



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

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

Members:

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2023

**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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate29, 53

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 12.59 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

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Starick, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager, Policy and Strategy, Economic Development

Maclachlan, Mr Hugh, Executive Branch Manager, Business and Innovation

de la Rue, Ms Annie, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Infrastructure Coordination

Elkins, Mr Matthew, Executive Branch Manager, Venues Canberra

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The committee will today hear from the Minister for Economic Development and the Minister for Business and Better Regulation.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of 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.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses could use the words: "I will take that on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Mr Andrew Barr, Minister for Economic Development, and all the officials today. I remind all witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Can you all please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

Witnesses: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Great. There are no opening statements today, so we will proceed to questions. I am going to shoot mine over to Ms Lee while I get myself organised.

MS LEE: Thank you, Chair. Mr Barr, in 2008 then Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope called for a new convention centre. At the time he said, "At some stage in

the future there will be a need for a convention centre that meets international standards.” Planning and negotiations were underway for a new convention centre with the federal government until eventually, in 2017, you scrapped the detailed design and scoping for one. Now the ACT Infrastructure Plan says that a convention centre will be developed as part of stage 2 of the convention and CBD precinct project, where construction is unlikely to be completed until the late 2030s.

Last year, in the annual reports hearings of this committee, you said that you were looking at “complementary facilities”, I think your quote was, to help support some of the current Convention Centre’s limitations to host large-scale events. When you were asked a question about that in last year’s hearings, you specifically said, “including Exhibition Park and in the CBD precinct”. Could you tell us the capacity of Exhibition Park to host large-scale events and also what you meant by the CBD precinct? What are the areas that you are looking at there?

Mr Barr: Exhibition Park has a range of venues that support major conferences and exhibitions. I will provide the committee with the specifications of each of the facilities at Exhibition Park. In relation to the CBD precinct, a number of sites have been identified for facilities that would support convention activities. They are within what would be defined as the Civic area, east and west, and would encompass both the ANU and the University of New South Wales campuses. The ANU has had a significant investment in facilities that support convention activities. The UNSW Canberra campus would also have facilities that would support convention activities.

MS LEE: Do any of those facilities that you have just outlined have the same capacity as the Convention Centre would?

Mr Barr: In certain contexts, yes. There are theatre-style and meeting spaces that would be of similar size, up to some elements of the Convention Centre, that are utilised for events. For example, the Kambri complex at ANU has a large lecture theatre and a range of break-out rooms that would support not conventions with thousands of delegates but events with hundreds. That is similar to some of the facilities at the National Convention Centre, the point being that not all convention activities and events need take place within the Convention Centre. In no city do all events, conventions and exhibitions take place within just their convention centre. They also obviously have other venues that are suitable for those sorts of events.

MS LEE: Have you done any modelling or received any advice about the extent of, in dollar figures, the direct economic benefit that we are missing out on because we do not have a convention centre?

Mr Barr: Well, we have got a convention centre.

MS LEE: You know what I am saying.

Mr Barr: There certainly is modelling and work that has been done. That goes to scoping what our future facility could look like and what would be suitable for a city of our size. Most of the discussion in recent times has been effectively between two different models of convention centre, for want of a better description. One would be considered a national-level convention centre that would be on a scale equivalent to

some of the biggest Australian cities. That would only be viable with the Australian government funding the majority of it and utilising it for major national and international events.

Some of the constraints against that sort of usage from an Australian government perspective go to, for example, the number of high-end hotel rooms to host a G20. We do not have 20 presidential suites in hotels in the ACT and we are unlikely to. The scope of a national convention centre at that end is very grand, very expensive. An analysis of what sorts of convention facilities a city of 450,000 people would need gives you a different answer. Probably sitting between those two examples is the sort of facility that would appear to be appropriate for Canberra in the next decade.

MS LEE: And that is the kind of facility that you refer to when you are talking about the new convention centre as part of stage 2 of the Canberra CBD project.

Mr Barr: Yes. The scope of what we are looking at is larger than the existing facility but smaller than, for example, what is on offer in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide or Perth.

MS LEE: I know that we have raised this—and, I am pretty sure, in question time as well—but it was quite some time ago. Just remind me: in terms of that proposal that is now on the table have you had discussions with the federal government about funding?

Mr Barr: The commonwealth have issued infrastructure guidelines in relation to funding for what would be considered nationally significant infrastructure projects. Any funding is, according to their policy, a 50-50 proposition. I think that pretty explicitly rules out the major, national Sydney-sized venue for Canberra, because that is bigger than the territory's needs and would only work if the commonwealth were funding it. It would require more than a 50 per cent contribution from the commonwealth.

MS LEE: And that is not a commitment. That is just their guidelines and these are early stages, so it is not at the point of actually getting that commitment; is that right?

Mr Barr: Yes. There is no current commonwealth commitment to fund 50 per cent of a convention facility in the ACT; that is correct.

MS LEE: It has been stated that the current facilities that we have mean that we are missing out on about \$25 million per year of direct economic benefit. Is that something that you would agree with?

Mr Barr: We obviously depend on the state of the convention market, and the capacity of other venues within the ACT to accommodate particular events, but the current forward bookings for the existing Convention Centre are very strong. They say that they do have to turn away some business. The question of whether that can be accommodated at other venues in the ACT is obviously a matter for some of the other venue operators. It largely depends on the size of the event, in that you can make up that amount by hosting a lot more smaller events that can be accommodated across hotels, universities, Exhibition Park, some club venues, but they are events probably

up to about 500 delegates.

When you get into the thousands of delegates, it does start to get difficult to hold those really, really large events in Canberra. That is true. The issue is that we do not have enough hotel rooms to accommodate those sorts of really large events at the moment either, although we are obviously working hard to add to the hotel room supply.

MS LEE: You mentioned earlier the ANU and UNSW as part of the Civic line-up of facilities. Does the ACT government have a formal relationship with those universities in relation to accessing those facilities?

Mr Barr: I guess it depends on what you mean by a formal relationship. We fund the Canberra Convention Bureau, who would be the broker, I guess, of conventions for Canberra. They are not just the broker of convention centre events; they have a wider remit. Our deeds of agreement with both the ANU and UNSW around the development and sale of land for university and related activities has resulted in the construction of facilities that support conventions and events, and we have delivered events in partnership. For example, the Uncharted Territory event last winter was done in partnership with the universities, and many events, meetings and activities were held on the ANU campus.

THE CHAIR: Ms Arthy, I want to chat about the Canberra Convention Centre and how we got to where we are. You told the joint standing committee inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's national capital:

... the Canberra Convention Bureau regularly provide information about the conferences we cannot accommodate here.

Can you tell the committee when the Canberra Convention Bureau started briefing you about conferences that they could not accommodate, as well as the size of each conference that they have missed out on?

Ms Arthy: Ms Castley, I have been talking to the Canberra Convention Bureau since I have been in this job, really, for about six years. At various points they have mentioned particular conferences and I have asked for detail to be provided to me. I believe they have provided information as part of the work that we are currently doing around the operational needs analysis for a new convention centre. We would have some information that has been provided to us and we can look at whether we can pull that out of the needs analysis and provide it to the committee. I just do not have it in front of me.

THE CHAIR: In the same inquiry you said that, since you have been supporting the stadium and convention centre work, there has not been a formal request. As you say, you have been here for six years. Can you just clarify: are you saying that the ACT government have never submitted a formal business case for a new convention centre?

Ms Arthy: I have been responsible for this for about a year, so I can only talk about what has happened in that time, and at this point we are still in the early phases of

analysis. As the Chief Minister mentioned, there is a particular framework that we have to work through, and we are working through that now, in the very early stages, before anything formal is provided. In the time that I have been involved, it has really been just about working with stakeholders, identifying needs and doing benchmarking studies with other convention centres to pull together the argument, as it is now, following the release of the Infrastructure Plan.

THE CHAIR: I just wanted to clarify, because it was not clear to me in answers to questions on notice.

Mr Barr: What was I think referred to as the Australia forum proposal, which was developed between the territory government and the then Canberra Business Council, was formally submitted to a previous federal government. Obviously, no funding was forthcoming for that proposal.

MS LEE: When was that?

THE CHAIR: How long ago was that?

MS ORR: It was before I was in this place.

Mr Barr: Yes. It would be going back a while, so you would be talking about probably the tail end of the Rudd, Gillard or Abbott governments, about 10 years ago.

THE CHAIR: So nothing recently?

Mr Barr: No. When that was not supported, the Assembly then held an inquiry into convention facilities, chaired by Mr Hanson, and that recommended not proceeding with a model along the lines of the Australia forum, which was the large, national model that involved the federal government. We got the message from the federal government and from an Assembly committee, chaired by Mr Hanson, not to proceed with that model. What we are now looking at is something that is more suited to half a million people, with some growth potential, rather than a national convention centre for 25 million people.

MS ORR: Just picking up on that, I had the pleasure of sitting through that inquiry. That was shaping some of my line of questioning. One of the things that did come up through that was that a lot of the stakeholders said, “We would like the big, fancy, ‘let’s go’ one,” and the committee found that actually the market might be requiring something else.

It was also interesting that through that inquiry there was a lot of evidence and testimony, and I think the committee also made some recommendations around this, looking at how improvements could be made to the existing facility. I wanted to get a bit of an update from you as to what has been invested in the facility, given that Ms Lee, when she started her line of questioning—which was a while ago now, so please forgive me if I do not get this entirely correct—

MS LEE: 15 minutes.

MS ORR: quoted Mr Stanhope and some time frames. That was a little while ago now, I think it is fair to say. I guess my question, if I am getting to the point, is: what has changed in that time period that would mean that we are actually addressing the needs of the Convention Centre?

Mr Barr: Obviously, there has been investment in the existing convention facilities, refurbishments of both the back-of-house and the public-facing amenity. That is everything from bathrooms to seating, so there have been progressive improvements to the facility.

The principal issue around utilisation is how many events simultaneously the Convention Centre can hold. Larger convention centres hold multiple events simultaneously—that is, the 1,000-plus delegate range. Our Convention Centre can only hold one 1,000-plus event at a time, so if it is booked then it is not available for another similar sized event. That then means that, if they want to hold the event in Canberra, they have to look at alternative venues. It is possible for the current Convention Centre to hold multiple events simultaneously, but they would need to be of a smaller delegate number.

The Convention Bureau identified and recommended a particular constraint, which was that, outside of the Great Hall of Parliament House, there was not a large sit-down dinner venue that could seat more than 1,000 people. We have endeavoured to address elements of that through investment in other ACT government facilities that can cater for nearly 1,000 but not quite 1,000.

Part of the thinking in terms of next stages and interim steps is how you may be able to accommodate exhibition space, 1,000 delegates in plenary and break-out sessions, and then a dinner venue for a conference. That is one element of a first phase of investment in new infrastructure that would support the operations of the existing centre. That is why the Infrastructure Plan outlined effectively a two-step, two-phase approach to investing in new infrastructure that would enable better utilisation of the existing facility in the interim stages.

MS ORR: Am I picking up, then, that the need that is being tested in this new scoping work is whether there is a market demand for multiple conventions at the same time or whether we are broadly meeting the demand, based on being able to tell—

Mr Barr: Yes. I think the market testing and the level of booking interest are demonstrating that, yes, for some weeks of the year, if the facilities could accommodate it, you could run two events, if you had the floor space—sometimes more than two. It is not to say that that is the case every week. There is not a lot of activity, convention-wise, in certain months of the year, for obvious reasons.

I guess there is a question of the east coast Australia domestic market and then the international market. We are not really in the large, 10,000-delegate international conference market; we just do not have the facilities for that. There are really only about four convention centres in Australia that can accommodate that level, and they are, unsurprisingly, in the four largest cities.

MS ORR: Is it then a question of: while there might be room for growth, it needs to

be balanced with what the investment in infrastructure and capital costs will be?

Mr Barr: Essentially, yes. If you had an unlimited budget you could build the biggest convention centre in the world, but it would not be full and it would be an overcapitalisation in the Canberra context.

MS ORR: So it is fair to say that, in the scoping work you are doing now—noting that coming out of COVID has had a big impact on tourism and convention-type things—you are essentially trying to find the right balance to inform the next steps.

Ms Barr: Yes, that would be a fair summation. There is not much point in having increased convention space unless you can accommodate the delegates as well. Linked to an expansion of the broader business and meeting industry events market is the need for more hotel accommodation.

There are messages going out that, for example, for the end of this month there are no rooms available in Canberra. We are going to be fully booked, overlapping with a federal parliamentary sitting week and other events and activities. From a hotelier's perspective, being fully booked is fantastic. Your room yields are going to be very high.

It is clear that there is room in our market for more hotels, and we have released land for that specific purpose. If you follow the property pages of the *Financial Review* or the *Canberra Times*, you will see that a number of projects have been announced and are under construction—or soon to be—that will increase the number of hotel rooms in the city.

MS ORR: So there is also that need to get the whole supporting infrastructure, if you like.

Mr Barr: Yes. Just building an extra space in a convention centre will not mean that you will capture all of that lost revenue. because if there are not places for delegates to stay then the convention will not come to Canberra.

MS ORR: Does the recovery of the aviation industry play into this as well, post-COVID?

Mr Barr: It certainly is a significant factor if you want to draw delegates from a wider geographic range. Our market is principally within three or four hours drive. It is a substantial market; there is no doubting that. It is the biggest city in Australia. One-fifth of the national population is three hours down the road; that is our bread and butter. But if you want delegates from elsewhere in Australia, who need to fly in, then clearly the strength of the aviation sector and the accommodation sector is important. All of these things are intertwined. It requires channelling both government and private sector investment in order to get all the pieces of the puzzle together. That is what we have been working on. There is a clear plan and we are implementing it.

MS ORR: On a slightly different note, earlier this month the ACT government entered into a civic partnership agreement with the University of Canberra. What does this agreement encompass?

Ms Barr: I think it is an important next step with the University of Canberra. It builds upon enabling legislation that the Assembly supported back in 2015 around UC's campus development, supporting it to both host ACT government-funded infrastructure but also to attract private investment in facilities that are aligned with the overall education objective of the university and to support more on-campus accommodation. This builds upon similar university partnerships but, yes, it has a special element because the University of Canberra is our city's university. It is the only university that comes under the Assembly's responsibility. There is an act of our parliament that guides both the governance and operations of the University of Canberra. I might ask Ms Arthy to talk a little more about the partnership.

Ms Arthy: Thank you, Chief Minister. The partnership itself is a principles-based document, but there are five areas of focus that have been outlined in the agreement. I might also mention the significant role that UC plays in our workforce development and training in nursing, teaching, midwifery and allied health. The five focus areas include UC's role in contributing to thought leadership in the ACT.

On the day that we released the partnership, they also released the Centre for a Better Canberra, which is a think tank focusing on those issues that are important for Canberra. The second area is driving knowledge-based economic growth, focusing on those areas that are particular strengths for Canberra but also for the broader region. The third area is looking at how the ACT government can leverage the university's capabilities in research and partnering to benefit wellbeing for Canberrans and those in the Canberra region. The next area is looking at our sustainability and renewables priorities—how we can partner with the university in informing policy and decision-making in regard to sustainability. Finally, the fifth area is a focus on enriching the social and cultural economy of Canberra. They are the five focus areas.

We are about to stand up a joint working group between UC and the ACT government, co-chaired by the Deputy Director of Economic Development, and the Vice-Chancellor. There will be representation from across the ACT government and different faculties within UC on that committee. What we found in the development of the partnership is that there are many touchpoints between the university and the ACT government already, and this builds on that.

MS ORR: When you say it builds on those touchpoints, is this a way for you to better align those touchpoints? I think you said something about a training workforces and those sorts of things. Are these the opportunities you are really going to want to see be realised through this partnership?

Ms Arthy: I think that is a good starting point: to build on the existing touchpoints that we have, making sure that those different relationships are known across government and across the different faculty areas. That way, we can identify together what the priorities are, going forward.

MS LEE: I want to go back to the Convention Centre. Minister, the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum made a budget submission calling on a business case for the Convention Centre. They said that the Convention Centre was "turning away business due to lack of size and flexibility". There obviously was not funding in the budget for

a business case. Was that a decision in terms of—

Mr Barr: No; there was.

MS LEE: So there is funding in the budget for a business case?

Mr Barr: Yes, for the initial development. Ms Arthy can—

MS LEE: Explain, yes.

Ms Arthy: Yes. That was done as part of the budget review from last year. We were provided with some funding to do the operational needs analysis for a convention centre, which is the first step in preparing a business case.

MS LEE: Can you confirm for me how much was funded and the scope of those works?

Ms Arthy: I do not have it here with me, but I can get it for you by the end of this session or I can pass to Ms de la Rue.

Ms de la Rue: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. As Ms Arthy mentioned, we did get funding in the budget review for the Convention Centre precinct. We received \$1.1 million to proceed with an operational needs analysis. We did an operational needs analysis for two projects concurrently, being stage 1 and stage 2 of the Convention Centre precinct, which are an entertainment pavilion and a convention centre.

MS LEE: I am not sure who is going to answer this next question. In terms of the operational needs analysis which has been funded, can you give the committee a bit more information about the scope of what that involves?

Ms de la Rue: Yes. I am happy to answer that. The operational needs analysis assesses everything we spoke to previously, such as the demand and potentially what the economic benefit could be. It starts looking at the actual sizing and those kinds of things. We are ending that work now. We completed that work in the last month or so.

MS LEE: It has completed?

Ms de la Rue: Yes.

MS LEE: Is there a final report?

Ms de la Rue: A report is being finalised currently, yes.

MS LEE: Will that be submitted to the minister? Is that how it works?

Ms de la Rue: That is correct.

MS LEE: Have you got a time frame for that?

Ms de la Rue: It is imminent, within the next couple of weeks.

MS LEE: Minister, is that something that you are prepared to make public?

Mr Barr: I will take it through a cabinet process first, so it will not be public this year, but I would anticipate that it will be public next year.

THE CHAIR: I have some questions about the AIS. Documents received under freedom of information show that in June 2022 your federal colleagues requested documents from the Australian Sports Commission, which included the AIS master plan. In addition, these documents show that the new Labor federal minister asked for a brief on the potential relocation of the AIS in August 2022. Were you aware of these discussions and the Australian Sports Commission's report on relocating the AIS?

Mr Barr: The relocation of the AIS is something that was before the previous federal government. It was clear that a number of options were being considered. It was clear to me that there was a live risk that the institute would be moved out of Canberra; hence my actions to seek to work with the Sports Commission and to sign an MOU, which we did, many, many months ago, after many, many, many months of engagement. It was an MOU that I was able to secure under the new federal government. We had been getting no engagement at all from the previous federal government.

MS ORR: Can I just check what role you have and what role the Minister for Sport has on the issue of the AIS?

Mr Barr: Sure. The sports policy and specific sports-related matters are principally with the Deputy Chief Minister, in her role as Minister for Sport, but because this is a major—

MS ORR: Economic driver.

Mr Barr: territory-federal government relations matter, and it overlaps, obviously, with some areas of my portfolio responsibilities around infrastructure—

MS ORR: We can ask you some questions; yes.

Mr Barr: Yes. I have taken an interest in the matter, as Chief Minister, because I have needed to engage with not just the federal sports minister but the federal infrastructure minister and the federal Minister for Finance to secure the money to refurbish the AIS arena, for example, so we have been actively involved.

We were getting nowhere under the previous government. I will be fair to Minister Colbeck. He was also the Minister for Aged Care, in the middle of the COVID crisis, and things were not going so well in aged care. I can understand that they would have essentially paused and sought to do nothing in relation to the AIS. It would not have been at the top of his list. I accept that.

The problem was that the inertia began before COVID, and that was what led to the closure of the AIS arena. They failed to make a decision on the necessary decision to

keep that as a functioning facility. Under the cover of COVID, it was closed. We were able to then negotiate a reopening of the facility, for the purposes of the mass vaccination centre, so we have been live to the issues associated with the venue.

That is why we fought so hard to get a commitment to refurbish the arena, to make it useable again, and why I resisted that being something that territory taxpayers would have to fork out for. In spite of there being some criticism on that matter, I think history has proved us right—that it is a commonwealth asset—and the commonwealth has now committed the funding to restore it.

We now have a further conversation to be had around the Institute of Sport. The evidence is pretty clear in relation to the relative costs of the different options that the Sports Commission commissioned, which were effectively the stay in Canberra and refurb or the different relocation options. The relocation options are far more expensive, far more uncertain. Given that we are eight, nine years out from the Brisbane Olympics, if the rationale for moving the AIS to South-East Queensland was for those Olympics, that ship has sailed. It is too late.

We are now engaging in the review that is being undertaken by the current government. We have been very clear about our position on that matter. I think the facts speak for themselves in relation to the relative costs and risks associated. The best outcome clearly is an investment in renewal of the AIS on its current site.

MS LEE: Minister, in your first answer you said that it was a concern that you had developed under the previous federal government. When was that, and what was it that made you come to that conclusion?

Mr Barr: It might have been under Minister McKenzie or before. There were a lot of sports ministers in the previous government. They had a habit of getting themselves into trouble and getting sacked. At least before Senator Colbeck was the minister—I think it was Bridget McKenzie—the Sports Commission did seek to engage with the territory government on their proposed master plan for the renewal of the AIS precinct here in Canberra.

Things then went a little quiet. Ministers changed. Clearly, some work was commissioned to look at alternative locations, and that is when the report emerged that the *Canberra Times* FOI'd, which gave the three different options. Those options were commissioned and canvassed by the previous federal Liberal government. It was very clear in the public statements that Kieren Perkins made, as the Sports Commission's CEO, that the Sports Commission's recommendation to government was and remains to refurbish the campus here in Canberra. I support that position.

MS LEE: I think we are all on a unity ticket. I do not think there is any question about that remaining here. The report that the *Canberra Times* FOI'd talks about the possible relocation as early as June and August 2022. You are telling me that you had come to a conclusion yourself way before that?

Mr Barr: Yes. That report was FOI'd. It was provided as an incoming ministerial brief to the new government, but it was commissioned by the previous government. They were the ones examining the previous options. The process of looking at

whether the AIS could move out of Canberra began under either the Turnbull or the Morrison government. No decision was made. Morrison lost the 2022 election and an incoming ministerial brief to the new sports minister outlined the work that had previously been undertaken. That would appear to be the document that was FOI'd by the *Canberra Times*. It was not news to us that the previous federal government was considering relocating the AIS.

MS LEE: Presumably, you would not have had access to an incoming brief?

Mr Barr: No, I did not have access to it, but I did know that they were looking at the options because the Sports Commission had come to brief me on their preferred option, which was to stay in Canberra.

MS LEE: Fast forward, and now we are talking about the announcement made by the federal Labor government in October about this new review. When did you first find out about that review?

Mr Barr: There was an announcement in that week. Whenever the date was that they publicly announced it, I was advised—

MS LEE: The 16th, I think.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LEE: You found out then? There was no—

Mr Barr: I was not given three-months heads up advance notice of that, no.

MS LEE: The only heads up you would have been given was—

Mr Barr: That there was an announcement coming.

MS LEE: That sounds about right. Since then, aside from the publicly stated positions that many of us have had, can you tell us what other engagement you have had with your federal colleagues on this issue?

Mr Barr: Yes. Minister Berry has been leading a number of pieces of work. I will ultimately sign off on the ACT government's submission to that review process. We have been engaging. Ms Arthy may be able to talk a little more about that.

MS LEE: Ms Arthy, can you give us the time line as well.

Ms Arthy: I might have to ask my colleagues to remind me. Since the review was announced, we have met with the review panel once. That was a couple of weeks ago. I can check my diary; I was trying to do so before you turned to me. It was very recently, and we are scheduling another meeting with the review panel for either this week or next week, because we could not get through all of the questions that they had in the time that we had available initially.

Minister Berry hosted a meeting of stakeholders at the AIS on 14 November, last

week. I was not there, but it went quite well, from everything that I have heard. As the Chief Minister said, we are finalising our review input because it is due tomorrow, the 21st. Everything has been very tight. The review panel has met with us once. It is meeting with us again, either this week or next week, because they have further questions. I have also met with the department that is managing the review—a preliminary meeting before we met with the review panel. That has all happened in the last couple of weeks.

MS LEE: Have they indicated—I could not find it publicly—when the review will be completed?

Ms Arthy: All I have seen is that it will be by the end of the year, I believe. That is all I have—

MS LEE: That is the only thing in public, so you do not have any other information.

Ms Arthy: We have been told that they want to do it very quickly; that is why we are trying to give them as much information as we can.

MS LEE: No indication about making that public?

Ms Arthy: It is not our process, so I cannot answer that question. It is a commonwealth government process.

MS LEE: But are you aware of—

Ms Arthy: No, not at all.

MS ORR: What is the ACT government doing to engage with other universities around Canberra? While noting that University of Canberra is Canberra's university, we still have a lot of other universities here.

Mr Barr: We have formalised either development deeds or precinct deeds with ANU and UNSW Canberra. We also have a range of specific partnerships and agreements with other universities, including the Australian Catholic University, as was recently announced, with the project around nursing and midwifery. There are other perhaps smaller, less formal agreements and partnerships with some of the other universities that have a presence in the ACT.

If you extend the higher education portfolio to include the CIT as well, clearly, there are two streams of national work that have local implementation opportunities. Firstly, there is the national jobs and skills agreement, which was launched by the Prime Minister at CIT Fyshwick only a few weeks back. There is also a universities accord. They pick up some of the national policy priorities, with the capacity effectively for an ACT-specific implementation of relevant initiatives.

MS ORR: What benefits does the ACT community see stemming from these agreements?

Mr Barr: In the simplest economic terms, this is our largest non-government industry.

It obviously has a degree of public funding, but it also generates a lot of its own revenue through student fees, research and other partnerships.

Outside the commonwealth public sector and the ACT government, the universities are our next largest employers. In simple terms, around one in six Canberrans either work or study at one of the higher education institutions, when you include the CIT in that context. We have more than 40,000 students in the territory, or around nine per cent of our population. The higher education sector is our single largest export industry and the only one that, pre COVID, had an annual revenue of over a billion dollars. It is the biggest game in town outside government.

It is an area where, proportionally, as a share of national exports, as a share of national higher education activity, the ACT is way over our population share, our per capita share, of activity—whether that is exports, engagement in higher education, employment in the sector or study in the sector. It is a very significant part of our economy, a massive generator of skills and talent for our economy, and a massive attractor of investment, both nationally and internationally.

MS ORR: What role will the development of UNSW’s city campus have in further expanding those attributes and outcomes?

Mr Barr: About \$3 billion of economic activity, hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in the physical campus and, commencing fairly soon, thousands of additional students, hundreds of additional jobs, and additional payroll tax revenue for the territory. It will be a very significant contributor. It is part of a broader vision to have our CBD anchored by Group of Eight universities. There are eight of them in Australia, the Go8, and we will have two of them anchoring the western and eastern sides of our CBD. That is a massive economic output generator. There is nothing else in the ACT economy that could generate as much investment, economic activity and export earnings than those institutions.

MS ORR: I preface my next question by saying that I appreciate UNSW probably has responsibility for some of this, but where is the project up to, in being delivered?

Ms Arthy: The master plan has been approved and work is underway to begin construction next year. They are starting on the car park opposite CIT Reid. Things are progressing quite quickly now, which is really good. I do not have much more to say apart from that because, as I said, the master plan was the biggest piece of work that we had to get approved. Now that that has been done, there is the normal approval process before construction begins, which, as I said, is due next year.

MS ORR: They are looking to start construction and undertake approvals?

Mr Barr: Yes, and noting that the National Capital Authority is the approval entity for this.

MS LEE: Staying with sport, I want to take you to a direct reference in the annual report, volume 2. 1, at page 132, table 8—accountability indicators output 3. 1. If we go to paragraph k, the estimated economic activity as a result of supporting local elite teams was 12 per cent below your target of \$14 million, and the explanation for that

states:

... a decline in the average daily spend of visitors travelling to Canberra to attend a local elite ... match.

Minister, can you confirm for the committee whether that is a decline in attendance or a decline in terms of the visitors who are attending spending less?

Mr Barr: A combination of both, I expect. This can be highly impacted by which teams are playing, the propensity to travel of their fan base and that team's relative performance in the competition year to year. It will come as no surprise that people—

MS LEE: Everyone loves a winner.

Mr Barr: Yes, that is correct, or an entertaining loser.

MS LEE: A few teams spring to mind.

Mr Barr: The Fijians always play interesting, entertaining Rugby. They do not always win, but you would normally expect to see a bit more—

MS LEE: In the Asian Cup, the Iraq-Iran match was—

Mr Barr: Yes, indeed, but not—

MS LEE: You made fun of a possible North Korea-Russia match. That would have been amazing.

Mr Barr: I think people would turn up for North Korea v Russia. It will depend a lot, obviously, on the distance the fans have to travel and the timing of the fixtures. Certain time slots lend themselves to an overnight stay as opposed to a day trip. An overnight stay will generate more spend in the economy because it will generally involve a hotel spend as well. Obviously, the time of year can work against that.

It is clear, over many years of experience, that we generally do want night games, because that does give you the overnight stay, but if they are too deep into winter then that is a problem, particularly for fans coming from much warmer climates. Daytime tends to work better, and you see that in the crowd attendance, but it does also depend a little bit on how our own teams are faring in the competitions.

MS LEE: Those factors probably, you would say, are applicable every year.

Mr Barr: Yes. In some years we will have exceeded that metric because the Brumbies, the Raiders or the Giants are performing particularly well, and they are playing against teams whose fans have a propensity to travel. In the AFL context, clearly, more people following Melbourne teams travel than, for example, people coming from Western Australia over to Canberra to follow the Eagles, as Mr Parton would indeed testify—

MS LEE: I am sure he will.

Mr Barr: when they were having a rough year. Those sorts of factors do come into play.

MS LEE: Last year the indicator was also below target because we actually hosted fewer games at home.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LEE: Was that the case for 2022-23 as well?

Mr Barr: That is a very good question.

MS LEE: What is the direct comparison?

Mr Elkins: I acknowledge the privilege statement. This year we have not hosted fewer games over what would be the normal course of events, but, with some of the reporting, depending on the year, it falls in and out of different reporting periods because of the timing of when the events happen.

Mr Barr: A financial year can cover two football seasons because football seasons run across the calendar year. Another factor that tends to bump up the figures—more so for the Raiders these days—is that, if they are hosting a final against a Sydney team, past experience shows that that will be the biggest crowds you will get. People from Sydney will travel to watch their team play in a final in Canberra.

MS LEE: That makes sense. Minister or Mr Elkins, do you have the exact number of home games that we had in 2021-22 and 2022-23?

Ms Arthy: For the 2022-23 financial year, the Brumbies had seven home games, the Raiders had 11 and the Giants had four. In 2021-22, the Brumbies had six, the Raiders had seven, and the Giants had two.

Mr Barr: But that was COVID impacted.

Ms Arthy: That was COVID impacted, yes.

MS LEE: So there were fewer games.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LEE: I do not know whether you have this; I will be very impressed if you do. If not, on notice, would you be able to provide to the committee the attendance numbers? Do you have those?

Ms Arthy: I can do both total and average crowd game. What would you like?

MS LEE: Total.

Ms Arthy: This is for 2022-23. For the Brumbies, the total attendance for the season was 52,754; for the Raiders, it was 143,358; and for the Giants, it was 39,209.

Mr Barr: Average attendance?

MS LEE: Yes, I was going to ask about the average—

MS ORR: It might be worth getting the average temperature for each game.

MS LEE: I think Andrew anticipated what we were going to ask for.

Ms Arthy: The average crowd per game for the Brumbies in 2022-23 was 7,536; for the Raiders, it was 13,033; and for the Giants, it was 9,802.

MS ORR: Did one of the teams play more games? Is that why we are seeing a difference in the averages? How many games were played—

Mr Barr: Yes. The Raiders played the most games because their NRL season is longer and there are more rounds, but it would be fair to observe that the Raiders attract a bigger crowd than the Brumbies do, and the Giants. They play fewer games, but their average crowd sits between the two.

MS ORR: We might need a good Excel spreadsheet of all the numbers and the temperatures, and we can start to figure it out.

Mr Barr: The other factor that is impactful—you could also get some data, and I might ask this question—is the percentage of venue capacity for each game.

MS LEE: Yes.

MS ORR: There are a lot of different ways that you can cut it.

Mr Barr: Quickly doing the maths in my head, the Giants would utilise the most venue capacity because they average 9,000 in a venue that can accommodate 13,000.

Mr Elkins: It is 13,000 at its absolute peak, because there are some nuances to the seating.

Mr Barr: And the Raiders are at 13,000 in a 27,000 capacity?

Mr Elkins: 25,500.

Mr Barr: A little over 50 per cent, and the Brumbies, at 7,000 out of 25,000, are at about 30 per cent.

MS LEE: You hold this data; do you calculate what the economic benefit is when each team plays at home?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Ms Arthy: I have local economic activity. I will do that one because I think I have another spreadsheet from which I can get the bigger number. In terms of local

economic activity, for the Brumbies—I will not do all of the numbers; I will round it up—for 2022-23, it was about \$1.9 million; for the Raiders, it was \$7.2 million; and for the Giants, it was \$1.8 million. That is economic activity.

MS LEE: With all of the figures that we have just discussed, in terms of total attendance, average attendance, percentage of the capacity and the economic benefit, how does that compare to pre COVID?

Ms Arthy: I might need to take that on notice. I might be able to give you an example. Actually, we did not calculate the economic activity pre COVID, so I do not have that here. I can take on notice and see whether we have it from another source. I might have another spreadsheet which might be able to help.

With respect to other information—I do not know whether this is useful because it does not calculate everything—I have economic activity from ACT residents pre and post COVID. We know that, for example, for the Brumbies, as I mentioned, there was \$1.9 million spent. That is seven per cent lower than it was in 2019. That gives you an example. It is only one aspect, but it gives you something. The other information I have here is for the Raiders—a 72 per cent increase since 2019.

MS LEE: A 72 per cent increase?

Ms Arthy: Yes. For the Giants, it is a 117 per cent increase.

MS LEE: Both increases.

Ms Arthy: Yes.

MS LEE: Keeping in mind, obviously, the various factors that we have just discussed, this is the second year in a row that the target has not been met. Keeping in mind the variability, obviously, there have been some anecdotal concerns raised about the facility, the stadium, not meeting certain standards when it comes to the bars, restaurants and nearby activity. Does the directorate have data on any analysis done on economic activity, including benefits to surrounding businesses, that would be generated from having a stadium in the city? Is that something that you have available?

Mr Barr: No; pretty minimal. You are talking about a net increase, because it would just be a simple substitution effect.

MS ORR: You are just moving from one geographic location to another, so you would be changing where the money is spent, as opposed to what is spent. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Barr: Yes, that is correct.

MS LEE: But there is nothing specific in terms of a dataset?

Mr Barr: No. If you work on the presumption that people will eat, and all we are talking about is where they eat, yes, I think it is a reasonable presumption. There are

some people that will eat at home and then go to the football. There are others who will eat out, either at the venue or somewhere else. It is not a significant factor.

In terms of a net increase for the economy, it would almost substitute out to zero, because it is just shifting money from being spent on one activity to another. Presumably, given most household budgets are not unlimited, if you spent the money at restaurant X in the vicinity of the stadium on night 1 of the week, you may not then spend money somewhere else at a different restaurant on a different night, because you may only be able to afford to go out once a week.

If you can afford to go out more than that, you might be spending more; but, in most instances, most family budgets, most household budgets, do not accommodate unlimited spending, and you do not just spend more simply because of the location of a venue. You may spend it somewhere proximate, but you are just substituting away from spending somewhere else, or on something else.

MS LEE: Obviously, no-one has unlimited budgets, especially now, but a lot of people look at the option that is at Bruce and say, “All right; the only thing I’ve got is what’s at the venue.” But if they go to the city, there is a whole abundance, so surely that will make some difference in decision-making.

Mr Barr: It may, to the extent that there might be more money spent at a city restaurant or a city pub, but it just means less money spent somewhere else in the economy, because there is not extra money. There is the same amount of money; it is just a matter of where it is spent. It does not bring a net boost to the economy. The only thing that would bring a net boost to the economy would be more interstate expenditure.

MS LEE: Which would also flow if there was good stadium infrastructure, too.

MS ORR: Arguably. Inherent in Ms Lee’s assumption is that there is an unmet demand there. I do not know about the Brumbies; I only go to the Raiders, but venues like the Duxton and a few other pubs will put on, “Come and get a beer and a special, and we will bus you over to the stadium.” If I understood correctly, Chief Minister, you were saying that this demand is met in various ways, and it will just move, if you move the stadium. It is not as simple as there being a big, unmet demand.

Mr Barr: Yes. Obviously, at the stadium, we have gone to great lengths to—

MS ORR: There are even vegetarian and vegan options now. It is great.

Mr Barr: Indeed; so it is not just that the only option is—

MS ORR: I know we are laughing, but I have eaten a lot of chips at football games over my life and not much else.

Mr Barr: The team may wish to discuss some of the initiatives that go to provide—

MS ORR: Those vegans with their burgers, yes.

Mr Barr: opportunities and more diversity, yes.

Mr Elkins: It has been one thing across the whole venue group that we have been really focused on—everything from having entry-level products to having a variety, be that vegan, vegetarian or gluten free, as well as engaging across local communities and local providers. If you come to Manuka Oval and GIO Stadium, you can have Fricken chicken, Jacko’s Pizzas, a BentSpoke beer and a Capital beer. Actually, at Manuka, you can only have a Capital, not a BentSpoke.

We have been really focused on making sure that we get a product range that is supportive of the whole market. If you want to have chips or a pie, that is quick and easy; you might want to have rice paper rolls or a Canberra icon like Jacko’s Pizza. Across those sites, we have made sure that it is accessible both in the outer area of the venue and focusing on the inner bowl, so that it is quick. If you are a football fanatic, you can quickly get up and grab something to eat. One of the great joys of GIO Stadium is that at no point, when you are purchasing, will you miss the game. It is quick and it is easy. If you want to order Jacko’s Pizza, and go up and wait for a few minutes, you can have—controversially, maybe—one of the best pizzas in Canberra.

MS ORR: Do they have a vegan option?

Mr Elkins: I will take the vegan option on notice!

MS ORR: Don’t take it on notice. I will check, next time I am there.

MS LEE: Minister, with the elite teams, many of them have publicly lobbied for exploring a city stadium. What have been the main reasons they have told you about, and what is your response?

Mr Barr: I think they are mostly focused on a new venue. With its location, some are agnostic; others have a preference. But when the relative factors of cost, size of venue, fan experience, revenue-generating potential for hirers and cost of hiring a venue are all factored in, I think there is an understanding that the Civic pool site will not work, for a variety of reasons. It has been thoroughly explored but it is not viable, so we are looking at alternative options. That process is very clear and links back to the previous discussion in relation to the Australian Institute of Sport.

MS LEE: Just for completeness of these hearings, when you say that the Civic site is not viable, what are the reasons?

Mr Barr: We have already outlined them. I will provide them in writing again.

THE CHAIR: I have some questions about the ACT Infrastructure Plan update. For entertainment and sports, it mentions a \$2.2 million investment in strategic infrastructure planning for major arts, business, entertainment and sports venues. This options analysis is meant to look at stages 1 and 2 of the Canberra pavilion, as well as a new, enhanced stadium. Is the options analysis being developed in house or is it being outsourced?

Ms de la Rue: The \$2.2 million provided in the budget review was to establish a

strategic infrastructure coordination section in economic development. Some of that funding is for internal FTE. Where we do require the expertise of external consultants, we do engage them. We have engaged some external consultants. With the study you referred to that I spoke to earlier, the operational needs analysis for a convention centre and an entertainment pavilion, a convention centre precinct, we have engaged KPMG to do that work, within which we had a number of technical subconsultants and architects involved as well. That consultancy cost was \$250,000.

THE CHAIR: The work has begun?

Ms de la Rue: It has begun.

Mr Barr: Yes, that was the earlier line of questioning.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to provide a bit more detail on what this options analysis will look at for the three infrastructure projects?

Mr Barr: We answered that earlier. That was in the questions Ms Lee—

THE CHAIR: Nothing further that you would like to add?

Mr Barr: No. As I have indicated, it will be a report to me. I will take it to cabinet; then there will be the public release of a further update on the project next year.

MS LEE: I know you mentioned that previously. There will be some internal resourcing and some external consultants. You talked about the KPMG contract, which is worth \$250,000. Are there any other contracts within that bucket?

Ms de la Rue: There were two projects. Ms Castley mentioned the convention centre precinct. We were also funded, which makes up the third project, for the Canberra Stadium. We have been progressing work on the Canberra Stadium due diligence, and we have a consultant engaged for that, Arup. Again, they have a number of subconsultancies within that, including architects. That consultancy is for \$317,000.

MS LEE: That is the totality of contractors?

Ms de la Rue: That is correct, yes.

MS LEE: The two contracts plus the subcontractors.

Ms de la Rue: That is correct.

MS LEE: Just to clarify, so that we have it, \$250,000 and—

Ms de la Rue: \$317,000.

MS LEE: Do they include the subcontracted amounts as well?

Ms de la Rue: Correct.

MS ORR: I have spent a lot of time asking about universities and what they will contribute in the sense of their precinct footprint in the ACT. What opportunities are there for other specialised precincts outside our largest ones?

Mr Barr: There are a number, and they have been identified, as publicly discussed, to varying degrees. That can extend from the Exhibition Park precinct to Gungahlin town centre and the Thoroughbred Park precinct. As we head further south, east and west, there is the Academy of Interactive Entertainment precinct in Watson, the arts precinct in Kingston, the Canberra Brickworks precinct in Yarralumla, the CIT Woden precinct and the CIT Fyshwick precinct.

MS ORR: With these precincts, what are the opportunities that you see for future development and contribution to the ACT?

Mr Barr: They vary, depending on the nature of the activities currently there and what the investment driver is. Obviously, where government is a lead tenant or lead investor, there is opportunity for private sector co-investment. In other instances, it is principally a residential component with mixed use opportunities. Largely, the government role there is land sale and infrastructure augmentation. One has an arts focus, so it varies.

I have announced a further related precinct that we are looking at. It touches on a lot of what we have talked about, and it brings all of these strands together; that is, the broader AIS Bruce, north side hospital and University of Canberra precinct. That encompasses higher education, TAFE, health facilities and sporting infrastructure. That is quite a diverse opportunity in Belconnen.

There are other specific and allied precincts. The health precinct in Woden would be another example. There is aviation and the associated precinct at the airport. The eastern broadacre study is looking at the options associated with both north and south of the airport precinct, with more agriculture and tourism-related product at the northern end—wineries, truffle farms and those sorts of things—through to more transport logistics and bulky goods—

MS ORR: At the Hume end?

Mr Barr: Yes; also around the airport. There is that work. The western precinct study is principally residential but not exclusively. There are some examples, and they are all at different phases of government consideration, from early planning feasibility and assessment through the planning authority through to Major Projects Canberra-led infrastructure precincts. I have overlooked the theatre precinct immediately around us. That is another example, and the City Hill precinct. That is currently with land release in the market, and there is the Acton waterfront as well. There are a number, and they have a variety of different uses, depending on the areas that they intersect with. Of course, there is the CBR Innovation Network at Moore Street.

MS LEE: That is a good segue because the next question I want to ask is about CBR Innovation Network. With CBRIN's Innovation Connect grants, does CBRIN report to your directorate on those grants?

Mr Maclachlan: Yes, they do. Each year they will report through to us around the grant rounds that are run.

MS LEE: Is that report publicly available?

Mr Maclachlan: I am not sure. I can take that on notice.

Ms Arthy: We can have a look. I would have to look at whether CBRIN puts it into their annual report. I cannot remember. We can take that on notice and come back to you.

MS LEE: Okay. If it is no, could you also provide an explanation for the committee as to why it does not?

Ms Arthy: Yes, we can. I am pretty sure it would be in their annual report. We will check while we are sitting here. I do not see a reason why we cannot provide you with the grants. If not, we can talk to CBRIN, given they own it as well. I have just had a message saying they publish successful grants on their website.

MS LEE: On their website, okay. Obviously, the administration of those grants is done by CBRIN, but in terms of reporting to the directorate, and through the annual reports, what are the accountability measures that you seek, expect or ask for?

Ms Arthy: I will take on notice the specific measures because I do not have that level of detail in front of me.

MS LEE: Thank you for taking that on notice. In relation to the report details, does that provide information in relation to the number of grant recipients and how much? Is that information available?

Ms Arthy: Again, I will have to take that on notice, unless I can get my team to send me the information before the end of this session. I do not have that here but I am happy to look at it.

MS LEE: No worries. You might have to take this on notice. I also want to know whether—because this may not be available—there is information about grant recipients who have left Canberra over the last five years.

Ms Arthy: I do not think we would have that information because that would require looking at each company and trying to find where they are now. I do not think we would hold that.

MS LEE: Can you clarify whether you do not hold that; if you do, can you provide that data?

Ms Arthy: I will do that on notice, but I am fairly sure that we do not hold that data.

MS LEE: The other metric that I was interested in was whether you have any information about some of those grant recipients that are now no longer operating.

Ms Arthy: That would be a similar question. We do have the amount. We will get that information.

MS LEE: No worries; both of those metrics in the last five years.

Ms Arthy: Ms Starick has found the document online, and it has just come through to me as well. We can send you the link to it. All of the information is online. It has the icon “grant recipients”. It has all of the grant recipients, so it goes by the month, the time when they were provided, they have the company name, project description and the funding involved. That is all online via the CBRIN website.

MS LEE: Thank you. That is all I have on CBRIN.

THE CHAIR: Before we finish, is there anything else that you would like to add?

Mr Barr: I do not think we will. We have taken a couple of questions on notice. We will get those answers to you as soon as we can.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank witnesses for their attendance today. As the Chief Minister noted, there have been questions taken on notice. Please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. The committee will now suspend the proceedings for afternoon tea.

Hearing suspended from 2.19 to 2.46 pm.

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, Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

McKinnon, Ms Margaret, Acting Deputy Director-General, Access Canberra

Lhuede, Mr Nick, Executive Branch Manager, Construction, Utilities and Environment Protection, Access Canberra; Construction Occupations Registrar; and Architects Registrar

Mangeruca, Mr Giuseppe, Controlled Sports Registrar and Acting Executive Branch Manager, Fair Trading and Compliance, Access Canberra

Cubin, Ms Derise, Commissioner for Fair Trading; and Registrar for Co-operatives, Executive Branch Manager, Licensing and Registrations, Access Canberra

Springett, Ms Emily, Executive Branch Manager, Service Delivery and Engagement, Access Canberra

Vaile, Dr Jodie, Executive Branch Manager, Strategy, Data and Governance, Access Canberra

Chesworth, Ms Fiona, Executive Branch Manager, Better Regulation Taskforce, Policy and Cabinet Division,

Engele, Mr Sam, Coordinator-General, head of Better Regulation Taskforce, Policy and Cabinet

Arthy, Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Maclachlan, Hugh, Executive Branch Manager, Economic Development

Stewart-Moore, Karen, Executive Branch Manager, Economic Development

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing for the committee’s inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: “I will take that on notice.” This will help the committee and the witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw their attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

Ms McKinnon: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

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

Mr Engele: I acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: I believe, Ms Cheyne, you would like to start with an opening statement.

Ms Cheyne: Yes—just something very short. Thank you, Chair, and I thank the committee for their indulgence. I have also read and understand the privilege statement. Access Canberra has identified some incorrect figures in the annual report. They will be addressed through a corrigendum, but I just want to draw them to the committee's attention today. One relates to page 66, table 9, which is about the number of compulsory conciliations resolved through early resolution process; and the other one is on page 74, the fourth main dot point, which goes to figures relating to infringements and infringement notice management plans. I am happy to talk you through what the actual figures are, if that is useful, or we can come to them if you have questions on them.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to go through them briefly?

Ms Cheyne: Sure; I am happy to. Page 66, table 9: the incorrect figure states that 41 compulsory conciliations were resolved through the early resolution process. The correct figure is now being confirmed but it is fewer than 20. On page 74, relating to infringements, the report states that over 12,400 infringement notice management plans were established. The correct figure is over 14,400. It states that 89 work development plans commenced, and the correct figure is 114. And the report states this represents over 26,600 infringements, and the correct figure is over 28,100. On that one, we are still working to understand what happened, but it seems like the data was perhaps taken at an earlier point in time, given all those numbers are higher. When we know, we will be able to share that.

THE CHAIR: Because I do not have it in front of me, what infringements are we talking about?

Ms Cheyne: We are talking about traffic infringements.

THE CHAIR: Parking, speeding—the whole lot?

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I will kick off with questions. I would like to understand a bit more about workers compensation in the private sector. I know there is a lot in the report about public sector workers compensation, but I am wondering: who decides the fees for businesses for workers compensation?

Ms Cheyne: I think this is not my portfolio.

MS ORR: Would this not go to the insurance groups in CMTEDD?

THE CHAIR: Great. I will move to a second one.

Ms Cheyne: I would be happy to help, but I have never had anything to do with that.

MS ORR: I think we have another session with them, because they are in the same group as the procurement people.

THE CHAIR: Are they?

MS ORR: I think so.

THE CHAIR: So they are coming to us.

MS ORR: We have only just started this, so maybe we can double-check that they will be appearing.

THE CHAIR: The point of my questioning is: are you, as business minister, aware of the impact that these fees are having on business? I do not know—

Ms Cheyne: I do not recall whether that has been raised with me, Ms Castley, but I will ask my staff to double-check and, if it has been, I will let you know.

THE CHAIR: I had someone chat with me about the Secure Local Jobs Code, when you are renewing. They did it online. If you are a sole trader, you still have to scroll through, and a lot of it is not applicable because you are a sole trader. I am just wondering who knows—

MS ORR: Does that sit with you?

Ms Cheyne: No; it does not. It is with Minister Gentleman.

MS ORR: Who is also appearing later in the week.

THE CHAIR: Is he? Great. Onto you, Ms Orr. Why don't you take over!

Ms Cheyne: Sorry, Ms Castley. We would like to be helpful.

MS ORR: If you tell me all your questions, I can tell you—

THE CHAIR: That would be great. I should have sat with you first!

MS ORR: Bookable appointments are now available at all service centres. What has been the response to this service option?

Ms Cheyne: I will ask Ms Springett to come and join us at the table because she has been leading the work on this. You might be aware that the Dickson service centre has been operating with the bookable appointment model for some time. We did that as a pilot to see what the take-up would be, with a particular focus on Council on the Ageing and their contacts. Some of the benefits that we have seen from bookable appointments include that, obviously, people know the time and date to come, but, also, they are assisted with any information that they need to bring along to the bookable appointment to make it as fast as possible. We know that sometimes people attend service centres but might not have all the necessary documentation. We have an excellent concierge role that assists them right at the front door, so they do not have to wait and get right through to having an appointment and then being turned away. Bookable appointments have really assisted. For people who are time poor or people who just want certainty, it has been really great.

Given we had such a solid take-up of bookable appointments and consistently high feedback, we have now rolled that out to all our service centres. Dickson remains a specialised bookable appointment centre, but all the other service centres still allow people to turn up whenever they choose, within the opening hours. That is still perfectly fine. We have had very strong take-up since we announced that. With Dickson remaining a bookable-appointments-only service centre, we have been able to double the number of bookable appointments there. Ms Springett will tell you a bit more about the public response.

Ms Springett: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Bookable appointments were introduced in October 2022, as the minister said, at the Dickson specialised centre. It is really important to note that, when we first started bookable appointments, it was a trial developed in partnership with Council on the Ageing. It is a really great community partnership and, indeed, we were recognised at their awards last Friday for that partnership. Since that trial occurred, and it was very successful, we have expanded it to all our service centres. We offer 21 appointments each day across the service centres, noting that Dickson is specialised and takes appointments only. We offer 42 at Dickson.

What we are seeing, really pleasingly, is that the members of the community that are taking up appointments are often those that require additional assistance or support: older members of our community; those who might be coming in to do a quite sensitive transaction, such as a deceased estate, for example; or people who might have children with neurodiversity or other additional requirements. We are seeing the bookable appointments being used in that way.

Since their introduction, we have undertaken close to 5,000 appointments across our service centres. We are at 4,812. People leave feedback after the bookable appointments, on our pedestals in the service centre, and, pleasingly, we are at 99.4 per cent positive feedback, so people are enjoying coming to a service centre at a designated time and getting fast-tracked, if you like—coming in and going straight up to a counter to do their business at a service centre.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: Thank you. I might jump straight into some of the performance accountability indicators, perhaps starting with indicator 2.1f. These questions are largely around indicator 2.1. That indicator—average number of days to issue business authorisation or personal registration—was not met, but the report is pretty light on information. It just states:

(the average number of days to issue a business authorisation was greater than 10 days against a target of 10 working days or less ...)

What was the average number of days to issue a business authorisation? What proportion took more than 10 days? And was that the longest time taken?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Cocks. Ms McKinnon can assist here. I believe that this has been largely affected by changes to real estate agent requirements that came

through during the period for this annual report, and that has had a big impact on figures. Ms McKinnon will be able to assist you.

Ms McKinnon: Thank you, Mr Cocks. We acknowledge that we do have significant variance in the number of days. I am hoping that Dr Vaile is busy finding the answers; otherwise, we will have to take that on notice. The minister is correct. There are two things. There was major reform to real estate agent licensing, including the introduction of new classes. The system that supports that is 20 years old, so there was a lot of manual work, and it took longer than we had hoped to issue the real estate agent licences.

The other thing is that, if I understand it correctly, it is a basket of business licences, for want of a better expression. Regarding the 10 days, for example, in terms of liquor licensing, you have mandatory public consultation. You could never possibly do that in 10 days. So the average is not granular and does not actually tell you much, which is why I am hoping we can find you some more detail.

Ms Cheyne: The actual overall average, Mr Cocks, was 32.4 days.

Dr Vaile: Yes—32.4 days for business authorisations. I do not have a breakdown here as yet, although I hope I will get one very shortly. There are a number of different licence types that are included in that accountability indicator and each of them has a different statutory timeline attached. This particular measure has been very much affected by the real estate agent renewal process. There has been a range of different issues with some of the types, whereas for others the timing has actually come down slightly. I will try to get that breakdown, though, very shortly.

MR COCKS: Okay. Is there a reason that, unlike other measures, it was simply reported as “more than 10 days” rather than providing actual data on what the performance was?

Dr Vaile: This is one of the accountability indicators that is actually changing and, in part, for this reason. It is quite difficult to get any kind of granularity with the old accountability indicator that we are looking at here. As we shift across to the new ones for next year, there will be more granularity. You will be able to see more clearly.

Ms Cheyne: As Ms McKinnon said, it is a basket of licences, and some have different time frames applied to them legislatively—the time frame in which they need to be issued. So grouping them all as “10 days” is problematic. The new accountability indicator for next year’s annual report will be the percentage of occupational licences that are issued within the published time frame target, and the published time frame target is available online. I am happy to share that—

MR COCKS: That does sound like a better indicator. I will move on to 2.1d, which refers the percentage of services completed online. From that indicator, it looks like you have only just fallen short. Can you tell me: was this due to the number of services available online or the information available to customers about what they can and cannot do online?

Ms McKinnon: It was 89 per cent achieved against 90, so it is very close. If I thought

about the reasons, they would include the behaviour change post COVID—being able to go into service centres again. We saw an uptake in people wanting face-to-face transactions after being required to do things online. Anecdotally, that would be the rationale for that.

Dr Vaile: This is another indicator that will change for next year as well, primarily because we have reached the saturation point with the digital services. There is very little left that we can actually put online. We do not have to actually hand over a number plate, for example, which really does need to be done face the face, with proof of identity issues and those kinds of things. The rationale for this is that we are moving away from that because there is very little more that Access Canberra can achieve once we are over the 90 per cent mark of everything being available digitally.

MR COCKS: Alright. Performance Indicators 2.1a and 2.1b refer to customers satisfied with Access Canberra—85 per cent; and the percentage of the Canberra community satisfied with the ease of interacting with Access Canberra—86 per cent. Over 2022-23, Access Canberra completed over 420,000 transactions through service centres and answered 348,883 phone calls. If only 85 per cent of people were satisfied—and I will say that it sounds, percentage wise, like things are looking good—customers for around 115,500 services, either over the phone or in service centres, were not satisfied. I would assume that customers for whom transactions were not completed were also not satisfied. Can you tell me what is being done to improve the service level and customer satisfaction for the 115,000 or so services?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cocks, I can give you a bit of a sense about how this survey is conducted. Not every single transaction that occurs has someone surveyed. The sample size of the survey for the customer satisfaction and ease of interacting is 642. For the target to have been reached for customer satisfaction, just 38 of 642 respondents would need to have changed their response to “satisfied”, and, for ease of interacting, just 56 would have needed to change their response to “satisfied” for the target to have been reached. I appreciate that you have transposed the data, and that is perfectly fine, but I think it is useful to hear that.

In terms of the actual results against the targets, those targets are exceptionally high. Regarding customer satisfaction, sometimes, when we have engagements with people and they are of a regulatory nature, they may not be happy with the outcome rather than the customer experience that they had. That can be reflected in the figures.

Also, Access Canberra, like other agencies, is still recovering from COVID-19. The period of this annual report captures when we had some longer wait times at the service centres last year. They did come down, but not anywhere like where they are now. All those things combined can have an impact. We are continuing to see a recovery and I believe that these are also indicators that are being updated.

Ms McKinnon: We acknowledge that we fell short in meeting those accountability indicators. There has been improvement on previous years, but they have not yet returned to pre-COVID levels. As the minister indicated, 2022-23 was not a year where we were out of the woods in terms of backlogs and service pressures resulting from COVID. We hope that next year will see us returning to pre-COVID levels of operation in both service pressures and wait times. In terms of new performance

indicators, the customer satisfaction target is problematic, in the way that the minister explained, so we are now going to be measuring ease of interacting with Access Canberra.

Our research shows that three things really impact on people's perception of ease of interaction and how satisfied they are. One is wait time at contact centres and service centres. I think we are down to four minutes at the contact centre and less than 10 at service centres now. We think that will be improved in next year's report. The other thing is the ability to complete transactions in the minimum number of contact points. I think the website will help with that. Also improvements like the concierge and the bookable appointments will also help people interact once and get what they want done in one touch. The last thing that impacts on ease of interacting is how knowledgeable our staff are. It would be fair to say that, in both the contact centre and the service centre over the past few years, we have had turnover. It is an entry-level position, and it takes a huge amount of training to get across the 700 transactions you can have at a service centre. We are focusing on assisting our staff.

Ms Cheyne: In terms of turnover, it is usually that people are being promoted out. They are constantly poached by other directorates, I would say, because they are very skilled and they have excellent customer service. I believe there was a very large recruitment round through the temporary employment register earlier this year. The point that Ms McKinnon raised is right: training takes time, as does familiarity with the system. You can see that there may be some transactions that a person may not be 100 per cent familiar with.

MR COCKS: Could I quickly go back to the survey. You said there were 642 responses. That seems like a very small percentage of the total number, of transactions at least, that occurs. That raises concerns with me about confidence in terms of—

Ms Cheyne: In terms of the sample size—

MR COCKS: statistical validity. What is the confidence interval? Also, how are people selected to participate in the survey?

Ms McKinnon: Again, I will look to Dr Vaile. There is the current figure, which you are looking at now, and we have improved the validity and the selection methods for the new performance indicators.

Dr Vaile: I have part of the answer and I believe that Ms Springett has the other part of the answer. We had two parts to the old survey. One was a survey done by a random sample of people who have undertaken a transaction with Access Canberra. That is the customer satisfaction survey. We would also invite people to do a telephone interview with business customers for Access Canberra. Those would be combined with the survey results to actually come to this figure.

There are some methodological questions about that particular way of doing things, which is why we are moving to a new system. That will be all based on a random sample in a similar way, but it will be an extended sample that will take in both business and personal transactions with Access Canberra. The new system will mirror closely for business what is there for individuals currently.

Ms Springett: To add to that, I am looking at the 2023 Micromex survey, which is publicly available on the Access Canberra website. For the 2023 survey, there were a total of 601 resident interviews completed. It breaks down to both sample selection and error, as well as the demographics of the selection. I can advise that the sample size of 601 residents provides a maximum sampling error of plus or minus four per cent at 95 per cent confidence, so it is methodologically sound. The sample is also weighted by age and gender to reflect the 2021 ABS census data for the ACT. A sample profile, which is weighted, is also published as part of the survey online and that breaks down things like gender, age, household status and employment status to ensure that it is a great cross-section and indicative of those coming into service centres and using our services more broadly.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

Ms Cheyne: We can share that survey with you, if you would like.

MR COCKS: That would be wonderful.

Ms Cheyne: Okay. We can send that through. Ms Castley—

Dr Vaile: Sorry, Minister—some answers have just come through about the range of business licences and individual licences that are included in that previous measure that we were discussing. There are the licensed business agents, both new and renewal; licensed employment agents, which are again renewal and new; licensed real estate agents; licensed stock and station agents; liquor; security master; trader licence; security trainer licence. All of those were ones where we did not meet the 10 days. Then there are: registered salesperson, business; registered salesperson, stock and station; Working with Vulnerable People registrations—new and renewal for both, as mentioned before; change of name; security employee, both new and renewal; and builder licence. All of those did meet the 10 days.

MR COCKS: The question was actually around the proportion that took more than 10 days and what the longest time taken was. Are you happy to take those on notice?

Dr Vaile: It would be better to take those on notice.

MR COCKS: Okay. As an extra ask, would it be possible to get some information? As you said, Minister, you are moving to reporting against those legislated time frames. Are you able to provide the proportion that were met within those time frames?

Ms McKinnon: I have to check.

Dr Vaile: I am a bit hesitant because that is a fair bit of work to retrofit it, if you know what I mean, because those are next year's accountability indicators.

MR COCKS: I would assume you are tracking whether you meet the legislated time frames though.

Dr Vaile: Yes. We will be able—

Ms McKinnon: Yes; we are.

Dr Vaile: We will take it on notice and do our best.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a thought on that. What was the impact if these were not met on time? Have any businesses talked to you about what that impact has meant?

Dr Vaile: One of the complexities is that often, as we are processing one of these transactions, it might actually be that not all of the documentation has been supplied. Then there is a process where we go back to the people and they supply the information and then we then go through it. Often, particularly with more difficult ones, it might be quite a process to actually get all of the answers to the questions, particularly given the complexities of things—with liquor licensing sometimes and some of the others. There might be an extended process where there is a lot of contact. While the time frame that we are talking about is 10 days, sometimes those processes cannot be completed without all of that documentation.

THE CHAIR: If there is back and forth, does the business owner have the ability to go directly to the person who is working on their application—is that how it works—or do they go back in the—

Dr Vaile: They generally will have been contacted. I am also aware that somebody contacted the business area directly because the issuing of the licence meant they were qualified as a trade and would be paid more, so the delay really impacted on them. As soon as they contacted us, we fixed that and issued the licence within three days. So we are mindful when people talk to us about the impact on their business. They can have personal contact and we will work with them to resolve it.

Ms Cubin: I also acknowledge the privilege statement. Thanks for your question. Absolutely, they can directly contact one of the team. We kind of step along with them because it can be a pretty complex process when you are having to get information from different parts of government or work with a certifier for a fit-out certification. There are different aspects that we will work through with them.

Another area that has been impacted is security industry employees, and part of that is about the time frame on requiring a police check. It is a third-party time pressure where they are waiting, and we obviously cannot process a licence until that information is received, because it is part of the legislative requirements. As soon as we can get the information, we will process it as quickly as possible.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, you would recall earlier this year that—

THE CHAIR: Yes. I gave you a call.

Ms Cheyne: The one we worked on.

THE CHAIR: Yes. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Ms Cheyne: That was a good outcome and—

THE CHAIR: I am sure they are very grateful.

Ms Cheyne: big thanks to the team who stayed late to get that done.

THE CHAIR: Yes. I appreciate that. Thank you. There was a hub in my electorate and, just so everybody knows, they were struggling to open on time.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, regarding your workers comp question earlier, I believe that there has been feedback given to our team in Business and Innovation which was then reported to me. It is about the uncapped nature of ACT claims compared to other jurisdictions. I would add that I know that there are issues across insurance premiums everywhere and it is not getting better. It is something that we have recognised in our Small Business Strategy and our actions, but the ability for government at some national level to do much is difficult. I raise this repeatedly with the small businesses at the small business ministers meetings, and I am hopeful that it will be on the agenda for the next meeting for a more fulsome update from the commonwealth about what they are doing, because it is hurting businesses in different areas.

THE CHAIR: Massively. I had someone tell me that their last year's bill was 250 grand and this year it was 500 grand. They would love to move. It is terrible. We do not want that, so I am very keen to work this out for businesses, especially if it is more expensive elsewhere than in Canberra. Mr Cocks, have you finished your questions?

MR COCKS: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I might have all mine wrong, but let me give this a whirl. These questions go to key management personnel, Business Support Grant, output class 2.1, on page 81. There are just a couple of questions. There is mention about the COVID-19 Business Support Grant program and what they still do.

Ms Cheyne: Is it B.1?

THE CHAIR: Yes—B.1. I have some questions about the program: what is it currently still doing; how many people were working in the team at the height of the pandemic; where is it now; and what is going to happen with the team going forward? It says, "The total number of KMP has decreased."

Ms Cheyne: The Business Support Grant program was a major investment during COVID. My understanding is that the team had a senior member of staff and that position was no longer required when that grant program finished, because it was so big.

Ms Arthy: I will have to get more detail on this, but, in general terms, the minister is right. There was the Business Support Grant program and the Small Business Hardship Scheme. Once the core of that concluded—I think it was around March or

April 2022, and we had a large number of people working on that, as you can imagine—we wound back the team to only a couple of people, to then wind everything up, do the review and move on. I cannot help you interpret the numbers that are in there at the moment.

THE CHAIR: I thought it had wrapped up, so I am querying what the program still does, if anything. As you say, the team obviously would have been redistributed or moved on.

Ms Arthy: It flipped into the next financial year because, you can imagine, to do all the archiving and evaluation, there was still activity at the end of 2022. It was a fairly small team, and they were part of Economic Development, so they stayed with Economic Development.

THE CHAIR: At the end of 2022.

Ms Arthy: Yes. We wound up in September or October.

THE CHAIR: If you could take on notice just a little bit more detail about what happened, the costs and when the—

Ms Arthy: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Suzanne, do you have a question?

MS ORR: Yes. The next-day outdoor dining permits—what are they and what are the benefits that you anticipate seeing from those?

Ms Cheyne: Thanks, Ms Orr. This is something that we announced on Friday, which is a real credit to the team at the small business ministers meeting I was just talking about. It happened in early October. Jurisdictions always provide updates on what they are doing. The WA government minister shared that they had next-day or same-day outdoor dining permits in the City of Perth and that they had been incredibly successful. Our turnaround times for outdoor dining in the ACT are still pretty good—10 business days—but I did take that back to the team. I was acting minister for city services at the time, and, given there is a public land use component, I put it past them. I also asked Ms Cubin and Mr Mangeruca to look at this as well—to look at how Perth had implemented this, whether there was something that we could learn from and see if we could do something very similar. That has been the case. Within a month, the team put it in place. It is now available for businesses to apply and we really hope that this has very good take-up over summer. I will ask Ms Cubin to talk you through the detail and what we expect the benefits to be.

Ms Cubin: Ms Orr, thank you for your question. I think from our perspective and the broader perspective, as the minister has highlighted, the businesses will benefit from a more vibrant, diverse restaurant and outdoor dining scene. It is starting off in the middle of summer; it is that vibrancy that they will be able to participate in.

They will benefit from faster processing times, which is relevant to what we have been talking about earlier, so they can start operating as soon as possible. The process

will be a one business day turnaround, subject to certain criteria being met—basically, that it is public, unleased land that they are utilising, and it is tables and chairs, and with some other criteria to be put into place as well. We can do that quickly, and it is of benefit for businesses.

MS ORR: Great, thank you.

MR COCKS: As a supplementary question, I would be interested to understand how you factor in consideration of other businesses and the community impact for that use of that public unleased land.

Ms Cubin: At this point, because it is unleased land, generally, directly in front of the business, we are giving consideration to that so they can utilise it. At this point in time, if they are not licensed, or they want to extend their liquor licence out to that area, we are taking a different approach to that. It will not be the one-day business turnaround, because there are factors to consider with regard to that. But, again, we will work with the business either through a liquor licence process or to extend their current liquor licence out to cover across the area. It just takes a little bit more time than the one-day turnaround.

Overall, I think it is the vibrancy aspect—the cafe is still operating, and it is just putting tables and chairs outside. It might be during the daytime, and our hope is that businesses nearby will actually embrace that, because it is increasing the vitality in the area and hopefully drawing more people to the space.

MR COCKS: That sounds like it only applies if it is relatively straightforward.

Ms Cubin: Yes, exactly.

MR COCKS: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary question. Just so I am clear: we would be talking about when they have a liquor license for inside the building, and they would then apply to have tables and chairs out the front but no alcohol out the front until they go through a liquor licence extension?

Ms Cubin: Yes, we work then to extend it out.

THE CHAIR: How do you work out the cost? What is the cost—is it in square metres?

Ms Cubin: Yes, it is per square metres. It depends on the location, because there are different calculations per land use in different parts of the territory.

THE CHAIR: So if you are in Braddon, it is probably more expensive than if you are in Gungahlin?

Ms Cubin: Yes, it is different per square metre.

THE CHAIR: The perks of living in town!

MS ORR: Has much changed in the parameters of what is permissible? Is it more that the process has just been sped up?

Ms Cubin: The process has been sped up, and I guess when we looked at our overall ability to do this, and based on the thoughts of the minister, yes, we were able to speed up the process by keeping it simple. Obviously, if there is a structure that has to be put into place that creates more complexity with development approvals or building approvals, so that really could not be considered in the quick turnaround.

MS ORR: So the due diligence is still being done; it is just a simpler proposition. It is a much faster process.

Ms Cubin: Yes.

Ms Cheyne: Yes. The more impactful ones, going to Mr Cocks's question about impact on neighbouring businesses and permanent structures and things like that—

MS ORR: Where it is not right out the front of their existing shopfront—

Ms Cheyne: Yes, exactly. For anything that is more complicated or more impactful, then it—

MS ORR: Say, next door at their neighbouring cafe's outdoor space. It would still be considered—

THE CHAIR: So they could not put permanent pots out to segregate their little spot. That would be more—

MS ORR: Pots would be okay because they could be removed.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so anything that can be put away at the end of the day.

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cocks?

MR COCKS: Table 10 on page 66 of volume 1 of the *CMTEDD Annual Report* is labelled "Service pressure improvements", and we briefly touched on this earlier. It identifies reductions in the backlogs for Working with Vulnerable People checks and infringement reviews, but, unless I have missed it somewhere, you do not appear to have reported on any other backlogs. Are there other service areas where Access Canberra has a backlog of work?

Ms McKinnon: Thank you. In terms of infringements, I am assured that we are now up to date and processing as they have come in. I think there are some more complex cases in Working with Vulnerable People where we are not meeting our time frames, but, again, that relies on external police checks, et cetera. I will ask Ms Cubin to talk about licensing, as in medical monitoring—so she can go first with medical monitoring.

Ms Cubin: Sure. Thank you very much. With our driver license medicals, for context, we are monitoring over 60,000 drivers annually in the territory with either medical or visual acuity—eye test requirements on the driver licenses—and because of that number we are, obviously, receiving people’s information and, at the same time, trying to process it in enough time to stop their license being impacted or suspended. There are times when we have received information and, because the processing is manual, it has pushed out the time frame of being able to process them in time. And there were instances where, regrettably, some people’s licenses might have been suspended, but we have put stopgaps in place now to alleviate that while we continue to process licenses. Statistically, it looks like there is a backlog, but, basically, people’s right to drive still is in place and we are processing them.

MR COCKS: So it sounds like there is a backlog, but you have got measures in place so that people can—

Ms Cubin: Absolutely, yes.

Ms McKinnon: So we do not cross-over.

MR COCKS: To reduce the impact.

Ms Cubin: Yes.

MR COCKS: Is that the only other backlog?

Ms Cheyne: There are some builder license delays—

Ms McKinnon: Working with Vulnerable People and then building—

Mr Mangeruca: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. In relation to Working with Vulnerable People, last financial year was the biggest year on record. We had an average processing time of between 13 to 14 days but did experience periods of backlog during that period.

In terms of Working with Vulnerable People, new applications and renewals, in terms of the statistics we are not actually seeing a downturn in terms of demand, so we are able to review and unpack when applications are coming in and divert resources within the team to address those backlogs. Whilst now on the Access Canberra website we are not meeting the time frame that we are seeking to meet, there are external factors such as seeking criminal history checks, increases in applications and seasonal sickness that might mean that we are not able to meet those time frames. But, once again, we are able to pivot.

In terms of the infringements team, we did experience quite a significant volume and backlogs in the last financial year, but we have been able to bring those under control through some management decisions within Access Canberra. At the moment, we are processing most applications within a two-week period.

MR COCKS: Can you tell me how many Working with Vulnerable People card

applications took longer than 20 working days in the last financial year?

Mr Mangeruca: I can give you the average processing time, but I would need to take that level of detail on notice.

MR COCKS: If you would. I would also be interested in the average processing time, and how many took longer than 20 days and how many took longer than 50 working days.

Mr Mangeruca: The average processing is between 13 and 14 days, but I will need to take the other aspect on notice.

MR COCKS: Yes, okay. And it sounded like there was another backlog—

Ms McKinnon: My colleague with building licencing—

Mr Lhuede: Thank you. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. We also issue construction licences under the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act. That includes builder licences for building surveyors, works assessors, plumbers, electricians and drainers. There are actually about 62 classes there and endorsements that we apply. We also do things like a number of licence applications on behalf of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner, such as the white cards, high risk work licences and the like—as well as for architects. There have been delays in some of those licence classes. White cards, which in themselves are a relatively straightforward licence, are very high volume. We get about 4,500 to 5,000 of those per annum, so there can be delays in just going through the transactional processes of dealing with them, because they are very much manual processes in terms of identity and checks.

Builder licences—there have been delays in those. Again, that is reflecting some of the complexity, particularly around the higher class of licences, where we are looking at not just the training qualifications but other eligibility requirements, skills, experience and documentation, as well as an interview process and a questionnaire process. As explained in one of the earlier matters, it can be somewhat iterative to gather that information, so there have been delays with builders' applications as well as some of the trade licences. But, as Ms McKinnon mentioned, where matters are particularly brought to our attention—and we do acknowledge the impact of those delays, particularly on people's capacity to work—we are able to and do respond quite quickly to those.

MR COCKS: In terms of the information that is reported on page 66, in particular, discussing additional resources that were invested to address backlogs, were they only dedicated to the Working with Vulnerable People applications, or did they support across all of the different backlogs we are hearing about?

Ms McKinnon: Generally, they moved across Access Canberra, because when we were behind and had a backlog, we then had staff talking to people on the phone who were asking, "Where is my application?" So, it actually becomes more resource intensive. When that started to happen, we moved teams around to address the backlogs, and, also, prioritised according to risk and the impact on the individual—

“This is an occupational licence, so I need it to work.”

I am going to bravely say this, and they will probably all look at me! I think, largely, now, Mr Cocks, we are at a stage where there are not things sitting in a queue totally unlooked at. Where the time frame is blowing out, it is because we are waiting on a medical specialist report; or there is something to do with a criminal check; or, as Mr Lhuede said, we are assessing fitness for more the complex classes of building—that is not a ten-day exercise, and because of the potential impacts, it can happen. So, I think I am reasonably comfortable in saying that they are not sitting there not being looked at. The ones that are taking more than the time frames generally have some complexity in them or we are waiting for external information.

MR COCKS: It sounds like you are pretty comfortable that those backlogs have fundamentally been addressed, and it is just dealing with the ongoing pressures.

Ms McKinnon: Yes.

Ms Cheyne: Yes, and, as Ms Cubin alluded to before, with the medicals and automatic suspension notices and things like that, there have been adjustments made to that where we have known that there has been a bit of a backlog, as well as with the builder licence time frames. Access Canberra is, at the moment, reviewing application requirements with the view to reducing the complexity of them but without reducing the rigour. More complex licence types do require quite a lot of steps to make sure that the person is genuinely qualified.

Mr Cocks, if I misheard you, I apologise; but just to clarify, I think the nature of your starting question was about what the “service pressure improvements” are that are not captured in the table—or something. It is at the top of page 67 where there are other improvements, and so many of the examples we have just given fall under “community industry and trader licensing”.

MR COCKS: I guess my concern was that we only seem to have improvements listed, and I am interested to know if there are any areas that have not improved or have not improved enough to be listed in the table.

Ms McKinnon: Real estate agent licensing—I think we are at the end of that process. That was a largely manual process. I know it concerned the team because they were working as fast as they could. If you are asking me to identify other, particular, less than successful stories, as I said to you, I do not think they are sitting in a queue and we have not got to them. I am pretty comfortable across the range. Again, it goes to the accountability indicator and actually publishing the time. For a tobacco renewal licence we do it in a day, and we had 400 of them, so you can see how that will distort the ten-day waiting time. I think the next accountability indicators for licences against a printed, statutory time frame will be much more able to shed some light on where we are not actually meeting the targets.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a question. In volume 1 of the CMTEDD report, page 167, it talks a bit about budget consultation. It says you talked to multiple people, and

businesses shared their views on the budget, and a YourSay report was published in September 2023. Was that the community priority survey? Or have I got that wrong?

Ms Cheyne: This is managed by Treasury.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Cheyne: I am not sure what the survey is called, but I assume it is publicly available—given it says it will be.

THE CHAIR: I kind of gather that this might not be for you, but since we are talking about business, was there any other consultation done with business about the budget and things like that?

Ms Cheyne: In the previous financial year, yes. We are talking to business very regularly, including about the budget. The Treasury hosts round tables, including with business, and Ms Arthy's team, in particular, meets with the peak bodies very regularly, as do I. That feeds into actions that we take and into responding to any issues that arise.

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr, do you have anything further?

MS ORR: Can I get an update on the new Access Canberra website: what has changed and what has been the feedback to date?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Springett is just joining the table. At the end of October, I think on the 31st, Access Canberra's new website was made live. It has been a huge undertaking. Access Canberra hosts an extraordinary amount of information on that website and it is one of the most, if not the most, visited ACT government websites across all of the suite of pages that we have.

There have been considerable improvements to being able to find information. I think one of the key things has been that there has been a real review of the language that is used. All website content has been rewritten in plain English, at the grade 7 level, to improve accessibility and readability. We have also engaged with some design principles to ensure that for people who have some difficulties or limitations, such as blindness, low vision, learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, deafness and speech and physical disabilities, the website is much more accessible for them.

We have also reduced the number of pages that we have. I believe it is by around 90 per cent. That is removing content that was unnecessary or irrelevant, or where it was duplicative, and also, as I mentioned, improving written content to make it easier to read. Ms Springett will have some more detail about what the response has been and also the engagement that we undertook to get it to this point.

Ms Springett: Thank you, Minister. As the minister noted, the Access Canberra website is one of the ACT government's most visited. We have more than 6.5 million visits to our website each year and we host and undertake more than eight million digital transactions each year from the website, so it is a critical source for the

community to engage with government, get information they need and undertake transactions.

The new website was designed and developed based on research insights and testing. That included a range of different users. I think our youngest was around 22 years old, and our oldest were well into their seventies. We looked at a wide range of users, backgrounds and the kinds of purposes that they were going to our website for. There was a range of engagement, of card-sorting activities, of understanding, of watching how they navigated the website to really inform the new design. The content, as the minister said, was completely rewritten. It was rewritten with ease and simplicity in mind. We did significantly reduce the content. The previous website was 2,700 pages. We are now at 240, so it is much more manageable content for the community. It goes to show the breadth that Access Canberra offers to the community as well.

It was a significant undertaking. We also partnered strategically with our contact centre, the teams that answer the phone when somebody calls 132281. They are one of our biggest users. Each and every day they are on our website, all day, supporting our community, assisting them to navigate, directing them how to do a transaction. They worked with us in very close partnership to also inform the navigation and design.

Since it has launched, we have had more than 300,000 visits to the site from more than 70,000 users, and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. We have also improved how people can give feedback. On each page there is a thumbs up or down that you can give, and you can provide us with direct feedback on whether or not the content was helpful. That is monitored by real humans and we check it each and every day. The website is not static, it is dynamic and we go in and make those improvements to content or navigation.

In a nutshell, we are very pleased with how the new website has gone. We will be continuing to monitor a whole range of different things: are people spending less time on our website because they are getting what they need quicker and is it impacting positively on our contact centre because they can address callers' issues or drive them through the transactions in a much speedier way? Underpinning it all was accessibility. It was about giving Canberrans back time, ensuring that their experience was as seamless as possible and making sure that all content on there is simple, easy, purposeful and there to support our community. They were some of the key drivers.

MS ORR: When you were reviewing the website and you were able to move from 2,700 pages to 240, what were the kind of things you found? Was it about condensing the information? Was it about refining it? How did you get that change?

Ms Springett: It was really about going back to looking at what is the purpose of the Access Canberra website. Websites can, over time, attract other content from other directorates, for example, because we are the front door to government. We went back to: what is it that the community are actually coming to our site for? What information are they accessing and how do they want to access it? We started breaking those things down and seeing the customer journeys—why they were coming in. This was very much to a granular level. We looked at heat mapping of where people were clicking. It was about really looking at their journey, their experience, what content

they were seeking, and then the rest flowed out of it pretty easily, in terms of reducing the content. A lot of the feedback, to date, has been, “It is so much easier to find what I am looking for.” That was one of our key markers of success.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you.

Ms Cheyne: I know websites can be boring to talk about, but I think you can see that the team has been so thoughtful with this process. It is a real credit to the team.

MS ORR: Yes. Thank you.

MR COCKS: As a former webmaster, let me nerd out for a minute. There are two ways of doing these processes. One is that you go through and forensically analyse everything on the site. The other is that, fundamentally, you go out and you work out each specific piece of content. I have not worked out which sort of path you went down, or did you try and combine the two?

Ms Springett: I would say it was a mixture of the two. The first was understanding what content were people actually accessing. That went right down to how many pages were used and when was the content last updated et cetera. That was one of them in terms of looking at content accessibility. The second looked at how people were using and interacting with the website. Then it was looking at how they want to do it. Then it was the card-sorting activities, the surveys, the one-on-one interviews with users, the actual watching in real time people navigating the new site, when it was in a testing form, and further understanding their journey and approach.

A lot of the focus was on enhancing search functionality. That used to be one of the bits of feedback about the former site. Pleasingly, it is much more intuitive and also more direct in its search functionality. It is something we are incredibly passionate about—and you can probably tell, as I am talking—because it has been a game changer for us. Giving the community back time was really, as I said before, one of the key underpinning principles, and we are very pleased to see that happen in real time.

MR COCKS: One of the other complaints you will always get on a government site in particular is inaccessibility of forms and the ability to fill in PDF-based forms. Have you addressed those sorts of issues through the process?

Ms Springett: We are working through a lot of the forms. More broadly, one of the focus areas for the next calendar year is looking at transactions from beginning to end, looking at how we can simplify the transactional journey. That is looking at things like smart forms, PDF forms, more holistically. Accessibility was front and centre. We were looking at users who might have blindness, low vision, learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities deafness, hearing loss. We tested the website for accessibility across all those different domains to make sure it was as user friendly as possible. But transaction design and delivery is really the next cab off the rank, and improving that digital experience.

Ms Cheyne: The Centre for Inclusive Design is doing an audit of the website now.

MR COCKS: That is good to hear. The other side of Access Canberra is face-to-face interactions. During the COVID pandemic, Access Canberra stopped accepting cash payments. I understand that that is still the case today. Can someone explain why that is the case? When other businesses and governments in other jurisdictions are now accepting cash, why is Access Canberra not?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Springett can talk to that.

Ms Springett: Thank you, Minister. Yes, we did stop accepting cash during COVID, but prior to COVID a number of our service centres did not accept cash, so it has been a transition that has happened over a period of time. The community has also adjusted significantly since COVID. The number of complaints we might get in any formalised way from not accepting cash I could probably count on one hand in a calendar year. We are not seeing that demand for cash payment.

Having said that, there are still avenues available for the community who do want to pay transactions in cash. That includes going to Australia Post. There are other forms of payment available to the community. I would also note that when you remove cash from an environment like a service centre it supports the safety and security of both staff and customers. It enables us to remove a lot of the high screens that might be in place. It provides a more welcoming and inclusive environment. You can sit down in the common areas without the additional security functions and arrangements that are required when you are taking cash payment.

As I said before, we are not seeing a strong demand in the community for the acceptance of cash. What we are seeing is a lot of the community appreciating the more welcoming environment that the service centres are providing, noting that we do not have to have the additional security arrangements in place.

MR COCKS: It sounds like there is no intention to reintroduce cash payments at this stage.

Ms Springett: At this stage in the service centres we continue to operate on a card payment only basis, or via digital transaction. We continue to monitor. We continue to assess. I would also note that there are other areas of government, such as public transport, that have also predominantly gone cashless. It is the way the direction is moving. Having said that, we are incredibly conscious of not leaving anyone behind and making sure that we continue to provide very valid other ways that people can make payment.

I also want to note that we are very up-front and clear in our communication to the community. It is clear on our website. It is clear through signage, prior to entering the service centre. If somebody is booking an appointment it is very clear that we do not accept cash. We are managing that expectation from the outset. As I said, we do not really get many inquiries or complaints about this.

MR COCKS: Table 12, on page 69 of the annual report, shows 27,769 transactions for establishing a vehicle registration and 22,429 for renewing a vehicle registration. Can you tell me if any of those people were turned away from an Access Canberra service centre because they wanted to pay cash? Do you collect that information?

Ms McKinnon: Mr Cocks, what might help get to the matter is if we took on notice how many transactions use the Australia Post method, which is the option when you present with cash. You can go to Australia Post and pay cash and then come back to us. If we tell you how many of those transactions happen, that gives you an indication of how many people want to pay cash, cannot do it over the counter at a service centre and have to take that extra step. We could do that for you.

MR COCKS: That would be useful, but it sounds like you do not capture whether someone turns up and has to leave Access Canberra and go somewhere else.

Ms Springett: It is quite rare, because this has been in place now for three, in some cases five or six, years across our service centres. We are very clear and overt in our communication. If somebody turns up and they are seeking to pay cash, they are greeted by our concierge. We then have a conversation to understand their transaction further and give that guided direction, if they do want to pay cash, about the ways that they can do that to facilitate their transaction.

MR COCKS: That extra information would be useful, if you can do that, but I am interested in that general pattern as well.

Ms McKinnon: We will see what we can get you. For example, with renewal of registration I think the majority of them are done online; therefore, cash is not an issue. But we will see how many Australia Post—

MR COCKS: I ask because it is a significant constituent issue that is raised with our office relatively regularly.

Ms McKinnon: Okay. We will get that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Can I ask about the EPA?

Ms Cheyne: The EPA has its own dedicated session on Wednesday.

Ms McKinnon: Our EPA experts will be surprised that they have a dedicated session.

Ms Cheyne: Let me just check. Maybe I created that in my head.

THE CHAIR: It is really simple. It is about the fact that there were a lot of infringement notices.

Ms Cheyne: Dr Wild-River is here.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MS ORR: Does the EPA report to a different committee?

Ms McKinnon: It does.

THE CHAIR: That is a no from Ms Orr. That is okay.

MS ORR: We just need to be careful of not doing the work of another committee. I appreciate the effort. There might be a question coming for you on Wednesday. Chair, do you want me to ask a question while you figure one out?

THE CHAIR: That would be great; yes.

MS ORR: What are the wait times at the service centres and on the phone? How are they going?

Ms Cheyne: They have come right down, I am pleased to say. I think we saw a record high perhaps around January 2022, which was hard for the community—I think we all respect that—and certainly hard on the staff as well. There was some latent demand as well, given that the service centres were largely closed during COVID. We do publish the average wait times on our website. When people are looking, if they want to do a bookable appointment or turn up to a service centre, those wait times are there and that guides them. Ms Springett, I am sure, has to-the-minute detail on what the wait times are or have been.

Ms Springett: Thank you, Minister. The average wait time last financial year was seven minutes and two seconds in our service centres. With bookable appointments we are just waiting to see the impact on the wait times and what will happen there, but we expect that will have a positive impact on the wait times.

In contact centre the average wait time in the last financial year was five minutes and four seconds, but last week, for example, it was 26 seconds and at times there was an average wait of zero seconds, so it was an immediate pick-up. Particularly in the contact centre, we have seen a significant improvement as it relates to wait times.

You may have noticed as well, if you ring 132281, that we include a message letting the community know when our busiest times are. They can make a decision at that point about whether they want to call back in a quieter period. As I said, at various times throughout the week there was an average wait time of zero seconds, with immediate pick-up.

Ms McKinnon: Noting Ms Springett talking about the website, our contact centre uses that as a resource too. The fact that they are not wading through 9,000 pages means that they are going to be able to get the information quicker.

THE CHAIR: I have some questions about the intelligent regulator project. On page 68 of the CMTEDD annual report, volume 2.1, there is a footnote that explains the amount of capital works in progress that have been written off.

Ms Cheyne: Can you say that page again, 66?

THE CHAIR: It is 68 in volume 2.1.

Ms Cheyne: I am not sure that this is us. Ask your question, Ms Castley, and I will—

THE CHAIR: Sure. I was just wondering why the intelligent regulator project had

been written off and what outcomes it sought to achieve. No idea?

MR COCKS: This is one that I am interested in as well. Maybe you can—

Ms Cheyne: Let us, in the time that we have got, see if this is us. I do not think so, but we will check and we will find out who it is.

THE CHAIR: Great.

MR COCKS: On the theme of regulation and our regulatory burden, volume 1 of the annual report at pages 26 and 27 looks at key priorities. There was a statement about partnering with the ANU School of Regulation to undertake a pilot project to test the methodology to measure the value and burden of existing regulation for certain business types. I am assuming this is following on from some of the discussions we have had in previous sessions. In the first instance, it looks like it is going to look at food and drink businesses and health and fitness businesses. It seems like this might be an economic-type evaluation methodology. Is the methodology something that can assess economy-wide or sector-wide regulatory burden?

Ms Cheyne: I will hand to Mr Engele in a moment to talk through it. This is an action that was identified in the BRT work program that we released some time ago. That is the genesis of it. We have now engaged with ANU and that work is underway. Mr Engele can talk you through what that looks like.

Mr Engele: Thank you for your interest in our evaluation methodology. The ANU project is focused on those sectors as a sort of pilot to get us to understand how we can measure both the cost of businesses and also the benefit that regulation can bring. We know that there are some benefits in terms of consumer confidence in the product and consumer safety as well as, obviously, the burden that is placed on businesses from having to comply with the administration. The ANU work involves some surveys of businesses to be able to understand their experience with that as well as some analytics that sit behind that. We will only get it for those business types, but, as I said, it is a pilot. The intention is to understand how that work has come together and whether we can then roll it out to other sectors of the economy.

MR COCKS: Can you tell me why food and drink and health and fitness businesses were selected as the first stage?

Mr Engele: We chose the food and drink sector because it aligned with the night-time economy work. We chose that sector as an area that we are doing the deep dive into—and we have a session on Wednesday to talk about the night-time economy—but we also focused on the end-to-end user mapping, which is looking at analysing the different steps that are taken to apply for a licence or to make a change. We have been focusing all those analytical approaches on that sector so we can get as much knowledge as we can in order to undertake those reforms.

MR COCKS: On the health and fitness side of the equation, what types of health businesses are included in the projects? For example, are you including medical practitioners in there? Is it the non-medical side as well.

Mr Engele: I will just confirm that with my colleague Ms Chesworth.

Ms Chesworth: It is focused on the personal fitness industry—gyms, personal trainers, and personal fitness training studios—rather than the medical side of that. That was based on the advice from ANU when we were looking at two sectors to run the methodology. Their advice to us was to choose something that is fairly different in terms of regulatory frameworks so we can compare and contrast the two sectors in terms of the methodology and how it applies under both regimes.

MR COCKS: You have mentioned gyms. Does that extend to personal trainers who operate as sole traders?

Ms Chesworth: Yes.

MR COCKS: Does it include things like massage therapists and physio therapists?

Ms Chesworth: That is a good question. It probably would not go to massage therapists and physio therapists, but it would focus on those that are sort of encouraging exercise and physical fitness.

MR COCKS: It sounds like the fitness and wellness sectors, rather than health more broadly.

Ms Chesworth: Yes.

Ms Cheyne: For example, Mr Cocks, there might be a physical fitness training studio or a personal training fitness studio that has a whole lot of different elements to it and physio might be captured in that. But we are focusing on the studio element as a whole from the physical fitness side.

MR COCKS: Okay. Is there any reason that you are not using some of the more established economic tools, like cost-benefit analysis, when you are looking at regulatory burden versus the desired impact?

Mr Engele: The cost-benefit analysis is a tool that we use when we are proposing new regulation. So that is definitely a technique that we do use in a number of circumstance—mainly for new or augmenting regulation. For this one, it was really about trying to get a better way of capturing those. I think the cost-benefit analysis really has a focus on what the monetised costing benefits are. This is about using the expertise at the regulatory school to look at a different set of measures, essentially, and give us some options in terms of what we can use to understand the regulation on business.

MR COCKS: The term “value” is not used very often with regard to assessing and evaluating regulations, except in terms of public value and Moore’s work from, I think around 1995. It is very different and far more difficult to measure than other views of value, which tend to have a monetary value that can be attached. In this project, how have you defined “value” and, in particular, value to whom?

Mr Engele: Value to whom is the key for us. We understand that businesses value the

regulatory frameworks that are put in place and they recognise, as I mentioned before, that that sort of unpins consumer confidence in the sale of their goods and services. Coming into this, we started with that regulatory cost. Obviously the key focus of the task force is to reduce that cost. Our discussions with the regulatory school at ANU identified that you really could not just focus on that one angle without better understanding the balance on the other side in terms of the benefits. That is why we went down that path of trying to measure both aspects.

We are also looking at what consumer benefits they are receiving from the regulatory frameworks, because there is obviously this offset between administrative burden on businesses to comply but then, say, health and safety benefits for consumers. It is about trying to understand, at a more nuanced level, the offsets to understand how you can adjust those regulatory frameworks, rather than taking crude measures like we have tried in the past.

MR COCKS: Certainly in other sectors it is possible to apply quantitative analysis here. For example, in health economics, you have things like quality adjusted life years and you have got very strong, established ways of looking at the economics of things that we do not usually attach a dollar value to. Are you looking at other areas of economics in trying to pull this together? It just seems like a very different way of looking at things to what the standard approaches are.

Mr Engele: The intent was to really test how those other analytical frameworks have been used in the past and see what we could come up with by using the expertise at the regulatory school. I do not think that we are discarding those existing techniques, but it is how they get factored in and really revalidating some of the assumptions under that. What you are referring to, I think, are the wider economic benefits in the cost-benefit analysis. That can be very difficult to put accurate numbers against.

MR COCKS: Yes, and being able to undertake things like cost utility analyses and things like that. It is quite a valuable way of looking at things, and I would not like to see those sorts of pieces of work discarded if this is not adding something extra.

Mr Engele: Of course. I think it should add other pieces of work that we are looking at as part of the broader regulatory quality framework. We are working with Treasury, who also looks at that quantitative analysis element. Obviously, not every single piece of regulation gets a full cost-benefit analysis, because it does require resources to do that analysis at a robust level. But when we see significant regulatory proposals coming through, we try to put them through that regulatory impact assessment process. We are continuing to work with Treasury on how we prioritise those areas that should be focused on for the RISs. Currently there is a requirement for the RISs for certain pieces of regulation coming into the Assembly. But, obviously, there are also changes to legislation, which has not come under that requirement but may also benefit from that regulatory impact analysis.

MR COCKS: That is good. When is this piece of work due to be completed?

Mr Engele: The ANU work?

MR COCKS: The ANU work.

Mr Engle: They are currently about to put the survey to market now, and we are hoping to get something in the first quarter of next year.

Ms Cheyne: Correct. I have some updates for you, Ms Castley. I will start with KMP and then go to intelligent regulator.

THE CHAIR: Great.

Ms Arthy: Ms Castley, I have now had a chance to read the reference while you are here. I just wanted to clarify a few things. The key management personnel, that particular part of the annual report, will be put together by our more central corporate areas because there is a particular definition around what constitutes key management personnel. If you have questions about why decisions were in or out, that would be directed to the broader CMTEDD area. Specifically, the reference to the business support grant position further down is that that position has been removed as a key management personnel person in 2022-23. So that adjusted the numbers. That aligns with what we were talking about before. I imagine they were classified at KMP because it was a very large operation. Once it wound down, we brought everything else back in house into economic development. All the tidy up, the review and everything was done within our normal staffing footprint. The person who continued was no longer deemed to be a key management personnel.

THE CHAIR: I understand.

Ms Cheyne: Then there is the intelligent regulator, and I have also got an answer on WWVP as well for Mr Cocks. The intelligent regulator is Access Canberra. So we apologise. However, we understand it to be a project from before when I was minister and before Ms McKinnon was in her job. That is why we do not know. You can put those questions to us, but we will have to take them all on notice, if that is all right.

THE CHAIR: Yes, okay.

Ms Cheyne: Happy to receive them as on notice questions, or we can take them on notice here and now.

THE CHAIR: Yes. I will pop them on notice.

Ms Cheyne: Okay. For new and renewal WWVP applications, 16.6 per cent took more than 20 days, and 5.5 per cent more than 50 days.

MR COCKS: Just as a supplementary on the intelligent regulator project, who made the decision to scrap the project? Was it you or the former minister?

Ms Cheyne: We will take it on notice.

MS ORR: I want to have a chat about the driver licence medical time frames. I have heard there were some issues where people had sent in their documentation but their licence was still suspended. What was the cause and, more importantly, how is it being addressed?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Cubin is very well placed to talk about this. This was an issue that was identified. We received a number of representations from MLAs and directly from the community. So there has been a considerable amount of work and adjustment on this to better support the community. Ms Cubin will talk you through it.

Ms Cubin: As I said before, because we are managing over 60,000 drivers annually, given this number, we have automatic driver licence suspension notifications. That is the best way to manage the quantum. But, because suspension letters are sent by post, there is sometimes an overlap between when an automatic letter is sent and when we are receiving people's medical forms. Because it is a manual processing time, if we miss that cut-off, people were receiving a letter in the post, even though we were processing shortly afterwards.

What we have done to mitigate that is actually put a stop on the automatic letter going out immediately. That gives our staff time to process that and also means that people do not receive a suspension letter in the mail when they know that they have provided their information to us. As you can appreciate, it is pretty distressing and upsetting when they know that they have sent it to us. So we have done that in the interests of addressing that concern.

MS ORR: Thank you.

MR COCKS: I have a question on constructions, buildings and utilities regulation. I say that so the relevant person can make their way forward. I am interested in the impacts of moving away from gas connections in new suburbs and whether, as a regulator, we are seeing any evidence of people trying to avoid that ban by introducing LPG gas into buildings. Is that something that your inspectors are able to see?

Mr Lhuede: I probably want to take that on notice, Mr Cocks. Obviously, there has been a lot of discussion with the transition to gas both at the policy level but also at industry and practitioner level. Anecdotally, I have heard reports, but it is not something that we are necessarily tracking at this point in time. So I think it would be best to take that question on notice.

MR COCKS: The other issue that I have had raised around some of the climate focused and environmentally focused changes is the issue of insulation in existing buildings—in particular, the potential to impact on existing wiring standards. Have you looked at that? Have your inspectors picked up, as people are installing insulation in older buildings, whether there is some impact on older wiring? Pre-1996, I think, was only required to be a lower standard—a V65, if I recall correctly.

Mr Lhuede: That is definitely a matter that we are aware of. Under the Sustainable Household Scheme, one of the requirements we did put in place was a requirement for electrical inspections. I believe we got an extra one or maybe two electrical inspectors specifically to support that program, to undertake the expected additional inspections required directly in relation to the installation of home insulation. So, yes, that is definitely something we are aware of.

MR COCKS: That is good to hear. Have you commenced those inspections?

Mr Lhuede: I believe so. Quite recently, we recently employed a couple of extra electrical inspectors as part of that program.

MR COCKS: It sounds like it might be a bit early to hear what is coming out of that.

Mr Lhuede: Yes.

MR COCKS: That is all right.

MS ORR: I have two questions.

THE CHAIR: I could go back to public unleased land, but you go next, and I will just read through.

MS ORR: Okay. I believe you issue a business newsletter each fortnight. Are you finding many people engaging with that one?

Ms Cheyne: I will just ask Ms Stewart-Moore to join us. Our business newsletter is packed full of useful information, particularly about opportunities available or changes to laws or regulations that business may have an interest in. The newsletter had a very strong uptake during the COVID years, for obvious reasons, and particularly as it related to the grants programs. It continues to have a good number of people and a very high open rate for a newsletter. Ms Stewart-Moore can talk you through that.

Ms Stewart-Moore: We do issue the *Canberra Business Update* once a fortnight on a Tuesday. It has just under 8,000 subscribers. As the minister said, it started during COVID and was something that we used as a really core part of communications on all the COVID related restrictions, opportunities and support. That has continued as a really helpful way to communicate with businesses. We certainly know that is one of the preferred ways that businesses prefer to hear from us. It has an open rate anywhere between 50 and 60 per cent, which is higher than the industry benchmark for those.

There is a range of content. We coordinate content from across government into that newsletter, so that we have a more coordinated and consistent approach. It can be anything from grants programs to information about the Sustainable Business Program, for example, in EPSDD. We feature a spotlight each month, which is usually linked to a government program. It might be the ICON Grant Program, for example. We recently had an article on Maddie Easterbrook, who was successful with an ICON grant for her business, Future Swirl. It was great. She reported some additional subscribers to her newsletter following that article. It also promotes the ICON grants and for people to take up that opportunity as well.

MS ORR: Great.

THE CHAIR: I have question about public unleased land regulation permits. Access Canberra administers permits for the use of unleased land in the ACT. Table 24 on page 79 of the CMTEDD annual report shows the number of permits for outdoor

dining, hawkers and vehicle verge. Is there a category of permit for people using unleased public land for private fitness businesses, like bootcamps and things like that?

Ms Cubin: I am not sure if I have the breakdown of use in front of me, but we definitely do know what permits are issued for. Generally, with public unleased land, we are issuing for outdoor dining. Hawkers is a little bit different. There are different, I guess, opportunities there. But I think if it is a fitness centre, it might be our TCCS colleagues. I will take it on notice with regards to a potential hawkers permit; otherwise, it might be a matter for our TCCS colleagues.

THE CHAIR: Sure. Personal trainers and other fitness businesses require a permit to use the unleased land and, while some bootcamps and other fitness activities use government ovals, there are some now using urban spaces. I am just wondering if you guys are the ones to talk about controls that are in place for these activities or whether it is TCCS.

Ms Cubin: It will be TCCS.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR COCKS: I want to check in on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development. Given that the ACT government had to apologise to the Ngambri people for the lack of recognition relatively recently, I am very keen to understand whether the approach to business development reaching all of the different groups in the Aboriginal community in the ACT.

Ms Cheyne: It is my understanding, Mr Cocks, that it is not just about traditional owners; it is about any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who is on these lands.

MR COCKS: How do you go about validating and verifying that a business is an Aboriginal business?

Mr Maclachlan: Our cornerstone Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business support program, Badji, is run by Coolamon Advisors. They are responsible for administering that program, and any sort of necessary engagement or verifications of that nature is run through them as a contractor to government.

MS ORR: Aren't you able to register as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and controlled business? Isn't that an accreditation you can get?

Mr Maclachlan: There is a process behind it. I do not have the granularity around that process in front of me, but we can take that on notice.

MS ORR: It is more just asking whether that is one of the ways you would identify organisations that say that they are.

Ms Cheyne: Yes, we do have a list.

MR COCKS: I understand there is a list. There is a concern amongst a number of Aboriginal people I have spoken with about the capacity of non-Aboriginal businesses to identify themselves as being Aboriginal. I am interested in what the checks are that you have in place to ensure that these supports are going to the right people.

Ms Cheyne: We will take that on notice, Mr Cocks. I am happy to give you that. I just do not think we have got it to hand.

THE CHAIR: I would like to understand what it takes for someone to be classified as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander business.

Ms Cheyne: So, for example, do we just take their word for it or are there other checks that are taken?

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is right.

Ms Cheyne: Yes; understood.

MS ORR: What trends are you seeing so far with mobile device detection cameras?

Ms Cheyne: I will just get the right official to the table.

MS ORR: It is quite a different topic.

Ms Cheyne: Yes, it is. I would say, Ms Orr, that we have not seen the change in behaviour that we had been hoping for during this period where we have been publishing our stats on, I think, a monthly basis about how many people have been detected and where the cameras have been. In fact, we have seen an increase in people using their phones, which I think points to, in some ways, the need for these cameras and for there to be a further regulatory outcome here. The warning letters have started to be issued, or are being issued from this month until February next year. So that is a three-month period to try to get some of that behaviour change.

MS ORR: So the cameras have been out and visible, but people have not been receiving that thing in the mail?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, that is right. They have been out and about since January. Since then, the ACT government has published its figures monthly about how many people are being detected. But people have not been contacted if they have been detected. Even with the publication of that information and there being reporting on it, we are not seeing that change. We hope that those warning letters have an impact.

THE CHAIR: This might not be you guys either. The mobile cameras are the ones with the big arm that go across the road. What are the white cameras? They are on a trailer. I can tell you where there have been a few. They just seem to be different to the mobile phone cameras. Are they observing traffic flow? They are white.

MS ORR: Are these the big ones on the yellow? I thought the yellow one was a fancy light at first.

THE CHAIR: No; the yellow ones are the cameras—the mobile phones.

MS ORR: They are the cameras. What is the white one, then?

THE CHAIR: I know that there is definitely one at the intersection of Kuringa Drive and Barton Highway at the moment. They are on a trailer.

MS ORR: Is that a speed camera?

Mr Maclachlan: I would not want to hazard a guess. Obviously, the mobile phone detection cameras are the yellow ones with the large gantry.

Dr Vaile: Ms Springett is willing to hazard a guess.

THE CHAIR: They are definitely white. They seem to be triangular, and they have cameras at the top.

MS ORR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, can you tell us every single type of fining device we might come up against while we are travelling?

THE CHAIR: These ones have been specifically raised with my office.

Ms Springett: My understanding is they are not Access Canberra related cameras. As part of my remit, I have the mobile speed vans and the fixed-camera network. These ones, I understand, are traffic monitoring cameras. It relates to supporting the flow of traffic around the city, noting there is a level of disruption activity that is currently occurring. If they are the ones I am thinking of, I understand they might be assets of Transport Canberra and City Services. My understanding is that it is predominantly for the monitoring of traffic flow. There are other cameras across the city as well, but they are mainly for other purposes relating to policing and security.

MR COCKS: It sounds like you have not seen any positive behaviour change as a result of the first stage of this. Was there any consideration of the behavioural economics literature around these types of interventions and, in particular, the publication of numbers which could encourage more of the activity? There is a fairly strong body of behavioural economics literature that suggests that, if people think everyone is doing it, more people will do it.

Mr Mangeruca: With the mobile detection cameras, we believe that we will see a triple compliance curve when this is borne out. The first will be with the media that has been happening. The second is when people start receiving the warning letters in the mail. Whilst we started issuing those from 3 November for the three-month warning period ending in February, those have not hit people's letterboxes quite yet, or they are just starting to hit people's letterboxes, because there is obviously a postage window. So that might be borne out in the data. The final compliance aspect would be when people start receiving the actual infringement notices. That will happen next year around February.

This would not be dissimilar to, I suppose, some of the trends that we see with our traffic cameras, where there is a high initial capture and, as people start receiving

finer, there is social media coverage and people start talking, there is a trend downwards. We have not seen, as the minister said, the initial spike coming down as quickly as we would have thought. But I think we need to wait and see how that looks over the medium to long term. In terms of behavioural dynamics, as people start receiving these notices and receiving the infringements and talking to the people that were driving the cars, you might actually see those behavioural changes.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank all the witnesses for your attendance today. It has been great. Lots of questions were taken on notice. Please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank witnesses, who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank our Broadcasting and Hansard team for their support. If a member wishes to ask any questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practicable and no later than five business days after this hearing. The meeting is now adjourned. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 4.30 pm.