



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2023-2024

**(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and
Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2023-2024](#))**

Members:

**MR M PARTON (Chair)
MS J CLAY (Deputy Chair)
MR M PETTERSSON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K de Kleuver (Ph 620 50129)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

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ACT Health Directorate	358
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9 am.

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs,
Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health

ACT Health Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Lopa, Ms Liz, Acting Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure and Engagement

Coleman, Dr Kerryn, Chief Health Officer, Population Health Division

George, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Health System Planning and
Evaluation

Culhane, Mr Michael, Executive Group Manager, Policy, Partnerships and
Programs Division

Murray, Ms Christine, Executive Group Manager, Population Health Division

Canberra Health Services

Peffer, Mr Dave, Chief Executive Officer

Zagari, Ms Janet, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Howard, Dr Grant, Chief Operating Officer

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2023-2024. The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution that 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 are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. Essentially, the sessions are quite short, and I want to ask members, ministers and officials to be mindful of time constraints when answering questions. I know that we have been blessed with some wonderful information, particularly from hardworking people who are very keen to share information, and we really appreciate that. But there is no need to go further than the answering of a question. Sometimes, just for time's sake, it would be beneficial to try to keep to the matter in question.

If you are taking a question on notice, emphatically say, "I will take that as a question on notice."

In this first session we welcome back Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for Health, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Could you all confirm together, at the same time, that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it? Excellent.

We are not inviting opening statements. We will now proceed to questions. I will start, Minister, with you. I want to ask some questions about a response that Ms Castley

received to a question on notice, specifically 12-42, although I do not imagine that you have memorised that number.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I do not have them all in front of me. Ms Castley asks a lot of questions.

THE CHAIR: She does. This particular question was regarding medical imaging equipment past its end of life in Canberra Hospital. The response revealed that 14 out of 39 of these medical imaging machines are past their end of life, and another six are due to reach their end of life next year. Could you tell me whether any of the machines in Canberra are past their maximum end-of-life span? Are you able to provide how many years each machine has been in use in Canberra Hospital, as well as before that, if indeed these are second-hand pieces of hardware?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will probably have to take some of that question on notice. I will hand over to officials for the detail, Chair. I think it was clear in the response as well that end of life is calculated on a particular time frame, and that is around billing as well. It does not mean that, beyond that time frame, the machine is not useful and operating effectively. In responding to that question, I also sought some further briefing and was assured that the machines that are at end of life formally are still functional. I will hand over to Ms Zagari.

Ms Zagari: Minister, you are correct; the machines that are at end of useful life are still functioning. They are routinely serviced and continue to operate. I cannot provide the detail immediately regarding the length of time that each of them has been functioning. We will take that as a question on notice and we will be able to respond on that. The devices are functioning, they are routinely serviced and they continue to be within that extended end-of-life period that is acceptable.

THE CHAIR: Minister, are you telling me that, with this technical end-of-life scenario for these machines, you do not subscribe to it at all?

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is not that I do not subscribe to it at all; it is just that machines will continue to function beyond that time frame that is prescribed. Particularly around X-rays, I was assured that they are continuing to work perfectly well in the environment that they are in.

Of course, one of the things that Canberra Health Services has done over recent years is to develop a much better understanding of all of its equipment and assets. It now has a strategic asset management plan that allows much better forward planning of replacement of equipment and assets. We have also made substantial investments through budgets to replace some of that equipment. That work that CHS has done to understand its assets and equipment is informing budget bids every year around replacement of the equipment that is in fact reaching the point where it genuinely needs to be replaced. You will have seen, for example, the media stories about the wall coming off building 12 to insert the new MRI. That is one example.

THE CHAIR: Where do the parameters come from in regard to this official determination of end of life? I like to break things down so that they are simple. Is this like going to the fridge; the milk says the use-by date is the 19th, but it will probably

be okay today?

Mr Peffer: It is probably more of a “best before”, Mr Parton, rather than a “use by”. There are different descriptions of what is end of life. Some might come from the suppliers themselves, where they say, “We’re stopping producing parts for a particular piece of equipment.” Some might relate to the ability to bill at the full rate. It might taper down, depending on the age of the machine. This relates to the quality of the image. Obviously, there is a desire to continue to maintain currency with the sort of technology that we are using, so that is reflected in our ability to bill, using the machinery. It does not mean that the machine has stopped working and we just have all of these bits of equipment that are unusable sitting in the hospital. That is not the case at all. But it does mean that, on one or a number of measures, it is deemed to be end of life.

THE CHAIR: Please excuse me if I have the wrong handle on this, because I am not entirely sure how it works. I want to know: has Canberra Hospital lost revenue from not receiving or partially receiving Medicare funds due to these 14 medical imaging machines being past their end of life?

Mr Peffer: I would need to take the particulars of each of those machines on notice, but we can certainly answer that.

THE CHAIR: All right.

MS CASTLEY: I have some supplementaries. Going back to the asset assessment, when was that undertaken? Do we not understand what state they are in? Is there not a register?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think there was not as structured a process previously as there is now. I cannot give you a year. COVID has made time meaningless, but it was a few years ago that they established a much more formal process.

Mr Peffer: Yes. Within the organisation we went through a process of building a strategic asset register for our infrastructure, to begin with, and that moved on to equipment. That is not a small task. Within Canberra Health Services, there are over 8,000 pieces of equipment. Some of it is very small and some of it is very large and expensive. Building a register with clear information on useful life, with varying descriptions of what that might be, as well as what the contractual arrangements are and the support that is in place, is something that has been ongoing within the organisation. It is not something that we finish; then that is it and we put it away. It is a live document that is continually updated.

MS CASTLEY: Going to Mr Parton’s questions about end of life, I understand there is also the term “the maximum extended life span”. When you take that on notice, could we get that clearly laid out?

Minister, you mentioned the new MRI machine. In a report in the *Canberra Weekly*, you said:

This significant upgrade, combined with the recent installation of a new CT scanner into the

Canberra Hospital's Imaging Department ...

In July 2019 there were also reports of expansion of medical imaging, stating that the initiative would fund replacement of one MRI machine. Are they different machines or have we just done another announcement on the 2019 machine? Are we talking about the same scanner?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am not sure, Ms Castley. I do not know whether anyone is in a position to answer that.

Dr Grant: I apologise; I was not here in 2019. I imagine that announcement related to the MRI that is currently being switched out now and being put in. I will add some context regarding the previous questions. At this time the medical imaging apparatus and machines that are going in are a new CT scan in the main medical imaging department at Canberra Hospital and a new CT scan at Weston Creek. There are a number of new machines going into building 5, and a change-out of a new MRI. We are in a position at this point where we have more machines than we need to deliver the current capacity. That is a pretty good position to be in, moving forward.

MS CASTLEY: I understand. I would like to be clear on whether or not the machine that was announced in the *Canberra Weekly* recently is a new, additional machine to what the minister announced in 2019. Could someone confirm that and take that on notice, please?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will definitely take that on notice, Ms Castley. It is important to recognise that the recent announcement would not have been the first time that this machine was talked about. The first time we talked about it would not have been when we were taking the wall down to put it in. We would have told people that we were purchasing it; then we would have told people that we were installing it.

MS CASTLEY: On average, that is a five-year process. When you announce something, it takes us five years to get that machine in our hospital. That is my point.

Ms Stephen-Smith: This is a very large machine, so it would have taken some planning, and we do plan ahead with these investments. But we will take the question on notice in relation to the previous *Canberra Weekly* article.

MS CASTLEY: Okay. The federal health department website says that once equipment has reached its end of expected life, Medicare no longer pays any benefits for imaging taken using that piece of equipment. Mr Parton did allude to this with his question about imaging. Mr Peffer, you said that the quality of the image might be not so great with older machines and that funding goes down on a scale. But this clearly says that it no longer pays any benefits. Are you able to confirm that we are not losing money because we have so many machines at end of life?

Mr Peffer: I am happy to take that on notice and come back to you against each machine.

MS CASTLEY: In a recent answer to a question on notice—I apologise; I do not have the number with me—there were staff incidents, three radiation incidents. I am

wondering whether any of those incidents were due to medical imaging machines at the hospital.

Mr Peffer: We would have to take that on notice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will have to take that on notice, Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible to take on notice—unless someone knows—whether any of the 14 machines, the 14 that we are talking about that are past that technical end of life, have broken down after passing their end of life? If that is the case, which machines have broken down? How many years past end of life were they? How long did it take CHS to source the parts and fix the machine? I am keen for that, if possible, to be taken on notice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, we can take that on notice.

MS CLAY: Minister, on Monday we heard from Asthma Australia. They have put in a big push to phase out woodfired heaters, in the same way that we are now phasing out gas. It is interesting; the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has made this same call.

Asthma Australia told us that one in eight Canberrans have asthma and the health impact of each woodfired heater is estimated at \$3,800 per woodfired heater. So the health impact on other people of each woodfired heater is \$3,800. Do you have a view on this issue?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am probably not the expert to have a view on this issue. The Chief Health Officer is here and she can speak to this. Obviously, we are continuing to work with Minister Vassarotti around a response to the sustainability commissioner's report. The primary responsibility for the regulatory side around woodfired heaters sits with Minister Vassarotti. From the health side, I will hand over to Dr Coleman.

Dr Coleman: I am terribly sorry; I did not hear the actual specifics of the question.

MS CLAY: We have heard from Asthma Australia and the commissioner for the environment that one in eight Canberrans have asthma. They have estimated the health costs of each woodfired heater at \$3,800. Both organisations are now calling for a complete phase-out of woodfired heaters, in the same way that we are doing a complete phase-out of gas. I am interested in the Health Directorate's point of view on this issue and the health costs of that issue.

Dr Coleman: Unfortunately, this morning I do not have any of the health costs in front of me. Health costs are very difficult to determine in the ACT, so often we do rely on the national averages and the national information in that space. But what you say is one aspect of the national information that is really useful.

We need to remember that air quality is probably the best in Canberra than

internationally or other parts of Australia. But we acknowledge that it does cause problems, particularly for highly vulnerable people, including those with asthma and underlying comorbid conditions.

The issue of bushfires and the increasing incidence of decreasing air quality associated with air pollution is actually really challenging. Looking at the data from last year, there was only one day during the year in which the NEPM standards were exceeded, which is actually an excellent component of that. What we are trying to do, with the environment protection directorate, is to focus on using our air quality in a positive way to reduce this as much as possible.

MS CLAY: I appreciate all of that, Dr Coleman, but I believe the issue with woodfired heaters is not that there is poor air quality across Canberra that would be measured by our existing air quality detectors; it is more that there are pockets of Canberra. We have some in Tuggeranong. We have some in Belconnen. These are causing a lot of problems for vulnerable people and, with one in eight Canberrans having asthma, we have a lot of vulnerable people for whom this is causing problems. Would you be able to take on notice the figures that I have quoted about the economic health costs of woodfired heaters, look at that and come back to us on notice as to whether you think that is an accurate assessment of the costs of each woodfired heater?

Dr Coleman: I would not be able to provide that back to you from an ACT perspective. I think that is far too specific, on the amount of information that we have in the ACT. We could certainly look at it—and I would assume that that is a correct assessment—from a national estimates perspective.

I would like to talk a little bit about how we respond to it. In responding to asthma, there is a broad range of options that we need to consider in terms of supporting people and vulnerable people with asthma to have a high-quality life. Some of those include when we provide warnings and when we are able to detect poorer air quality coming on board, so that people know what to do and how they can protect themselves. Unfortunately, we cannot reduce all of the risks. We try and reduce them as much as possible. We do encourage them to use their preventers and have treatment plans with their doctors.

One of the things you may remember is that we have been investigating low-cost air quality sensors to see whether they might be a useful addition. Unfortunately, we have found that the information that we get from them is not very reliable or valid and it is not able to provide as good quality information as our normal air quality sensors, to even provide that information to people at this point in time. We are continuing to investigate the use of those, in concert with Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales, and look at better ways in which we can provide that data to individuals to help monitor and manage their conditions.

MS CLAY: Thank you; that is excellent information about how we generally manage the risk. You have noted that sometimes we cannot remove the risks. In this case we actually could remove this specific risk. Does the Health Directorate, or do you, Minister, have a view on whether we should move towards removing this particular risk altogether? We cannot remove the risk of bushfires. There are many risks that we

cannot remove, but we could remove this one. Is there any view on whether we should remove this risk?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Obviously, there are already strategies in place to reduce this—providing incentives for people to replace their woodfired heaters, and providing advice to the community about how to reduce the smoke associated with using woodfired heaters, including a change in the name of the winter campaign this year, recognising that “Burn Right Tonight” was not an appropriate way to describe it because that encourages people to think that there is a right way to burn.

Clearly, the government already has a view that we need to reduce both the number of woodfired heaters in the community and the impact of those. My understanding is that there are areas where, because of the topography in new areas, you are not allowed to install woodfired heaters. Clearly, the government does have a view that we need to reduce the prevalence of woodfired heaters in the community, and we need to provide incentives and support for the community to do that.

In terms of responding to the commissioner’s report, the government will obviously be considering a response and cabinet will provide a considered position in due course.

THE CHAIR: Dr Coleman, you have alluded to a large range of factors that lead to an escalation of asthma symptoms. That being the case, when you consider all of those factors, is it difficult to ascertain whether one of those factors is the driving force behind an escalation of symptoms and how much percentage you can place on that particular factor? Is it difficult to ascertain—given that, obviously, smoke is one of the factors—how much impact that has had?

Dr Coleman: In short, yes. What you are talking to is the attributable proportion. With complex conditions like asthma, that can be different at an individual level as well as at a population level. An individual may be more sensitive to smoke, or they may be more sensitive to specific allergens or even the cold. So that change may vary.

THE CHAIR: Does it then go to the fact that it would seemingly be extremely difficult to arrive at a dollar figure per wood heater, given that we are not exactly sure how much each factor is attributable to the escalation of asthma symptoms?

Dr Coleman: Yes. As with all of these estimates, we take population-level data, including hospital admissions, what a basic hospital admission would cost and the numbers of asthma in the exacerbations. At the moment my team has just advised me that we are involved with the Australian National University in looking at some current research to help define this in a little bit more detail.

THE CHAIR: Good.

Dr Coleman: As you can imagine, it is quite a complex area, and we will continue to work with those bodies moving forward.

MR PETTERSSON: I have a range of questions about workforce recruitment. Earlier this year you provided advice that there were a significant number of applications for cardiologist positions at Canberra Health Services. Can you update

the committee on how that has progressed?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will hand over to Dr Howard for that one.

Dr Howard: We are in a fairly fortunate position of being able to recruit two permanent positions in the cardiology department and bringing in a new range of skills that we have not had in the public sector for a period of time. One of those is what is commonly known as TAVI, a transcatheter aortic valve implantation. Through that, people do not have to have their chest open to have a new valve put in their heart; it can be done through a wire ascending in the groin.

As we bring new cardiologists on board, we will be increasing the range of services we deliver. We have someone starting in August and another person pending for February 2024. As we move towards building 5, we will slowly bring in a new range of services that are supported by the cardiologists we have recruited. That is going to be very promising and exciting, actually.

I was involved with the TAVI introduction to Australasia some time ago, when we were learning how to use it and what to do with it. It has now become established therapy. It decreases the length of stay and really changes people's lives, with a very small procedure compared to what open heart surgery used to be. So it is an exciting time for us.

We have managed to recruit the cardiologists that we need to set these programs up. They will be arriving sequentially from now until early and midway through 2024. As we have been doing for the last six months and longer, in the interim we will be covering some of those positions with locums and VMOs who have made themselves available.

MR PETTERSSON: That is great. ACT Labor took to the last election a commitment to deliver 400 more frontline workers. Can you please update the committee on how that commitment is progressing?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. We have gone well and truly above the 400 that we committed to at the election. Indeed, I think we have now got to over 560 new healthcare workers, as of this year, which is a really fantastic outcome. Of course, we are continuing to invest in our frontline workforce, not just in the number of workers but also in the supports that are available to them.

I have just found the information. It is actually an additional 570 positions that have been funded since the 2020-21 budget.

Of course, we are also investing in substantial efforts to support the wellbeing of that workforce as well and to invest in recruitment and retention of strategies. We have been doing work on recruitment, but there is a new recruitment campaign that is going to roll out shortly as well that covers medical, nursing and midwifery and allied health. So it is sort of a general "Come and work in Canberra. There are great opportunities, and great opportunities for work-life balance as well."

In line Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development broader work around

promoting the ACT and the benefits of living and working here, we are highlighting things like getting some time back in your life with the short commutes that we have, compared to working in capital cities like Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, and the sort of broader lifestyle benefits.

Also, from a health specific point of view, we have very well remunerated staff here in the ACT. We have good conditions for staff and we have some really exciting opportunities to do different things with your career.

We are obviously making some substantial infrastructure investments. So people have the opportunity to come and be on board with brand new state-of-the-art facilities like the critical services building, the new building 5 at Canberra Hospital, and be part of the broader master plan but also then be part of planning for the new north-side hospital, what is now North Canberra Hospital.

With CHS now running the acute public hospitals, the sub-acute rehabilitation hospital and all of the community-based services, there is a real opportunity for people to have a wide range of different work experiences and be able to try different things and try different career pathways in one organisation without having to move organisations.

Then, of course, CHS has also established a research strategy alongside the ACT health broader research strategy, Better Together, and a training, teaching and learning strategy to support the professional development of staff across the organisations.

All of those things coming together are creating a really positive environment to attract and retain staff, as well as the investment, of course, that we have made in the additional 570 FTEs since 2020-21.

MR PETTERSSON: That is great. The budget includes funding to support junior doctors. Can you detail for the committee what that is?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will hand to Dr Howard to talk about that.

Dr Howard: We have put forward a proposal to augment and support junior doctors in a much more wholesome way than we have in the past. I think everyone understands, particularly post-COVID, that looking after our staff is really important, and the junior medical officer workforce, as a generic workforce, is right at the frontline of getting our health service working day to day and looking after patients.

We are planning and, have approved through the budget, three different initiatives. One is to increase the amount of support that we supply for doctors in their third to fifth year of experience. We are reasonably good at supporting doctors in their first and second year but, after that and prior to going into specialist training, there is a gap where we clearly need to provide better supports. So that is one arm.

The second arm is around supporting and coordinating trainees and training programs. We have approved funding for a director of clinical training and support for that position. That role will be to make sure that all of our training programs and the

people who are supervising those training programs are well supported and have a community health practice.

The third arm is probably my favourite. In the past, our junior doctors in their first and second year, before they become signed off, have only been issued with two-year contracts. So halfway through the second year, classically, they would be looking to secure a job and, if they were not able to do that locally, would then be looking to go somewhere else, and it is pretty stressful for them. We have introduced longer contract terms so that that anxiety is removed.

We are also going to put in mid-range positions that we are calling senior house officers, which is quite a well-known term in other jurisdictions, to provide opportunities for those doctors to have a bridge between being a junior doctor and then becoming more experienced and going into our training program.

The idea is that we take away some of the stress of them having to find a job whilst they are only really in their second year of work and also creating a pipeline for our doctors to advance locally and stay part of our workforce and feel like they are bonded to us and they belong with us and support them better to do that. We are quite excited about that moving forward.

MR PETTERSSON: That is great. Thank you.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, you said 570 staff since 2020. Are they frontline workers and nurses? Could you break that down?

Ms Stephen-Smith: In terms of health professionals only, doctors, nurses, midwives, and allied health, it is 573 in this financial year growing to almost 600 in the 2026-27 financial year. If you include administrative and other, it grows to more than 700. So there is a bit of a bump for this year, 2023-24, to more than 800 and then there is a slight reduction in those admin and other additional staffing positions over time because obviously there is a big commitment to the commissioning of the critical services building at Canberra Hospital. But if you are just talking frontline, it is 573.3 FTE for this year, growing to 599.5 in 2026-27.

MS CASTLEY: And how many have left in that time period?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Obviously, none have left in that time period because we are talking about the future.

MS CASTLEY: You have made these commitments to increase staff and I understand you have recruited that many people. At the same time, people are obviously leaving, retiring et cetera. Could we get the figure for that cohort that have left?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Sorry. So 573.3 is the number of full-time equivalent positions that have been funded. Obviously, in any organisation, people leave and new people are recruited. We have largely managed to recruit up to more than replacement. But we can take on notice, as we regularly do, how many staff have left over the three years since 2020-21.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you. I know that there are some good initiatives for junior doctors now but, in the doctors-in-training survey, they said that the ACT was the worst in Australia. That was their comment. What are your thoughts on that? How do you respond to that? Is this the attempt to respond? What do you say to those doctors who believe it is the worst in the country?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I leave that to Dr Howard.

Dr Howard: We acknowledge the medical training survey results. There are some highlights in there, but we are just going to deal with the proposition that we need to make significant improvements. We do need to have a look at how we roster and schedule our junior doctors and how we support them. We will be doing that as a second piece of work outside of the budget initiatives that were announced and I then described previously.

MS CASTLEY: So you are sure that there will be an improvement on the survey results?

Dr Howard: That would be my expectation.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, this budget provides \$150,000 capital works funding to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm for a residential service delivery trial. What is this money for and how will it support the long promised trial of a residential program?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There was funding provided in the previous budget for a trial of the residential program. There is some additional funding in this budget as well for upgrades, which will fund the construction of a new shed at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to replace an existing unsafe shed. That is going to be used to store equipment for outdoor programs.

That is sitting alongside the expenses support to implement the residential program, including designing the shed with a space for program delivery, which consultation with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Board has indicated would be helpful.

As I said, the funding for the residential service pilot was provided in the last budget. That has not been able to commence at this point, but the Health Directorate has been working not only with the advisory board—whose operation and meetings are currently suspended but they are still being engaged in a process and advised of progress—but also with the team from The Glen, which delivers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential rehabilitation and healing services.

I will hand over to Mr Culhane, who is probably the right person to provide an update on where those conversations are up to.

Mr Culhane: Sorry, but can I just clarify the exact part of the question that you are wanting me to answer?

MRS KIKKERT: I will just move on. The minister has actually answered my question with regard to the funding that is going towards the capital works, to the residential program at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. The funding from last year has been put forward to this year, and so nothing has been done. Why is the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council on suspension?

Mr Culhane: The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council has been paused while we undertake a review of the advisory board to determine the best way forward to take the farm towards a community controlled residential model of service delivery. That review is underway right now. It started in March I think, if I am correct, and it is expected to report in late August.

MRS KIKKERT: While the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council are currently on suspension, are they able to provide input into how the residential program will be managed, or even the day program?

Mr Culhane: We are continuing to manage the day program, consistent with previous guidance that the advisory board has provided us and the decisions that the advisory board has taken. We have not varied in a material sense from the operating model that existed when the advisory board was meeting. We are still working towards the residential model in partnership with an Aboriginal community controlled residential service provider, consistent with the request of the advisory board.

MRS KIKKERT: Is the delay in providing the residential program due to the fact that the advisory council to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is currently suspended?

Mr Culhane: No.

MRS KIKKERT: I beg to differ. The freedom of information document that I received says on providing information to the minister: "Delay in delivering of residential services through suspension of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council, pending findings of review." So your recommendations to the minister actually suggested that the delivery of the residential program will be delayed due to the review of the suspension of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. Is that correct?

Mr Culhane: That is correct. I interpreted your question in a different way. I thought you were talking about the delay to date in the delivery of the residential model, and that has not been delayed to date due to the review or the pausing of the board.

MRS KIKKERT: The co-design of the residential program is supposed to be with Health Services and also the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council. Is that correct?

Mr Culhane: Sorry; the co-design of the day program?

MRS KIKKERT: The co-design of the residential program.

Mr Culhane: Of the residential program?

MRS KIKKERT: At the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

Mr Culhane: That was what we were trying to achieve, yes.

MRS KIKKERT: However, in the freedom of information response there is an email that suggests that you do not really need a board to co-design the residential program. It says: "The absence of the board would remove an avenue for exploring the cultural impact and considerations in making these decisions. However, the day program can be designed and managed by the directorate."

So if you are not co-designing the residential program or even the day program with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council, what is the point of having a Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council?

Mr Culhane: The day program was co-designed with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council before the council was paused, and we continue to operate the day program consistent with the parameters set by, discussed with and agreed with the advisory board.

MRS KIKKERT: Also with the residential program—

Mr Culhane: We are not currently running a residential program. At the moment we are working towards the residential program. The advisory board during last year put a lot of work into the parameters for the residential program. We are continuing to work and establish relationships with a First Nations service provider who currently provides residential programs consistent with the request of the advisory board. The directorate is not independently designing a residential program. We are working towards it, but we are not designing it.

MRS KIKKERT: I beg to differ because the freedom of information document says with the briefing to the minister that it is managed by the directorate without the board being present. Freedom of information, Minister.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Mrs Kikkert, are you able to provide a page number of the FOI?

MRS KIKKERT: Yes; 102.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: Also, there was a meeting that was planned for 30 January and 31 January. The agenda on the meeting was for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm residential services, facilitated and informed by the First Nations consultants and key services partners from New South Wales. That meeting was cancelled due to the suspension of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council. Is that correct?

Mr Culhane: I do not have the document that you have in front of me; I am sorry.

MRS KIKKERT: Was a meeting in January with the agenda of discussing the

residential program with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm with First Nations people in New South Wales cancelled?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That meeting was cancelled as a result of the suspension of the advisory board. You have got the FOI, Mrs Kikkert, so you understand why that difficult decision was taken to suspend the advisory board.

MRS KIKKERT: I still do not understand why there was the suspension of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council, though. It is not in the freedom of information document. You did not provide that.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think it is, Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: Why was the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council cancelled or suspended.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I have got the freedom of information response open in front of me, and it is clear, if you read the freedom of information response, why the advisory board was suspended as a result of—

MRS KIKKERT: It is all redacted, Minister. You probably have the full view of it in front of you with all the details and emails.

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, I have got the exact thing that we have provided under freedom of information in front of me, Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: It does not actually say why it was suspended.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I have got the exact thing that we provided under freedom of information in front of me.

MRS KIKKERT: I have lots of blank pages here. They are black.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Kikkert, if you can just allow the minister to answer.

Ms Stephen-Smith: As you just indicated, you are on page 103 here.

MRS KIKKERT: Could please take that question on notice as to why the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Advisory Council was suspended?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Or I could just answer it if you stopped interrupting me.

MRS KIKKERT: Sure; go ahead.

Ms Stephen-Smith: There were a number of complaints received from members of the advisory board about the way the advisory board was operating, their concerns that they did not feel safe attending advisory board meetings, and that the way the advisory board was operating was in fact hindering progress on the objectives that the advisory board and the directorate were trying to achieve in relation to improvements to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm operation and the establishment of the

residential program.

When the meeting was cancelled between the advisory board and the provider from New South Wales, as you have indicated, it was also indicated to the advisory board at that time that the provider would still come to the ACT, they would hold meetings with the Health Directorate and the Health Directorate would continue to work with that provider on developing a model of care for the residential program absolutely in line with the advice that the advisory board had already previously provided. The advisory board had signed off on a healing framework. I think that was actually finalised—the healing framework.

Mr Culhane: Yes, it was.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That provided a really strong basis for the conversations that the directorate has been having with an established experienced provider. I have also met with that provider, and we have been working through options for how we can use their experience to support the establishment of a residential program.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Kikkert, we are going to have to move on. If you have one quick supplementary that is fine, but we are going to have to move on.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay; one quick supplementary question. Minster, how many designated positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people exist at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm? I understand that one of the main complaints from the advisory council was that a designated position for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander position at the farm has been given to a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That concern has been expressed. Mr Culhane might be able to go to how many positions there are.

Mr Culhane: I am afraid I cannot. I think Jacinta Evans may have the answer to that.

MRS KIKKERT: Thanks for your patience, Chair.

Ms George: Good morning. I am the Executive Group Manager, Health System Planning and Evaluation, and my portfolio includes the day-to-day management of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. There was, at a point, a vacancy at the farm and we were unable to fill it. It was identified and we were unable to fill it with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. We then created a position that was not an identified position and moved a staff member who was not an Aboriginal person into that because we were unable to fill it otherwise. That person had had some experience in a similar position.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you.

MS CASTLEY: I would like to revisit some information from yesterday on DHR. You said that Canberra was one of the first jurisdictions to deliver such a large IT health project. I think you referenced that Queensland started similarly and scaled up. Why was that not our approach here in Canberra?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We are obviously already a relatively small system and a single local health district. If we look at the way New South Wales is planning to implement the Epic digital health record system, they are looking at doing it local health district by local health district. The ACT public health system is effectively the size of a local health district—probably smaller than a local health district—in New South Wales. Mr Peffer can answer a bit more in terms of the project thinking.

Mr Peffer: Thank you, Minister. That is correct. In terms of scale, New South Wales will start small and then scale across the balance of the state. The LHD that they are looking at, which is up around the Newcastle region, has an FTE profile in the order of 18,000, so it is actually much larger than what we have got here in the territory. That is their starting point, and then they will scale up from there. In terms of comparisons with what has been done in other jurisdictions, starting with a large hospital, a large service provider, in Queensland and then looking at the balance of the state, it is not markedly different to what we have done here.

MS CASTLEY: But yesterday you were explaining that it was such a big deal. It was this massive project that we have embarked on.

Ms Stephen-Smith: No. I think you have conflated two things, Ms Castley. What I was saying yesterday, in comparing our implementation of the Epic system to Parkville's implementation of the Epic system, was that we have implemented the Epic system across more types of activity. We are the first in Australia, I think, to include the patient administration system element of that. I think that was the comparison I was making. While Parkville was a useful reference point for us, having implemented Epic as its digital health record, we are using more of the Epic functionality than it has implemented.

MS CASTLEY: Did they advise that that was the best way to go, given the risks that had been raised about getting data out and all of that sort of stuff? Was it always just: "Yes; let's go ahead with dragging in these 40 systems"? Was that the right advice that they gave you, do you believe?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, I do actually think it was the right advice. I think what we are going to end up with is a much more streamlined system which has a lot more functionality. Mr Peffer can correct me if I am wrong, but if we did not have the patient administration element of it we would still have a disconnect between the booking and the patient information and the frontline clinical services. If we want to have a system where the MyDHR patient portal works well and is a single portal for people to have information about their bookings, their upcoming appointments, their results from pathology and imaging, and their discharge summaries—all of that in the one place—we then need to implement Epic across the system.

The point I was making yesterday about Parkville was that we are the first in Australia to do as much as we did with Epic, but we are not the first in the world to do as much as Epic can do. Epic is a well-established electronic health records system in other parts of the world—

MS CASTLEY: So they should have been able to identify this reporting problem,

had they had that in other areas?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think we said yesterday, Ms Castley, that it was known that there was going to be work to do after going live, and that much of that work could not possibly have been done prior to going live. We made that point very clearly yesterday.

MS CASTLEY: You were aware of that before going live? They clearly said to you, “For an unknown amount of time you will be unable to get some reporting data out, but let’s go live anyway”? You knew that before going live?

Ms Stephen-Smith: It is inevitable with this system that there were going to have to be changes post going live, so the project—

MS CASTLEY: But not chunks of not being able to report.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Ms Castley, I think that you are conflating a number of things, but let me step through that. The project did not finish on 12 November, at go live. It was never intended to finish. We always knew that there would be both implementation issues at the front line—that some things would not quite work the way that they had been built and expected to work, and that staff would need to continue to be trained, at the front line, in that service delivery—and that work would need to continue on reporting and pulling out data, and how the data flowed from where it is entered at the front line through to the data repository and through to the reporting processes. I am probably not using the right technical language there, but kind of roughly—

MS CASTLEY: I understand that. My question is: did you know in November that, for an unknown amount of time, there would be significant issues getting data out of the system for crucial reporting? Did you know that, for an unknown amount of time—

Ms Stephen-Smith: What do you mean by “crucial reporting”, Ms Castley?

MS CASTLEY: Your FOI documents say that there was a briefing to you that said—I do not have it in front of me—there would be reputational damage and impacts to funding if you were unable to get this data out. We know that there was outpatient information; that sort of data. Did you know that you would be unable to report on that out of the system, like you cannot at the moment? You have told me it is an unreasonable diversion of resources. We are now in July, and you told us yesterday that you can get the September data out, but it might be manual. It will not be, as we all hoped, that nice, automated process.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I am not sure that that is what we said yesterday.

MS CASTLEY: Can you confirm for me? September—

Ms Stephen-Smith: There are a couple of things. Your question on notice related to outpatient data. It has never been the case that outpatient data could be pulled automatically from our systems before. It is not part of national reporting. You asked

specifically, in your question on notice, about outpatient data that has previously been pulled manually and provided to members of the Assembly. It has been pulled manually and provided to you.

I think it is fair to say that the last time that we reported that data to you, we already had access to more information as a result of the implementation of DHR. It was not just “push a button and bring it out”, but the implementation of DHR gave us more robust and more information that needed to be extracted manually. That information has always needed to be extracted manually, and it is not information that is included in national reporting—

MS CASTLEY: But we were told that this system would help with reporting—

Ms Stephen-Smith: We are providing information to the Assembly on outpatients that is not part of national reporting at all, so you are conflating two things when you are asking me about national reporting and then you are asking me about your question on notice in relation to outpatients. They are two completely separate things.

MS CASTLEY: What you are saying is that the ACT implementation was no bigger than Queensland’s, Parkville, but we have still failed on reporting. Do you accept that that is the case?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, I do not accept that we have failed on reporting. My view, Ms Castley, is that this was always going to take a period of time after going live, to ensure that the reporting system was robust. The deadline for reporting for national systems is in September, with an update in November. We are not at September or November yet. I will hand to Ms Zagari to provide an update on how that work is going.

Ms Zagari: Thank you, Minister. To reinforce your point around the outpatient data, the data that we have available to us now, operationally, is significantly greater visibility around outpatients, understanding that the data that we provide and the ability to provide public-facing reporting, as we have committed to, is dependent on that validation process and work to ensure that the information that is going into the system reflects accurately and relates to that data-mapping exercise that the minister has spoken to at length.

The teams are working very closely together to ensure that that process is proceeding. There has been really significant progress in the space of emergency department data in particular. With outpatient data, we have the reports that we need in order for us to manage day to day. They are not yet sufficiently validated for external public reporting. We undertook a manual process of validating that data in order to respond to the earlier question on notice so that that information would be available. We can do that, but it is a process that diverts the team away from the delivery of care.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, yesterday you said that, frankly, there were failures. There are missing accountability indicators in the budget papers. Also, yesterday you talked about lessons learned. Today you will not accept responsibility that there were failures, but yesterday you did.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would want to review the *Hansard*, because I do not actually think I used the word “failure”. I said that, frankly, I think there are lessons learned and that there was information that was held by frontline data teams who were concerned about how long this would take and that I do not think escalated and flowed up in the way that it should have. I am being really frank about that, Ms Castley, because I have met with the frontline data teams. But it is not true to say that we did not know that there would be things that needed to be done after going live. We absolutely knew that there would be things that needed to be done after going live to get all of our data reporting robust.

MS CASTLEY: So you do not accept responsibility that there are accountability indicators missing in the budget due to this?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Well, it will—

MS CASTLEY: No?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes, Ms Castley. There is data missing in the budget as a result of this. This is a known problem, but there will be annual reports in another couple of months and we are working to ensure that all of that data is included. That is always more accurate than the budget data anyway, because budget data has to be an estimate because it is produced before the end of the financial year. Annual report data is always the more accurate source of information. What I was saying yesterday was that I have met with a number of the people on the frontline data teams and their very clear message to me was that they felt that the workload that they were facing in trying to develop all of the data reporting, post going live, was more than the people above them had understood and more than I had understood.

MS CASTLEY: So you do accept responsibility?

THE CHAIR: Ms Castley.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We have listened very clearly to those frontline teams that are doing that important work. We have put a structure around prioritising that work to ensure that the most important data reporting gets prioritised. Obviously, the most important data is operational. The most important thing that we are focused on is ensuring that our hospitals and health services function effectively, that the system is used clinically well, and that operational data is available. That has been the first priority. The second priority is around national reporting to the National Health Funding Body, because that is obviously important for funding, and then to AIHW. Frankly, the third priority is reporting the things that you want that are not part of the national reporting. That is not our highest priority.

THE CHAIR: All right. Minister, if we could move on. Mr Davis has been patient.

MR DAVIS: I try to be. Thank you, Chair. Minister, I hate to take us to a sombre point, but the sad reality of a changing climate is that our health service is going to be responsible for treating more ailments related to climate change: smoke inhalation from bushfires, heatstroke from hottest days on record and growing.

You will recall that in October last year I moved a motion in the Assembly asking the government to develop a climate change preparedness strategy, particularly as it related to the delivery of public health care. I can see \$366,000 allocated in the budget for research on the health impacts of climate change and the development of that aforementioned climate change strategy. Can I get a better understanding about who will be developing that strategy, when you intend on being able to release it and what kinds of things you hope it will touch on?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. Christine.

Ms Murray: Thank you very much for the question, Mr Davis. I note the request to be brief and I will try my best. We are working, in ACT Health, as part of the broader whole-of-government work that is progressing in relation to the climate change adaptation and amelioration work. As part of the work, we are planning with key partners, so we know that we are not going it alone. We are working very extensively with the Australian National University in relation to some of this, to better anticipate the future risks, consider the anthropogenic impacts and develop a climate resistant operation model.

That sits in the two parts that we are focusing on. The first is mitigation in the health system. That is focusing on reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the whole of the health system, from direct emissions to those that occur indirectly through our current models of care. The other is the adaptation component, which seeks to find practical innovation points, focusing on building resilience in our infrastructure, our community-based responsibility and the interceptor capability to cope with the impacts of climate change that is already locked into our climate systems.

A practical example of where we are doing a lot of modelling and forecasting in relation to how we can best respond to things that are impacting is JEV, or Japanese encephalitis. I will pass to Dr Coleman to go into greater detail, if necessary, in relation to that. There are practical applications in relation to how we are predicting what the potential impacts will be, and then preparing, responding and surveilling our appropriate response.

In relation to some even more detailed practical activities, we are doing a huge amount of work to build the adaptive resilience to climate change and deliver more sustainable low carbon emissions health care. This has been led from the ground up, as well as from a policy level down. We have engaged in conversations across the board, and clinicians are leading discussions and decisions around medical and appliance usage, based on the carbon impacts. Equally, we have, in this last budget, established the Preparedness, Planning and Surveillance Branch, effective from 3 July, which will take on some of the transition from COVID-19 into a business-as-usual environment but also establish greater capacity for us to focus on that preparedness, planning and surveillance.

MR DAVIS: Ms Murray, I hate to cut you off. Can I just ask a clarifying question. When we were debating this motion in the Assembly—to which I hope and expect this funding can be attributed—I recall a discussion about challenges with the ability of the current workforce to delivery yet another action plan or strategy. There is a finite team. Can I get some specificity around the \$366,000? Has that been for

additional staff or have we employed an external consultant? It sounds like some of the work that you have been spelling out for me commenced prior to this budget allocation.

Ms Murray: Absolutely, and thank you for that clarifying question. We were allocated—and that sits within our division—the \$360,000 over the next two years. It is focused on research and programs. It is not focused on individual staff. That is actually to support research and programs, with additional support in the planning and preparedness and surveillance team that we have been able to get, and some of the support that we are getting from the national strategies and the work that is being done in that space.

What it has been able to do is allow us to pull together quite a number of resources. A huge amount of work is being done in this space, as I said, at the ANU, and through the HEAL area at ANU. So we are not going it alone. We are being really sensible in terms of how we utilise the existing research, the existing programs and the existing strategies in place to make sure that we deliver on a practical application.

MR DAVIS: Fantastic. Can I ask a follow up, then, on practical application, just to help the layperson who does not speak fluent public servant. I have gotten pretty good now, after three years. Can you give some examples of some practical differences that healthcare consumers are going to see in the delivery of public health care long term that you expect relative to a changing climate? I used the examples before of people being more susceptible to smoke inhalation and hotter days et cetera. How are people going to see the tangible difference?

Ms Murray: You might not necessarily see a tangible difference in relation to some of the examples that I have given, such as clinical decisions around the medical appliances that are utilised. That will impact on the emissions component, but you will not see on the ground what that individual difference is. We have got that clinical-level response, that smaller level response, which has quite a large impact.

Similarly, with the conversations that we have around some of the procurement decisions that we're making, again, you will not see an amendment to treatment outcomes, but we will see a longer term reduction in the impact of the healthcare system on the environment. I flagged the readiness, the preparedness and our ability to respond quickly. I might pass to Dr Coleman in relation to the JEV example specifically, because I think that is a great demonstration of those practical differences that the healthcare consumer would see.

MR DAVIS: Can I just apologise: I have only one more follow-up. Dr Coleman is great. Big fan. I have one quick follow-up and then I have somewhere else that I need to be, so I need to quickly ask this. I see in the budget that it is 2023-24 and 2024-25, so can I assume that the plan is intended to be delivered by 2025?

Ms Murray: If not before.

MR DAVIS: Great. We have a lot of people in Canberra with an interest in, and subject matter expertise in, the intersection between climate change and public health care. Is there a point, through the development of this strategy, when you expect to be

consulting with the community? When might that be?

Ms Murray: I would like to give a little bit of a plug for the Preventive Health Plan consultation that we currently have underway. That is looking at the tapestry and the intersection of all of those pieces that feed in. We have eight sessions currently underway. We have a YourSay survey that is particularly targeting multicultural groups, LGBTIQ + and people with disabilities.

On the preventative health component, I do not think you can see climate change as a separate component to preventative health. I am really plugging that this is an opportunity for people to participate, through the YourSay survey and in the kitchen table conversations that we are supporting through the individual sessions that we are having with the community.

Climate change has come up as a regular thing, and how we continue to participate and make that connection with climate. We had Landcare at the last session and it was really fantastic to see what they brought to the table in the conversation. That is probably a major mechanism that we will utilise, in addition to the other consultations. We will probably start relatively small and practical and then build to something much bigger into the future.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will very quickly add that we absolutely recognise the expertise that sits in the ACT community around this. We had a really productive meeting with Minister Kearney federally, with a whole of lot of experts either working locally or working nationally but based here. We have so many national institutions and professional bodies here as well. We know that we have a huge well of expertise to draw from.

MR DAVIS: Awesome. Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: The commonwealth Labor government is also developing a national climate change and health strategy. What role does the ACT government have to play in helping to develop that strategy?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you, Mr Pettersson. The roundtable that I co-hosted with Minister Kearney was part of that work that the commonwealth is doing. Ged Kearney is hosting roundtables around the country with various experts and stakeholders to start to develop that national climate change and health strategy. The ACT government is very much engaged with that process. In fact, it was one of the first things that I raised in the health ministers' meeting, in Mr Butler's first meeting as health minister. We knew that federal Labor had made a commitment around this, so we immediately were encouraging them to get on with it. They are, which is great to see.

For us, one of the really important things about the commonwealth government coming to the table on health and climate change is that there is a lot that can be done in health systems to reduce the impact of health system delivery on climate change, on emissions. There is a lot of mitigation work that can be done. Doing that policy work at each individual jurisdictional level, especially for a small jurisdiction, is really challenging. Having the commonwealth engaged and taking the lead in some of that

policy work—that we can then learn from and draw from and implement the outcomes of, rather than having to do all the policy work separately across eight individual jurisdictions—is really vital and important for us. We really, really welcome that initiative.

MS CLAY: It is great to hear the update on the climate change adaptation planning, but it is not a lot of funding for the implementation of what will be extremely extensive measures. We have seen a lot of things come through the Assembly recently. We have insulation in roofs; we have got pubs as refuges. I can see elements of our adaptation rolling out quite well. I am just wondering: where is the central point for tracking how much we are spending on those adaptation measures that are really important to human health? How do we know if we are spending enough and doing that quickly enough? Is that the Treasurer or is that—

Ms Rule: That is a Treasury question: how you can track whole-of-government expenditure.

MS CLAY: So, if I put that question to the Treasurer of how much in total we are spending on our climate change health adaption measures, he will be able to give me a clear answer? And if I ask him whether it is sufficient, he will be able to tell me?

Ms Rule: I do not think we can answer that question for you.

MS CLAY: Sure. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you took a question on notice on 6 June about the further loss of training accreditation in obstetrics and gynaecology. Your response said that CHS “received informal feedback on the day of the review that reflected some known challenges in obstetrics and gynaecology”. Minister, are you able to tell us specifically what these known challenges are, given that the community would not be aware of many of these challenges?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think the previous commentary would indicate that the community is aware of some of the challenges. I will look to Dr Howard, who has been engaged in this conversation.

Dr Howard: I think it is pretty clear that, globally and across Australasia, the maternity workforce is under significant pressure. That was confirmed in a meeting that the minister and I had with RANZCOG, the college for obstetrics and gynaecology training, recently. The chair of that college painted a fairly bleak picture—that we are all competing for a fairly limited resource. To be honest, that is reflected even in the private sector. The largest private provider in the ACT has gone on bypass on a number of occasions in the last couple of months because it is unable to staff its service reliably. So this is not particularly just a CHS issue. The relevance of bringing that up is that the training and teaching arrangements often conflict with service provision and the shorter we get in staffing, the greater that tension becomes. I suspect that that is what we would all acknowledge as a known challenge, moving forward.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Minister, in your answer you referred to receiving

informal feedback on the day of the review. Have you received any formal feedback, to date? Are you able to tell us what that feedback was? How long does CHS have to try and fix these known challenges, or at least deal with these known challenges, before it loses another trainee accreditation?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. CHS has now got the report from RANZCOG. Again, Dr Howard can speak to that.

Dr Howard: We are in receipt of a draft of the report. We have been given the opportunity to comment on matters of fact, not necessarily content. I would not comment on that report at this stage, until the board at RANZCOG has received and acknowledged it.

What I will say is that we are not waiting for the formal final report to arrive. Reflecting on our previous conversation around workforce challenges in teaching and training, we are currently working on addressing those, challenging some of our baseline assumptions—which we should do, as health service managers—looking at the services we provide, the capacity required to do that and the staffing to support it. We commenced that process some months ago and are in the process of working through those things so that the service becomes sustainable and that teaching and training component becomes better supported. That includes increasing the range of services that are provided in the ACT through the women’s service.

MS CASTLEY: With fixing the known challenges, do you have a time frame for how quickly they need to be addressed? Is it six months? Have they given you a time frame?

Dr Howard: Again, the report is in draft form. It would be premature to comment, at this stage, on what is in it and any time frames it contains. We are moving to make the service as sustainable as we can in the current environment. The time frame for that is now and ongoing.

MS CASTLEY: You say, “to keep the service sustainable”. Is it not? Is the unit working?

Dr Howard: The unit is working. However, as I outlined in a previous response, there are significant challenges locally, nationally and globally in trying to attract a sufficient workforce, across midwifery and medical, to meet the demands in the maternity sector.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, are you aware of any other units that have received either informal or formal reports that their training accreditation may be suspended, or part of it may be suspended?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Not off the top of my head.

Dr Howard: I am not aware of any at the moment. In fact, there is a rolling program of reviews. We have colleges on site reviewing training programs almost continuously but at least episodically. Some of the recent reviews—for example, by the College of Surgeons in the particular subspecialty of urology—have been very glowing. We do

not often table those or have them in the media.

MS CASTLEY: I have just received information that there might be some concerns with the plastic and reconstructive surgery unit. You have not heard anything about that?

THE CHAIR: In terms of its training accreditation?

Dr Howard: I cannot comment on that specifically. What I can say is that, like maternity services, plastic and reconstructive surgery across the nation and globally is one of the high volume, high workload services that we have—

MS CASTLEY: So can you give us your word today that there are no other units, other than the ones that we are already aware of, that are at risk?

Dr Howard: Not to my knowledge, but I will check on that and come back and correct the record if necessary.

MS CASTLEY: Great. Is it fair to say that doctors who train in Canberra are more likely to stay here? Is that how it works?

Dr Howard: If that is a general question about providing reasonable training, experience and support for people staying then I would say that is a truism.

MS CASTLEY: I am concerned about reputational damage. Does this have an impact on us recruiting—losing training accreditation, as we do, or having it suspended?

Ms Stephen-Smith: What probably contributes to reputational damage, Ms Castley, is your ongoing misrepresentation of this issue as if we are losing training accreditation more broadly than has actually been the case. Again, I would emphasise, in relation to FMU, that that was a mutual decision. It was in fact the specialist at Canberra Health Services that asked RANZCOG to suspend the training accreditation of the maternal and foetal medicine unit because they did not feel that they could appropriately support the trainee at that particular time. That was not a unilateral decision of RANZCOG to withdraw training accreditation.

It is you who is presenting in the public that training accreditation is constantly under threat in multiple areas, when you do not actually have the evidence to support that. You talk about reputational damage. We are not alone, as Dr Howard has said, in having challenges in obstetrics and gynaecology in particular. I can talk to my colleagues and we will find issues in other jurisdictions as well, in particular hospitals and particular services where they have experienced the same kinds of challenges. It is a known issue across health services in Australia.

One of the other things we have been very much focused on—and Mr Peffer might like to comment on this—is how we support the wellbeing of staff in these areas, recognising that, as Dr Howard said, these are high throughput, stressful areas. Obstetrics and gynaecology, in particular, is a very difficult environment to work in. When things go well, that is great. When things do not go well, it is a terrible, traumatic experience for everybody concerned.

We have obviously had additional challenges in that particular unit. I think everybody acknowledges that the death of Peter Scott just over a year ago has been a very traumatic event for that particular unit. There are a range of things that we know are general, as Dr Howard has talked about, and specific to obstetrics and gynaecology at Canberra Health Services. The effort that Canberra Health Services is going to is addressing some of those general recruitment challenges but also the wellbeing work. Mr Pepper might like to touch on that, very briefly, Chair.

MS CASTLEY: I ask the minister one more time: you can assure us that there are no other units at risk of losing or having their training accreditation suspended?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take that question on notice, Ms Castley.

THE CHAIR: Minister, please do. I am mindful that we are five minutes away from the break and that Ms Clay has been waiting for some time to ask a question. I want to clear enough time for her to do that.

MS CASTLEY: Sure.

MS CLAY: Minister, I could not see any new funding in the budget for free dental. Is there new funding for free dental in the budget?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, there is not additional funding for dental in this particular budget. However, there is work going on at Commonwealth, state and territory levels. You will be aware that the previous, coalition government cut funding quite substantially to public dental services and then, having cut the funding, consistently provided only 12-month increments of new funding. It would just be a rollover: “We have to give you another 12 months; we are going to give you another 12 months.” They refused to engage in any conversation about a sustainable public dental agreement. Positively, the Labor government has provided a two-year funding agreement, recognising that there is work being done—being led by South Australia, if memory serves me correctly—to look at the national agreement on public dental.

MS CLAY: Excellent. How many people in the ACT as of now—and, if you have it or can take it on notice, as of last year and projected for next year—will be able to receive free dental as a result of all of these combined funding sources?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take that on notice.

MS CLAY: That would be great. Maybe provide the last couple of years, this year, and, if you have it, a projection for what it will look like. Is there any funding in there for preventative dental? Is that preventative dental or is that treatment only?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think there is some preventative for vulnerable communities.

Ms Zagari: I do not know; sorry.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take it on notice.

Ms Zagari: I understand that it would build on the existing preventative dentistry that is available through some of the services.

MS CLAY: Great. I will restate what would be useful. The information that would be really useful is to know, for both preventative dental and treatment dental, what the funding was in the last couple of years—whatever your periods are—what it is now, from ACT and Commonwealth funding combined, what you are projecting that it might be, under the new agreements, and how many people that might service. If there is any ready data on how many people are missing out, if you have got waitlists, that would be good to put in there too.

Ms Zagari: I will caveat that, when we are talking about the number of people, some services may be to the same person, but we will count total number of services for ease of—

MS CLAY: Whatever ready data you have will help us immensely. Just explain it and we will manage. Thank you.

Ms Zagari: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have one simple yes/no question. It is a supplementary that I was intending to ask, but I think we went too far on the accreditation. It is pretty much a simple yes/no. We have now got two units that have lost training accreditation. Am I correct in saying that any trainee doctor who wishes to specialise in those units would therefore not be able to undertake their training at Canberra Hospital? That is my simple question.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Which two units are you talking about?

MS CASTLEY: FMU and obstetrics and gynaecology.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The Fetal Medicine Unit, again, did not lose training accreditation. It was mutually agreed that it be suspended. Yes, it is the case that currently we cannot take trainees in maternal foetal medicine at Canberra Hospital.

THE CHAIR: Okay. That is my simple yes/no. So it is correct that any trainee doctor who wanted to specialise in that unit would therefore not be able to undertake their training at Canberra Hospital?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is true. It is also true at a number of other hospitals around the country; they cannot undertake training in maternal foetal medicine.

THE CHAIR: All right. I want to thank the minister and officials for being here. We so look forward to your return in 15 minutes.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We cannot wait.

Hearing suspended from 10.30 to 10.45 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the thousands that are watching the public hearings

of estimates. In this session we will continue speaking with Minister Stephen-Smith, as Minister for Health, and officials.

MR PETTERSSON: This budget includes funding to invest in services to reduce the harm of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Can you please provide an update on how this budget funding will support community partners to deliver on this investment?

Ms Murray: Thank you so much for the question. I want to focus on a couple of major things. There is quite a significant increase in funding in the 2023-24 budget. It has included more than \$13 million worth of support across the sector, and that has included building on significant investments over previous years.

It includes existing alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment and support sector enhancement, with \$6.4 million over the four years to support the delivery of residential rehab facilities, more targeted treatments for methamphetamine addiction, and new support services for family and carers of people who use drugs.

In the first half of 2023, Family Drug Support received a grant of \$242,000 for a 12-month pilot, as the only alcohol, tobacco and other drug service in the ACT that was designed and tailored to support family, friends and carers of people using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The Salvation Army received an extension of \$275,000 to an existing grant to increase their capacity to continue to deliver residential rehabilitation in the ACT moving forward into 2024. The total funding for that grant over the period, including the contribution by the Capital Health Network, is \$715,000.

To provide additional capacity in the sector to address drug issues with a specific focus on methamphetamine, an additional \$96,000 was allocated to Canberra Health Services' alcohol and other drug services to recruit a counsellor ahead of the implementation of the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Bill. There is also ongoing funding against the methamphetamine treatment and other measures to be included in the commissioning work that we are undertaking.

In addition to that, there has been a significant commitment in relation to establishing the ACT's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation service. Just shy of \$2 million was provided in the budget over two years to Winnunga for building design, project management, alcohol and other drug capacity and building, and training for staff. Of the 2022-23 funding, \$745,000 has been provided to Winnunga for the building design and project management, and we have moved the extra \$725,000 over into the final years. Once we have built the building, we can focus on the model of care, the training based on that model of care, and building a strong service, which is something that the community is really excited about, as are our service providers.

We have also seen additional funding for the ACT Drug and Alcohol sentencing list, DASL. That is one that Justice and Community Safety has been leading and can talk more about. The 2023-24 budget has provided additional funding for that particular sentencing list over the next four years.

We are in the process of commissioning. We are working with our partners in relation

to the service system design and any gaps, and the analysis that we are undertaking to ensure that we have a full and responsive service system moving forward. In addition to that, we have focused on infrastructure improvements, which have been co-funded with the commonwealth under the Community Health and Hospitals Program. Work has been completed at Karralika in Fadden, significant work is underway in Isabella Plains, and more is planned for Toora and Directions Health.

There is additional work being undertaken in the Watson precinct, and specifically looking at the construction of a new facility for Ted Noffs—AOD treatment offering residential rehabilitation and withdrawal, particularly focused on 13 to 17-year-olds. It includes construction of a new facility for CatholicCare's youth mental health services. The concept of combining those will support best practice clinical and therapeutic outcomes for young people and create a fit-for-purpose environment for that body of work. I am happy to provide additional detail, but I hope that is pretty fulsome.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. There is a lot there, which I appreciate. Stepping through a few of them, in terms of the decriminalisation of certain common illicit substances, it was raised yesterday with police what they were doing to prepare for decriminalisation. In respect of health, what work is underway to prepare for that decriminalisation?

Ms Murray: Thanks very much for the question. There has been a lot of collaboration between the sector, policing and the justice system, all around that central premise of the harm minimisation approach in this particular space. We are working collaboratively to make sure that everyone's part of the pie is aligned and will work with the implementation. That is probably the strongest piece of work that we are doing at the moment. However, we are also doing a lot in relation to preparing the community and the sector, and designing a package to help people understand the reasons for the changes and what the changes are.

I suppose there is a bit of a conundrum at the moment in relation to how clear we are being that this is all around harm minimisation and a health approach to drug usage, and how we can actually provide those important services and a pathway through to the services. Communication is obviously really critical in that. We know that government communications are trusted communications, by and large, but there is a real need to ensure that people are getting the information from their trusted sources. Working with those community sector partners who have those really deep, personal and trusted connections with individuals who will be likely to come into contact with this system is really important. We are designing with them, based on their advice, appropriate approaches, which include direct information postcards and broader information campaigns.

We also did some work with a focus group of people with lived experience, to inform the appropriate communication methods. We certainly want to maintain health as the central premise in terms of the change. We are quite excited about the allocation and the step forward in terms of the educational funding for the counsellor role in relation to Canberra Health Services. Again, we are meeting often. We are having deep, robust conversations around what is the best way, but it is all done with that health focus and reducing harm across the community.

MR PETTERSSON: In regard to drug checking, for several years we had trials at music festivals. Now we have a pilot at a fixed site, and there is funding in this budget to extend that pilot. When does the conversation turn to a permanent, ongoing service?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Earlier this week we released the evaluation report for the first six months of the pilot for the fixed site service, which has found some really positive outcomes, and we will continue to work with the providers. We have already started implementing some of the findings from the first six months of the pilot program, and we have some additional lived experience and operational feedback subsequently, as we extended the pilot through to August this year. In the budget, as you said, Mr Pettersson, we have \$1.2 million to extend through to December next year. That will enable us to work through the findings of the evaluation, the further operational experience, and look at other options around how we better embed the service into the broader alcohol and drug service system.

Some of the feedback in the evaluation related to the appropriateness of the physical facility. That site was chosen because it is central and it was available, but it is quite small, and there has been some feedback around the appropriateness of the testing rooms for that work, and the waiting spaces as well.

There was some feedback around the proportion of people who inject drugs using that facility not being as high as the CanTEST folk would want to see. Again, there is some thinking about stigma and concerns around engaging with a health service and what that might mean in terms of police engagement. Obviously, as we see the coming together of the decriminalisation work with the ongoing drug checking service over the next year or so, we will learn more about how we can engage people who have previously been quite stigmatised and concerned about criminalisation of their drug use.

We are also going through a commissioning process with the alcohol and other drug sector, and we can think through that commissioning process of how we would embed this type of service and support into the broader alcohol and drug system to create probably a more cost-effective approach, where people are coming to one place for multiple different services. Obviously, we are already providing brief health interventions alongside the drug checking service, but it is about whether that can be done in a more holistic way, as part of an ongoing service.

MR PETTERSSON: In regard to the Watson health precinct, can we get some more detail on time lines and the services that are expected to be delivered?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. Ms Lopa is probably the person to speak about that. I understand we are pretty close to a development application going in for all three of the facilities; that is, the rebuild of Tedd Noffs, CatholicCare's facilities and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential rehabilitation facility. The whole project is fully funded through this budget.

Ms Lopa: Yes, you are right, Minister; the DA for the three services—the Winnunga residential rehabilitation, the Ted Noffs and the CatholicCare—is imminent. That should be going in in the next few weeks, so that is a really great step forward. We

will then be moving through to head contractor stage, which is building of the buildings. That work is all on track and going really well. At the moment we are thinking that there will be construction completion in mid-2025. Usually, though, I like to put a caveat on that. It is when we go out to tender and get the tenders back in, and the contractors tell us how long and what their program looks like, that we get a much better idea of delivery, but at the moment we are thinking mid-2025 for that.

MS CLAY: The CanTEST pilot service is fantastic. Can you update me on what is happening with pill testing at events?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The challenge with pill testing at events has been the availability of insurance, and that is really a matter for the providers of both the pill testing service and the festival itself. It is not possible for the ACT insurance agency, ACTIA, to cover that service that is provided with no contract to the ACT government. We have explored opportunities to support Pill Testing Australia, but that would be a very difficult thing to do.

More broadly, it is frustrating that they are not able to access insurance given that it is a well-known service in other jurisdictions—in Europe, in particular. It does not appear to be, from our perspective, a particularly appropriate risk-based decision on the part of the insurers. We will continue to work through that. What we have done to address the challenges that they face in accessing insurance and being able to offer festival-based pill testing is to support CanTEST to open for extended hours around the times that festivals are taking place.

MS CASTLEY: I noticed CHS recently distributed a new signature block featuring the *Monga Waratah* by Natalie Bateman. Is this artwork, which is beautiful, the new logo for Canberra Health Services?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, it is not the new logo. It is an artwork that was commissioned, in partnership with the Canberra Health Services Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consumer Reference Group, some time ago. A big image of that artwork hangs in the front reception area of Canberra Hospital. As you say, Ms Castley, it is now being used in a range of ways to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers to feel more culturally safe in accessing services. I noticed earlier that Dr Howard has a badge that has been created in partnership with Natalie Bateman; but, no, it is not the actual logo.

MS CASTLEY: Do we know when we will get the new logo? When will the brand refresh be announced?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I received a brief relatively recently around the brand architecture, which I have sent back to have a further conversation with Canberra Health Services around the architecture—not the logo, but actually how we think about describing the different services that CHS offers. In terms of the time line, I will hand over to Mr Pepper.

Mr Pepper: Thank you for the question. We had been working to a particular time line, but with the recent addition of the North Canberra Hospital, it is important that we involve the whole workforce in the process.

We do have some initial concepts that the team has pulled together around logos that could be used for the organisation. Obviously, we will need to go through a bit of a consultation process to settle that. We want to make sure that, with the merger of the two health services, that is an inclusive process and it is an owned participatory process between the two organisations. It is something I would expect that we would have settled in the next couple of months.

MS CASTLEY: When you kicked this contract off with Studio Binocular, that was before you were taking over Calvary, and now we have. Did you kick off this rebrand before you took over Calvary because you knew you were going to forcibly acquire?

Mr Peffer: No.

Ms Stephen-Smith: No.

THE CHAIR: I would like to ask some questions, Minister, about CHS and data on theatre utilisation. I note that, as far back as 2011, the Auditor-General recommended that—and I quote:

ACT Health should, in consultation with the doctors, implement strategies as outlined in its Policy to avoid elective surgery patients waiting longer than their clinical urgency timeframes. This includes the options of transferring patients to other doctors with a shorter waiting list, transferring patients to another hospital and increasing theatre utilisation.

In answer to a question on notice from Ms Castley, asking for you, Minister, to provide your theatre utilisation figures, you said that this information is not in an easily retrievable format. My question is: do you keep this data and is it easily retrievable for clinicians, executives and CHS committees, to make sure that the CHS is maximising its efficiency for theatre utilisation?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Could you tell me what the exact question Ms Castley asked was, so that I can get an idea of—

THE CHAIR: Let me tell you exactly what that question was.

MS CASTLEY: We were asking about theatre utilisation and what those stats are.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Okay.

MS CASTLEY: We were told it was not easily retrievable.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Given that general response, I will ask Dr Howard to provide a further response. The short answer is that, operationally, Canberra Hospital understands what its theatre utilisation is. Calvary Public Hospital would have understood what its theatre utilisation was. Obviously, the fire at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce has had a significant impact on the capacity to deliver elective surgery. Whether the data, exactly as Ms Castley asked for it, was available is a separate question.

THE CHAIR: Minister, the question from Ms Castley was quite broad. You have just indicated that that information would have been readily available to two hospitals and certainly to CHS. Why was it not in an easily retrievable format?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There is a difference between operationally understanding how theatres are utilised and being able to provide that as a data response. I will ask Dr Howard to talk about theatre utilisation more broadly.

Dr Howard: Theatre utilisation is an interesting beast. I will get into the weeds for a moment, as I walk through it. There are simple things to understand like late starts and early finishes. If you decide or you plan to run a theatre from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon, how often do we start at eight and how often do we finish early? That is one measure. It is not strictly utilisation, but it is an important measure.

With respect to theatre utilisation itself, there is a fair amount of nuance to explain what I mean. If I am doing one long case in a day and it takes 12 hours, the theatre utilisation for the planned session is 100 per cent—one case. If I am trying to do 15 grommets in children and the turnover is 50 per cent preparation and 50 per cent operating, the theatre utilisation is significantly lower, as a number.

There is a fair amount of context to understand when it comes to utilisation. There are tactical approaches to this. There would have been more arguments about what utilisation means and how it should be interpreted amongst anaesthetists and surgeons over the last two decades than almost any other subject known to man.

What is important to us, moving forward—again this has been fairly contentious for quite some period of time—is to grow our theatre schedule so that we are using our fixed assets for more than eight hours a day, five days a week. It is about growing the amount of time we have available for acute and emergency surgery whilst protecting the amount of time we have available for elective surgery, which is booked. If we have said to a patient, “You come in on Thursday; we’ll do this for you,” we do not want to cancel.

Specifically, that means growing into evenings. Many tertiary centres nationally and globally have gone to evening shifts, and we have done some lately. More particularly, it relates to how much operating and how many theatres we run on a weekend. If you come in on a Monday morning and you have only done the absolute emergencies over the weekend, you run into this interference between acute and elective.

In the bigger discussion of what utilisation means, it covers all of those things—late starts, early finishes, time on the table and how many sessions we run using our fixed assets.

MS CASTLEY: The question we are referring to is 11-51, and we were asking about the detailed explanation. The Auditor-General in 2011 made this recommendation about understanding the utilisation. Recently, there was this Operation Reboot which said:

Consideration was given to hiring external space however, it was not deemed cost effective ... The lack of central view of clinic room availability, its

utilisation, and untrustworthiness of lending out clinic rooms managed by services negatively affected Outpatient Reboot.

It seems that there is this problem from the 2020-21 financial year. What is it about these recommendations from the Auditor-General almost 10 years ago and then recently that make it difficult to answer or produce responses to?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Again, Ms Castley, you are conflating two things. My understanding from Mr Parton's question is that the 2011 Auditor-General's report—and from what you have said as well—related to elective surgery and theatre utilisation. The Auditor-General's report on Operation Reboot was specifically related to the outpatients element of Operation Reboot.

If you looked at the elective surgery delivery for that year, where we were seeking to catch up on missed elective surgeries as a result of COVID in 2019-20 and doing more in 2020-21, you will see that we delivered more than 15,300 elective surgeries in that year, which was massively more than the next highest delivery year, which I think was 14,017.

You could argue, certainly in that year, from an elective surgery perspective, that we were both utilising theatres well and running more elective surgeries through our public theatres. We were also, going to the earlier quote that Mr Parton used, working very closely with private providers to ensure that we were running more public elective surgeries through the private program, and that work has continued. Obviously, there were additional disruptions in the years since, around COVID slowdowns, some planned slowdown in delivery of elective surgery in order to go live with the Digital Health Record and ensuring that everyone was trained in that, and then as a result of the theatre fire at Calvary Public Hospital Bruce.

The two things that you are talking about are completely different types of work, in terms of elective surgery and outpatients.

MS CASTLEY: It says that there is no central view of theatre utilisation. The committee believed that there was not enough of a central view, and that was impacting both outpatients and elective surgeries.

Mr Peffer: No. I think that comment, Ms Castley, relates to clinic space, which, for CHS, is scattered not just across the hospital campuses—multiple hospitals—but out in community-based facilities as well. We do not have a central register that at all times captures which ones are being utilised.

MS CASTLEY: This retrievable format is similar to theatre cancellations. Back in 2011, the Auditor-General found that 40 per cent of cancellations were avoidable. How do you monitor that now and what are the current stats around avoidable and unavoidable cancellations?

Mr Peffer: I might start; then I will hand over to Dr Howard on the specifics. I was not in this sector in 2011, but it is safe to say that the rate at which we are sweating these assets—the theatre complex—today would far exceed what we were doing in 2011, in terms of total throughput and volume being achieved on both the emergency

and elective front.

We run a hospital-wide huddle every morning at CHS, where we talk through all of our specialties, and we talk about constraints on any of the services. It might be workforce impacts or patient flow issues. It would be rare, these days, to have a report that we did not have the entire theatre complex running first thing in the morning, and for the day. It is rare, and that is usually because of unplanned absences where we have had the surgeon or anaesthetist with COVID more recently, or with some sort of issue that would mean a theatre is not running on the day. That is exceedingly rare. I will hand over to Dr Howard on that.

Dr Howard: In the field of operations management, which is trying to get everyone in a place on a certain date to make sure that the patient gets what they need reliably, it is an iterative process. We continue to try and improve on what we are doing. It is clear to most of us that we have two competing services—on one hand elective or planned services and, on the other hand, emergency and acute, and they intersect. We are going through a process constantly of trying to isolate what those services are, what they do and how they interfere with each other, because that is really where the tension is between using the facilities we have and sweating them, as Mr Peffer has said, while also trying to plan sufficiently on any given day for acute and emergency patients, so that we do not interfere with the elective schedule that we have set up.

As you suggested, the marker of a good service is when we agree with someone that we will provide a service on that day, and we follow through with that. That is an iterative process for us. We will continue to develop those systems and mechanisms to get to the point where we think we are at a stage that looks like “good,” and there is some improvement to be made there.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I will add two things that are relevant. The first is in relation to elective surgery and theatre utilisation. As we move into the new critical services building, with more theatres available, we will look at how we can reduce the downtime for cleaning by utilising additional theatres so that there is less downtime for the surgical teams waiting for theatres to be cleaned etcetera, because we will have more theatres physically available.

In relation to outpatients, one of the benefits of the Digital Health Record, MyDHR and having the patient administration system as part of the Digital Health Record, will be that, where we get short-notice cancellations, people who are on the waiting list for that type of outpatient clinic will be able to be alerted that there is a short-notice cancellation and, “Do you want to come in and take up that appointment?” It was not possible to do that under the previous system, so that is another benefit that the Digital Health Record will deliver over time.

THE CHAIR: Minister, time flies when you are having so much fun, and we are done. Thank you, Minister, and thank you very much, officials. If you have taken questions on notice, please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days of receiving the uncorrected proof transcript.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Vassarotti, Ms Rebecca, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Rutledge, Mr Geoffrey, Deputy Director-General, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction

Burkevics, Mr Bren, Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Water. and Conservator of Flora and Fauna

Cooney, Dr Rosie, Senior Director, Office of Nature Conservation

Glennon, Mr Chris, Senior Director, Resilient Landscapes

Larson, Ms Eliza, Conservator Liaison, Environment, Heritage and Water

Magee, Ms Alexandra, Executive Branch Manager, Communications, Engagement and Media

THE CHAIR: In this session we will hear from Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for the Environment, and officials.

I would say to members and officials that the hearings are quite short, so do not feel the need to go into reams of detail; just try and home in on the basis of the question and answer it, so that we can get through as many as we possibly can. If you are taking a question on notice, make that clear by saying, “I will take that as a question on notice”.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Could you all confirm together, at the same time, for the record, that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it? Thank you for that.

Minister, you have provided the committee with a written opening statement for the record. I thank you; that is on the record.

We will now proceed with questions. Minister, are you able to provide an update on the Kangaroo Management Program for this calendar year?

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you very much for the question. I am very happy to provide an update. The 2023 Kangaroo Management Program is approaching conclusion. My understanding is that the outcomes of the program are currently being assessed by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, so I will defer to him very shortly. We will be making a public statement very shortly, which will include the arrangements for reopening the closed reserves.

There were six reserves, including Mount Ainslie, Mount Majura, Mulanggari Grasslands, Red Hill and the Pinnacle. They remain closed on specific days and at specific times of the week. There is also the Kama section of the Molonglo River Reserve to be closed to support operations. I will defer to the conservator, Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: Thank you for your question. As you know, the Kangaroo Management Program is really important for sustaining the health of our grassy woodlands and box gum woodlands. I am pleased with the performance of the teams over the last several weeks, and I thank the Canberra public for their patience whilst those reserves were closed, while this really important conservation operation was completed.

I am expecting to make a public announcement in terms of the program soon. We are finalising the data from the program that has occurred over the last few weeks. I had the pleasure of joining the operational staff that conduct that operation last week. I was able to see it through my own eyes and I was very impressed with the conduct of those teams in terms of public safety and animal welfare. I credit those teams that have huge amounts of experience over multiple years.

It is important to note that whilst the culling aspects of that program are complete, the program continues, through our monitoring of the health of our grasslands as well as the GonaCon program, which my colleagues and I hope will, over time, lower the amount of culling that we have to do. I respect the advocacy of certain groups and the public, in that this is a confronting topic. I have engaged with a number of groups over the last few weeks to identify opportunities to enhance our sharing of information and work together on collective goals. Overall, I am very satisfied with the outcomes, as I understand them, for the program. I particularly note that, from the data that I have received so far, the operational targets that were set have been achieved, which gives me very strong reassurance that our methodologies for assessing the health of our grasslands and counting kangaroos are indeed accurate.

THE CHAIR: Minister, my understanding is that when a joey's mother is killed during the cull, the current practice has this baby kangaroo either clubbed to death or decapitated. Why is that the government's approach to dealing with joeys?

Ms Vassarotti: In relation to the Kangaroo Management Program, the operational elements occur in line with the non-commercial code of practice. This is a code of practice that has the support of the RSPCA in terms of the most humane ways of managing kangaroos and any pouch joeys.

A key element of our program, which is unique across Australia, is that we look particularly at when we do this operation, in terms of ensuring that particularly joeys at foot have much less opportunity of being orphaned. I will look to the conservator to answer about the operational arrangements, but our operations are absolutely in line with the code of practice and are meeting the highest standard.

THE CHAIR: You are comfortable, as minister, with that?

Ms Vassarotti: The Kangaroo Management Program is actually a confronting program. We would prefer not to have to do active kangaroo management. The situation is that we need to manage some of the last sensitive ecological areas in Australia in terms of grassy woodlands. We need to take a whole-of-ecology perspective. It is a difficult process. We would like to move to a process where we did not have to cull kangaroos and undertake these activities. That is why we have been pursuing activities such as the GonaCon fertility program, but—

THE CHAIR: Mr Burkevics may be able to answer what will be my final supp on this: the last independent audit of the Kangaroo Management Program, which took place six years ago, found that 98 per cent of female kangaroos inspected after being shot carried pouched joeys. That is a total of almost 200 joeys. Again I am seeking advice on what the government's approach is to avoid the shooting of joey-carrying mothers and whether they are actually realised in the field.

Ms Vassarotti: I will look to Mr Burkevics to answer that. I note that an independent audit has occurred as part of this program, so we will be able to get updated information in relation to that.

THE CHAIR: When will we see that, Minister?

Ms Vassarotti: I will defer to Mr Burkevics in relation to that. In terms of how we approach this program, we are constantly looking at how we can operationalise it in a way that is the most humane. That is why it has been important that we have worked with organisations such as RSPCA, who actually identified the need for this activity to occur. If there are ways that we can increase the animal welfare elements, we will do that. As far as we understand it, our program is meeting the very highest standards. I understand that, particularly when we see footage of things that happen in other jurisdictions, it can be really confronting and people can conflate that that is what is happening here in the ACT; it is not. I will defer to Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks very much, Minister. I can certainly reassure the committee and re-emphasise and reaffirm the minister's advice that the cull of kangaroos is indeed carried out with the highest standards, with the objective of exceeding the national code for the humane killing of kangaroos. It is a confronting and challenging role that our conservation officers perform. All of those conservation officers are under the direct supervision of government officials that work for the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and the broader division, and I again commend those staff for carrying out this difficult topic.

It is important to note that the Kangaroo Management Program that involves culling is done at a certain time of year to minimise the likelihood of pouch-carried young. However, the arrangements and procedures that are well described in the code are carried out to the letter. I hope, as part of other announcements about the cull, that we will make available as soon as practicable the outcomes of the independent veterinary audit that was carried out this year.

THE CHAIR: You have used the words "challenging" and "confronting", Minister. As the minister, ultimately the buck stops with you. Does it give you grief personally?

Ms Vassarotti: I find it a really difficult situation. I would really prefer us to be in a situation where we did not have to undertake these operations. Kangaroos are not the enemy. We actually need kangaroos in our conservation areas. They play a really important role. We love them. The operations are really focused on ensuring the management of this species. Actually, what we are trying to do is ensure that we do not see other species become extinct.

These are really difficult situations that are as a result of decisions that we have made as humans and the impact of climate change. These are some of the difficult decisions that need to be made when we are taking a whole-of-ecology perspective.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

MS CLAY: Minister, the budget has got \$2.1 million in it for environment, sustainable development and climate change combined. Can you tell me how much funding there is for environment as distinct from climate change and sustainable development?

Ms Vassarotti: Sure. Thank you very much for the question. In relation to the budget we have secured \$5.2 million which is going to be looking at a range of issues. We are looking at specific conservation activities. I will look to officials to go into a little bit of detail into some of the conservation activities, particularly looking at the issues of our fishery conservation and other forms of conservation, particularly in the Namadgi National Park.

There is funding for invasive species management, particularly, again, in relation to our Namadgi National Park in terms of bird of prey pest species as well as managing species such as rabbits, which everyone would be aware is quite an issue within our nature parks at the moment, and really looking at biosecurity issue.

There is also funding to support the review of the Nature Conservation Strategy. That is a 10-year strategy that is due to come to an end in 2023. We will be looking at reviewing that strategy, and there is some really exciting work that I might look to Mr Burkevics and maybe Dr Cooney to talk a little bit more about.

Finally, we are also ensuring that we are able to engage in the national discussion around the review of environmental laws. There is an ambitious plan in relation to review of the national environmental laws. This is much needed. We know that our national environmental laws are failing us. So we are looking at how we can ensure that we engage in a really proactive way.

I think there is also some work around support for threatened species and support for Mulligans Flat, which sits with my ministerial colleague Mr Gentleman.

Mr Burkevics: I will make a few opening remarks and I am happy to seek other comments from my colleagues. All things considered, and noting the pressures on the government, as Conservator, see that I am very comfortable with the budget and the opportunities that it provides for a strategic look at conservation and other environmental priorities as well as a tangible on-ground effect to make a difference—so a really pleasing result.

There are a couple of things draw out. In the “busyness” of the work that we do, it is really important from time to time that we stop, review and think about the investment that we are making in different things and its effectiveness. Noting the outcomes of Australia’s *State of the Environment Report 2021*, there is an absolute signal in there that everyone needs to be doing more to protect the environment.

This budget, as the minister has described, provides \$400,000 for a strategic review of the ACTs conservation arrangements. That is aligning really well with some work that we have done within the directorate to provide a honed and sharpened approach on outcomes based conservation, the establishment of the Office of Nature Conservation, led by Dr Cooney, and the strategic review of conservation arrangements. I might invite some comments from Dr Cooney on the specific goals of that.

MS CLAY: I might not go through that level of detail. I might instead focus the question a little bit. To me, \$5 million out of \$7 billion does not sound like a huge amount for environmental protection. I am pleased to hear you say that you are comfortable with the budget, but that does sound like a small amount of funding.

We are facing increasing challenges from climate change. We have got La Niña and we have got increasing issues with invasive species. Are you getting enough money to manage these problems? I am concerned that we are not managing our weeds and invasive species well enough to deal with the impact of climate change.

Ms Vassarotti: It is fair to say that the challenges in the environment space are really large. You point to the fact that we have had three years of La Niña. The impact on our environment in relation to invasive species and weeds is a really good example of that.

I have been working consistently over the last three budgets to ensure that we do have additional funds to support invasive species and weed management. It is certainly something that we continue to be working on. I think there is absolutely a significant challenge for government.

As you note, the impacts of climate change mean that we will be seeing increased challenges. Biosecurity is a really good example of that. I have been working in my role as agricultural minister with the federal minister in relation to the issue of biosecurity and the need for us to do a lot more work in this area.

This will be an ongoing focus of government. It is something that we do need to prioritise. I think it is really positive that we have seen injections of funding in this area, but it is certainly something that we will continue to need to work on from a government perspective.

MS CLAY: How much do we have in total in terms of funding and entities for on-ground invasive species management and threatened species conservation?

Ms Vassarotti: I might look to Mr Burkevics to answer that.

Mr Burkevics: It is very challenging to get specific detail on that information. I certainly note the multitude and diverse roles that all staff that work in the environment play. It is very hard to provide a specific advice.

I can certainly that this budget has seen a boost to existing biosecurity invasive programs over two years with further funding to continue the thermally-assisted aerial shooting program; a boost to the program to tackle invasive weeds—with two FTE funded there; and additional funding to tackle rabbits, which we have seen an increase

of over the last couple of years.

So there has certainly been a boost in and a continuation of the many successful programs that we recently concluded, including the thermally-assisted aerial control program in Namadgi conducted over the last couple of months. Just over 500 pest animals were removed, and I am advised that one animal was detected every seven minutes.

MS CLAY: Do you think we have enough funding at the moment to manage the extinction threats we are facing?

Mr Burkevics: I think the most important thing is that we stop and reflect on the current resources that we have got and how effectively they are being used and what the risk environment is that we face.

I would certainly say that this budget provides funding for us to take a strategic look at what investment government is making at the moment and how that is being delivered and where that is being prioritised at the moment. Dr Cooney's team is working on a number of different projects and models that will help guide some, I think, enhanced focus on where the efforts of government and the resources of EPSDD need to be on protecting the environment.

Certainly in my first year as Conservator, I have asked the team some very direct and specific questions around what our greatest threats are and how we prioritise a list of 60 threatened species and where that effort needs to go. There is some great work happening to better guide and inform that as well as a strategic review of conservation measures, which will further sharpen and hone the on-ground efforts and our policies.

Ms Vassarotti: It is really important work. In the past we have looked at, for instance, threatened species action plan by action plan. We are doing work to see whether there is a more strategic way to look at this at a landscape level. For example, good habitat is often supporting a range of certain species. So we are really trying to identify how we can work in a way that really supports a range of threatened species.

The other big challenge—and, again, it will continue to increase as we see the impacts of climate change—is ensuring that we do keep our common species common. We know that, once it gets to the point of threatened and endangered, it becomes much more resource intensive to do everything that we can to ensure that these species do not become extinct.

So we really need to be doing that double investment in terms of making sure that we are not seeing species that are endemic and much loved within our bush capital become at real risk. We do have 60 species that are on the threatened list. Unfortunately, I did need to uplift another nine earlier this year. We want to get into a situation where we are not seeing this, but we know that there will be increased pressure with changes to climate.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

DR PATERSON: Minister, I would like to follow on from estimates last year where

we were discussing the wild dog issue. I am still very concerned about the fact that we call them wild dogs when in the ACT they are genetically mostly dingoes.

When you go to the National Wild Dog Action Plan you would be forgiven for thinking the ACT does not exist on that website. When it lists the regulatory authority for each state it does not list the ACT. Also, when you click on the action plan for the ACT it goes to a non-found page—like “cannot find the page”. So I have looked at that wild dog action plan and then I have gone to the ACT’s Pest Management Strategy, which I think is the appropriate document.

What is our engagement with the national plan? Who is responsible within the directorate for attending meetings as the ACT rep? How are we meeting the national plan objectives—because we are not providing them with a national plan? What is our reporting back to them in terms of the data or in terms of the baiting of dingoes here? That kind of information would be great.

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks, Dr Paterson, for the question. I think there are probably two parts to that question. The issue that you spoke about at the very beginning of the question around the wild dog-dingo distinction, is something that we talked about at the last estimates and which was followed up with a briefing a little while ago.

It might be quite useful to get some information from Dr Cooney and her team on some of the research work that is happening, particularly in the conservation areas of Namadgi, where they are not dealt with as a pest species, and to provide you with a bit of an update in terms of what has happened in relation to that work.

Mr Glennon can provide you with some details in terms of our engagement with the national action plan. There is potentially a little bit of work to be done to make sure that we have got the links working et cetera. So we can follow that up as a follow-on action.

We might start with Mr Glennon and then maybe go to Dr Clooney in terms of some of the work that is being done, to further engage with some of those questions that you put at the beginning.

Mr Glennon: Thank you very much. I suppose I will take a bit of a lead. We did give a presentation to the Assembly or your committee, Dr Paterson, earlier on. I will not repeat that but, if you do want to question me on that, that would be appreciated.

Our plan is aligned with the national plan, and that is where the terminology “wild dog” comes from. We pick up on that definition in there. In a lot of ways, for us, our management strategies are, if you like, blind to the genetics. We have two objectives—and, again, those objectives are consistent with the national plan: maintaining a conservation area which maintains the population of wild dogs/dingoes as first order predators; and trying to mitigate the impact of those animals on neighbouring rural leaseholders by having a controlled area and we stay within that controlled area.

We believe that our program is reasonably conservative. For instance, we do dog baiting, but I am not quite sure that the public would be aware that we only do it for

two five-week periods a year. So it is not something that happens over the 52 weeks of the year; it is over a limited period for those conservation purposes and things like that.

Ms Vassarotti: How many dogs are baited in that?

Mr Glennon: It is very difficult to say how many are baited. All we can do is count the baits that we put out and count the ones that go missing and then make some assessment out of that. But, having said that, they could go missing through other processes, if you know what I am trying to say.

I can tell you that we trap about 30 or 35 a year and the numbers are very consistent. We do not often get high spikes or low spikes. That leads us to believe that the program has a sense of sustainability in terms of the populations.

You asked a number of questions about connection with the national processes, and I thank you for that. Our staff are in constant contact with those national experts. We actually had one in the minister's office earlier on giving the minister an update. At the time, she made a lot of enquiries about the relationships between national processes and how we do things in the ACT. The national coordinator gave those assurances that we are aligned.

We are a contributor to the CRC for invasive species. Again, that is a strategy to keep up to date with emerging technologies and those processes so we can adopt those in our plan.

Probably the other thing that has changed since we did the briefing to your committee, Dr Paterson, is some of the research that Dr Cooney's team has recently set up that we are very keen to get the results of. But I might leave it to Dr Cooney to provide the detail on that.

Dr Cooney: This is a program seeking, as Mr Glennon has said, to manage both the conservation aspects here and the impacts on landholders. From a conservation perspective, we have set up a number of research projects with leading universities—with the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales—to actually understand in more detail what roles dingoes or wild dogs actually play in the food webs and in the ecology of Namadgi National Park and to understand the impact of the baiting program.

For example, one of those projects is looking both at baited and unbaited valleys and comparing both the wildlife and the presence of foxes and cats in areas with and without dingoes. That will really help us understand what the impacts of this program are and inform our approach going forward.

DR PATERSON: When is that research supposed to present its findings?

Dr Cooney: There are two PhDs. They are only in the early stages. So we are still looking at a good three to four years yet, although preliminary results will be available earlier.

DR PATERSON: Going back to the national plan, they have a map which they use as evidence to justify the national plan. It has a map of Australia and the dingo purity areas. The whole bottom south-eastern end of Australia is saying very low, like under 60 per cent purity. We are included in that space. Why is this plan based on such outdated research as 2011 and why are we not saying, “Actually, our dingoes are much purer here and probably in surrounding New South Wales”? This seems a very inaccurate map.

Dr Cooney: I will leave it to Mr Glennon to comment on the map. As you may be aware, we do have a very particularly pure population here. Over 65 per cent of our dingoes are more than 90 per cent dingoes. There is only about five per cent of animals which are actual feral dogs. There is usually a bit of a gap between scientific literature making its way into the whole policy and planning process. That is probably what is happening in this case.

DR PATERSON: What concerns me is this is the national plan and it is on very outdated research. As you said, Mr Glennon, the national strategy is blinded to the purity of the dingo. Is there advocacy from the ACT to say, “Our dingoes are actually very pure here. So perhaps they should not come under a wild dog management plan”? Perhaps there should be a separate dingo management plan that we do. Why did we sign up to this if we do not actually have wild dogs here?

Mr Glennon: I might have to take advice from some of my staff on that and take that question on notice if I could. I suppose the answer I would go back to is that the program that we set up—for better or for worse—was set up to, I suppose, mitigate some of the impacts on the wellbeing domain.

I am particularly talking about having a program that meets the environmental outcomes, and we spoke about that. But, equally, we are very upfront that a lot of the program is about mitigating stock losses on rural properties.

To give you an idea of the numbers, earlier on, around 2002 to 2008, stock losses were in excess of 200 per year. That was in the period when we were getting established with our program. It was going, but I suppose we were still learning how to do it. Those stock losses now average around the 30 mark. That was the outcome that we were after.

Even though it was not a direct objective of our plans, it has played a role. You would have seen in the paper that there has been an interface with wild dogs/dingoes and the human population. That has been in the press lately. We do not get that in the ACT. We have had, in the past, incursions of wild dogs/dingoes into the peri-urban and also into the reserves that are on the fringes of the city, but that is not happening at the moment under the current programs.

So they were the objectives. I should leave that last one out, because that is more of an added benefit than a specific objective of our management plans. So, from that perspective, we think they are working. But I would have to take advice on your question about the data and the relationship with that data in the national action plan.

DR PATERSON: Just a final—

THE CHAIR: Dr Paterson, I am mindful of the time and I want Mr Braddock to get a question before we close.

DR PATERSON: I will not ask a question; I will just put it on notice. Can the committee have data on the number of baits that are put out and the location of the baits in the ACT?

Mr Glennon: Yes, I can provide that.

DR PATERSON: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: On Tuesday, City Services were talking about how they prioritise the planting of trees in city spaces. Whilst I am not disputing the benefits of trees, I do not want to lose sight of the value of shrubs and groundcover. I am interested in knowing what EPSDD is doing about ensuring that we see shrubs and groundcover planted in our urban footprint.

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks very much for the question. I think it is a really good one. I think you are right in that we have really focused on canopy and trees. They are incredibly important, but we also know the importance of the understory—shrubs and bushes particularly—on some of our smaller wildlife, including woodland birds and other creatures that we share the ACT with.

Again, I might get Mr Burkevics to give a little more detail. But there are a few substantive things that we are doing in this area. The Connecting Nature Connecting People initiative, which was actually an initiative that was funded in last year's budget, is really focused on the restoration of about 20 sites across the urban environment.

This is really about how we connect up our important remnant pieces of vegetation, but we are also looking at areas that might need restoration as well. There will be a real focus on those smaller shrubs and bushes as well as tree and canopy in relation to that.

It is probably also useful to note the ACT environment grants, which are around \$500,000 a year. Again, we increased the funding to those grants a couple of years ago through a budget initiative, which really worked with community in terms of supporting environmental restoration. A lot of those programs are working with ParkCare and Landcare groups that are looking at restoration, which has a significant focus on restoration in relation to understory and not just canopy.

But I will go to Mr Burkevics to talk a little bit more in relation to how EPSDD works, and particularly with TCCS, in terms of supporting that ongoing work and really looking at habitat in a very broad sense with trees rather than just canopy.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, Mr Braddock. The primary focus of the work of myself and my colleagues is our high-value conservation areas—our parks and reserves. I think we are seeing a real focus now, though, on the connectivity between those high-value areas and a real push to ensure that we do what we can with any available open space to ensure that it is high quality and encourages that connectivity and value in small

spaces, as we see the community do.

The minister described a number of measures that we are really focused on. There are a few others that I could mention. There is some work through the grants program, where we are seeing local communities empowered to do some rehabilitation work with the guidance of not only EPSDD ecologists but also officials in TCCS, to rehabilitate local parks. I recall a park in Curtin that has achieved far higher levels of biodiversity through their plantings.

We are also doing some work with TCCS and the Friends of Grassland, through their advocacy, to address the planting guides. They have raised a number of concerns that some of the recommended government plantings may no longer be appropriate in urban areas because of the risk of weeds. So we are working with our colleagues in TCCS to adjust those recommended planting guides.

It was a recommendation of the inquiry into environmental volunteering to have a TCCS official in a biodiversity conservation forum, which I co-chair with officials from the Conservation Council and Landcare. That is a great opportunity for some information exchange on planting guides.

With the project that is being progressed by TCCS, the urban tree cover plantings, we have enhanced our support to that program through providing TCCS with really good advice in terms of upper- and understory planting opportunities. I think more recently through the Connecting Nature Connecting People initiative, Dr Cooney's team has been specifically focused on plantings at an understory level. Dr Cooney.

Dr Cooney: Yes, that is right. We are working closely with TCCS at the moment to provide advice from Environment, Heritage and Water about that planting list, and specifically including a whole range of species which provide habitat for native fauna—so not just trees, which are problematic to focus on in isolation, but also shrubs and groundcover.

MR BRADDOCK: I appreciate the focus on the high-priority areas, but I am just wondering what the opportunity is with the low conservation value areas. I am talking about, for example, the median strips between roads or unutilised public spaces.

Mr Burkevics: I think the Connecting Nature Connecting People program is identifying the importance of those sorts of areas and providing food for thought for our ecologists and TCCS to think about how best we could use those public spaces at the moment for improved connectivity.

I think a now completed outcome of Connecting Nature Connecting People is the blue-green map. That has really identified some of the key connectivity areas across Canberra and areas that we should potentially zoom in on for rehabilitation or improving plantings.

So I think there is a renewed focus through the CNCP project on those sorts of areas, and how better they could be used to support good connectivity between our high-value to lower-value areas.

Ms Vassarotti: What I would reflect, though, in terms of that is that, with the 20 sites that we have identified, we think that that is potentially just the start and that there are real opportunities in this initiative. We have had a really great level of engagement with our community in terms of identifying sites. These are not just the high-value sites; this is also about identifying where the gaps are and where we need to put increased effort into restoration.

I think one of the great things about this initiative is that it is a partnership and it really connecting up people who really care about their local area and understand their local area and the importance of that and, again, how we look at that at a landscape area.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will draw this session to a close. Thank you, Minister, and officials for your attendance. I understand that we are back with the same crew after the break.

Hearing suspended from 12.01 pm to 1.00 pm.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to this public hearing for estimates 2023-24. Continuing from the previous session, we will hear from Minister Vassarotti as Minister for the Environment and other officials.

DR PATERSON: Minister, my question is in respect of myna birds. In your 2001 press release declaring the myna bird as a pest animal, you said:

They are very aggressive and intelligent, known to evict native birds such as kookaburras and parrots from their nests, dumping out their eggs and even killing their chicks.

... they are considered a threat to the long-term survival of native birds and other animals like the sugar glider ...

That is accepted by the myna groups. But, in your letter to me a couple of months ago, you said, "After careful consideration and consultation with our conservation experts, we found no evidence that common mynas displace nesting sites of endangered native species or have any effect on agricultural production in the ACT." I am wondering what the deal is.

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you very much for the question, Dr Paterson. It is actually a really good question because, in some of these areas, our research is evolving, particularly in relation to invasive species and what their impact on the environment is. I will defer to Dr Cooney to go through some of the work that has happened since the period in which we made the declaration and some of the work that has been happening by some of our researchers and ecologists.

Indian mynas are absolutely a pest species, and that is why it was important to declare them as a pest species. I would like to acknowledge the really important work the community has done in terms of their response to this pest species. Their action and activities have actually been significant in terms of some of the management. Significant research has been undertaken and we have been reflecting on that. Again, I will ask Dr Cooney to talk about that, because we really think that it is important

that our response is very much evidence based.

Based on that evidence, we do not think it is appropriate to develop a specific action plan on this species at this time. However, we are doing an invasive species management strategy which is looking at the totality of the invasive species that we are dealing with here in the ACT and we are working out a strategy about how we respond to those issues in a way that reflects the biggest impact on our native species and other issues here in the ACT. I might ask Dr Cooney to speak both about the research that has been happening and what the evidence is telling us, specifically around Indian mynas, and also some of the work that is happening and why we are taking this approach in terms of invasive species management.

Dr Cooney: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you for the question. Yes, they are indeed a problematic species, but the best evidence that we have at this point does not indicate they are a threat to any of our threatened species here in the ACT. There was a PhD carried out fairly recently on the species in the ACT which supports that conclusion—that, at the moment, they are not a high-priority species. At the moment, we are looking at prioritising action for other species—for instance, the recently listed woodland birds, where we think there is a really clear priority for action and there are some clear targeted actions we can take. I might also call on Mr Glennon, whose team takes care of the management aspects of the species.

Mr Glennon: Thanks very much, Dr Cooney. Building further on what Dr Cooney just said, the work happening in the team that I manage, Resilient Landscapes, is around the invasive species strategy that the minister referred to. In an earlier response, Mr Burkevics talked about the risk assessments that were recently funded in the recent biosecurity budget bid. Those risk assessments will look at the risk to the environment and also the pathways of those risks entering the ACT. They will be independently developed and reviewed, and the result of that risk assessment will drive our prioritisation for the development of management plans.

DR PATERSON: The community does a lot of work in euthanising these birds. Do you think that the reason they are not considered a substantial pest like the ducks are at the moment is that the work the community has been doing has been keeping on top of the numbers?

Dr Cooney: Not necessarily. The evidence as to the long-term impact of that kind of work is still really unclear.

DR PATERSON: It has come to my attention that New South Wales has a policy on euthanising myna birds. I think it is the department of agriculture, or something, and it recommends against carbon monoxide poisoning. We are encouraging community groups to continue to euthanise these birds. Is there an evidence base that we are using here to manage this?

Ms Vassarotti: That is a really important question. There are concerns around some of the current management strategies. We have noted specifically the concerns of groups such as the RSPCA, in terms of some of the management methods. That is part of what is going into the thinking about our active management strategies. Again, I might look to Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks very much, Minister, and thanks Dr Paterson. As Dr Cooney has indicated, the evidence available to us at the moment shows that we are seeing a decline of common mynas in our woodlands. There is certainly no evidence to suggest that there is any direct action required by government in terms of a specific action plan. The declaration by the minister prohibits a number of things, including the breeding and keeping of that species. At the moment, that would seem to be a proportionate response based on the assessment that we have made to date, noting that we are doing further work to undertake strategic assessments of all threats to the ACT through the work that Mr Glennon has indicated.

In our meeting with the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group—and I commend their efforts and enthusiasm to control this pest species—we recommended a number of actions to them, including that they engage with their fellow organisations, such as Canberra Birds, to better understand some of the work they could do together and look at being able to understand some of the numbers. I certainly note that the information available to us differs from the information that the action group is presenting and that they may wish to reconsider their approach to euthanising. Just to address your point, I do not think the government is encouraging action against mynas. We think there is some further work to do between that group and RSPCA to resolve potential concerns around animal welfare.

DR PATERSON: Do you feel that there needs to be education if the research is so suggestive that these birds do not actually have an impact of native species? That is a big turnaround from what the minister said two years ago. Do you think there needs to be some community education about the impact of these birds?

Mr Burkevics: Quite possibly. We have already engaged with CMAG to explain the evidence that we have available to us and encourage a number of actions. We do note that there is a petition before the Assembly at the moment on that issue and, in time, I am sure the minister will have some remarks to say. At the moment, we are certainly not seeing any need for specific community action on this issue beyond what is already occurring.

DR PATERSON: Is it possible to get references to the research that was provided?

Dr Cooney: Yes.

Ms Vassarotti: That is something that we can take on notice. We can provide you with some further information about the research base.

DR PATERSON: When will the report that Mr Glennon was talking about come to government, in terms of the identification of—

Ms Vassarotti: The invasive species strategy?

DR PATERSON: Yes.

Ms Vassarotti: I am not 100 per cent sure of the timing.

Mr Glennon: The first quarter of 2024.

DR PATERSON: Great. Thank you.

MS CLAY: I have a supplementary on that. It is good to hear that you are doing the invasive species management plans in a strategic way with all species. It sounds like you are having to make some pretty tricky choices about prioritisation. I assume that this is going to become much harder with climate change bringing more invasive species to the ACT than ever before. How are you going to manage that prioritisation? You are going to need more funding.

Ms Vassarotti: Yes. It is a really good question. It is absolutely the case that invasive species management is becoming a bigger and bigger issue. We know that, with climate change, the threats will continue to increase. This will be an issue of resourcing. We will need to invest in this activity, particularly if we are going to protect threatened species and also common species. We will need more funding. We will be working with our federal counterparts around this.

In relation to the issue of Indian mynas, they are absolutely a pest species. We know they are having some impact on the urban landscape, but, in terms of the impact particularly around threatened species, there are higher priorities for where we put our resources. It absolutely becomes an issue of prioritisation, but we know that the threats will increase. With biosecurity, in its entirety, we are seeing more threats, whether it be varroa mite or red imported fire ants. These are all big national threats that we are contributing to and they need significant additional resourcing that we will need to advocate for and allocate.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I refer to the *Draft native species conservation plan for the koala* which is, I understand, taking public submissions through YourSay regarding the possible reintroduction of koalas, which are extinct in the ACT. Minister, how much money is the government spending on a conservation plan for an animal that does not live here?

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you for the question. Certainly, at this point, there is no evidence of resident populations, but research is continuing into that area, particularly working with First Nations and traditional custodians, because it is really good habitat. Certainly since the 90s, the evidence about resident populations has been quite small. I will refer to our officials, but, in terms of the development of the plan, this is the subject of funding support that has been provided by the commonwealth government. It is in the quantum of \$230,000, but I will look to officials to give you an exact amount.

Mr Rutledge: Thanks, Mr Parton. Minister Vassarotti is correct on that. We are doing two things. Pre European colonisation, certainly koalas were here in Canberra, and the gula, or the koala, remains an important species for our traditional owners. We do not know it is extinct. I do not want to make a distinction around that, but we have not identified resident populations, but we do know that we have prime habitat for them. The commonwealth—

THE CHAIR: So it is surprising that they are not around?

Mr Rutledge: Yes; it is surprising that they are not around. As the minister said, this is commonwealth government funding and we are backing it, not with direct funding but in-kind support, including running things like the YourSay campaign and consulting with traditional owners, to try and see if they do exist and we have a resident population or, ultimately, what a reintroduction could look like. We know koala habitat on the eastern seaboard is under a number of pressures.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Is it complete commonwealth funding?

Mr Rutledge: The direct cash investment is commonwealth funding, but, for support such as running the community consultation et cetera, we are putting in EPSDD resources.

THE CHAIR: That is a sufficient answer for me, so I do not think that we will go to you, Dr Cooney. You alluded to it in your answer, Mr Rutledge, but I will probably swing back to you on this, Minister. The *Draft native species conservation plan* refers to koalas as gulas, with some sections concerning koalas excluding the word “koala” altogether. When did the government decide to start using the word “gula” instead of “koala”?

Ms Vassarotti: I will ask officials if there is any specific reason. Certainly one of the great opportunities that has happened through this project is that it has been an opportunity to work really closely with our traditional custodians. In fact, I was talking to the project officers when we launched the YourSay consultation about how we are actually a leading jurisdiction in how we are engaging with traditional custodians.

THE CHAIR: Which is great, but is there not a fear that, if you had a complete outward-facing document that only referred to koalas as gulas, it would lose a lot of people because—

Ms Vassarotti: We have not done that. We have been talking about koalas and also referring to their Ngunnawal name of “gula”. In terms of the specifics around terminology, I might look to officials who have probably—

Mr Rutledge: There are just two things. You may have said \$230,000 and I think the number is \$130,000. I will say that just in case, but it was commonwealth funding.

THE CHAIR: Good.

Mr Rutledge: Mr Parton, we have been working with our traditional owners and traditional custodians to try and work out, where appropriate and where it makes sense, to increase our First Nations knowledge, and part of that is being able to educate the community. What you will see is that we use “koala” and “gula”. Was there a time when we decided we would do that? No, there was not a specific date or a specific decision. We have just continued to try and increase our own knowledge of Ngunnawal language and, when we see it is appropriate—and, as I said, koalas, or

gula, were very important to our traditional owners and were probably hunted out in the 1800s. That is probably the history of that. We thought it was worthwhile adopting that interchangeable name. You are correct: maybe some people will see “koala” or will only read “gula”, but it is about educating ourselves and educating our community.

THE CHAIR: I know things have changed a little in this space in recent times, but you talk about consulting traditional custodians. We are speaking of the Ngunnawal people. I wonder if the Ngambri people share the same view on this.

Mr Rutledge: Mr Parton, I will not answer specific to Ngambri, but “gula” is a word that goes right up the eastern seaboard. “Gula” is often, in many nations, the word for koala. Koala is the national word and, I suppose, as non-indigenous people, we have espoused on “koala” nationally. “Gula” is certainly the Ngunnawal name. I will not speak for Ngambri because I do not know. If you go to Coffs Harbour and further north, even into parts of Queensland, “gula” would be the traditional name.

MS CLAY: Minister, we had an environmental tourism inquiry that made a number of recommendations. I just wanted to check on the funding and implementation of those recommendations. One of the recommendations was for a full-time wildlife carer. Have we got that in the budget?

Ms Vassarotti: Carer or—

MS CLAY: Sorry—vet. A full-time wildlife vet that is available to all of the wildlife carers.

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you very much for the question, Ms Clay. The government did agree in principle to recommendation 13 of that report which talked about providing the services of a wildlife vet. Certainly from the government’s perspective, while recognising that we did need to provide veterinary care to injured wildlife, regarding the approach to deliver it, we think there is probably a better way than having a government vet that would specialise in this area—providing services through the private sector. I will look to the conservator because I know that he has been working with representatives of the ACT Wildlife in particular to ensure that there is a good understanding of the approach. We think that this is a way of ensuring equity of access and a means for a range of organisations to access these services.

As we continue to develop the services and the supports that are provided to Canberra’s wildlife, things may change and there may be new opportunities that emerge. That is certainly our approach at this point, but I will look to the conservator, Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, Minister. We, Mr Glennon and I, have met with ACT Wildlife a number of times to understand their specific requirements and desires for an initial wildlife vet. The costs, particularly noting that wildlife vets or vets in general are hard to come by at the moment, are only part of the equation. Any decision by a government to treat wildlife comes with a range of facilities, diagnostic equipment and rehabilitation equipment. I have certainly formed the view with my colleagues that it is a very labour-intensive process and, as the minister has indicated,

we feel it is best managed through the private sector and through other means.

My colleague Mr Glennon recently met with ACT Wildlife, further to the discussions I had with their representatives, to gain a better understanding of their specific needs, which I understand relate to some of the pressures that the veterinary sector is facing with regard to having access in a timely way and increasing costs. It was really good to better understand that. Mr Glennon and our biosecurity vet have also explored ways that government could provide support and the assistance needs that they are seeking.

MS CLAY: I might refine the question. Is this still a scoping exercise? I am not too fussed about whether it is in-house or outsourced—I trust government to come up with the best mode—but is there actually funding dedicated to provide those services or are we not there yet?

Mr Burkevics: No. As I think the minister has indicated, the position of government is as per the government's response—that there are other ways that government view the services could be best delivered.

MS CLAY: No. Let me be clearer. I do not mind if it is insourced or outsourced. Is there already a budget allocation for an outsourced model or are we still in the scoping process and that might be in next year's budget?

Mr Burkevics: I would say we are still in discussions with ACT Wildlife about ways the government could best provide that support if, indeed, there is a responsibility for government to offer those services.

MS CLAY: Sure. I am delighted that ACT Wildlife are involved. They absolutely need access to these services. There are other organisations as well. Obviously, the RSPCA has a lot of expertise and a big role, but there is also Wombat Rescue and snake handling organisations. There are a number of organisations. The people I have spoken to have reasonably voiced a desire that prioritisation of services should go by the need, not by the organisation. Is that part of this scoping exercise?

Mr Burkevics: It is fair to say that, over the past year, we have had a real focus on engaging with our environmental community, and that work is ongoing in discerning the best ways for us to stay engaged and connected with all the environmental communities. I cannot say that there has been specific involvement with other organisations outside of ACT Wildlife on this issue, but, should those organisations feel they need specific discussions, then we more than welcome it through our existing mechanisms or new mechanisms that are needed.

Ms Vassarotti: Just to follow up on that, it is a well-made point in terms of delivering any services. Part of the idea of really testing out what the model might look like is to ensure that it is not something that only one organisation could access. That is absolutely a factor in the conversation. Obviously, we are also looking at the opportunities that might present themselves in the future. For instance, there are the discussions that are happening not only with EPSDD but also with TCCS in terms of the potential relocation of the RSPCA. Particularly as those projects progress, there will be opportunities that will no doubt present themselves in terms of facilities and services that might be able to be delivered. Those conversations are occurring.

MS CLAY: That is great. If somebody wants to be involved, if a wildlife carer or somebody who is involved in this area wants to be involved in those discussions, who should they contact? Should they contact Access Canberra or your office, Minister? Where should they go?

Ms Vassarotti: They can absolutely contact my office and we can connect with the office of the conservator, which is probably where the conversations will be promoted.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. There is funding in this budget for the implementation of Mulligan Flat Woodland Sanctuary Strategy. Could we get an update on what that money will be used for?

Ms Vassarotti: Yes. That is something that has been progressed primarily through Minister Gentleman, but it does involve the officials sitting behind me. I feel that we should be able to answer that.

Mr Rutledge: There is the Woodlands and Wetlands trust, and the government has invested over \$1 million into that organisation. It has been a very successful organisation that has looked after Mulligans Flat and now Wildbark, which is the new offering in Throsby. It would be fair to say that the government has continued to build strong relationships with conservation, education and recreation offerings. The building of Wildbark itself, which is, as I said, a new facility in Throsby, meant there were some the pressures and it was time for responses, such as for the ACT government to reinvest, and this will see that reinvestment. The trust itself, through its commercial and philanthropy donations, has provided a large community benefit for a small government investment, and this is just the next investment in that.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: On Monday, this committee heard from Asthma Australia that they would like the ACT to phase out wood-fire heaters like we are phasing out gas. They suggested that we should start with no new woodfired heaters in new suburbs and increasing the rebate for replacements to cover the full costs of replacements and installation. Also, one in eight Canberrans have asthma and the health impacts from wood heaters have been estimated at \$3,800 per wood heater, which is an amazing figure. The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has made similar calls. I would be keen to get your views on that.

Ms Vassarotti: Thank you, Mr Braddock, for the question. I think the issue of the impact of wood heater smoke is one that we have been engaging with quite significantly over the last two years. We had the announcement of the Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy and we are into the first action plan in relation to that. There was the investigation and the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment provided a report into that investigation earlier this year. It was a really helpful investigation and inquiry. The government is currently working on a government response to their recommendations. One of their recommendations is the phaseout of wood-fire heaters, and we are currently working on a response in relation

to that. There is no doubt that, as we pursue an electrification pathway and the phase-out of gas, and other fuel sources fit into that picture, that something that we need to engage with. Certainly, as part of our response to the commissioner's report, it is something that we will need to engage with.

There is already significant work happening in this area. We have been looking at reshaping some of the programs that we work on. We do awareness and education. It was previously tagged as Burn Right Tonight. Reflecting on the evidence on the ongoing impacts, that has been reshaped as Burn Better, recognising that there will be impacts, and we are asking the community to engage on the issue of the impacts based on an environmental and health perspective.

A range of initiatives are going on at the moment in looking at the impact of our rebate program and whether that can be shaped and how we can support lower income households. That is currently ongoing. We are waiting for the final evaluation of a project from Health at the moment in relation to the effectiveness of low-cost monitors, air quality sensors, to see whether that might be a way for us to have much more widespread monitoring across the city. We cannot really move forward with that recommendation until we see the results of the evaluation.

There is quite a lot of work happening. We already do not allow wood-fire heaters in particular areas—the Molonglo area in particular and there are also some in Ginninderra, particularly looking at the topography. How we engage with this issue into the future is significant and it is quite imminent in relation to the response to the commissioner's report, which is due in August, where we will be able to provide a significant response to that report, including some of the issues that are raised by Asthma Australia.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, in the Health hearing today, we touched on this matter. Mr Braddock mentioned a figure that was quoted by Ms Goldman from Asthma Australia: \$3,800 per wood heater. In evidence this morning, Dr Kerryn Coleman spoke of the massive number of factors that could attribute to an escalation in asthma symptoms and certainly indicated that it would be difficult at this stage to attribute an escalation in asthma symptoms to one or two specific matters. I am assuming that is being taken into account as we progress with this.

Ms Vassarotti: Yes; absolutely it is. Some of these issues are really complex. There is emerging international evidence in terms of the impact of particulates that come from sources such as wood-fire heaters, particularly the 2.5 particulates. We are absolutely engaging with the evidence, but the work that is coming out of the World Health Organisation is suggesting that wood-fire smoke is potentially having quite a significant impact on a group of people's health.

I know that you live in Tuggeranong and I certainly get a lot of representations from people in terms of the individual health impacts from neighbours' wood-fire heaters. For a group in the community, this is certainly having a significant health impact. We are engaging with the evidence base. We are engaging with the community. We are also looking at it in the context of what is happening in our community, particularly

around alternative methods of heating and cooling.

THE CHAIR: Given that statement and reflecting on the community hearing on Monday, Ms Goldman, in response to questions, very clearly said that she would be keen for fire pits to be banned across the ACT. Is that something that you would subscribe to as minister?

Ms Vassarotti: It is really interesting because the issue of fire pits comes up quite regularly in terms of this conversation. We need to look at what the impact is. It is part of the difference between, say, a wood-fire heater that is being used as the primary source of heating and run every day for months on end, and a fire pit that might be used once in a couple of months because of particular events.

THE CHAIR: You should come to my street.

Ms Vassarotti: There is an issue and we need to look at the proportionate impact on particular things. In the conversation, the issue of fire pits comes up.

THE CHAIR: Are you saying you would not rule out a potential ban on fire pits, if you are assessing the impacts?

Ms Vassarotti: It comes up, but certainly, in responding to the commissioner's report and recommendations, there was not a focus on that. In that inquiry, for instance, it is not something where there is a high level of engagement in terms of the first Action Plan and the air quality strategy. It is something that is raised, but it has not been a core focus in the inputs that have come into my office at this juncture.

DR PATERSON: My question is with respect to wombat mange. If you look at Wombat Rescue's Facebook page, for example, you will see we are absolutely not getting on top of the mange problem in the ACT. These wombats are very sick and injured and often die. In the budget this year, has there been an increase in the funding to address the mange problem, and, if not, why not? What are we doing? It is really quite urgent.

Ms Vassarotti: There has not been a specific allocation in this budget to responding to the issues of wombats and wombat mange, but certainly, as part of the ongoing operations, EPSDD is engaging with this issue and working with wombat rescue groups is an element of work that is occurring. The EPSDD convenes the Wombat stakeholder working group and that informs and shapes a collaborative approach to wombat management. In addition to that, the directorate also convenes a wombat mange stakeholder subgroup. Since 2021, it has been focused on developing a coordinated and collaborative approach to address this issue. That includes monitoring as well as some specific research projects. In addition to the mange projects, I might look to Dr Cooney to talk about some of the specific research projects that are happening in partnership with universities and stakeholder groups in responding to this issue.

I also thought, given we are talking about wombats and the issue of wombat burrows came up in the last estimates hearing, at this juncture it is probably useful to share some additional information about some work that has happened since that estimates

hearing. The conservator is developing guidelines for reducing the impacts on wombats and other burrowing native animals from development and related activities, and they have been working really closely with wildlife organisations in relation to that. They are well underway, and, although they are not finalised, they are already being used to guide the assessment process, as well as providing advice to developers about what they need to do to access and manage burrowing animals.

We are looking to get to a point where they are publicly available so we can provide early advice to developers, but that advice is already being provided to developers. The Denman Prospect development is one area where that has been occurring. I just wanted to let you know that there has been some quite significant progress since you asked that question last year.

DR PATERSON: I am very happy to hear that. Thank you.

Ms Vassarotti: I will now hand to Dr Cooney to talk about some of the specific activities that are happening in terms of the research to identify and care for wombats here in the territory that are impacted by mange.

Dr Cooney: Thank you for the question. This is an area where we work really closely with the community, and we have been working with them for a number of years, including the stakeholder groups. One of the problems is that we have not had a good system to monitor the incidents of mange or wombat populations themselves, so we have been working on setting up the infrastructure over the last couple of years. Last year, we undertook a number of trials to understand how we could set up a monitoring program for wombats. We have come up with a way forward, and from this year forward we will be running an ongoing monitoring program, so we will really start to be able to get a handle both on the numbers of wombats and on the incidents of mange.

We have also set up a portal with the community through which people are able to report sightings of mange, so, over time, once we have a good set of data, we will be able to understand changes in the incidents of mange in the wombat community. At the same time, we are also working with those stakeholders to trial use of a different and potentially more effective chemical to treat mange, as well as new delivery techniques, including the use of effectively a paintball gun, replacing some of the current methods.

DR PATERSON: When will that research be ready to be funded to roll out a program?

Dr Cooney: Which components?

DR PATERSON: The mange treatment.

Dr Cooney: A small number have already been treated and that is going to be rolling out over the next couple of years.

DR PATERSON: There should be funding in next year's budget for mange?

Dr Cooney: This is work we probably can do within existing resources.

Mr Burkevics: Dr Paterson, I will add to Dr Cooney's remarks. I spoke earlier about our focus on strengthening relationships with our volunteering environmental groups. I was made aware, through the minister's office, of difficulties that Wombat Rescue were having with accessing private property to investigate a report of a wombat and a baby in distress. The property owner, for absolutely appropriate reasons, was reluctant to allow Wombat Rescue onto their property for biosecurity and WHS reasons. Through the conservator's office and working with Parks and Conservation, we were able to facilitate a ranger, through negotiations with the property owner, to get access to that property. I will highlight that as a really great example of our enhanced focus of working with the volunteer community to help them achieve their goals.

DR PATERSON: Great. On the wombat portal, from what I can see online—and it would be great if some further data could be provided to the committee—it does not look like there are many reports of wombats.

Ms Vassarotti: What I can report is that over 200 wombats have been reported through the portal and, of those, 40 have been undergoing treatment.

DR PATERSON: That is not too bad.

Ms Vassarotti: It is certainly having an impact, and my understanding from everyone who is involved is that it is a really useful element to the program. There is interest in expanding its use to see if we can track all the treatment. We know New South Wales is quite interested in looking at it in terms of expanding the portal into New South Wales, so there are some conversations going on in that area as well. We are looking at how we can further enhance and develop it.

DR PATERSON: Are you going to do more promotion work with the community, letting people know that it is out there and they can access it?

Ms Vassarotti: Certainly, we look at how we promote and engage. We often look at where there are opportunities to talk about wombats for particular reasons and promote the portal through things such as our social media presence et cetera. Ms Magee might have something to offer in relation to whether there are any particular plans around promotion of that activity.

Ms Magee: Thanks, Minister. We have the portal and the data and the mapping that you have probably seen online on our website. There are always opportunities for us to talk about all our local critters and animals, so we will certainly take that question as an action for us to continue to promote how the community can get involved and promote awareness of the portal.

DR PATERSON: Thank you.

MS CLAY: I sometimes hear concerns reported from the field, sometimes on PCS-managed land and sometimes on land release and commercial land, that burrows have been marked as abandoned, but they are not abandoned burrows on the basis that wombats use multiple burrows. Particularly with commercially developed land, there is a pretty strong incentive to not mark an active burrow as active. How confident are

you that our regulation and our PCS staff management is accurately identifying abandoned burrows that are genuinely abandoned, not ones that are still in use?

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks for the question. It is a really good question. This is why the guidelines are really important, in terms of developing the guidelines and then ensuring that there is good understanding of them and they are being applied and complied to appropriately. I might look to Mr Burkevics in relation to the specifics of compliance. I know that there have been a number of instances where the conservator has been on site to ensure that things are being adhered to.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, Minister. I am very confident that the work of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and the rangers accurately identifies what is happening with different burrows. From time to time, my office, through Conservator Liaison, gets reports of wombat burrows that are in use versus those out of use in potential areas for works. I am aware of a case recently where, as a result of information received by the office, we requested an assessment of the burrows. The area managers at the Murrumbidgee River Corridor know that area like the back of their hand, as most rangers do, and provided advice that, yes, those burrows had been assessed and no activity for some time had been detected, including looking for evidence of recent scats, feeding or something like that. I am very comfortable that the work of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service is accurate. As you know, the rangers are out there, often 24 hours a day, attending to different things and they know their areas very well.

MS CLAY: Do those guidelines apply on commercial land and land-release land?

Mr Burkevics: I would love to invite Conservator Liaison, Eliza Larson, to address her work on leading this.

Ms Larson: The guidelines will assist the conservator in assessing developments and will allow us to provide advice to developers, and anybody, on how to identify burrowing animals and their burrows, as well as how to monitor them to determine whether they are active or vacant. Then we will outline the steps to take in terms of what you do if you find them active or even vacant. They will provide the legislative context in terms of any licences under the Nature Conservation Act that would be required to disturb or destroy a burrow, even if it is vacant. All of that will be in the guidelines to provide advice, and that is across tenure. If you are undertaking any kind of works that might impact a burrow, it outlines what to look for and what to do once you have looked for it.

MS CLAY: Those guidelines are out now?

Ms Larson: They are under development. We expect that they will be finalised by the end of the calendar year.

MS CLAY: Is it up to developers to comply or is there—

Ms Larson: The guidelines will come in when the conservator provides advice as part of one of his functions under the multiple acts. For the most part, it would be as part of development approval conditions where they will need to have complied with those guidelines, and we can refer to specific sections in the guidelines that are relevant to

their development. In saying that, it will also be useful to internal staff—for example, PCS—in providing extra guidance on identifying and monitoring burrows.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

Ms Vassarotti: The guidelines will provide advice to people about how they meet their obligations under acts such as the Nature Conservation Act.

DR PATERSON: In terms of these guidelines, what will be the end point? Is it relocation of the wombat or euthanising the wombat?

Ms Larson: This is a tricky one and it is one of the remaining points that we are still discussing with our internal licensing and compliance and vet teams, as well as the wildlife carer groups. Current conversations indicate that euthanasia is not typically permitted, unless it is an animal welfare concern, so it may be that the end step becomes relocation.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Paterson. I want to briefly add on that. Firstly, it pleases me that every witness is on the scoreboard now, except Mr Ponton! He will not be displeased and he has probably got a busy afternoon coming. Dr Cooney, I am fascinated by the concept of treating wombat mange with “a paintball style gun”. Is that real or did you just make that up? Is that real? And what sort of range are we talking about?

Dr Cooney: I would have to consult our senior ecologist to give you that sort of detail.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Vassarotti: If nothing else, Mr Parton, you can be assured that our researchers and our ecologists are very innovative in terms of our effort.

THE CHAIR: I have a question for you regarding eradicating invasive species populations in the ACT. When it comes to the eradication of invasive species, what are the prime targets? What are the invasive species that we are focusing on most? What are the top three?

Ms Vassarotti: It is a really good question and it goes back to the issue of us being under more threat than we have been before and we really need to prioritise. We have been doing a lot of work in ensuring our catchment is a pristine national environment. It is our water source for the ACT. Ensuring pests species are being managed in our national park is really important.

We are really pleased that, as far as we understand, we have not had any incursions of feral horses into the park, and we maintain a zero tolerance policy in relation to that, knowing that they are just across the border. It is of deep concern to us in terms of the management of that species within Kosciusko National Park. The vertebrate pest control program that was talked about has been really important, and we are leading in relation to the new thermal technology—how successful and how impactful it is. That is looking at deer and pigs in particular and the impact of those species on the national park. I also talked a bit about rabbits.

THE CHAIR: What is the rabbit story? The specific question I had was to seek data on the progress of rabbit control initiatives, including their impact on population numbers. I am keen to get to another Jo Clay substantive, so I am looking for a really succinct answer on rabbit control.

Ms Vassarotti: I probably cannot give you a succinct answer, but—

Mr Burkevics: It is fair to say that, similar to a lot of other invasive species, it will be a fight forevermore against rabbits. We have seen, particularly with wet conditions over the ACT over the last couple of years, a growth in rabbit population numbers.

THE CHAIR: And they breed like rabbits!

Mr Burkevics: That is exactly right. The government has responded by investing a further \$150,000 each year over the next two years for enhanced rabbit control. We have a number of invertebrate species in our conservation areas. Pigs, deer and goats will always be on the target list. In terms of some of the weeds, again, I think there is a fight forevermore in terms of blackberry, serrated tussock and African lovegrass. They are probably the top ones that have the potential, if left uncontrolled, to transform landscapes for the negative.

THE CHAIR: That is a good summary.

MS CLAY: Minister, I am quite worried about offsets. There is a big toxic conversation going on at the national level about offsets and how they have been used in the past and how they are going to be used. I see we have some funding in here for our local offsets policy. What are you going to do with that?

Ms Vassarotti: Thanks so much for the question. It is a really important question. We have seen some real concerns, particularly at a national level, around the use of offsets. We have been really active in the conversation in terms of the work that is happening at national level on how offsets might be used into the future. We are very focused. We are very cognisant of the fact that we have traded away a lot of our environment and there is not a lot left to offset. This budget initiative does provide the opportunity for us to look at the need for a refresh in our environmental offset policy, and we want to make sure that it is consistent with any work that is happening at a commonwealth level. In particular, a national environmental standard in relation to offsets has been delivered, so we want to make sure that our work is consistent with that.

We have done an initial preliminary internal review around the offsets policy here in the ACT, and now we have engaged the University of Technology in Sydney and Rooftop Social to support the ACT's review. Initially, it will be a consultant's report in terms of looking at our policy. We recognise that this is quite a complex piece of work. We are looking at how offsets are calculated in the use of an environmental offsets calculator, the strategic planning of offsets, and how we align funding with needs. We really need to focus on the mitigation hierarchy. We really need to ensure that offsets are being used as an absolute last resort and only when there is clear justification for it. We are custodians of such a small amount of remaining important habitat that we want to make sure that we are not losing it, if at all possible.

The other issue is how that sits, particularly with our neighbour New South Wales—what our offset policy might look like in terms of what is happening in New South Wales. The issues with the management of offsets in New South Wales have been well ventilated in terms of an Auditor-General report. The integrity of those processes is deeply alarming and we want to make sure that any process we have is very robust. What is happening at the moment—

MS CLAY: Minister, we have only a couple of minutes left. I might narrow in. If we have little or no available land left to offset, what does that mean for our current planning system? We are going through this planning review to develop more land. Does that have an impact?

Ms Vassarotti: This is why we are looking at the offsets policy right now. I think it is going to be more and more difficult to identify appropriate offsets, and we really need to look at that mitigation regime. It is an issue that will need to be contemplated by planning processes. That is why the strategic planning process often takes quite a long time, because of the studies that need to be undertaken, particularly when it enlivens matters of national environmental significance.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Clay. That is it. On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Vassarotti and officials for their attendance and for their contribution in this session—except for you, Mr Ponton! If you have taken any questions on notice, could you please provide answers to the committee’s secretary within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript. Thank you very much.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Acting Director-General

Aigner, Mr Geoff, Acting Executive group manager, Housing Assistance Division

Naughton, Mr Ben, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts

Callaghan, Ms Lauren, Acting Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Division

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Hocking PSM, Mr Stuart, Under-Treasurer, Office of the Under Treasurer

Miners, Mr Stephen, Deputy Under Treasurer, ERI and Coordinator-general for Housing, Office of the Deputy Under Treasurer, ERI

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Ponton, Mr Ben, Director-General

Suburban Land Agency

Dietz, Mr John, Chief Executive Officer

Gordon, Mr Tom, Executive Director, Development Delivery

Tennent, Mr Simon, Development Director, Molonglo Greenfield Development

THE CHAIR: Hello again, and welcome to the many thousands that are glued to their computers, watching this one. In this session of estimates hearings we will hear from Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, and officials.

I am going to ask, as I have in a number of sessions, that people on both sides of this chamber be mindful of the short amount of time that we have in these sessions. Try to be specific, on this side, with your questions so that we get straight to them. I ask ministers and officials to do their best to be succinct in answers and to try to focus just on the question. I understand that there is always a lot more information that can be given, but ask whether that is entirely necessary. I know that sometimes it is, but be mindful of time.

The proceedings are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. If you are taking a question on notice, be quite emphatic about saying, "I will take that question on notice." I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Right at the start, could you all confirm together, at the same time, for the record, that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it.

Witnesses: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. We are not inviting opening statements. We will proceed

straight to questions. Minister, in your Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement, your coalition has committed to the delivery of 400 additional public houses by 2025. In fact, let me go with this one instead.

Ms Berry: So is this a succinct question, Mr Parton?

THE CHAIR: Of course it is.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: The Community Services Directorate budget statements G, at page 49, set out a number of accountability indicators, including the number of social housing properties, with a stock of 11,602 targeted for 2023-24. I am sure you would be aware that a number of people have approached me recently, voicing their frustration over public housing properties that have been vacant for many months or even years, including a public housing complex in Braddon. I can understand why properties might be vacant for, say, three months, while they are being cleaned or fixed up, but when they are vacant for longer periods, I know it is perplexing to members of the public. Minister, how many public housing properties do you think have been vacant for more than three months? Are you able to give me a rough figure?

Ms Berry: I will have to ask if one of my officials has a figure on the number of homes that have been vacant for longer than three months. However, there would be a number of reasons why homes might be vacant for longer than three months. That can include insurance claims. It can include significant maintenance that might be required to get the house back to a standard where people can live in it. Those are just a couple of reasons. I will ask Mr Naughton to provide a bit more detail on the numbers that you are asking for, if he has them with him.

Mr Naughton: Thank you, Minister Berry. We will have to take the question on notice, with regard to three months or longer.

THE CHAIR: All right. In relation to the complex that I know you are aware of in Braddon, how is it possible that this complex has been vacant for seven years or more? How is that possible?

Ms Berry: I know the complex that you have referred to, Mr Parton. That complex was tenanted up until 2016. Unfortunately, the complex had a number of defects, so tenants had to be moved out of those apartments. There were some complex issues around insurance that needed to be investigated by the government to see whether it was appropriate to refurbish the apartments or to demolish and rebuild. That took some time as well. Between 2018 and 2021, I think, there was a decision to move from refurbishing to demolishing and rebuilding. There was a development application which went to ACAT. Housing ACT are in the process of now putting together a different plan for the build of that house. That one is unique and is particularly complex for a number of reasons. I can ask Mr Naughton to give a little bit more detail, if that is appropriate, Mr Parton.

Mr Naughton: Thank you, Minister. With regard to the Lowanna Street development, the development application is working its way through ACT government approvals

processes. We expect that to be finalised in the coming weeks. We then expect that engagement with ACAT will take approximately three months, after which time it will go to contract for a builder. The contract will be for demolition and construction, so you will see this complex demolished and reconstructed. The reconstruction will see the building of 10 dwellings, with two single-bedroom, class C, fully adaptable dwellings built and eight two-bedroom, class C, fully adaptable dwellings built.

THE CHAIR: You pointed to some complexities around this complex. We knew that there were some complexities, but, Minister, you must be dismayed. We are talking about 10 dwellings here, at the height of the worst housing crisis in our memory. So many people have said to me, “How could you possibly have this vacant for seven years? By the sounds of it, it could be another year at least, maybe two.

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We could be getting close to 10. How is that acceptable?

Ms Berry: These particular apartments are not safe for people to live in. We cannot even put them back on for people to be living in at the moment, for a variety of reasons, which is why the property is vacant. There were a range of complex issues around insurance, developers going into liquidation, all kinds of really difficult issues to move through.

I accept that, absolutely, we do not want to see homes vacant when we are in a crisis. We have places like this that people walk past and do not understand, and why would they? I can tell you and the committee today that, for this particular one, this was quite a complex issue. The ACAT process has taken some time as well. It took a couple of years before the decision was handed down, in January this year.

Now we are at a point where we can get on with amending the designs for the building and then building works can commence. But, yes, it is frustrating. It is very distressing. I understand that people will be confused about that because they will not understand the issues behind this one. A lot of them were out of our control, unfortunately.

MR DAVIS: I want to ask Mr Naughton, on the demolition and construction, if you could be more specific about how you intend on managing that. I ask specifically in reference to a site in my and Mr Parton’s electorate, Langdon Avenue and Sternberg Crescent, where it appeared the demolition and construction were completed by two different contractors and there was a substantial period of time when the site sat vacant, with no properties. Do you see any risk of that happening with this Lowanna Street site, and how are you managing that?

Mr Naughton: Thank you for the question. The demolition of existing homes very much differs from site to site. It is based on the development application process, which is a statutory regulation within ACT government. For this particular site, the site cannot be demolished without a development application and work approval for the new build to be undertaken. Therefore, until we have got that development application approved, we cannot commence demolition. We see them as linked. Whether we undertake the works with the same contractor will depend on market

conditions at the time. At times, we will split the demolition and the construction because of the specialist expertise of builders.

MR DAVIS: Can I ask for a bit more specificity, if you would not mind, on how Housing ACT determines to split those contracts between demolition and construction? It appears to happen more often than not. Feel free to correct me if I am wrong. It seems to have been, at least on a range of other sites, a contributor to the delays.

Mr Naughton: The process that we go through when we go to tender is that we have a builders panel. We currently have 16 registered builders on the panel. When we go to market and request that they respond to the offer with regard to the total project, they respond to us. Then, based on time and money, we make an informed decision as to how to proceed with works. At times, as I have said, they are separated between a demolition contractor and a builder. At times the builder may subcontract to a demolition contractor who is a specialist in that area. What you might see is two separate contractors on site but, as far as Housing ACT is concerned, we may be managing it as one contract. It is very specific, site by site. I would need to take your question on notice with regard to the address that you have provided, but that is the answer to your question.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

MS CLAY: I am happy for this question to be taken on notice, but I will state it here to make sure we have a chance to get the question right. I would like to know, for each year over the last five years, how many of our public housing DAs have been taken to ACAT. I want to know the DAs and also the number of dwellings. There are probably two sets of figures there. Is that information that you can provide on notice?

Ms Wood: We will do our best.

MS CLAY: Yes?

Ms Berry: That is quite detailed information you are asking for. We will do our best.

MS CLAY: Is there a more useful way for me to get the information that is less onerous?

Ms Berry: I can tell you that most of the public housing builds have a development application process and are appealed.

MS CLAY: Yes.

Ms Berry: That is my understanding. But going back over the last five years of all of those particular builds would be—

MS CLAY: How about three; would that help? I want useful information. I am not trying to make busy work. I do want genuinely useful information. But we need to see the data. It is too hard to understand otherwise.

Ms Wood: We will take on notice what we can do with an appropriate level of effort to see if there are trends—that kind of insight.

MS CLAY: Thank you. That would be useful.

THE CHAIR: On that line, for these long-term vacant properties—and I am going on six months or more because I think, in the middle of this crisis, six months is long term—will you deploy some of the \$345 million in additional funding to get them back online? Will some of them be available before the end of this calendar year, hopefully?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Parton. Regarding some of the homes that have been vacant for longer periods of time, I think it might be useful for the committee—and I take on board your message at the start about being succinct—to understand the reasons that homes are vacant. A number are vacant due to turnover or tenant returns, a number of homes are vacant due to the growth and renewal program, and sometimes those are combined. It is important to acknowledge those causes.

Yes, the ACT government is considering some of the homes that have been earmarked for either sale or demolition, through the growth and renewal program, and whether they can be refurbished or remodelled, repurposed and brought back online. Most of those of those homes have been identified for particular reasons. They might be in areas where there are high numbers of public housing and we want to shift those numbers, or they might be substandard and end of life, and demolishing and rebuilding is a much better outcome for public housing tenants. Going into the actual numbers and the reasons why is important for the committee to understand. Mr Naughton.

Mr Naughton: Thank you, Minister. For the committee's records, there are 198 vacant properties as part of the growth and renewal program. That represents a percentage of vacant stock. I will break that number down, for the committee to understand those 198 vacant dwellings. Forty-five dwellings have just been completed, as part of the growth and renewal program. They were completed in the last six weeks of the last financial year and are therefore new builds, but they are vacant. They have been handed to allocations. However, that was the reported figure at the end of the financial year.

Eighty-five of the dwellings that are vacant have been identified for redevelopment. Where those 85 vacant dwellings are, 232 dwellings will be built on those sites. Those sites were vacant properties at the end of the reporting period for the end of the financial year. However, 232 dwellings are to be built on those sites. Sixty-eight dwellings have been identified for sale. Of the 68 dwellings that are vacant and on the sale path, 28 had been exchanged at the end of the financial year and 14 are currently on the open market, advertised for sale. The remaining 31 are being prepared for sale.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. That is exceptional information.

MR DAVIS: In terms of the 31 being prepared for sale, how exactly does the ACT government prepare them? Is any capital investment made on those properties before they go to market?

Mr Naughton: Thank you for your question. The properties are prepared with engagement from real estate agents. We make a decision based on the current market conditions, the value of the property without any works done, the value of the property with works done, and make an informed decision about what we need to do to the property to maximise yield. This renewal program is self-funded, which means it is funded out of the sale of properties. At times it might be as simple as a yard clean. But at other times it might involve a repaint or it might involve recarpeting. It is very much a property-by-property decision. That is made internally in ACT Housing, within the structure of the growth and renewal program.

MR DAVIS: Can I just ask quickly, at the risk of taking too many liberties: if a decision is made to make those investments—paint, carpet et cetera—do you go out to market and seek a range of quotes? Is this managed by the same company that you use to upgrade other public housing properties? How do you source those tradies?

Mr Naughton: Thank you for your question. It is managed through our Total Facilities contract. We have rates that we use that are tested against the market to ensure that we are getting a competitive figure for the work that is being undertaken. The work is contracted to that Total Facilities contractor so that we get the best value for money that we can for the works that are being undertaken. We also work very closely with our tenant experience team to ensure that the work that is being undertaken is not detracting, as the minister has articulated, from the work that is occurring with vacant properties.

MR DAVIS: Tremendous; thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, we had a fairly vigorous discussion yesterday about 70-30. We do not need a long discussion today, but I just want to get something on record. We have, in the budget papers, on page 94 of the SLA section, that the SLA has a goal of supporting the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate in delivering up to 70 per cent of new housing within the existing urban footprint. Can you tell me what you think the SLA's target is on 70-30? Is it up to 70 per cent or is it at least 70 per cent?

Ms Berry: I am going to ask Mr Dietz to respond to that.

Mr Dietz: Our requirement is to deliver the ILRP. We would not have a target outside of what the ILRP requires us to deliver.

MS CLAY: Sure. Do you believe your role is to support the EPSDD to deliver at least 70 per cent infill or up to 70 per cent infill?

Mr Dietz: It is not really a question of what we believe. The ILRP identifies what we need to deliver, and we deliver that, to the best of our ability.

MS CLAY: Okay. So it is entirely EPSDD.

Mr Dietz: Pardon?

MS CLAY: This target. It is in your papers, but it is entirely—yes. Okay. That is fine. When you are doing land acquisition in infill areas, how do you approach that? Do you have land acquisition in infill areas planned at the moment?

Mr Dietz: We will be scouring the market for any land opportunities that may assist with the infill areas. When we find an opportunity, we go through a significant process with government to ensure that that purchase is approved by the Treasurer, and it goes through the regulations. By us following the process, EPSDD is able to do the appropriate due diligence to ensure that the delivery of the dwellings on that land acquisition is reflected as part of the Indicative Land Release Program.

MS CLAY: Have you done any recently? Is there an example that you can give me of a recent one where you have done that?

Mr Dietz: The most recent example where it followed the regulation is the Ginninderry joint venture.

MS CLAY: Okay; sure. Do you have any infill sites at the moment that are on your acquisition list that you are thinking of going through that process for?

Mr Dietz: I would say that it is a continual process that we are monitoring. Yes, there are some sites that we are monitoring at the moment.

MS CLAY: Is that a public list? Are we able to see that?

Mr Dietz: No. For appropriate reasons, we would not normally make that list public.

MS CLAY: Commercial-in-confidence.

Mr Dietz: And to ensure that we get the best value for public funding.

MS CLAY: Yes. I understand. I will state it really clearly: you do not want to provide that list because then people know you are interested in the land and the price might go up.

Mr Dietz: Exactly; especially if we have got an ability for an off-market transaction. It would not be appropriate for the community for us to release that.

MS CLAY: That does make sense. Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: I have some questions about the residential construction building contracts panel. Have there been any instances where builders on the panel have declared non-compliance with the Secure Local Jobs Code?

Mr Naughton: I would need to take that question on notice.

MR PETTERSSON: Okay. Have builders who have previously been non-compliant with the code been engaged by Housing ACT?

Mr Naughton: I would need to take that on notice as well, but thank you for the question.

MR PETTERSSON: All good. What procedures does Housing ACT have in place to ensure compliance with the Secure Local Jobs Code?

Mr Naughton: I will need to take that on notice as well.

MR PETTERSSON: Of course. Lucky last: are contractors expected to notify Housing ACT if they have failed to comply with their obligations under the code?

Mr Naughton: I will take that on notice as well; thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: All right. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: In the budget papers, specifically under the headline “Increasing housing access, choice and affordability”, the budget item for increasing the number of public housing dwellings allocates a total of \$55.9 million over the forwards. What I would like to better understand is why the \$30.8 million is included as capital but deducted as offset capital provisions. Can someone explain, in simple terms, what that means?

Mr Hocking: I think it is simply a matter that in previous budgets we had provisioned that amount but not allocated it to Housing ACT; now, in this budget, we are allocating it to them.

MR DAVIS: Okay. You will have to explain to me how we provision money and then it is not allocated to a particular department. Is that like budget purgatory? Where does that money sit in the meantime?

Mr Hocking: It sits in Treasury, effectively.

MS DAVIS: So Treasury allocated that for housing more broadly but did not give it to Housing ACT?

Mr Hocking: That is right; yes.

MR DAVIS: Can I understand a little bit more than why there is no money allocated in 2024-25 for increasing the number of public housing dwellings? The 2023-24 figure seems to largely have come from this offset capital provisions account, only to have more direct funding in 2025-26. A layperson might read that as, “We are not expanding public housing dwellings in 2024-25.”

Ms Wood: Mr Davis, I will ask Lauren Callaghan, our CFO, to take that question and take you through the details.

Ms Callaghan: Thank you for your question. The reason there is no capital provision in the 2024-25 year is that that provision was allocated in a previous budget and will remain in the Treasury central provision until it is released at part of the 2024-25 budget.

The reason that there are additional provisions in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 years is

that additional funding was requested by Housing ACT to deliver the Growing and Renewing Program, and that was approved as a new provision as part of this budget.

MR DAVIS: Okay; that makes sense. Are you able to break down for me how that money will be split in terms of the construction of new homes and the purchase of established homes?

Ms Wood: Mr Davis, I think we may need to take that level of detail on notice. Yes, I am getting nods.

MR DAVIS: I have just got a few more. I would be interested in getting a better understanding, if not from this pool of money, where I could see the money that we are spending to purchase new homes in addition to the construction, pointing out both in Mr Parton's line of questioning and some answers from Mr Naughton, there are a number of challenges in the government's way that were not in the government's way when it established this program around construction of new homes.

So there appears to be quite an appetite to purchase more homes. I would like to better understand how those things are allocated separately, if it all.

Ms Wood: Mr Davis, we will come back on notice. What I would say is we manage the Growing and Renewing Program as a whole program, which gives us the flexibility as conditions change to change how we are profiling the program in terms of construction and acquisition.

So we do not separately have a pool of funding that is for acquisitions. We have an overall bucket that is for delivering new dwellings, and that will be a mix of constructions and acquisitions. But we will provide you with as much breakdown as we can.

MR DAVIS: Thank you. I appreciate that because that probably goes to the root of the conversation that at least I have had with all of you in these forums for some time now about reassessing some of those internal figures around the Growing and Renewing strategy, and some of those external factors that are outside of the control of you good people, around the building and construction sector.

Are you able to articulate if and how those internal targets have shifted? Essentially, to put it simply: it is tougher to build homes than we once thought. Maybe we should sell less and buy more. Have those conversations been had and how have those targets been readjusted?

Ms Berry: Those conversations have happened as a result of this program from the start. We are constantly shifting and assessing the program to make sure we get the best value for money and the best product for housing tenants to live in at the end of the day.

So we are constantly assessing the program, constantly looking at homes to purchase that will meet the needs of our tenants now and in the future, working through the panel of developers on what they can provide and get the best value for money through that, and making sure that we have properties that meet the needs of our

tenants and are not sub-standard properties.

There is a significant process that Housing ACT goes through Growing and Renewing and it is not as easy as you buy this house and it costs this much and you demolished this one and it costs this much. Mr Naughton talked earlier about the 90 dwellings that will be demolished and then there will end up being another 200. But that will add to both growth and renewal, because it will replace the 90 but will also add to the housing stock, other houses.

We can try and get some of the detail at the point of time of this hearing and see where we can go from there. But we are constantly assessing what is appropriate for housing tenants into the future.

MR DAVIS: I have a last follow-up. The challenge with the program being a bit of a self-feeding beast is that it has to fund itself. You will know that the recent Assembly committee inquiry into cost-of-living pressures made 11 recommendations to the government related to housing and many of those concentrated on the growth and renewal program. Recommendation 25 recommended that the government continue to manage the sale of public housing properties to ensure the portfolio is not in decline at any one time. Has that recommendation been factored into the assessments that have been made around the sale, purchase and construction, and is that a recommendation that the program thinks it could deliver on?

Ms Berry: First, the government will respond to that committee's recommendations when it is appropriate. Second, with regard to the comment on the growth and renewal program being self-funding, as I said earlier, yes, it funds itself; however, it is conducted in a way that provides a number of different outcomes, including new and better homes for Housing ACT tenants but also a change in high numbers and concentrations of public housing stock in particular areas and putting public housing into other areas where there might be lower numbers of public housing to continue with our kind of salt-and-pepper approach for public housing across the ACT, removing homes that are not fit for purpose and have outlived their useful life.

So there is a range of different reasons. It is not just the self-funding; it is about a whole change in the public housing stock, which, at the end of this program, will mean that 20 per cent of our housing stock will have been renewed and be fit for purpose and sustainable.

MR CAIN: I have a supplementary question and it relates to the number of questions taken on notice. Why is the head of ACT Housing, Ms Gilding, not amongst us, Minister?

Ms Berry: She is on leave.

MR CAIN: For how long?

Ms Wood: Mr Cain, it is not an appropriate place to talk about individual employee matters. Lots of people take leave.

MR CAIN: Is it long-term leave or short-term leave?

Ms Wood: I am not going to answer that question, Mr Cain.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, we will move on to your substantive.

MR CAIN: Sure; thank you. Is it time for a break?

THE CHAIR: Is it?

MS CLAY: Yes, and then we come back with the same people.

THE CHAIR: I do not know why I thought we were charging on all the way through to 4.15.

MR CAIN: You were just keen to hear from me, Mr Parton.

THE CHAIR: Yes. So we are going to take a break, as much as we are having so much fun.

Hearing suspended from 2.32 to 2.45 pm.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back. We are going to continue our session with Minister Berry MLA, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, and officials.

Ms Berry: Chair, during the break we have been able to find some detail around the ACAT question on DAs, development applications. Would you like us to provide some information on that now?

THE CHAIR: Yes; sure.

Mr Naughton: Since October 2021, nine applications for review have been lodged with the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Those nine applications have got a future yield of 36 dwellings on those sites. There have been five lodged in the last 12 months with ACAT.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR CAIN: Minister, my question is in regarding a block in Whitlam—block 17, section 87, which is one of the unsold blocks. It is priced at \$702,500 and is 369 square metres in size. Minister, do you consider this an affordable block, given its size and location?

Mr Dietz: Thank you for your question, Mr Cain. Initially, in providing a response, we might just work with the team to understand exactly which block that is.

MR CAIN: While you do that, I can move on to some sort of general questions that do include this block but also include others. Is that okay?

Mr Dietz: Yes.

MR CAIN: When a price like this is set, how often is pricing reset if blocks are unsold? What is your documented pricing policy in such circumstances?

Mr Dietz: We can answer both questions. First, I might just look at the first question and see if we can identify which block it is, because I think that will help educate our response.

MR CAIN: The general question is probably more pertinent. But I would appreciate something in particular as well later.

Mr Dietz: Firstly, is the price justifiable in today's market? We do go through a very open and transparent pricing valuation process which ensures that we are taking educated information from independent valuers as to what the price of these blocks should be. Those prices, therefore, reflect not only sales within the suburb but also sales in areas outside of the suburb. So I am confident that the prices, at times, do reflect appropriate market value.

To answer the second part of your question—do we continue to reevaluate pricing as markets move and markets continue?—the answer is yes, we do, and we do have a policy around that revaluation, and it does specify the timing of certain revaluations.

MR CAIN: Is that policy publicly available?

Mr Dietz: I would have to take that on notice to see if that policy is publicly available.

MR CAIN: If not, would you otherwise provide it to this committee?

Mr Dietz: I will definitely consider that. I can understand that there could be reasons that it would be inappropriate for people to identify when—if by some regular process—we were looking to revalue blocks. However, we will definitely consider the release of that.

MR CAIN: Are you currently reevaluating the pricing on those unsold Whitlam blocks?

Mr Dietz: We are currently looking at our strategy with regards to releasing those unsold Whitlam blocks.

MR CAIN: Given interest rates and construction costs, why are you not just putting them out to auction, which would get them moving pretty quickly, one would imagine?

Mr Dietz: As to the different release methodologies available to us, as you say, one is auction. When we look to value, we are looking to ensure that we get the best value for money outcome for government. When we look at what market value deems, it is an open market transaction which reflects a willing but not anxious buyer and seller. I would suggest that, at certain times in the market, for us to go to auction it might be more of an anxious seller rather than just a willing seller.

MR CAIN: But auctions are a frequently used tool in the market. So why would you

discount an auction in such a circumstance and in the housing affordability crisis circumstance we are in now?

Mr Dietz: I am not sure that the auction would get the best outcome; however, in looking at the strategies that we are looking at for unsold blocks, a consideration will be an auction.

THE CHAIR: Why is it a concern of the government whether there is a level of anxiousness or willingness?

Mr Dietz: That is actually within the regulation. I would say that an anxious seller may not be looking to get the best value outcome for a government release.

MR CAIN: Again, auctions are a frequently used tool. Are you saying that, in all auctions in the market of private land, it is a flawed process for getting the best price?

Mr Dietz: No, I am not saying that.

MR CAIN: It does seem that you are saying that.

Ms Berry: No, he is not.

Mr Dietz: I have not used those words at all.

MR CAIN: You said it is an anxious seller if it is at auction.

Mr Dietz: If you look at when an auction is most often used, it is in a very hot market. Hot markets are when auctions tend to give very high prices in release. When the market is not very hot, there are fewer auctions—and you would see that through statistics.

I will leave the option open. I have stated that it is something that we will look at in our strategy as to whether an auction would be appropriate.

MR CAIN: Given this is all government land and we are in the midst of a housing affordability crisis and a cost-of-living one, why will you not say for these unsold Whitlam blocks, “Just let the market accept these blocks and get on with building more residences”?

Mr Dietz: Sorry; when you say, “accept these blocks”, the blocks—

MR CAIN: Put them out to auction, for example.

Mr Dietz: To put them out to auction?

MR CAIN: Yes.

Ms Berry: That is being considered. I think Mr Dietz has already responded to that question.

MR DAVIS: I just want to quickly clarify a question. Mr Naughton answered Ms Clay's question that was taken through the break. Forgive me for a preamble, but I have to be really clear. The minister said that almost all developments are opposed through ACAT or are held up through some sort of ACAT process. For a long time I believed that and attributed that to be part of the reason why we are struggling to increase the public housing portfolio at the rate the community expects.

Mr Naughton, you just answered that 36 dwellings were held up at ACAT over three years—a dwelling a month equivalent. So I am not quite sure that that argument holds up, that 400 homes are being delayed, based on the 36. Is it not unreasonable to suggest ACAT opposition in and of itself is a substantial contributing factor to our inability to increase the housing portfolio, based on those numbers?

Mr Naughton: Thank you for the question. The development application process that the ACT government manages, to which all of our sites are bound, is a process that involves consultation with all neighbouring blocks through the general course of business. That does take time. The additional nine sites which encompassed the 36 dwellings have gone to the ACAT process, which has extended those time frames.

But, as to the time frame for a development application in an existing suburb, in order to demolish an existing home and in order to build generally outside the building envelope for which that block has currently been designed to maximise the yield on the site, we are knocking down one home and we are building many homes. We are knocking down 300 homes to build 700. That yield means that we operate outside the development application constraints generally.

The consultation and engagement with the community that is required to meet the development application thresholds is significant. Those that have gone to ACAT sit well outside the bounds of the development application process and time frames.

MR DAVIS: Notwithstanding those challenges, I still do not understand how we can get away with saying, "Almost all developments are held up because of ACAT," when, by the numbers you have presented, only 36 dwellings in the last three years were held up in any way by an ACAT process. Is that not untrue?

Ms Berry: Mr Davis, my understanding is that new public home dwellings that are built are delayed because of ACAT processes. That is one of the reasons that they are delayed. There are a range of other reasons that delay the building of properties in the ACT, including through the growth and renewal program; demolishing homes; the development application process; claims being put into ACAT by neighbours, which they are entitled to do, delays the building and the demolishing—so there are two delays there; weather; construction supplies; and construction availability. Those are the answers that I have provided to all those questions.

MR DAVIS: I understand that, but the minister's words were "almost all developments" and 36 are not almost all.

THE CHAIR: Mr Davis, you indicated to me you had one follow-up question and you have had three. So let us keep it moving. Let us get to Programmed Facilities Maintenance and Housing. I have had the shadow minister's role in this space for well

over six years. So I have sat in a lot of hearings, and not much changes.

Ms Berry: I do not think that is fair.

THE CHAIR: I think it is fair, Minister. I just want to know why this government continues to fail in the delivery of maintenance services to Housing ACT properties and tenants. I am not sure whether you watched the community day hearings. Genevieve Bolton from Canberra Community Law was dismayed at what is going on with regard to maintenance. She spoke of a complete disconnect between Programmed Facilities Maintenance and Housing.

I have a number of quotes here. These emails have come in just in the last week, from 14 July to 20 July—and these are all separate. We have got A: “I have been trying to get asbestos testing for cracked ceilings, walls and mouldy eaves for 11 years.” Another one says, “Recent hail damaged roof where Programmed have taped the external roof as well as taping over the interior ceiling cracks, and it has been left like that for three years.” Another says, “This ongoing and unnecessary saga has worsened my condition of diagnosed PTSD.” Another says—and this is actually a quote from a tenant phone call today, just after midday—“I am treated like a subhuman by Housing ACT.” Another says, “While I am grateful for a roof over my head, I should not have to battle for basic human rights.”

There are some major problems here. Minister, again, I want to sit before you and say: why are we failing in this space?

Ms Berry: I do not completely agree with the assessment that you have made around Housing ACT failing in this space. I do ask that you, if you have not done so yet, put all of the people who have contacted your office through to my office.

THE CHAIR: And you know that, for the most part, I have.

Ms Berry: We always follow up on these issues, because it—

THE CHAIR: But that should not be the way that they have to deal with it.

Ms Berry: It does concern me when I hear about these issues. They are followed up and I provide you with responses within the realms of maintaining privacy for those tenants.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate it.

Ms Berry: If there are ever any occasions when you require more detail or want to provide more information to a tenant that might impact on their privacy, you can always contact my office. That invitation has always been open to you.

We have invested a significant amount of money—millions of dollars—into the maintenance program. I have certainly seen an increase in the maintenance across ACT properties, including a range of different upgrades and more sort of Programmed upgrades around kitchens, painting, carpet replacements, wet areas and things like that.

For those more sort of reactive responses to people who are experiencing the kinds of issues that you are referring to, yes, I would much prefer that I did not receive those complaints, like you. We are continually working with Programmed to ensure that those maintenance and repairs happen as efficiently as possible and that our tenants are dealt with respectfully, as they should be.

I think Mr Aigner has a few details on some of the funding and where it goes to and how we are responding to some of the issues, particularly the mould issue, which has been an issue across a lot of buildings in the ACT, given the rain events that we have experienced more recently. I might ask Mr Aigner to provide a little bit more detail on those.

But, again, for all committee members: please, if you do get public housing tenants contacting you with regard to their housing maintenance, do not wait to ask a question here but get in touch with my office so that I can attend to it as quickly as possible.

Mr Aigner: Thank you for the question, Mr Parton. I would like to begin saying that nobody is standing still at Housing ACT. There is no business-as-usual for us. Everybody is trying to do their job and also improve it at the same time. That goes from tenant experience through to infrastructure and contracts, the people who are handling our program contract and indeed Programmed themselves. Everybody is working on improving how we do our business.

Mr Naughton will speak in a moment about the volume of jobs that we carry every year. It is a massive piece of work. I do not mean to diminish these complaints, but they sit in the context of a huge volume of work that is happening every single day.

I should say that every complaint is taken seriously, as the minister has indicated. The examples you have given us dismay me as much as they do the minister, and we take them all seriously and we try and rectify them. I will let Mr Naughton speak to the breakdown of the amount of work orders we have and how we manage them every year.

Mr Naughton: Thank you, Mr Aigner. In the context of our facilities management, an important element is to understand its interrelationship with the Growth and Renewal Program. We are renewing 20 per cent of ACT government homes, at a total budget of \$1.2 billion, the largest investment that has been made into housing.

The work orders that were created last financial year exceed 50,000 individual work orders and 26,000 immediate urgent response. An urgent response is a response to a tenant request within four hours.

The Total Facilities contract manage a 24/7 response centre for calls for tenants to request support. That support is catalogued. Certainly we acknowledge that we work with tenants very closely and also acknowledge that at times we have had matters that we have had to look to further support tenants with matters that are unresolved. We do have a complaints process. We do work very closely with the tenants to resolve those matters.

But the volume of work across our portfolio is significant and we do work with the

Total Facilities Management contractor to resolve those matters as quickly as we can against the performance indicators under the contract.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Naughton. I am not going to bang on about this. You know I could probably talk about this for hours, but I am not going to. But I just wanted to say: Minister and officials, we are all friends in here; could we not just be honest about the fact that Programmed Facilities Maintenance, by my assessment, based on feedback from dozens and dozens of tenants and based on feedback from some Programmed Facilities Maintenance subcontractors—who, by reports, risked their jobs by talking to me, but there were at least seven of them that reached out to me—again exhausted their contract well shy of the end of the financial year?

Indeed, some of these contractors specifically told me that they had been given the advice that, “As of this date”—which was pretty early on; like early March—“all we are doing is trying to get vacant properties online. We are only dealing with absolute emergency repairs and trying to get properties online.” And they specifically said it is because they had run out of money. Can you not just be honest and say that that is the case?

Ms Berry: No; I do not think that is the case actually, Mr Parton. I can provide or take on notice the detail of all of the upgrades that have happened over the last couple of years.

THE CHAIR: I am not talking about upgrades; I am talking about maintenance.

Ms Berry: Or maintenance and upgrades.

THE CHAIR: And I am talking about tenant-inspired, “I need this fixed.”

Ms Berry: I think we can provide that information to you as well. I would note that we are now at the midpoint of the Programmed contract.

THE CHAIR: How do you think it is going?

Ms Berry: We are now going through that review stage, to understand exactly what the issues are.

THE CHAIR: How do you reckon it is going?

Ms Berry: I hear the points that you are making here today, Mr Parton, and I appreciate your feedback. We are now at a point where we can review the contract and make adjustments in that respect.

Ms Wood: Minister, I would just add on the budget management for the repairs and maintenance program that it is a mix of capital upgrades and responsive maintenance. We always have funding available for responsive maintenance. That is not something that gets exhausted. We do tend to try and do more of the capital upgrades at the front end of the year, but we always retain funding for that responsive urgent maintenance.

THE CHAIR: All right. I do not need to say any more.

MS CLAY: Canberra Community Law told us that they spend a lot of their very limited legal resources advising public housing tenants who need to take up an issue with a contractor who has made repairs and those repairs are not satisfactory. Apparently it is the job of the tenant to follow through; this is not the job of public housing. Can you just confirm for me who it is who is responsible for making sure that those repairs are done correctly? Is it up to the tenant?

Ms Berry: Just before I get a response from officials in a bit more detail for you, it would depend on the circumstances. We could not say 100 per cent of all times that the tenants who have gone to Legal Aid or to Community Law to get support are the only ones that are having issues that are not being addressed by Housing. So we could not answer that as just a, “That is the answer to that question.”

MS CLAY: Let me rephrase the question because I think you should be able to give me a principled answer to this.

Ms Berry: That is different. You have asked a general question and said, “Is it Community Law’s responsibility to”—

MS CLAY: No; is it up to public housing to make sure that the contracted repair work is done satisfactorily and to make good, chase up and ensure that that job is done, or is it up to the tenant to chase the contractor and make sure that it is done? This is a legal relationship and the only person who could possibly follow through on that is the person who has legal responsibility for it. Can you tell me: who has the legal responsibility for doing that? Is it public housing or the tenant?

Ms Berry: I will ask officials to respond to that. I also say that a tenant has the right to get legal advice when they require or need it as well.

Mr Aigner: Thank you for the question. Absolutely, as the landlord, it is our responsibility to make sure that repairs are done properly. There may be disputes that arise because of the work that is done. There may be a disagreement between the tenant and us as a landlord about what that kind of work should have been. We would really need to understand the examples. Yes, absolutely; it is our job to make sure that work is done to the standard. The criteria for us are that it is safe and functional. Sometimes the argument point for us is that we need to make sure it is safe and functional, and sometimes people have different ideas about what that means.

MS CLAY: What information would you need to determine if there is a problem with this? We are obviously not going to delve into the details of individual legal cases, but is there any information that Canberra Community Law could give you, or Legal Aid? Is there information that somebody could give you about whether or not that is happening—whether or not tenants are being asked to enforce the contracts or whether, systemically, public housing is enforcing the contracts?

Ms Berry: We can follow up with Community Law on that question, and based on their submissions yesterday, and find out what the issues are that they are experiencing.

MS CLAY: That would be excellent; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Davis, do you have a supplementary?

MR DAVIS: I promised just one so I will make it a good one. It would seem the obvious one—

Ms Berry: You are making a lot of promises today, Mr Davis.

MR DAVIS: Anyone would think I'm a politician, Minister Berry! I want to be really specific. We are the most left-wing government in the country, a Labor-Greens government. We have a secure local jobs code. There is a systemic problem with the maintenance of public housing properties, as evidenced by Mr Parton's testimony, relative to the people getting in touch with his office. Why are we not insourcing completely the management of our own assets? Why do we continue to outsource, at such great expense, the maintenance of public housing assets?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Davis. Whilst I do not completely agree with the reference that you have made to Mr Parton's evidence around the public housing maintenance program, I have told the committee that we are at the midpoint of a contract. You cannot just cancel a contract willy-nilly. Decisions about insourcing are complex. This is the largest contract that the ACT government has, so a decision around whether or not a contract like that would be insourced would be a significant one.

As I said we are now at the point of a review process of a significant contract. We will discuss some of the issues that have been raised here and the way that we want to see that contract improved, which is what we are always seeking to achieve.

MR CAIN: Minister, you said you cannot cancel contracts willy-nilly, but you certainly demonstrated you can with the Calvary takeover.

Ms Berry: That is a very different situation, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: No, it is a contractual issue. You can do what you said you cannot in this particular area of administration. You can do that, and you know that.

Ms Berry: Thanks for that advice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: You are welcome.

Ms Berry: I do not think I agree with you.

MR DAVIS: I want to talk about the parliamentary and governing agreement. I have to provide a little bit of context, so I will take my lead from Mr Parton. When I was first elected, I knew nothing about the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, how it was going to be delivered, what it was seeking to achieve and how much was allocated for its investment, but I signed the parliamentary and governing agreement—in fact, all members of Labor and the Greens did—on the basis that that program would be able to deliver the government's ambition to increase the public housing portfolio by at least 400 homes by 2025.

In the 2½ years I have been in this place, it would appear to me that the raw number of assets owned and managed by Housing ACT is in structural decline. We appear to be pushing out our parliamentary and governing agreement target to 2027 to increase the size of the portfolio. There are a number of challenges on the program that did not exist either in the last term of the Assembly or even at the time that the parliamentary and governing agreement was signed, particularly challenges related to the building and construction sector.

If we are serious about increasing the size of our public housing stock, is it not time to scrap the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, go back to the drawing board and stop selling public housing properties to ensure that at no point our stock is in decline?

Ms Berry: Thanks for that, Mr Davis. You may recall that in November I provided a statement to the Assembly about the time frames for the PAGA commitment, which was an aim to deliver an additional 400 homes onto our public housing stock and renew 1,000 properties of our public housing stock to ensure that they were fit for purpose and met the needs of our tenants now and into the future. You have identified one of the issues that has arisen in the last couple of years.

However, these were impending issues that were identified in the lead-up to the development of the agreement made between the Labor Party and the Greens political party. We have always aimed and we will always strive to continue to hold the most public housing dwellings in the country per capita, which we have for many years. However, we have been confronted with a number of issues that have been beyond our control, including construction supplies, construction work force, interest rates, tax settings, HomeBuilder and La Niña. There has been a range of things beyond our control, not just with public housing, that has delayed a number of builds across the ACT, including some of our school facilities as well. We have had to adjust the time frames for some of our schools. We have had to adjust the time frames for public housing to achieve this outcome.

However, in saying that, we have an opportunity now to consider some of the growth and renewal program and, as I referred to earlier, some of the homes that we have identified for the growth and renewal program that may be able to be rectified or upgraded and put back onto the market for public housing tenants. We have the \$50 million accelerator funding from the federal government, so we have an opportunity to consider how that could be used to address some of the issues that we face with regard to delivering on what has been a very complicated and complex program of growth and renewal.

MR DAVIS: I ask this question with all sincerity. I, along with the other 15 members of this government, signed that parliamentary and governing agreement. It was not just a contract between our two political parties to govern; I would argue that it was a contract with the Canberra community about what they could expect from the most progressive government in the country. At the moment the inability to meet that target leads me to conclude that I and the government at large are in breach of that contract, both with the two governing parties and with the electorate at large.

Is it acceptable, in the greatest housing crisis that the territory has ever seen, to not find a way to reform this program to meet the most modest of targets agreed to by our two parties and committed to the electorate?

Ms Berry: Perhaps I should start by reading the PAGA agreement. The agreement states:

The Government will aim to deliver a total of 400 additional public housing dwellings by 2025, inclusive of the 260 additional dwellings already committed to by the Government for the period 2019-2025.

The parties share a commitment to working towards an ambitious affordable rental housing target for dwellings focused on affordability for the second income quintile, and acknowledge there are significant challenges in land availability, industry and sector capacity to deliver additional housing, and capital demand on the Territory Budget. The Government will strive to deliver additional affordable housing dwellings despite these constraints, with a goal of 600 additional dwellings by 2025-26.

MR DAVIS: Do we think the community accepts “aim” and “strive” as a good explanation? They sound like “get out of jail free” cards.

Ms Berry: It is the agreement, Mr Davis. However—

MR DAVIS: Okay; we aimed and we did not make it, so we can give the Tories a go.

THE CHAIR: Mr Davis, I think Ms Berry wants to conclude.

Ms Berry: Thank you. However, we have opportunities now, through the federal government’s \$50 million, through the budget announcement that the ACT government has just made of \$62 million towards opportunities to work with the community housing sector around providing more community homes, around build-to-rent-to-buys or build-to-rent projects across the ACT, and we are continuing to aim to deliver this 400, despite all of these constraints.

We will deliver the 400 additional homes and we will renew 1,000 properties across the ACT. Unfortunately, because of all of the issues that are out of our control, we are facing more challenges than we expected, which means that we are having to rely on the federal government to dip into their funding allowances, which is the \$50 million, which will go a long way to assisting us to achieving this outcome. Mr Aigner talked about Housing ACT. The government are not sitting still; we are always striving to meet this aim, but we know that it is complicated. I think we can provide some detail on the targets and where we are at, with respect to the commitment. Mr Naughton?

Mr Naughton: Yes, certainly, Minister Berry. Thank you for the question, Mr Davis. Of the 400 dwellings, which are the growth target dwellings, 280 are being achieved through acquisition, through purchases from the private market through expressions of interest from private developers, and 120 new dwellings are being constructed on new land sites. We have all of these earmarked at street level—in other words, the addresses of the sites that we are purchasing.

By way of an update for the committee, of the 280, 131 dwellings have been purchased and 127 are committed for delivery in the forward years. The remaining 22 dwellings, to bring the total to 280, are currently under assessment for purchase by the acquisitions team within ACT housing to be committed to this financial year, once the EOI process is fulfilled.

With the 114 dwellings that have already been constructed on new land sites and have been delivered, we have a remaining six dwellings to be delivered this financial year. Of the total of 400 that we have earmarked for delivery for growth, we have six dwellings to be delivered for 2023-24, to round out the 120 dwellings that will be constructed on new land sites, and we have 22 dwellings remaining out of the 280 dwellings to be delivered on new land sites. So we are well progressed through the growth. You will not see the program grow until we get into the later part of the next financial year because of the renewal program and the way the renewal program is structured, but we are growing under the growth targets.

MR DAVIS: There are a lot of numbers there, Mr Naughton. Thank you; I will have to go away and process those in more detail, and inevitably I will have some questions on notice. Could you clarify, specifically, how far short of the 400 properties by 2025 we expect to fall?

Mr Aigner: Can I just clarify: committed or delivered?

MR DAVIS: Delivered. Actual keys in the hands of tenants; people are moving the fridge in.

Mr Naughton: We will have all properties delivered in the financial year that we are in right now, under the PAGA commitment.

MR DAVIS: Delivered? As in, people will be moving in?

Mr Naughton: That is correct.

MR DAVIS: Under the PAGA agreement?

Mr Naughton: Correct.

MR DAVIS: All 400?

Mr Naughton: Correct.

THE CHAIR: On the back of that line of questioning, I want to say that I think it is remarkable, Minister, that there are very few people—I think there are very few people—in Canberra who believe that this target will be met, and that is displayed today by the fact that a member of your government does not believe that the target will be met.

The budget outlook statement says that you are spending an extra \$345 million for 400 additional homes and the renewal of 1,000 public houses, but there has also been talk of a delivery of up to 600 additional dwellings by 2025-26. Let us forget about

the 600 and just go with 400. Are you telling me that the stock of homes will increase from 11,602 to 12,002? It is very rare that Mr Davis and I find ourselves on the same page, but what we are looking for is: that was the start point; this is the finish point. We started here, and if we add 400 homes, we end there.

MR DAVIS: Yes. A net increase is what we are looking for.

Ms Berry: Before I ask Ms Wood to provide a bit more context around that, the growth and renewal program replaces 1,000 homes. Under the previous growth and renewal program, when Minister Rattenbury, as housing minister, and Mr Barr, as Treasurer, signed up to the asset recycling initiative, which I know you have views around as well, Mr Parton—

THE CHAIR: We will not go there.

Ms Berry: However, under that program, 1,288 properties were demolished and replaced as part of that program. We were required to do that because we had signed an agreement with the government. Also, we were moving people from homes that were unacceptable into homes that were much better suited to their needs.

This program is similar but much more complicated, because it is individual homes, not big complexes like the BACs. It becomes more complex because we are dealing with individual tenants. It is a very tenant-focused program, so it does take time, because we want to make sure that tenants are living where it suits their needs—whether that is out in the suburbs or whether it is closer to public transport or shopping centres. It is a complicated program because it is tenant-focused and, again, because of all of those other complex issues that have come on board since the start of the program, or even since the last growth and renewal program.

Our aim has always been to build better homes for people. We do not, as a government, want people to live in substandard properties. We do not want high numbers of low-income people disadvantaging each other by living in areas where there is a densification of low-income people. That is not helpful for people to build better lives. The aim of both of these programs has always been to build better lives for public housing tenants.

I cannot even remember now what you were asking. What was the question?

THE CHAIR: We were asking about this basic premise: if you are adding 400—and I am assuming that the start point is 11,602—we will end at 12,002.

Ms Berry: What numbers have you added to that?

THE CHAIR: This is the stock; I have just added 400. This is the public housing stock figure shown at page 49 of budget statements G, being 11,602.

Ms Berry: Yes. I gave a bit of the history there. It is important in the context of what we are trying to achieve here. I will defer to Ms Wood.

Ms Wood: Thank you, Minister. As the minister said, the renewal part of this

program is, in many parts, the most complex. As Mr Naughton has detailed, we have focused on delivering the growth through acquisition and construction on new land and managing that additional growth through the PAGA, through all of those buildings being acquisition and construction on new land, and not impacted by some of those complexities of the renewal program. We will deliver that growth, as Mr Naughton has outlined. In addition to that we will deliver the renewal.

With the size of the overall portfolio, which relies on both the growth and the renewal, we will start to see that increase in the 2024-25 year, and the full delivery of the complete growth in the portfolio will be in 2026-27, and it will be 12,100 properties. That is all forecast, and those forecasts are constantly revisited to ensure that we can be confident that we will reach them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Wood. Ms Berry, I promise that I will be watching very closely.

Ms Berry: I appreciate your feedback, as always, Mr Parton.

MR CAIN: With these completed dwellings that you are acquiring, how many of them were bought directly as built and how many were off the plan?

Mr Naughton: Thank you for your question. Currently, under the growth and renewal program, 131 dwellings have been purchased. For this particular reporting period, in terms of this financial year, we have purchased 13 land sites which have been procured for development. Please do not confuse the 13 land sites with 13 dwellings.

MR CAIN: How many were bought in bulk from the larger developers in Canberra?

Mr Naughton: I would need to take that question on notice.

MR CAIN: Also on notice, if you do buy in bulk, do you get a discount?

Mr Naughton: To best answer your question, we buy land where we can best utilise that site for a number of dwellings.

MR CAIN: Who is guiding your procurement approaches to these acquisitions?

Mr Naughton: We have a team in ACT housing that have specifically been stood up for this task. They are presented with land sites through expressions of interest from developers, from builders; we also work very closely with the Suburban Land Agency for each release site.

The team assesses the release site for its location, working very closely with the tenant experience team, and understanding, as Minister Berry articulated, the right location for each of our homes to be built and how we can best utilise the land portfolio that we are provided with.

We build class C adaptable homes. That is our aim. That requires at-level entry and at-level exit from the home. It goes all the way down to how far a tenant might have to move a bin to put the bin out for bin collection. The assessment very much relies on

how the site will best meet the needs of our tenants.

MR CAIN: Does Minister Steel have a role in this procurement process as Special Minister of State, responsible for procurement.

Ms Wood: Mr Cain, we obviously work under the requirements of the government's procurement rules, so all of our procurement is entirely compliant with government procurement rules.

MR CAIN: Do Minister Steel and his officers have a direct role in the hands-on procurement of these dwellings?

Ms Wood: No.

MR PETTERSSON: The budget contains funding of \$60 million to create an affordable housing fund. Can someone explain to the committee what the purpose of that fund is and what it will hope to achieve?

Mr Miners: The \$60 million fund is designed to support community housing providers in providing affordable housing in the ACT. It came about following a process we ran last year. We ran a request for a proposal out to the community housing sector to bring forward to us proposals that were ready for development that needed some government assistance to get them off the ground. From that process, we received a number of proposals. Of those, three were selected that are ready to go, met all the requirements and can be funded, and they are the first ones to be funded from the fund.

We are now in the process of moving that fund to be more of a rolling, ongoing process where community housing providers who have land, who are shovel-ready, and are ready to move with a project can approach us. We will then assess the proposals and put them to government for consideration to use that money to basically support them in providing affordable housing in the community.

MR PETTERSSON: Can you quantify how many extra homes you think this will support?

Mr Miners: It very much depends on the type of home and what is required. The three proposals that have come through so far are expected to deliver around 161 additional dwellings. On top of that, that fund is also supporting the Ginninderry women's build-to-rent-to-buy scheme, which is being done through Ginninderry, SLA and joint venture partners. That will deliver another 22. Already, to date, it is expected to deliver another 181 dwellings. Of course, it will depend a little bit on the nature of the type of housing that is required.

MR DAVIS: Can I ask a clarifying question because there is a lot of misunderstanding. Does the government officially define the difference between public, social, community and affordable housing? It appears to me, the more I read about this, that different NGOs and different governments appropriate those terms to different types of projects and different kinds of funding models. Do we have a consistent way that we determine those four types of housing?

Mr Miners: It is very easy to get caught in a debate about what fits on what side of the line, and it is not especially helpful. Through the work we are doing, we are trying to look at all of those and we are not too worried about drawing a line. Typically, there are some definitions. Public housing is supplied by the government. Affordable housing is 75 per cent of market rent or more; anything less than that tends to be classified as social housing.

We are less worried about how that might look because through the lifetime of an affordable housing project, you may have a tenant that moves across the barriers or those lines. They may start in an affordable property, and move into a period where they lose their job. It would then become a social housing project. They then get a job and move back into affordable. It does not make any sense to be drawing a line and be too tied up in the definitions. It is much more about making sure that we are delivering across all of those needs and we are being flexible enough to deliver them as needed at any point in time.

MR DAVIS: The way that I would be keenest to define them—the only hair I would like to split here, if you would not mind—is: how would you define them in terms of what the government owns and what somebody else owns?

Mr Miners: The government is certainly much more involved in that social housing space. That is because that is the people in greatest need, and that is where the focus of the public housing is. But the community sector equally provides a mix of social and affordable housing and does that in a really good way. They are able to work with people over their lifetime to do that. I would say yes, you can split hairs on this but, in fact, the community sector is providing right across that spectrum, and we should acknowledge that in the way we deal with them.

MR DAVIS: When the community sector is providing, as you describe it, social housing, is that an instance where it is an ACT government-owned asset and we have contracted the management or head lease to a community organisation to manage that asset?

Mr Miners: It could be, or it could be an asset that they own and they are managing it. So it could be either.

MR DAVIS: I see. In respect of the ones that the community housing providers own or that, frankly, any group external to government owns, can I get a better understanding, both in this budget specifically and in budgets historically, of the proportion of ratepayers' money that has been provided to external providers to own and operate their own asset base as opposed to our own?

Mr Miners: I will have to take that on notice. I do not have the details in front of me. Certainly, the fund that we have set up will allow them to own the assets. There is a mix and I just do not have that detail with me at the moment. I will take that on notice.

MR DAVIS: I do not want this to sound hostile regarding the valuable and important role that community housing providers play in supporting affordable housing, but I would like a better understanding. We have just had a big conversation about, as I see

it, some of the challenges with us meeting relatively modest targets on the public housing end, and capital is a large part of those challenges.

You will forgive me if I raised an eyebrow about \$60 million going outside government to subsidise and support the provision of housing. Can I get a better understanding about how the government is making sure we get value for money in that \$60 million investment?

Mr Miners: The other half of my role is as Deputy Under Treasurer, so I do tend to focus a little bit on value for money.

MR DAVIS: It pays to have you here, Mr Miners!

Mr Miners: All the proposals we receive, and that is one of the key criteria we assess them on. We look at the value, or the cost, of delivering those services should the government have to deliver them themselves. We have some benchmarks against which we will assess all the proposals. Those benchmarks are a little bit fluid, because it will depend on the nature of the service being provided. But a lot of those organisations out there have access to finance, they have access to land, and they have access to development capabilities to actually do this. So, we will assess each of those proposals to ensure they do represent value for money. When we provide advice to government, we provide an assessment of whether we think it does provide value for money, and, in fact, if it does not, it does not actually get that far. We cross it off before it gets through the process. So it is a key criteria in making sure it is being delivered.

When we are looking at housing affordability, I think we need to recognise that there is no one single way of delivering any particular type of support, and we really need to make sure we look at all the avenues and we explore them all so that we are not providing advice to government. Sometimes it might be saying, “Yes, build it yourself.” Sometimes it might be saying, “Build the asset and get someone to lease it.” Sometimes it might be saying, “Just support the community sector to own it and build it and run it themselves.” It will be a mix of all those things that will deliver the best outcomes and the best value for money.

MR DAVIS: My last question, and I need you to answer this question for me as if I were a simpleton! No raised eyebrows anybody! The average house price in the ACT is about \$950,000. We seem to be struggling to meet some of these growth renewal targets by 2025. A simple, lay person might say, “Why don’t you just use that money to go and buy 70 average homes which would surely help us meet that target?” How would you, I suppose, counter that simple budget analysis?

Mr Miners: The first thing I would say is, already, through the first allocation from the fund, we are delivering over 180 homes. Again, the market is not segmented. It is not like, “There is a public house here, and a community house here and a market house here.” All those parts of the market interact with each other.

Again, just increasing land supply flows right through all of those sectors. Moving someone and allowing them to move from a public house into a community house frees up a public house somewhere. Allowing more houses even to be built in

higher-value suburbs allows people to move out of suburbs that have lower value, which people can then move into.

So I do not think you can pick one thing and say, “Just do this and it will solve the problem.” It is really about making sure you are operating right across the spectrum of the entire housing market, and that is the way we are trying to phrase it. To be honest, that is a large part of why the government has set up my role: to be able to look at all those bits and pull them together and think about the issue in a very holistic way.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

MR CAIN: I have some questions regarding the compliance under the Commonwealth’s Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, with respect to the West Belconnen conservation corridor out at Ginninderry.

There was a final approval decision for taking of actions in accordance with an endorsed program under that act dated 1 September 2017. There was a condition to that approval. I will read the condition:

For the NSW portion of the West Belconnen Conservation Corridor the **approval holder** must secure the land for conservation in perpetuity through a legally binding mechanism approved by the Department within two years of endorsement of the Program.

This is back in September 2017. Minister, is the Ginninderry development conditional on complying with the EPBC statutory assessment, and has the New South Wales portion of the West Belconnen corridor at Ginninderry been secured within the required two years?

Mr Dietz: Thank you, Mr Cain, I appreciate the question. As you state, the Ginninderry Joint Venture is required to meet conditions under the EPBC Act. I do note, for all intents and purposes, from the aspect of the joint venture, we do believe that we have met the intent of pre-conditions of the act; however, as you point out, there is a condition which is under review by the commonwealth as we speak.

MR CAIN: Have you met the conditions within the two years of the approval in 2017?

Mr Dietz: I would prefer not to provide a further view on the issue, knowing that the commonwealth is reviewing that currently.

MR CAIN: But has Ginninderry met that condition that within two years it will legally secure all the land in that corridor?

Ms Berry: I think, Mr Cain, the answer that has been provided is that the commonwealth are currently reviewing the process, and Mr Dietz and I are unable to answer your question at this time. However—

MR CAIN: I have got some more factually based questions.

Ms Berry: Pardon?

MR CAIN: More factually based questions. The West Belconnen conservation corridor appears to include land that is not owned by the SLA or the joint venture, some of which neighbours SLA-owned lot 60. Obviously, you seem to be aware of that. Minister, has all the land in the West Belconnen conservation corridor been purchased by any of the SLA reviewed developments, the Ginninderry joint development, or the ACT government?

Mr Dietz: All of the land has not been purchased, no.

MR CAIN: What discussions have been entered into with the registered proprietors of land in that corridor regarding the sale of that land or any part of it to SLA, the Ginninderry Joint Venture or Ginninderry Conservation Trust?

Mr Dietz: To that point, two of the landowners have sold to the ACT government. Discussions have occurred over the period with the other two.

MR CAIN: Has lot 61, for example, been acquired?

Mr Dietz: I am trying to recall which one lot 61 is. If it is the one closest to the Ginninderra Falls—

MR CAIN: It has the quarry on it, I believe.

Ms Berry: No, it has not.

Mr Dietz: No, it has not been acquired.

MR CAIN: So why is it then included as a portion of the West Belconnen conservation corridor?

Mr Dietz: The initial master plan was agreed by all landowners in the area. As part of that master plan, the zoning of that lot was agreed within the master plan; however, the acquisitions have not occurred, as they are being negotiated in the time that comes as development continues.

MR CAIN: So is it your view that you are not in compliance with the commonwealth requirement?

Ms Berry: Okay!

Mr Dietz: No, that gets back to the first question you asked. The commonwealth is reviewing that. The joint venture believes they have met the intent.

MR CAIN: And yet there are some statements within the Ginninderry annual report to acknowledge non-compliance.

Mr Dietz: Of that particular issue?

MR CAIN: Yes, of that condition.

Mr Dietz: Which is why the commonwealth is reviewing. So, the Ginninderry Joint Venture believes that they have met—they recognise that there is an issue, which has brought to the commonwealth's attention, which is being reviewed.

MR CAIN: So it would appear that you are not in compliance at the moment with the commonwealth act—

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, I think you have canvassed that question—

Ms Berry: Okay—now you are just making-up stuff.

MR CAIN: No, no.

Ms Berry: We have just said the federal government is reviewing it.

MR CAIN: But you are not in compliance.

Ms Berry: In your view.

MR CAIN: In the views of the condition—

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, I think we are done! Thank you.

Minister, on 3 February, you announced the establishment of a coordinator-general to oversight your housing policy with the position based in CMTEDD.

Ms Berry: I did.

THE CHAIR: The position appears to have quite a wide remit, and I do not envy the challenges of that job. I feel a little weird talking about Mr Miners in the third person when he is actually here in the room, but in relation to this position, was this role advertised? And if not, why not?

Ms Berry: No, it was not advertised.

THE CHAIR: Can you explain why you did not deem it necessary to seek a person for the role with deep housing, and particularly community housing, expertise?

Ms Berry: This might be a question that might be better for—

THE CHAIR: For the chief?

Ms Berry: the Chief Minister. I would say that the breadth and the complexity of housing supply—not just public housing, not just community housing, but housing supply more generally and build-to-rent and all of the different initiatives and innovative ways the government is trying, in the ACT, to approach the housing crisis—requires a coordinated approach, not just from the housing and community perspective but also bringing a central-agency approach to all of this work.

THE CHAIR: Does—

Ms Berry: But I think it might be better question, in the detail, for the Chief Minister.

THE CHAIR: I am going ask and see if you are across it: does the Coordinator-General for Housing have KPIs? Are they outlined in the budget papers? And if we do not have KPIs, how will we know if the new office is succeeding with its objectives?

Ms Berry: Mr Parton, can I ask you if you could, perhaps, put those questions on notice for me? Then I can respond to them, or I can ask—

THE CHAIR: How would you feel about me asking Mr Miners now?

Ms Berry: You can ask Mr Miners now—this is the coordinator-general that I have prepared earlier!

THE CHAIR: Mr Miners, are there set, outwardly viewable KPIs for this role?

Mr Miners: There are not specific KPIs in the sense that we see them against criteria against which we are reporting, but there are some fairly clear objectives for the role, and we work with the government to make sure that those objectives are being delivered.

So, for example, there is a very clear objective around delivering on that \$60 million fund to make sure that that affordable housing is being increased. There are very clear objectives around making sure that all the elements of policy development, right across all aspects that affect housing, are being drawn together in a coordinated way so that the government is getting one perspective on it, not a siloed view from all directorates. There is a very clear intention for me to be involved and working with community housing, and building those relationships, and making sure that we are working with them as a partnership approach.

I do not have any lack of clarity around what I am being asked to do. But, is there a set of publicly announced, “Here is what I do”? I think that the closest to that is the press release on the announcement, which sets out very clearly the breadth of the remit.

THE CHAIR: My final question on this would be to you, minister. Is the appointment of Mr Miners quite simply because Mr Barr is another member of your government who did not believe—

Ms Berry: He is the Chief Minister, in fact!

THE CHAIR: that you would deliver on the promises that were made in this space?

Ms Berry: No, not at all. I think what has occurred, as a result of Mr Miners holding the Deputy Under Treasurer position, is that it brings an economic, or a Treasury, lens to the process that we are trying to embark on, which is to improve housing in the

ACT. This housing crisis is not something the ACT is immune to, but having a coordinated approach, across agencies, with a few different lenses on it means that we can have a central place where people can go to, particularly around these initiatives of the \$60 million. Because there are people who have been interested in working with the government and accessing funds to provide more community housing in the ACT, and it did not sit well with any particular portfolio, so having a coordinated approach was, in the government's view, the best way forward.

THE CHAIR: Is the only expressed KPI, as has been the case today, that Mr Miners is there to make sure that the government does it says it was going to do?

Ms Berry: No, they are your words, Mr Parton; that is a bit unfair.

Mr Miners: I do not believe I said that.

THE CHAIR: Okay; it might have been a stretch on the paraphrase!

Ms Berry: I think so.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you tell me what feedback the SLA has provided to EPSDD about the ILRP in recent years?

Ms Berry: They are constantly providing feedback. They are here.

MS CLAY: Great. Rather than having a really long conversation, maybe you can tell me your process of how and when you provide feedback, and the nature of it. If there are general themes?

Ms Berry: Before you start, Mr Dietz, a lot of this happens through cabinet and through the development of the Indicative Land Release Program, and then the government assesses all of that. It is approved through cabinet, and then it becomes part of the budget papers, which is what we are discussing now. Mr Dietz might be able to provide you with a bit more detail on it.

Mr Dietz: Thank you, yes. As the minister says, we do not have approval powers over the ILRP, but we work very closely with our colleagues in EPSDD around ensuring that all the information we have can be provided when they make the decisions about what would be in the ILRP.

The high-level process has a governance framework, so we have a working group that meets regularly as well as a steering group that meets regularly. The working group are ensuring that the status against the ILRP is understood but also the risks of delivering to the ILRP are understood; that, in a less regular process, brings to a steering group.

That steering group consists of not only of us and EPSDD but also the Under Treasurer, and TCCS have joined that as well to ensure that the knowledge of status and risks to delivery of certain land within the ILRP are known and captured. That

steering group then also has an opportunity to review and endorse the ILRP prior to it going to cabinet.

MS CLAY: Are there any themes for the sorts of feedback that you have tended to provide in recent years?

Mr Dietz: I think the issues are vast when we look at each of the particular blocks of land.

MS CLAY: I bet, yes.

Mr Dietz: To try and classify that into themes is probably very different.

MS CLAY: So you are very much approaching it on a block-by-block basis?

Mr Dietz: Yes. We will look at each individual block and understand the risks. The risks are very much around the development process that is required to release a block of land, and where that block of land sits within that process. If it is mostly through the process, low risk; if it has still got a lot to go, high risk.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. The Suburban Land Agency does a great job in my neck of the woods running the Mingle program. I was hoping to get an update on some recent activities.

Mr Dietz: Thank you, and you are right; I agree with you 100 per cent. I think the Mingle program is a fantastic program that really puts us apart from developers. We are creating communities and delivering the land that people purchase. Releasing that land is really only one of the very early steps in creating that community.

I note that we do look to ensure that we have the Mingle programming starting very early in the process, and although we have only just released and started to sell blocks at Jacka, we have already started a Mingle process in Jacka. I will hand to Tom Gordon to perhaps give a little bit of discussion around some of the Mingle process in Gungahlin. Also, I think Simon Tennent is very much across the Mingle program in Whitlam, which has been very successful.

Mr Gordon: In Gungahlin we have just completed programs in Throsby. There is about five events this year. In Taylor we have had over 20 events in the last year. We will continue programs there. As John just indicated, we have started very early in the Jacka process. We have not got residents as yet, but we are meeting some of those that are purchasing blocks. To a similar extent, we have got Mingle programs running in the Molonglo Valley. I will hand over to Simon for Molonglo.

Mr Tennent: The Whitlam Mingle program is really successful, and I think it is a great blueprint for how we will roll this out in future suburbs. Mingle has been around for a while, as we know. There was a big investment in Whitlam with respect to the display village, plus an investment in a home for Mingle within the suburb. That investment was quite considerable in terms of a display home which has been

converted into a premises where the community can meet, as well as an investment in a cafe, which was really learning from the Coombs and Wright experience.

Mingle is running regular weekly programs. They are even out counting bins on the street so that they can understand exactly how many residents are moving in. We are up to, I think, 240 houses now occupied. We are offering all sorts of programs, for young mothers through to older persons, and we are also managing the community shared garden beds that exist within the suburb as well—so an extremely fruitful program for the SLA and Whitlam. And, as I said, it will really inform the next suburb across the road and the future suburb as we go down towards Molonglo 3, and certainly, very successful programs, as Tom mentioned—equivalent ones in Gungahlin.

MR PETTERSSON: Have the activities and events changed over time in response to community feedback?

Mr Tennent: The ones in Mingle have. Certainly, the ethnic background of our new home buyers has seen a real increase in programs that are more culturally targeted. We invest in events like Diwali and other similarly culturally appropriate events. We are seeing a lot of families that have got more children as well as having their elderly parents living with them, so household size in Whitlam is quite large at the moment. We are now seeing those multi-generational families, and our programs are being tailored accordingly—putting on all programs for seniors and, as I mentioned, young mothers, and lots of programs for children during school holidays.

MR PETTERSSON: How long do we expect Mingle to run in Throsby, Jacka and Taylor?

Mr Dietz: Mingle does have a life span, but the purpose of Mingle is to educate the community to run the program itself and, by doing that, empower the community to continue thriving. With regard to Throsby, it has just come to a close. I might make a side mention on Throsby with regard to innovation in the program. One of the lead Mingle community members there is Aunty Serena Williams. The NAIDOC ball was recently coming up, and it was her idea that we have a table from SLA and we bring elder community members from different backgrounds to the NAIDOC ball. So we had a continent background who came from Whitlam and another one from India who came from Taylor who joined us at the NAIDOC ball with Aunty Serena Williams. It was a great example of the evolving innovative nature of Mingle creating communities.

The Throsby one has just finished. I can also say Throsby just won a Property Council Australia national development of the year award, of which Mingle is part—of that development—so it was also very beneficial. It starts early, and we probably have looked at moving our program to start earlier and then leaving when we feel the community is at that point of critical mass and can continue on. Throsby was delivered, probably, four years ago. Jacka is just starting now, so roughly for four years or so over the life of the development Mingle will be heavily involved.

MR PETTERSSON: Wonderful. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: I will go to a new line of questioning. I wanted to ask about “increasing housing choice, access and affordability”, and “continuing to maintain high quality public housing” in the budget. I have got a couple of questions on this.

In that initiative the total project value is \$177 million over four years, and specifically \$67.5 million in this budget year 2023-2024. In the capital spending data table this is classified as “new works”. So is this funding for all new repairs and new maintenance?

Ms Wood: Thank you, Mr Davis. This funding is operational funding for Housing ACT, the public trading enterprise, and it is sustaining what we have seen over the last couple of years—a higher level of investment in repairs and maintenance.

MR DAVIS: Okay. How many houses will benefit from repairs and maintenance in the next year from the \$67.5 million?

Ms Wood: I will check with Mr Naughton if he has that level of breakdown here.

Mr Naughton: Thank you for the question. We have the statistics from the last financial year that we could share to give an indication as to what we are looking at for this financial year that we are now in. Would that assist?

MR DAVIS: That would be great. Last year we allocated the same amount or slightly less?

Mr Naughton: Last year’s allocation was \$64.9 million towards repairs and maintenance, which was committed to the end of 30 June.

MR DAVIS: So last year’s numbers would give us a rough idea. About how many were there last year, Mr Naughton?

Mr Naughton: Certainly. As I mentioned earlier, 50,000 work orders and on top of that another 26,690 responsive packages of work. I think the key high-level achievements that would be relevant to note for this committee are: we undertook 277 kitchen upgrades; 393 wet area upgrades; domestic violence works upgrades totalled 526; disabled modifications were 264 at a total spend of \$1.9 million; internal paint work had 556 jobs at \$3.4 million; 1,983 homes received new appliances; for major works at multi-unit properties, we had 35 work orders across five multi-unit properties; and there were roofing upgrades across 190 properties at \$1.2 million. They are some of the key highlights from the last financial year.

As we roll into this financial year—working with our total facilities manager, working with the allocations team and the tenant experience team—we are allocating out the roles and the responsibilities and the work that we will undertake this financial year.

MR DAVIS: Great. Are those numbers part of the renewal of the 1,000 properties?

Mr Naughton: No.

MR DAVIS: So repair, maintenance and renewal are not considered interchangeable;

they are different?

Mr Naughton: That is correct.

MR DAVIS: To be very clear; okay, great. Why is the total spending over the forwards significantly less for this year? There is \$67.5 million this year. This year there is a lot more, but then there is only \$34 million next year, only reaching up to \$38 million in the last forward year. Why is it that you anticipate we will spend so much less on repairs and maintenance in the future years?

Ms Wood: Mr Davis, I will take that one.

MR DAVIS: Please.

Ms Wood: The forward estimates show a base level of funding—operational funding—that government has committed into the forward estimates. That funding is recognising the additional cost of operations, particularly repairs and maintenance. We set the repairs and maintenance program each year, so we will come back to government with proposals for what repairs and maintenance should be in future years. We are currently—in parallel with continuing to deliver repairs and maintenance, and connected to the work that is happening looking at energy efficiency upgrades across public housing—doing a really detailed property condition analysis across our whole portfolio. We will have more detailed property condition reports for the full portfolio. That will help us set our appropriate level repairs and maintenance program into the future. We are working from where we are now, but we will have more data that will enable us to set that program for future years.

MR DAVIS: That makes sense to a degree, Ms Wood. I guess I am still a little bit confused, because if we have been spending \$64.5 million last year and \$67 million this year—not to mention, and I appreciate that there is some disagreement, Mr Parton had some really good examples of where people are still waiting for repairs and maintenance—it does not appear to me that there is any chance that \$34 million next year and \$36 million the year after is going to come anywhere close to covering the demand. So I cannot understand why we have not thought to appropriate that into the forwards to begin with, rather than pre-empting what appears more likely than not that the department will have to come back to Treasury and ask for more money.

Ms Wood: It is something that we will review, and we will look at in the next budget process. It is giving us a base we did not have before—that funding that is across the forward estimates—and we did want to be in a position with much better evidence and data to set what a medium-term investment should look like.

MR DAVIS: I have a final follow-up question. I appreciate that Mr Naughton answered about how much we spent last year. Would you happen to have the 2021-22 year figure with you?

Mr Naughton: Yes; for 2021-22 it was \$80 million.

MR DAVIS: I would hazard a guess that Ms Wood will almost certainly be coming back to Treasury for more money in the next budget.

Ms Wood: We will come back with an evidence-based position, Mr Davis.

MR DAVIS: Tremendous; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, Ms Wood in her answer alluded to the fact that this spend was to provide a higher level of repairs and maintenance. What leads you to believe that we need to provide a higher level of repairs and maintenance? Are you of the belief that the previous level of repairs and maintenance was not sufficient?

Ms Berry: Some of the approaches that have been taken consider the age of our housing stock, which is why we are going through the housing renewal program. We have some of the oldest stock, I believe, in the country, so that does need greater maintenance. Again that is why we are going through the growth and renewal program.

We have also seen a significant increase in mould issues across all buildings, including housing, which has needed increased remediation. Those are just a couple of the issues that have been identified relating to that greater need. As Ms Wood said, we will continue to assess and provide the evidence to show Treasury where we might need to come back and get additional funding to ensure that these homes are maintained appropriately.

MR CAIN: Minister, I want to clear up a statement. You said that I was making stuff up. I will read from your own documents; please pay careful attention. The Umwelt consultants audit in August last year states:

Riverview Projects is not compliant with Condition 5 in relation to the NSW portion of the Conservation Corridor. A legally binding mechanism to secure the land for conservation in perpetuity has not yet been approved by the Department or secured over the land.

That was meant to be done by 18 July 2019. The Ginninderry annual report for 2021-22, in August last year, states:

Whilst the Audit Report states Condition 5 is non-compliant, Riverview has been working with the Department prior to the Audit Review Report and continues to work with Department in finding a suitable legally binding mechanism.

Obviously, Minister, as we have picked up today, if you are finding something, you have not yet found it. Could you describe what types of conversations you are having with the commonwealth, and give a time line for those conversations with SLA, about gaining the compliance which you do not currently have?

Mr Dietz: I will take that on notice, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Thank you. Mr Dietz, you might also have said—forgive me if I have got the wrong person—that you had been in discussion with the owners of land that you currently do not own. Could you detail the discussions with those other owners who own their own land and you do not, even though they are in the corridor?

Mr Dietz: Just to correct that, it is the Ginninderry joint venture representatives who have been in discussion, and I will take on notice providing you with the history of those discussions.

MR CAIN: For each of those two parcels that you need to get; thank you. How have you been trying to influence the commonwealth and New South Wales governments? Throw in the New South Wales conversation, if you do not mind, in that question taken on notice. Obviously, it is New South Wales zoned land at the moment.

I want to refer as well to the ecological impact assessment report by Capital Ecology, on behalf of Ginninderry, dated December 2020. This document appears to incorrectly state that all EPBC Act environmental conditions have been complied with. On page 15, for example, it states:

As demonstrated throughout this EIA, the proposed development is compliant with all of the EPBC Act approval conditions.

What efforts have you made to correct that false statement in that assessment report?

Mr Dietz: We will take that on notice, along with your original question.

MR CAIN: What kind of discussions have you had with the Yass Valley Council in particular regarding this noncompliance?

Mr Dietz: We can take that on notice; thank you.

MR CAIN: Finally, in a press release in October 2018, after the end of the two-year required compliance period, Minister Gentleman stated:

The project has also received environmental approval under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

That is a misleading statement by the minister at that time. What has been done to correct that misleading statement?

Mr Dietz: We will take that on notice; thank you, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Have you discussed this particular misleading statement with Mr Gentleman; if not, why not?

Mr Dietz: We can take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Thank you. I look forward to those responses.

THE CHAIR: Minister, am I able to discuss something that is mentioned on page 5 of budget statements G? There is a brief mention of the commissioning process which is currently being undertaken by CSD. Is that something that we can discuss here?

Ms Wood: It is a matter for the homelessness portfolio—Minister Vassarotti.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Wood: Chair, I have one correction to make to evidence that we have provided. For 2021-22, the repairs and maintenance actual expenditure was \$77.291 million, not \$80 million.

THE CHAIR: Can I go to budget paper B, page 77? There is mention of \$61 million worth of properties that have been transferred from Community Housing Canberra in return for extinguishment of their debt to the government. In this regard, just to be clear, can I ask—

Ms Berry: You can ask.

THE CHAIR: who owns CHC's housing stock now? In other words, is it Housing ACT or is it CMTEDD?

Mr Miners: I am just trying to recall. I believe they are on CMTEDD's books. Yes, they are.

THE CHAIR: How many properties were transferred, and what housing stock has been left with CHC?

Mr Miners: I will have to take that one on notice.

THE CHAIR: Does CHC now have a rent liability that it did not have before?

Mr Miners: CHC has taken on responsibility; they will collect the rent and that rent goes into a pool. They use that pool to maintain those properties. Is there a rent liability? No; but there is a process set up that creates the funds for them to actually collect the rent and maintain those properties.

MR DAVIS: Is there any risk that those newly acquired properties will be transferred from CMTEDD to Housing ACT and conflated with growth and renewal targets?

Mr Miners: There is no risk that they will be conflated with the growth and renewal targets. There is a separate process. As to where the final ownership of those properties ends up, at this stage I am anticipating that they will stay with CMTEDD, but I could not say where they might end up in the future. There is a separate arrangement, a separate contractual set of obligations, for both CMTEDD and CHC.

MR DAVIS: I have a question relating to the ILRP, since Mr Dietz is here. I know it is not common for members to want more infill in their areas; but, looking at the Indicative Land Release Program, it appears that Tuggeranong, which I represent, is the only district in the ACT set to see a decline in its population. I already hear from constituents regularly about the sustainability of many of their government services—schools at half-capacity, bus routes cut etcetera. I cannot help being anxious that, if our population is declining, that may impact the sustainability of our services long term.

Can you give me any insight as to how those numbers for Tuggeranong in particular

came about, and if there are sites in Tuggeranong that you have started to initially identify as possible future sites inside our current urban footprint, in particular, for more housing.

Mr Dietz: Thank you for the question, Mr Davis. The discussion we had earlier showed that the SLA enacts the ILRP but does not have power over the approval of what is in the ILRP; that is through EPSDD and Minister Gentleman. It might need to be directed there.

MR DAVIS: I will ask a broad question. You can answer this in any way you like, Mr Dietz. Is there any role for the Suburban Land Agency to relay to government when you are identifying these sorts of trends or demands? You prepare the ILRP, so you see the figure that shows that the population in Tuggeranong is set for a decline. Is there any process, formal or informal, where the SLA says, "There might be some opportunity in these parts of town," for example?

Mr Dietz: There are two parts to your question. Regarding the bit where you said that we prepare the ILRP; no, EPSDD prepares the ILRP, approved by cabinet through Minister Gentleman. However, we do work very closely, and the governance process that we identify, the working group and the steering committee allow us to have a voice to provide ideas as to where we think there could be acquisition opportunities or other opportunities for increased infill, and that sort of discussion does happen regularly.

MR DAVIS: Has the SLA, through those processes, identified any sites particularly in Tuggeranong that it would seek to acquire or think would be suitable for housing?

Mr Dietz: I would have to take that on notice.

MR DAVIS: Okay; thank you.

MR CAIN: I note that this year's projected release under the ILRP for 2023-24 is 1,883 parcels, and in last year's ILRP we were promised 2,319. That is quite a shortfall. There seems to be an across-the-board trend of promising and not delivering. Can you explain why, in successive years, the promised releases do not seem to eventuate?

Ms Berry: Mr Cain, these are questions better suited to Mr Gentleman.

MR CAIN: There was obviously an ILRP context. What, in your understanding, from SLA's point of view, is the reason for this under-delivery?

Ms Berry: Mr Cain, the ILRP is in Mr Gentleman's portfolio area.

MR CAIN: Mr Dietz was happy to answer some of Mr Davis's ILRP questions.

Ms Berry: The Suburban Land Agency delivers the land. The Indicative Land Release Program is put together by EPSDD and it is in Minister Gentleman's portfolio.

MR CAIN: You must have some indication as to why there is under-delivery.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, I think it is clear that it is under Mr Gentleman's umbrella.

MR CAIN: Or bonnet, Chair.

THE CHAIR: It has been a wonderfully robust session. As much as we are all enjoying ourselves, we might have to call it quits. On behalf of the committee, I thank Minister Berry and officials for their attendance today. If witnesses have taken questions on notice—and there have been quite a few—could you provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof transcript? We will now suspend the proceedings for 15 minutes and resume at 4.30.

Hearing suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
West, Dr Damian, Deputy Director-General, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy
Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development
Kelley, Ms Rebecca, Executive Branch Manager, Sport and Recreation

Transport Canberra and City Services
Clement, Ms Sophie, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure Delivery
Iglesias, Mr Daniel, Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation

THE CHAIR: This is session No 7, day 4 of one of the best fortnights of my life thus far! In this session of the estimates committee hearings we will hear again from Minister Berry, this time as Minister for Sport and Recreation, and officials. It is good to have you here.

The proceedings are being broadcast live. The proceedings today are also being transcribed and will be published on the Assembly website. We are asking those on both sides to try and be succinct because the sessions are quite short. Can I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement? Could you all confirm together, at the same time, for the record, that you understand the privilege implications of the statement and that you agree to it? Excellent.

We are not inviting opening statements, so we will now proceed to questions. I will start, Minister. Support for the expansion of the Belconnen basketball facility was announced in the budget but no financial data was included. When will details of that financial support be revealed?

Ms Berry: We are in discussions at the moment. Once we finish discussions; that is the short answer. I do not know that there is any other information that we can provide today.

THE CHAIR: It appears in the budget. You have said you are in discussions. Are we going to find out at the end of this calendar year or at the start of the next calendar year? You do not really know?

Ms Berry: As soon as possible; that is what I would hope. But those conversations are continuing.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to tell me if support will be limited to new court construction on the adjoining vacant block at Belconnen or will it involve other stuff?

Ms Berry: Because the discussions are continuing, we probably should not talk about

any thoughts or ideas with regard to Basketball ACT or that site at this point.

THE CHAIR: That, to me, indicates that things are not all that far forward. Announcements have been made and we are heading in that direction, but we are not all that far forward.

Ms Berry: We are continuing conversations at the moment, Mr Parton, and they are positive.

MS CLAY: Royal Life Saving ACT recently had their core funding terminated. Can you explain to me why that happened?

Ms Kelley: Over the last two years we commenced a process of reviewing the Sport and Recreation Grants Program, which has seen the implementation of the Sport and Recreation Investment Scheme this year. Through the extensive consultation process that was undertaken, as part of that review that has resulted in the investment scheme, the new categories within the program very much focus on the point of delivery of actual participation.

Unfortunately, for a number of organisations, of which Royal Life Saving is one, we have recognised them as an umbrella body until now, but they tend to be a facilitator or a supporting organisation for actual participation; they work closely with our pools and other organisations, but do not actually deliver on the ground. That is where they have received funding from an operational perspective previously.

They remain eligible for program-based funding under the investment scheme moving forward. If they were to have a pool-based lifesaving obstacle course program, which is the sort of thing they have spoken with us previously about, they could certainly still apply for that.

In recognition of the fact that they have been and still remain an important organisation within our sector, there has been transitional funding offered to them this year. We will be working with Royal Life Saving in terms of what their operations might look like moving forward and where we could assist them from a program perspective.

MS CLAY: Program-based grants funding would not, I assume, meet their needs for the services they provide as an umbrella organisation.

Ms Kelley: Correct.

MS CLAY: Is the conversation you are having with them about transitional funding related to how they will provide those services now or how somebody else might?

Ms Kelley: As part of that, yes. We also understand that ACT has been absorbed under New South Wales as one body, and it is working more closely now. They have certainly acknowledged the fact that, operationally, they have a number of other streams. They are a registered training organisation, so their revenue opportunities are quite different to some of the sports. As I said, through our discussions to date they recognise where they are at, but they were appreciative of the transitional funding this

year.

MS CLAY: From your discussions so far, do you think that transitional arrangement is likely to get to a good result?

Ms Kelley: Yes, I think so. We have been quite clear with them. They were involved in our consultation process throughout the review, as to where that is headed. As we have said, there is still funding opportunity for them; they just might need to think a little bit differently about the appropriate avenue of support from the ACT government.

MR PETTERSSON: How is the government continuing to deliver and grow sporting participation opportunities, particularly for women and girls?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Mr Pettersson. You will have seen this week our announcement to increase funding to Canberra United, the women's football team. That funding, which we talked about over quite some time with Capital Football, obviously recognises women's sport and the Canberra United team, as well as the expansion of the A-league women's game. There will be more costs involved for the women playing because there will be more games away. Rather than the costs falling on the team or Capital Football, the ACT government has provided additional funding for them.

We have also been improving our sporting infrastructure to make sure that our pavilions and sportsgrounds are more female-friendly and more inclusive. There have been a number of changes to change rooms across 13 playing fields across the ACT to make sure that they are more inclusive and female-friendly. We have also provided funding of around \$7 million to Netball ACT to undertake improvements across their five district netball facilities. That includes the replacement of surfaces, pavement repair and stormwater management across those areas.

There is also support for players in the elite professional pathway program, and the upgrading of change rooms to accommodate the Super W and NRLW teams. By the way, the Raiders women have their first game away this weekend and their first game in Canberra on the 29th. I will be very excited to see everybody there supporting our new Raiders NRLW team. Making sure that they have facilities that are fit for purpose and meet their needs has been an important goal. The government has been working with the Raiders to ensure that that is the case as well.

MS CLAY: Minister, in October last year the Assembly passed Mr Braddock's motion to provide gender-specific and gender-diverse swim times. Have we got an update on that?

Dr West: We have been giving consideration to a range of gender-specific swim solutions. We are waiting on the outcome of the current procurement process to engage in further detailed discussions, once the tender process has been resolved. We are getting very close to resolving the broader tender process and we will look to engage in discussions with the providers, whoever they are, once they are put into contract, to move forward.

MS CLAY: The broader tender for the pools?

Dr West: Yes. As you are well aware, we have got a tender process out for five of the pools at the moment. That process is getting towards its conclusion. The valuation team have selected their range of preferred providers. There are legal considerations being conducted at the moment.

MS CLAY: You will be requiring the new providers to deliver on this commitment?

Dr West: We will be engaging with them, once we have put them into contract, to work out how to take this discussion forward. We did not feel it was appropriate to take it forward at the moment with providers who are about to cease running the pools.

MS CLAY: I understand that. I am just making sure that we do not do a procurement and sign contracts, and then ask the service providers to do something and have them say no and have no ability to get them to do it.

Dr West: Yes.

MS CLAY: That is not going to happen? You will be able to require them to do it?

Ms Berry: My recollection is that it did not require us to change contracts.

MS CLAY: No, it did not. It just required us to provide services.

Dr West: Swim solutions.

MS CLAY: We sometimes have trouble when we have contracted out services. If the contracted provider is not required to do it under a contract, they do not always do it.

Ms Berry: It is not a requirement at this point in time, but it is something that we will engage with these contractors on.

MR MILLIGAN: In January of this year the government formally announced the construction of the Canberra Arena ice rink sporting facility in Greenway. The government's initial commitment was \$16.2 million towards a total project cost of \$45 million to \$50 million, as I understand. Given that construction is expected to commence at the end of this year, with the centre opening at the end of 2025, is that a reasonable expectation, and are you able to give an update on where this is at?

Ms Berry: That is still the advice that I have. The expected completion of the project for ice use will be in 2025. I understand that Cruachan and Pelligra are commencing the necessary planning and design work for that new facility, which will be exciting. I know that that has taken some time, and the ice sports community have been incredibly patient with that project. Unless there is an update that I have not heard, that is the information that I am able to provide. We look forward to working with the developers and owners of that rink.

MR MILLIGAN: During the process, is the government planning consultation with all clubs that use this facility? Are you having consultation with the federation and

other groups? What sort of consultation will that consist of?

Ms Berry: We have attempted to keep people up to date, even when there is no news, but certainly now that things are starting to move we will make sure that there is regular feedback to the community on our part of the project. We will also work closely with Cruachan and Pelligra to make sure that there is good communication between them and all of the ice sport and other users of that facility.

MR MILLIGAN: When can we hope that that will start?

Ms Berry: As soon as there is something more to say than what we have to say now. We are hoping for some more milestone announcements along the way, and then for those communications to occur and continue.

MR MILLIGAN: In the budget there does not seem to be any funding for ongoing support for this rink, once it is operational. Is that the case? Is there going to be any funding provided by the government for the operation of this facility?

Mrs Kelley: The funding allocation is for construction only. After that it will be owned and operated by the joint venture of Cruachan and Pelligra. As part of that, though, and the binding agreement that we are working towards, we will look at how the community's interests are protected, in terms of that \$16 million investment in the facility from the ACT government, to ensure that the owner operators value that and to ensure that that is key to their business, moving forward.

That is a key interest of the Ice Sports Federation. They have been very vocal, and we have been working with them really closely every step of the way. Pelligra and Cruachan certainly understand that, and they also understand that they need the ice federation because they are their primary user groups, so those discussions will be critical. To answer your question: moving forward, it will be the responsibility of the owner-operator.

MR MILLIGAN: You can confirm that the owner-operator will own 100 per cent of that facility and the government will have no ownership or involvement at all with that facility, going forward?

Ms Berry: That is the case.

THE CHAIR: I am going to the Throsby Home of Football. Looking at the budget outlook, on page 316, there does not seem to be enough money to match the expected construction costs. There seems to be a massive shortfall to complete this project. I know some are suggesting that it is going to be closer to \$50 million to complete. Initially, this was to be funded as a joint venture between the ACT government, Capital Football and the federal government. Now, with only \$19.36 million in the budget and forward estimates, to me there appears to be a shortfall in funding. Where is that going to be made up?

Ms Berry: We have been working with Capital Football, getting the project started, starting stage 1 of the project, and this funding goes towards doing that. A number of issues were identified, leading up to the development application and design work of

the project, which have cost a lot of money, leading into making the site ready for building the project. That is not to say that future governments would not make decisions around what other expansions could be made to meet the aspirations of the football community. As I said, we work very closely with Capital Football and the broader football community to make sure that we provide the facilities that they aspire to, and we will continue to work with them in that respect.

THE CHAIR: What you are telling me is that you are not going to deliver what you had originally promised. It is a bit like the three-year-old child care. You are going to deliver it one day a week, to fulfil the promise, but you are not going to deliver what was originally outlined. That is what you are telling me.

Ms Berry: That is not correct. As far as the delivery of early childhood education and three-year-old preschool goes, we had always committed to delivering it and phasing it in. That is another portfolio. That is for tomorrow.

THE CHAIR: But is this going to be delivering and potentially phasing it in? There was a massive promise made and it was very, very clear what was going to be delivered, but it would appear that what was planned is going to have to be heavily reduced to deliver it at these numbers.

Ms Berry: It is still a massive promise, and we are still committed to delivering the Home of Football. I will ask Mrs Kelley to provide more detail.

Mrs Kelley: Yes; sure. The total funding that we have for the project is \$33.5 million. We had that \$19 million that you referred to, as the initial commitment, and then there was a further \$9 million committed subsequent to that, which couples with the \$4.5 million from Capital Football. That \$33.5 million will deliver the indoor Futsal facility, an enclosed ground and two other fields, initially. In terms of an initial substantial uplift for the football community, what is to be delivered under stage 1 is significant, with capacity for noting that there is, within the broader estate development plan, room for further grounds, which is where government would need to consider the further funding. We are in the detailed design phase of the project now. The detailed design will determine what level of additional funding is needed to deliver stage 1 and, subsequently, the additional grounds to complete the full picture from what was originally considered.

MR MILLIGAN: You mentioned just a moment ago the additional \$9 million. Correct me if I am wrong, but was that used because of the landscape and where the Home of Football is meant to be built, which is swamp lying area, and the \$9 million is meant to be used to get it to a state where you can build on it? It is a lot of money. Did the government ever consider relocating the Home of Football to another area to save that additional \$9 million on earthworks?

Ms Kelley: It is essentially the size. I do not have the exact hectareage in front of me, but a substantial size of land is required for the size of this facility, including both indoor and outdoor facilities. As we know, it will be a very unique facility for us in Canberra, and it is the first of its kind in terms of a sport exclusive space. In terms of finding alternative land, there were not really a great deal of options available to us. It is also because the available land across the territory—and, in many cases, sports

grounds go on verges where there might be flood plains or other development opportunities that would not be afforded to residential or other built infrastructure—requires significant civil works in order to have it prepared. This one, similar to the Amaroo site, which, as you are well familiar, is just down the road, requires similar works because of the nature of the sites available for these types of developments.

MR MILLIGAN: Have there been any costings done for the Amaroo tennis centre in terms of additional civil works needed for the land to become suitable?

Ms Kelley: No. We are in the detailed design phase for that tennis facility as well. Similar to Throsby, that work will inform the final costings for that project. We are not anticipating additional funding would be needed for the tennis facility. Throsby, as we know, has a staged approach to it. That is why it is pretty critical that we get that detailed design work to inform what can actually be achieved within the \$33.5 million that we have to start with.

MR MILLIGAN: Going back to the Home of Football, of the \$33.5 million, so far, what money has been put aside for combatting noise complaints from the football field? We have heard from a lot of residents suggesting that there could be a lot of noise pollution. As well, through the Wetlands and Woodlands Trust, there have been concerns with light pollution. How is the government addressing those two areas of concern?

Ms Kelley: Those concerns have been raised heavily throughout the community consultation so far and certainly have been considered heavily through the state development plan's development application process, which we received approval for yesterday, which was a big milestone for the project. Those elements and conditions on that now need to be considered within the detailed design. They are known issues from the very first discussions with the neighbours of the facility, being the custodians of Mulligan's Flat, and certainly Throsby residents. They are well-known issues and they will be at the forefront of the design, in terms of how surrounding impacts can be minimised.

MR MILLIGAN: There might be some additional costs depending on your approach going forward. Did the government consider Mount Stromlo as a location for the Home of Football, which would alleviate three of the issues if it were built at Stromlo? Was that a consideration?

Ms Kelley: There have always been district playing fields planned for Stromlo. We received successful funding through the budget this year for \$1.2 million for the design of the new Stromlo district playing fields. In terms of that particular site, it is constrained in a different way with creeks and the like running through it, but, again, we have to look at how that is overcome. It would not probably have any other advantages over the Thorsby site. In fact, the size constraints might have been an impact because it just would not physically fit there.

MS CLAY: Minister, the budget has funding for a new online booking system so that community groups can more easily access the sports and community facilities in 12 public schools. Can you tell me a little bit about how that system is going to work?

Ms Berry: This might be in Education for tomorrow. We have been working—

MS CLAY: If you would rather me ask something else, I can.

Ms Berry: Yes; that is fine.

THE CHAIR: Do you want me to leave it with you or just duck off to Michael and come back to you?

MS CLAY: Duck off to Michael and come back to me—yes.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. Minister, what is the ACT government's plan for future indoor sports facilities across the ACT?

Ms Berry: Thank you for that question, Mr Pettersson. We are having very positive conversations at the moment with Basketball ACT, but, in addition to those conversations, Sport and Recreation have been working very closely with Education about how we make sure that the facilities in Education are fit for purpose for different sports. That has been a really good and collaborative approach—again working with Basketball ACT to make sure they are providing all of the surfaces and equipment appropriate for various sports across the ACT to use. Do you want to provide any more details on indoor sports?

Ms Kelley: Just to add to your point about the schools, Minister, we have a starting point now that any of the high schools have double gymnasiums, which is a significant progression from many years back when schools had a focus of school curriculum and student based needs initially. Now we are really confident in our collaborations around schools being built for not only that but also as community hubs outside of school hours. The Throsby school development is our most recent successful example. We have a number of sports singing its praises in terms of accessibility and suitability for both training and match-play, and that is an aspiration that we have in working with Education across all new school developments moving forward.

In addition to that, the revised Arts and Entertainment Infrastructure Plan speaks to the recognised need for indoor sport in both Woden and Gungahlin. We appreciate that sites are challenging in both of those locations and we will start to look at what potential options there are for government's consideration in the future.

MS CLAY: Minister, the budget has \$8.3 million for the southside hydrotherapy pool. Is that the same funding as for last year's hydrotherapy pool?

Dr West: I will need to take that on notice. I know that we are in consultation with ACT Health and Major Projects around the design and specification to go to market in that process. In terms of the dollars, I will need to take that on notice.

MS CLAY: If you are taking it on notice, I will tell you what I am after. In last year's budget, we had \$8.5 million for the hydrotherapy pool. This year, we have 8.3 million. Is it the same money? If so, why was it rolled over? When will the pool actually be built and opened? You can take that on notice. Thank you.

Dr West: On notice.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to our pools in the territory, there is a reference to a pools improvement program and refurbishment of ACT public pools. Has expenditure been allocated for the planned renovation of the gymnasium and the hall sections of the Gungahlin Leisure Centre to rectify flooring problems and to upgrade lighting before the new managers take over?

Ms Berry: Regarding the Gungahlin pool, the ACT government's Sport and Recreation took the opportunity during repairs to the swimming pool to improve lighting in the pool. I am not sure if it has been completed yet, but the acoustics were being investigated as well. We worked very closely and listened to pool users, including the Gungahlin water polo group, about some of the issues that they had experienced prior to this. We used it as a chance to do those upgrades. I have not heard—perhaps somebody else has—about the other issues that you have raised with regard to the gymnasium, Mr Milligan, but we would be happy to talk with the pool user groups and the new incoming contractors about those kinds of issues.

MR MILLIGAN: What extent of this budget will be allocated to refurbishment, upgrades and maintenance of the Civic and Dickson pools?

Dr West: This budget provides \$3.8 million for capital funding over the next three years across the Gungahlin Leisure Centre, Dickson, and Manuka Pool precinct. This includes health and safety upgrades, upgrades to refurbishing the heritage listed toddler pool at Manuka, and other plumbing and sewerage works across some of those sites. That money has been allocated over the next three years.

MR MILLIGAN: We will move on to Mount Stromlo. We have been pushing for a new dive pool facility for quite some time. We have the Civic pool, which is an ageing facility, and the government mentioned that they were consulting and considering having such a facility at Mount Stromlo. Where is that up to?

Ms Berry: I am not sure that there is a further update, unless Mr West has something, but we are just doing the feasibility study at this point.

Dr West: Correct, Minister. The feasibility study is well-progressed and we intend to have that finalised in the latter half of this year, at which point we will be able to bring, on completion, a proposal back to government.

MR MILLIGAN: Consultation has been had with the dive community and other stakeholders?

Dr West: I understand consultation is occurring and will continue to occur.

MR MILLIGAN: Where are we up to in the tender process for the management of these pools?

Dr West: The tender process is well-advanced, as I mentioned earlier. The tender team have selected potential preferred providers, but there are legal and contract

negotiations underway. I would imagine that, within the next month, will be resolved and the outcome of that tender process will be announced.

MR MILLIGAN: You found tenderers for the four sites—is that correct?

Dr West: Five sites—yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Is that potentially one tenderer? Can you announce?

Dr West: I should not go further.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you very much. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Please excuse me if I am incorrect, but I want to know when the government will update its aquatic facility strategy, because my understanding is that it is now 10 years out of date?

Ms Kelley: The strategy formerly developed was from 2013 to 2033, which, in hindsight, was a long time for an aquatic strategy. When that was released, it noted that Gungahlin Leisure Centre was still under construction. We have seen a lot of change in the aquatic landscape since that time, so at the moment government is considering steps through possible renewal of that strategy in light of the other aged aquatic facilities around the city.

THE CHAIR: One of the many thousands watching the broadcast from Woden has just sent me a question about this--

Ms Berry: Mr Parton's talkback!

THE CHAIR: It is a bit, is it not! The gentleman asks: what is planned for the Woden area in terms of indoor aquatic facilities once the ice rink is up and running in Tuggeranong? He says an indoor 25-metre pool is not what the Woden residents want, and he asks: has the minister or the directorate had any more discussions with Geocon, as the community journalists and even MLAs have struggled to get any information from that company about the Phillip site? Are you able to shed any light on that?

Ms Berry: I have not had any further conversations with Geocon. I did initially when they purchased the pool and invited them to come and meet with me so that I could reassure the community on what their plans were with the existing facility in the meantime. Geocon came and met with me and said that it was their intention to continue to operate the pool and ice facility, that they were not intending to do something that would interfere with the program the government has in place with regard to a new ice facility in Tuggeranong, and that it was their intention last summer to have the pool available for use. Unfortunately, the weather got in the way for them to be able to do that. My understanding is it is still their intention to have the pool ready and open for use this summer. Further into the future, I do not have any notice or advice on what their plans are for that site.

THE CHAIR: Which goes to this constituent's question with regard to the future planning and what is going to be available for residents of Woden, because there does

look to be a bit of a hole there, does not there?

Ms Berry: I understand. I very much have heard the Woden community and their wish for a newer pool facility if the Phillip facility no longer exists. That is a future decision for the operator and owner of that pool, at the Geocon site, but I have no other advice from them about what their intention is. We will definitely continue to work with the Woden community around a future pool and indoor sports. We have heard that very loudly as well, that an indoor sports and pool facility in Woden is something that the community aspires to. There is no commitment in this budget, at this point.

THE CHAIR: Further to that, are you of the belief that the long-term aquatic facility strategy needs updating?

Ms Berry: Yes. We definitely agree that it needs updating, and that is because it is out of date, obviously. We do need to review it. I also recognise that probably nearly every area in Canberra would like to have their own pool. We have to manage, as a government, what is appropriate. Part of this pool strategy is that, as our population grows, where are future pools most appropriate to meet the needs of our growing city?

THE CHAIR: There is a bit of density in Woden. I do not know if you have noticed.

Ms Berry: I have noticed there is a bit of density in Woden, as there is across the city, in Gungahlin, in Belconnen and in Woden, and in the Molonglo area, and, hence, they have the new Stromlo pool up there.

THE CHAIR: Where I am going with is this on page 187 of *Budget outlook*. This is in reference to support for suburban and city services infrastructure. There is nearly \$5.3 million allocated to the support for suburban and city services infrastructure, with 50 per cent to be spent this year. Specific mention was made of the Belconnen half-pipe skatepark and Casey recreation park. Are you able to, Minister or officials, provide me with a summary of the allocation for each of those projects and what other sport and recreation projects will be funded?

Ms Berry: We can provide some information, Mr Parton.

Ms Clement: The Casey Community Recreation Park was originally allocated with \$3 million of funding in the 2022-23 budget. We came back with an allocation of an extra \$900,000 and that was due to cost pressures that we have been experiencing across the program. Did you want an update on where that project is up to or just the funding?

THE CHAIR: Sure. While we are here, we would be keen to hear.

Ms Clement: We have just completed a tender process for construction and we are looking at having a contractor on site mid-August to deliver that project.

THE CHAIR: Excellent.

Ms Clement: The Belconnen half-pipe has been a little bit more complex for a

number of reasons. I would have to come back and take the actual funding as a question on notice.

THE CHAIR: Okay. We are happy with that.

Ms Clement: As an update to that project, we had a contractor engaged. We have an issue with that contractor. I think we have spoken previously about some of the financial capacity issues we have seen across the market. That contractor was PBS Building, which went into liquidation, so we have been through a process of needing to terminate that contract. We are now in a position where we have just engaged another contractor. We are working with them to relook at the program. That project needs a specialist skate park contractor as a subcontractor to do those works, so we are working with them to finalise when they will be able to come to Canberra to do that work and, obviously, the fabrication timing around that.

THE CHAIR: I am guessing there are not many of them around the place.

Ms Clement: No. Across Australia, it is quite a limited field. It is a decent sized market, because skate facilities are something that are provided in most jurisdictions. We will be on site before the end of this year. Whether it is completed by the end of this year or early in the new year will be around the availability of that contractor.

THE CHAIR: Further to that line of spending—I think it is in that line—Hawker District Playing Fields has a 25 per cent allocation of project costs for this year. How long are we anticipating that it will take before that project is complete?

Mr Iglesias: We are right at the commencement of the project now that we have the funding identified. We will invest the initial timing to get the design and the specifications right. I would imagine that we would be able to move quite quickly to construction, if not this financial year, early next year.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Iglesias.

MS CLAY: Minister, I am trying to get a sense of what role Sport and Recreation is playing in mountain biking in the ACT. We have a lot of agencies involved, and it is quite hard to work out between PCS, Sport and Recreation, and TCCS who does what. What role does Sport and Recreation play?

Ms Kelley: Our primary liaison with mountain biking is via work with AusCycling, the fairly new peak body, two years in. It is the new peak body for all cycling disciplines, of which mountain biking comes under. Until the commencement of the investment scheme, we have had operational funding provided to cycling, and it has been at their discretion as to how they utilise that funding. We anticipate that, pending the categorisation process that we have for sports at the moment, cycling will be a sport that will look to apply for forthcoming rounds as well under that investment scheme.

Aside from that governance and support side for the sport, we work quite closely with our colleagues in Stromlo Forest Park management in terms of the trails and the broader masterplan for that site, noting that it integrates a number of sporting facilities

such as our future Stromlo District Playing Fields, the creek track and obviously the expanse of mountain bike trails. That is an ongoing conversation because we recognise that it is not helpful for user groups to be talking to various areas of government and it is seen that we are not talking to each other on this side. That is something that we think has been working really well. In terms of any approach, that that approach is shared. If one of the mountain biking clubs or stakeholders is talking to Stromlo Forest Park, it can convince them that they are also talking to us.

In terms of the broader trails around the place, where there are developments we are always contacted to ask, “Is there a different sport and recreation perspective on this? Would there be funding available? What have the clubs and peak bodies been talking to you about?” We are very much involved, albeit at times we are not the sole driver of necessarily the capital works or the trails network that goes across our city, but we see ourselves as a key conduit with all cycling and those responsible for mountain biking.

MS CLAY: As a result of a motion I put up and we passed last year, we centralised the contact point to Stromlo. Are you finding that is working and that all contacts are going through to that single email address and they are going out to the right agency now?

Ms Kelley: As far as I am aware. We probably need to do some checking with user groups to see that they are feeling that is working. From our side of the fence, it is working. As I said, we have regular conversations with Stromlo Forest Park. It is helpful that we also sit divisionally within the same area, so we are meeting on a regular weekly basis as well.

MS CLAY: There were a lot of complaints about mountain biking. We have great structures out there, but there were a lot of concerns that we were not investing enough in ongoing trail maintenance—that it was being put out to volunteer user groups rather than being done—and that there was not enough investment in the core trails. That is on the back of the fact that Canberra was a really key destination for mountain biking. It is a really big sports and tourism draw, but there is very much a feeling that we are falling behind Mogo and other areas. Do you think that we are investing enough in that sport and that facility at the moment?

Ms Kelley: I probably cannot speak to it in the same detail that my colleague Scott Saddler could. That is maybe for another session. I think it is fair to say that the needs and requirements for the maintenance of the trails and the contribution of the volunteers in that space is well known, but that is probably something that we would have to elaborate on in another session.

MS CLAY: If I wanted to find out more, I would ask EPSDD in another session or would I ask CMTEDD?

Ms Kelley: CMTEDD, with Stromlo Forest Park.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: I have had a number of local residents raise concerns with me in

relation to hiring out ACT government facilities for recreation or for sport or whatever purpose that they want. Has the government changed its policy in terms of public liability? Does that have to be supplied by the person hiring the facility? Clubs and associations, sporting groups and recreation groups most likely have that insurance, but the general public, if they are not part of a club or association, will not have it. Has the government got a policy where they are unable to hire a facility if they do not have public liability insurance?

Ms Kelley: Are you talking about sports grounds specifically?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes—sports grounds, sports ovals, school halls.

Mr Iglesias: I would have to take that on notice. I know that most of the groups that we deal with do have their own public liability insurance. There is an initiative to investigate how government might be able to make small events easier to happen, but whether that extends to the sports grounds is a doubt in my mind. I think the best thing to do would be to take that on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Does the government have its own public liability insurance on those facilities or ovals that the community could use or buy into?

Mr Iglesias: The government has—yes.

MR MILLIGAN: But the general community cannot access that public liability or use that if they are not part of a club or association?

Mr Iglesias: That is what I would like to double-check to be sure.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: On page 187 of *Budget outlook*, there is mention of a new home for the RSPCA. What arrangements have been made to accommodate the equestrian agistment facilities that are to be affected by the construction of new premises and facilities for RSPCA? You are shaking your head, Ms Berry.

Ms Berry: As much as I am a great fan of the work of RSPCA, I am not the minister responsible for that.

THE CHAIR: I am happy to go to something a bit more interesting, then, or probably less interesting—

Ms Berry: I can talk to the budget papers providing funding to the Hall Pony Club. One of the equestrian groups got a grant—\$20,000. Anyway, it is in the budget.

THE CHAIR: No—I am keen to know what is actually in the memorandum of understanding with the AIS at Bruce, given the inexperience of the ACT government to own and run indoor sports facilities and other facilities like indoor aquatic facilities, which it is certainly struggling to manage at the moment, notwithstanding the evidence from Mr West earlier today. Can I get some detail as to what is included in that memorandum of understanding?

Ms Arthy: The MOU of the AIS has been struck specifically in relation to work on a potential new stadium. The MOU is very much about agreeing to work together to look at options for the stadium there, as well as to look at options for further development of an innovation precinct. This comes under the Chief Minister's portfolio, so perhaps more detailed questions can go there. But that is really what it is about: to provide the framework for which we can work with them, given the stadium is owned by the commonwealth government, and we need to work with them on the future stadium.

THE CHAIR: Surely, given the nature of the activity there, some of this does fall within the remit of Sport and Recreation. I am keen to know the level of oversight you will have as minister and the level of oversight your directorate will have in terms of delivering facilities for the community through this project.

Ms Arthy: With the way that economic development is structured, we report to many ministers. We make sure they are fully informed of anything that is relevant for the different ministers. This particular MOU is in relation to the stadium and the further development out there, so that is for the Chief Minister. Regarding any other activity that is out there—because we have ACTAS that sits out there—

THE CHAIR: Of course; we do.

Ms Arthy: that is under the purview of Sport and Recreation, up to Minister Berry—

THE CHAIR: But not much changes as a consequence of this?

Ms Arthy: No.

THE CHAIR: That is all I have on that. Is there anything else? Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Thank you, Chair. Minister, climate change is going to have a pretty big impact on sport and we are doing quite a lot of adaptation work already: we are putting out shade cloths and we are helping some of our facilities get off potable water. There are quite a lot of different measures in line. Can you tell me how much budget funding, in total, you have for climate adaptation measures for your sports facilities?

Ms Berry: I do not know if there is a particular line item for it.

Ms Kelley: It is not a particular line item. It is certainly something that is identified as a key piece of work. In terms of protection of the sector moving forward, with CBR Next Move, our current sport and recreation strategy, we have commenced some work with our colleagues in EPSDD to look at: what does establishing the carbon footprint of sport look like? We have that data in and around ACT government facilities. We are looking to map out how we might look at case studies a little bit further to deep dive into a sport and ask, "What does that look like in terms of not just a facility but the impact of their operations as well, and what improvements would we make?" We do not have specific funding allocation. Operationally, it is a key part of our work.

MS CLAY: Sure. That is great. You have spoken about the climate footprint. That is

about the climate impact, the emissions from the sport. I am talking about adaptation measures: what we will need to do as we get more heat and less water in our environment so that we can still play sport—more adaptation, which means shade cloths, potable water and various other measures like that.

Ms Berry: One of the things that the government has been doing, which is also included in some of the funding that goes to addressing irrigation across sports fields, is upgrading or updating irrigation so that they are not on all the time, they are effective and efficient, and the sprinklers and the other bits and pieces that go with the sprinkler system work appropriately. Maybe you can talk to that.

Mr Iglesias: Yes.

Ms Berry: Sports fields themselves are quite large heat islands in the middle of the day during climate change. You cannot put shade cloths over them, but you can make sure that the water is used sufficiently.

Mr Iglesias: Absolutely. The minister is correct. A lot of our ovals have aging infrastructure when it relates to irrigation. We have a logical process of going through those and modernising them. That also includes understanding the nature of the soil profile and the moisture contents in the soil profile so that we do not add water when we do not need to add water.

Your question is around making the areas a little bit more comfortable for users. A lot of our ovals have spaces for trees to be planted, and we are looking at that at the moment to be sensible about where we can deliver plantings of evergreen as well as deciduous trees to provide that extra cover. It makes a huge difference when you get the balance right, where the trees do not absorb the moisture out of the sports field but, rather, limit evaporation. If we get that balance right, there can be amazing differences to the amount of water we need to actually put on the sports fields.

MS CLAY: Thank you for that. Have we got an overall strategic plan for climate adaptation moving forward? There are a few different bits that we have heard about, but is there not an overall climate adaptation plan for all our facilities?

Mr Iglesias: EPSDD might have a climate strategy. It might sit with them.

Ms Kelley: The commission for the environment—I am struggling to remember when it was released—had a sports-specific report with a number of recommendations that were integrated into our forward work plans, around tips and toolkits for sports to take away about how they can achieve their own adaptations, and then they would be eligible for grant applications and those sorts of things. Certainly, all our capital works and our design principles around our facilities take into account what they need to look like into the future. In terms of water efficiency, there is obviously no gas usage, but there is shade and comfort for user groups. This is where the indoor facility provision into the future will become critical as well.

MS CLAY: But it is not being centrally managed; it is being parcelled out in bits and tips to different organisations and sportsgrounds to manage themselves.

Ms Kelley: That is probably an accurate assessment of where we are right now. Regarding the piece of work that I just referred to, initially, whilst it was looking at emissions, I think it will be the start of our education in the sports sector in terms of how we can be more savvy in the environmentally-aware space. We still need to acknowledge that a lot of our sports, as we know, are volunteer based at the core and they are worried about how they are delivering competitions on Saturdays. They do not really have time to turn their attention to “What shade shall we have for spectators and how are we looking after our officials at half time, in terms of heat stress?” and all those sorts of things. It is our job to work with them on how we are going to have significant growth in that space in the coming years.

MS CLAY: Yes; precisely. I think it is too much to put onto the volunteers. Thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: I would like to understand the government’s position on their charge rates to clubs and groups in the territory for sporting assets. There is a community charge rate and a commercial charge rate. There are a lot of small clubs out there that may not be under the required registration for their club to get the community rate, so they are being charged the commercial rate. We see that particularly with a lot of swimming clubs, and other things. My question is: what is the government doing to help support these smaller clubs to assess their ability to pay the fees that the government might charge, considering they are being charged the commercial rate? We have all the smaller clubs out there. What type of registration do they need to be under to fit into the community charge rate?

Mr Iglesias: In relation to the two different rates, I might take that on notice for you and be clear about it. I will add that the rates that we charge depend on the usage and the site. The quantum of the rates is a very small percentage of what it actually takes to run the sports field. It is around the 14 per cent mark. That is the contribution that the community makes to the maintenance and the running of the sportsground assets across the territory. My understanding is that it is a modest rate, but, as to difference between commercial and non-commercial, I will have to take that on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay.

THE CHAIR: Thanks everyone. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the minister present and all the other ministers who participated today, and statutory officers and officials who have appeared throughout the day. We really do appreciate the work that goes into preparing for these hearings, responding to questions on notice, and everything else. If you have taken questions on notice, could you get those answers to the Committee Support office, to the committee secretary, within five working days of receipt of the uncorrected proof. Thanks to the aforementioned Committee Support office and the committee secretariat. Members, if you want to lodge questions on notice, do that via the portal within five working days of the hearing.

The committee adjourned at 5.29 pm.