing manual sorting. If they get a truck and it dumps all their stuff and it is tipped onto the line, obviously they are worried about what they are exposing people on the line to. You have dog waste and quite often dead animals or whatever else is going in there. What goes into a compost facility is obviously very different to what comes out; they are not the same. At the end of the day, it is not what went in. Again, that is another perception. People say, "We don't want human waste on our garden," but if something is composted it is no longer what it was. It is now compost. That is a perception thing and education.

MS CLAY: Do you know anywhere in Australia that is composting any nappies in an in-vessel facility, not an open windrow?

Mr Creese: Very soon we will finally have the first one. Sue has started and she has been working with building in-vessel systems. It is a tumbling barrel, all enclosed. We have finally got someone in Australia to set them up. We had trials done in Canada 10 or 15 years ago and the guy said, “This will never work because it is a really short cycle.” He said, “It’s just going to go in one end and it’s going to come out the other.” Then there was basically disbelief: “Hold on. I can’t find it. Where has it gone?” I do not know how deep you want to get into it, but as long as there is movement and there is heat and things do not dry out, the nappies will basically break down as fast as anything else that is in there.

Compared to some of the single-use compostables like cutlery, some of these thick spoons and forks, our pads use the same bioplastic as you get in compostable shopping bags but thinner. We use tissue paper and we use the water-storing granules that they use in the hygiene products to the highest standard. They are the same water-storing granules that people apply to farmlands to increase the water-holding capacity. So we see our product as a value-add for compost, not as a negative.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR COCKS: I was very interested in your observations about the impact of having to work to the tender and only working to the tender in Victoria. If you were going to provide some suggestions on how to design something at the outset so that it was best able to take in a wide variety of products, what sorts of suggestions would you make?

Mr Creese: I do not want to speak for the composters, because I know how hard their job is to start with. The only thing I can suggest is that you just have to go, “Where do we want to be in five, 10, 15 years? How long is this facility going to last us and what do we need it to do over that time frame?”

As I said, I have only been doing it for a few years, but it is very interesting seeing all these claims of: “We’re going to reduce our landfill waste to zero and this is how we are going to get rid of X, Y and Z.” Nappies and these products just magically disappear from that list, and they are probably going to be the single largest item that will be left over in the waste bins which generally is not being dealt with.

MR COCKS: Are there any other barriers you see commercially to the expansion of compostable nappies?

Mr Creese: It is the same as—I missed her name—the lady before was talking about with the modern cloth nappies and her service. It is price. That is the barrier. Our products are more expensive because our materials are more expensive. We know that there will be competition sooner or later. Sue has been working on this product for 10 or 15 years and when she started compostable people would say, “What’s combustible?” “Compostable” was not even on people’s radars. I have said to her that she was 20 years ahead. She has been banging her head against a wall for a very long time.

So it is very interesting reading all these submissions and seeing compostable nappies listed in them from all the different areas, which is fantastic. We know that more companies will move that way, but when you are trying to compete against a plastic

disposable nappy that is made for, effectively, cents in the dollar compared to what we can make ours for, that is always going to be a challenge. We hope that, as we make more progress and we get better economies of scale, we can increase the quantity that we are making. Hopefully, we will be able to bring it back to Australia. They were made in Australia many years ago, but the manufacturing industry changes or plants shut down. A lot of the materials that we use come from China and other countries anyway. That is why we manufacture there, because it is coming from there anyway at this stage.

The biggest thing, I think, in terms of more people being able to use our products would be just the fact that they are more expensive. I have heard people talking about rebates for modern cloth nappies and whether you are just rewarding people who are going to use them anyway. We have some pretty dedicated people who use our products. We had to put our prices up by 20 per cent because of shipping and everything recently. We literally did it saying, “We don’t know if we will still have a market, whether we will still have a customer base, but we just have to.” It has been very surprising to see just how many people have stuck with us and are willing to pay that extra if they know they are doing something better.

THE CHAIR: How are councils navigating education if yours is the only compostable nappy? I would imagine that there is a fair bit of concern that if they say, “Your product can be composted, but don’t put anything else there,” mixed messaging could result. How have you or they navigated that?

Mr Creese: We suggest that they just make a flyer that says, “You can use nappies that are suitable for commercial composting and here is the list,” and there is a list of one. Like I said, we know that there will be others. There is one which we do not know anything about, but I think someone else is trying to make one at the moment. We do not think that that should be a barrier. Just because we have invested the time and the effort to make something that can be used in that scenario, just because we are the only one, why should that be a barrier to councils promoting it?

THE CHAIR: Yes. How available are your products in the locations where they are able to be composted?

Mr Creese: We are warehousing locally in Sydney and Hobart and then we freight them from there. We go direct to customers at the moment. We have had a lot of interest with what Tackle Lab have done, which has been fantastic. There is a lot of interest and a lot of people wanting to use our products. As we grow, we will be able to go local and have them locally and more available. That is the idea. That is the goal.

THE CHAIR: This may be a silly question, but can people compost your nappies in their own compost?

Mr Creese: We have got some information on our website. We always say if it is a soiled nappy it has to be commercially composted, that they will just have to dispose of it in their general landfill. If it is just wet, there is no reason why they cannot, but they do require heat. There is a composting method called the Berkley method. You need space and you need time.

It is the equivalent of using modern cloth nappies; you have to want it. For people who want to do it, they can do it—and especially people who are more remote. We have got people who maybe do not have a regular rubbish collection service and they have got the space and they are already composting at home, so they do it themselves. So, yes, they can be composted. Like I said, they are beneficial to the compost, but only wet ones in home composting.

THE CHAIR: We might finish up there. Thank you very much for your time today. We greatly appreciated your submission and the work that you are doing. Thank you, Ben.

Short suspension.

YANG, MS AMY, Waste Strategy and Engagement Coordinator, City of Stonnington

THE CHAIR: We will move to our next witness, Ms Amy Yang from the City of Stonnington in Victoria. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing today and for your written submission. Please be aware that proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Can I just ask that you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Yang: Yes. I understand the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Great. We will get into questions for the next 20 minutes.

MS CLAY: Thanks for joining us, Amy. I was very interested in your submission. It is really great to hear from a local council with experience. I noticed that you were not sure if rebates for reusables and other things like that drove behaviour change or if they simply rewarded people who were going to make that change anyway. Can you tell me more about how you got to that point?

Ms Yang: Yes. We have received numerous requests from our community to introduce rebates. In responding to residents and councillors, we interviewed our neighbouring councils in Victoria who already had rebate systems in place. We really wanted to understand what was the program that they had, how was it administered and the effectiveness of rebates.

Through these discussions we have realised that there is not a lot of data on or evaluation of the effectiveness of rebates. That led us to join a study to look into the effectiveness of a wide range of interventions. That study reaffirmed our understanding that rebates were good financial incentives for those who may already be considering using it or seen as a reward for those who are already using it or using a combination of reusables and disposables. So rebates on their own were not effective in encouraging re-usable behaviours.

MS CLAY: And did you feel that rebates with education and outreach were effective but you cannot do it by itself? Or did you feel that they were not a useful tool?

Ms Yang: Absolutely. A combination of tools would be needed. It is about having conversations, targeted education and campaigns to parents before the baby is born, when they are considering the use of the nappies beforehand, because once the baby comes then families are too busy or time poor to consider all the additional information on top of a newborn. It is about prior education, advice from trusted sources, knowledge sharing about products and, on top of that, incentives to encourage those who may not be able to afford the up-front costs of reusables. The whole combination of interventions would be needed.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR COCKS: It sounds like timing and awareness are really critical. I am wondering:

did you notice any other behavioural factors that affect someone choosing to or being interested in taking up re-usable nappies?

Ms Yang: Yes, absolutely. From the survey responses we found that the environment and financial savings were key drivers for many who chose reusables. Even those who ended up choosing disposable options were acutely aware of the environmental impacts of disposables, but the practicalities and the convenience and the easy use of disposables often overrode those decisions for those families who did end up choosing disposables.

THE CHAIR: Has your council looked at composting and the FOGO compost collection services?

Ms Yang: Yes, we have. We are aware of a new supplier who has introduced compostable nappies into the supply chain. We are a little concerned about the implications of compostable nappies on the organics end markets and the usability of the compost or mulch.

We are acutely aware of the high standards that are required from end users, from market gardens to our parks and reserves, so by introducing a plastic based product—even natural plastic—into the compostable organics stream, we are concerned about the impacts of that on the quality of the products and whether users will buy the organic material if it does include compostable nappies. So we are aware of it, a bit wary, and we are keen to see the outcomes of further testing to ensure that the quality of the compost is not compromised.

THE CHAIR: With the work that you have done, have you looked at adult incontinence products as well and done any work around that?

Ms Yang: Yes. That is part a large piece of work that we are doing to further our study of re-usable nappies. That bit of work is about to commence, early next year, with a cohort of other Victorian councils. We are going to be taking a very similar approach that we took to the re-usable nappies, where we will be engaging a consultant to do some desktop analysis and lots of interviews with stakeholders, and that report and any findings will inform our program for next year.

THE CHAIR: So the key questions of that work will be around looking at opportunities in that sector; is that correct?

Ms Yang: Yes; correct. It is what products are available, people's awareness of products, and ease of use and ease of availability in the market. We will be looking across all of those interventions and that knowledge so that we can be informed on what is the best approach and how council can influence more people to use reusables.

THE CHAIR: Back to the nappy products, what is your next step in terms of where you are looking at the next great areas for change?

Ms Yang: We were fortunate to receive a grant from Sustainability Victoria to continue and use the recommendations of that study to develop a council-wide education campaign. This will be in collaboration with Melbourne councils. We will

be looking at developing key messaging and materials that can be used across maternal and child health settings, and our libraries and our council's outreach, to really get that messaging across and dispel some of the misconceptions of those who use disposables, to really address some of their concerns.

MS CLAY: You noted in your submission that the introduction of FOGO led to concerns about fortnightly collections. We are running through that same issue at the moment in Canberra with our trial. How did you deal with that and how did you overcome that?

Ms Yang: At the moment we are still having fortnightly FOGO. With fortnightly FOGO there is still the weekly garbage collection, so that is less of an issue at the moment. We have seen in some other councils who have introduced weekly FOGO collections and fortnightly rubbish that it is really when that service switches that these concerns arise because of the increased volume of garbage that households need to manage. Also the smell and convenience factor is an additional consideration for these families. What other councils have done and what we are also considering for the future is larger garbage bins for these households. We are pre-empting that by encouraging more households to use reusables prior to making that switch we can get more of the community on board. It is a challenge and it is something that we will need to work with households and the community on when we do that switch.

MS CLAY: Just to check that I have got that right: right now you have fortnightly FOGO and weekly garbage?

Ms Yang: Correct; yes.

MS CLAY: So does the fortnightly FOGO not lead to the same concerns about smell?

Ms Yang: It does, yes.

MS CLAY: Yes; okay.

Ms Yang: You have it either way.

MS CLAY: Yes. Okay. You are intending to flip that and you are intending to use education at some point to help.

Ms Yang: Yes. In the future, in order to meet our climate emergency targets and our waste emission targets, we will need to switch so that we recover more organics. When that happens, we are anticipating that we would have done lots of community education and campaigns prior to making that switch, just to lessen the impact.

MS CLAY: And part of that education would be educating people on the alternatives?

Ms Yang: Correct; yes.

MS CLAY: Okay. Great. Thank you.

MR COCKS: One of the things we have been hearing a bit about is the regulatory

environment. I am wondering whether you have had any experiences or observations from your experience of the interaction between making it easy for people to make good choices and what regulations look like for you.

Ms Yang: That is a really good question. As a council, we do not have a lot of impact or knowledge of the regulations and possible policy settings that may encourage the use of reusables. What we can do is use our waste collection services to influence households' decisions. That will go to the size of people's bins and/or the collection frequencies. We are fully supportive of policy settings or legislation or regulations that would encourage reusables. I think the ACT may be the first across Australia, if you are looking to do so. We are keenly awaiting the outcomes of this inquiry.

MS CLAY: As are we all.

THE CHAIR: On menstrual products, have you done work with schools in the Stonnington area or education work there?

Ms Yang: We have not, but that is an area that we are very keen to work towards. We are starting up our schools program at the moment and talking to teachers about introducing those concepts within the schools. The introduction of reusables is part of that conversation. At the moment we are still bringing up our programs in schools, but that is something that we are definitely looking to introduce in the future.

MS CLAY: Amy, a lot of the success of these interventions relies on education and behaviour change. Have you learned any lessons from a local government level on how much you need to spend and how much you need to invest in those education and behaviour change programs?

Ms Yang: Yes. For a general intervention campaign, we spend a good 12 months or so planning the campaign, including talking to the multiple stakeholders and testing messaging. We usually employ a multi-stage approach to our interventions: introducing targeted messaging at different points to convey our message to really address those key steps to behaviour change. Then we look at awareness-raising options, priming and really encouraging behaviours, and, after the behaviours have been adopted, monitoring and support. So there is a multi-pronged approach. It is really lengthy and resource intensive, not only for the person who is implementing it but for all of the support teams that are required to share and bring that message. It is very resource intensive, but if we do not do it and if we do not get that messaging right then we miss that opportunity.

MS CLAY: What sorts of channels are you using to deliver that?

Ms Yang: We use council's maternal and child health centres. The workers speak directly with the parents. We use all of our council newsletters and our social messaging and we also tap into our community networks and identify champions within the community who are able to share the messaging.

MS CLAY: I do not know if you can answer this: how many FTEs do you have working on education?

Ms Yang: We have two.

MS CLAY: Okay. They must be busy.

Ms Yang: We are fortunate that we have two.

MS CLAY: They sound like they would be busy.

Ms Yang: Yes, very busy.

MS CLAY: And you are probably supplementing that with consultants, as you have mentioned already.

Ms Yang: Yes. We are also fortunate that we have an internal communications team. That has three communications advisers, graphic designers, website and digital. So that is not including their time as well.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR COCKS: I am interested in whether you have got any quantification yet around how much of a shift you have managed to achieve through education and incentives. How many people are moving their preferences?

Ms Yang: We have not commenced that campaign. That is scheduled for next year. We are more than happy to share the results with the committee and anyone else who would be interested in them.

MR COCKS: Do you have any expectations about where it might be able to go?

Ms Yang: We are not sure yet. It is a tricky space. I think where we have landed is: the more people using reusables the better it is. If they are not currently using re-usable but are using a combination of reusables and disposables, we still see that as a win for us.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, on behalf of the committee, Ms Yang, for your time today and for the good work that you are doing. Thank you for sharing that with us for our inquiry. When available, a proof transcript will be sent to you to check, to make sure there are no errors. Thank you.

Ms Yang: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Hearing suspended from 11.24 to 11.45 am.

STEEL, MR CHRIS, Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State

FITZGERALD, MR BRUCE, Executive Group Manager, Infrastructure Delivery and Waste, City Services, Transport Canberra and City Services

HARRINGTON, MS KATHERINE, Senior Director, ACT NoWaste

THE CHAIR: The committee will recommence, and we will now move to the final witnesses appearing today, Mr Chris Steel, Minister for Transport and City Services, together with officials from the Transport and City Services Directorate. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing here today and for your written submission.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement in front of you on the table? Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Steel: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We will start off with questions. With the new FOGO facility that is going to be built, has consideration been given to disposable nappies being part of that?

Mr Steel: One of the barriers that has been mentioned in a couple of the submissions is around capacity in the ACT to undertake commercial industrial composting and the range of materials that could be composted under that particular standard. At this stage, we do not really have that capability in the ACT. So it is very challenging to accept any of those products into a current green bin or, in the future, a FOGO bin.

That is why we are working through a procurement process to establish a new facility located in the Hume industrial estate, the waste recovery estate, to enable that composting to occur. The exact capabilities of a new industrial composting plant are yet to be determined. Through the procurement process we will certainly be hearing from tenderers about what sorts of things could be delivered through that process.

We work closely with other jurisdictions and officials. We are in discussions with New South Wales on a regular basis and hear about some of the challenges that they are currently having with contamination from some of those compostable products through their composters. So we need to be really careful about what can be accepted into those composting systems, to make sure it does not contaminate the rest of the products.

We have not specifically considered these particular items. What we have considered is the potential of meeting the current industrial composting standard which could apply to a range of different products and what opportunities there might be in the future to be able to accept those products. That would be dependent on what can be provided and what can be supplied to us through the procurement underway.

Mr Fitzgerald: It has been a consideration through the procurement process and is

partly the reason that we are looking at a two-stage procurement for the FOGO facility. We want to test with the market what is possible. We are also very cognisant, as the minister points out, of the potential for contamination. We are engaging with the New South Wales EPA. They have recently come forward with some additional standards in relation to composting, and we are making sure that through the procurement process they are considered.

THE CHAIR: Great.

MS CLAY: Have you done a desktop analysis of the councils that have and have not had a go at composting Eenee or compostable nappies? From what we have heard today, it sounds like Hobart City Council has been doing it for a long time with extremely low tech—I think a person in a truck and open windrows—and some of the other councils have had on-again and off-again trials. Have you done that desktop research?

Mr Steel: We have certainly looked very closely at the Bega trial and how Bega have put forward and managed their trial. It was of a much lower scale, obviously, than what we would need to contemplate as part of the ACT. We look at the experiences in other jurisdictions, and that will continue to happen through the procurement process.

MS CLAY: Great. We had a really interesting chat with Conder House Laundry & Linen Service, who are the only commercial nappy-laundrying service in Canberra. They provide the nappies to early childhood centres and collect them and launder them. They are running through a few challenges with space, which is interesting, in the circular economy strategy. They also noted that Capital Linen is sort of in the same market as them. They do not do nappies but they do linen and they are doing a lot of facilities. Has TCCS had a good look at what laundering or nappy library services might be needed going forward to encourage more reusables?

Mr Steel: I do not think Capital Linen has necessarily had a focus on nappies, but I will hand over to Bruce Fitzgerald.

Mr Fitzgerald: It is something that we have looked at from the point of view of what trials are available and what kits can be provided to the community to test, particularly the reusable nappies. I might pass to Ms Harrington to go through some of the statistics as to how many kits are being put out there and provided to the community.

Ms Harrington: Across the ACT government we have had discussions with ACT Health in terms of what services, for example, the MACH nurses can provide and what opportunities there may be. We did develop a sustainable period products and hygiene and nappy products education kit, which gets borrowed out very regularly. In the 2020-21 financial year that kit was borrowed out 267 times, and in the last financial year that kit was borrowed out 305 times as well over the same period. So we do know that there is a level of interest. The feedback we have had on that kit has been very positive. The choices that people make are their choices to make, I suppose. But the purpose of that kit as well is to provide that education so people are actually aware of what the options, opportunities and alternatives may be.

MS CLAY: What is in that kit? Is that like an Actsmart kit?

Ms Harrington: It is a little bit like an Actsmart kit. It has a range of examples of the different options that are available. For example, with period products, there are alternatives such as the cups that can be used. There are also examples of some of the different nappy types that you can get. Nappies can range in price a fair amount. It gives you a good understanding of what the different options are out there and what is going to be suitable for different people to use.

MS CLAY: We have heard from a number of people today that demand for period products and infant nappies, reusables, is outstripping supply. We heard that from the community pantries and we heard it from the only commercial laundry service that operates. Have you done any sort of analysis to see if demand is outstripping supply? For the people who actually are interested and want to use these products, it sounds like there are quite a few barriers and they cannot actually get to them.

Mr Steel: I think the major focus for the government thus far has been on education in this space. We are, of course, interested to hear about submissions through the inquiry and any ideas that come up that might be considered. But the focus has been on education. We have not played a role in the market in terms of either regulation or, at this point, undertaking other measures. I know that education has been a focus of a lot of the submissions. It is something that I think we can look at enhancing going forward. Ultimately, it would be up to the market to supply a lot of those products.

MR COCKS: Minister, you have referenced the Assembly resolution of 5 April 2022 around investigating better environmental options for nappy waste. Can you let us know where you are up to with that and what the time lines and the scope look like?

Mr Steel: The government is currently consulting on a draft circular economy strategy. One of the chapters in that strategy is around problematic waste streams. This sort of fits into that area. It is something that we are keen to look at and we are consulting with the community about what they would like us to do. Feedback through this inquiry is useful in terms of informing a final strategy and then an action plan that will be developed after that point.

As part of that strategy as well the No. 1 focus is on food and other organics. That is also, of course, helpful in terms of managing compostable alternatives to a range of different problematic products, including sanitary products. The reason that we are focusing on that is that it opens the door to enabling us to explore some of those alternatives which are better for the environment and more sustainable. So that has been the focus of the government's investment.

As part of the strategy, as Ms Clay alluded to earlier, one of the chapters is around the availability of land to demonstrate and showcase the circular economy here in Canberra. The reality is that there is not a significant amount of industrial land or land that is appropriately zoned for this type of activity. There has been a lot of concern from community groups who do not want to see these types of facilities built even in places like Fyshwick that are actually zoned appropriately. So we need to look at where this type of activity could potentially occur in the future. That is one of the reasons why there is a focus there to undertake further planning work to identify more land for this type of purpose as well.

MR COCKS: Will that work go into the economics of different proposals, market readiness and those sorts of issues as well?

Mr Steel: We are keen to hear from the community about what they would like us to focus on, but we have set out, I guess, five areas that we want to focus on in the strategy. We are seeking feedback on that at the moment. It is a strategy; it is not an action plan. We will then move to the actual actions, and each of those actions would be considered and, if there is a financial part involved, whether that is a good investment. There have been calls during this inquiry for us to consider things like rebates and that sort of thing. I think there is a bit of work to do to actually consider what the evidence base is behind those types of proposals before we consider those further.

MR COCKS: What is the time frame that you are looking at for both of those components, the strategy and the action plan?

Mr Steel: The strategy is currently being consulted on until 8 December. We will then consider the feedback from that and start finalising a strategy next year before we then go out on an action plan.

MR COCKS: So we are looking at fairly lengthy time frames at the moment?

Mr Steel: We want to undertake that work next year.

MR COCKS: Okay.

THE CHAIR: We heard from Stonnington council, who have implemented FOGO there. I am not sure how long it has been running for. They were saying that the next piece of work is to look at nappy waste and where that fits in the whole system. They were saying that it is a year-long kind of education program before they really transition things. Given that FOGO is coming, do you think that we need to be doing more to educate the community now? Even though the facility is not here and we are not at that stage yet, it is going to take a long time to get people to change behaviours and to think about things differently.

Mr Steel: In scoping the FOGO service in the ACT based on the best practice guidelines that had been developed from other jurisdictions' experiences, we knew that we needed to start with education as a very strong component. At this stage, the focus has not been on educating people around nappies per se in relation to composting the actual nappies; it has been about managing your waste, including that waste that needs to go into the garbage bin, as well as what can go into the FOGO bin. I will hand over to Katherine and Mr Fitzgerald to talk a bit more about that.

Ms Harrington: We have actually been putting a key focus on education for those who are in the FOGO trial area, and nappies, of course, is one element of the broader FOGO picture. But what we really need to do is to get the residents in the trial area to be using the FOGO bins appropriately, whether that is knowing where they need to put nappies or knowing where food scraps can go or if there are any exceptions. I am pretty sure that they are motivated to participate. It has been very, very popular, and

we have received strong support from that community. So the high focus at the moment is making sure that the bins are used appropriately.

Once some of that further work has been done in terms of the FOGO facilities and where we are moving to in the future, we may look to tailor that in the future. But, at the moment, the key focus is more on ensuring everyone is participating, getting their feedback to see whether there is anything we need to iron out and making sure that the bins are being used correctly. But, overall, that is going very, very well.

THE CHAIR: The collection issue has also come up. I would imagine that nappies form a major part of that conversation. For example, if it is two-week rubbish collection, and nappies are supposed to go in the rubbish, that could be a big problem for families, particularly ones that have more than one child. Does the transition either to cloth nappies or to compostable nappies need to be much more at the forefront of that FOGO conversation?

Mr Steel: At this stage, I think the jury is still out about whether they are compostable. Also, because the facility is some time away, it is not something that we would be making eligible for the scheme at this point in time. As Ms Harrington alluded to, it might be a later conversation once we have been able to determine what items or products could be composted through an industrial composting facility. At this point in time that is not clear.

I think there has been a bit of discussion and inquiry about what appropriate standards might need to be set or to be developed for compostable nappies to make sure that they are actually genuinely compostable. Unfortunately, we have seen with some other products that claim to be compostable actually are not and, if they went into a FOGO bin, they would cause contamination. So there is a bit of work to do there. I will hand over to Mr Fitzgerald and Ms Harrington to talk a little bit about the engagement that we have been doing directly with families and carers who do have nappies in their waste stream.

Mr Fitzgerald: We have been meeting with individuals and advocacy groups to discuss some of those concerns, particularly around the fortnightly collection. There has been a desire for a solution as to what happens with the nappies. In a fortnightly situation, there can be an increased number of nappies and waste in general in the bin. So we are, on an individual basis, looking at those circumstances and trying to take a very proactive approach to managing the situation.

Our contamination rate at the moment for FOGO is less than 0.1 per cent, and we want to maintain that. As Ms Harrington mentioned, education has played a really strong role in that space to be able to tell people what does and does not go in the bin. We are very keen to continue the strong message that has been put out to the trial at the moment around what can go in the bin—we think that that has had success—and we are looking to manage individual households on a one-to-one basis as soon as we can.

MS CLAY: It is an interesting time. The point was made by one of the other witnesses that, when you are drafting up these contracts and procuring, you are obviously doing it for the long term but you do it at a point of time right now. At the

moment you are tendering for the household waste and your recycling collections, tendering for the Hume RF and tendering for the new FOGO. Are you confident that, in all of that, you are allowing for compostable products that will meet the Australian standard as genuinely compostable—whether that be nappies or cutlery, for instance—or are you confident that you will be able to change all of those contracts so we do not find in five years time that we have locked ourselves out and we cannot do anything until 2040?

Mr Fitzgerald: Part of the reason for doing all of the contracts at once is to actually get that alignment between the different outcomes and policy objectives of government. All of the contracts will have performance obligations within them and also the opportunity for innovation throughout. So, in short, yes, we believe that, by tendering at the same time using similar methodologies, we will actually have a way forward to address problematic waste streams as they come forward and we can modify the systems and processes in place to adopt new standards as they come online. So, yes, I believe that we are in a situation where those tenders and the contracts that we sign will respond to future waste issues.

MS CLAY: We have heard there are some big barriers in this area and that there are some areas that are really difficult, but there are also some things that are working well that would probably be easy to help along. There are two that pop out instantly. One is working with schools to provide reusable period products, period pants and things like that. That seems to be quite popular. We heard there is a school in Kaleen that is quite keen to do a trial. We also heard that Conder was working very well with early childcare centres.

Business-to-business recycling seems to be a good way to get large volumes and also might be a good way to test out what is acceptable in an easier way rather than making individual human beings feel guilty about their habits. Do you have somebody in ACT NoWaste who is working specifically on business-to-business education rather than household and individual consumer choices?

Ms Harrington: The approach we take in education is a little bit broader. We have is we have an education team and they work on different elements depending on the priorities of the government of the day and the other work that is going on. Our team within ACT NoWaste works very closely with the Actsmart group—be that schools, be that working with businesses or be that working with events. So it is not so much a specific individual working particularly on business marketing; it is a whole team working on where the priorities of the time are.

MS CLAY: Is there somebody in that team who is working with childcare centres and working with schools on the reusable products that are available now?

Ms Harrington: We work very closely with Actsmart, and Actsmart schools have that area set up. So we do work with the schools but more directly with Actsmart to facilitate that relationship. So the answer is, yes, for schools, but I would have to take it on notice in terms of child care. I know that previously we have been out and spoken to some of the childcare agencies, but I would have to take that on notice for now.

MS CLAY: When you take that on notice, could you also tell me whether there are any programs like targeted help and rebates and if there is any actual industry development. If you could take that on notice, that would be great. Thanks.

Mr Steel: The early childhood sector is regulated and there are requirements under the National Quality Standards for them to consider issues of sustainability. It does not go specifically to nappies or other products, but it certainly encourages the early childhood centre. I am not surprised to hear that they are actually leaders in this space, because a lot of them have had to turn their attention to that as part of their requirements to look at these sorts of issues.

THE CHAIR: Do you think we need to be looking at other sectors—for example, like child care, where there is this very identifiable waste stream—that we could tackle head on? Are there other sectors that we could be working with more closely to reduce waste?

Mr Steel: Obviously, there are the product manufacturers and encouraging them to design out the problematic waste from the beginning, even for the single-use items, and looking at compostable alternatives and making those mainstream. I think that is probably where the sector is going to head in the future, but there are still a few issues around standards there and then the capacity to actually take that material and compost it.

The principle should be to try and eliminate waste in the first place, and I think that designing-out process is the best place to start. Some of the packaging manufacturers are in touch with us on a regular basis, particularly around our single-use plastic ban. We are not quite there with these types of products. I do not think we are suggesting at all that we would regulate in that way for these products. It is up to individuals, including business, to choose what they want to use and the range of options available, and we do not want to take those options away from people. That was strongly put forward in this inquiry by people with a disability and their representatives. We have heard that very loud and clear.

Engaging with product manufacturers around innovation is an important thing. Obviously with a national market, it has to be dealt with in a national way. That is why we will continue to have that conversation with them through the range of forums that we are involved in.

MR COCKS: One of the suggestions that I have been hearing is that those people who are already committed to using environmentally friendly products are going to do so but that there are a lot of people for whom the convenience and all sorts of other factors mean that they are going to stay for the foreseeable future with single use. Has the government done any work around managing the impact of those products long term?

Mr Steel: Single use?

MR COCKS: Single-use nappies and period products.

Mr Steel: I think education is key here. People will adopt the single-use product

because it is often the simplest and the cheapest upfront. Education can help in making people aware about the wide variety of options available that they may not have been aware of and also to try out those products for the first time and get a sense about whether it is right for them and their family. Education is probably the main area that the government has been involved with in terms of engaging with the community about making them aware of the range of products, and that might in turn help reduce the potential use of single-use products but in a way that is not threatening and in a way that hopefully will change behaviour over time. So that has been the major focus, and I suspect that is where we will continue to have a focus going forward.

MR COCKS: I guess my question was more around work on how you handle those products once they enter the waste stream.

Mr Steel: It is like a lot of products; it goes straight into landfill. That is not a good outcome for any product, but these products contribute to climate change through methane emissions and, over time, will increase the size of the landfill. It is not unique in that sense; there is a range of products that unfortunately go into landfill. That is why we have to start at the other end and try and make sure that, through the circular process, we try to reduce the amount going into landfill. Education will play a significant role there in terms of educating people about the fact that these do go into landfill and cause problems at the other end.

THE CHAIR: With the cloth nappies, there is quite a bit of an initial outlay cost and they do take a little bit of learning how to use to be effective. Some of the ideas that have come through the submissions is about a community cloth nappy library, so that parents could try them and different products and learn how to use them. Would that be something that the government would be open to?

Ms Harrington: There are a lot of elements of what you are saying there which actually go into our sustainable products kit, so that people can have a look and see how they work. The individual items are not sort of lent out for individual use but, as a kit, residents can access that and actually have a look and see what is going to work for them.

THE CHAIR: Who accesses this kit?

Ms Harrington: The information is available on our website. There is a range of community groups who access it. We have also worked closely in the past with the Canberra Environment Centre, and it can be accessed through those means as well. Schools are the main areas that borrow the kit.

MS CLAY: I was interested in your submission that, in the last audit, it was shown that around 6.1 per cent of the waste stream are these sorts of products. I think our emissions from landfill was around 10 per cent of our carbon inventory at the moment. If we have not had an audit for a while, how do we know how many we have got at the moment? Are you doing ongoing studies on all of these products? Do we have good data right now?

Mr Fitzgerald: We are in the process of finalising our latest waste audit. As the field

work has been undertaken we have been monitoring the results as they have come through. We know that nappies are largely at the same percentage as what they were back in 2014. We have not seen a significant change in the number of nappies going to landfill as a percentage. That is a pretty consistent measure at this stage.

Previous to this larger waste audit we have continued to review as we go through with our landfill operator and our collections contractor, to gain as much information as we can around what is going into the waste stream. But the waste audits, for sure, are our best opportunity to really understand that.

MS CLAY: Are you also doing adult hygiene products?

Mr Fitzgerald: That forms part of—

MS CLAY: Yes, it is not increasing?

Mr Fitzgerald: It is part of the total figure for nappies. We do not disaggregate to that level.

MS CLAY: As we get better at reducing our emissions in other areas, our emissions from waste will become a greater proportion of the remainder. When you do those audits, do you do modelling, or does somebody else in government do modelling, on what the carbon emissions are as well as what the waste is?

Mr Fitzgerald: As the submission notes, we do use the standard rate for calculation of emissions from landfill. With the help of the Office of Climate Action, we are doing some modelling in this space. We also work closely with our landfill gas operator to understand some of the trends when it comes to methane capture and its use. So there are varying sources of data that we use to understand the total emissions and, with that, some of the projections into the future.

MS CLAY: Where are those productions reported?

Mr Fitzgerald: At the moment they are for internal use. We are looking at particularly our landfill management, and that is a contract that we hope to go out to tender shortly. Part of it is around seeing a baseline and understanding how that landfill is operating so that we can put in an operations plan with the new operator to make sure that we are getting the best outcomes from an environmental perspective.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: When is the waste audit going to be completed?

Mr Fitzgerald: We are finalising the report with the consultant now. We would hope that that would be available within the first half of next year.

THE CHAIR: Thanks.

MR COCKS: One of the messages that we have heard is that there are barriers to setting up commercial laundries to deal with nappies in particular in the ACT that are

around finding appropriate locations and facilities. I was interested to hear that slow planning approvals have been a really big part of that concern. Is there anything that the government can do to make that process easier so we can scale up some of these good businesses more quickly?

Mr Steel: I did not suggest that slow planning approvals have been the issue.

MR COCKS: Sorry; not you. It is something that we had heard through others.

Mr Steel: I am happy to raise that specific issue. We know that land is an issue for the circular economy. A lot of organisations that want to set up businesses often struggle to find appropriate land to undertake that work. That is part of the reason that we are out consulting with the community about addressing that issue. That is an issue for the whole community, not just for government. The community has to ultimately accept that we have to do some of this stuff here in the ACT and we have to find appropriate spaces for that in a very small footprint.

It is a discussion about social acceptance and social contract around managing the waste is close to the source of generation as we can. This is probably one stream where we can do things locally compared to some of the other ones that require large remanufacturing around the place. Particularly in the reuse side of things, there is clearly a role there that can be played.

I am certainly interested to hear about some of those barriers that are coming across to the committee there. Obviously, when setting up large industrial laundering businesses, they need large amounts of land, and the simple fact is there is just not a huge amount of that land scarce in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Icon Water's submission was really interesting about the cost and the impacts of the sewerage networks getting clogged up by people flushing non-disposable products down the toilet. They talked about behaviour change and more education that needs to be done. Do you work closely with Icon Water around this issue and in terms of the messaging that goes out to the community?

Ms Harrington: We certainly do work very closely with Icon Water across a range of waste-related issues. So, yes, we do work closely with them. They have their own campaign on these issues at the moment. But we do touch base and we do ensure alignment of messaging where it is appropriate to do so. We do work in a very collaborative way with not just Icon Water but also Actsmart and other areas in ACT government that focus on waste avoidance and behavioural change messaging.

THE CHAIR: Do you think there could be more or better collaboration between different agencies—for example, they have got their campaign going at the moment, so what is the sort of counter or alternative message that could come out of your section?

Ms Harrington: What do you mean by alternative message?

THE CHAIR: If they are saying that these products are not disposable, then more education through the work that you do to say what is or what is not and things like

that.

Ms Harrington: That is the kind of area that we do work very closely with Icon Water on to make sure that those messages are aligned. A collaborative approach is actually beneficial for all, and they take a similar approach of course with their own work. So, when those messages go out there, whether it is from the ACT government or from Icon Water, it has a very, very similar base in terms of where it is coming from.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS CLAY: We have heard a little bit about product design today—but not a lot. It is another area with, I think, more opportunity and fewer barriers. We have heard about the ability to reduce the amount of material in disposable or compost or products with thinner material—just designing it so it uses less and you can probably do the same with packaging. We also heard a little bit about possibly doing ecolabelling so that you clearly signal to people who buy them or you tell manufacturers to have less of an impact in the manufacturing chain. I imagine that all of that work requires national coordination. Is that likely to actually deliver results in the next few years?

Mr Steel: There have been some examples through the National Packaging Targets, working with the National Packaging Covenant Organisation, and the potential of regulation in that area to enforce the targets that I guess shows a potential pathway in relation to products like these. But that is really focussed on the packaging itself rather than some of the actual products.

But it is a challenge because of the national approach that is required and because, ultimately, we are dealing with products that are sold into a national market where the ACT may not have an influence over exactly what products are supplied by, in some cases, multinational companies who are supplying them here in the ACT. We are certainly part of the discussion nationally through environment ministers meetings or with waste officials, who meet on a regular basis about what those priorities are. But I am not sure whether it has been a specific focus of the National Waste Action Plan. There is a lot of work happening there, but I am not sure that there is a focus on nappies per se.

Mr Fitzgerald: This Thursday there is a workshop for the Resource Recovery Reference Group, which is a national group of all waste jurisdictions and some of the other relevant organisations, such as APCO, which will be looking at opportunities to specifically design out waste. That may provide opportunities at that national level.

It is a very difficult place to be, as the minister said, dealing with international producers. It is very, very tough to control what comes into the country sometimes. I know it will be a focus of the workshops. I am not sure that progress will be swift, but we will certainly put forward a strong argument as to why it needs to be.

MS CLAY: It did work for packaging a long time ago. It did reduce the amount of material going into packaging. But I have seen fewer results delivered in recent years. Do you think there's a need for more mandatory schemes and fewer voluntary schemes?

Mr Steel: Generally speaking, we would support further regulation nationally to try and design out waste and hold the commercial sector to account in delivering targets that they have signed up to. For a number of years it has actually been industry that is leading governments in setting their own targets, which is fantastic. I think we have now got to the point where further regulation is required, but whether that is in this space specifically, I am not sure. I think the first step would be to try and put some further teeth around regulation of the packaging targets specifically before we then move on to other products.

Obviously, at the state level, with the agreement of all states through the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition process, we have gone down the path of phasing out single-use problematic products. But they are only certain products where there are clear alternatives available and where we go through quite a rigorous regulation impact statement process. So I guess we are at the start of that sort of regulation journey, and I think we are improving it as things go on.

There is further work to do in that space about what regulation might look at in the future. Product stewardship is probably the biggest area of development that needs to occur. There is obviously regulation of that but it is moving at a much slower pace than we would like. I do not think that that necessarily plays a role here, though, in these sorts of products that we are talking about in this inquiry.

MR COCKS: We heard earlier today about the importance of consistency or regulations across jurisdictions and different levels of government as well, in particular between councils, when it comes to how you set up a FOGO facility and what it can take. Are there conversations going on with New South Wales around how they do things or how we can make sure we are working closely with what is happening just over the border?

Mr Steel: The biggest inconsistency across the country at the moment is that some councils do not have FOGO or GO at all and some have GO. We are currently in the process of adding the FO to the GO. Consistency is important because, if there is a national approach that is taken, the suppliers want to know and the federal government will want to know that the alternative products—compostable nappies, for example, being one of those—can actually be accepted consistently across the country in composting facilities. If one council does not have access to those, then obviously that is problematic. So consistency there is important.

The National Waste Strategy has set the target for the reduction that we want to see by 2030 in terms of FOGO. Most councils are moving towards this, if they have not already. We are slightly behind some of them—we will certainly admit that—but we are on the pathway now with the pilot. We have been learning from what other jurisdictions have done ahead of us in their rollouts to inform the settings that we put in place, which are very consistent with a number of other local councils.

Mr Fitzgerald: The opportunity for harmonisation across all of the bins is something that is a point of discussion across jurisdictions. It is proving to be a very difficult conversation. I think, in the first instance, if we can look to a regional opportunity to have harmonisation, that can lead to a better outcome, particularly where our

education campaigns do have reach well beyond the ACT borders.

MS CLAY: The federal target for food waste collection changed in the last few days, though, did it not?

Mr Steel: It certainly was not met around the country, at 2025.

MS CLAY: They have sort of walked back from it, have they not?

Mr Steel: But there is a target for 2030 that was already established, which is the 30 per cent reduction in food waste going into landfill, which is what we are certainly committed to do with other states and territories.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time today and for your submission and evidence to our hearing. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to check and identify any errors. I do not think there were any questions on notice. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 12.31 pm.