



**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)**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2023

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**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 Directorate	85
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Privilege statement

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

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 3.35 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, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director General, Economic Development,
Fulton, Ms Caroline, Executive Branch Manager, artsACT
Ramsay, Mr Gordon, Chief Executive Officer, Cultural Facilities Corporation
Budd, Mr Alex, Director, Canberra Theatre Centre, Cultural Facilities Corporation

Major Projects Canberra
Geraghty, Ms Gillian, Chief Projects Officer

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to this public hearing of the Economy and Gender and Economic Equality Committee for its inquiry into the annual and financial reports for 2022-2023. The committee will hear from the Minister for Arts.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome 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 used the words, "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome, Ms Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for the Arts, and officials. I would like to remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw 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. Let us start with this table, as always, and then as people come up.

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

Ms Fulton: I have read and understood the privilege statement and will abide by it.

Ms Cheyne: I have read and understood the privilege statement.

Mr Ramsay: I have read and understand the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Great. We are all go. I believe, Minister, you want to start. There is

another correction to the record.

Ms Cheyne: Yes. I apologise, Chair. Thank you again for your indulgence. I apologise to the committee as a whole for giving notice of this only in the last hour. There are some areas in the annual report that are particularly around arts grants and they will be addressed through a corrigendum which is in train. I do not think any of these have material impact but they are inaccurate. Let me run through them as quickly as I can.

The amounts of two grants have been overstated on page 186. There is a grant under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts Program to Patrice Soward to compose the new single *You Can't Handle Me*. That is incorrectly recorded as \$15,000 instead of \$14,173.

Page 193, arts community outreach program funding to the Belconnen Arts Centre is incorrectly recorded as \$293,172 instead of \$142,174. The difference is \$150,000 one-off funding which had already been accounted for in special initiatives, and \$998, which is the result of incorrect recording of an invoice amount. Then there are several other minor errors, as I would classify them, in the annual report. Would you like me to detail those as well?

THE CHAIR: Are there many?

Ms Cheyne: Five.

THE CHAIR: Sure. Go for it.

Ms Cheyne: On page 85, the total amount for the 11 activities under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts Program will be changed from \$128,392 to \$127,565. That is related to an adjustment of that grant for that single being composed.

On page 89, there are several changes to be made. Through the ACT Arts Fund, we state there is over \$11 million in funding to artists, arts groups and arts organisations. This is going to be changed to be nearly \$11 million. It is not quite \$11 million. Funding to 29 arts organisations totals over \$8.7 million, not \$8.5 million.

The dot point on community outreach will be amended for clarity and to reflect the correction to funding to the Belconnen Arts Centre and to funding to the ANU School of Music, the School of Art and Design and five arts organisations, totalling \$1.15 million, specifically for community outreach programs. And the total amount of funding for 11 activities under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts Program will be corrected to \$127,565, and, again, that relates to that single. They are minor adjustments in scheme of things.

THE CHAIR: When can we expect that?

Ms Cheyne: Imminently.

Ms Arthy: Part of the process of issuing the corrigendum is part of the annual report. We can follow that up with our corporate area.

Ms Cheyne: I am happy to table this statement with the secretary if that helps the committee.

THE CHAIR: If anything comes up in a question and we want to put it on notice, will it be within the five-day period? I suppose that is the reason.

Ms Cheyne: Yes. We are happy to share this. I will get my chief of staff to send it through right now.

THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you very much. I will kick off with questions. This may be for Major Projects, but I believe that is still part of this section.

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I am wondering about Canberra Theatre time lines and the plan for parking. Is it under City Square or is it under the new building? Perhaps you could talk about that.

Ms Cheyne: Yes. We will start on the time line. As you know, the Chief Minister and I announced on 11 May that we had appointed a consortium as our design partners to deliver the theatre design, and so, in conjunction with Major Projects Canberra, the design partner is undertaking that early planning and design process. Insights are being gathered from the Performing Arts Reference Group and we have a consultation underway with the public, which I believe we are extending to 4 December. It closed yesterday, but we are extending it. We have received some great engagement through that group so far. We are also undertaking some meetings and workshops, as well as consultation with First Nations people. The community consultation will contribute to the design development and help the design partner understand what people want from the live performance experience. Then there will be a planning approval stage, and that is when another round of community consultation will be held.

This work is intended to bring us to a business case. The business case will be considered through the budget process, and that includes things like timing, overall cost and exactly what the design will be. We understand that the design partner will be delivering the early designs early next year, and then there will be further community consultation on concept designs for planning approvals. Then the design and application for planning approvals will be ready for government's consideration by about mid-next year. After that time, procurement and construction will occur. We expect that, approximately, at this stage, and depending on circumstances, it could take around four years for the entirety of the works.

THE CHAIR: Before we go to parking, why did we extend until 4 December for community consultation?

Ms Cheyne: I believe it was due to us continuing to receive feedback. I will hand over to Major Projects.

Ms Geraghty: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. We extended from 20 November to 4 December. That was acknowledging that we had received

over 500 responses through the YourSay campaign, but also acknowledging that there were lots of other things happening at the same time and to giving people a little bit of extra time to input their feedback. We see this vehicle as a really important mechanism for the community to provide input into the design, so we did not want to cut it short.

THE CHAIR: What do you have on parking?

Ms Cheyne: Car parking will continue to be provided from nearby car parking areas, of which there are thousands.

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr.

MS ORR: I have seen some commentary about the moth sculpture in Tuggeranong, in Canberra. I quite like it.

Ms Cheyne: It has had an extraordinary amount of community attention.

MS ORR: Yes. The moth has always received a fair bit of attention, I think it is fair to say. But I like it. What is happening to the moth?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Fulton will be able to talk you through that.

Ms Fulton: We conserve all of our public artwork, and it was time for the moth to be repainted. That work has actually finished. We are working with the artist and we have new technology in paint materials. The moth has been given a new lease on life and we expect that it will keep it looking very bright and orange, and great for the drive, for some time to come.

MS ORR: How much was the cost for that?

Ms Fulton: It cost \$45,000, excluding GST.

MS ORR: Did that come from existing funding?

Ms Fulton: We have a repairs and maintenance budget, which is around \$165,000 each year.

MS ORR: On repairs and maintenance, are there any other public artworks that you had to look at doing maintenance on that might not be as, say, high profile as the moth?

Ms Fulton: We might do polishing, particularly of our bronze works. We did that with Laurie Daley and Mal Meninga at the GIO Stadium. We do that as routine maintenance in going around our artwork. One work that we are looking at doing a bit of work on is the Illumicube, which is a bit of an icon in Canberra. We are also giving that a bit of a new lease on life, in terms of utilising new technology. It is a bit technical, and I will not say that I am an expert, but it is about building a new internal structure to fit and programming the lighting of the Illumicube. Then we can curate the light changes of part of that going forward. We are looking at that work starting

now and it will be finished next year.

MS ORR: It is part of the works program and it is also looking at ways that you can improve the—

Ms Fulton: Yes—to extend the life of our work, and, where there are potentially things like new technology or different kinds of paint that means it will stand up to our environment, we will do that as well.

MS ORR: Fascinating.

Ms Cheyne: There is a graffiti removal program as well. There is general undertaking of cleaning and polishing, but, when the community reports to us graffiti or any damage, they try to address that.

MS ORR: That is graffiti or damage on public artwork?

Ms Cheyne: Yes; that is right.

Ms Fulton: I have been told that there has been very little graffiti this year. There have been only around five incidents.

MS ORR: Are there any indications of why we might be seeing a decrease in graffiti?

Ms Fulton: I am not sure. Maybe it is in terms of value of our public art.

MS ORR: People's appreciation of art is growing.

Ms Fulton: People's appreciation—yes. And keeping people around as well. That reduces that sort of vandalism.

MR ORR: Great. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I would love to get an update on the tenant relocation plan for Gorman House. Where are the Gorman House tenants up to on that?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Fulton, are you able to—

Ms Fulton: Thanks, Ms Clay. At this point in time, we are still undertaking the costings of the final sketch plans. That work is being done right this moment by our architects, Philip Leeson. Once we are in a position of knowing the scope of the works and what we can do within our available budget, we will be briefing government on what works can be undertaken. At that point, we will then be able to know whether relocation of tenants is actually required as part of the refurbishment work. We are hoping, as much as possible, to minimise the disruption to the tenants at Gorman House.

MS CLAY: There may not be any need to relocate tenants?

Ms Fulton: We are hoping it will be minimal.

MS CLAY: You have given me the stages. That is really clear. What sort of timing is there? When would tenants get some kind of certainty about whether they definitely do not have to relocate or whether they might have to relocate?

Ms Fulton: We are hoping in the next couple of weeks, if the costings are done. We will be in the position to know the scope of the works early in the new year. We will meet with the tenants once we know the level of work expected—possibly February, when everyone is back from leave next year. And, at that point, if there does have to be relocation, we will work with each of the tenants in any relocation. Some might go to Ainslie for a period of time or there might be other arrangements, or they might move elsewhere in Gorman House, if we stage the works.

MS CLAY: Will anybody be financially worse off if they are relocated?

Ms Fulton: We will cover, within reason and in terms of need, like-for-like if we have to, as part of the project budget, and we will try to minimise the cost impact, both to Arts Capital and to the tenants.

MS CLAY: Does that mean relocating gear as well? Some of them have some quite heavy equipment.

Ms Fulton: If it comes to that, yes.

MS CLAY: But you do not yet know?

Ms Fulton: We do not quite know yet.

MS CLAY: Have you been chatting to the artists working there? They have been in uncertainty for a pretty long period of time.

Ms Fulton: We send out fortnightly bulletins. In the last lot of bulletins that have been done, we say we have been working on it and that we do not know at this point. The last bulletin identified that we were doing the costing work. We have also advised Arts Capital that we would look at meeting with tenants early in the new year.

MS CLAY: The last newsletter told the tenants they would get—

Ms Fulton: I do not think it gave the date. I think that conversation was just with Arts Capital, but in the next bulletin, which will go out next week, we would probably be in a position to do that.

MS CLAY: It might be helpful if you can give them a month. I know there is quite a lot of uncertainty.

Ms Fulton: Yes.

MS CLAY: A lot of them were hoping that they would know what was going on before Christmas.

Ms Fulton: We are still anticipating that the works will commence in April next year. Of course, there are some variables that are a bit out of our control around development approvals and heritage approvals. But we are still working towards the end of April, to start being on-site and undertake some construction work.

MS CLAY: Thanks.

MS ORR: Ms Fulton, can you run us through—I know you are still finalising the scope—the sorts of things you are looking at as part of the works?

Ms Fulton: Of course. We are looking at a variety of improvements that will range from improving energy efficiencies, safety issues, slips and trips and that sort of thing to making some of the spaces more workable and having accessible bathrooms. We are looking at updating a cafe space that will support the tenants and the patrons on site, and it will be able to cater for events in the evening. We are looking at painting and fixing the windows. A range of things will be a priority for the site.

MS ORR: A lot of it is about modernising quite an old building?

Ms Fulton: A lot of it, and about improving spaces, which we got in feedback from the tenants.

MS ORR: And scoping out what works. When you are scoping out what works, what are the things that you are still bedding down? I imagine this is adding to part of it—that everyone just wants to know what is happening but there is a process to determine it.

Ms Fulton: Yes. What we are looking at, and what will probably end up being prioritised, are those safety improvements and efficiency improvements, and being able to do the works in certain blocks to a good position—so, if that is sound attenuation, that we are doing that properly and, in terms of lighting, doing that properly, and those sorts of things. It will possibly mean there will be some areas within Gorman that we will not be able to manage within the budget, which could be the moving of some of the studio spaces and changing the configuration. If we cannot do that properly and fit everything in, that might be the thing that we do not do. It will be a bit of that value management exercise within the available budget that we have.

MS CLAY: So it is very much a case of you have some intentions as to what you would like to be able to do and it is now about scoping what is possible with the design work. Given that you are not sure what exact costs are going to come back and you have to manage it within the budget, I take it that there is a little bit of uncertainty as to who is going to be impacted and who is not and what that impact would look like.

Ms Fulton: That is it; yes.

MS CLAY: Is it fair to say that some people might not be impacted—that some of

things could be done without anyone having to move?

Ms Fulton: Yes; well, minimal, in terms of impact.

MS CLAY: So, for example, they might just need to move for a week to another part of the building?

Ms Fulton: Yes. We are expecting to stage the work; so that it might be that people just move to another part of the building or go to Ainslie. Some might even prefer to work from home for a period of time.

MS CLAY: Have you given any thought to what the consultation plan will be with people when you reach that point in the process of saying, “These are the works we are going to have to undertake and this is what we think the impact will be”?

Ms Fulton: We will start that off in February in that first meeting.

MS CLAY: I guess what I was getting at is: what sorts of things will that involve? What is the process that you are looking at doing in working through those issues with people?

Ms Fulton: We will have a meeting with all tenants and then we will have those individual meetings in terms of impact, so that we can understand their exact needs.

MS CLAY: Okay. So they will be able to say, “We have heard your proposal and here is what we think”, and then you can work through if there are any issues that arise from it?

Ms Fulton: Correct.

THE CHAIR: I have questions about the Cultural Facilities Corporation. I have been told that a staff member who was previously employed in a minister’s office here then won a job at the Canberra Theatre—I believe there have been questions about this in the past—but that that particular staff member is now the director of something else. My information is that it was a new role that was not advertised. Is that correct? Was the role advertised?

Mr Ramsay: During the last 12 months there have been a range of considerations across the organisation with the restructure of the organisation. As part of that, each of the positions in what is known as the senior leadership team—which in some areas would be called the executive—were refined in some small ways. There is a new position that was put into the senior leadership team, which was the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works. There was the redefining of the position of Director of the Canberra Museum and Gallery and Director of ACT Historic Places. That has now been rolled into a new position—or a combined position—which is the Director of Galleries, Museums and Heritage.

There was some refinement of the position of the Chief Financial Officer, with some of the responsibilities moving from the Chief Financial Officer to the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works. The position that was previous titled the

Chief of Staff, which is now the Director of Collaborations and Engagement, had a minor refining of the responsibilities with that. There was not a major reshaping of that position. As part of that structural reorganisation, the title of that position changed but the position description largely did not.

THE CHAIR: Just so I understand: the staff member that was working at the Assembly went to the Canberra Theatre and is now working in the Cultural Facilities Corporation as a director. Was that job advertised?

Mr Ramsay: The position that you are talking about is now the Director of Collaborations and Engagement. That person did not move through the Canberra Theatre. Obviously, the Canberra Theatre is part of the Cultural Facilities Corporation in any event. So all employment within the CFC comes under the umbrella of the Cultural Facilities Corporation. In terms of the organisational restructure, the positions that were slightly redefined were the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Galleries, Museums and Heritage, the Director of the Canberra Theatre and the Director of Collaboration and Engagement. None of those positions were readvertised during that organisational restructure. It was simply a slight refinement, as is often the case with any position descriptions.

In fact, across the organisation there have been, especially in the area of Galleries, Museums and Heritage, there has been some re-working of the positions at the assistant director level as well, which has broadened the responsibilities for our assistant directors across areas of both what historically have been the Canberra Museum and Gallery and ACT Historic Places. Those two teams have been brought together and have redefined the assistant director level and the teams. All of that was done according to the standard processes of making sure there is close negotiation and close collaboration with the staff who were affected and also with the union, as part of the organisational staffing restructure.

THE CHAIR: Okay. That was a lot to take in. So who signed off on the position creation for these additional directors?

Mr Ramsay: The only new position that was created was the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works. That was done through the organisation's processes. I sit with the appropriate responsibility as delegate but, with any matters in relation to the restructure of the organisation, that was done in close consultation with the CFC board. This flows through from what has been an extensive process of strategic planning.

Because of the strength of the organisation and its directions at the moment, the board chose to refresh its strategic plan and to adopt a new strategic plan in February, and then finally endorsed in April this year. As part of that, there was an element of looking at how it is that the organisation can most effectively structure itself and most effectively deliver on that strategic plan. The reason for that re-working of the strategic plan was that we had effectively moved beyond what the previous strategic plan was, which was largely, in summary, "Let's recover from COVID," and the organisation had moved into a position of being able to think through, "What are the next few years?" As part of that, the consideration of an organisational design and an organisational executive structure was considered by the board, and board signed off

on that earlier this calendar year.

THE CHAIR: So, just so I am following the bouncing ball here, has the role that the person that is now the director of the collaboration and engagement team previously held been backfilled?

Mr Ramsay: The role that they have previously held had a slight reworking of some of the responsibilities and a change of title. The position is still the same position number. There was no abolition of the position. There was no documentation that required, as an EBA, to end that position and to start a new position. It was simply, as part of the organisational restructure, a slightly redefined position responsibility and a change of title.

THE CHAIR: Right. And a level and salary change, I imagine?

Mr Ramsay: Not at all.

THE CHAIR: No? It is the same?

Mr Ramsay: No; no changes to the contract for the terms of employment and the same level of contract across each of the areas of the Director of Collaboration and Engagement as well as the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works. That was the new position. That was advertised and recruited and, along with the Chief Financial Officer and the Director of Galleries, Museums and Heritage are all at SOGA level.

THE CHAIR: Okay. In the 2020-21 annual report, there are four directors reporting to the CEO; in 2021-22 annual report, there are five; and, in the 2022-23 annual report, it has grown to six. I think you have probably covered that. Can you just explain that again?

Mr Ramsay: Yes. What had been the case was that there was the CEO, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of the Canberra Theatre, there was the Director of Canberra Museum and Gallery and the Director of ACT Historic Places. As was canvassed in committee hearings in recent times, there was consideration as to the work pressures within the organisation and the responsibilities that sat very much in terms of human resources and other areas. Following consultation both within the organisation and more broadly, including the former Chief Executive Officer as well, it was noted there was effectively a gap in a key area of the organisation and so a new position was created. The circumstances around that have been well canvassed. That was called the Chief of Staff.

As part of the reorganisation, part of what it is that we have been looking at is how it is that the procurement processes, the contracting and the capital works and facilities operations across the organisation can be most effectively delivered. The way that we have chosen to do that is to create a position, which is to centralise all of the areas of facilities operation, capital works, contract management and procurement. That sits under the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works. As part of the most recent round of considerations in the organisation, the two roles of the Director of Canberra Museum and Gallery and the ACT Historic Places have been merged into

one position. So there is now the Director of Galleries, Museums and Heritage.

THE CHAIR: I have one last question on this, and then I have a bit more on staffing. Have you heard from anybody in the organisation that there are concerns that these roles have been filled without the proper employment processes like advertised positions, and that people have just sort of been slotted in? Have you heard any concerns from staff about that?

Mr Ramsay: Firstly, I would say that the question assumes that there have not been appropriate employment processes, and I would not accept that as a premise. There are a range of employment processes. Part of that is negotiation with particular people across the staff. The work with that has been open across the organisation, and there was certainly consultation both with existing staff and also, as is required, with the union as part of that. That has been followed very closely.

There have been, as I mentioned, some minor modifications to a couple of the director positions. That included, for example, the previous movement of the responsibilities of human resources out of the responsibilities of the Chief Financial Officer into a different position. That was done, obviously, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer as part of the change to their position description. That is part of the way that appropriate employment processes follow. There has not been, to my recollection, anyone raising with me that those minor modifications should have been anything further than direct negotiations with people across the senior leadership team and the CFC board.

THE CHAIR: So you are happy that they were just role modifications, not new jobs that should have been advertised?

Mr Ramsay: The only new position was the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works, and that had an open recruitment process. We went through open advertising, open interviews and a merit-based process for that. The others have been minor modifications. The drawing together of the director of CMAG and the director of ACT Historic Places was done in close consultation with the board.

THE CHAIR: How many applicants did you get for that role?

Mr Ramsay: I am pretty sure it was six, but I will take that on notice and let the committee know.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS CLAY: You have made quite a number of structural changes to staffing arrangements, and the CFC was operating in a pretty stable way for quite a long time. When you arrived in the job, what was it that made you realise that you suddenly needed to make a whole lot of changes to the staffing structure, when it had been operating quite well before that?

Mr Ramsay: There were a couple. One of them was extensive conversations with the former CEO, who had indicated that she had, over time, realised that there were key pressures on the organisation, especially on the executive of the organisation, and that those pressures had meant that there were some areas that were probably being

delivered less effectively than they might have been able to be. That was one of the core areas. That was a key conversation with the board itself.

Another area was that we are very aware that, with the pending redevelopment of the Canberra Theatre Centre, the organisation is likely to expand in complexity, in its size, in its finances and, accordingly, in its range of required business operations. One of the things that is important for us to be able to do is to step up and be ready for that. Organisation theory indicates, as we have been working very closely with the board and across the organisation on this, that, when there is significant change that is likely to happen in an organisation in the future—and part of that is with, for example, the extensive growth that we warmly anticipate, subject to government decisions about when and how and in what form a redeveloped Canberra Theatre Centre would go ahead—that will mean that the way that the CFC operates will be more complex and larger. We believed, in consultation with the board, that it was more appropriate for us to take a step-change to organisational growth rather than wait until there was a very significant growth in size, growth in complexity and growth in income, and do some preparatory work at the moment.

The changes that have happened at the moment have been seeking to draw facilities operations out of each of the silos of the organisation as it has previously been. Previously, the facilities operation, the capital works management, the project management for CMAG was done within the CMAG team; with historic places, specifically around Lanyon, it was done within the Historical Places team; and, in the Canberra Theatre Centre, was done within the Canberra Theatre Centre team. That meant that we had across an arts organisation people scattered with facilities operation, capital works, procurement, contract management skills and responsibilities, and we looked to see how it is that that might be able to be most effectively done.

We believed, on the basis of the consultation across the organisation that it would be most effective to draw that together and that, because of that, the staffing that is in each of the business divisional areas would be able to concentrate on conservation of historic places, on making sure that we have excellent exhibitions and on making sure that we have the best possible theatre.

For many cultural organisations at the moment, it is very difficult to get back to pre-COVID levels. Right across the Cultural Facilities Corporations, each of the areas of the cultural activities massively exceeded the targets that we had for our visitor numbers. I believe that one of the key reasons is that, with our organisational restructure, we have managed to free up our creative staff, our programming staff, our marketing staff, our curatorial and exhibition staff, to be able to concentrate on delivering that excellence rather than have a number of shared responsibilities across the organisation, which, we believe, led to a level of inefficiency.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MS ORR: I was actually going to ask about how the visitor numbers are going for the Cultural Facilities Corporation venues. Would you mind providing more information on visitor numbers and trends that you are seeing?

Mr Ramsay: I am happy to do some of that, and I will also call on the Director of the

Canberra Theatre Centre to pick up on some of the excellent things that have been happening in the Canberra Theatre itself. In 2022-23, across the Cultural Facilities Corporation, we have returned to and exceed pre-pandemic levels. The numbers were 383,000 across the organisation. That is 46 per cent above our targets, which I think is an outstanding thing itself. In the Canberra Theatre Centre, we were 35 per cent above target; in ACT Historic Places, we were 47 per cent above target; and in the Canberra Museum and Gallery, we were 138 per cent above target—a truly outstanding effort. Putting that in perspective for the committee, it means that the equivalent of four in five ACT residents visited one of the venues of the Cultural Facilities Corporation.

But it is not only the bare numbers though. For example, with the *How Cities Work*—which was an interactive exhibition in what used to be the Chinese restaurant at the front of CMAG—we had an outstanding family focused exhibition. It was a ticketed interactive exhibition. It meant that we were attracting a new audience. Two-thirds of the people who visited the *How Cities Work* exhibition were first-time visitors to CMAG. So that has been part of our key focus as well—not only increasing our numbers but also broadening our experience. I will hand to Mr Budd to talk about some of the visitor numbers and the way that things have been going at the Canberra Theatre Centre. It has been truly outstanding as well.

Mr Budd: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Mr Ramsay has outlined many of the numbers, but I think the comment I would make is that the Canberra Theatre Centre numbers were really fantastic last year, with 240,000 tickets. That is more tickets than the theatre has ever sold in a financial year, as far as our records go back. It is akin to some of how the industry is feeling—the rollercoaster as we come out of COVID. I do not think we are out of the woods. The rollercoaster ride does not have a finish date at the moment and with the cost-of-living pressures, we are seeing people making choices to this day. If we look back to *Bill Shakespeare* a few weeks ago, they were the first performances we lost through cast illness in the entire COVID period. The bumps get smaller and smaller, but we are still getting there.

The other point that I would like to make about 240,000 ticket sales is that, when you are running a performing arts centre, these numbers can be blown sky high by booking the most popular product or just doing as much popular fare as possible. But we have not done that within these numbers. We are really proud of a lot of the work that we are doing. We worked with the Sydney Theatre Company, for the first time in the centre's history, to produce, and really being involved in the making of the work *Julia*, that premiered in Canberra. It sold out before it opened. It is doing a return season around Australia and tour this year that we are also participating in, which is very exciting. We are also working very hard in our New Works Program, which has seen Heart Strings Theatre Company, a local theatre company, have two works take off in Canberra and then get seasons in Sydney.

So the fabric of what we are working on below those numbers is as important, I think. As we move towards the redevelopment of the centre, it is building those relationships and building the fabric of the performing arts community in Canberra that is as important as those numbers—as good as the numbers are.

MS ORR: Going back to Mr Ramsay, those visitor numbers were quite above the targets, as we have established. To what do you attribute that—I do not want to say

extraordinary performance. What do you think is actually drawing more people to the facilities?

Mr Ramsay: A range of things have done that. Partly, it is with due respect to the excellent staff that we have, in this case staff in the Canberra Museum and Gallery. I draw to members' attention the front cover of the annual report which has a photo of the Canberra Exhibition. It received a national award for the best permanent exhibition anywhere in Australia. There is literally the excellence of the exhibitions that have been taking place. Part of it has been about very deliberately trying to make sure that we are looking to broaden our audience, so there has been a focus on working very closely with the Canberra festivals, and we have been working right across a broad range of festivals. That has been part of the deliberate focus on broader collaboration and engagement across the community, across Canberra itself.

We were very actively involved in Winter in the City, the Design Canberra Festival, the Art Biennial, Christmas in the City, the National Multicultural Festival, and Enlighten in the city. We helped with the World Cup soccer screening, the Heritage Festival and the Floriade Walking Trail in the city. We were in Lanyon this year for the first time ever—a satellite Floriade site. Part of the work has been not just been about making sure that what we do is excellent, and that has been a key part within CMAG, within the Canberra Theatre Centre and across historic places; it has also been about deliberately trying to broaden the community's understanding of the different venues and the different things.

We know that the Cultural Facilities Corporation is not necessarily a well-known organisation, but the venues, the activities, the exhibitions and the performances are well-known and well-loved. We figure that, if we can embed ourselves even more in the ongoing activities of Canberra and become more known, even down to simple things like making sure that the CMAG coffee cart is out in Civic Square during event weeks so people can see that there are things happening, that is a key part of it.

There was a very strong focus in a couple of the special events at Lanyon. Recently, we had an ensemble from the Canberra Symphony Orchestra there as part of Floriade. That was drawing a new audience. One of the significant things about that was that there was an audience of young families as well as a more mature audience. It was joked that it was probably a very different skew of audience age and demographic for a typical Canberra Symphony Orchestra performance, and probably also, to be perfectly honest, a different skew of audience demographic that may otherwise be at Lanyon. We had record numbers at the Harvest Festival earlier this calendar year. So there is a range of ways.

We believe that the key thing is to have layers of approaches to it. It is not just a marketing approach, it is not just an excellence approach, and it is not just about doing something different; it is about trying to make sure that all of those things happen. Most recently, the eX De Medici exhibition connected with our Nolan gallery—an outstanding and very contemporary engagement with Nolan. We have carried on an installation by the same artist in Lanyon to transform one of the rooms within Lanyon Homestead for a while. We held the ACT Historic Places Art Prize this year. It has been coming for a while. It has been hoped for for a few years. It was one of the things that was delayed because of COVID. It was outstanding. We were hoping for

maybe 30 or 40 entrants this year, and, even in its inaugural year, 97 people chose to be part of that. We are trying to get that going more broadly. If we continue to raise the broader awareness of the Canberra population, working in partnership with other organisations across government, beyond government and across the arts sector, we believe that is one of the key ways of being able to help make sure that those numbers increase.

THE CHAIR: I am just conscious of time. It has nearly been 15 minutes on the one question.

MS ORR: I thought that was my substantive.

THE CHAIR: It was, but I am just concerned—

MS ORR: I just have one last question to finish. Thank you. That was very informative. Just quickly, are the new things that you are exploring and new ways of doing things all part of what you have referred to as, in conjunction with the board, the new approach, the new strategy and the new thinking, as well as the steps you have taken to put the structures in place to support that?

Mr Ramsay: That is right. There was a new strategic plan across the organisation that was a new vision—a new mission. It reidentified values for the organisation. There is a five-pillar strategic goal approach across four years. Part of that includes more deliberate engagement with Canberra festivals, an organisational restructure, and re-thinking through how we build a stronger sense of financial growth and sustainability—that is, adding in new revenue streams. There is a whole range of things, but a lot of that flows deliberately from a more deliberate focus on the strategic plan.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Minister, regarding audience numbers but not for Canberra Theatre particularly, you put out a media release today saying:

Audience trends showed the recovery of audience numbers and continuation of last minute ticket sales, while spending on events is yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

There is a little “fact check, please”, so you probably left a little thing in there. I just want to check: that is saying that our audience numbers have not yet bounced back to pre-pandemic levels. Can you tell me what data you were using to measure that?

Ms Fulton: That statement is referring to research that Patternmakers did as part of their Audience Outlook Monitors series of work. It is on their website. This survey is from August 2023 and it identifies that there are still some barriers in audiences returning across the arts sector, in terms of events, workshops and all manner of arts activities. It says there are a lot of variables around certain demographics, and it explores that and identifies the slow return of audiences after COVID, but there are also other pressures or priorities that various demographic groups are facing, which would include cost-of-living pressures.

MS CLAY: Thank you for that explanation. PAC Australia—you know the performing arts—

Ms Fulton: Yes.

MS CLAY: Great. PAC Australia run national figures, and under their national figures they say that about 80 per cent of theatres are able to program at a loss, and what they mean by that is that, in Australia, 80 per cent of our theatres do not have to return a surplus or break even; they are able to do their artistic programming based on the fact that they will be subsidised—that they will not be breaking even. Can you tell me about the breakdown in Canberra? Are 80 per cent of our theatres able to run at a loss because they are being subsidised?

Ms Fulton: I do not know the answer to that question. I would probably have to go to each of our organisations to get that information.

MS CLAY: Can you take it on notice, and, if the answer comes back saying, “We do not keep that information,” that is an answer?

Ms Fulton: Yes; I will take that on notice.

MS CLAY: I will tell you the information that I am interested in, because there might be another way that you can answer the question. I am interested in whether we think about 80 per cent of Canberra theatres are also able to program artistically and not worry about ticket sales covering the full cost of an event or whether we are out of step with that national figure. I do not know whether you keep that data. You might be able to ask PAC if they have that data, because a lot of our theatre members will be members of PAC.

Ms Fulton: Yes.

MS CLAY: I know quite a number of our PAC members do not have the ability to do that; they must break even or return a profit. Are you able to provide me some meaningful answer on that?

Ms Fulton: I will take that on notice and come back to you.

Ms Cheyne: And there are private theatres, Ms Clay. I think it is going to be difficult for us to give a like-by-like answer. For example, there are some standalone theatres, like the Street Theatre and the Canberra Theatre. There are others, like ACT Up, which is in its infancy. It is achieving amazing things already, but it is only two years in. Then we have our community organisations, like Belconnen and Tuggeranong, that serve a range of different functions for community arts. And then we have private theatres—for example, Dramatic Productions, which operates out of Gungahlin College Theatre; Philo, which operates out of Erindale Theatre; and the theatre that is able to be used—and Child Players uses it often—at the Belconnen Community Centre. These organisations all have pretty different functions; so I think we are going to struggle to give you the granularity you are after.

MS CLAY: Do you know which organisations are PAC members?

Ms Cheyne: No.

MS CLAY: Do you do any annual surveying of the arts organisations and theatres?

Ms Fulton: No; not in terms of that. We get acquittal information from the organisations that we fund, but we do not do a survey across all of the theatres in the ACT.

MS CLAY: But you would know for the theatres that are arts organisations that are funded?

Ms Fulton: We would get their numbers, through acquittals. I am not sure if we would get that granular detail on arts programming and how they are running. With some of the theatres, it is one element of their business; so I am not sure we would get that kind of granular detail.

Ms Cheyne: My office has just advised that PAC members in the ACT are Belconnen Arts Centre, Canberra Theatre Centre, Flowers of Peace, Helen O’Neil, the Street Theatre and Tuggeranong Community Arts Association.

MS CLAY: I wonder if you can provide the answer for those ones, if you have it. If you cannot, can you come back to me on notice with what the reason is?

Ms Fulton: Yes, we will take that on notice.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MS ORR: I have a quick question—and you can take this on notice too if it helps with time, because I know the chair has a few more questions. Have you ever had any representations from PAC, or from members of PAC, asking for these different incentives or programs?

Ms Fulton: I am happy to take that on notice.

MS ORR: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about staffing positions at the Canberra Theatre. Can you let me know the total number of positions and whether they all filled at the moment?

Mr Ramsay: Chair, while Mr Budd is looking for that, I can just answer the question that I previously took on notice for the Director of Facilities Operation and Capital Works. There were eight applicants.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Budd: Chair, I am sorry, but I do not have the exact number of the total FTE

count at the Canberra Theatre. I can take the exact details on notice. It is approximately 45, but it is very skewed by the largest part of our workforce being casual employees through our casual technical labour back of house and then casual ushers at front of house. So the actual number fluctuates a lot.

We have a number of positions that are going to a vote at the moment in the EBA proceedings around the technical back-of-house staff, which will see us fill some level 2 technical positions that were unable to be filled at the rate originally advertised. We also have a number of positions that we are mid-recruitment for at the moment that relate to providing additional resources for the redevelopment of the theatre.

THE CHAIR: Okay. On the number of positions, if it is the approximate 45, how does that compare to the previous number of positions? Has there been a massive increase other than for the expansion?

Mr Budd: No; there has not.

THE CHAIR: Can tell me what the churn rate, the separation rate, is at the Cultural Facilities Corporation and specifically at the Canberra Theatre?

Mr Budd: I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Could you also take on notice how this compares to previous years, possibly for the past five years? Could we get that detail?

Mr Budd: I will provide the detail I can provide.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Do you do a staff survey—a staff satisfaction survey?

Mr Ramsay: The CFC participates in a whole-of-ACT government staff participation.

THE CHAIR: Do we know when the next one comes out? Is it annually?

Ms Cheyne: I do not know; I am not a public servant.

MS ORR: The *State of the service report* should be annual. It is usually at a point in the year from memory. I cannot remember when.

THE CHAIR: Is it normal that departments working with government would not do their own survey—that it would all just be rolled into the whole of government?

MS ORR: Yes

THE CHAIR: Okay.

MS ORR: Sorry; I probably cannot answer that, to be honest.

Ms Cheyne: You are on the wrong side of the bench.

MS ORR: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Does anybody have anything that they would like to add?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, perhaps with indulgence, I think it might be of interest to the committee—and I would really like to put it on the record—that Dawn Waterhouse, nee Calthorpe, is celebrating her 100th birthday this month. She is older than Calthorpe’s House, which is 96 years old. I just wanted to put on the record a “happy birthday”. I will see her on Friday. It is pretty significant and, obviously, Calthorpe’s House is among the suite of historic places that CFC is responsible for.

THE CHAIR: Happy birthday, Dawn. On behalf of committee, thank you to the witnesses for your attendance today. There have been questions taken on notice that have not been answered. Please provide the 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 all the witnesses, who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank the Broadcasting and Hansard team for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practicable and no later than five business days after the hearing.

The committee adjourned at 4.34 pm.