



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Inquiry Into Annual and Financial Reports 2022 - 2023](#))

Members:

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

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2023

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Secretary to the committee:
Mr J Bunce (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.

APPEARANCES

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate	1, 32
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2.34 pm.

Rattenbury, Mr Shane, Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Wright, Ms Fiona, Deputy Director-General, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction

Burkevics, Mr Bren, Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Water

Lawton, Mr Kieran, Acting Executive Group Manager, Climate Change and Energy

Malouf, Ms Ros, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Programs, Climate Change and Energy

De Hosson, Ms Rachel, Executive Branch Manager, Net Zero Energy Transformation, Climate Change and Energy

Ogden, Dr Ralph, Program Manager, ACT Healthy Waterways, Catchment Planning and Water Management, Office of Water

Major Projects Canberra

Piani, Mr Adrian, ACT Chief Engineer

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The committee will today hear from the Minister for Gaming; the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction; and the Minister for Planning and Land Management.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event or online.

The proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard. When you receive a question on notice, please say that you are taking that as a question on notice.

For the first session, we will hear from the Minister for Gaming. We welcome Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA and one official. Could I please remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. It is understood. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Can I confirm for the record that you understand the implications?

Witnesses: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We are not taking opening statements, so we will start proceedings

and just work down the other members. Minister, you appear before us here as Minister for Gaming, as one of your many ministerial positions, including your role as Attorney-General. As the standing orders outline, as a committee we are able to put questions to ministers relating to public affairs with which the minister is officially connected.

The ministerial code of conduct states that ministers have individual responsibilities relating to their personal decisions and conduct. I have questions relating to public affairs that go directly to your position as a minister in this government and that relate to your decisions and actions over the past few weeks. Minister, given the seriousness of the possibly criminal allegations, your statement today and the internal review, do you think that you and Ms Davidson have conducted yourselves with the level of integrity, diligence and transparency that the Canberra community would expect of a minister in relation to allegations of child sexual abuse or sexual misconduct?

Mr Rattenbury: Well, Dr Paterson, this is not obviously an area we were expecting, but if you want to have this conversation, we will have it. Certainly, the ACT Greens have taken these matters extremely seriously. These allegations were reported to us by our own staff. I welcome the fact that we have a culture in our organisation where staff felt comfortable to come forward and to report these very serious matters to us.

These matters were very general when first reported to us. We felt that the best approach was to try to garner further information. I want to be very clear that we did not seek in any way to dismiss the allegations; we took them very seriously. We sought to balance listening carefully and taking onboard the allegations, whilst also being mindful of procedural fairness for persons who have been accused of matters. We felt it was appropriate to try to just garner a bit more information and understand what reporting obligations we might have. And that is what we sought to do, and we did it quite quickly.

These matters were only raised with me literally a little over a week ago—on last Monday for the first time—and I asked that a review be completed by Friday of last week. That was completed on time, and we used that information that we garnered to work out what reporting obligations we had.

THE CHAIR: Minister, we spent the past three years seeing on the national stage the damage that poor complaint handling processes to allegations of sexual assault can make, and how damaging it is to complainants, and that it leads to very obvious accusations of political coverup. Do you think that this internal review that you conducted—or your staff conducted—meets both workplace and community standards and expectations of appropriate process?

Mr Rattenbury: I do. As I said, we were very clear that we took these matters very seriously. We had no intention of dismissing them in any way. We were able, through the connections that we had, to make contact with the complainant. We did not have that in the first instance. These complaints came to us via other intermediaries. We invited the complainant to speak to our most senior staff member, who has responsibility for HR and related matters, and the complainant agreed to that. A meeting occurred within a few hours of that contact being made. That was last Tuesday.

Subsequent to that, our senior staff member has had ongoing contact with that person, so they have had a channel of communication to us the entire time, and we have been very clear in our willingness to help them seek support and seek contact with organisations that they might find useful to contact, while we also sought to garner further information.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that you or your party's handling of these allegations have compromised police investigations and the safety and wellbeing of alleged victims in this process?

Mr Rattenbury: We do not believe so. At the time the matters were reported to us they were reported as historical matters. They were not conveyed to us as being current or in any way contemporary, so that was the information on which we were operating. Now, it is evident that perhaps you, Dr Paterson, and others have views that we might have done it differently. All I can say is that we have proceeded with absolute commitment to protecting the safety and the wellbeing of the complainants and being mindful of many other people involved in this process who also find it incredibly stressful.

THE CHAIR: We can suspend the session for a minute.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: We will proceed. Minister, the committee deliberated and decided that as you did not raise the line of questioning as problematic at the beginning of the session, it is in line with standing orders, so we will continue. Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Minister—

MS LEE: Sorry, was that finished? I have supplementaries from your questions, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MS LEE: Attorney-General, are you familiar with the child safety code of conduct and policy of the ACT Legislative Assembly?

Mr Rattenbury: In broad terms, yes, Ms Lee.

MS LEE: I refer you to clause 7.4, which talks—

Mr Rattenbury: I do not have that document in front of me, Ms Lee.

MS LEE: I can go through it with you.

Mr Rattenbury: I am going to object to this line of questioning now, because I have come here to talk about annual reports. I have not brought the document you are now discussing. There is no basis for me to bring that document, and I decline to answer questions about a document I cannot possibly have in front of me. If you are going to

refer to specific clauses, that is entirely unreasonable.

MS LEE: I will take you through the document, but given the ruling of the committee, I ask the chair—

THE CHAIR: Ms Lee, given the minister does not have the document, do you have a more general question?

MS LEE: Okay. There is a code of conduct that requires MLAs, if they are concerned about the welfare of a child—possible criminal activity—to report that to the Speaker.

Mr Rattenbury: Okay.

MS LEE: Did you do that?

Mr Rattenbury: We have reported to a range of bodies. We have reported to the Integrity Commission. We have reported to ACT Policing. I will have to take that part on notice; there have been a number of reports. I have not brought notes for this matter, as you can appreciate. This was meant to be a hearing about environmental performance and energy efficiency programs for clubs.

MS LEE: I understand; it was not me that raised it.

Mr Rattenbury: No, but you were happy to join in.

MS LEE: Yes, I am happy to join in. I think this is very important for the public record, do you not? Attorney-General, while you are taking on notice when you reported it to the Speaker, and whether you can answer it now or not, the Speaker herself was reported this morning in the papers to say that she found out about it from the *Canberra Times*. Do you dispute that?

Mr Rattenbury: I have no idea how the Speaker found out about it. I have seen those public reports. I cannot obviously answer for the Speaker.

MS CLAY: Can we just correct the record? This is not a session with the Attorney-General, so please address the minister.

MS LEE: All right.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lee, you have had supplementaries. Are there any further questions from other members?

MR COCKS: I want to just clarify something from that last response. Minister, it sounded like you said that you are not aware of how the Speaker was made aware. Did you not inform the Speaker?

Mr Rattenbury: Not directly, no. Mr Davis has written to the Speaker conveying his resignation.

MR COCKS: Sorry, this is in relation to the concerns about potential criminal

behaviour.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR COCKS: You did not contact the Speaker yourself?

Mr Rattenbury: Not on those matters, no. We have reported to a range of other agencies, which is the answer I was trying to provide Ms Lee.

MR COCKS: This is in relation to you personally. Did you personally report the matter to police?

Mr Rattenbury: No, the senior staff member in our office who had been conducting the internal review to get information to work out what information we had and what reporting obligations we had, made the report to police, because that was the person who had the information. That person had information in greater detail than I had at that point in time, so they were the appropriate person to take that information to ACT Policing.

MS LEE: When?

Mr Rattenbury: They went on Friday morning at approximately 10 am. And to anticipate your next question, the timing of that was because early last week when I asked for that review, I asked for it to be completed by Friday. The staff member completed that work by Friday, as directed, and that was the point at which they drew the conclusion that the nature of the information was such that they needed to go to ACT Policing.

MS LEE: And was that before or after the media article that was published on Friday?

Mr Rattenbury: I believe it was shortly before. What I can tell you, Ms Lee, is that that timetable had been set before the *Canberra Times* had the story. We only found out about the *Canberra Times* story late on Thursday night. A lot of work was already in train by that point in time.

MS LEE: So you were contacted by the *Canberra Times* before the story went live on Friday morning?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, we were.

MR PARTON: Minister, you are genuinely telling me that it was not until you got to the end of that review that there were not enough warning sirens sounding for you to intervene and say, "This must be referred to the police now," whether that be Wednesday or Thursday or Tuesday?

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Parton, what I have said to you is we were trying to gather information. There were a series of rumours and allegations being presented to us. We were trying to establish the veracity of those, and by Friday we felt the information we had was serious enough—still not conclusive, but serious enough—that we should

go to ACT Policing; yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay, your question?

MS CLAY: Minister, how is the clubs energy efficiency fund helping to reduce emissions and cut energy costs for our clubs?

Mr Rattenbury: Thank you, Ms Clay. This program was set up in order to assist ACT clubs to reduce their emissions but also reduce their energy costs. It is sustainability on both fronts, I suppose; it improves their environmental performance and also their financial performance. It is a partnering program. The venues offer a level of financial contribution. I will defer to Ms Wright to provide a little bit of detail on that program.

Ms Wright: Thanks, Minister. The clubs program, as the minister said, is there to support clubs to improve their energy efficiency. We undertake an energy assessment and we look at how they can make some energy efficiency improvements, such as changing their appliances or installing rooftop solar. For small clubs there is a co-contribution where they contribute 50 per cent, and for larger clubs the government contribution is 25 per cent and the clubs contribute 75 per cent. So far we have had 10 clubs completing energy efficiency upgrades; that is nine of the smaller clubs and one large club. We estimate annual energy bill savings of around \$158,000 a year due to those energy efficiency upgrades.

MS CLAY: Are there any clubs that are not participating in the scheme?

Ms Wright: I probably do not have a list of who is not participating, but I have a list of who is participating. I could let you know who is participating. Looking at the clubs that have been completed—and I am trying to look at which ones are this year—we have the Australian Croatian Club, Canberra Racing Club, the RUC, the Tradies at Dickson, Harmonie Germany Club, Raiders Belconnen, the Canberra Services Club, Raiders Gungahlin, Raiders Weston, the Mawson Club, and the Canberra Irish Club.

MS CLAY: Excellent. Are we tracking emissions reduction as a result of this, as well as tracking participation?

Ms Wright: I do not have those figures to hand. I am not sure if Ros has those figures to hand on emissions reduction, to save us taking one on notice. Thank you.

Ms Malouf: I understand the privilege statement. We are tracking reductions on each club and we can provide more detail to the committee. Some of those savings are hard to define; it is behaviour change as well. Clubs, by their nature, are very open areas, and it is hard to insulate and work on the footprint, but this program will definitely be tracking cost savings and emission savings.

MS CLAY: Excellent. Are we reporting those emission savings?

Ms Malouf: We can, once we have got all the projects completed. We will report them through the annual report process.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cocks, have you got a substantive in the last five minutes of this session?

MR COCKS: Given the time, I might pass to Ms Lee.

MS LEE: Thank you, Mr Cocks. Minister, can you confirm when your senior staff member went to the police? What was the bit of information that was received that prompted the reporting to police?

Mr Rattenbury: Thank you, Ms Lee. Let me come back to your earlier question just briefly. You asked whether there had been a report and who we reported to. I now have my full notes on that.

MS LEE: I actually specifically asked whether you reported it to the Speaker.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, I know. What we did is report to the Clerk of the Assembly on Friday morning.

MS LEE: Yes. For your information, the policy—and I know that you do not have it in front of you—does say the Clerk, in the instance of staff, but for MLAs it is to report to the Speaker. That is why I asked whether you reported it to the Speaker.

Mr Rattenbury: Sorry; the question again. I just wanted to finish that other one.

MS LEE: Thank you. We are just trying to get a time frame in terms of the police, because I understand that you have stated publicly a number of times now that the concerns that you had reported to you involved the 17-year-old. When did you first find out that there was a potential relationship with a 15-year-old?

Mr Rattenbury: Broadly, at the same time. There were a series of allegations that were unclear but they were broadly about the same time.

MS LEE: So that is Monday, 6 November?

Mr Rattenbury: I cannot think, off the top of my head, exactly which piece came in at which time, but it was early last week, Monday or Tuesday.

MS LEE: Yes, and it took until Friday morning for that to be reported to the police?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes, because the judgement that we made was that these matters were reported as not being contemporary; they were historical matters. There was no information that there was a current risk to a young person. These were matters that were put to us as having happened several years ago and there was no complainant that we were aware of. I seek to be very careful with my choice of words because I do not wish to denigrate the seriousness of this matter in any way whatsoever, but they sat somewhere between being a very serious allegation and being an unclear rumour, and that is the information we sought to clarify a little bit so that we knew what our reporting obligations would be.

MS LEE: And when did you first approach Mr Davis about the allegations?

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Davis approached me first to tell me that these allegations had been levelled on Monday.

THE CHAIR: Minister, do you find it concerning that Minister Davidson and your chief of staff knew about these allegations a week before you became aware of them?

Mr Rattenbury: Minister Davidson has been very, very clear in her rationale for that. For members' benefit, even though neither party has previously sought to ask me any questions outside of this process, we have released the full copy of the internal review. It outlines these questions in some detail, and I invite you to read them. What Minister Davidson indicated was that when information came to her it was even less developed.

Mr Davis was out of town at the time, and he was for a number of days, on work-related commitments. Again, Minister Davidson sought to get an understanding. I think it is very important to be clear that at no time was anybody standing still. There was a constant effort to better understand the nature of the allegations and what information was available that we might use to form a basis for any reporting that we needed to do.

THE CHAIR: Minister, your internal report says:

We were concerned that if we were to contact him—

Mr Davis—

directly over the phone, he may attempt to contact any alleged victims and remove evidence. If there was to be any future police investigation that evidence would need to remain intact.

That, to me, sounds like the allegations were viewed as very serious.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes; they have always been viewed as very serious.

THE CHAIR: Why did the ACT Greens decide that they were the ones to determine how to progress this, rather than going straight to the police?

Mr Rattenbury: As I have outlined, we were uncertain of the status of the allegations and the level of information that was available. We sought in good faith to understand that better, whilst absolutely respecting the allegations that had been brought to us.

MS LEE: Minister, prior to Mr Davis coming and talking to you on Monday, 6 November about the allegations that had been levelled at him, had you received any reporting from anyone about the conduct of Mr Davis?

Mr Rattenbury: Ms Lee, that is obviously a very broad question. Is there any specific kind of conduct you are—

MS LEE: Of the sexual misconduct variety.

Mr Rattenbury: As I stated publicly earlier today, I was aware of a previous occasion on which Mr Davis had had a relationship with another person in this building. That matter did not raise issues of misconduct per se, but as a party grouping we felt that that was inappropriate, and Mr Davis was counselled against that at the time.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Rattenbury and officials for their attendance. We will now suspend proceedings for 15 minutes.

Hearing suspended from 3.01 to 3.14 pm.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity for the inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. In this session we will continue to hear from Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA, this time in his capacity as water, energy and emissions reduction minister, and officials from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

For officials who have not appeared today, I ask you to acknowledge the privilege statement when you first speak. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. We are not inviting opening statements.

Just to clarify, in the break the committee deliberated and decided that in this session questions will relate entirely to climate change policy, energy policy and energy efficiency programs, sustainability of government services and assets, water efficiency programs and water policy. It was determined by the committee that, for further questions that relate to matters outside of that scope, there will be another session for JACS tomorrow morning, Minister, in your capacity as Attorney-General, that may be a more appropriate forum. That will also allow the minister some time to prepare for potential questions. In this session we will stick closely to those terms. Mr Cocks, do you want to go first, seeing as you did not get a question last session?

MR COCKS: Thank you. Minister, I want to dive into the issue of EV charging, electrification, the gas ban and the grid. I want to start with EV charging. There is a contract entitled “Electric Vehicle Charging Investment Framework”, which asks Evoenergy to look at energy requirements from the grid and the cost of infrastructure and network upgrades to allow for energy planning and efficient and effective choice of charging locations. I would like to understand the timing of this work. I would really like to know why this report was not finalised before changes were made to the Planning Act, which now requires all new apartment buildings to be EV charger ready.

Mr Rattenbury: Certainly. I will ask Ms Wright to go to the detail on that for you, Mr Cocks.

Ms Wright: Thank you for the question. I understand and acknowledge the privilege statement. If I understand the question correctly, you are asking about the contract with Evo to look at electrical capacity?

MR COCKS: Yes. The “Electric Vehicle Charging Investment Framework” is the

contract title.

Ms Wright: The investment framework is not with Evoenergy. The investment framework is a body of work to look at the charging outlook. As you can imagine, in any city, and in a city such as the ACT, there will be a percentage of people that will charge at home and a percentage of people that will need to use public charging infrastructure.

What we are looking at now is: what is the right mix of public-private charging that needs to go forward to support our city as we take up electric vehicles? At the moment, a lot of people do charge at home, and we are investing in government charging facilities, in public charging facilities. So far, this year to date, we have 23 of 50 of the first round of public chargers installed. As we keep looking at the strategic way that we are going to install charging infrastructure, this investment framework will look at what is the correct mix to support the city into the future.

MR COCKS: Has the final or the draft report been completed?

Ms Wright: Kieran has got that.

Mr Lawton: I acknowledge and understand the privilege statement. The investment framework is a piece of work that is underway. A draft report has been provided. The consultant is Common Capital, and we expect to have a final report by the end of this month. I guess we are doing some iterative work here. It is a fast moving space, the charging plan for EVs across Canberra.

This is designed to advise government on the best investment, the best bang for buck, if you like, for government investment in the charging network across Canberra. It will look at things like whether we should be investing in large, very fast charging stations on the highways or in key hubs, versus providing support to multi-unit developments, and car park chargers versus street-side small parking, small AC chargers, that kind of thing. It is to provide guidance on that point.

MR COCKS: In relation to those multi-unit developments that you mentioned, there was a Riotact article from July 2022 that outlined some of the barriers to EV charging in apartment buildings. In that article Alex Boundy, an electrician and property manager, said:

Drawing extra current also adds pressure to a street electricity grid that is already having to contend with gas going offline. For many urban dense areas, such as Kingston Foreshore and parts of Woden, they're already at capacity.

Has this issue been considered through this Evoenergy report or have EPSDD completed any analysis about whether the ACT grid would cope if there was a large uptake in EVs and chargers in apartment buildings?

Mr Rattenbury: These issues have absolutely been at the forefront of decision-making around both electrification of the city and the separate but related question of how to deal with EV charging. Certainly, in the process to make the decision to phase out the gas network and electrify the city, these were considerations

that we looked at very closely. We worked closely with Evoenergy; there are detailed reports that are publicly available that consider these questions.

It is clear that over time there will need to be augmentation of some parts of the grid. We would need that anyway, with population growth. The biggest driver of energy consumption in the city is actually our population growth. Depending on further studies and further work, parts of the grid will need to be augmented. Equally, the use of distributed energy resources—batteries, solar panels and possibly vehicle-to-grid technology—will be a counteracting influence. I think we are living in a time in which the grid is changing a lot, and the ACT is at the forefront of some of these developments.

MR COCKS: How are you going to make and actually manage to get the changes necessary over a decade, which is a relatively short period of time, to support the transition off gas, as well as all of the new electric vehicle purchases? The ACT is clearly leading the way in terms of consumer demand. How are you actually going to make sure the grid can handle all of that?

Mr Rattenbury: The most effective way to do it is to have clear, long-term policy. The government has been—

MR COCKS: It needs to be practical as well.

Mr Rattenbury: The government have been absolutely clear about where we are going. There has been significant research to understand whether that is possible. The biggest threat to that at the moment would be if a new government came in and started unwinding the policies that have been put in place.

MR COCKS: Help me understand. What are the practical steps that actually need to happen? What is the infrastructure that needs to go in?

Mr Rattenbury: There will be a series of infrastructure decisions that need to be taken. Some of them have already been identified and more will continue to be identified. It is an iterative process over two decades.

THE CHAIR: Minister, given the technology changes so rapidly—I do not have an electric vehicle, but I read stuff about Tesla chargers and how they are different to other chargers and things—how will the government work with those advances in technology for what will be implemented in terms of charging infrastructure?

Mr Rattenbury: We are embracing that evolution as it happens. For example, the latest main charging station in the ACT is the six-bay charging station at the Mint. It has almost instantly become the busiest charging point in Australia, partly because we have so many EVs in the ACT, but what is also demonstrated is that consumers like that model because there are six charging points. Range anxiety used to be the big issue with EVs. Access-to-charging anxiety has become perhaps an even bigger issue. With six bays, people feel more confident, so they go to that site more often. I was chatting on the weekend at the NRMA EV drive day with some of the providers. They have really taken a big lesson from that. So what we are seeing is that there is learning going on.

Last week, we had the Norwegian Electric Vehicle Association in town. In Norway, something like 90 per cent of new vehicles being purchased are EVs. It is great to be able to learn from those jurisdictions as well. We are learning from others and we are also making local decisions based on the culture here.

THE CHAIR: I have one more supplementary on EVs. I am not sure whether it was Norway or one of the other Scandinavian countries I read about and how their transition has been really rapid to EVs, but that in itself has solidified cars into their culture. I wonder how we are balancing the need to get people on public transport and active travel as well as electric vehicles. How are we going to do that?

Mr Rattenbury: I think it is really an important point, Dr Paterson. When we think about Canberra, it is obviously a city that, at the moment, relies very heavily on cars. Overall, the government has a number of transport strategies where we are trying to deal with both transport emissions, which currently emit more than 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, and a range of congestion and transport policy issues. Minister Steel, of course, has the primary lead in transport policy, but the government has a clear understanding that there is a range of things we need to do in the transport space. We need to better invest in public transport; we need to electrify the fleet, which produces a reduction in pollution, a reduction in noise, and a whole range of things; and we need to provide better walking and cycling infrastructure as well as micro-mobility. We need all those things together.

At the end of the day, what we need is for people to be able to have a choice and an easy choice to get where they need to go, and not necessarily needing a car to do that. People talk about choice. At the moment, so many Canberrans do not have a choice. You need a car, and I think that is a failing that we need to gradually counteract. It will take time. Your central point that EVs are not the sole answer is absolutely right.

MS CLAY: I have a supplementary. Minister, I sat through three inquiries looking at EV transition and the energy transition. I have been here for 2½ years. It is a pretty thoroughly canvassed area. Minister, a couple of years ago, Evoenergy was coming out with some, I would say, less confident information about how they would manage the transition. In the third inquiry that we ran, they came out with some much more confident predictions about managing that, and a lot of the information they gave us was about managing peaks and troughs. Do you feel that the energy transition has progressed a little bit in the last couple of years?

Mr Rattenbury: What I can say—and Ms Wright will probably add some additional comments—is that I think the partnership between Evoenergy and the ACT government has really advanced. There is a strong working partnership now, there is a series of working groups, and both parties are using the data they have and they are openly sharing the data. There is a formalised MOU around data sharing, and I think that is significantly increasing our understanding. It has really come along in the last three years. That is probably the first part of it.

MS CLAY: Ms Wright, maybe you can run me through this. I think the key learning from some of the inquiries was that, whilst energy demand is sometimes very high, it is sometimes very low, and part of the transition is not necessarily about increasing

how much energy we need but shifting it around. Is that part of that learning?

Ms Wright: Yes; that is very correct. For the energy system, the infrastructure has to be built to manage the peak demands. What you have just said is in terms of levelling off. If we can level off those peaks and bring up the troughs, then we can have smoother use and more efficient use of the infrastructure that we are building. In a lot of the work that we are doing in our modelling we see there are technological improvements such as how we manage on the demand side: how do we change the behaviours where we are using electricity; and how do we influence that through tariffs perhaps or through installing more technology such as battery storage? Electric vehicles themselves are battery storage devices as well. Also, how do we utilise other consumer energy resources through it?

In some aspects, more infrastructure will be required, but in other aspects it is just about changing the way that we are using the existing infrastructure. We continue to work with Evoenergy to make sure that our modelling is well informed and that we are looking at practical aspects as we work through our policy.

THE CHAIR: We might move to a substantive. Minister, the inner north is getting the transition of Sullivans Creek—the renaturalisation of Sullivans Creek. I wrote to you a couple of years ago and asked questions in hearings about the opportunity for Yarralumla Creek to be renaturalised as well. I am wondering if there are any updates or if there is any possibility that Yarralumla could be next in terms of renaturalisation. Also, could I have some idea of the process that Sullivans Creek will go through?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes; certainly.

Mr Burkevics: I acknowledge and agree with the privilege statement. Thanks very much for the question. Obviously there are a lot of waterways across the ACT that the government is very interested in, as we are within the Office of Water, to renaturalise. We certainly know the benefits of renaturalisation. We are seeing some terrific benefits already from those that are underway and completed.

Specifically in relation to Yarralumla, whilst we note many concrete line drains are very suitable for renaturalisation, it goes to the further consideration of priorities and further discussions with the minister as part of potential future resourcing requirements as well. I think it is fair to say there are no immediate plans for Yarralumla, but we would certainly love to see as many concrete line drains renaturalised where it is appropriate. Certainly, the catchment of that area has some specific implications for flooding, if I am not mistaken, and so they would have to, as part of any healthy waterways asset, be considered very carefully in the fine balance between achieving a biodiversity environmental and water outcome versus public safety and flood mitigation.

THE CHAIR: Given that there will be substantial works along that line and along that waterway when light rail is built to Woden, I am wondering if there is any consideration of it being a priority and to conduct those works at the same time or at least to have light rail built in consideration of a renaturalisation process.

Mr Rattenbury: It is an interesting question. Certainly, the government continues to

invest heavily in the Healthy Waterways program. There has been around \$30 million in projects in this term. You have probably heard from questions in the chamber and the like that there has been a real focus on the Tuggeranong catchment, given the state of Lake Tuggeranong, which has been problematic. It is our most problematic water body in the city. In terms of somewhere like Yarralumla Creek, it is an interesting question as to what the link to light rail will be. From my recollection of the area, light right will be quite high up that channel. It would be worth looking at whether there is an efficiency there. We are a few years away from getting that. It is a strategic opportunity we can take on board.

Certainly my imploring to cabinet colleagues will be to continue to invest in this program because it is having a great outcome from a water quality point of view and a biodiversity point of view, and also for the quality of life of people in the suburbs. People really appreciate these assets. They get a lot of recreational benefit from them as well.

THE CHAIR: Just going back to Sullivans Creek, what is the process for that? How long do you expect that renaturalisation process to take?

Mr Burkevics: I would expect an extended period. We are still settling the community consultation phase and design phase. Obviously, the catchment is quite long, heading right up to the northern end and almost Gungahlin. My sense would be to recommend potentially a sequenced approach for government's consideration and for the minister's consideration. It is a wonderful project being such an extensive catchment that feeds directly into Lake Burley Griffin. It is one of the big areas that require further analysis and good design to achieve great outcomes. Of course, it works really well with the Connecting Nature, Connecting People initiative and adopting that really integrated approach to planning.

Further to the minister's remarks about Yarralumla Creek, I can certainly say that the office of nature conservation is engaged with some early designs for light rail, aiming to achieve the best outcomes for the blue-green network that we can and with an ecologically sensitive corridor along the way. I am sure those conversations will continue, particularly in relation to any opportunities for the nearby waterways, particularly if we can have someone else pay for it.

Mr Rattenbury: It is all still the government.

Mr Burkevics: It is. That is right.

Mr Rattenbury: Perhaps I could pick up on the point about community consultation that Mr Burkevics touched on as well. It is actually really important. We have just got a project going in Belconnen where the community had some real concerns about the original design. We had some really good workshops to get that local knowledge. The government was able to take that advice on board, work with the community and reshape the design in a way that is really quite good, and I think we have landed in a place that is delivering the ecological outcome we need and meeting the community expectations. That local knowledge is a very good part of it.

MS CLAY: I have a supplementary on that. Minister, what types of consultations did

you run? What did you learn from running that consultation?

Mr Rattenbury: One of the valuable lessons was that talking in technical terms about these waterways is not the best way to communicate with the community. It seems like an obvious statement, but sometimes things about plans and diagrams can be quite technical. The other part was to be really clear on what the objectives are. We found that people generally agreed with what was trying to be done. That is a good starting point, and from there you can work on the more specifics of the design. Having flexibility is really an important part of it.

You need to start with a design and you need to come up with a concept because, before that, people cannot imagine it at all. Then you have to have the willingness to change the design based on the feedback. In having a quite detailed workshop—and I heard about the community concern, so I went along with the officials—and creating the space for people to share their local knowledge, I think we end up with a really strong partnership. The community is probably much happier than they were at the start. I think they were quite concerned it was locked in, and they also really appreciated the flexibility of being able to change the design.

MR COCKS: I just have a quick question on Sullivans Creek. The annual report refers to commencing work to develop a vision for Sullivans Creek and scoping renaturalisation opportunities. Is this going to deliver a better result than some of the other renaturalised creeks? Wanniasa is one that has been brought up with me.

Mr Rattenbury: What is your concern with Wanniasa, Mr Cocks? I am just not familiar.

MR COCKS: It has been brought up as an example where it has not gone as well as the community would have liked to see.

Mr Rattenbury: Just so that I am clear to answer your question effectively, what is the concern about what did not work?

MR COCKS: I am afraid I do not have the details in front of me.

Mr Rattenbury: Maybe the officials have that feedback.

Mr Burkevics: No. I am not aware of any adverse community feedback in terms of that asset, Mr Cocks. Good design, of course, and good community engagement always leads to good planning, and this has been very clear with us in ensuring that there have been high levels of effective community consultation. We did learn a lot through the Belconnen wetlands. I am not aware of anything on Wanniasa in particular.

MR COCKS: Maybe we can provide some more information on that question on notice.

Mr Rattenbury: Yes; certainly.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay, a substantive?

MS CLAY: Minister, I am interested in the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme. Can you just run me through what activities we have run in the last year, and then I would love to hear how we are tracking emissions reductions from those activities.

Mr Rattenbury: I think Ms Malouf would be delighted to give you the details of that.

Ms Malouf: I would be delighted, thank you. I have read and understood the privilege statement. The Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme has been going for some time now—since 2013, so 10 years. Over 80,000 households and businesses, including 21 priority households, have benefited from the scheme. That has created over \$1.4 million in energy savings to households and businesses. The products, as the available rebates under the scheme, can change each year depending on what the tier 1 retailer decides to focus on. They have a list of approved installs.

One of the installs that has happened is ceiling insulation, which is a new one we added in the last 12 months. There have been 547 of the high efficiency ducted reverse cycle systems installed—this is in 2022-23—and 72 insulation installations. There have been 93 high efficiency electric room heaters. We have had decommissioning of existing space duct work, which has been 545; 701 resistance hot water heaters; and decommissioning and disposal of 610 refrigerators and/or freezers. So there have been 2,578 individual activities. Some of those could have happened where there were two things or three things at one house, depending on what the householders' needs were.

MS CLAY: I am interested; what were the insulation installations? That was a bit lower than I expected.

Ms Malouf: The insulation has only been taken up as an activity in this calendar year—in January this year—so it has taken a little bit of time to get it up to pace and to get the installers trained in the certification insulation training. So that has been 72, probably since June. The second half of the year was when most of those installations happened.

MS CLAY: And is that likely to be a focus for promotions going forward? A lot of commentators rate insulation as one of your best bangs for bucks in terms of emissions reduction and also increasing comfort.

Ms Malouf: Certainly the insulation has been picked up by more people with the minimum standards that are being installed. And it is also being used in some of our own programs in the Vulnerable Household Program, in the government sites as well as the community sites. So the government housing sites as well are having insulation done first.

MS CLAY: Yes.

Ms Malouf: So there will be a bigger number next year.

MS CLAY: How do we decide what things to add into that scheme? How do we target our efforts at things that will reduce the most emissions?

Ms Malouf: It is a market led scheme. There is a list of activities that the retailer can undertake, and that is reviewed over time. As I said, insulation was one that had not been picked up. A lot of that was about training and having a really effective training model. People were a little bit concerned in the past about insulation installation.

MS CLAY: I think we know where you are going, Ms Malouf. I think we are aware of the things that they are scared of.

Ms Malouf: So having really good training and certification processes that are independent of the government has been something we have worked really hard on in the last 12 to 18 months—to make sure that is something that can be delivered safely, both for the householder and for the installer.

MS CLAY: Yes, right; that quality control aspect.

Ms Malouf: Definitely the quality control. We also have an audit program to make sure that installers know that we are going to keep an eye on it to make sure we are getting the product and that it is being done safely.

MS CLAY: Can you run me through what an audit looks like?

Ms Malouf: An audit is making sure that the compliance with the electrical safety requirements under the minimum standard is happening, and that the insulation has been installed in a way that is both safe and effective. There are different ways of doing insulation, and there are certainly ways that are better than others. The training requires that they are installing right to the edges, making sure that there is removal of any downlights that can cause a fire hazard and that the switchboard is up to scratch—that there is no uncertified electrical works that have happened in the past.

MS CLAY: That is great. And are those routine audits or are those sample audits?

Ms Malouf: They are sample audits.

MS CLAY: Yes.

Ms Malouf: They are done under the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme as a requirement, and also under the government program.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR COCKS: I have a question supplementary to that. I have had concerns raised with me around the electrical aspects. Can you tell me what standard wiring is required for properties with this insulation installed? Is it being installed to current standard? Previously houses were required to install, I think, V65—it might be V70—standard wiring, rather than V95, which is current.

Ms Malouf: So the requirement is for current. So if we go into a home that is an older home, and potentially has previously approved wiring, some of that needs to be upgraded. The downlights tend to be the bigger challenge in the insulation, because

putting in insulation over the top of downlights is a fire hazard, so they need to be replaced. There are also requirements, often, to upgrade a switchboard, which would be a safety requirement anyway. It is recognised because of the insulation going in at the time.

MR COCKS: The information that I have been given is that the wiring itself in a house—the quality of the cables’ insulation—changed. It may have been in 1996, but it may have been more recent than that. Before that it required what was called a V70 or V65 standard, which is to do with the amount of temperature that it can withstand. That changed much later. So we are potentially looking at issues with the entire wiring of the house. I am wondering if you are looking at that issue at all. Are you requiring the entire wiring of a house to be upgraded to modern standards?

Ms Malouf: I will have to take that one on notice, just to make sure that we are getting you the exact information, if that is okay.

MR COCKS: Yes, please.

Ms Malouf: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: Chair, if I might just jump in again, Ms Clay asked, as part of her original question, about greenhouse gas measurement. In broad terms, Ms Clay, I can tell you that since 2013, the EEIS, the scheme, has saved over 700,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cocks, do you have a substantive question?

MR COCKS: Thank you. During budget estimates in July, Minister, you told the committee that the ACT had 89 public EV charging stations across 38 different sites. Can you provide an update on how many public chargers are available in the ACT now?

Mr Rattenbury: I can, Mr Cocks. I would be pleased to. I am just looking for my information on that. As at 1 November—just 10 days or so ago—the ACT has approximately 110 public chargers across 48 sites. Some of these stations can charge two cars or more simultaneously, meaning there are actually 136 charging points in total. There are, of course, more coming under the program that has been announced, but we can give you that update perhaps in the next round of hearings. But that is the progress from the last time you asked.

MR COCKS: The Everyday Climate Choices website says that it is anticipated that 53 new public charging stations will be installed in the ACT. So were all 53 chargers that were identified there installed?

Mr Rattenbury: The intention is that all of them will be. What I can say is that the rollout has been a little slower than expected because operators have faced some unexpected challenges finding viable locations. Each site requires negotiation with the land custodian and detailed assessment of available electrical capacity. So there have

been some lessons as we have gone through that, but as of 1 November this year, 23 of that group have now been installed. The rest are still contracted but, as I said, they are a little behind schedule.

We are working very closely with the operators, the installers, to iron out some of those challenges that they have faced. In terms of the next round of contracting, the government will take some lessons from the first round to improve that rollout process.

MR COCKS: Okay. There appear to be two different targets. The government had a target to install 50 new public chargers by mid-2022. And in addition to that, the website—as we were talking about—has a target of 53 publicly available chargers installed in 2022-23. Is there a crossover, an overlap, between those two targets? Are you able to provide a breakdown of when the chargers were installed?

Mr Rattenbury: Let us take that one on notice, I think. It is a fair question of detail but let us make sure we give you an accurate answer and provide that later.

MR COCKS: Okay. But it does seem like things are a little bit behind schedule at the moment.

Mr Rattenbury: Certainly, compared to what we had initially anticipated. But what I am pleased about is that now having the 110 chargers across the ACT we have certainly got a lot more coverage than we had even just 12 or 18 months ago.

MR COCKS: Yes.

Mr Rattenbury: We have really accelerated quite quickly.

MR COCKS: I appreciate that, but given the announcement that the ACT government will deliver 180 by 2025, and that the number seems to have only moved by 39 in one year, are you going to be able to deliver that full number?

Mr Rattenbury: We have a reasonably high level of confidence that we can. I think, as was touched on, with the lessons that have been learned and the new approaches to rolling them out, I think the operators are also getting better at it. I mean that in the politest possible way. It is a new technology, and I am quite confident that the rate of installation is accelerating, and that that target can be met.

MR COCKS: And just going back to the question on notice, could you also provide for each year since August 2020 how many public EV chargers have been installed by the government.

Mr Rattenbury: Do you want a cumulative total, or do you want a number for each year?

MR COCKS: I am comfortable with a number for each year.

Mr Rattenbury: Sure; we can do that.

THE CHAIR: Minister, my question is in relation to the Climate Change Council.

That is identified as a strategic indicator 4.3. I am just wondering if you can outline some of the council's work and the value of their work, I guess.

Mr Rattenbury: The Climate Change Council plays an incredibly important role in the ACT. It has some really excellent experts in their field. The chair Mark Howden, of course, is internationally recognised for his climate change knowledge, and a range of the other members have areas of expertise in transport, energy efficiency, and health-related impacts of climate. So it is quite a diverse group.

Historically, their role has been very important. The advice they have provided to government has been centrally used to determine the legislated climate change targets we have here in the ACT. I think that is an example of the level of impact. The current Climate Change Council has continued to provide government advice on specific questions. They have run a number of briefings for the climate change sub-committee of cabinet, providing direct advice to the ministers working on the relevant projects. They have a strong and developing program of policy engagement. The council sees that many people feel they do not have the knowledge they would like to have about climate change issues, and so they have also decided to really take on areas of public engagement. I think those different bits of work overall add up to quite a good influence in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: One of the terms of reference is about identifying risks and that type of thing. Are there any new challenges on the horizon that they are identifying that the ACT should be preparing for or considering?

Mr Rattenbury: I certainly think climate adaptation is on their agenda. As we are seeing climate change starting to have real and material impacts, adaptation is on their agenda. They have made some very constructive contributions to the electrification agenda for the city. One of the members, who happens to have expertise in an entirely different area, lives in a large-scale multi-unit development, and has been very valuable in bringing his personal experience to the table, because he is quite heavily involved with his body corporate. That is an area of work where we have a lot of questions still to resolve. So they are probably two thoughts. The other is at a more macro level. They are thinking about issues of overall emissions budgets and using that to contemplate whether the ACT needs to reconsider its emission reduction targets.

MS CLAY: Minister, I was interested to see a tender published earlier in the year—"Green gas alternatives for the ACT's commercial and industrial sector". Can you talk me through what that tender is about?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes. I will tell you where it broadly fits in, and I will have one of the officials give you a bit more of the detailed of the piece of work. As part of the government's decision to electrify the city, one of the policy decisions in that space was that there may still be a niche application for gas in the ACT. Particularly in commercial and industrial practices, there are some specialised areas where gas is the key way people do things and there are not considered to be viable electrical alternatives at the moment. That is the context.

If we are to be in a situation where there will continue to be niche users of gas, the

intent is to examine whether we can use green gasses for that purpose so that we end up with a zero emissions use of gas as opposed to a traditional methane gas that would be currently used in the processes. Would one of my colleagues like to add anything to that?

Ms De Hosson: I will provide a bit of an update on where that work is up to. Throughout the consultation period that we led on the integrated energy plan, we surveyed a range of businesses here in Canberra to understand their gas use and also whether they are aware of alternatives for that gas use now but also some of the concerns they might have in terms of changing appliances or switching that use to electrification, to understand just how much we are able to electrify now with technologies that are available and where there may not be those alternatives—so feeding into that broader question of: what is the role for green gas in the territory?

What we have found is that, for most uses in the territory, we can electrify, and there are only a few sort of commercial uses, mostly that relate to high temperature heat, that we will not be able to electrify with technologies currently available. For us, that information, in terms of feeding into that longer plan for the territory, is a really useful starting point for us to understand what those uses are. They are things like crematoriums and glassworks, where we really do have a need for high-temperature heat. We are just starting to finalise that work and look at the results of that to feed into the longer-term plan.

MS CLAY: Yes, crematorium and glassworks are certainly two of the tricky ones. I was interested recently to learn that we have electric kilns now in Canberra, which made me quite happy. I have heard concerns from people in commercial laundries. Are you doing a routine survey of all businesses? You get these funny applications that you have never really thought through, and the people who are running those businesses do not always have time to go out and see if there is an electrical version of it. How have you managed to cover all the businesses that you need to look at?

Ms De Hosson: We have gone out to as many businesses as we can. The number escapes me right now, but the businesses that have contributed have given their views on what they know now. The consultants that we have working are also giving us some advice on what uses we think are able to be electrified. So we are both looking at that input from businesses but also getting expert advice on possibilities for electrification and where we might need to allow for use of green gas in the future.

MS CLAY: If somebody who is currently using fossil fuel methane gas had an application that needed a green gas, would they need different appliances anyway? Would that be a like-for-like; they can just plug in the green gas, or would they actually need to change their fittings and change their appliances all round?

Ms De Hosson: It depends on the appliance. Many appliances will need to be changed, particularly for some of those larger uses. It does depend on the appliance. For most, there will need to be some investment to enable a change to green gas or electrification.

MS CLAY: When does this piece of work finish?

Ms De Hosson: We are in the process of finalising it now, and it should be done by the end of the month.

MS CLAY: Great; thank you.

MR COCKS: I have a quick supplementary on that one. Previously we have spoken about Whitlam as the first area that has come off gas, and I have raised questions around the proportion of households that are still installing LPG as an alternative. Anecdotally, I am hearing that it is a significant number of households out there. Does the government have any information on how many households are choosing to install LPG as well?

Mr Rattenbury: I do not think we do have any. Not to want to flick-pass the question but, if you are also seeing the Suburban Land Agency, you might also ask them that question. Certainly from the data, we have heard similar reports from Ginninderry, which is of course also gas-free, but the numbers have been, from my recollection, in the tens in the development of Ginninderry. We are certainly aware that it is happening but not on a significant scale. I am not disputing the point you were making about Whitlam but I do not have any data for Whitlam.

MR COCKS: That is fine. I am interested to find out any data that there is.

Ms De Hosson: I think that is right but we are very aware of it and thinking through what those implications may be as the territory electrifies.

Mr Rattenbury: I think perhaps there is a cultural issue, Mr Cocks. I think people are used to gas and for, a long time, people in Canberra were really encouraged to get on to the gas network. There is a certain amount of community uncertainty where people say, “Well, the government told us to get on gas and now you are telling us to get off gas”—and I understand that community sentiment. That is why we are putting a lot of effort into really trying to explain to people why and to provide plenty of information—things like the Choice tool that we partnered with Choice to create an electrification tool—and there is also the time line, so that people have sufficient time to understand the transition that is coming.

MR COCKS: I am very keen to look at the issue of multiple contracts to look at EV chargers. Minister, the 2030 Electric Vehicle Charging Outlook for public zero-emission vehicle chargers in the ACT contract, which was completed in August 2021, asked the contractor to describe the demand for charging in the ACT. A new contract, which commenced on 25 August, is asking a different company to re-examine the demand for charging, with almost identical requirements. Can you explain why the demand for EV chargers had to be re-examined, given that a nearly \$200,000 contract was provided almost two years ago? Is the fact that you have asked a different company to look into the same issue an admission that the target of 180 chargers by 2025 is not enough to meet demand in the ACT?

Mr Lawton: I am happy to take that question. Yes, that is true. The outcome of the first consultancy was published as the plan. Like I said in my answer to your first question, it is a relatively fast-moving space, and we thought it was worth looking again. For example, we have had a stronger uptake of zero-emission vehicle purchases

in the ACT than we thought. There have also been changes in, I guess, very-fast chargers. It is a changing landscape, would be the short answer to that question. I would not be surprised if we were doing this again with vehicle-to-grid charging in mind in two years time. It is an appropriate thing to do.

MR COCKS: Is there a reason that you are going out to contract on this sort of analysis, rather than having the public service update the existing analysis with new information?

Mr Lawton: It is a good question. We do have a lot of talent within the public service. The contractors we are working—I think I made a mistake in the earlier one: it is not Common Capital for this; it is a West Australian company, and I will get the name in a second—are doing some pretty sophisticated modelling of what type of charging and where related to car park use, transitway use and energy supply. It is a very specialised area. It is what they do. This is a specialist consultancy that we are having done now, and obviously the public servants at EPSDD are working very closely and meeting with those consultants every week.

MR COCKS: Is this a different type of modelling to what was undertaken previously?

Mr Lawton: Yes, it is much more data driven, I would say. The company name is Evenergi—and so I retract the Common Capital; that is another consultancy. I would say it is more data driven than the original one that we did.

MR COCKS: My concern, I guess, is that a quick count on the ACT contracts website shows at least five contracts worth around \$659,486—that is very specific for “around”, I understand—have been put out for tender to inform policy and spending on EV charging. That is more than what is allocated in the 2023-24 budget to actually install public EV chargers. Could you confirm how many contracts the ACT government has entered into that look at the ACT’s EV charging infrastructure, and the total cost of all of those contracts?

Ms Wright: I think we will take that on notice to make sure that we answer it in completeness. But the two that you have talked about are the two that have happened in recent times that informed our policy. Just to add to Mr Lawton’s response, the first outlook was looking at public charging predominantly. This latest requirement is a lot more nuanced and it is a lot more data driven. We are looking now not just at public charging but also behaviours for charging at home, what the emerging technologies are such as vehicle-to-grid and what the best investment is for government in this space and what is going to be market driven.

MR COCKS: Thank you for taking that on notice. Along with that, could you also, when you come back, tell me how much the government has actually spent on installing EV chargers?

Ms Wright: Yes, we can.

Mr Rattenbury: Just on that, Mr Cocks, I would add for some context—and, again, it is a fair question and we will get you that information—that the reports are also

guiding and informing the private investment that is going on as well. When we did the mapping for the original contract that we talked about, it showed where charging was going to be needed. The private capital is also looking at that work. So it is not solely about the government charging, just to put some context on it.

MR COCKS: Just to confirm: it is all going to be fully publicly available?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR COCKS: The most recent contract asks Everengi to look at the types of chargers needed around the city. How does the ACT's current charging infrastructure compare in terms of efficiency with what else is available? Are our chargers more, less or equally efficient to others available?

Mr Rattenbury: I have not heard that framing around efficiency of chargers before; so I am not quite sure what the question is. Do you mean the speed of them?

MR COCKS: Yes, the speeds—the amount of time people are going to be waiting.

Mr Rattenbury: Got you.

Ms Wright: In terms of the total public charging network, which includes the government charging, we have predominantly AC charging, which is slower, but it is a type of charging that you would use while you are going to do your shopping or using a facility. There are 106 AC charging bays and we have 30 DC charging bays, which are the faster charging. With the second round of EV charging that we are running we will be looking to focus on DC charging bays, being the faster charging. Of course this study that we will be receiving soon will tell us what is the best appropriate mix of those we should be looking to in the future.

MR COCKS: Are there any comparisons of energy losses between different technologies for either?

Mr Rattenbury: We will take that on notice and see if we can provide you with any insights.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, I would love to get an update on how we are going with our energy efficiency and our electrification improvements in ACT public housing. Are you able to provide me with details on that?

Mr Rattenbury: Ms Malouf will provide you with substantial detail on that.

Ms Malouf: Part of the Vulnerable Households Energy Support Scheme was to deliver insulation and electrification where possible for public housing properties. We have done a phase 1 on a smaller scale, went out to market and got an installer that could do both insulation and, where possible, electrification. We are working with Housing ACT to make sure that we deliver something that is useful for the householder. We also want to make sure that we target our houses that are least

efficient and are likely to stay in the stock for a significant period of time, so the investment is well worth it.

So far, 164 Housing ACT properties have received an insulation upgrade. Part of that process is for property condition assessments reports to be done for each household by Housing ACT, which provides us the information to go to the contractor and let them know exactly what is in the house and how much insulation is there, if any. That was the number done at 8 September this year. The first \$1 million has been expended and the second \$1 million will be expended. I will get you the number of products that we have actually installed.

The focus was to deliver those upgrades to the housing properties where it was not a new heater or cooktop that had been replaced. So we are trying to get rid of the oldest gas appliances first. At this stage, we have had 113 energy efficiency appliances installed across those houses. The goal is to actually have all the gas products removed from a house in one go, so we have fewer visits back to the house, and the householder can then completely disconnect from the gas mains and potentially have a \$350 saving a year off their connection fee.

MS CLAY: I imagine doing it house by house is both cheaper for the government and less disruptive for the tenants.

Ms Malouf: Yes, that is correct. We have also had some really good feedback from tenants. A lot of them were done over the winter period, and they have really noticed immediately how successful it has been, especially the insulation. So that building envelope has really worked. We also couple that program with our low energy householder program, where we come in and potentially put in curtains and/or do behaviour change so that people know how to use the new appliances but also how to use them effectively—heating in the room you are in; not heating the whole house and the like—to further reduce energy bills.

MS CLAY: How many houses are still waiting to have insulation or electricity upgrades?

Ms Malouf: There are between 5,000 and 6,000 that will need insulation upgrades. That next piece of work has gone out to tender. Approximately \$30 million that has gone out to tender, and that tender is being assessed at the moment. We expect that new tender to start in about January.

MS CLAY: What are the next steps? Is it just going to focus on insulation and electrical upgrades, or is there another phase of the program that might come in?

Ms Malouf: That will be insulation and electrical upgrades. That is a big piece of work to be done over a very short amount of time. We need to have all the insulation completed to meet our own minimum standard regulation by November 2026. So there is a lot of work in that space to be done.

MS CLAY: Yes, there is a lot to do. I imagine people are saving quite a lot on their bills as well as—

Ms Malouf: We are doing some surveys at the moment to try to understand what that is, and we will certainly be reporting that through our annual report when we have more of that data through. Correct.

MR COCKS: I am going to go to the question of increasing emissions across government directorates. Minister, you have talked about the ACT government leading by example when it comes to reducing emissions through electrification and transitioning off gas and petrol vehicles. For the 2022-23 financial year, the total emissions of a number of major directorates, including Education and the Community Services Directorate, exceeded the previous financial year's total emissions by around 18 per cent. Natural gas in the Education Directorate increased by five per cent compared to pre-COVID levels and the amount of fuel used for diesel vehicles increased from 11.15 to 14.6 kilolitres. How can you continue to stand by policies to cut off gas and ban diesel cars while the directorates at the same time are increasing their gas and fuel consumption?

Mr Rattenbury: Mr Cocks, I would have to take some advice on the specifics of those agencies. I am afraid I cannot analyse their usage straight off the top of my head here. But I think your point that is central there is that we need to continue to work with those directorates to cut their emissions. It is not the direction we want to go in to see those increases. Those increases may be seasonal. For example, we do have warmer and colder winters, and so you can see gas use fluctuate from year to year. I am not saying that is exactly the answer here, but those have been historical issues for us. With growth of the community, there will be more ACT government vehicles on the roads. So they will be some of the pressure points on vehicle emissions.

But our central point is we need to turn these things around. For example, the last three new schools that have been built in the ACT have been all-electric schools. They will never have an emissions problem. But we have got a legacy issue with our older schools. They are the challenges we have to work through.

MR COCKS: At the same time, 18 per cent is not a small margin to increase by.

Mr Rattenbury: No. It depends on the baseline, probably.

MR COCKS: Sorry?

Mr Rattenbury: It would also depend on the baseline.

MR COCKS: The pre-COVID period. Can you understand why there is community concern that the community is being asked to meet a standard when the government is not managing to meet that standard?

Mr Rattenbury: We are all being asked to meet a standard, and I expect the government to meet that standard, just as the community does. There is significant work being done across the government to make that transition. We have also in this year's budget funded a program to electrify government assets. That is a \$70 million to \$80 million program over the forward estimates that is not only about reducing the government's own emissions but also about building the capability in our city so that private citizens and private buildings can also access that expertise. I think the

government is putting its money where its mouth is by making these investments. I think the pathway to cutting emissions will not always be linear—and you have picked a couple of examples—but the commitment is absolutely there.

MR COCKS: You have just mentioned funding allocated to electrify government assets and transition off gas. Did you say \$70 million to \$80 million?

Mr Rattenbury: Yes.

MR COCKS: Do you have a precise figure?

Mr Rattenbury: I can get a precise figure.

Mr Piani: As Minister Rattenbury referenced, this year's budget had around \$70 million allocated for a couple of the works to electrify—

MR COCKS: Around \$70 million?

Mr Piani: I do not have the number in front of me, but \$69.—

MR COCKS: So \$69 million and something?

Mr Piani: That is works to support directorates remove their gas assets—for example, gas boilers for heating, hot water or air conditioning. We just started working through that program. The capital injection is \$69.36 million—to put that on the record.

Mr Rattenbury: That is the capital injection. There are also expense injections, which we will need to add to that total.

MR COCKS: Can you tell me how much was actually spent, as well as what was allocated?

Mr Piani: It has just been allocated for this financial year, and so we are just in the process of spending it. This year we have got \$9.36 million allocated to capital works.

MR COCKS: Was there any money spent in 2022-23 on electrifying government assets?

Mr Rattenbury: Not under this specific program, Mr Cocks. This is a new program that is being set up. There will have been works in the previous years, and I think that is where Ms Wright is going to help me out.

Ms Wright: Yes. I do not have the figures, but for many years each directorate has been responsible for their own ongoing maintenance upkeep of their assets. This program that Mr Piani was starting to talk about was seeking to look at the most efficient way to bring together the replacement of those, looking at government as an entire fleet. Certainly, over the last few years there would have been money expended on replacing government gas assets with electric assets. We have also had, for quite a few years, a zero emissions government fund, which is a repayable loan fund for directorates, as well as a social cost of carbon fund.

MR COCKS: In developing this new program, it sounds like there has not been some analysis of the total spend over previous years.

Ms Wright: That would have occurred as part of the development of this program.

MR COCKS: It is not a number that you can give us?

Ms Wright: I do not have that number today. We can take that on notice.

MR COCKS: Thank you; that would be good. Perhaps someone can tell me how many ACT government assets still rely on gas, and how far we are through the process of electrifying ACT government assets.

Mr Piani: I can answer the first question. I would say approximately 160 sites are on our program. We have a long list of ACT government sites that we are working through, as the start of this program, to analyse and solidify the data we have on each site and the gas assets they have. It is around 160 sites.

Within those 160 sites, at the moment we have estimated that there are over 1,000 individual assets—a gas boiler, a gas heater or a gas radiant heater. Again, we are working through that program. It is a 17-year program, going out to 2040. Our job at the moment is to stand up the program while delivering some capital works, and to learn from them. That will inform the delivery of the capital works program over the longer term.

MR COCKS: Will there be money attached to maintaining those assets as well, or will that be separate?

Mr Piani: Yes, that is directorate-led expenditure. Our role in this is to centralise the delivery. From a perspective of delivery, it makes sense to centralise and, with lessons learnt, get those across all of the directorates and centralise how we undertake activity. Once we have completed the works, it becomes the asset of the directorate, and they are responsible for its ongoing maintenance. In that respect, we have started a process of engaging very closely with those directorates. They will want to have a say in the type of assets that are being replaced, what we are putting in there and what the asset management requirements are.

MR COCKS: The reason I ask is that, in a 17-year program, by the time you get to the end of it, some of those assets will probably need to be replaced.

Mr Rattenbury: Potentially, yes.

MS CLAY: Some of the assets include the old boiler at my old primary school.

Mr Piani: Potentially.

MS CLAY: It might be the same age as me, so it probably needs to be replaced. Have you come across any technical barriers when you are going through these government assets? Apart from operationally, where you have to get out and do it, and work out

which bits to do first—maybe the really old boiler—are there any technical problems? Is there anything that cannot be switched over?

Mr Piani: Not at the moment. There will be technical issues that we need to resolve from an engineering perspective. That is another advantage of centralising the program. We get those lessons learnt, and we can apply them to all of the sites rather than have six or seven directorates try to do this themselves.

There will be technical issues. There will be engineering solutions and other complexities that we will have to work through. We are in the early stages. I am not aware of any project we have come across where we have said, “There’s nothing we can do about this one.” We expect that we should be able to move through it.

MS CLAY: There is not a government building, a school or anything like that, so far that means we say, “We absolutely have to have gas for this particular activity and there is no other solution so far”? You are able to replace what you need to replace?

Mr Piani: So far. I will say that, with 160 assets over 17 years, I can look at the schools and at what we might call run-of-the-mill assets where we think we can certainly have a solution. They are probably solutions that we are all very familiar with—heat pumps and reverse-cycle air-conditioning, and technology that is readily available. It is improving every year, so it is really exciting, from a technology point of view, to see what comes out there.

I expect fundamentally steady improvement in the state of the technology over those 17 years. They will get more efficient at reducing more power, they will take up less space and they will make less noise. All of the things that we are dealing with will improve.

There are larger government gas assets into which we have not yet put the technical detail. I think we have referenced some of those, like crematoria. They are not on our program for engineering analysis at this stage. Certainly, they may be something that we get to in the longer term. We work with EPSDD and others on those technology solutions, which we are already starting to think about.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you tell me how many Healthy Waterways projects you have rolled out in the last year? I am interested in how many new sites we have had coming online.

Mr Rattenbury: Certainly. I might throw to Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: I will ask my colleague Dr Ogden to join me. Thanks, Ms Clay, for the question on our Healthy Waterways assets. A number of Healthy Waterways assets are on their way. With many of them, I suppose it depends on the physical construction versus the planning and approvals process. All of them, of course, happen concurrently. I will ask Dr Ogden to talk to his work.

Dr Ogden: Thank you. I have read and understood the privilege statement. So far in this stage of work, we have put together six projects; four are built and two are under construction. There are another two or three to go. It will depend on how much the

ones that are underway cost. There are two very expensive ones. The Calwell drain is worth around \$3½ million and the Belconnen wetland, which you would be interested in—

MS CLAY: I am.

Dr Ogden: is worth around \$4 million. There is a construction contingency in that. Depending on how much of that gets released, we might be able to build another two assets or another three smaller assets.

MS CLAY: I am very interested in both. How many of these do you think you can roll out in a year, given that Healthy Waterways has gone from an early stage to something that now everybody wants in their area? How many of these can we bring online, realistically, in a year?

Dr Ogden: It is fairly easy to conceive of a wetland and roll it out to the stage of getting approvals. The challenge comes if you are looking at innovations, which we looked at, because we are trying to expand our toolkit of options for managing water quality. That is harder. The approvals take longer. The engineers in TCCS need to look at that more carefully and ask themselves, “Is this going to work? Is it going to be able to be maintained?” So it takes longer. If you have that expanded toolkit and you want to continue to roll it out, I think that the approvals will be relatively quick and you could implement as many as you could afford.

Mr Rattenbury: One of the advantages, Ms Clay, is that we have had this program rolling out for a number of years. There are a group of partner contractors who have developed their expertise. Again there is an efficiency and a momentum in that; we now have a pool of people who work with us who have learnt some of the lessons. I was at a site visit with one of them recently, and they were saying, “From the last project we’ve done, we’re now doing this project because we learnt there’s a better way to do it.” That is certainly helping in terms of being able to do more projects and do them more quickly. As Dr Ogden concluded, to a large extent it is a function of money. The more we put in, the more we can do.

MS CLAY: Given that they are great for water quality and wildlife, but they are also really important for recreation, are there any areas of Canberra that you think are missing out that might be the next area that you need to move into?

Mr Burkevics: That is a very good question. We would rely on the community to tell us and guide us in that. From our perspective, of course, our focus is on the areas that require the best water quality treatment to support areas. As the minister has described, Tuggeranong is one of the key areas. Of course, there is a lot of preventive work that may be needed at Lake Ginninderra, because we would not want to see the water quality in that location deteriorate.

It all depends on feedback from the community and what the priorities are. Based on the new contract that has been put in place for water quality monitoring across the ACT, it is about what that tells us over time in terms of the data and modelling that are done, when we need to further consider water quality treatments, and work with the community to achieve not only water quality objectives but also biodiversity,

amenity and recreation., Certainly, our consultation with the community in Belconnen informed us that the community want these resources and assets to do a lot, which is great.

Dr Ogden: We are creating Healthy Waterways plans to try and prioritise where infrastructure and other activities go on in the Lake Tuggeranong, Lake Burley Griffin, Lake Ginninderra and Yerrabi Pond catchments. Yarralumla is not in that area at the moment, but that is an area in which we get community interest. That would be next on the list in terms of planning. There are areas that are outside our scope at the moment, but there are plans, and we are trying to prioritise where these assets go.

MS CLAY: If a community want to have a wetland or a rain garden in their area, what is the best way for them to make that happen?

Mr Burkevics: There are contact details on the website.

Dr Ogden: Yes.

Mr Burkevics: Dr Ogden has made himself very available to the community to have one-on-one conversations. There is a website address and an email address that are monitored readily by the team. We would welcome further interest.

MR COCKS: I have a question about Yarralumla. Certainly, members of the community there have been campaigning for a very long time to get a wetland in Yarralumla. They are very disappointed by the lack of progress, despite a series of what they feel were promises. Is there any further progress on building that and getting something done?

Dr Ogden: We did look at the Yarralumla catchment, the part that actually drains into Lake Burley Griffin. It was not a good catchment when it came to looking at innovations. It is a good catchment for looking at regular designs. Part of this program is about trying to expand our toolkit of options for water-sensitive urban design infrastructure. That is the reason we did not at this stage build in that catchment. There is plenty of opportunity to build in all of the brownfield catchments.

MR COCKS: It sounds like that has prioritised innovation over proven methods.

Mr Rattenbury: The key priority has been probably the water quality of the catchment. That is why there has been such a strong emphasis on the Lake Tuggeranong catchment, and it all stayed at Lake Tuggeranong. If we think about prioritisation factors, number one has been water quality.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Minister Rattenbury and officials for your time. If you have taken questions on notice, please provide them to the committee secretariat within five working days.

Gentleman, Mr Mick, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Burkevics, Mr Bren, Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Water

Alegria, Mr Stephen, Executive Branch Manager, ACT Parks and Conservation Service

THE CHAIR: In this session of the public hearings of the environment, climate change and biodiversity committee inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23, we will hear from the Minister for Planning and Land Management. I welcome Mr Mick Gentleman MLA and officials from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly. When you first speak, could you confirm for the record that you understand the implications and agree to those implications of the privilege statement?

We are not taking opening statements. I think this is the first public hearing at which you are appearing before our committee, so welcome. My first question this afternoon is about how La Nina affected the program of works for parks over the last year or so.

Mr Gentleman: Thanks very much. I understand the privilege statement. It really is a change from what we have seen over the last couple of years. There has been heavy rainfall in the park, and that has hampered some of our works in regard to fire trails and that sort of thing. It has changed the landscape of the park a little bit as well, so that we know there is more moisture content in the grass and soils around Namadgi National Park, and particularly to the west of Canberra, too. We are keeping an eye on that for the bushfire season that is coming up.

The prediction from the BOM presented to us at the AFAC conference and the ministers conference was that we will see a very hot, dry season this summer with less rainfall than we have had in previous years, which means that we need to be better prepared for bushfire season. The parks team are doing a fantastic job in preparing for that. They have been doing a lot of work, particularly in regard to our fire trails; 270 kilometres of work has been done on the fire trails. We now have accessibility up to those internal areas that we were concerned about earlier.

THE CHAIR: Will work be continuing over the summer? Is this ongoing work?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, it certainly will. Now that it is a little drier, there is more opportunity to get up into the park and do those remediation works that we need to do. There have been a lot of fuel load reduction and fuel load reduction burns. You would have seen on the weekend we had some burns that were well achieved, and our BOP is getting there as well.

THE CHAIR: You spoke of the conference that you went to, or the meeting that you had. Are there climate predictions for the next few years that you take into account in planning for the trails, back-burning and that type of thing?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, that is right. At the AFAC conference, there was a presentation. Also, at the most recent national emergency ministers meeting, there was a presentation from the BOM that this season will be hotter and drier, but the next season after that will be even worse. We are planning for that change. The team have been out reducing those fuel loads where we can, with thousands of kilometres or hectares of slashing and strategic grazing, as well as the work on the roads.

MR COCKS: Minister, looking at 2022-23, EPSDD did not achieve its target for bushfire operations plan works. The Parks and Conservation Service delivered only nine out of 14 planned fuel reduction burns. How does that significantly lower level impact the level of fire danger, coming into a hot, dry season?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, it is an important question. Of course, with so much rain having occurred in the park, it was not easy to get up there. You cannot do reduction burns when the weather is unsafe, or the predictions are that it is unsafe for people go up there. We have had to do some other work, and that is where we have come in with the strategic slashing and grazing to remove the fuel loads there. That will continue all through the season.

MR COCKS: The annual report also states that the majority of incomplete works were associated with incomplete road maintenance and repairs. Have those repairs been completed now?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, I understand that most of those roads are now navigable, and you can go up into the park, where we were concerned about not being able to get up into the wilderness area. On top of that, we are doing roadworks that are much more permanent. We could have simply graded over and repaired the roads. Whilst some of that can be done in an emergency, we are using the commonwealth-funded money over the next 12 months to do longstanding repairs—much better separation for erosion, and making sure that we can have the roads in a strong position into the future.

MR COCKS: Are there any other damaged or dysfunctional roads, beyond those that were identified, that might inhibit the ability of firefighters to control bushfires in coming seasons?

Mr Gentleman: There are a number of roads in the pine forestry areas—Pierces, Murrays Corner and areas like that—where the roads have eroded. Parks are telling me that it is not at front of their mind to do immediate repairs to those roads. They are not the accessible roads that they would use for firefighting. ESA is quite comfortable with the level of preparedness for this year and next year.

MS CLAY: Minister, I know we do cultural burns. We also do cool burns, which I understand are similar but there is no cultural element to those. I have heard mixed feedback over the years. I think a few years ago the people who knew the land wanted

a lot more of those. We seem to be doing more of those now. I recently heard some very good feedback on a patch of orchids that had been marked out for PCS. The burn was done exactly around the circle. They do not always do that. I think it has been mixed in the past, when there are things that are ecologically precious that you do not want to burn around. Is our knowledge getting better? Have we been using more of these cooler cultural burns over the last three years?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, we certainly have. They are more successful as well. I will ask our fantastic parks people to give you the details.

Mr Alegria: I acknowledge the privilege statement. As the minister said, our level of knowledge about what ecosystems need to thrive is really increasing. I think part of that is in the cultural burning space, yes, but also in our ecological space. We have the office of nature conservation, who have got really well qualified fire ecologists. We have embedded those sorts of schemes into our teams directly so that they perform a values officer role. Their only function is to help us plan and implement these ecological burns. They have that ecological perspective.

The important thing about that is that they are there on the ground. They are actually observing and guiding the incident management team, to make sure that the purpose of the burn is fulfilled. They are also involved in the monitoring. A huge amount of monitoring goes on for these types of burns, to measure the impacts and to try to work out: is this the best way to do it, and what else could we do?

I think that ecological understanding is really at the forefront. Going forward, we are really keen to try and embed the ecological risks into the way we do our burning. At the moment we are really focused on measuring the risk to life and property. We want to be able to add in environmental values and measure how much we are reducing the risk. That is a piece of work that we are hoping to roll out in the next few years.

MS CLAY: Yes. Are we finding that those ecological burns are also doing a good job of reducing risk? They are also for reducing risk in housing.

Mr Alegria: I guess they are primarily an ecological burn, a cultural burn. They might have some value as a risk reduction, but primarily it is about ecological or cultural practice.

MS CLAY: Yes.

Mr Alegria: That is generally where we see the slight difference. We are still burning, yes, but not primarily for risk management.

MS CLAY: Thanks. Minister, we discussed in the last sittings that the overall environment conservation budget has increased, which is good to see, but some elements of that budget have dropped. One of the elements that dropped was for urban rangers. It took us a while to pick through the detail in our office because people on the ground were telling us this but we could not work it out from the budget papers. It went from \$1.34 million in 2018-19 to \$1.28 million last year for the PCS rangers who look after our urban areas.

I am interested in how you are going about preparing budget bids for the future, knowing that we have a changing climate and we need more urban rangers on the ground. We need more in La Niña because we have more weeds management, and we are going to need more in El Niño because we have more fire risk. How do you prepare your budget bids in such a way to make sure that you are incorporating that increasing need that is coming through from climate change?

Mr Gentleman: I think we are well informed when it comes to what we need for the future to address those concerns. We prepare the bid in advance for that. It is up to budget cabinet to make the decision on how much funding occurs out of those particular bids.

In relation to your comments earlier on about the funding amount, I understand that we still have the same number of rangers in place. There are some programs that do not continue across budget years. You see that reflected in the budget papers as well. I am very pleased with the work that we have been able to achieve so far. But, as you say, there is a lot more to do and a hotter, dryer climate is going to provide more challenges. We will use the evidence and advice that we have, with our teams, to bring forward those budget bids.

Mr Burkevics: I acknowledge and agree to the privilege statement. Further to the minister's and Mr Alegria's remarks, one of the nuances of budgeting is that the funding could be for things outside of PCS that still form part of the entire environment, heritage and water budget portfolio. This financial year we have seen boosted resources allocated by the government for weed control, with an additional two positions there for further invasives work. Minister Vassarotti might have more to say about that. Certainly, there has been a boost from government, in this budget, for tackling invasives and for other pressures that the environment is facing. They are funded outside of the PCS but work very closely to achieve an outcome in partnership with PCS. Those resources, at the moment, are part of the resilience landscapes team.

MS CLAY: The biggest needs I hear of out in the community are for more rangers. We have about nine urban rangers looking after a really huge area of land. They love their rangers, but they just wish they had some more. There is also an ongoing concern about turnover, which makes me wonder if we are training people well enough, treating people well enough and paying them well enough. Do you think there is a need for more rangers and having a look at the pay and career path for those rangers?

Mr Alegria: We have actually increased the number of rangers from 2018 through to 2022, from 38 to 46, so that is a good thing. It is not just rangers. I guess rangers are what the community often see. There is a whole suite of people—field officers, technical officers et cetera—that are all contributing to the work. Bren mentioned the resilient landscapes team, which also support parks work.

As for turnover, I have heard that as well, in terms of particularly volunteer groups building a relationship with a particular ranger and that ranger moves on. In my experience, it is mostly people moving sideways or getting promoted, rather than leaving the service. It is probably very healthy that we have people who are willing and able to expand their careers and move on to jobs in the organisation. That is the

positive part of that movement.

The challenge for us, as an organisation, is to make sure that we actively rebuild that relationship. If a new person comes in, we need to make sure that they have a proper handover, and that they realise the importance of the relationship with that community group. As an employer of choice, we need to support our staff in pursuing their own career aspirations. It is good for us as an organisation to have that diversity and experience as well.

MS CLAY: It is absolutely brilliant when people progress and take another job that they like; that is fantastic. There is a huge amount of local expertise that comes in land management. What do you do when somebody leaves the job of being a ranger for a certain area? The community has worked with them and they know that area really well. How do you take that knowledge and make sure that it gets passed on?

Mr Alegria: It is challenging. I do not have an easy answer. The fact is that we have teams that actually work in these areas. We might have a ranger who has particular knowledge or a patch, but you have a team around them. Often those team members are also very longstanding in the organisation. They might have been in that area in the past. We do not see it as being completely dependent on one individual.

We think that there is a team and a district, and people are responsible for a whole lot of things over lots of different areas. Collectively, they have that corporate knowledge. As I say, I think the challenge is in making sure that we can pass that on to a new person. Also, we need to work with the community group and say, “We understand. We feel your pain. Change is difficult.” We need to help them to move through that process and, hopefully, they will then be able to develop that relationship with the new person.

Mr Burkevics: Further to Mr Alegria’s remarks, whilst there is a risk of knowledge transferring away, one of the advantages that we also see is that new knowledge is seeded in areas. I am reflecting on an area manager for Mulligans Flat who recently acquired a position in charge of Namadgi. A lot of the knowledge that that senior person held and experienced at Mulligans Flat is now available in Namadgi, and equipping and skilling staff there that might not have been exposed to some of that knowledge.

Whilst it is a risk, sometimes we actually see benefits from movement, too. As Mr Alegria mentioned, the trick is to ensure good handover practices, that we do not jeopardise relationships in seeing rangers move on, and that that knowledge is transferred in the best way we can.

MR COCKS: You have spoken a bit about how maybe it looks like there are more rangers moving on than might be the case. What is the actual separation rate?

Mr Alegria: I do not know that off the top of my head. I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: Okay. When a ranger does move on, do you undertake any separation interviews? Do you find out why they have chosen to leave?

Mr Alegria: As I say, most movements tend to be sideways, promotion or moving within. No, we would not necessarily do an exit interview there. Certainly, we do have provision for exit interviews for our staff.

MR COCKS: Where staff have left, are you able to give me some indication of the reasons that they provide?

Mr Gentleman: Retirement is probably the main—

Mr Alegria: A current example is a fantastic officer that joined us last year from Victoria. He has been working on the strategic review of roading. He is going to leave shortly, and he is going down to the coast to take up another opportunity. His family has moved down there. The range of answers to that would probably be as diverse as the experiences in this room. I have never had a sense that people are leaving because they hate the organisation, they do not like the work or they do not like the people. Generally, it is a personal choice.

Mr Gentleman: Indeed, when you visit them, they are pretty passionate about the work that they do.

MR COCKS: I would like to know a bit about the progress regarding plans to construct a new visitor centre at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. In other words, when will a visitor centre actually be open to the public?

Mr Gentleman: There is a fair bit of design work to occur first.

Mr Alegria: You would be aware that we have some budget funding to undertake that redesign work that the minister mentioned. That is progressing very well. One of the key features of that has been the really deep engagement we have had with the Ngunnawal people in terms of design of the building and the functionality of the building going forward. We are really excited that this will have that element. It will not just be a standard visitor centre; it will have that real cultural element, which I think is something that we do not have in the ACT—a focal point for on-country Ngunnawal culture. That has been a big part of the exercise.

Obviously, there are the design elements, which are all being progressed now. We are hoping to have a business case for consideration by government in due course. We will seek approval to progress the project to the next stage, which will be construction, eventually.

MR COCKS: It does not sound like there is currently a date for—

Mr Alegria: No, we do not have a firm date for that yet.

MR COCKS: What work has ACT Parks and Conservation Service been doing to address dangerous and reckless driving in and around Tidbinbilla, including on the entry road?

Mr Gentleman: That is a matter for the police, and the work that they do. The parks people certainly liaise with police around that.

Mr Alegria: Yes, we absolutely do. Our main focus there is really on staff safety and wellbeing. We have had circumstances where staff after hours have had to run the gauntlet from those groups. We have now made a plan for them to exit in a different way, so that they do not have to expose themselves to that situation. As the minister mentioned, it is a wicked problem. We do not condone it, and it is obviously pretty awful to have all of that tyre waste as you enter a beautiful reserve. We will continue to do what we can and work with our Policing colleagues.

MR COCKS: How frequently are you having to use those alternative plans?

Mr Alegria: I believe zero. We received it as a safety and wellbeing issue, and came up with a plan B. Fortunately, we have not had to invoke that plan since we did that.

THE CHAIR: Minister, what new technology or equipment has been rolled out in the last 12 months?

Mr Gentleman: We were talking yesterday about the remote-control mowers. We come upon a challenge every now and again where areas are either boggy or on a slope and it is dangerous for our parks people. We now have some tracked remote-control mowers to use. We had a chat about this with our friends at Mount Majura yesterday. There is an opportunity maybe to exercise those new tech components in removing some of the weeds in that area, too. I will ask Bren and the team to give you some more detail.

Mr Burkevics: The new mower that has been purchased operates within our biosecurity rural services team. I think that you would be flat out to get a booking for that mower over the next 12 months. PCS has got it booked flat out, which is wonderful. This mower is very effective and safe at removing large areas of weeds and triggering into it in a way that reduces the regrowth of weeds. We are learning a lot more about that machine. Certainly, the feedback I am getting is that there might be a place for another one in due course, as we learn more about it and we are able to tackle some of these challenging areas.

Another piece of technology that we are gaining a lot of experience with is a new drone, which is commercially rated. We have gone through a process over the last year to obtain a chief pilot arrangement and a licence for EPSDD to operate this drone. There is no shortage, as you can imagine, of sensing equipment that can be fitted to that drone. We are seeing a real application of that drone to wildlife monitoring, particularly after hours. It used to be done on foot by teams of people, surveys and remote area type access. Again, really good technology is emerging there.

We continue to work very closely with our emergency services colleagues regarding the latest technology around firefighting. Of course, parks have always put their hands up to try the next resource that is available, and we see technology there.

Through the last year, and with funding allocated in this budget, we are seeing the technology through the thermal-assisted aerial shooting program, which is having real success over parks at tackling invasives—detecting and monitoring invasives. We are certainly seeing that technology now having a place in an urban area—not so much

with a chopper, of course, but being able to tackle some of the rabbit challenges that we have around the ACT. From the briefing that I had last week, we are moving very quickly to address a lot of our longer standing rabbit population issues around the ACT. We are now working quite closely with the National Capital Authority to tackle some of the rabbit challenges they have had on their land.

There is no shortage of good technology that parks continue to work with.

THE CHAIR: With your mower, does it capture blackberries?

Mr Alegria: It absolutely can. It can chew into anything. You can adjust it to operate on a wide range of slopes, so it is stable. From the briefing that I had not so long ago, we were operating and destroying blackberries around the Lake Burley Griffin area. It is quite quick, too. As the operators continue to develop their capability, we are seeing that it is having fantastic results in improving the efficiency of our weed management control and, most importantly, reducing our use of herbicides.

Mr Gentleman: It is also much safer for staff. In those areas that I mentioned before, that were wet and boggy after the rains, instead of them being in danger while operating a mower themselves, they can do it by remote control.

THE CHAIR: We might end the hearing now. I would like to thank the minister and officials for your time today. If any questions have been taken on notice, you have five working days to report back to the secretariat.

The committee adjourned at 4.59 pm.