



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER  
AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2021-2022](#))

**Members:**

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)  
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)  
MR J DAVIS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2022**

**Acting secretary to the committee:  
Ms S Milne (Ph: 620 50435)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

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

## APPEARANCES

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## **Privilege statement**

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, it may take evidence in-camera if requested. Confidential evidence will be recorded and kept securely. It is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly; but any decision to publish or present in-camera evidence will not be taken without consulting with the person who gave the evidence.

*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 1.16 pm.**

### Appearances:

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

West, Dr Damian, Deputy Director-General, Workforce Capability and Governance and Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Registrar Secure Local Jobs Code

Young, Mr Michael, Executive Group Manager, Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations

Noud, Mr Russell, Executive Group Manager, Industrial Relations and Public Sector Management

### WorkSafe ACT

Agius, Ms Jacqueline, Work Health and Safety Commissioner, Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for the inquiry into the annual reports and financial reports for 2021-22. This afternoon, the committee will be hearing evidence from the Chief Minister, the Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, the Office of the Work, Health and Safety Commissioner and the ACT Long Service Leave Authority.

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 the continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Please be aware that we are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and the transcript will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and web streamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if the witnesses could say, "Taking that one on notice," which helps the committee staff to get themselves organised with regard to that.

This is our first session, and we are hearing from the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety. Welcome, Minister Gentleman, and all of the officials today. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. When you first speak, please confirm that you have understood the privilege implications of your statement.

As there are no opening statements today, I will kick off with the first question. I would like to ask about COVID-19 compliance. On pages 31 and 33 of the annual report of the Office of Work, Health and Safety highlights the COVID-19 operations and the key COVID-19 campaigns. On page 32, we see that there were some notices

issued for COVID-19 breaches. It made up a considerable percentage of total breaches issued, ranging from 20 per cent to 70 per cent, dependent on the day, from the looks of things. I am just wondering whether the high number of COVID breaches were expected, because these were targeted campaigns? Could you talk to me a bit about that.

**Mr Gentleman:** Thank you, Chair. I am aware of the privileges statement. I think I will go straight to the commissioner to provide that information for you.

**Ms Agius:** I have read the privilege statement. Thank you for the question, Chair. With respect to the campaign in relation to residential construction, a lot of that occurred when the residential construction sector returned after a lockdown. So those visits were targeted. They were proactive targeted visits, specifically for COVID-19.

**THE CHAIR:** My understanding of the figures is that it started out at 34 per cent compliance and then grew up to 70 per cent. Is that because people became better educated and managed things better? What was that about?

**Ms Agius:** I would put that down to a number of things. Firstly, it was WorkSafe engagement with industry and going out and speaking to people and using improvement notices to ensure that people were safe and, where absolutely necessary, if there were people at risk or about to be at risk, using prohibition notices. As we continued our proactive work in the COVID-19 space, we did see an increase in people complying with the legislation.

**THE CHAIR:** So there was no lowering of restrictions or any of that sort of stuff; it was just more about that education?

**Ms Agius:** At that stage, there were not.

**THE CHAIR:** Great.

**Ms Agius:** The requirements under the Work Health and Safety Act remain the same regardless of what the health requirements are.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. What have we learnt from COVID-19 for future shutdowns?

**Ms Agius:** We have learnt a number of things. I think the most important thing that we have learnt is that, when it comes to work health and safety, anything is possible, that we should be making it a priority and that we should be looking after our workers.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS ORR:** Can I just get a sense of where this key COVID campaign which was focused on the construction industry fits within your broader regulatory oversight of the construction industry, given it is an area you have said that does require focus?

**Ms Agius:** We have a residential construction strategy, and the key component of that strategy is Operation Safe Prospect. We have certainly spoken about Operation Safe Prospect before at committees. Operation Safe Prospect was named after the two

workers who died in Denman Prospect in early 2020. One of those PCBUs was found guilty for one of those deaths, and you may have seen that in the news during the previous reporting period.

We actually changed our residential construction campaign and relaunched it in June because we know that a lot of injuries are in the residential construction sector, and we have a lot of workers compensation claims in that sector. The data is showing us that we are seeing lots of breaches of the Work Health and Safety Act in that sector. So our COVID campaign in that sector was also consistent with the residential construction sector as a priority sector for us when it comes to work health and safety.

**MS ORR:** Great. Thank you.

**Mr Gentleman:** I want to thank the commissioner and her team for their work in Operation Safe Prospect. It has brought about some real changes in behaviour from some of our builders across the territory. We saw that firsthand when we went to visit some of the sites where a notice had been provided to a construction area with regard to fall issues and they repaired that in a few days. We saw some very good outcomes.

**MS ORR:** Minister, I understand that National Safe Work Month has just concluded. Would you be able to discuss what activities were undertaken throughout the month?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes. A number of activities were undertaken by WorkSafe ACT. I will ask the commissioner to give you the details of that.

**Ms Agius:** National Safe Work Month is a month where we remind everybody to commit to work health and safety, not just during the month of October but throughout the year. We had quite an extensive body of work this month. The key activity that we had was a free sausage sizzle at Bunnings at Belconnen, where we engaged with members of the community, a number of tradies—well, lots of tradies because they visit Bunnings all throughout the day—and industry and unions, and we invited a number of people to that event as well. As part of that event, we raised money for Beyond Blue and Cancer Council ACT. Both of those organisations assist workers and their families who have been injured while at work. We raised over \$1,300 for both of those organisations.

We also ran a number of popups which were highly attended by a number of people. Each week we had a different focus. The focus in the last week of National Safe Work Month was young workers. I know Mr Davis is very interested in what we do in relation to young workers and has asked questions about that before. We did popups out at CIT as part of that week and we also launched our Young Workers Portal, which provides information to young workers, to their parents, to their employers, to their carers and to the community.

I particularly like the portal because, in relation to parents and carers, it suggests some questions that parents can ask their young people when they get home from their first day at work—like “Have you been inducted and were you taken through emergency procedures?”—so that parents can have those conversations with their children and the people that they care for around their first day at work. That portal is really about raising awareness, educating and taking information to everybody, because we want

to make sure that young workers live healthy, safe, long, happy working lives. So that was a great week.

We also had one week that focused on psychosocial hazards. For that, we did a popup in Garema place and we had all of our inspectors out there available to answer questions. Lots of questions came from the community but also from workers who were in and about Civic during lunchtime, particularly. We also focused on labour hire licensing and workers compensation in one week and, in the first week, we focused on dangerous substances and dangerous goods. During all of those weeks, we released particular information in relation to each of those priority areas.

I also spoke at a Hatchery conference on intelligence-led regulations. That was to tell the story of WorkSafe and what we have done in relation to improving and leading our organisation by the intelligence that we are gaining from a number of spaces.

**MS ORR:** Those all look like great focuses for the month. But, as you said in your answer to the question, it is not just in a month; it is across the whole year. So how are you going to take these activities throughout the rest of the year, particularly with regard to the young workers, because it sounds like there are some quiet interesting initiatives going on there?

**Ms Agius:** We are really proud of the work that we are doing in relation to young workers. I want to commend the agency on this priority. We decided to have another popup for young workers at CIT in Bruce—the first one was in, I think, Woden, though do not quote me on that—because the young workers were really engaged and involved in that particular popup.

We have a totally different colour scheme for young workers. That colour scheme was developed by young workers. We met with the youth council, the young workers centre, a number of apprentices and different young workers throughout the ACT. They told us what they wanted from us and we listened to what they wanted. The Young Worker Strategy that we have released is based on what those young workers wanted.

We know that young workers are a vulnerable group in the ACT. Generally, amongst all age groups, workers compensation claims are around two per cent but, when it comes to young workers, it is around double that; it is around four per cent. So we know they are a vulnerable work group. We have a Young Workers Inspector and we have also put on a Young Worker Educator. That Young Worker Educator goes out and speaks to schools, CITs and tertiary colleges about what their obligations are as a young workers in relation to safety but also what they should be expecting to see in workplaces.

**MS ORR:** Is this the first time WorkSafe has had such a particular focus on young workers?

**Ms Agius:** When I sat on the Work Health and Safety Council, before I was in this role, we spoke at the Work Health and Safety Council about the risk to young workers. But there was not this type of focus where there is a strategy. We are constantly revising and reviewing that strategy but, most importantly, that strategy has been

informed by the voices of young workers.

**MS ORR:** Great. Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** I have a supplementary about the Young Workers Portal. It looks great but I just wonder if you could talk me through how that is being promoted. It is a whole-of-government challenge. Young people are hard to find and then maintain their attention. So how are we making sure that all young workers know that that resource is available?

**Ms Agius:** In a number of ways. As part of Safe Work Month I also had the opportunity to go and speak to a group of years 9 and 10 girls at Caroline Chisholm School. The group is called Empower. They have a number of guest speakers and, as part of Safe Work Month, they invited me to speak.

We have some cards that have QR codes on them to hand out, which take our young people to the portal. Also, when our Young Workers Inspector and our Young Worker Educator go out and speak to groups of young workers they are also raising awareness around the portal. We also have it on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is the only social media forum that we use. Whenever our inspectors are out, they can hand out to young workers the cards that will take them to our portal.

**MR DAVIS:** Great. More broadly when it comes to young workers, anecdotally, over the COVID period, in particular, it would appear to me that young workers have been working in the sectors that seem to be disproportionately impacted by COVID. During lockdown there were young Uber drivers and young people at the Maccas drive through et cetera. Did you notice a trend of young people from certain industry groups accessing your services, particularly during lockdown, and was there any reprioritisation of emphasis or effort on WorkSafe's part to meet some of those demands?

**Ms Agius:** We always see a high number of apprentices coming through our young worker information and asking questions. We did see some apprentices who were exposed during COVID and lockdown. But the engagement from industry during COVID was great and people were really responsive, which was fantastic.

We have recently received information from some young women in trades who are raising some issues with us. We will be looking at those issues, including sexual harassment issues. We are very concerned about that. A number of those young women are saying that they do not feel that they can speak up. We will work with industry associations and unions to ensure that we are getting a really clear message out to those young women.

**MR COCKS:** Commissioner, it was very good to hear that you had some communication activities around psychosocial hazards. It is an area I am particularly interested in. It is also an area which is particularly poorly understood and the terminology can be quite confusing for PCBUs, workers and all sorts of people. Psychosocial is challenging even in the disability and mental health spaces. How does WorkSafe define the psychosocial hazards? Are there clear lines for PCBUs to work to?



**Ms Agius:** Thank you for the question, Mr Cocks. Because this is an emerging and developing area, even though it has always existed as needing to be risk managed in the Work Health and Safety Act, we are really just starting to see how this is impacting on workplaces. We have produced some material in relation to psychosocial hazards and we will be producing some more.

There are a number of drivers or hazards, and they can be things like work overload and having no clear idea of our job role. Those sorts of workplace conditions will lead to particular behaviour. The behaviour may be bullying, it may be harassment, it may be physical abuse or it may be verbal abuse et cetera. It is the frequency of that behaviour that may result in a psychological injury.

So it is the psychological injury that we are trying to prevent. We need to identify what the hazard is in the workplace and then we need to put in controls to stop the behaviour and hope that the behaviour stops so it does not result in a psychological injury. When we say “psychosocial hazard”, we are actually talking about the things that might lead to behaviours that might result in a psychological injury. We have produced a really good poster on that. That is available on our website. We provide all our posters for free on our website.

**MR COCKS:** In those communication activities that you were discussing, did you find that there was much of a level of awareness amongst PCBUs and amongst businesses and workers around what psychosocial risks are or your material?

**Ms Agius:** I think that we have a long way to go. We have identified that as a priority area. We do have a psychosocial strategy that—

**MR COCKS:** I have got it here.

**Ms Agius:** Dr Peta Miller has conducted a survey for us and has gained some information for us around what the maturity is in the ACT community around psychosocial hazards and awareness.

We are also using a tool called iAuditor. For the first time since I have been brought in as commissioner, we have a psychosocial hazard team. That team not only conduct inspections but also develop all of the educational programs for industry and for workers around psychosocial hazards. They are using a tool called iAuditor. They punch a series of questions into iAuditor, and it gives an on-the-spot percentage to the employer of what their psychosocial hazard identification maturity is. It is out of a hundred. They will say, for example, “You can improve in this area,” or “You could improve in capability,” or “You need to improve in culture,” et cetera. So they can give on-the-spot advice to PCBUs.

**MR COCKS:** Is that available to PCBUs without an inspection happening?

**Ms Agius:** No. But what is available to PCBUs without an inspection is our People at Work tool. I am not sure if you are familiar with that tool. People at Work is funded by all of the regulators around the country, and we also contribute to that tool. It is essentially a survey that is deidentified that the workplace can fill in. It provides a

report back to the employer of the areas in their workplace they need to address from a psychosocial perspective.

I have run the tool with my own workforce. The tool is fantastic. Firstly, it is free—which is wonderful. The report also provides a time line and how you can comply with the legislation. So you get the report and then it suggests that you run focus groups with your workforce and provide the report to your workforce and then your workforce have the opportunity to provide controlled suggestions. That satisfies the consultation part of the legislation.

It is a great tool, and I would absolutely recommend it. I am plugging it because I think it is fantastic. I used it with my own workforce and I can say it has worked really well with them.

**MR DAVIS:** Given the revelations about the culture of parliament staffing across Australia in recent years, in particular the *Set the standard* report by Commissioner Jenkins, could you comment on the application of that report to this Assembly and, more broadly, what supports, mechanisms and protections are available to political staffers in this place, in light of some of those revelations?

**Ms Agius:** There is a wonderful portal that was launched yesterday, which is the Respect@Work portal.

**MR DAVIS:** Is that from WorkSafe ACT?

**Ms Agius:** That has come out by the Human Rights Commission. Ms Jenkins released that yesterday. I had a brief opportunity to look at that, but I have not looked at it in a lot of detail yet.

Our theme for Safe Work Month was “All workers, all workplaces”. The staffers here are entitled to contact our agency in the same way that any other worker in the ACT is able to. Have I addressed your question? Was there another part to it?

**MR DAVIS:** I suppose at the risk of being spicy, I think there has been a spotlight shone on the behaviour and culture in parliaments, based on that report. So I guess I am interested in your reflections and whether you think that we have anything to be worried about here, if you think we are exhibiting good standards, standards that other parliaments could emulate, or if there are, in your view, opportunities for improvement in this workplace relative to some of the findings in that report.

**Ms Agius:** I have not ever conducted an inspection on this workplace. So I could not determine whether or not there are any improvements that should be made. What I can say is we have never received a complaint about sexual harassment or bullying from staffers at this workplace in the way that it has been highlighted in other parliaments around Australia.

**Mr Gentleman:** I would say that the government have a very firm view that every workplace should be safe, whether you are in the parliament or whether you are in the construction industry. It is our view that we should ensure that we have laws in place to make that happen and that ensue that the commissioner is able to respond to those

if called.

**MR DAVIS:** Great. Thank you very much.

**MR COCKS:** I want to come to the introduction of the Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation 2022 and crystalline silica. As I understand it, after that was introduced, Commissioner, you applied a three-month exemption to allow industry to adapt. I am interested in what happened between that regulation being introduced and your decision to apply a regulation and what authority the exemption was applied under?

**Mr Gentleman:** I might just kick off, if you like, Commissioner. Thanks for the question, Mr Cocks. It is an important one. We have been working on silicosis for some time now, particularly looking at engineered stone and the amount of operation that is occurring in the ACT and other jurisdictions. We have seen the incredibly serious adverse health impacts of silicosis from these particular areas but also concrete cutting and those areas.

We worked with industry and stakeholders to look at the safeguards that could be put in place for that operation and then introduced some strategic pieces of reform, including silica dust reforms, and an action plan, for example. The first phases of those were those work health and safety regs that you just talked about, mandating silica training awareness and ensuring that we have a ban on uncontrolled dry cutting. We know that, if you use water and other materials, that can lessen the impact of silica dust moving around in the atmosphere, for example.

Industry said that they had some concerns about those regulations. So the commissioner has put forward, as you have just indicated there, an—

**Ms Agius:** Exemption.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, allowed the exemption to take place for workplaces to be able to conform with that. Commissioner, I will let you go on with the exemption.

**Ms Agius:** Firstly, I think it is important that I note the different responsibilities that we have and WSIR have in relation to policy and legislation and then implementation. The government make policy decisions and WSIR follows through and writes the legislation, and then WorkSafe implement the legislation.

When it came to those regulations, there were some concerns raised about whether or not people could comply. Mr Young and I had a meeting and talked about how we could help industry to comply. I decided that I would use my exemption powers to exempt that for three months so that we could not only provide the time line for people to comply but also provide the time for industry to give us examples of when they could not comply. Mr Young might be able to go into more detail about the writing of the legislation.

Prior to the legislation, WorkSafe got together a group of industry representatives and we wrote a guideline. We consulted quite extensively on that guideline with industry and with unions. I understand—although, again, I do not wish to speak for Mr

Young—that the first tranche of those silica regulations was based on that guideline. I will hand to you, Mr Young.

**Mr Young:** Thank you, Commissioner. I acknowledge the privilege statement. As the minister and the commissioner have already outlined, the regulation in question did a number of things. It is a regulation that is occurring as part of a broader suite of reforms, all focused on improving safety for workers who may be exposed to respirable silica in the course of their work.

The regulation that is in question here introduced a ban on the dry cutting of engineered stone. It introduced a requirement, with a transitional provision for certain workers that are involved in riskier forms of work, to do mandatory training on silica awareness. Thirdly, it introduced a ban on the uncontrolled dry cutting of other forms of silica-containing material, excluding engineered stone. That includes things like cement, concrete, bricks, mortar and natural stone.

The exemption that the commissioner described applied only to that third aspect of the regulation. The other two parts commenced as originally envisaged. The issue that arose, as others have already described, was that closer consultation and feedback from industry identified that there were some barriers to the implementation of the regulated controls on the mechanical cutting of those non-engineered stone silica-containing materials.

The exemption that the regulator put in place, using the general exemption power, was to allow time for closer consultation within industry to fully understand those issues and to allow changes to be made if necessary. The regulation in question never actually commenced. By the time the exemption period and the transitionals expired, alternative arrangements had been put in place.

Those arrangements are in place now, and they continue to strongly require wet controls to be used for the mechanical cutting of the non-engineered stone silica-containing materials. It sets up a mechanism by which, after a thorough and documented risk assessment, if it is not practicable to use a continuous flow of water or a wet control, that alternative best practice dry controls can be used.

**MR COCKS:** So there has been a change to the regulation or the implementation of the regulation?

**Mr Young:** There has been a supplemental regulation made, which commenced during the period that the transitional and the exemption that the commissioner described—

**MR COCKS:** Precisely, what date did that commence?

**Mr Young:** Midnight on 31 October.

**MR COCKS:** Okay. So it has only just come in. It sounds like that did not come in during the initial three-month period but was introduced in the additional two weeks after. That is a pretty long time to leave industry in the dark around what the future direction is.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Cocks, the industry has been involved the whole way through. We have been consulting with industry and key stakeholders as we formed this. We have got a group that has been working with them. I have personally seen the change. I visited a construction site just off Parkes Way early in the year where they were dry cutting concrete tiles on the ground. The operator had a dry saw. He was literally holding the tiles of concrete in one hand and cutting it with the dry saw. There was concrete dust everywhere. Probably about four months ago now I visited and saw that he had a new bench, he had a wet system attached to a new cutter, and he was using the tiles on the bench—much safer than ever before.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you, minister. I have to say that dealing with this issue is really important, but what I am talking about here is the situation that led to headlines like, “ACT silica regulations—good intention, bad regulation”. So what I am really keen to understand is how precisely we got to this situation where there was a change from the strategy in April to the regulation that was introduced.

**Mr Gentleman:** As I said, we worked with stakeholders and industry to organise these regulations to ensure the safety of workers, and there was general agreement that, as you say, we do need to do much more for the protection of workers in these particular areas. They provided to us some argument about whether or not they could use wet suppression in certain areas. That is why we have had another look at it and looked at some of the control measures. There are a number of control measures you can use, as Mr Young was explaining, and we are looking at whether or not we can meet the safety of workers by using perhaps a number of other control measures.

**Mr Young:** I just need to correct the record. I had that date wrong. It in fact commenced on 2 November. I think the regulation that we have in place now is good regulation. To the question around how it came to pass—the headlines and so forth that you referred to—the ACT has deliberately determined to put in place the best safety practices in Australia as they pertain to silica. So, in that sense, the regulations that have been put in place go further than a number of other jurisdictions have gone.

I think it is a factor of that process, the fact that we are seeking to optimise and maximise safety arrangements, that those technical issues came to light very close to the commencement of the originally planned regulation. The government and the commissioner acted quickly to ensure that we did not set up a situation where people were unable to comply. The transitional arrangements and the exemption that was described there were deliberately done to quickly respond to those issues that were identified and to allow time to ensure that the regulation that we have put in place strikes a balance between being operable and being practical but also striking a best practice for safety.

**MS ORR:** That goes part of the way to my question, because I was going to ask about this being nation leading as to how we deal with the silica dust. What steps are you taking to continually review the efforts we are putting in place to respond to the dangers of silica dust? Also, why is it important to be taking these measures to respond to silica dust and the dangers that it poses?

**Mr Gentleman:** I will deal with last part of your question first. It is important

because, as I mentioned, it is an incredibly debilitating disease. We have seen a stronger emphasis on companies wishing to work with engineered stone—for example, with bench tops and those sorts of things—and dry cutting of concrete at the same time. So we want to make sure it is safe for employees into the future.

We have looked at the best possible control measures for allowing industry to go ahead and carry out those sorts of operations but in a way that is safe for those workers and safe for people that are entering the workplace too. You might be simply visiting a building site and see dust in the air, and we want to make it safe for those people as well.

**Mr Young:** I would like to speak to the question of why it is important that we do this. The physical effects of silicosis are well known and have been discussed here. One issue that is less well known is the fact that the current workplace exposure standard for concentration of atmospheric silica is not a safe level. It is a 0.5 parts per million per cubic metre, but the recommended safe level, the healthy level, is about 0.2. Safe Work Australia was not able to set the exposure standard at 0.2 because it is, in fact, so low that it is difficult to measure. That means that the general duty on employers is not to achieve just the compliance with the exposure standard; it is to minimise exposure to the absolute maximum extent possible.

That is why the minister tasked my group and the consultative Workplace Health and Safety Council to fully explore the range of silica controls that might be able to be put in place. So there was a working party of the WHS council that was convened to look at what other jurisdictions were doing, and we sought expert advice from occupational physicians. It was that work that led to the program of reforms that we are partway through but are not yet complete.

**MS ORR:** Who was on that working group?

**Mr Young:** It was a tripartite working group made up of myself, the WHS commissioner, union and industry peaks, particularly with a construction industry focus.

**Ms Agius:** As to your question about why we should do something about silica, last year I met a young man who was in his mid to late 20s who had been diagnosed with silicosis and I had quite a long conversation with him. I asked him how he was physically. His words stuck with me and I will never forget them. He said, “Physically, I am okay, but my head is’—and he used a swear word which I will not repeat here. We were talking about psychosocial hazards. With silica dust exposure there is not only a risk of a physical injury but also a risk of a psychological injury, as I believe all work health and safety risks are.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I would like to ask about labour hire licensing regulation. In May 2021 there was a new licensing scheme for labour hire providers introduced, and November 2021 all labour hire providers operating in the ACT are required to hold this licence. My understanding is that the fee is \$2,900. I am just wondering what you are hearing from people about this. Has it been a deterrent for any companies or individuals who are applying for this new licence? How is that going?

**Mr Gentleman:** That is a good question. We have had some submissions to us that it is a burden to some providers. Others have said, “We are happy to comply and work through that process.” I might ask Dr West and directorate officials to add to that.

**Dr West:** I will defer to the commissioner on this one.

**Ms Agius:** We have not heard a lot from people around the \$2,900. I think an indication of it not being a problem is the amount of applications that we have had. Initially, when the scheme came in, it was thought that we would end up with about 300 applications. In its first year, we had 851 licences issued. From this morning, we have 1,084 first-time licences but 1,241 licences issued with some of those being renewals.

**THE CHAIR:** I believe there are unconditional and conditional licences. Did everybody that applied receive approval or have some been knocked back? If so, why were they knocked back?

**Ms Agius:** Nobody has been knocked back in relation to the suitable person test that they are required to comply with. Some licences have been knocked back because they had not paid the application fee when they applied for the notice. So, if you do not pay the application fee, you will not get the licence. But our people do write and call those people just to check in with them to see whether or not they still need a licence.

Some people have been knocked back because they applied and paid for licences but did not require a licence. When our labour hire licence team had actually looked at the application, it turned out that that person really did not need a licence, so they were refunded their money.

**THE CHAIR:** That was my next question. So, if they get knocked back, they get that application fee back. Is there a fail rate?

**Ms Agius:** I do not have with me the figure of how many people have not received licences, but nobody has not received one for failing a suitable person test. I can absolutely tell you that. Some conditions have been put on those licences. For example, if there has been a Fair Work decision in relation to the labour hire licence provider and their obligations under that decision, a condition of the licence will be that they must comply with those obligations, and our inspectors will make sure that those obligations are being complied with.

**THE CHAIR:** Great.

**MR COCKS:** I have heard some concern from both workers and employers in labour hire businesses about data security. Is there any need for any worker information to be provided to any third-party organisation through the process?

**Ms Agius:** I do not believe there is any worker information that is provided as part of that application process, but I will take that on notice and get back to you. It is the name of the labour hire licence provider that we keep in our system. The system that we use is Salesforce, and it has all of the security checks in place.

**MR COCKS:** As I understand, Salesforce is an international provider. Does it comply with Australian privacy requirements?

**Ms Agius:** I will have to take that on notice, but I am sure it would.

**Mr Gentleman:** Government uses Salesforce for a number of applications. But, yes, we will certainly take that on notice.

**MR COCKS:** I believe there are requirements around Australian hosting of data. If you could come back on that, that would be useful.

**Ms Agius:** Absolutely happy to.

**MS ORR:** Can I just clarify that you are not keeping individual labour hire employee details in the data space?

**Ms Agius:** I am almost certain that we do not keep the individual worker's information. But, as I said, I will check. I understand the licence asks how many labour hire workers the company provides. But I would think that it would be almost impossible for us to keep all of that data of how many workers there are that are labour hire workers. But I will absolutely check.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**MS ORR:** Minister, can you talk to us about what consultation is ongoing with the commonwealth government to pursue legislative changes in the workers compensation area and how successful these conversations have been?

**Mr Gentleman:** We have had some early conversations with the commonwealth to ensure that we can provide the best workers cover for our public servants and, indeed, commonwealth public servants across the ACT. Sometimes there is some crossover. For example, if you look at the AFP, they are still under Comcare. We have, of course, moved away from Comcare to our own scheme now, which I think has been quite successful and has provided some really good responses for our workers. But I will ask the directorate officials to give you some of the detail about the correspondence and negotiations.

**Mr Young:** Thank you for the question. There is certainly quite a bit going on at the moment. Compensation for ACT public servants is provided by way of the Commonwealth Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. So, although we are a self-insurer and administer the claims ourselves, the rules about the types of injuries and diseases that are covered and the benefits that are payable, derive from the commonwealth law. The ACT is also a signatory to an intergovernmental agreement that sets up consultation arrangements around changes to those laws. The consultation that is underway at the moment has been in accordance with that IGA.

Broadly, there have been two areas of consultation. The first relates to content that is included in the Fair Work Amendment Bill that is currently before the commonwealth parliament. If it commences as currently introduced, it will have a number of effects.



The changes relate to compensation for firefighters and volunteer firefighters. There are special arrangements for firefighters who contract cancer. The legislation sets up something called presumptive coverage. That means that, for certain types of cancers and for firefighters who have served certain periods of service, the legislation provides that, in order for a claim to be accepted, there is a presumption that work contributed. So it is not necessary for the injured worker to demonstrate on balance of probability that work caused or contributed to, their disease.

That presumptive arrangement has been in place for salaried firefighters for some time. It is not currently in place for volunteer firefighters. So, if that bill is implemented, that coverage will be extended to volunteer firefighters. It also makes some changes to the qualifying period for a number of cancers and adds an additional category of cancer.

There is a second piece of consultation that has recently gotten underway with commonwealth officials. They are giving consideration to the recommendations of a national working group that looked at presumptive cover for post-traumatic stress disorder for first responders. Consideration is being given to whether that recommendation to extend such coverage should be legislated in that commonwealth act.

However, I can report that, as an administrative arrangement, the ACT government has already put in place presumptive PTSD coverage for first responders. So, in a sense, if that legislation were to come into effect, it would essentially pick up and continue those arrangements. That is currently the position that ACT officials are taking into that consultation. But, ultimately, it is a matter for the commonwealth government to introduce the legislation and make changes.

**MS ORR:** Given that there is a lot going on within the workers compensation policy area, what are the government's priorities as we continue to progress this work?

**Mr Gentleman:** As I mentioned, keeping our workers safe in the first place and, should they become ill at work or require assistance, ensuring that we can support them through that. The new scheme for the ACT government has meant that claims can be processed quicker and support is really based on returning to work in a healthy way rather than the old long tail of litigation that used to occur in other compensation operations. I am pleased to say that it has been successful so far. We have had feedback from employer and employee groups that that has been the case. So we will continue on with this work and try and get the best outcomes for our employees.

**MS ORR:** Great.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you for mentioning PTSD. I have had quite a number of conversations with people affected by it and their representatives. You have referred to presumptive coverage. As I understand it, there is a difference in the scheme that covers firefighters compared with something that would cover our paramedics and other first responders. Can you run me through what the difference is there?

**Mr Young:** In respect of post-traumatic stress disorder?

**MR COCKS:** Yes; that is right.

**Mr Young:** Like any other form of disease, an ACT government employee can request workers compensation in respect of that disease. In order to access workers compensation, they need to demonstrate, on the balance of probability, that their employment either caused or contributed to the disease or an aggravation of it. Where presumptive arrangements are in place, that onus of proof is reversed. The claims can still be declined, but it is a requirement for the insurer to demonstrate on a balance of probability that the condition was not work related.

Having those presumptive arrangements in place are not a guarantee that liability will be accepted, but they do provide a more streamlined pathway to compensation. The benefits of doing so are generally that it is a less adversarial process and it can proceed more quickly. In the case of PTSD, it does not require, necessarily, the person to relive their experiences in the process of making a claim.

I think there have been some recent ministerial representations that go to the amount of time that it has taken in some limited number of cases to process those claims for post-traumatic stress disorder. While I cannot speak to the specifics of actual claims, what I will flag is, particularly in the case of PTSD, that it is important that there is an accurate diagnosis in place. It is a requirement of our scheme that for PTSD to be accepted there must be a psychiatrist or other specialist that has diagnosed the condition. Where that diagnosis exists at the time that the claim is made, it can proceed very quickly. Where it does not, then the insurer will work with the person to put them in front of a specialist and to get a diagnosis.

One of the key factors that was discussed at that national officials working group that I referred to earlier was the adverse consequences that can arise for people if PTSD is misdiagnosed. We do need to be careful, by setting up presumptive cover for PTSD, that we do not set up some sort of perverse incentive to misdiagnose. So getting that accurate diagnosis and, correspondingly, the proper treatment in place as quickly as possible is the focus. Where delays do occasionally occur at the moment it is around accessing those specialists to do the assessment and diagnosis.

**MR COCKS:** You have not come to the question about the difference between a fire and a paramedic and the access to these schemes?

**Mr Young:** There is an arrangement in place currently. I will provide a link on notice which describes the exact cohort of the ACT government workforce that is currently able to access the presumptive cover for PTSD, but it is essentially first responders—fire brigades and emergency services workers. Defined in that online instrument are workers that have access to the presumptive cover. Other employees seeking compensation for PTSD would go through the standard application, where they would need to demonstrate on balance of probability that work caused the condition. So all employees can apply for and receive compensation for PTSD, and the pathway is somewhat accelerated for emergency services workers.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** I am interested in asking the commissioner about the changing work

landscape. Particularly over the last two years, as a lot more people have been working from home—and “You’re on mute” has become the catchphrase—I would be interested to learn how that has changed how you deliver supports to working people and particularly those people who have been most disproportionately impacted by lockdowns. Of course, a tradie cannot take that work home, but a lot of professional workers in Canberra have been able to do so.

Also, while it is a little bit more future focussed, this committee is currently inquiring into the future of the working week, could you proffer any learnings from this period for the committee to consider as the workforce continues to change and the workplace continues to change as well?

**Ms Agius:** Whilst professionals have had the opportunity to work from home, most working people and the priority industries for us are working out in the community still. There is a lot of discussion around working from home and the obligations that exist for the PCBU, and they are still there. Whether a worker is working in the office or whether they are working from home, their home is still their workplace. The biggest risk that we have seen for people working at home has been isolation, and that is something for everyone to be cognisant of.

I know that a lot of people that are working from home have daily meetings for instance, with their team on Teams—and, yes, you are right: the most common phrase of the last two years has been “You’re on mute”. I have used it many times myself and it has been used against me many times. Ms Grey, the Deputy Health Work and Safety Commissioner, may have something to add to this.

So the biggest risk we have seen is isolation. The obligation is still there. There was a very interesting workers compensation case where a woman died and her children were initially denied a death benefit. She was killed in a family violence incident and the court case determined that, because the incident occurred in what would have been her general working hours pattern, the employer was liable or the workers compensation scheme was liable for that death benefit for her children.

**MR DAVIS:** Expanding on that, given that we have spoken a lot today about the psychosocial risk of work, even the best workplace with the best boss is still called “work” for a reason, it is still going to be taxing. There are employers in Canberra that this committee has heard from that are considering alternative models of work, including flexible working conditions, four-day work weeks et cetera. What supports has your organisation provided or could your organisation provide to employers and workplaces considering more flexible working arrangements?

**Ms Agius:** I guess it is not really a matter for us to provide support. What we would do is still ensure that the workplace had all of the safe systems in place for their workers that work at home, and we absolutely do do that. Safe systems of work, the need to identify hazard risk management and putting in controls, are required wherever the workplace is. The obligations are exactly the same whether a worker is working in their own home or whether they are working in a place that is required to be there for a workplace. I would absolutely recommend that there be connection with any workers that are working from home. I know some people do things like having in-office days, for instance, where the whole team go into the office for that

particular day.

**MR DAVIS:** As commissioner, with a particular eye to limiting psychosocial risk and the mental strain of work, do you see a benefit in, and would you encourage, Canberra's employers considering alternative models for their workplace, not unlike a four-day work week that the committee is currently considering?

**Ms Agius:** I do not think there are any challenges to a four-day work week. From a psychosocial perspective, what we have seen is that a family-work balance helps with psychosocial hazards in relation to work health and safety. If people have more balance in their lives, they feel happier. When they are happier, that is what they take home to their families, and that creates a great environment for people to live in. That is an opinion.

**Mr Gentleman:** I would be happy to submit a four-day work week for MLAs.

**MR DAVIS:** And, as a fellow member for Brindabella, Minister, I am happy for you to pitch that to our respective constituency, not me.

**MS ORR:** On the conversation of working from home and what hazards are in place and how employers still have obligations for work health and safety, even when an employee is working from home, in a nutshell, what are those hazards that you would be saying to employees to be aware of? You have said isolation is certainly one. Are there others?

**Ms Agius:** There are a number of hazards that an employer should be aware of, and that should include whether or not the home environment is a less safe place to be than a work office, for instance. We have spoken and provided advice to both workers and PCBU's where there was a requirement to work from home but the home environment was less safe than the office environment. The requirement is to assess the hazard, determine what the risk is and then control that risk. If you are controlling a risk where the home environment may be less safe, the actual control may be that the person works in the office rather than works from home.

**MS ORR:** What risks would have to be present to make a home environment less safe than the office environment?

**Ms Agius:** Things like the one I already referred to, which was family and domestic violence. There are some instances where there are particular challenges in the home in relation to coercive control. In an instance like that it may be safer for that worker to work in an office rather than at home. There could be interruptions that are impacting on the worker's ability to do their work which would need to be identified as a hazard and then controlled.

**MS ORR:** Great. Thanks.

**Dr West:** If I may just add a point. I have read the privileges statement. From the point of view of the territory government as an employer, we have positioned ourselves to be a leader in this space and flexible and hybrid work and are, I think, leading all public sectors across the country in what we are offering staff. In a

moment, I will ask Mr Young to talk about some of the policies and tools we have available to help staff who are working at home to ensure that their workplaces are safe. It is something that we have been thinking about and actively pursuing and leading industry and engaging industry on in terms of what might be transferrable to differing settings.

We have a large white-collar workforce but we have a larger workforce that fronts the community every single day. There are provisions of flexibility that we already find in our EBAs currently—and Mr Noud might expand on that shortly—and we have been progressing this very, very directly. Our approach has not just been about flexibility to the workplace; it has also been about being hybrid, hybrid work, working from different locations, working from central buildings and working in a hub-and-spoke and other settings that we are establishing across the territory.

We are about to open up a flexi-hub in Tuggeranong, where ACT public servants will be able to work from for part of their day if they do not want to come to the city or go to Dickson or somewhere else. There are similar sites in Belconnen. We are transferring our large office space in Gungahlin to activity-based work and also reclaiming some of that space so that people from any part of the service can work from there at any point in time. We have invested heavily in the technology to enable desk spaces to be bookable. We have technology to support that. We have also been investing in the cultural elements. There has been a huge investment in leadership, management and upskilling.

We have just led a ground-breaking piece of work with ANZSOG and UNSW that looked at the working environment and how we have matured over COVID in a hybrid working sense. It goes to some of the points you have mentioned around teams and connection. Hybrid and working from home can be about the individual. We think the next level of maturity is about teams, connectiveness and how team stay productive together and achieve outcomes.

We see huge rewards from our staff who can access that and even our customer-facing staff, where we challenge them to think about their rostering and to think about how they can deliver services to the community in different ways and expanded ways that provide them with more flexibility.

It is a real cornerstone of where the public service is trying to achieve, supported by the government minister and certainly the Chief Minister in terms of the investment in the physical, the technology, the buildings and the ability to move between with a really strong authorising environment. I might just ask Mr Young to talk about the—

**MR DAVIS:** I have a quick supplementary, but I do want to hear what Mr Young has to say. Can I want to ask about the flexi-hub in Tuggeranong. Can I just get an understanding of when that is intended to open and how many people that could accommodate at any one time?

**Dr West:** The flexi-hub in Tuggeranong is, I think, around 50 people. So it would have 50 bookable desks. We had hoped it would open in the last month of this year, but COVID has scuffled that. It will be very early in the new year. We also have the Belconnen site opening early in the first couple of months of the new year. I think

there will be about 100 desks that we will have there that will be totally bookable.

Again, it will provide balance to our staff. We see this going more broadly. Just this morning the Head of Service spoke about the ability to offer flexible and hybrid as supporting gender equality, as we move to the removal of any gender pay gap and increasing female participation, because we are allowing people to work in a flexible way.

That comes with some challenges. We are very conscious of ensuring that people disconnect. When you think of cyber-social risks, it could occur in the wrong settings where people just work longer and they do not disconnect. What we are doing is setting up rules, and we will be educating and encouraging people to choose when and how they are working and contributing to their teams but also noting that, if they are doing that, they can disconnect from the workplace. Studies all around the world have shown the benefits of that. We are really interested in the four-day work week, and we have provided a submission to your good selves.

**MS ORR:** I dare say we will be seeing you back in the future on this topic, Dr West.

**Dr West:** There is certainly an opportunity here for us to pursue. We would hope that parts of the service would be able to pilot those sorts of activities potentially into the future. But I might turn to Mr Young before I ask Mr Noud for a quick overview.

**Mr Young:** Thank you. On a related subject, our healthier work program, as part of National Safe Work Month, hosted an industry networking event with a focus on hybrid work and working safely, which indicates the strong focus that government has on promoting safe hybrid working arrangements, as Dr West has described. In that vein, I think 100 people attended in person and 100 online.

As a large employer, the ACT government, like other large employers, faced with the prospect of having to shift a large amount of its workforce to remote working at short notice had close regard to making sure that they were able to do so safely. So some of the initiatives that were put in place in response to that involved a consultative review of the full range of relevant WHS strategies and policies, including the psychosocial health and safety, picking up that risk of isolation and working remotely.

We have developed an entire suite of policies, not only on COVID safety but also on working from home and working remotely. We have introduced a range of early intervention initiatives, such as an online physiotherapy service and a related psychosocial related intervention model for people who suffer musculoskeletal conditions while working from home perhaps as a result of their home office setup. There are several other initiatives there. We manage centrally a process to assess and adjust workstations and do other safety consultative work in support of the hubs that Dr West described.

There is very much a keen interest in the risks of working remotely and working in hybrid arrangements in a sustainable way. In recent times we have focused on shifting from what initially was a very crisis-based response to an emerged risk to moving towards promoting better work design in hybrid arrangements on a long-term and sustainable basis.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Noud, do you have something to add?

**Mr Noud:** I certainly do. I acknowledge the privilege statement. With respect to flexible work in the enterprise agreements, we are currently in a bargaining round, and we have spent a large amount of time with the unions and other bargaining representatives working through what flexible work looks like for the public service, especially post COVID. During COVID, like every employer all over the world, in fact, we had to very quickly develop new ideas and new models of work to be able to continue to provide services. We were very successful in doing that in a very quick and short time.

The approach we are taking through bargaining this time is to ensure that, through the enterprise agreements, the arrangements and options available to employees and managers to facilitate flexible work are there and clear—almost like a smorgasbord of choices that they can work through for particular employees when they request it. We have put in place arrangements to codify and structure those conversations to allow for the employee to have their decision not to grant flexible work reviewed and to make sure that our directorates take an approach of trying to be flexible and trying to think outside the box about how can we make this work.

There are challenges of course for certain types of workers. I think it was Mr Davis who earlier spoke to shift workers or frontline workers. For those workers, flexible work is difficult. They are on a roster. They are very much on the frontline. They are either on work or not. For workers such as everyone here it is somewhat easier to do flexible work. But that is not say that, for frontline workers, flexible work just cannot happen. We will look for our directorates to work to work with the employee to try and examine their circumstance and try and work out and be creative about how we can make this work.

**MS ORR:** Do you have any indications, Mr Noud, of what might be possible, particularly for frontline workers or people who are not based in office-based scenarios?

**Mr Gentleman:** Certainly shift patterns and how we can provide those frontline workers with the same sorts of jobs but maybe in a different way. I have had a conversation with paramedics, for example, about their shift patterns and how we might be able to move those around into the future to support them.

**Mr Young:** Minister, that is correct. It is about shift patterns. It is about whether we can share the job for the employee, whether we can share one shift worker job between two people, whether we can manage within the shift pattern for that employee to start later or however that might work, whether we can arrange cover for that employee's particular needs, or whether it is a long-term arrangement that the employee needs for a number of years or it is really just to get through a life event that the employee is having.

Rather than, to quote *Little Britain*, "Computer says no," it is about encouraging an approach to look beyond the easy answer of, "It is all too hard to think about," and to move into, "How can we actually do this? Can we make this work?" We are seeing

early results across the service where there have been arrangements put in place that are thinking outside the box, and that is very encouraging. There is always going to be cultural change needed to embed this and develop further, but that is what the enterprise agreements will do over the course of the next few years.

**THE CHAIR:** Great. I think that we could talk about this for ages.

**Mr Young:** We could.

**MR COCKS:** Commissioner, I want to come to WorkSafe inspections. During budget estimates we discussed the process for those inspections and who is and can be represented. Since then, I have heard increasing concerns from both businesses and workers about those inspections and how they are conducted. I have heard them described as raids, and I have been told that they are being weaponised. I have heard of workers and businesses being given directions that they feel are unreasonable, and that they feel like they are being treated as the bad guy, and what they do not feel like is that the inspections are being undertaken in good faith. Do you have any sense of what leads to this sort of breakdown in trust?

**Ms Agius:** I have not heard any of those things, ever. We have a really good relationship with industry. In fact, both the MBA and HIA support our residential construction strategy. We are very clear about what that strategy is. Part of that strategy is our inspectors on mass going into particular greenfield suburbs and conducting visits of every single place in a street, for instance, that has been constructed. Our inspectors are professional and they engage professionally. We very rarely receive complaints about the conduct of our inspectors' professionalism. We train them to be professional. I will never take a step back from the fact that our people are out there conducting proactive campaigns to ensure the safety of workers in the ACT, and that is absolutely our role.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Cocks, every worker should be able to come home safe at the end of every day, and we need to do as much as possible to ensure that.

**MR COCKS:** Absolutely, and I have said precisely the same in this place. Do you see any opportunities to build better relations with PCBUs, not only in the construction industry, to reduce fear around inspections and build a sense of good faith?

**Ms Agius:** Absolutely. I think there are always opportunities and we should always be looking to improve our stakeholder engagement, which is why we have a stakeholder engagement strategy. We are also working on an ACT government strategy. I do think that some people fear what we do, but fear can be brought about by people who are not willing to accept that they should be making improvements in their workplace around safety.

We will always conduct our proactive campaigns as well as our responsive ones, and particularly our responsive ones. When we receive information from members of the community, from PCBUs and from workers alleging a risk in a workplace, we absolutely should be responding to that. We have worked not just with the construction industry but also with the AHA, the Canberra Business Chamber and unions. Our stakeholder engagement is varied and in lots of different places, not just



construction.

**Mr Gentleman:** It is worthwhile acknowledging too of course that industry has been involved in many of the campaigns that WorkSafe have initiated. I have been there with them as we have announced community awareness campaigns—for example, most recently, in Denman Prospect at a breakfast there. It was quite a strong media campaign where industry said that they are very pleased to work alongside WorkSafe. So I think the relationship is pretty good. If there are ways that we can make it better, well fantastic, but so far I think it is working well.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a supplementary. I have had a couple of businesses contact me about a situation where, for example, the inspector comes and says, “Hey, you need this thing because you are not complying.” The business then makes the change and says, “We have got to fix this. We do not want a fine.” Then another inspector comes back and checks. It might have been a course someone had to do or something they had to change and they have either been unable to find the course for their people to do, or they have made the change and a different inspector has come back and said, “What did you do that for? You have that over here. That is unnecessary.” That is an overhead to business. It is not that they do not want to keep their people safe. They would love to find the course but cannot find the course. What are you hearing from business about that sort of thing?

**Ms Agius:** I have heard of one instance where that occurred recently where one of our inspectors provided the wrong information to a PCBU. Everyone is human and people do make mistakes. We do train our people. We have just set up a capability section in order to ensure that our people are trained and that they are all getting the same information, and we are setting up the iAuditor to assist with consistency throughout our inspections. I do not think that that is something that is just particular to us as a regulator. When I meet with other work health and safety regulators around the country, an issue that we all face is how we keep our inspections consistent. We are all working together to try and make that happen, and we will continue to improve on that space.

**THE CHAIR:** As an aside to that, with regard to, not raids as such but inspections, when there are, say, farmers markets or things like that, who is the PCBU responsible and do WorkSafe inspectors do blitzes or spot checks on those Saturday and Sunday markets and things like that?

**Ms Agius:** Yes, we do. Firstly, there can be more than one PCBU, and there can be more than one PCBU in any workplace. When it comes to, say, a farmers market, you will have your overriding PCBU. I guess they are a little bit like the main builder in a construction site who has subcontractors working for them. So, when you have a farmers market, you will have individual stores and those individual stores will have people working for them. They will also have work health and safety obligations. The Work Health and Safety Act provides for more than one PCBU in the same workplace. What was the first part of that question? I have just forgotten.

**THE CHAIR:** It was about who is responsible in those farmers markets.

**Ms Agius:** Yes, it was about spot checks. We have on-call inspectors working 24

hours a day. We also pay people overtime to do different things that occur on the weekend, such as Floriade, the Canberra Show, the multicultural festival and all of those things that are happening.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you just take on notice from me if there have been any of those weekend events where someone has had a breach? I am just wondering how many of those there might have been.

**Ms Agius:** On weekend events?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the weekend events, like the Floriades and the farmers markets and that sort of stuff.

**Ms Agius:** Chair, could I provide the answer to the earlier questions on notice in relation to labour hire licensing? Is that all right?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you.

**Ms Agius:** Mr Cocks, it is just the directors information that is provided and stored as part of the labour hire licensing scheme and it is only the number of workers which is provided. Also, we access Salesforce through the ACT government system. The IT security for that system sits with TCCS and the Office of the Chief Digital Officer. They will be able to answer the question in relation to the security.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Minister Gentleman and all of the officials that have come along today. I think there was just that one last question on notice about breaches for weekends within, say, the last 12 months. It would be appreciated if that answer could be provided to the secretary within five working days.

**Hearing suspended from 2.45 to 3.02 pm**

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate  
Triffitt, Mr Ross, Executive Branch Manager, Events ACT  
Starick, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Policy & Strategy  
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director General, Economic Development  
Priest, Ms Jenny, Executive Branch Manager, Business and Innovation  
Kobus, Mr Jonathan, Executive Branch Manager, Visit Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** In this second session today we are hearing from the Minister for Economic Development. Welcome, Minister Barr, and all the officials.

Before we start, there are a few housekeeping matters that I would like to draw everyone's attention to. I am sure you are all aware that proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. We are also being broadcast live—webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, please use the words: "I will take this question on notice." That helps the committee and witnesses to confirm for the transcript.

I would like to remind you all of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the statement that should be in front of you. Please confirm that you have read and understood the privileges statement.

No opening statements today. I will kick-off with the first question. Chief Minister, I have a couple of questions about the Convention Centre. The National Convention Centre estimate they are missing out on \$25 million in direct tourism spend per year due to the limitations of the conference and event facilities. On October 12 this year, you said that the government is pursuing an alternative strategy in relation to increased exhibition and large-scale banqueting space. Can you talk to me a bit more about that strategy?

**Mr Barr:** Yes; we are looking at complementary facilities that would support large-scale banqueting. There are a number of options that have been committed to, including at Exhibition Park, and in the CBD precinct.

**THE CHAIR:** They are the strategies—those two options? Are there more?

**Mr Barr:** In relation to short-term questions of enhancing the capacity of the existing centre to meet some of the challenges that they currently face, which is that they sometimes do not have space within the centre to host all of the exhibition space and then host a major dinner within the centre, so they have to take the dinner offsite. The National Arboretum, the Great Hall of Parliament House and Exhibition Park all provide alternative venues for dinners towards a thousand people, but they are more comfortable in the 700 to 800 delegate range. The commitment that the government made in relation to Exhibition Park, and a new major venue there, would accommodate a larger banqueting option.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. They are far away from the Convention Centre. Is there anything in the city other than the Arboretum?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, indeed. The forward infrastructure plan released in 2019 identified such possibilities. There was also a proposal floated at one point for a temporary facility to be built. That was on land not owned by the government.

**THE CHAIR:** Right; I understand that the Convention Centre proposed that \$12 million for the temporary facility, as you have just mentioned. Do you have any time frame?

**Mr Barr:** We are not pursuing the temporary facility option.

**THE CHAIR:** You are just not at all?

**Mr Barr:** No. We will go to a more permanent solution.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure.

**MS ORR:** Just around the Convention Centre, coming out of COVID and knowing that international travel has been hit and national travel has been hit, and the like: what sort of work is the government looking at doing from an economic development point of view to encourage large-scale conventions back to the ACT, beyond just the dining facilities?

**Mr Barr:** There is, in terms of international programs, a Tourism Australia-led marketing effort; they do most of the offshore. The ACT market is principally not international. It is mostly national association-type activities. As far as I am aware, the forward bookings for the Convention Centre are now quite strong. There was a lot of pent-up demand post the COVID public health restrictions being eased that would enable more face-to-face activities. Officials may be able to help with some further information, so we will provide some further information on that.

**MS ORR:** That is fine. Just on the topic of things coming to Canberra, I understand that we are going to be hosting the Australian Masters Games in 2025. What benefits do you see this bringing to the territory?

**Mr Triffitt:** I have read and understood the privileges statement. The Australian Masters Games brings around 8,000 to 10,000 competitors and entourage for the event over, approximately, eight days, so there are significant economic benefits associated with the event. In 2003, the last time we hosted the event, the economic impact was over \$18 million. The cohort are particularly known for enjoying the festivities within the city, so it is one of the better yielding events that we do have.

**MS ORR:** Can you run me through a little bit more about the preparations that go into it, and what role government will have in preparing for an event of this scale?

**Mr Triffitt:** It is organised by the Confederation of Australian Sport. The main role of government is to support the relationship between CAS, the Confederation of

Australian Sport, and the local sporting organisations. It was a competitive bid process, so ACT government's involvement was mainly through the bidding and the securing of the games. The actual operation and running of the games will be conducted by CAS in coordination with the state sporting organisations.

**MS ORR:** Okay, great. Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** I am interested in getting an update on the work done in the last 12 months to bring the University of New South Wales to the ACT. It appears that a fair bit has happened in that space, but there has also been a lot of pressures on that sector, so I wanted to see if we are still on track and if there is a timely update.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, Ms Arthy can assist.

**Ms Arthy:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. Work is still underway with UNSW and negotiations are continuing. As you may be aware, there was a change in the executive at UNSW as well as UNSW Canberra. We had granted an extension so that the university itself could revisit what their plans were. They have now done that, and we have now got the final proposal from them. We have also been working around remediation. That has taken a little longer than we had expected, but we are very close with that as well.

As you can imagine, in anything as large as this there are still a couple of final details we are working through, but we are hoping to have all of that finalised towards the end of this year, early next year.

**MR DAVIS:** How does that change the time frame for when we could expect to start enrolling students into the campus?

**Ms Arthy:** I may have to get some further advice from my people. COVID had that impact—not the work that has been happening this year. Because of the delays of COVID, I think the time frame was pushed out about a year, maybe two. I will just do a quick check—yes, a year of two.

What UNSW have been doing instead is focusing on the research side of the new campus and working on how they can use their existing facilities and the relationship with CIT to start bringing research and innovation work already into the campus so that things can get moving as well. It is certainly a very strong commitment to making this happen.

**MR DAVIS:** Great. This might seem a little left field, but Canberra is a finite space, and we have fewer community facilities than the demand we have. Ms Kelly and I have had this conversation a lot, in particular, with community sport. What conversations have happened with UNSW to explore the facilities they will have on their campus when it is on line and, given its locality, how Canberrans and Canberran community organisations might be able to share and utilise their facilities?

**Ms Arthy:** This campus is probably not going to be the traditional campus that you might see with ANU and UC, which have expansive grounds and facilities. This is very much targeted at research and sciences, so there will not be that high level of

facilities that will be open to the public except for some in public realm, like cafes and other services like that. There was a master plan that went out for community consultation, and I believe that was overwhelmingly positively received. On any sort of future development of whatever happens at UNSW, I know that UNSW are very committed to working with the local community.

**MR DAVIS:** Great. What conversations have we had with the ANU, UC and ACU in relation to bringing UNSW to the ACT? Obviously, it is a boon for Canberra, but I imagine, instinctively, that might be threatening—for lack of a softer word—for other universities also actively seeking students. I would be interested in how those conversations have played out.

**Mr Barr:** UNSW are already here and have been here for 50 years, so one would view it more as an extension or an expansion of their presence rather than them arriving cold into the university environment. Of course, it is a competitive environment and there are very strict competition rules between universities. Whilst cooperation is possible, collusion is illegal, so there is not a cartel of ACT universities that can keep other universities out.

**MR DAVIS:** Let the record show the Chief Minister used those words, not me!

**Mr Barr:** So to that extent, the expansion of UNSW is not really a matter for which the other universities—they can have a view, but there is no formal process for which that is considered by government. It is a free market operating within certain regulatory parameters. Obviously, the ACT and this Assembly have a legislative framework for the University of Canberra, but we do not for the ANU; it is, of course, governed by an act of the commonwealth parliament. Funding and other arrangements for universities are, again, at the commonwealth level.

The principle decision for the ACT government was in relation to the parcel of land, and if we would be prepared to entertain its release for an education purpose through an MOU with an existing university accredited and operating within the territory. We have similar MOUs for land use with the ANU that date back 20 years and with the University of Canberra in the past ten—in particular, where this parliament voted to change the range of uses for the University of Canberra's land endowment, to support its economic development, in essence.

I think in any context around expansion of higher education there will be a variety of views put forward. Some may see it as threatening; others would see it as healthy competition. I would observe that the areas of focus are not in direct competition, in large part, with existing courses and offerings from the other universities, but there is nothing within national higher education policy and the operating frameworks that says universities cannot go head-to-head for students. I think in our market it is recognised that a degree of complementarity is really the best way to grow the entire sector. I do note that ANU and UNSW have strong working relationships in a number of research areas, including space; that is not the only example of collaboration there—just as ANU and UC have areas of both competition and cooperation.

All the universities have been well aware of the process and have expressed views on the matter, but they ultimately respect that it is an open sector, and as long as the

university entrant meets the requirements under Australian legislation, it is entirely within their purview to expand or contract based on their institution's desires.

**MR DAVIS:** That makes sense.

**Mr Barr:** ANU, for example, has placed a cap on their student growth. They have determined to have a limited number of students and to pursue a slightly different approach, rather than wanting to significantly expand their student enrolment. That is a decision their governing council and vice-chancellor have made.

**THE CHAIR:** When UNSW and its new site comes on line, that will create opportunities for Canberra students. Given we are in the very elementary stage of some of this planning, have there been any conversations, even preliminary, at the Education Directorate about some of the opportunities and new pathways this might present for Canberra students to go into higher education offered by UNSW?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, there is strong engagement between this area in the higher education portfolio together with the Education Directorate more broadly. A number of the universities have early entry possibilities—examples include the ANU Secondary College. It is certainly open to those universities to seek to engage with students at year 11 and 12 level, and sometimes even earlier in some particular disciplines. There is certainly that opportunity. The areas of focus for UNSW Canberra are ones that are in high demand across the economy, particularly in STEM and ICT skills. I would see every opportunity and every reason for UNSW Canberra to want to engage closely around education pathways with the secondary college system, particularly, but also, potentially, the high school level.

**MR DAVIS:** That is great, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Chief minister, I have got questions about a stadium. I just want to make sure I am on the right track. It has been well documented that you have ruled out a stadium in the city in preference for an upgrade at Bruce. Is that correct?

**Mr Barr:** You cannot build a suitable facility on the old Civic Pool site without moving Parkes Way, and that additional cost, which would be in the order of several hundred million dollars, makes that an uneconomic proposition. A new stadium is expensive anyway and adding another \$200 million to the cost makes that uneconomic. That option, having been thoroughly explored through feasibility, has now been removed from the list of potential future options.

**THE CHAIR:** “No” to that site.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. The more likely outcome, following engagement and decisions that the Australian Sports Commission have made, is that they would seek to redevelop the AIS precinct, and they have indicated they are open to a discussion with the territory in relation to the stadium they own that we lease. It is a commonwealth owned stadium. The land is zoned for the purpose of a stadium, and there is, obviously, an existing facility there. That option would remain, at this point, the preferred one.

Should that not be possible, a further option that was identified in a previous feasibility study was Exhibition Park as a potential location. That has never been the preferred location. When the city stadium option was being pursued, the city stadium option was the preferred; now that is not feasible. The Bruce option has always remained in the mix, and it is preferred over Exhibition Park, but Exhibition Park remains the final fall-back option should the Bruce option not be viable.

**THE CHAIR:** I know it has even trickled into my office. Have any other representations been made? I think there is somewhere in Turner or ANU. Have you heard about that?

**Mr Barr:** I certainly am aware of various proposals from Southwell Park to the ANU North Oval in Turner being floated as potential sites. Both of those are flood plains. Sullivans Creek runs through the middle and—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr Barr:** I do not think either would be suitable. The locations are, I can see, appealing, but one, obviously, is a major community sporting precinct, so removing the land for an elite sporting facility would have flow-on implications, but I think the major issue there is the fact that it is a flood plain. The other site is not owned by the territory. It is not a large site, and it is in a flood zone as well.

**THE CHAIR:** So they are ruled out?

**Mr Barr:** Whilst I appreciate people have looked at a map and said “oh, yes”, I think they have significant constraints and challenges, not least of which is the flooding, and in one instance, the territory does not own the land. Then there are planning and zoning issues that would need to change in order to facilitate such a location. I think, at this point, given the extensive range of exploration on possible sites that we are now down to two, with a preferred one being with the existing AIS precinct.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure, and just one last question. What about the AIS would deem it unsuitable?

**Mr Barr:** The question there would largely be one of asset ownership, and, really, who is paying for the new stadium. If the assumption is that the territory government would pay for a new stadium, then there would be the question of land ownership and asset ownership. At the moment, we rent a commonwealth owned facility on land that the commonwealth owns. It would be unusual for us to go in and rebuild and not own the asset or the land it sits on.

I would envisage that an outcome, a preferable outcome, would be territory ownership of the asset if the territory is expected to pay for it. If the territory is not paying for it and there is a benevolent private sector entity, or indeed the commonwealth felt that they wanted to build the stadium, then there is nothing stopping that from happening. The territory may or may not then need to be involved in leasing the stadium to football teams—if someone else builds it. We would just play a middle manager role in that instance in that we would lease the stadium from the commonwealth and then maintain the leasing arrangements with the sporting teams and other users.



A privately owned stadium would not need ACT government involvement. Equally, a privately owned stadium would be a loss-making exercise so would only really be a philanthropic gift to Canberra. I cannot see any investor seeking to lay out three-quarters of a billion dollars with very little financial return. It is certainly not a going proposition. It would only be a gift. I am not sure there are any people around who have \$750 million to gift to the territory and the people of Canberra by way of a new stadium.

**THE CHAIR:** Certainly not me.

**MS ORR:** How are our university student enrolments? I know you have had a bit of a discussion about UNSW, but I was actually thinking more broadly than that—bouncing back from COVID travel restrictions and lockdowns. What is the ACT government doing to ensure the continued return of students to our university campuses?

**Mr Barr:** The numbers are reasonably encouraging, based on ABS arrivals data. We are seeing a pretty strong recovery. They are not yet back to pre-COVID levels, though. We are working with the universities through Study Canberra, our overarching city marketing branding for international students, and working across the university sector with a view to next year's enrolment stream.

**MS ORR:** As that work continues, what are you doing to support the universities beyond the return of students to the campus—including, say, research and development functions?

**Mr Barr:** Undergraduate students are a part of the story, but postgraduate and research students, and the universities' research efforts, are clearly very significant drivers of the universities' rankings and overall health as higher education institutions.

The government has sought to work with each of the universities on particular programs and projects that are aligned to our economic development strategy and areas of priority: from renewable energy through to defence, national security, ICT, space and agriculture. There are a whole range of industry sectors where we have sought to partner with one or more universities in creating either research centres of excellence or supporting programs and activities that have led to the commercialisation of research spun out of the universities—or, in some instances, working with other third-party partners in sponsoring particular courses, scholarships and other activities in that sector.

**MS ORR:** Great, thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** I have a slightly tangential question, but I promise it is related. As the university sector recovers, it then brings in more students. An ongoing conversation in this room has been the housing affordability crisis. Can I get some insight on what work has been done with the universities, specifically, to consider what impact an increased student population is going to have on the housing market? What supports, if any, do we provide to accommodate them on campus or within their own means?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, the on-campus accommodation program has a long history, where land that was formerly territory land was sold to the university, the ANU, for the development of large-scale student accommodation. You see that at the intersection of City West with the eastern edge of the ANU campus; there is one example. The University of Canberra has also developed a significant amount of new student accommodation in partnership with some of the recognised student accommodation providers in the Australian and Australasian markets—UniLodge and others.

Universities soon make a decision on the extent of their future enrolments and the demand for on-campus accommodation. I guess if there is a supply and demand imbalance that would then justify further on-campus student accommodation, the universities have that opportunity. I think UC, perhaps, has more land to do that than ANU does, at the moment, but the ANU has previously leased off-campus student accommodation. What I knew as Fenner Hall, which I think is now the Canberra Accommodation Centre, has also been able to meet some surge demand for student accommodation in the city.

I would anticipate, if there were a further significant increase in international or domestic students outside of the Canberra region who needed accommodation, the market is well geared to respond to that, because there is land available. They can build new student accommodation, but they normally need a guarantee of student enrolment before they will build.

**MR DAVIS:** It would appear, anecdotally at least, that currently student accommodation that is provided, at least at ANU and UC, is not meeting the demand and so those students are seeking property on—

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I think it would depend; there is often a question around catered versus non-catered and around individual versus dormitory-style student accommodation. By dormitory as I mean six bedrooms sharing a common area, so group living on campus as opposed to everyone in their own en suite hotel-room-type accommodation. So there is a mixture and it is ultimately for the universities and the student accommodation providers to get the market settings right there. The ACT government cannot dictate to the universities what sort of—

**MR DAVIS:** No, no, but what I am trying to isolate here is when they do not get the market settings right, as in they do not supply enough housing to meet the demand—

**Mr Barr:** Yes, is there still overpressure in the ACT housing market?

**MR DAVIS:** That is right, and because I am putting to you that I believe there is, have we had those conversations with the university sector to see what additional supports we can provide them so that that increased student population is not having a disproportionate impact on rents? I am thinking particularly rents in the CBD area.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, sure. We have certainly encouraged the universities to seek to accommodate more of their international and national student enrolment on campus. They have also though struck partnerships with the private sector for student-accommodation-specific projects, I am aware of at least one that is under

construction in Braddon at the moment. I guess the advantage of that model is that it is not institution-specific, so it is student accommodation but you can be studying at any institution and stay there, as opposed to ones that are for ANU or for UC. I think that is a way that the student accommodation market has responded to that mix of demand, depending a little bit obviously on location and proximity.

In the city precinct, most enrolments are ANU or CIT and would then also, presumably, be UNSW Canberra. Belconnen town centre has more option I guess for UC students, but UC itself has a lot of land. So, if there were a view from UC that their enrolments were going to dramatically increase, then we would expect that they would work with an accommodation partner to expand their on campus housing capability.

**MR DAVIS:** Great. Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

A bit of a bug-bear of mine, Chief Minister, as you know, is that we are the smart little capital and there is lots of very exciting stuff happening in the innovation space in particular, but as a member for Brindabella, I sometimes feel it is remiss that that seems to happen within a certain locality. So I know we have had this conversation before, but we are going to have it again today. Can you point to me to anywhere where this sort of investment in things like the innovation policy, international education and investment attraction has been specifically prioritised to some of our group centres or regional centres, as Canberra grows, and not just in the CBD? Of course, I would be interested in Tuggeranong in particular.

**Mr Barr:** Well, there are, obviously, land releases across Canberra that support innovation and business formation and development. I am aware of companies that have established their quarters outside of the CBD. because of the planning framework in Canberra, a lot of that is then focused on some of the light industrial areas, so some of the advanced manufacturing that is taking place in Mitchell or Fyshwick, Hume or some of those industrial estates. Office space is, obviously, cheaper the further from the parliamentary triangle and then the CBD that you are. There are pretty clear market forces at play there.

**MR DAVIS:** I guess my point is that while that is the private market making their own decisions—and, of course, as a local member I would always encourage the private market to spend their money down south—but where is the government investing or giving some strategic direction and advice for people to set up shop or provide a service in some of these spaces that we are very proud of that are encouraged not necessarily just in the city?

**Mr Barr:** Right. We have put forward investment prospectuses for government-owned land in town centres seeking to attract investment and that, to varying degrees, has been successful. The government cannot direct where the private sector invests. We can provide land release opportunities for the land release program, and we do that. The forward planning framework does identify particular precincts for innovation, and each of the district plans that have been outlined in the Territory Plan provide for that. But unfortunately in the context, I think, of the question you are asking, the planning framework has designed Tuggeranong as a series of suburban areas supported by a town centre, group centres and retail areas. There is not a light

industrial precinct other than Hume. Is that in Murrumbidgee or your electorate?

**MR DAVIS:** Murrumbidgee.

**Mr Barr:** The nature of Canberra's separation of uses planning framework, for good or bad, means that you have particular areas that are zoned for certain types of economic activity.

**MR DAVIS:** I mean, I suppose if I can use the innovation hub as an example. The government provides subsidies and—

**Mr Barr:** The Canberra Innovation Network?

**MR DAVIS:** That is right. So, the Canberra Innovation Network has provided a space in the city or subsidised rent. There is, obviously, ACT government-owned real estate in the town centres, and so there would be opportunity to offer subsidised rent or commercial offerings to not dictate terms but to incentivise diversification, and I wonder if there are any examples like that you could point to.

**Mr Barr:** Well, certainly the investment in CIT Woden would be an example where a government institution is being located and there will be opportunity emerging from that particular investment. I mean, one of the challenges that we face, given our size, is that where we can only have one of something—there can only be one headquarters for the Canberra Innovation Network—by definition, it does need to be somewhat centrally located. I am familiar with the issues around northside and southside, let alone divisions within south and north, whether that is Woden, Tuggeranong, Western Creek or Molonglo, or north of the lake, Gungahlin, Belconnen and the elements of the Molonglo Valley that will be in that context. So, you know, naturally, where there is only one of something, it will tend to be centrally located.

We happened to have a surplus space in one of the buildings we own in the CBD. The Innovation Network sought to take up that opportunity at that time. Having invested in that space, we are certainly not going to relocate them, and they are expanding in that space. But I believe they can also—and they do—take their events and activities around Canberra, but they have got one floor on the building. Let us not overstate the level of impact that that has. As important as it is, their activities are not physical. They are the community of innovators that they build, and I have been to their events all over Canberra in a number of different group and town centres across the last four or five years.

**THE CHAIR:** I have just a couple more questions around the area and basketball. In the federal budget, there were funds to refurbish AIS, as we have discussed. I believe there were also funds allocated for a scoping study into a basketball stadium, possibly at UC, able to seat more than 7,000 people. So if AIS is the chosen one and the one that we go with, is there a need, do you believe, for both—for an additional 7,000 seat stadium?

**Mr Barr:** Right. If I can correct that element, I think the university might at one point have floated a larger facility. The funding they receive from the commonwealth government is not for a 7,000 seat arena.

**THE CHAIR:** No. A scoping study.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. The scoping study is not looking at a 7,000 seat arena.

**THE CHAIR:** I see.

**Mr Barr:** So that was previously floated by the university, but it is not what they have received funding for. They have received funding for a smaller-scale facility, the stated objective of which is largely around providing a train base and a regular season venue for the Canberra Capitals as well as meeting some of the university and potentially some community use for basketball facilities, but it is not a competitor with the AIS arena and would not be a competitor with a larger-scale venue for Canberra that would be bigger than the AIS arena.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. I guess I am just trying to understand if, from all of the information you have, is there a need for both?

**Mr Barr:** There is certainly room in our market for a number of different-sized facilities, so I have no contest with the university seeking to have a home base for the University of Canberra Capitals basketball team that would be their training base and a place that they could play regular season games in front of a crowd of several thousand.

I also appreciate that the Capitals, for their larger matches—often finals and other big-drawing games—may and would want a venue larger than a couple of thousand. So in the interim we have made the Convention Centre available for regular season games and they then played their finals at the AIS arena. So a refurbished AIS arena would give them a venue for finals basketball with a capacity of, I think, up to 5,000 people. That is still too small for major sporting events or major music events, and so that is why we have outlined in our infrastructure in 2019 a desire for a larger venue that the ACT government would pursue, and that is in our infrastructure plan.

**THE CHAIR:** Right, but that is not something that you would fund the UC to do there?

**Mr Barr:** No, it is not.

**THE CHAIR:** While we are on the Capitals, for the next season, I remember there was an issue with finals games and the location. I am wondering whether it has been booked. Have we booked space for the Capitals for the next season all the way through to finals?

**Mr Barr:** We do not book space; the Capitals would.

**THE CHAIR:** Are we going to help them to make sure they get that?

**Mr Barr:** The convention centre is, as I understand, their regular season venue. My understanding is that the AIS Arena refurb would not be finished in time for finals for season 2022/2023. It is a commonwealth project, but my understanding is that they

would seek to have it available for March of 2024, which would be the anticipated finals for the WNBL for the 2023/2024 season. It might be late February/early March. From memory, it is when the WNBL finals are.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. So, I just would love confirmation that from a government perspective, if you can, you will make sure that our Canberra team has that space for finals, if there is anything you can do.

**Mr Barr:** I cannot make the AIS arena available when it is in the middle of a refurbishment.

**THE CHAIR:** No, but the Convention Centre or the other options.

**Mr Barr:** The Convention Centre management manages the bookings. The Capitals, obviously, have a government-funded court that can be installed there. So I would presume that the Capitals will have contact with the Convention Centre and make the bookings once their season draw and their potential finals dates are known, but I do not manage the venue bookings, either on behalf of the venue or the hirer. They talk to each other and I am sure they can make that arrangement. They have done so in the past.

**THE CHAIR:** Great.

**MS ORR:** What opportunities are there for local businesses to benefit from partnerships and innovation research between the government, the universities and the innovation network?

**Ms Starick:** I have read and understand the privilege statement.

There are a range of opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the partnerships that we have with universities. For a number of years now we have been investing in a program called the Priority Investment Program, which deliberately sets up that relationship between our local businesses to benefit from the commercialisation of the research that happens in our local universities. It is a co-investment fund where the universities and the local business contribute, as does government, to invest in early-stage commercialisation, and it is happening across a range of the sectors in Canberra that we have competitive strengths in, whether it is space, quantum, as the Chief Minister mentioned agri-technology, et cetera. The ACT government has been investing in this since about 2018.

We have another round that will be opening in the priority investment program which will focus not just on partnering with local businesses but also on developing job opportunities, particularly in those STEM areas, as well as attracting investment. I might ask Jenny to provide some further detail on that program.

**Ms Priest:** I have read and understand the privileges statement.

What I would like to do is to provide some examples of the types of projects organisations that we have funded through the PIP program since it started around 2018. So one that is coming to the fore at the moment is Skykraft. So Skykraft is a

Canberra UNSW spin-out company. It started its journey with four people from UNSW Canberra Space who had identified a niche market opportunity, had developed a compelling business case, and had the support of key customer and a strategic partner. I think at the critical point of its journey Skykraft needed funding to rapidly develop their technology, and at that time it was successful in applying for a grant under the Priority Investment Program. It received \$1 million, and the funds allowed Skykraft to develop new capability, create new jobs and achieve its first external equity investment.

In terms of where Skykraft is at today, in December 2022 it will launch its first satellites with a total mass of around 300 kilograms, which is greater than the entire mass of previously-launched Australian-built satellites. That was designed and built in Canberra, and what this work will lead to and what Skykraft is moving forward into is the revolutionisation of air traffic management control, which is why the project is gearing towards with the satellite constellation they are launching. So that is Skykraft.

We also mentioned agri-technology. The Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology received a grant in 2018-19 of \$1.3 million. It is a dedicated business hub within the ANU for start-ups and SMEs in agri-technology, in food tech. It is well established through the Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-Technology. CEAT is a partnership between ANU and CSIRO and has strong regional links to surrounding agricultural and food tech networks.

One example that is a recent success as a result of CEAT is Nourish Foods, a CSIRO spin-out company that has worked closely with CEAT and has recently received a \$45 million series A funding to produce cultured meat and food technology. So these are just two examples of the types of projects that have been funded through the PIP.

I could provide another one, which is in a different area of our key sectors. It is the Academy of Interactive Entertainment. In 2020-21 they received \$389,400 and in 2021-22 \$450,000 to develop the world's first virtual production, education and qualifications for screen industry. The world's first virtual production, education and qualifications for screen industry will be coming from Canberra, plus state-of-the-art production facilities like those used to create Disney production, *The Mandalorian*. This capability will position the territory to be the go-to location for virtual productions in Australia, it will attract high-end feature films and TV series productions to use the facility and it will create and preserve local jobs through the production. So there is a bit of a spread of the types of things that we are funding.

**MS ORR:** Can you just remind me what the key priority areas are that you would be looking at?

**Ms Priest:** So there are key capability areas include space, cyber security, other defence-related industries, advanced technology, creative industries and renewables.

**MS ORR:** Do you have any examples, then, of the renewables technology and how the programs are supporting the renewables sector?

**Ms Priest:** Yes. There is another one that I can cite for you. So the Distributed Energy Resources or DERlab was funded \$1.5 million in 2018-19. It is an Australian-first,

and the laboratory provides access to developers and technologists, engineers, data scientists and industry to test and develop how renewable energy systems—like solar, batteries, electric vehicles and energy systems—work in real-world conditions. This facility can assist us to achieve a zero emissions future faster and safer than ever before. So that is the DERlab.

**MS ORR:** Thank you.

**MR DAVIS:** A couple of quick ones just so I can get a better understanding around the Canberra Economic Recovery Advisory Group. Am I assuming rightly that was a group purposely stood up during the pandemic?

**Mr Barr:** Correct.

**MR DAVIS:** How regularly has that group met?

**Mr Barr:** When it was in session, it met quite regularly. I can—

**MR DAVIS:** So it is not meeting anymore?

**Mr Barr:** No. It was wound up some time ago, yes.

**MR DAVIS:** I see. I guess what I would be interested in diving a little bit deeper into is what the process was for that group in making recommendations to government, in terms of economic recovery from the pandemic. Were all of their recommendations taken up? Were some of their recommendations taken up? What was the decision-making process around what they proposed we do to aid economic recovery and around what we inevitably did? There are a few in there, I know.

**Ms Arthy:** Perhaps it is easier if I work backwards. So the culmination of the advice went into the economic development priority statement called Canberra Switched On, which the Chief Minister launched in March of this year. The name of the group was actually the Canberra Economic Advisory Group. The “recovery” was taken away from the title, because at the time that it was set up, we were looking very much about what is recovery from COVID on a very micro level. However, as we saw, the economy was recovering quite well, and the Chief Minister asked us to look very purposefully at the next phase for economic development over a longer period of time rather than the immediate period coming out of COVID.

So this group of people were brought together based on their expertise. There was a mix of people, people who were invited to attend for their particular expertise, but there was also an expression of interest and a selection process that was taken on board. The group met a number of times; I just do not have it in front of me. I am sure we have provided this information to the committee before. I think it was about four or five times. We would meet and the Chief Minister posed several questions to them, and the group was accompanied by Tim Williams, who was with Arup, and he did the previous statement of ambition. He had just come from doing some major work about the future of cities in the UK.

So between the work of Dr Williams as well as the group, they were asked to provide



advice to the Chief Minister about what other things that Canberra should be focusing on to set ourselves apart in a really competitive post-COVID world. So “What are the things that we should really focus on?” So the advice, after the several workshops, culminated in a report, which I believe is available on the website, which was provided to the Chief Minister, which then formed the basis of further work, which then culminated in the Canberra Switched On release and the elements that were contained as part of that.

**MR DAVIS:** That makes sense. Just a couple of clarifying questions while I have you. On that recruitment process, was everyone who wanted to be represented on that group represented or were there a few people who missed out and disappointed?

**Ms Arthy:** There were a lot of people who applied and there were only a limited number of spots, so of course not everyone was able to participate.

**MR DAVIS:** Given the relative time intensity that the Chief Minister alluded to, were people remunerated for their time on this group?

**Ms Arthy:** Yes, they were.

**MR DAVIS:** How were they remunerated?

**Ms Arthy:** I would have to take that one on notice, unless I can find it. We went through the Remuneration Tribunal and a fee was set for the time that they were available. I just cannot remember off the top of my head what that fee was.

**MR DAVIS:** I guess I would be interested in knowing the regularity with which they met and how much they were remunerated, and then of course how many people were on that group, which is available, so as to ascertain the total cost of sourcing that expert advice.

**Ms Arthy:** We can certainly provide the total cost. When I talked about the meeting, the workshops, they also did a lot of out-of-session work. We were developing Canberra Switched On in parallel with them, so we would be testing ideas with them all the time. So it is not just a matter of them, say, meeting three or four times and commenting on things or providing things; they were actually heavily involved with working up ideas.

**MR DAVIS:** So we might have paid them but we got more than we paid for?

**Ms Arthy:** They were terrific. They were really outstanding in terms of the advice and the goodwill that they came and gave to us. Having a values-driven economic development statement, which is what came from them as well, I think is unique. It is what we have achieved.

**MR DAVIS:** That is why I asked. I hope my questions do not seem challenging. It seems like a good model and a learning for government—something that was born from COVID. But government always has challenges for which it seeks expert advice. I am trying to ascertain, if this was a cost-effective way of sourcing that advice in real time, could it be a model replicated for other challenges? Perhaps that is a question for

the Chief Minister.

**Mr Barr:** Subject of course to the terms of reference and the nature of the advice being sought, yes, I would think so, but obviously it is case by case.

**MR DAVIS:** Thanks, Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** A couple of follow-up questions for my understanding. You said they met four or five times. Were those the workshops or were they just meetings?

**Ms Arthy:** No, they were workshops.

**THE CHAIR:** They were the workshops.

**Ms Arthy:** There were not meetings where we took papers and just had them comment; we actually were taking concepts. We were generally interested in what they were wanting to tell us. So they were mostly workshops.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you talk to me a bit about the spread of people that were involved in those workshops? You said they applied and not everyone—

**Mr Barr:** As in who were they?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** Me; Kathy Leigh as Head of Service; Stephen Bartos, director Asia Pacific Pegasus Economics; Hala Batainah, chair of the Canberra Innovation Network; Renee Leon, now vice-chancellor of Charles Sturt University but at that time the former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Employment; Jane Madden formerly of Austrade who was various principal of Brickfielder Insights; Cherelle Murphy, the chief economist at Austrade at that time; Paddy Nixon the then and now vice-chancellor of the University of Canberra; Zoe Piper, founder and managing director of Ethitrade International; Dr Michael Schaper, the then senior strategic advisor to the Canberra Business Chamber; Professor Helen Sullivan, the director of the Crawford School of Public Policy. Then we had two small business representatives: Nick Tyrell, who is the CEO of GoBoat Australia, and Alan Tse, who is the co-founder and commercial director of Altina Drinks.

**THE CHAIR:** Of the \$326 million of support grants funded for business, how much of that 326 came from the federal government?

**Mr Barr:** I think it was a fifty-fifty program. There may have been some elements that we also funded entirely, but they were different programs. Principally the main program was fifty-fifty. There were other programs that were either a greater or entire ACT government share.

**THE CHAIR:** But that \$326 was the fifty-fifty.

**MS ORR:** On the “special events fund”, what events can we start to see coming back and how are we going to continue to put on events as we emerge from COVID and we

have more options available to us? Run me through what I can do over the next 12 months.

**Ms Barr:** Mr Kobus, up the back of the room, will assist on that one.

**Mr Kobus:** Thank you, Chief Minister. I have read and understand the privileges statement. The formal name that we use for the special events fund is the Major Event Fund for the grant program. It has been going for a number of years. It was opened in 2011. So it is a well-established program.

There have been 44 completed and acquitted events that have been delivered with support of the Major Event Fund. It is a program that delivers great return on investment. Those 44 completed and acquitted events have to date provided \$984 million in economic benefit to the ACT and attracted over five million attendees. For the most part, over 50 per cent of those attendees came from interstate or overseas. So the return on investment is that, for every dollar invested by the government, there is \$84 in return to the territory through that program.

The budget for the 2021-22 was \$1.5 million and for 2022-23 it is also \$1.5 million. There were nine events or exhibitions supported through the Major Event Fund in 2021-22 across our cultural institutions. We support Summernats through the event. We supported a major theatre event at Canberra Theatre, which was *SIX the Musical*. We supported the National Folk Festival. Also, for the first time, we set up in the 2021-22 year a Business Event Fund, which sees \$150,000 being allocated specifically for the purpose of attracting more business events to the ACT. That helps us compete with other jurisdictions around the country, to provide funding assistance and incentives to bring business events to the territory.

Again, this year, we have had a strong response. Pleasingly, events are proving to be visitation drivers for the ACT. This year alone we have been fortunate to have a wealth of cultural events come back to the city, which is a strength for Canberra, and attendees are responding really well. At the National Gallery of Australia, for example, we had Jeffrey Smart being held there. We have *Connection* at the National Museum of Australia and *Ancient Greeks* at the National Museum of Australia and *Shakespeare to Winehouse* at the National Portrait Gallery.

Those events provided a really good boost to our accommodation sector over that period. Over the winter months, for example, we returned to pre-pandemic occupancy levels throughout hotels, largely, and for a significant part, driven by the activities or events occurring around town and our major events and exhibitions.

The one thing we try to achieve through the Major Event Fund is to invest collaboratively where the event partners have the capacity to have reach and distribution into markets that we need to target. The National Gallery of Australia is a great example of that where, through co-investing with them, we amplify the marketing efforts. They more than match the investment the territory puts in and deliver extensive campaigns around Australia promoting Canberra as a place to visit with the primary reason to visit to attend a world-class event or exhibition.

**MS ORR:** Can you just clarify for me what a business event is?

**Mr Kobus:** A business event is a conference or significant meeting. The activities that would occur at the National Convention Centre, for example, would be constituted as business events. So if the primary purpose of travel is for business, with the event component being defined as a conference or other activity that brings people together for a particular activity.

**MS ORR:** Great. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to talk about page 145 of the annual report, “Economic Activity”. It refers to Canberra based home games for elite teams. The measure of estimated economic activity generated by major sporting events is mainly focused on a narrow range of named elite teams. Are there other sporting organisations also receiving government support in this economic activity?

**Mr Barr:** Within my portfolio, no. In Minister Berry’s there are other sporting teams.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; so I will check with her. And is Throsby Home of Football the same?

**Mr Barr:** That is the same. Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Can we chat about the Future Jobs Fund?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Page 82 of the annual says that there were four grants, and I believe that it said \$1.92 million in funding has been awarded. I am just wondering if you can tell me who the grant recipients were and how much each one received?

**Mr Barr:** We certainly can. Ms Priest can assist.

**Ms Priest:** Sorry; the four grant recipients in what year?

**THE CHAIR:** This current year, 2021-22.

**Ms Priest:** The information is not where I thought it was.

**Mr Barr:** There were four from the following sectors: allied health, to develop precision and personalised medicines; space, to develop a national test capability to develop a national civilian and defence mission control and space industry training centre; creative arts, to support the establishment of an LED sound stage facility with the Academy of Interactive Entertainment. As to the exact amounts for each, I am hoping I have bought Ms Priest enough time to find those. If not, I am sure we will be able to get that before the hearing is done.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a few more questions about the application process. I do not know whether anyone else can talk about that.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** How were they invited to participate and how many jobs came out of those four grants, in particular?

**Ms Arthy:** I can start while Ms Priest gets the detail. In general terms, there are two ways that companies or universities can access these funds. One is through an open process where we go out and invite applications. That is usually done through our priority investment program type work. We also have occasionally some projects that come in out of round that are really beneficial. For example, I believe that the projects that the Chief Minister referred to to provide funding to establish a new light and sound stage as well as the ANU space work came outside the round, but it was so important to the future of the city that decisions were made, based on our advice to the Chief Minister, around several criteria which relate to whether it amplifies our industry, whether it aligns with the priorities of the sector, and what the potential job creation could be. They were definitely two that came about out of round. As to the other two, I will have to defer to my colleagues.

In terms of the jobs created, it is more about potential jobs rather than actual jobs, because a lot of these projects take a long time. We usually tend to fund part of a project, not the full project. But we do make sure that, whatever we do fund, has the potential to create jobs. I will just check with my colleagues whether we have the information.

**Ms Priest:** Sure. The Canberra clinical phenomics, which was a partnership between ANU and Canberra Health Services, was \$525,750; the establishment of the sound stage in Canberra by AIE, which I referenced earlier, was \$450,000; an Australian satellite constellation operations facility, UNSW Canberra, was \$700,000; and the National Space Qualification Network, with ANU, was \$250,000.

**Ms Arthy:** Do we have information about the job's element? Perhaps we can take that one on notice and come back to you—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, sure.

**Ms Arthy:** Because we do have an assessment as part of each one of these to look at what are the jobs that are created.

**THE CHAIR:** The potential—

**Ms Arthy:** For each one of those, we can provide you with the information that was provided to us about the expected number of jobs.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; and the current financial year, \$5.811 million in funding. Is that all for grants?

**Ms Arthy:** There are a range of aspects to that. And I am just trying to get my information up. There are a couple of elements here. The Future Jobs Fund is made up of several components.

**THE CHAIR:** Right.

**Ms Arthy:** There is a capital component—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Arthy:** which is, I believe, for this one is about \$5 million—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, \$5 million..

**Ms Arthy:** I am just trying to remember—

**THE CHAIR:** This one—yes, that is what I have got here.

**Ms Arthy:** —I do not have it in front of me.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Arthy:** That is earmarked for work around how we assist start-ups, and we are currently working on what that might look like—to be released this year—particularly focusing around what venture capital we can provide to assist start-up communities.

The other elements that are part of this are some industry work that we do with, say, the Cyber Hub. We fund the Cyber Hub out of Future Jobs Fund funding.

We have allocated funding for space, because we are currently doing a space strategy at the moment, and have indicated work around a space hub, so we have allocated money for that as well.

There is money earmarked for further work around workforce attraction. Also, I believe there is some work there for investment attraction, I believe as part—

**Ms Priest:** Yes.

**Ms Arthy:** I do not know whether it is part of the \$5.1. I will just check with the—

**Ms Priest:** As part of the \$5.1 capital component?

**Ms Arthy:** No, the capital is the \$5.1, then there is additional funding—there is additional recurrent funding on top of that, as part of—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, that is right. \$5 million every year.

**Ms Priest:** Yes; there is additional funding for investment attraction and communications as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Alright; thank you.

**MS ORR:** What is the Space Hub?

**Ms Arthy:** Well that is what we are working out at the moment. I am not meaning to

be too flippant. We are currently working with the sector around what works. For the Canberra Cyber Hub, we worked very closely with the cyber sector to see what we need to put in place to really advance the Canberra cyber network.

We are doing the same process with space, and I can hand to Ms Starick to have a look at more detail. We are currently working with them around the strategy and part of that is: what are the elements of a hub that would really advance the space industry even more than what we have already got here in Canberra?

**Ms Starick:** We have been working with the sector and with the universities and businesses here in the ACT. We recently ran a round table discussion which focused on what were the strengths that the ACT has in space. Space is a very broad church, and the applications for everyday life run from geospatial technology, if you use an app to find your way around, through to the BOM and the weather forecasting, and bushfire and emergency predictions and management.

In the ACT we have got some specific areas of strengths around geospatial technology as well as optical communications. We talked with the sector around how we build those strengths, because we cannot be competitive in all the areas space covers, but we can focus in on the areas that the ACT has those competitive advantages in. What they were looking for was where we have credible expertise—how we can connect business with research capability, but also how we can connect businesses with a potential workforce, whether it be PhD students or people with technical skills in the vocational education and training sector. They are looking for people like CAD designers, project managers and precision welders, and how we can connect businesses with potential customers. Those potential customers are here in the ACT with the Australian government—national but also international. The hub will shape up to meet those needs that industry has raised with us. How that looks physically we are still going to work through.

**MS ORR:** In the example of the Cyber Hub—I think Ms Arthy made reference to that—you said they had gone through that process. What was the outcome? What did it look like? What did industry determine they needed?

**Ms Arthy:** It culminated in the Cyber Hub being formed as a corporation late last year, and it has been established with four goals. One is to focus on the education and workforce for the cyber sector, because one of the things that the industry told us loud and clear is that they are finding it very hard to get the skills they need. One of the elements that the Cyber Hub is focusing on is actually making it known what training is available and what education is available here in the ACT, because with three universities and CIT, and a lot of private providers as well, we have really great training. So we wanted to advertise, not to just Canberrans but to the world, that you can come and get great education in cyber here.

They have also got a focus around workforce and how we can generally develop workforce. There is another focus which is around growth and small businesses. A lot of the businesses in cyber are small start-ups who do not know how to grow, necessarily, or they do not know how to get the introduction to their first customer, and in the ACT we are so privileged to be in the same town as the Australian Government, which is the biggest purchaser of cyber.

What the Cyber Hub is focusing on is how we can introduce our capability to the commonwealth government so that they can get in to get their first customer, then working with the Canberra Innovation Network as well, who is with the ACT government we own the Cyber Hub, how we actually help and give these businesses the skills to grow.

The third area is around research. It is not about funding research; it is really about how do we amplify our research capability, how do we make sure that when our research capability is known but how do we make sure that the research outcomes benefit our local industry.

The fourth area is around general marketing and communications because we are a really well kept secret in that we have so much to offer, not just Canberra but Australia, and others. So how do we actually do that. So that is what they are set up to do.

**MS ORR:** And are we likely to see any more hubs in key priority areas because we have got two now.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, quantum we identify as the next area, so the Australian government is fast-tracking their quantum strategy. We will have a role to play. We have got some joinery facilities, capability and companies already in the ACT operating quantum computing but not just quantum computing. I imagine once we have concluded that work in relation to the space ecosystem, we will have cyber space and quantum as the very major areas.

**THE CHAIR:** I just have one follow-up. So 1.92, that was the spend for this year and we have budgeted 5 million; is that correct? Have I read that right?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Was it \$5 million for last year and we just fell a little bit short? Does it roll over?

**Mr Barr:** No, no, the program was scaling up over the parliamentary term.

**THE CHAIR:** I have another substantive. We are good to go on. So our priority athletes. Page 143 indicates a slight increase in support for nationally identified priority athletes. How many ACT sporting bodies are involved in promoting support for selective athletes?

**Mr Barr:** That is a question for the Minister for Sport and Recreation's portfolio.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess my last question is just wondering. I am unsure about where we are at with the agreement with GWS. Is that now?

**Mr Barr:** Sure. It is nearly finalised, and I would anticipate a public announcement in the coming weeks.



**THE CHAIR:** In the coming weeks; fantastic. We have finished slightly early but thank you Minister Barr and your officials for coming today. There were a couple of questions taken on notice so please provide the answers to the Committee Secretary within five working days. We will have a quick suspension. Thank you very much

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate  
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director General, Economic Development  
Bailey, Mr Daniel, Executive Group Manager, Economic Development  
Starick, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Economic Development  
Priest, Ms Jenny, Executive Branch Manager, Economic Development  
Triffitt, Mr Ross, Events ACT, Economic Development

**THE CHAIR:** In this session we will be speaking to the Assistant Minister for Economic Development. Welcome, Minister Cheyne, and your officials. We have already discussed housekeeping, so I am not going to go through that again, but please, when you speak for the first time, state your name, the role and the capacity in which you are appearing today, and that you have read and understood the privilege statement.

There are no opening remarks, I believe, so I will kick off with the first question on Screen Canberra's work on designing a scheme that promotes Canberra as a location for high-value screen producers, as funded through CBR Screen Attraction Fund. Is someone from Screen Canberra able to provide me with an update on how that is going and what has been happening?

**Ms Cheyne:** We do not have members from Screen Canberra here, but I can start with that. Ms Priest is here, as well, who will be able to fill in any blanks. We have committed \$500,000 towards a proof-of-concept program for the Screen Attraction Fund and at attracting high-budget screen productions to the ACT. So it is a pilot program—a proof-of-concept administered by Screen Canberra. Under the fund, productions that will have at least a \$2 million spend in the ACT, may be eligible for up to 10 per cent funding support. It was soft launched last year, so we started talking about it last year, but the actual hard launch occurred recently. The fund is now open for applications, but Ms Priest might have some further detail about how that is going so far, but it has just only quite recently opened.

**Ms Priest:** That is right, Minister. Really, there is not a lot more to add beyond what you have said. Screen Canberra is speaking to some screen companies at the moment, but there is nothing that has eventuated as yet as an application. But there are some people that Screen Canberra is talking to.

**Ms Cheyne:** Sorry, Ms Castley; I did not say that I have read and understood the privileges statement. Sorry, everybody.

**Ms Priest:** And I have read and understood the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there an expected completion date? I know you said it has just launched, so when are we thinking that this will be wrapped up?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is a one-year pilot program, so we are expecting the funding to be allocated and then evaluated over that period of time, but, again, it has only just opened, so it is very early days.

**THE CHAIR:** How will the outcomes of the scheme be measured? Will there be particular KPIs or targets?

**Ms Priest:** The screen attraction fund is a pilot, and what we will do at the end of that pilot is an evaluation. But, effectively, we will be looking at the economic impact of any productions that draw from and are successful in being paid through the Screen Attraction Fund, and the impact, also, on the local creative industry in terms of jobs and involvement in the local productions. So it is likened to what happened during *Blacklight*. When *Blacklight* came to town, not only did they bring local spend, but they also drew from the local creative screen and other parts of the creative industries to assist with the filming or to be part of the filming.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Orr, do you have a question?

**MS ORR:** I have some questions on screen so I will just continue with those if that is okay. I think we have heard quite a bit about successes that we have seen recently, *Blacklight* being one of them. You have just noted that attraction fund project, but are there other developments or successes that you have seen over the last 12 months that you can continue to build on?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, absolutely, Ms Orr. I think the first one that I will start with is *Sissy*. *Sissy* is a contemporary horror film, and, remarkably—quite simply because horror films generally do not attract this level of rating—it has been “certified fresh” on Rotten Tomatoes. That is huge, at a 97 per cent rating, and a 67 per cent audience rating. It is a Canberra-filmed horror film. It has several Canberra stars and Canberra-based directors, and it is something that Screen Canberra provided funding towards.

In addition to getting that certified fresh rating, it is actually in cinemas right now. You can see it at Hoyts, Palace Electric or Dendy in Canberra, so it actually has had not just a small or indie run, but a very large audience already, coinciding with the Halloween season. It screened at South by Southwest in the USA in March this year, and, as I mentioned, that commercial release has been in 70 theatres Australia-wide—again, an incredible achievement.

There is a streaming service called Shudder, which I believe has a horror and scary movies bent, and *Sissy* has been acquired by that as well. It has also been nominated for three Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards this year, which is also an exceptionally big deal—best picture, best actress and best director and co-directors. It is an incredible accomplishment because some of the other nominees in the same category of best picture include Baz Luhrmann’s *Elvis*. So that is the level that they are operating at. There have also been six festivals in which it has received very good reviews and had a limited theatrical release in August, but it has also been released internationally on Paramount Plus.

Another huge success has been a Canberra film, *Love Forever*, which premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in September. It is about an open, empathetic young woman who finds herself in pursuit of love, and it was shot in Canberra and Sydney.

We played a part, in that Clare Young, who is the director of that film, had been funded through Arts ACT, and some other projects some years ago. She undertook essentially what you would think of as an internship with Jane Campion, obviously a very well-known director of *Top of the Lake*, *The Piano*, *The Power of the Dog*. Jane Campion mentored Claire. I think *Love Forever* was the only Australian film that appeared at that Venice film festival, and the ACT government and Arts ACT part-funded both Clare's and the main star Hannah McKenzie's attendance at the Venice International Film Festival, particularly because of the opportunities that further presents for work with other producers. So we are really going forward from strength to strength, and showing that sometimes even a small investment in someone some years ago has a snowballing effect that is quite incredible.

**MS ORR:** Those are some of the great successes we are having. What else are we doing in Canberra to support screen production to build on these successes—I am thinking about some of the stuff that is coming out on AIE and a few other parts—and what role is government having in that to build the industry?

**Ms Cheyne:** We talked before about the Screen Attraction Fund. That builds on what we have been investing in for some time, which is the Screen Investment Fund. That is \$5 million established over a seven-year term, from 1 July 2018, expiring at the end of the financial year in 2025. In the last financial year, that committed approximately \$1.14 million, but it stimulated projected spending locally of just over \$5.5 million. It is a pretty significant local spend from that investment as well.

There is also the ACT Screen Arts Fund. That is a series of grants. It is a \$100,000 per annum grants program supporting local projects, activities and opportunities—similar to the artsACT grants program but within Screen Canberra. You noted—and I think it was covered a little bit in the previous hearing—the investments that we have made in partnership with the Academy of Interactive Entertainment. That is a state-of-the-art facility for film and virtual production. With respect to the virtual studio, from the Priority Investment Program, that is \$389½ thousand, for the largest LED video wall in Australia. For sound stage and lighting, there was \$450,000 from the future jobs fund, which is for a sound stage, to both build on attracting people here and build our local capability.

**MR DAVIS:** The officials will laugh because my question will be terribly parochial, as most of my questions have been today.

**MS ORR:** How much was filmed in Tuggeranong?

**MR DAVIS:** Well, I could ask that. No, I will not ask how much was filmed in Tuggeranong, although there are many great sites. We have an independent cinema in Tuggeranong which is relatively new, and it was one of the few that was missing from your list. Obviously, there is a relationship with Dendy and Palace Electric, but I wonder—

**Ms Cheyne:** I am not sure that my list was exhaustive. I was googling before, so it might be on there.

**MR DAVIS:** My recollection is that *Sissy* was not playing. Could you elaborate more on the relationship Screen Canberra has, or the directorate more broadly, with all of the independent cinemas in Canberra, to make sure that we are using those to highlight Canberra films and Canberra talent wherever possible?

**Ms Cheyne:** Certainly, particularly with the short film festivals, we have been working with Dendy as well as Smith's, which is often an outpost for showing some of those films. I am pretty sure Limelight has had a relationship there, but I will double-check that. In terms of theatrical releases, again, I would have to check the role that Screen Canberra may or may not have in that regard; it can just depend. My insight into that is not as clear as it could be, but I will check.

**MR DAVIS:** That would be great; thank you. I want to ask a bit more about the community events fund. For the benefit of the public, when we think about that, we think, "How many events have we had over the last two years of lockdowns from COVID and the like?" I would like to ask some clarifying questions. Has funding that would otherwise have been in place for community events been rolled over during periods of lockdown and pandemic response? If so, how is that impacting on our ability not just to meet demand but, hopefully—we spoke earlier about the Multicultural Festival, for example—to expand the footprint and expand the promotion of community events funded through that program, now that people can get out and about more freely?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, certainly. The ACT Event Fund, which supports community events, has been continuing from 2020, 2021 and 2022 with that \$400,000 availability. Yes, there have been some events still carried over from 2020. We have been working closely with organisers with respect to those events, which they were funded for and certainly put in detailed applications, were assessed, and were granted those funds to be able to put them on.

Examples from 2020 include SouthFest in the Suburbs, which I understand is being held imminently, with that funding.

**MR DAVIS:** This Saturday.

**Ms Cheyne:** Indeed; until 20 November. Let us put that on the record. The Forage will also be held this Saturday, here in Civic Square. The Canberra Highland Gathering, which was to be held on 8 October this year, has had to be postponed again until 2023, due to the awful wet weather. Those events are carrying over with funding that they were granted in 2020.

There are also events from 2021 that are carrying over. The Canberra Times Fun Run is on this Sunday. The Canberra BeerFest is on later this month. Wine Island will be held from 2 to 5 December. Yes!Fest had received funding, but this year's event is cancelled; that is my understanding. Events ACT is in the process of liaising with organisers on the appropriate next steps. In the last financial year, there was an event

which was granted funding, but the event did not proceed—the Winter Solstice festival. Those funds have been returned to the ACT government.

Those carry-over events that I listed are only the ones that are still to be carried over. Others have carried over in the meantime. Where we can, we have worked closely with organisations. The Tuggeranong Community Council and the SouthFest organisers have been very central to making sure that those events can still go ahead at an appropriate time. We are working with organisers, when we do see that greater level of community confidence that supports the aims of the event.

The 2023 ACT Event Fund was recently opened for applications; it closed not too long ago. Those have all been assessed. Again, \$400,000 is available, and 22 event organisations have been successful in receiving funding, totalling just over \$400,000.

The provision of this funding support is subject to the acceptance of the funding offer by the respective applicants on receipt of a signed deed of grant. Unfortunately, I cannot list them today. I can give you some high-level information, as it stands currently, including that the genre breakdown is seven applications across arts, seven applications across sport, five applications for community gatherings or festivals, and three applications across food and beverage, featuring local produce.

I can tell you, Mr Davis, from the list that I have, that there is good coverage geographically.

**MR DAVIS:** I have one specific follow up, particularly in terms of Yes!Fest, because you highlighted the process of grant recipients needing to sign off acceptance of the terms of the grant before it is paid. Has that already happened with Yes!Fest, then they cancelled, so the territory has to go through a process of recouping that money, or has it not been paid out to Yes!Fest yet?

**Ms Cheyne:** With Yes!Fest—I will check with Mr Triffitt in a moment—they were successful in receiving funding for last year, to be held this year. I believe they would have signed that deed. Mr Triffitt, can you add anything else?

**Mr Triffitt:** I have read and understand the privilege statement. That is correct. Yes!Fest have accepted the deed and been provided with the funding. They are currently holding the funding from the ACT Event Fund. We will have discussions with them about rescheduling the event and using those funds for the next event.

**MR DAVIS:** I could be mistaken, and potentially offending many of my social contacts. My understanding is that Yes!Fest is not continuing into the long term. Would it be safe to assume, if that is the case, and the territory recoups those funds, Minister, would it be your view that that money would be better allocated to other events with similar motivations? Of course, Yes!Fest is to celebrate the vote on marriage equality. We have other sexuality and gender-diverse events, like SpringOUT. Would you consider trying to reappropriate those funds for a like event or for a like social intent?

**Ms Cheyne:** It is hard to answer a hypothetical, although I absolutely understand where you are coming from, Mr Davis. These events are assessed by a panel and

recommendations are then provided to me. I would not seek to get ahead of that process. However, I will check with Mr Triffitt whether I am right about this. If funds were returned, there is a provision within the ACT Event Fund for out-of-round applications—things that come up that perhaps an event organiser might be proposing that did not quite fit within the application period that we have just run. That is much smaller than the \$400,000. It is usually a \$65,000 pool. I imagine that funds could potentially be returned to that. That is an assessment process that occurs within the directorate. I will check that I am not speaking out of turn.

**Mr Triffitt:** That is correct, Minister. There is an opportunity to pursue the out-of-round funding application process in that case.

**MR DAVIS:** I know I am getting very specific here, but, as you can see, the intent of my question is to make sure that money that was designed to be spent on an event for a particular community and a particular cause is spent on that particular community for that particular cause. How would other organisations, not necessarily Yes!Fest, but that have a similar social intent, apply for that money when it is popped back into that fund? If SpringOUT, or FreshOUT, as they call themselves now, say they want to access that money once Yes!Fest had returned it, how would they do that?

**Mr Triffitt:** That would be through the out-of-round funding process, through the ACT Event Fund. There is funding that is provided to SpringOUT. We are interacting and having discussions with the Office of LGTBIQ+ Affairs about funding that is available specifically for those events. I understand that some have been postponed, and this is a pool of funding that is sitting outside the ACT Event Fund. The process specifically for that \$15,000 would be through the out-of-round process.

**MR DAVIS:** That makes sense. If you are having conversations with the office, that would clear up that main concern that I have there, so that sounds good.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a couple of clarifying questions which you may have answered. In the last annual reports, I believe we were told that if the event had not been held and they had been given the money, they needed to hold the event. I know we have danced around this a little bit. How many of those people have not been able to hold their event, and have they given back the money? What is the process for that?

**Ms Cheyne:** You are right. We touched on the question you are asking, but not perhaps directly. Almost all events that were not able to be held at the original time have been able to be carried over into future years. I think the Canberra Highland Gathering is perhaps the best and, for them, the worst, example, in that it has funding from 2020. It was eventually to be held in 2022, and it is again being rolled over to 2023. We are continuing to work with those organisations who have not been able to hold events, to see whether they can hold them in the future.

One that stands out for me—I think we discussed this before—is the Big Canberra Bike Ride, which received a significant amount of funding and expended most, if not all, of that funding, on promotion and organising; then there was a massive downpour and the event was not able to go ahead. Again, within the deed, that funding was not required to be returned. I think that the directorate operates in a way that is as flexible as possible.

**THE CHAIR:** That is open ended—

**Ms Cheyne:** Ideally not.

**THE CHAIR:** No, of course. Everyone's intentions—

**Ms Cheyne:** We live in strange times, and many of these organisers remain very committed to putting on these events. We work as closely as we can with them to ensure that that occurs.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to chat about manufacturing, and what has happened in the last year with regard to manufacturing and your overall budget.

**Ms Cheyne:** Manufacturing covers a range of different areas that dovetail with the other different parts of this portfolio, including cyber, advanced tech and space; creative industries, perhaps less so. You could see it perhaps in terms of the AIE.

We do have a modern manufacturing industry overall, particularly in terms of where a lot of those large growth elements are—high-tech parts and components, new technologies and knowledge-intensive sectors. Ms Priest gave an example before of Skykraft, which is a good example of a modern manufacturer, essentially, as well as advanced tech and space. They have been supported through the Priority Investment Program.

**THE CHAIR:** I know that it reaches into other areas; for your output class, what is your manufacturing budget, solely in-house, if that makes sense?

**Ms Cheyne:** I would not say that there is a budget per se. The Priority Investment Program and the future jobs fund that were discussed in the earlier hearing are fantastic opportunities for some of those organisations, especially organisations that are producing manufacturing equipment, tech or whatever, to be receiving some significant grants and confidence from the ACT government that then allows them to grow very quickly. Essentially, that is seed investment funding. I think that was covered before, in terms of what those budget allocations are.

**MR DAVIS:** Ms Clay would want me to ask about the circular economy as it interacts with the work that you are doing in manufacturing. I know that Minister Steel—not in your area—has released a discussion paper around the government's responsibility in that space. Has that trickled through to the work that you are doing to support manufacturing businesses and provide supports and encouragement for them to think about their environmental footprint and what they are using and not using?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, absolutely. Again, one of those priority capability areas for us is renewables. It is a quintessential circular economy aspect. Of course, there are others. I think there is a recycling initiative that is being supported, and several others. Yes, those conversations are certainly occurring. Certainly, Ms Arthy, in her role, also works closely with Minister Steel. All of those conversations occur.

**MR DAVIS:** Ms Arthy might want to elaborate. I am interested in just a broad



understanding about how the government manages the priority to minimise our carbon footprint and our waste and continue to be global leaders in that space, as well as encouraging new enterprise, new business and business from other jurisdictions to come and set up shop in the ACT. How do we balance those priorities? Obviously, we do not just want any kind of business here; we want the businesses that are doing it the best.

**Ms Arthy:** I have read and understood the privilege statement. There are so many facets to your question, so I will start at the very top.

**MR DAVIS:** I do that a few times; sorry.

**Ms Arthy:** We talked in the previous session about CBR Switched On. One of the missions there is around how we establish Canberra, net zero and beyond, focusing on our environmental responsibility. A big part of that is around a circular economy. We have been very clear that for the future of our economic development, it is one of the three key missions when it comes to positioning the ACT economy.

At a very broad level, what we are finding—and I could hand to Ms Starick shortly to talk more specifically about the circular of economy and renewables—is that if the government makes a statement and announces an ambition around a particular mission, that actually attracts people. I talk to a lot of businesses, whether it is here or overseas, and as soon as we start talking about this being the government’s ambition, that is what gets them interested to come and set up here.

Economic Development does it in many different ways. We have an investment attraction facility—which I will hand to Ms Starick to talk about, shortly—so that if someone is interested in coming and establishing in the ACT, then we have a range of services that we can offer them to come. We work very closely with EPSDD, and others on this, to do it. We also try and embody the circular economy ourselves. I know Mr Triffitt can talk extensively about what we are trying to do with the way we run events to make sure that they are circular. In Economic Development, we also run the stadiums, and Manuka, and we have put a lot of effort in there as well about how we embody a circular economy. But I might hand to Ms Starick, who can talk about that. She has been doing a lot more close work with the renewable sector.

**MR DAVIS:** I am so sorry; I definitely want your specifics. I do want to hear that, but I just want to pick up on a point you just made, Mr Arthy, because I think is really important. I have had it put to me on more than one occasion that our government’s and our city’s approach to being carbon neutral and to being environmental leaders and stuff, limits business investment. It is seen as restrictive. You just put a different point. What would you say to those who think that our ambition in the environment and climate space is actually restricting our economic growth and our business opportunities?

**Ms Arthy:** I can only talk about what I am seeing. And what I am seeing is that there are a number of businesses who want to come to Canberra because of the ambitions that have been stated. We have regular contact with a lot of companies because of that.

**MR DAVIS:** Great. Thank you.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Davis, can I jump in before we go to Ms Starick, because I think I can answer part of your question? As Ms Arthy said, mission 2 of the three missions in Canberra Switched On, is essentially a prospectus that we have used to sell Canberra, but it is also guide to what our ambition is—that we want to work across government, but also have investors and businesses come into the ACT to help us realise.

Mission 2 does say, very clearly, that sustainable infrastructure and climate resilience is being favoured as economies decarbonise, and production and consumption transitions towards a more circular economy. It goes on to detail what we are doing under a heading of the “circular economy”. This certainly stands out there, and there is a clear statement that says, “Future investments will focus on initiatives that are not only sustainable but can showcase the commitment to the circular economy.”

You were talking about how you prioritise what those investments are going to be. Later in this, essentially, prospectus, there is a section on responsible investment. It is short, but just bear with me. It says:

Investors will be attracted to the opportunities that our city presents, the values that we represent, and the ease with which they can do business.

It goes on to say that the ACT government will prioritise investment in markets and products that embody the government’s commitment to climate action, the environment, sustainable development, and the circular economy. So certainly it is not just here over a website or the occasional thing; it is front and centre in what we are using to sell ourselves to Australia and the world.

**Ms Starick:** I have read and understand the privilege statement. I do not think there is much more to add, but I can give two examples of how this is actually filtering through the work that we do.

We talked in the last hearing about the development of a space strategy. One of the key themes that came from businesses and the universities that participated in the discussion about the space strategy was that whatever we did in the ACT, our focus is on having a responsible and sustainable approach to space. That includes not just the land-based assets—where we put radars and what have you, and our responsibility to the land—but also what we put up into space. Whatever we put up has to be able to be returned safely. That is one example.

The other example, which is a more bureaucratic example, I guess, is that in the work that is happening around the circular economy and renewables, economic development is part of that discussion because we are introducing ways to involve businesses in those discussions in creating innovative solutions and, when those initiatives are developed, how we bring businesses along in the roll-out of those initiatives. So they are just two examples of how those priorities are filtering through the work that we do.

**MR DAVIS:** Tremendous. Thanks so much. I took some liberty with supplementary questions, so I am happy for that to have been my substantive question.

**MS ORR:** We have sort of touched on this a little bit, but I wanted to go a little bit more specifically into community events, particularly looking at some of the ones that we have not seen in a while that are coming back. I am thinking about Windows to the World, and even things like our New Year's Eve celebrations. I would like to get an indication of what attendance numbers have been like for those sorts of things, and what we can expect to see, particularly over the coming months.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thanks, Ms Orr. I am very happy to go through that. We are excited to be welcoming events back in a big way. New Year's Eve by the Lake for 2021-22 was our first major event that we welcomed back to the ACT. That had an estimated attendance of just shy of 43,000 people, which I think was quite an incredible result.

In terms of other attendance that we have seen, particularly around the Canberra Day long weekend and Enlighten: Enlighten attendance was back at over 260,000, a 442 per cent increase on last year; the Canberra Balloon Spectacular was at 47,500, which I think was close to record crowds and a 541 per cent increase on the year before; attendance at Symphony in the Park, with Lior and the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, was 12,500, a 735 per cent increase; Canberra Day had 15,000 people, which was a 1,032 per cent increase; and Lights! Canberra! Action! had 1,704 people, which was an 82 per cent increase. Obviously, in 2021 there were unusual circumstances and we had very limited ticketed events, even when they were free. So it was great to see that very strong support of people coming back to events.

Windows to the World, which you just touched on, occurred over the past few weekends. The way it ran was an activation at Floriade. On the final Saturday of the Floriade Festival, eight missions were in attendance in a kind of a mission Windows to the World alleyway. There were about 23,500 people who engaged with those stalls. Then there were two embassy open days over the weekend of 22 and 23 November—so the following weekend. Essentially that Floriade activation was to build anticipation and excitement about the Windows to the World event the following weekend. There were 17 embassies that participated on the Saturday, with attendance of 5,500. On the Sunday, there were six embassies, with attendance of just shy of 1,200. So, in total, 27 separate embassies and diplomatic missions—and that included Australian Parliament House—in the event, with some participating over multiple days as well.

**MS ORR:** With Enlighten, what did we see from that in the previous financial year and what might we be able to see—

**Ms Cheyne:** What we have seen is a very welcome return back to festivals from the community. Of course, Canberra Day, as part of the overall Enlighten Festival, was quite different this past year. It was an opportunity for many of our multicultural communities to be able to participate, because the National Multicultural Festival was not on. Now the National Multicultural Festival will be on and will be quite close to Canberra Day. So Canberra Day in the coming year will return more to its traditional form, likely with a concert and Symphony in the Park. We are in those negotiations now with an appropriate front band or musician. The Canberra Balloon Spectacular will certainly be back with another feature balloon, which we will announce next year.

**MS ORR:** Great. Sky whale, take three? I assume I cannot get a heads-up.

**THE CHAIR:** With non-ticketed events, how do you work out how many people come to, for instance, Enlighten and Floriade? How do you get those figures?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Triffitt?

**Mr Triffitt:** In relation to Floriade we use electronic people counters at the gates that actually count the number of people in and out and records occupancy. That is a new initiative that we used for Enlighten this year and for Floriade.

Previously, with a fenced event like Floriade, we were able to use turnstiles or count people in. With an open event, such as some of our community events, we use density counts, which is kind of the industry standard, to calculate how many people are within a certain space and then multiply that across the size of the area that is activated.

**THE CHAIR:** Interesting; thanks.

**Ms Cheyne:** I missed an important event, and I feel terrible that I missed this. The Canberra Nara Candle Festival, which was due the other weekend, again had to be postponed because Lennox Gardens was swamp-like. It has now been rescheduled to 3 December—still this year. That is from 4 pm to 9 pm. We certainly look forward to welcoming everyone back and remind all that it is free.

**THE CHAIR:** I have questions about Amp It Up!

**Ms Cheyne:** It is technically in arts, but I am happy to take it now. I think we had the same experience in estimates and then you never got to ask the question.

**THE CHAIR:** I appreciate that.

**Ms Cheyne:** So let us see how we go.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. It is just about the second phase. I know we smack-bang in the middle of it. My questions are mainly about how this second lot of recipients got the grant. I know, sort of plotting it out on a map, that only one was not in the Kurrajong electorate. I have had a few people contact me from Tuggeranong, Belconnen and other areas wondering why they missed out.

**Ms Cheyne:** PJs got it.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, PJs got it; that is right. I am interested in how you got to that conclusion and why the love was not shared outside of the city.

**Ms Cheyne:** I will try to give you as much information as possible, Ms Castley. It is important to note that, as you rightly pointed out, this was round two of Amp it Up! The first round had a number of successful applicants who applied again, but there was not necessarily a guarantee that successful applicants in round 1 would be successful in round 2. Equally, the program, from its first round, gained quite a lot of

attention, which was lovely. It also meant that we had a lot of new entrants. Applications needed to be assessed on their merits, essentially.

In the media release—hopefully, my staff are listening and can pull it up—I am pretty sure that we said we wanted to encourage applications from right across Canberra. We opened the round on 2 May, and it closed on 30 May. There were 38 eligible applications. The total amount of funding that was requested from that was more than double the funding amount that was allocated to this program.

Applications were assessed against funding aims and criteria that had been made publicly available. That was a three-person panel from ArtsACT, Events ACT and one externally from MusicACT. They were assessed according to their merit against the criteria. There was then a moderation meeting to rank the applications.

The brief that came to me supported 13 applications in one option, but there was another option that supported an extra two, taking it to 15, on the basis that those who had been ranked in order would have their overall funding amounts reduced by a little bit to bring in more venues, to support more. On that basis I went for that option, with the 15 applications. That took the total number that we supported over the \$500,000 that had been allocated.

Essentially, that is all there was to it. This was a merit-based application process. There were a number of new applications that were successful. I believe that PJ's in Tuggeranong was a new applicant.

**THE CHAIR:** They were new.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, they were. Others that were new included Cube, One22, Verity Lane, and Queenies. Again, we would all agree, in representing different electorates, that we want to see a good spread. Ultimately, this was merit based. When presented with the options, I still took the option of trying to support more venues rather than fewer.

**THE CHAIR:** I do not want to speak here about specific venues; it is probably not appropriate. There were a few where, from my perspective of what the criteria were, they seemed to meet it as well, and they missed out twice. With regard to the commitment that these venues make, was it to promote Canberra-based artists? Was it also to amp up their facilities? Was it about having more speakers, or more this and that, or was it just about getting live music out there?

**Ms Cheyne:** It was really about live music and performance overall—

**THE CHAIR:** Local musicians or just getting those events?

**Ms Cheyne:** Both. I will see whether I can pull up those guidelines, Ms Castley. I am very happy to see if someone might—

**Ms Arthy:** I can provide an initial comment, if you like?

**Ms Cheyne:** There was a minimum for local content, but—

**Ms Arthy:** I was just going to say that. There was a minimum requirement for a level of local content; also we had other engagements, or people could engage acts from other regions as well. It was multi-faceted, in terms of the purpose. It was to support local industry, support local venues, and—

**THE CHAIR:** And musos.

**Ms Arthy:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Why was it half the amount this time? Was it \$1 million the first time?

**Ms Cheyne:** I think it was \$700,000; then we—

**THE CHAIR:** Almost \$800,000; that is right.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. Perhaps it was \$750,000 and then we funded to \$800,000. Again, we—

**THE CHAIR:** Went over.

**Ms Cheyne:** found money from wherever we could to support as many as possible. A smaller funding pool was a decision through the COVID relief at the time and through the budget process. Ultimately, last year, there were 22 venues that were supported, with close to \$800,000. This time there were 15, with \$500,000.

Ms Castley, your observation is not incorrect, by any means, about venues meeting the criteria. It was not a case of some venues not meeting the criteria, although there were some that did not. I think that, overall, there were 38 applications, so they had to be ranked. Ultimately, there were applications that probably just fell out of that \$500,000; we did what we could to provide support within the means available. It does not mean that they were not found suitable; in terms of the ranking, they fell short of that.

**THE CHAIR:** With regard to the ranking, what made them eligible? Is it the size of the venue or the impact they have on their local neighbourhood? I am thinking of Rose Cottage; it is massive, and they do lots of events. I know about Pot Belly. With those, why might they possibly have fallen below the line compared to others?

**Ms Cheyne:** Again, Ms Castley, it was how they responded to the funding guidelines and the eligibility. I can answer your previous question about costs and what was provided. Eligibility: demonstration of regular live performance and other performance programming, a history of hiring acts that perform original work, dedicated performance and audience spaces, needing to be solvent, have public liability et cetera. I am sure you are very familiar with that.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, I have read all of that.

**Ms Cheyne:** In terms of what they were eligible to receive funding for, there were costs associated with forward programming related to engaging artists and

independent sound or lighting technicians. Applicants had to put forward a proposed performance program, including artists' fees and travel expenses. Artists and technicians were to be paid a minimum of \$250 each, according to our funding guidelines, irrespective of box office sales.

At least 60 per cent of the proposed performance program had to support ACT artists, and any New South Wales regional artists included in that 60 per cent needed to demonstrate an ACT-based performance program between 1 July 2022 and 31 December, and up to 50 per cent of their expenditure on marketing and promotion. Venues were asked to outline a typical program for the venue, including the genres and the likely number of performances. What it came down to, I think, Ms Castley, is that it was just very competitive.

**THE CHAIR:** Sixty per cent of local acts; was the requirement that they cycle through different acts, or could they get themselves, say, an in-house DJ? If, say, Knightsbridge decided that they wanted one DJ for the next six months, would that be fine? There was no specificity as to how they spent the money, or on who?

**Ms Arthy:** Part of the criteria was that they had demonstrated a history, and that their forward program included original acts, and a variety. I am not saying that a DJ is not original, but it would not be the same act cycling through repeatedly; it would be a forward program of different performances.

**Ms Cheyne:** One of the assessment criteria was “demonstrated capacity to positively impact the careers of ACT musicians and performance artists”. In theory, a venue could show this, with one artist, and perhaps if they applied for a smaller funding amount, that might be eligible under that criterion. But if it was a bigger program, you would be expecting that there would be more artists supported.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister Cheyne, and your officials, for your attendance today. I do not believe there were any questions taken on notice. We will close the hearing.

**The committee adjourned at 5.24 pm.**