



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS, INDUSTRY  
AND RECREATION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT](#))

**Members:**

**MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS (Chair)**  
**MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR T EMERSON**  
**MS E LEE**  
**MR S RATTENBURY**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2025**

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

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

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

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## **Privilege statement**

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Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

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

*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.30 am.**

**BROWN, MR LIAM**, Committee Member, Yarabi Football Club  
**HAREB, MR LOGAN**, Committee Member, Yarabi Football Club  
**IZZARD, MR THOMAS**, President, Yarabi Football Club  
**NICHOLS, MR JARED**, Committee Member, Yarabi Football Club  
**SAUNDERS, MR JONATHAN**

**THE ACTING CHAIR** (Ms Carrick): Welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation for its inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT. The committee will today hear from several local sporting clubs.

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

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as the proceedings of the Assembly itself. Therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly.

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

We have many witnesses for this first session. In this session we will hear from Mr Jonathan Saunders and members of the Yarabi Football Club. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

Would you like to make a brief opening statement? Otherwise we will go straight to questions, because we have limited time.

**Mr Brown:** We prepared an opening statement.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr Brown:** Yarabi Football Club offers our appreciation to the ACT government for the opportunity to appear as a witness for the inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT. I am joined today by our president, Tom, and two other committee members, Jared and Logan.

Yarabi is a community-focused sports club competing in senior men's and women's

Capital Football competitions, based at Palmerston District Playing Fields. Being a seniors-only club provides us with a unique perspective of people aged 18 to 51, to support the investigations of the inquiry.

Participation in community sport is a key consideration for us, as it is how we are able to continue doing what we do. If we are not able to provide and contribute to a supportive and affordable environment to play football, we would struggle to attract and retain players, who are at the heart of our club.

We are a young organisation, having been formed in 2021 by a group of players who were left disappointed by the environment created by other clubs. In this time, we have firmly established ourselves in the ACT football community, including proudly expanding into women's football for the first time in 2024.

We strongly believe that we have a duty to represent the views of our players, coaches and staff, and to play our role in working with the ACT government and broader ACT community to ensure that community sport in the ACT is as accessible, safe and welcoming as possible.

Addressing barriers to participation in community sport in the ACT is complex. In many cases, sporting clubs and sporting associations are best placed to mitigate these challenges. However, there are key opportunities for the ACT government to play a pivotal role in removing barriers to participation in community sport.

In our submission we recommend that the ACT government should develop a mandatory code of practice for sporting associations facilitating community sport, aiming to promote and ensure value for money for participating players. The affordability of community sport is a key consideration for the ongoing participation of our players. A code of practice will support sporting associations to implement policies and procedures to ensure that participation in their sport represents value for the investment of every participant.

Additionally, we believe that there is an opportunity for the ACT government to conduct a strategic review of the funding provided to sporting associations to ensure all sporting codes are sufficiently supported to thrive and provide a rich and fulfilling community sporting environment. Within this review, we believe it is pivotal that the ACT government ensures that this investment in sporting codes is felt at all levels of sport, from the professional competitions all the way down to community participation.

We also recommend that the ACT government should significantly increase investment in ACT sportsgrounds and sporting infrastructure, ensuring paying participants of community sport are receiving value for their investment and an environment that supports them to achieve their best.

Yarabi is proud to offer a competitive registration fee each season. The rate we pay to the ACT government to hire sportsgrounds is more than 30 per cent of these fees per player, yet we do not believe that the quality of ACT sportsgrounds and sporting infrastructure currently justifies this proportion.

In our experience, sportsgrounds are uneven and unlevel, and have poor drainage, causing significant damage even after small amounts of rain. The ditches, divots and clumps of soil not only impact the progression of our matches but pose serious safety concerns for our players, contributing to numerous injuries.

There is a strong opportunity for significant investment from the ACT government in our sportsgrounds and other sporting infrastructure to protect players and increase the enjoyment of sports in these green spaces across the community.

Our submission explores the broad challenges with match official and referee numbers in the ACT, and we spoke to our work both internally and with our sporting community to move towards solutions to increase these numbers and improve the treatment of match officials in our game. We would welcome broader ACT government engagement on this issue, leveraging your unique position to bring together perspectives from across sporting codes to find solutions to this key challenge that is not unique to football.

We trust our submission was made available to the committee, and we welcome any questions on our submission or this statement to support the inquiry.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you. I will start with some questions. In the ACT government's sports strategy, CBR Next Move 2023-28, the mission is "to provide leadership, support and to champion a sport and active recreation sector that is welcoming, progressive and sustainable". My question is: do you think that they are achieving this policy when it comes to access to grounds, government investment and consultation? Specifically, how could that policy be improved? What could they do to improve the policy, having regard to these issues that you have raised?

**Mr Brown:** One of the key things we see is that the lack of investment in the sportsgrounds, particularly sporting infrastructure, is definitely going to some of those points about an inclusive environment. Having just expanded into women's football, we find that the lack of changerooms available, particularly for our women's team, is a significant concern for us as a club and the women who play with us.

The broader environment in those sportsgrounds is definitely something that we believe needs more investment, as we have said in our statement. As additional examples, we think that that infrastructure is lacking, to make sure that everyone feels comfortable and supported to play football and community sport, not just in our code.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** You will find across the board, when looking at the submissions, that all sports want investment. They want access to facilities. It is a common theme. Do you think it would be beneficial for the ACT government to identify all the needs that are out there, prioritise, and have a schedule for how they will invest, so that people know when they are likely to get some investment? It seems that sports are competing with each other, in trying to get that captain's pick and to get their sport funded.

**Mr Brown:** From our perspective, we believe that increased communication with the different sporting clubs across the ACT regarding investment into the sportsgrounds and the infrastructure would be really beneficial from the ACT government, no matter

how they choose to proceed from here. Being the unique community that the ACT is, we have a lot of players that have come from other parts of the country, and we hear lots of accounts of the varied experience of playing community sport elsewhere in the country, compared to the facilities that we have in the ACT.

I believe there are a lot of lessons that the ACT government could potentially learn from other parts of the country, while recognising that we have a unique government structure. There are places that have a similar metropolitan flavour, such as Newcastle and Wollongong, where there is a similar population and a similar style of population. There seems to be more investment in those grounds, admittedly from that local council or local government perspective, which we do not have here. I think there are still lessons that could be learned by the ACT government regarding how best to prioritise that investment.

I repeat my previous evidence: communicating clearly with not only the sporting associations but also individual clubs using those grounds would be beneficial. We share our ground with a number of other clubs, across Rugby League codes, and cricket in the summer, as well as sharing it with a school. There are a lot of stakeholders just at our field that would really benefit from that additional communication from the ACT government regarding investment across the board.

**MS LEE:** Thank you for your evidence. You talked about the prohibitive costs in terms of your members not getting value for money. Do insurance costs have an impact on that as well?

**Mr Hareb:** Insurance costs, as part of the registration, are quite low. Our registration, for example, was \$470 this year, and the Capital Football fees were about \$250 of that \$470—over 50 per cent. The Football Australia amount was about \$35. We are essentially paying 60 per cent just as association fees. My understanding is that the insurance component is part of that 60 per cent.

**Mr Saunders:** I organise the ANU Summer 9's competition. I was previously president of the ANU Football Club, in the same sort of competitions as Yarabi. This year the Capital Football insurance fee was \$40.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Saunders, I want to ask you about your submission. You spoke about the difficulty of booking the grounds, and the distinction between the organised associations and perhaps the more informal ones like yours. Have you made any progress on those issues since you wrote the submission?

**Mr Saunders:** No, it has actually got worse. I will give a bit of background. A quick check of the ABS suggests that the 18 to 45 population in the ACT numbers about 200,000 people. Our competition just kicked off last night. We have 2,000 participants in that age group, and 170 teams, so about one per cent of that cohort play in our competitions. We got a single field at Hackett on Mondays; that was it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** In this year's allocation of available places?

**Mr Saunders:** Yes. It is hard. I appreciate everything that Capital Football do; but,

fundamentally, they are under-resourced, so they do not have the ability to advocate for a single club. They have many other issues. We cannot get a foot in with ACT Sportsgrounds because they only deal directly with governing bodies on field allocations; it is then up to the governing bodies to deal with individual clubs.

I have offered some solutions. I think that the booking system could be more dynamic. I think that the allocations that go from year to year could be improved. For example, if a field is allocated from six to nine but they only book from six to 7.30, they get the six to nine again the following year, which does not help us.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Have you had any conversations with ACT government officials in the relevant areas as to—

**Mr Saunders:** For ANU Summer 9's, no. The ANU Football Club does, through its regular bookings, but any conversations about allocations will often be directed to governing bodies.

**MR RATTENBURY:** You have sought to have those conversations but you have not had any success in getting—

**Mr Saunders:** No, there is no avenue there, unless you are a completely separate entity and, even then, I am not sure of the process for how you would go about that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Does that mean you are having to restrict your competition?

**Mr Saunders:** Yes, absolutely.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I can hear the frustration. I am just trying to draw out the evidence for the committee's benefit.

**Mr Saunders:** For Mondays and Wednesdays mixed competitions this year, we had to turn away many numbers of teams. We have 40 teams playing on each of those days. They are all at ANU. With the Tuesdays and Thursdays comps, we were able to get some fields at UC, but even then it is making use of all the leftovers, like playing on gridiron pitches.

**MR EMERSON:** You spoke a fair bit about quality of fields. What are the pathways for raising those concerns? Have you gone through those pathways with the government? If you have, what kind of response have you received?

**Mr Hareb:** I have been in Canberra for 10 years and playing sport for 10 years. Essentially, every year that I have been on a committee, since about 2018 or 2019, I have raised photos, as evidence, to ACT Sportsgrounds of specific areas of pitches, in Palmerston, mostly, and in Scullin and Page. I have sent pictures to ACT Sportsgrounds as per their advice when there are issues. I have not seen any specific improvement in any specific areas of fields that I have taken photos of.

The only assistance that I have seen in the past 10 years is that we have finally managed to get ACT Sportsgrounds to drop off a big, concrete bucket of dirt. We go out and

purchase spades and buckets and essentially do the work ourselves. We fill in potholes in those areas with soft dirt, which inevitably gets muddied up and ruined, and it is not part of the actual field. It is obviously a very small, worthless option in order to attend to the fields, but it is our only solution in order for them to be as safe as possible for the players. That is the only assistance that I have received or recognised in my 10 years here.

**Mr Brown:** Also, to give credit where credit is due, ACT Sportsgrounds do respond to faults in our sprinkler system. In the early rounds of this season, we had a significant fault in our sprinkler system, which meant that the centre of one of our fields was, for lack of a better term, a swimming pool. It took them a few weeks to get there, but they were able to fix that system. With the amount of rain that we had this season, it did not help the ground itself, but there was support for that particular fault. It is outside our ability to be able to dig up the ground and fix those sprinklers.

**MR EMERSON:** Beyond the provision of dirt, when you raise issues, do you know whether officials come out and have a look, and then decide not to do anything?

**Mr Saunders:** It is not communicated, so we have no idea who does what or when. It just goes into thin air. They are very good at communicating—the people that I have communicated with, within ACT Sportsgrounds. But there is no communication regarding whether they have done anything. There could be another point of extra communication from the areas to say what they have done to heal the fields or to communicate what they have done.

**MR EMERSON:** With respect to potential participants who are turned off because of the quality of the fields, do you get feedback? I know you raised that in your submission. Do you get feedback about why that is the case? Is it safety concerns? Obviously, people do not want to roll ankles and that sort of thing. Can you share some of the info?

**Mr Izzard:** As Liam noted in the submission that he put forward, every year we do a survey of all of our members, in order to get a data point, and something to take forward to the next season, around participation and what the obstacles were. Regularly, we have the feedback on sustainability and injury concerns. I highlight that we are in the unique position of being a seniors-only club, so we are, naturally, by age, more susceptible to injury. But there are further considerations.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** It is funny that you are saying you are seniors!

**Mr Izzard:** There are further considerations, too. I think 15 per cent of our member base had either an ACL or a similar long-term injury this year which prohibits work in some instances. In what is already a very stressful cost-of-living position, that becomes a consideration around, “Is this a sustainable option for me to participate in sport, ongoing, if it’s jeopardising my life outside sport?” Unfortunately, we have, I think, 10 per cent of our members, on a quick count, that will not be returning next year because of those injuries. A lot of those are contributed to by the composition of the field and the surface that we play on.

**Mr Saunders:** From a Summer 9’s perspective, decisions to not participate because of

ground quality and things like that are often made on the margins by people. They are in and they are out; they are not going to voice those concerns. They will just choose not to play. The people that actually provide the feedback are probably the ones that are most interested, but you really want to target the people on the margins who are choosing to play or not play.

**Mr Brown:** On that survey, when I was reading through those responses, the number of people who spoke about the quality of the grounds specifically from an injury perspective in a written response was quite low. We have a lot of that from the broader conversations. Being a reasonably small club, we can have those conversations. Most of our players, when they raise those concerns, speak about the progression of the game—the fact that it is difficult to play football in those conditions. We are able to cross-reference that with that data, as Tom was saying, about the people who are not coming back because they have injuries. It is very easy for us to point out which injuries are more correlated towards the conditions of the ground, as opposed to a tackle or something that is a part of the game.

**MR EMERSON:** Is field quality an issue that is front of mind for you?

**Mr Saunders:** It was for us last year. We were able to get access to Giralang. There were similar pothole issues, issues with sprinklers, waterlogging and goal mounds. I was there at 5.30 or 5.45, before kick-off, shovelling water out of holes, to try and make it safe.

**Mr Hareb:** Essentially, with all unenclosed fields in Canberra, there is no winner. I have played probably on 20 different grounds in Canberra. They are all exactly the same. Some are a tiny bit better than others, depending on what other codes or whatever are played there. At the end of the day, with almost all the fields, if it is unenclosed, it is in poor condition. I would imagine that is simply because all enclosed ovals would have funding or investment from premier league clubs or top clubs.

**MR EMERSON:** You are paying higher fees to use these fields, but then you are fixing the fields?

**Mr Hareb:** Yes. We do not know how much energy is put in. I think there is a two- or three-week shutdown period in March, and in September for two or three weeks. Our assumption is that there is work done in those two or three weeks, but I do not know how many fields there are in Canberra. I do not know how they are able to manage all those fields within a short period of time. Even in those few weeks, they decide to leave some grounds open so that other sports can be played. Other than that, no sport in any code is played during those two or three weeks.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** My question is about the unirrigated ovals. I have had representations from people from a smaller club, saying, “We will upgrade the oval if we can use it as our home base.” This was a smaller club; because of the allocation, they did not get allocated properly and they were desperate to have somewhere. What are your views about the unirrigated ovals, and the opportunity for them to provide a base for smaller clubs, if they had people who had the capacity to do an upgrade? These were builders or construction people; somehow they had the capacity to do it.

**Mr Saunders:** By “unirrigated”, do you mean the range of facilities, for example, at Lyneham 3? It is north of Lyneham 2 at the moment.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Yes, and a lot of the school ovals are—

**Mr Saunders:** They can reactivate them but there would be significant investment in new drainage and whatnot?

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Saunders:** It is a good question. I can appreciate that, from a groundskeeper’s perspective, they maintain a lot of facilities. Every year, we get the ACT sportsgrounds booking schedule, and there are a lot of vacancies, so I can see that, from their perspective, they maintain a lot of fields. There are some that just will not get used for six months, and they keep maintaining them, yet there are clubs that say, “We need a home base because we can’t find a field.” I think there is a matching problem. I do not think it is the case that there are not enough facilities. I think there is a matching problem between clubs—what clubs want, the times that they want them and where they want them—and the facilities that are available.

I do not think that reactivating Lyneham 3 will do a whole lot, when you have a whole range of other facilities that are under-utilised.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Are you aware of an audit across Canberra? Is that the case across Canberra? Each district might be somewhat different. I do not know that Molonglo has much.

**Mr Saunders:** Yes, I included something in my submission about making what is actually allocated more transparent and more public. Definitely, there would be a benefit in more accurately tracking what bookings are made and releasing, from historical allocations, those bookings that were not used. You will quickly see lots of opportunities open.

**MR EMERSON:** Could you say, off the top of your head, if you had to guess, “This is the proportion that I reckon don’t get used”?

**Mr Saunders:** I would have to take it on notice.

**MR EMERSON:** Don’t take that on notice because that is a lot of work. It is all right.

**Mr Saunders:** There is a spreadsheet that gets provided to clubs. It is forwarded on from ACT Sportsgrounds. I would have to check whether it is something that I could share. It could potentially shed light on that kind of question.

**MR RATTENBURY:** We will ask the government for it in a later hearing. Thanks for the tip.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** This is a case of the ACT government playing more of a

coordinating role across—

**Mr Saunders:** It is a matching problem, so it is a coordination exercise. I do not think it is being done very well. Given the budget that the groundskeepers have, they do a decent enough job, in being able to get the number of fields operational that they are able to do.

Going to Logan's point about what they do in the shutdown, I have been out there. They dig up all the previous seeds, they put in the new summer grass, they aerate the ground, and they put down the new diesel line markings, where appropriate. Fundamentally, they only have so much money to spend. If we cannot increase the amount of money that they have, we could at least make use of the facilities that they do currently allocate and maintain.

**Mr Izzard:** I would also comment that different regions face different issues, going to Thomas's point. In Gungahlin, I look around, and we have far less infrastructure and facilities to support the level of population there versus other regions in Canberra. Looking at the usable fields in our region, they are used, I would say, almost at 100 per cent capacity, because there are no alternatives. There might be under-utilisation in other pockets around Canberra, and it then becomes a consideration for clubs to say, "Is it worth us booking a ground down in Tuggeranong, to have an extra training night?" It does not quite work. Even though there is probably capacity for that ground to host that, we want to stay within our region, and there is probably not that capacity for particular regions within Canberra.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** Do you think many people want to stay within their region for training?

**Mr Izzard:** Yes.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** That is across all sports, too, presumably.

**MS LEE:** I want to go back to some of the issues with bookings that you talked about, Mr Saunders. One of the suggestions that you made in your submission was that the clubs be required to finalise their bookings before the shutdown of the preceding season.

**Mr Saunders:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** Do you know why that is not currently being done?

**Mr Saunders:** I think it is because of the way, potentially, governing bodies organise their draws for the following season. They are often not finalised until a week before, so it leaves—

**MR EMERSON:** They do not know how many teams they have, or how many people are getting registered.

**Mr Saunders:** Correct. It leaves a very tight window. Potentially, if you were to bring that forward, it might light a fire and get them to do things a little bit earlier. From our

perspective, come 1 October, there will be a range of facilities right now that we could use that are not booked, but we cannot book them until 1 November. I do not know whether it is because clubs require them on the other side of the new year, and we just need them before Christmas. But the booking system does not differentiate in regard to any of that; the allocation system does not differentiate in regard to any of that.

**Mr Hareb:** When clubs make certain bookings, they will book however many fields they can book, or whatever they believe that they need, and it is usually done every year. The same club usually gets the same grounds every year. In saying that, there are occasions—and this happened to us, I think, this year—where the field was booked by the typical club. We would have loved to have had that field. The other club booked the field, but they did not even use the field. I think that a common problem in Canberra is that fields are being booked, but they are not actually being utilised after the booking, and the club seems to have the funds to be able to afford to not even worry about that.

For us, as a small club—ANU, I am sure, would have the same issue—we literally cancel bookings a few days in advance, if we know that we cannot get the numbers for training or whatever. Other clubs will have the capacity to book however many fields they think they need, and over-book, in a way, and not utilise the field. We are then in a position where we would have loved to have those fields, but we could not utilise them because they were already booked in the system.

**MS LEE:** And they wear the cost.

**Mr Hareb:** The club will wear the cost; they do not care. They probably do not care as much. It is not as much of a problem for them. For us, we literally cannot afford to pay for a field and not use it. We are so small when it comes to funds. We go basically year to year. We are a bit better off, because of good decisions in the past, but it is a difficulty for us, and we need to be as precise as possible.

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** There is the booking system; is there somebody at the end of the phone that you can ring and say, “What have you got available? Are there any fields around?” Is there some level of flexibility in the whole thing?

**Mr Saunders:** You are directed to the online system. The online system is fairly robust, and they do respond fairly quickly. As I said previously, the issue is not so much with that; it is with the rules that happen behind the scenes, and the website does not necessarily show that. For example, I could go on today, find a blank booking, try and book it, and they will come back and say, “Sorry, this has been allocated to X club, and they have not booked it yet. You have to wait until 1 November.”

The online system for booking is quite good. I do not think you need to waste resources by calling someone on a phone line to make a booking or identify vacancies. I think it is about the way in which you can actually book the fields that is the problem.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Saunders, you talked about one option being to allow bookings to extend until 10 pm.

**Mr Saunders:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is there any barrier to that at the moment, or is it just that the rules have always said it is 9 pm?

**Mr Saunders:** The rules have always been that it is 9 pm. There are a couple of edge cases, but I will leave that aside. The main reason is community expectation around lighting and light pollution at that time of night. At least for us, we use ANU facilities and UC facilities until 10 pm. If we were able to access until 10 pm, it would open a range of facilities that we could book in the 8 pm to 10 pm window. They might have junior training from 6 pm to 8 pm; then we could rock up at 8 pm and do two fields, one division, 8 pm to 10 pm. That is a barrier for us.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Are your players willing to play that late?

**Mr Saunders:** They are. It is a desirable competition. Essentially, there is not a single opportunity for people to play football on a full-side field at this time of year.

**MS LEE:** Just to confirm, there are not enough grounds at ANU for you guys who need more grounds?

**Mr Saunders:** The way in which we access the fields at ANU is a whole different palaver.

**MS LEE:** Let's not open that up!

**THE ACTING CHAIR:** We have a very tight schedule. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, which I do not think you have, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. Thank you.

**LARSEN, MS BRIDGET**, Parent of player, Canberra Region Powerchair Football  
**TIYCE, MS LINA**, Parent of player, Canberra Region Powerchair Football

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome witnesses from Canberra Region Powerchair Football. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement, or are you happy to go to questions?

**Ms Larsen:** I think we will just briefly introduce ourselves, make some key points, and then open it up for discussion.

**THE CHAIR:** It is your time.

**Ms Larsen:** I am the parent and primary carer of one of the powerchair football players. My son has been playing since he was 14. He is now 20 and in his third year of university and is a passionate powerchair football player. We first heard of powerchair football from parents of kids with the same condition in Sydney. For a few years, my son refused to even go and have a look. I think he felt that sports was not for him. He has muscular dystrophy, which is a rare condition that causes progressive muscle deterioration. He is now a full-time wheelchair user and requires hoist transfers.

Eventually, I got him to come along to a “come and try day” on the ruse of saying hello to some of the other parents. When we got there I jumped in the chair and took off. It was summer and the dress flew up—and then that was it. He said, “Mum, get out and let me have a go,” and he did not get out for the rest of the day. Since then he has played consistently for six years and he has represented Canberra at Nationals twice. When Canberra could not play, we travelled to Sydney every second weekend so he could play for just two hours, and he played for the Sydney team at Nationals in Brisbane.

He loves the speed, the strategy and the freedom of being able to move, kick and be part of a team. It is great for his mental health, and he is proud to say that he plays a sport. We think that the team skills will help him as he transitions from university to paid employment.

I also want to add that, whilst powerchair football is played under the Capital Football umbrella, we developed this submission as parents, and so it does not represent the views of Capital Football.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Tiyce:** I am here as a parent. I am a primary carer of a son that is playing powerchair football. Our son has been playing since he was eight years old. He started in 2018. He is now 15 and a year 10 student at Marist College Canberra, and he loves powerchair football. Our son has a rare tumour on his spine and brainstem, which has led to a whole heap of medical complications. As a result of that tumour, he is now wheelchair bound. He is not able to use a manual chair and is dependent on a powerchair to get around.

Our son first saw the sport on a brochure in a waiting room at the Sydney Children’s Hospital. He wanted to play straightaway but, unfortunately, the competition was in

Sydney and we could not commit to six hours of travel every week to play. He was later asked by his local physiotherapist to come and participate in the first “come and try day” at the AIS—and he has been playing ever since.

Our son has a bubbly personality and loves to talk. The sport allows him to be involved in a team sport independently, just like any other abled individual, without the assistance of parents or carers. The sport has given him so much confidence. It has assisted him in his everyday tasks and has allowed him to see a brighter future—because anything is possible. Just like any other athlete, our son can be very competitive and passionate, and powerchair football gives him the ability to express this drive. He has also played consistently for seven years and represented Canberra in the Nationals in Sydney twice.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. My question was going to be: can you briefly outline the benefits of playing powerchair football? But that question has been really well answered; so I will pass to the Deputy Chair.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. Assumedly, access is an issue. What does the government need to do across the facilities that we have to provide better access?

**Ms Larsen:** For us, it comes down to venues, visibility and volunteers. With venues, we currently play at the Lyneham Hockey Centre. We are in a quite tortuous move at the moment to Gold Creek High School. For our kids to play, we need accessible parking—we all drive converted vehicles—and we need an accessible venue. We have a container which is powered so that our Strike Force chairs—the chairs that the soccer is played in—are charged and stored. We also have a hoist in there so that those who cannot transfer independently can be transferred from their day chairs to their soccer chairs.

**THE CHAIR:** And you call them Strike Force chairs? I do like—

**Ms Larsen:** Strike Force is the brand, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like a Strike Force chair.

**Ms Larsen:** We have a small fleet from sponsors. One of the things that we struggle with a bit is that there is not a very good, accessible bathroom at Lyneham. It is incredibly hard to move around, and so some of the players have had to use other rooms for personal care. It is really old and it is cold in there. Some of them have temperature regulation issues. Having a modern facility with air conditioning and heating in winter, would be a real bonus.

We have had issues with venue availability as well. We have sometimes felt that we get the leftovers. We are sometimes bumped by other groups. There is a lot of work in just getting our players to the venue. Most of the players come with two parents, and there have to be arrangements for other siblings. We sometimes have to arrange accessible transport or paid support workers on a Saturday morning. Having a regular venue is a must for our sport.

**MS CARRICK:** Indoor sports facilities are an issue across a range of sports. The

government does not seem to invest in indoor sports facilities. They are either private—the ones in Tuggeranong are privately owned—or the peak bodies own them. What do you think about the ACT government changing their policy and actually invest in indoor sports facilities equitably across Canberra, so that multiple groups and access can be insured by the ACT government?

**Ms Larsen:** Definitely. Inclusive facilities are not just for players like us; they are for the whole community around them as well. You should have seen my son's face when he went into the bathroom at Gold Creek. He was like, "Oh, my gosh, Mum; this is amazing." That is because it is rare.

**MR EMERSON:** Is that the reason for the move? What has driven that move to Gold Creek?

**Ms Tiyce:** Access to the facilities and that we have not had a booking since September.

**MR EMERSON:** So you have been kind of forced to move.

**Ms Tiyce:** We are supposed to be trying to go to Nationals, and we just do not have the consistency. It is also the better facilities, and where we can have temperature control for heating and cooling bathrooms.

We just do not have consistency at the moment. We are trying to get the players ready for the Nationals, but they do not have training available. We have not been able to go in the last two years, because there has not been that consistency. There are other factors as well. It is not just the venue, but the venue is a big part of it, because, if you cannot go to training, you cannot improve your skills. There is no point going and just participating and showing the other capitals and cities that we have not improved.

**MS CARRICK:** You need more capacity.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes, that is right. To go to, for instance, Mpowerdome, we would need to go to Lyneham first, get a truck with a lift to stack all the chairs and put the hoist on and transfer that, and then do the reverse.

**Ms Tiyce:** Because there is no storage capacity at—

**MS CARRICK:** So, logistically, you can really only have one facility, because otherwise you would be moving chairs from one facility to another.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes, and you cannot do that. It takes all day just for an hour and a half training session.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** You talked about support from the ACT government and how fundamental that would be. Do you currently get any ACT government funding?

**Ms Larsen:** No.

**MS LEE:** Have you ever applied for any?

**Ms Larsen:** I am aware that Capital Football applied and received a grant for a container a couple of years back. Beyond that, I do not know—we are just parents. We are involved with a couple of sponsors and are trying to maintain those sponsor relationships. We are also doing fundraising. We pick up cans, don't we?

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes, every week.

**Ms Larsen:** We do that to try to raise money. Because it is very costly to get to Nationals, we are trying to help with accommodation and registration.

**MS LEE:** In your submission you mentioned logistical support. Was that in terms of the venue and that type of thing?

**Ms Larsen:** Yes, and having a consistent coach. We have a lovely coach with experience in Paralympic coaching. She has been involved for a while, but she has other commitments as well. Having a consistent coach who understands the diversity of a team like this in terms of their functional capacity and their different communication abilities is important. Some of them are more interested in competitions and some of them are more interested in the sports and recreational side. She is fabulous, but having a consistent coach is really important for those reasons.

The other thing is visibility. We have quite a lot of chairs now, thanks to our sponsors, but we only have a small, consistent core group. Our potential players are probably sprinkled salt and pepper throughout the community. It is hard to reach them. We need to do a bit more of a player attraction campaign. As parents and carers, we already have quite a lot on our plates. So we really do need some help with that as well.

**MS LEE:** In terms of the consistent coaching, is that because of the lack of access to qualified coaches or is it a funding issue?

**Ms Larsen:** It is probably a bit of both.

**Ms Tiyce:** Both, yes.

**Ms Larsen:** Our current coach is excellent, but she cannot come every week, because she has some other paid roles.

**MR RATTENBURY:** A lot of the questions I wanted to ask have been covered, but I would like to know how many players you actually have in the ACT?

**Ms Tiyce:** We have about six regular players.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes.

**Ms Tiyce:** There are about four core players, but we do have six that come. There are others that come and go because of other medical conditions that have happened and they cannot play at the moment. It is just trying to get that attraction and keeping them here. We have had interest outside of Canberra from the regional areas, but trying to

get here on a regular basis is hard.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Of course.

**Ms Tiyce:** It is also about the inconsistency of our training, because the lack of, I guess, our training venue, and having that information available for external—

**MR RATTENBURY:** So your new venue is more reliable?

**Ms Tiyce:** We do not know yet.

**Ms Larsen:** We do not know yet. We are in the quite torturous process of moving there and having to move the container and getting the container powered.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes; I am sure.

**Ms Larsen:** And then getting everything moved across. With players, there are only four on the team, but you need—

**MR RATTENBURY:** That was my next question—so, thanks.

**Ms Larsen:** We have a team who are really passionate and committed. We also have a couple of extras who are probably more interested in it from a social and recreational perspective, which is fantastic. As Lina said, we have had others coming in but. Quite a few come and try but have found that, because of medical issues, the adjustments—

**Ms Tiyce:** There is a bit of movement in the chair.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I can imagine.

**Ms Larsen:** Our youngest players start at five and we have an ex-Paralympian who is 60ish as well. So it is a very broad sport.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** Is it like a shipping container?

**Ms Larsen:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** I have been wanting to ask that since the start.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** On the cost of getting to the team to Nationals, what are we talking about, roughly?

**Ms Larsen:** It is about \$500 per player for registration and then there are the additional costs for transport and accommodation. Unlike other teams, there is a bit more involved in transport. It is not just throwing your bag in the team bus. It involves parents taking time off for work, potentially arranging support workers and then arranging accessible

accommodation, which allows for carers or parents to be there to support them as well.

**Ms Tiyce:** And hiring other equipment to support the players in their accommodation as well—so having hoists available.

**Ms Larsen:** Which we are quite used to doing, but there is a bit of a lead time and some logistics involved in that.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** Have you received any support from or had any engagement with the Health and Community Services Directorate or the former—

**Ms Larsen:** No.

**Ms Tiyce:** No.

**MR EMERSON:** That is where the disability portfolio sits.

**Ms Larsen:** I guess one of the reasons that I thought we would do this is I know Capital Football probably has limited resources to assist, and I can see that the government could potentially have reach into the educational, the health and the sports links that you have through the community to help raise the visibility of this sport. I feel like we are struggling as a team at the moment. We have this amazing little spark but we need a little bit of help.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes. This is the only wheelchair-powered sport available in the ACT that is in a team environment. We have been trying for a long time. It picked up for a while and then it has just died off. We feel that these players that are committed are going to start to lose interest and then we will lose this sport—a sport which is great for all ages and any gender. It will be so sad if, having tried so hard, it just disappears.

**Ms Larsen:** We do not have an alternative either. It is not like we will switch to basketball. This is the only sport that these players can play.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is it fair to reflect that it is also an important social environment for the parents?

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes; 100 per cent.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes.

**Ms Tiyce:** It is not just the communication on the sideline; it is the links and helping each other out with what we are all dealing with—for example, what is happening with the NDIS, what OTs are people using. It is all of that helpful stuff that we can get on the sideline, and it gives us a break. It gives the players an opportunity to be independent, and they can go off and do their own thing, and then it gives us a chance to have that break for an hour and a half on the sideline without having to interfere with—

**Ms Larsen:** It is very therapeutic and also very practical. Because we are the parents of these kids who use powerchairs, the local tips that you get—tips that you cannot get anywhere else—from people who absolutely get it are essential.

**THE CHAIR:** Bridget, you mentioned volunteers. Could you go into that a little bit more. I presume that every club, no matter the size, needs more or could do with better.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you expand on that, please?

**Ms Larsen:** As I said, I think Capital Football are probably struggling a little bit with resources. We really do need some help with a number of different things, including the player attraction and helping with events. The parents are actually the volunteers at the moment. I do not think you would meet a more passionate group of volunteers. When it comes to kids with disability, we are very, very passionate. We do a lot extra, but we need a little bit more help.

**Ms Tiyce:** Because we cannot make the final decisions. We have our bimonthly meetings with Powerchair Football, with the parent group, but it is not just a parent catch-up; it is about the direction of the sport. But we cannot make those final decisions that will make an impact. We cannot sign agreements and we cannot source funding. We can do a bit of fundraising, but those grants need to come from Capital Football or whoever it is—or, you know, what can we apply for? We can try to direct them in a path, but our limitation is that we are not going anywhere because we cannot make those final decisions.

**Ms Larsen:** We are doing a lot of lifting, but we are also, as carers, we have an awful lot of other things and other challenges that we have to manage on a day-to-day basis. We have a couple of good sponsors.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes.

**Ms Larsen:** One of them is absolutely amazing and is helping out wherever they can. But, beyond that, we do not have much.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you have visibility of how other jurisdictions do it and how governments—whether it be local government or state government—liaise with your counterparts in other jurisdictions?

**Ms Larsen:** Sydney Football Club are also a young team. They were sort of our competitors at the bottom of the table at one point. They have been able to—

**Ms Tiyce:** At the bottom.

**Ms Larsen:** You've got to start somewhere. They are part of the Sydney Football Club, and the Sydney Football Club are well funded. They have really big fundraisers. They have been able to support and grow the team. They have a passionate group of parents as well. They have also received quite a lot of funding through the New South Wales government—for instance, to have a stand at the Disability Expo and other places where

people with disability who may be interested in this sport could come, and also for regional development.

**MS CARRICK:** So you need a champion in either Capital Football or the ACT government—a direct link to somebody who is supporting you.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes. We have lots of great ideas. I have written a player attraction campaign and I have written sponsorship templates and things like that, but they are just not seeing the light of day through resources.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes, and I guess they are busy as well with their resources. Obviously, we are not a priority, but we can see that there are others and we are struggling to get that priority up.

**MR EMERSON:** In your submission you mentioned the use of photographs of some of the players in government materials.

**Ms Larsen:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** Can you speak a little bit to that—if you do not feel that you are prioritised, but the optics might suggest the opposite.

**Ms Larsen:** Sure. I noticed in the strategy there is a full-page picture of a person using a Strike Force chair. That is actually a person who is the brother of a player. That person does not in fact have a disability. I do not know whether there was permission to use that photo. I looked at it and thought, “Gosh; somebody’s putting something in there to demonstrate or illustrate some sort of inclusive sport capacity here,” but we have really had zero engagement with the government. So it did not sit well. I have also seen the same in the newsletter and in the website of Capital Football where, under the sponsorship part of their website, there is picture of our team but that is really it. So I do not really want to be sponsorship clickbait. I do not think that is fair for our players.

**MR EMERSON:** In terms of singular issues like moving that container, have you sought government assistance with that?

**Ms Larsen:** We are doing what we can to work with Capital Football but, because we are not an association, we have no legal entity in our own right.

**MR EMERSON:** So you kind of do not really go directly there; it is via—

**Ms Larsen:** We are doing what we can. I am talking to one of the sponsors on an almost daily basis at the moment to try and get that sorted out. You would not have thought that moving a container was that hard, but it is.

**MS CARRICK:** This question goes to something Tom raised before. If the ACT government only deals with the peak bodies or the main groups, if the peak bodies are not delivering for their members, can you raise that with the ACT government? How do you raise that issue? Otherwise, you fall through the cracks.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes.

**Ms Larsen:** I think you hit the nail on the head there for us. How do we raise it with the government? Well, that is why I wrote the submission and why we are here.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes.

**Ms Larsen:** We are very grateful to have the support that we have for this sport. There is probably a sort of a lack of time amongst the parents, but there is also a concern that, if we start rattling the cage, people might get their noses out of joint and that might reflect poorly on and not serve the interests of our kids.

**MS CARRICK:** And lose any support that you do have.

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes, that is right.

**Ms Larsen:** It is hanging by a thread at the moment. I am fairly used to using, you know, elbows a bit, but I am speaking on behalf of a team here, and I think we are a bit scared that—

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes. We do not want to break away from what we have already—but how do we go forward? Nothing seems to be happening. We have been in the same position over the last couple of years. We do not even have the local competition that we used to have where we would just play with the others. We used to have Woden and Gungahlin competing every fortnight. We do not even have that at the moment. So it is those four kicking the ball around and trying to improve their skills. We do not know where to go from here.

**MR EMERSON:** Chair, I am sure you were going to say the same thing, but thanks so much for all your work and advocacy and for showing up to the hearing and putting in your submission—and doing all that while you are carrying everything else. It is pretty impressive.

**Ms Larsen:** Thank you for having us.

**Ms Tiyce:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. You did not take any questions on notice—

**Ms Larsen:** No; but if you think of any questions—

**Ms Tiyce:** Yes, please reach out.

**THE CHAIR:** We appreciate it. We have your details. Thank you.

**Ms Tiyce:** Thank you very much.

**Short suspension.**

**ZAHARIAS, MR ZAC**, President, Canberra Climbers Association

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Mr Zaharias from the Canberra Climbers Association. Please note, Mr Zaharias, that as a witness you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr Zaharias:** Yes, I would; thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** You have 25 minutes, and it is your time.

**Mr Zaharias:** Thank you. I have been president of the Canberra Climbers Association since 2003. I represent 530 climbers in the ACT, but there are a lot more who climb who are not part of our association. We were incorporated in the ACT in 1998. Rock climbing is a climbing sports discipline that involves ascending routes consisting of natural rock in an outdoor environment or on artificial resin climbing walls in a mostly indoor environment.

Rock climbing is broad in its application, from bouldering at one end of the scale to climbing cliffs several thousand metres high. Bouldering involves climbing boulders a few metres off the ground with no ropes, using padded mats for protection from falls. This allows climbers to practise very difficult moves with little risk of injury. At the other end of the spectrum is the use of ropes, as climbers make their way progressively up a cliff face, either placing and removing temporary anchors or using pre-placed fixed anchors for safety. This style of climbing is higher risk and requires a broad range of skills in addition to technical climbing skills.

Although rock climbing is over 200 years old, it started in Canberra only in the mid-1960s as a solely outdoor pursuit, mainly centred around Booroomba Rocks, Gibraltar Rocks and Mount Cooree. As there is only one small cliff within close proximity to Canberra, bouldering became popular as a training method. The National Library retaining wall is a good example where climbers have trained for over 50 years and continue to do so. This has led to an uneasy relationship between climbers and Library security.

In the 1990s, indoor gymnasiums sprang up at various institutions—the ANU, Duntroon and the Defence Force Academy—and then smaller commercial gyms at Mitchell and Hume. In the last few years, two high-quality indoor gyms have opened catering to bouldering, Mountain Strong and BlocHaus. Unfortunately, the two rope commercial gyms at Mitchell and Hume have closed in the last few years.

While indoor and outdoor climbing have diverged to some extent—indoor being more safer and contrived versus outdoor being naturally but riskier—there is a close nexus between both. The pathway into the sport is usually through an indoor gym before transitioning to outdoor climbing. This transition is a big leap and requires increased skill, knowledge and risk management. The CCA has a big role to play in climate training and education to make the transition from indoor to outdoor climbing safer. Conversely, outdoor climbers will often use indoor gyms to stay fit and in shape as gyms are more accessible. Gyms allow climbers to push the technical difficulty of

climbs in a safer environment. In short, the two domains are complementary to each other.

Rock climbing became an Olympic sport in 2020. There are three events: league climbing, speed climbing and bouldering. Rock climbing is an inclusive activity suitable for people of all ages, genders and abilities, particularly through indoor facilities that enable safe, accessible participation. Female participation rates are strong among youth but tend to decline in adulthood—a trend the sector is seeking to address through targeted retention and mentoring initiatives.

The CCA has recently secured public liability insurance—a critical step, as insurance costs have historically posed a major barrier for many community-based climbing organisations. This coverage now allows the CCA to design and deliver new programs aimed at increasing participation among women and First Nations youth. These initiatives are currently under development in consultation with relevant communities. A sports climbing fundamentals course, for example, is being launched this November.

As noted in the CCA's submission, the two main barriers to participation in the ACT are the lack of a public access rope climbing gym and access to outdoor cliffs being eroded by the placement of gates on most access routes to cliffs. The lack of a rope gym means there is no facility to climb long routes using ropes and apply the appropriate risk management techniques in a safe environment. The reduced access to outdoor climbing areas in the ACT is resulting in many climbers travelling to New South Wales. The most popular destinations are the Mittagong area, Nowra, Tianjara Falls and, further afield, the Blue Mountains. Many of the traditional outdoor climbing areas in the ACT are almost deserted on weekends.

While the CCA has a generally good working relationship with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, we are increasingly finding that conservation is a high priority over recreation. Since the 2020 bushfires, roads to two significant climbing locations were frustratingly closed for many years until funding became available for road remediation. With respect to the proliferation of locked gates, we have made many suggestions for managed access, but ACT Parks personnel have stated privately that they have limited funding to implement alternative access procedures. We also believe that there is a reluctance by Parks to implement such systems.

Briefly, there are four solutions. The first is to set a better, more consistent balance between conservation objectives and sport and recreation objectives. The second is to establish a process to enable managed access to outdoor climbing areas in the ACT, mainly through coded or keyed access to gates. The third one is to consider installing a rope climbing wall in the ACT. This could be possible in collaboration with the AIS. The fourth is to consider establishing a bouldering park at Pierces Creek. That concludes my opening statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Zaharias. A quick question: how might the technology solutions for accessing the locked gates at ACT parks work, and are there examples of where they are used elsewhere? What sort of costs are we looking at?

**Mr Zaharias:** I cannot answer the cost question. Many years ago, I was in Redwood National Park with my family, and we went up to the headquarters, registered and there

was a registration system of the first 30 people. You were given keyed access and had 24 hours access to that particular site. There are lots of examples around the world where there is an arrangement where you can register or it is done through a club, perhaps MOU or some kind of arrangement, where access can be controlled and so the land managers then know who is getting access. I believe the solutions are there. We have had long discussions with Parks personnel over this, but I feel there is reluctance on their behalf to open up a system that might get abused.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there sites specifically where the access is limited? Are we talking sort of Namadgi National Park or—

**Mr Zaharias:** Most of our outdoor climbing is Namadgi, which is 50 per cent of land area. About 10 years ago, overnight, about 10 gates on the Corin Road were installed without our knowledge. That completely covers five climbing areas off the Corin Road. Climbers have traditionally gone in on the Corin Road rather than, particularly with Gibraltar Rocks, accessing it through the nature reserve there, simply because of the entry fees and, more recently, there has been a bit of conflict between some of the rangers and climbers. So that area now has almost become unused, or parts of that area.

With Pierces Creek, we have been for four years negotiating and discussing with Parks about getting a bouldering park, similar to the Mount Stromlo mountain bike park concept. But they have signalled they are going to put a gate up on the Laurel Camp Road, which pretty well destroys the whole notion of access to that area.

It is very frustrating for us. I understand the role of Parks and what they are doing. I do not personally blame anybody. It is just that it seems that we are a bit marginalised when it comes to this. We are just seeing people fleeing out of the ACT and going to external areas. Plus, the loss of our rope gyms means that we are a bit stuck at the moment and we are not sure how we can sort of grow the sport.

**THE CHAIR:** Was the conflict you referenced over whether or not access would be granted or allowed—the recent conflict between rangers and climbers?

**Mr Zaharias:** It is a bit more complicated there. There are also potential heritage issues, Indigenous heritage issues. This is the subject of the separate submission we have made to the Tidbinbilla Plan of Management, which is with ACT Parks at the moment.

**MS LEE:** You talked about the four years that it is taken—it must be very frustrating—and you mentioned that negotiations have now come to a stop because they have decided they are going to be locking it. Was that the only barrier, challenge or reason why those negotiations have stopped? What were some of the other issues and factors? Four years is a long time.

**Mr Zaharias:** There were a number of issues put up. One was that that area gets a lot of motorbike riders and others that trash it. So they are trying to keep people out and remediate that area. Our argument was, firstly, that, as climbers, we are actually very conservation minded and that, by having access and more people climbing there, we would actually become sort of the eyes and ears of Parks.

There was a reluctance to put in any facilities. We were not asking for much. We just

wanted some picnic tables and a toilet. They did not want to invest in that. We are prepared to actually pay \$30,000 to have signs installed if Parks did not have money. Then, more recently, there have been rumblings about Indigenous heritage issues—which, again, always seems to be the card that is put up against us to say that things are stopping and you cannot have access.

Another complication is that eastern side of Laurel Camp Road is fine and the western side is part of the water catchment area. So, whilst there were no suggestions that we could not climb there, it also meant that it was much harder to try and sort of publicise it as a climbing facility. The boulders we have in Canberra are probably the best in Australia, and potentially we could have competitions and climbers coming from interstate. It is the best bouldering in Australia. So there is a lot of potential for it. If we can come and overcome some of these issues, I see that, in particular, as being a great recreational opportunity not just for sports climbing but also for the general community and perhaps rehabilitating the area that is a little bit lost with the forestry that is now ceased in that area.

**MS LEE:** Are there any other alternative sites for a potential—

**Mr Zaharias:** No; not for bouldering. I think that is the best site. It is the closest cluster. There are seven clusters of boulders. We have them all mapped. We have a submission that is been sitting there for four years with all this detail. I have to say that I am just lost as to where we go from here. I guess the next step is to write to the minister with a submission and then hope that that might be able to then kick on the initiative again.

**MS LEE:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** Back to the ropes. I know that climbing is very popular with young people. Why did the Hume and the Mitchell rope climbing close? Was it a financial matter?

**Mr Zaharias:** It was financial. It was one of the first indoor gyms around, so at the time it was very popular. But I think it suffered from a lack of investment. Also, the technology is rapidly growing—the quality of the holds and the style of climbing walls being built. What has been done overseas is really incredible and really creative. It was very old-style, and the climbers started to stop using it simply because there was not the money there to reinvest in it. There was also a dispute between the landlord and the owner, and it was quite acrimonious. We actually went to the media over this issue. That became counterproductive, and the landlord just dug their heels in and shut the gym anyway. So we have lost that.

I think we have come to the conclusion that there is really just a lack of capital in the ACT for a commercial gym. I know Sydney and Melbourne, the big capital cities, have some pretty amazing private gyms. There is potential. I believe that the AIS have bought the holds from the Paris Olympics. They are looking at installing more for the high-performance end. There might be an opportunity for the ACT government to co-invest, but we would need something that is not just focused on the high-performance end and would be available to anybody of any ability. So that might be an opportunity for us to leverage off an existing potential facility in the ACT.

**MS CARRICK:** I did hear it on the radio when those Olympic walls were coming from—

**Mr Zaharias:** Paris, I think.

**MS CARRICK:** Paris, yes. So there have not been any conversations about where they go or who will be able to access them? Has the AIS done anything with them yet?

**Mr Zaharias:** I believe there are thoughts and ideas. I have had some brief discussions with people in the sports climbing community, but at the moment we do not have any program or information about when and where. We believe what will happen they will be very focused on the performance end, not on the average user. The idea could be that it is available—like a swimming pool—when it is not being used for training, but the high-performance end is out of the realm of 95 per cent or 99 per cent of climbers.

**MR RATTENBURY:** From a skills point of view—like, it is too hard for them?

**Mr Zaharias:** Just too hard, yes. Most walls can be adjusted if they are designed well and you can actually move holds around. But it would be too hard. It depends on how much space they are going to allocate. We are not really privy to what the AIS is doing; we just hear through the Sports Climbing Association that it is on the agenda.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Just flowing on from that, do you know if the ACT government is having any conversations with the AIS? Is that connection being made?

**Mr Zaharias:** I am not alert to that. We as an association have almost zero contact with the ACT. Our only contact is Parks. Part of that is simply that, because we have not had insurance, we have pretty well been locked out of any opportunities to get funding and get more engaged. But I think that will change, from our perspective, now that we have got it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do you have any formal contact with the Sport and Recreation service team?

**Mr Zaharias:** No. We are on the mailing list. But, as I said, it has just not been on our radar, simply because every time we look at an opportunity we get, “You must be insured,” and immediately the shutters go down from our end. Because we are a little bit different from the traditional sports, we do not feel that we have an avenue to go to. Maybe there is one, but we just have not taken advantage of it, because of just the nature of our sport. As I said, we are not a soccer type sport or use a playing field. We use the natural environment or a gym.

**MS CARRICK:** Does the government see it as more of a commercial thing when it is in a gym?

**Mr Zaharias:** I do not know if the government sees it as commercial. Indoor climbing is only recent. It is only been the last 20 years. It has only become an Olympic sport in the last five years. So it is emerging. Climbers traditionally tend not to be sports minded. That is changing the nature of our sport from what I call a recreational adventure pursuit to one that is a bit more multidimensional. As that is changing, I think we are all starting

to view it a different light.

This is not necessarily criticism here of anybody; we are also coming to terms with the changing nature of our sport. It is a very broad, diverse group of people, from those who want to compete to those who just want to disappear into the backcountry and just have a nice day on the crags.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thanks.

**MR EMERSON:** Your submission mentioned a track record of environmental stewardship and building constructive relationships with rangers and so on. I am wondering if you could provide a little bit more detail on what that has looked like from your side and also what you think could be done from the other side to cultivate that even more.

**Mr Zaharias:** Sorry, could you just ask that again?

**MR EMERSON:** On environmental stewardship among climbers and building relationships with the rangers. Basically, how it could be a positive on some of those other government objectives, if you were given more access.

**Mr Zaharias:** Certainly with Parks and Conservation, the relationship ebbs and flows. It really is very personality driven. We have gone into cliff-gear activities. So we go and assist Parks in maintaining trails. Some years ago at Gibraltar Falls, there was graffiti there and we were asked by Parks to go in there and remove it. We were there within two hours and had it removed in two hours; whereas, if Parks tried to do it through the normal process, it would have taken six weeks.

We see ourselves as stewards and care for the environment. We are allies. Sometimes we are seen as vandals, and this is the problem we have. You talk to anybody in Parks, some people love us and some people hate us. It seems to go to both extremes. But most climbers are very sensitive in caring about the environment and want to be part of that process. That is the outdoor environment. So I think that could be leveraged in terms of solutions, particularly with access. I think gyms are a totally different. That is more a facility infrastructure and transactional arrangement.

**MR EMERSON:** On the outdoor access, I suppose, you could imagine having a kind of an MOU or something to that effect, for you to say, “We will come in and help with these in these ways if you will let us climb on that.”

**Mr Zaharias:** Yes; and we are open to any of those arrangements—and also a bit of consistency with Parks. We find that, in dealing with them, it is very personality based, and we get a lot of fluctuation even on a year-to-year basis. I have been the president for 23 years and I spend a lot of time talking to rangers. It is frustrating. I have more corporate knowledge than most of the Parks people have in terms of some of the land management that occurs there. Again, it is just the nature of the rotating of personnel through organisations.

**MR EMERSON:** Where there is not actually access, I am assuming climbers just figure out their own access. When access is prevented and you have got locks on gates and

that sort of thing, it adds a hike to the climb. Being candid, is that the sort of thing that happens anyway?

**Mr Zaharias:** That is what happens. Climbers will access a cliff and then, as the trail gets trampled, it becomes it comes a trail. There are lots of examples of that. Then there is this discussion about the maintenance of that trail. Climbers have gone in and trimmed a tree here and cut a bush there and then that creates a problem because there are quite severe fines. It is a \$5,500 fine if you cut a log that is 10 centimetres greater in diameter. We have actually had some of our climbers threatened with being taken to court. Only trails that are authorised trails are maintained by Parks. So then climbers, of course, just go and do their own thing. That is where it becomes a bit tricky.

We are trying to be responsible but there is frustration. Even around those areas that we access, common areas, to actually get any remediation—because erosion occurs and fires come in—again, the budget is not there to maintain that. So, again, we see ourselves as part of the solution, as volunteers. Then, when we do go and volunteer, there is too much paperwork. So we have rarely actually gone out and done cliff care, simply because it is too hard for Parks to actually initiate the volunteer paperwork for us to go out and do a weekend's work. There is all sorts of issues. We are keen and able but the bureaucracy and the process seem to be the work against that.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay; thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** When you say that we have the best bouldering in Australia, why is it that we have the best? There are a lot of, I guess, crags around Australia.

**Mr Zaharias:** Just the geology. It is the granite outcrops, those little boulder contours, that are about one to two metres high. We are very much granite country. It is just the concentration of those boulders. Bouldering is very much around solving a problem. It is only one or two metres and boulderers can spend hours stuck to a rock—falling off and getting back up again. It is so absorbing. I do not do bouldering.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Don't have the patience?

**Mr Zaharias:** I do not get it. I do not get excited by bouldering. I prefer the really high stuff. The only other place that is close to it is the Brindabella National Park, the Black Rock Range, but that is about a two hour drive out of here.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. Thank you very much.

**Mr Zaharias:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**THE CHAIR:** You are welcome.

**Short suspension.**

**BRYANT, MS JOSEPHINE**, Committee Member, Save Phillip Pool  
**LUKE-EVERED, DR CAROLINE**, President, Friends of Manuka Pool  
**MILLER, MR MARTIN**, Committee Member, Save Phillip Pool  
**RAISIN, MS LOUISE**, Committee Member, Save Phillip Pool  
**RANSOM, MS SARAH**, Convenor, Save Phillip Pool

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome witnesses from Friends of Manuka Pool and Save Phillip Pool. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make brief opening statements?

**Ms Ransom:** Yes, we will both make a short statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Please go ahead.

**Ms Ransom:** As well as representing Save Phillip Pool, we are part of a coalition advocating for a new aquatic strategy for the ACT.

According to the ACT Sport and Recreation Strategy, swimming is one of the most popular sports in the ACT, with participation rates at around 23 per cent for kids and 12 per cent for adults. However, there are significant barriers to participation in swimming in the ACT. These can relate to the costs of entry, lessons, access to pools and safety.

I will focus on the access question. In particular, there is an alarming lack of adequate swimming facilities on Canberra's south side. In winter, north Canberra enjoys 2,000 hours of 50-metre lanes available per week, whereas it is only 300 hours in the south. That is split between Stromlo pool and Tuggeranong pool, which have the 25-metre barriers in place for most of the day. Access is an issue for both of these facilities. Even if you live in Woden, with respect to Stromlo Leisure Centre, it takes about an hour to get there by bus from most parts of Woden, for example.

Fifty-metre pools are needed in a community like Canberra for training and for recreational swimming, for school carnivals and to support the squads and the masters groups that incubate champions of all ages. This is recognised as a national standard by the Royal Lifesaving Society. In their report on the state of aquatic facilities in 2025, it noted that a 50-metre pool should be provided for populations of 40,000-plus people. Woden's population will double in the next 40 years. It is currently 41,000 people, and it is projected to go up to 87,000, according to ACT Treasury's most recent 2025 estimates.

Phillip pool is also the only 50-metre pool serving the inner south of Canberra, which has a current population of 33,000, estimated to increase to 54,000 by 2065. Woden is also the town centre for Weston Creek, which has a current population of 25,000, going up to 38,000 by 2065. These total numbers indicate that the ACT government should be preparing to provide adequate aquatic facilities to serve a population base of 179,000 people in the next 40 years.

Save Phillip Pool calls on the ACT government to prevent the closure of the 50-metre

Phillip pool and negotiate the surrender of the Crown lease back to the ACT government. The Phillip pool is a treasured community asset which plays a critical role in providing aquatic facilities, green space and a summertime hub for the community in Canberra's south. Almost 6,000 people signed a petition to save Phillip pool this year. This clearly shows that the current facility is needed. With some small upgrades, it would be an excellent facility, just like Dickson pool is, and it would ensure quality access to community swimming for the future.

Save Phillip Pool also joins a coalition of groups to call on the ACT government to invest in a new aquatic strategy to plan fairly for allocation of facilities across the ACT. I will hand over to Caroline.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Thank you for allowing me to speak. Swimming is unique. It is safe, low impact and benefits all ages. It is one of the most beneficial and cost-effective forms of exercise for people of all ages. There is a real shortage of swimming pools in Woden and across Canberra, especially outdoor 50-metre pools, as indicated by Sarah.

As president of Friends of Manuka Pool and a lifelong swimmer, I am deeply concerned that too many pools are closing, with little planning for our community's future. As a lifelong sport, swimming supports preventive health, reducing the risk of chronic disease, obesity and injury. These improvements translate into significant long-term savings for governments through reduced healthcare costs and pressure on health services.

As a retired general practitioner and sports medicine physician, I am very well-versed in the benefits of swimming, which I would always prescribe to my patients with almost any medical problem, be it physical or mental. At the same time, communities benefit from better physical and mental wellbeing, lowered illness rates and stronger social connections through local clubs and programs. Investing in swimming facilities and participation is therefore not just an investment in recreation; it is a smart, long-term investment in public health, economic sustainability and community resilience.

In that regard, as president of Friends of Manuka Pool, I am coordinating the coalition of aquatic groups towards an aquatic strategy for the ACT—the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not have one. This has involved many different water sports coordinating under a common cause for better aquatic facilities in the ACT, leading to better health benefits for the community, increasing aquatic facilities and activities for all and, again, long-term financial planning for the government by having an aquatic strategy.

With the loss of pools—for example, Phillip, Big Splash and now Civic—perhaps, with an aquatic strategy, this would not have happened.

**THE CHAIR:** Civic pool is still open.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Yes, but it is—

**MS CARRICK:** It is planned not to be.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** It is planned not to be.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; replaced with a much bigger one. The question about outdoor pools was mentioned. The outdoor pools are Queanbeyan, Phillip and Manuka. Are there any other outdoor pools in Canberra?

**Ms Bryant:** Dickson.

**Mr Miller:** Dickson.

**THE CHAIR:** Dickson. Is it open in winter?

**MR RATTENBURY:** No.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Are any of the outdoor pools open in winter?

**Dr Luke-Evered:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the patronage of Phillip pool? We cannot count it, because it is closed for half of the year.

**Ms Raisin:** We have no idea. The previous operators did not keep records of that, and I am pretty sure Geocon are not, either. We have no idea of the patronage, other than our anecdotal evidence. When we go to the pool, all the lanes are full. On weekends and Sundays, particularly when there is swim training—I am there for swim training—there are families coming in to enjoy the green grass and the other facilities that the pool offers.

**MS CARRICK:** Can you tell us about the pool party and how many people came to the pool party?

**Ms Raisin:** We gave away a lot of sausages, thanks to Woden Community Council. Yes, hundreds of people came to the pool party. The pool was full; kids were playing.

**Ms Bryant:** I think that measures right now would not be fair and reasonable, anyway, based on the development by dereliction process. Letting a facility run down does not give a measure of what its real value to the community is, particularly when it comes to projecting the future needs of the community and the young population coming through, who, in the landlocked environment of Canberra, do not have sufficient access to swimming. I think it is important to understand the context.

**Mr Miller:** ACT public schools cannot use Phillip pool at the moment because it does not meet the five-star accreditation. The ACT government actually paid for the assessment of that pool, because it was privately owned, obviously. But they cannot use that pool because it does not meet the five-star accreditation.

**MS CARRICK:** What engagement have you had with the government about Phillip pool in the past—its condition in the past, and its being run down—and about the future? What is the future for aquatic facilities in Woden?

**Ms Ransom:** It is probably fair to say—others have been involved in this issue for longer than I have—that there has been some sporadic engagement with government, but the conversation closes down very quickly. There was a decision made in 1996 to move to a 99-year lease from a short-term lease, which meant that, technically, it moved into private hands. Quite a strong theme in all of our engagements with government is that it is a privately owned facility and there is nothing government can do, but that is actually not quite the case.

There is a requirement in the lease for that piece of land to operate a publicly accessible pool. It has some requirements around the time of year and the time of day during which it has to operate. In some respects, it is the worst of both worlds—not quite private, not quite public. It is giving a very poor outcome. I think it is fair to say that we can see the same dynamic happening on the north side, with Big Splash.

We would like to engage more with government in future. We would like to be involved in the decision-making about aquatic facilities for our part of Woden. We also understand that there are budget pressures on the government at the moment, and we have a really good 50-metre facility in place in a great location with some really good green space that is becoming more and more needed in that part of Woden. It just seems like madness to let it go at this stage, when there are pathways open, we think, to change the course that we are on.

**Mr Miller:** Can I add that in 2008 the lease was granted, a 99-year lease.

**Ms Bryant:** It became private in 2008, yes.

**Mr Miller:** I have brought along a document, the variation to the plan, No 226, which states that the existing pool at that time was a government-owned asset managed by Canberra urban parks and places. The private company was a tenant of that site on a year-by-year basis. I see now that the ACT government is disputing that it was an ACT government-owned facility at that time, stating that the 10-year leases effective from 1979 meant that they owned it, but it is not the case at all. You have to have a 99-year lease if you actually own a facility—any facility in Canberra.

**MS CARRICK:** In those variations to the Territory Plan, they did guarantee that there would be a 50-metre pool there.

**Mr Miller:** Yes, it states that quite clearly, and it states it in the next one.

**MS CARRICK:** Over and over again, in all the historic documents, they have guaranteed that there would be a 50-metre pool there; so what changed?

**Mr Miller:** When they were going through the new Territory Plan process, in late 2022, I think it was, they decided to change the requirements for the lease. That did not come up in any consultations whatsoever then. It was in that short period between November and March that they went out for consultation.

You could not actually find that part of the document. It was buried in a supporting report that said, “We’ve had notifications from various sites that they want to change

their facility.” People had their say and, from what I have read in the documents, the majority of people wanted to keep the 50-metre pool. They then said that a sports and needs recreation analysis determined that a 25-metre pool would suit the Woden community. As we have found out now, no sports and recreation needs analysis was ever done.

**MS LEE:** You have talked about the need for an ACT aquatic strategy, and I understand that the ACT government currently has a “facilities framework”. Can you outline for the committee what would be the benefits of an additional strategy that are not currently covered by the framework?

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Firstly, we do not know what the framework actually covers. We have not had access to that. We asked for it, but we were told we were not allowed to have it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** It is not a public document?

**Mr Miller:** It was on there; now they have put it back on, so—

**Dr Luke-Evered:** We were not made aware of that. At our coalition meeting with Minister Berry a couple of months ago, when we asked for it, they said we could not have it. We said, “When it is available, could you let us know?” They did have all of our emails. We have not been sent that. I am sorry; I cannot comment on what that framework would be. We would like to see something aligned with many of the other jurisdictions all over the country. I think the Shoalhaven one is one that we have looked at that is quite good.

Basically, there needs to be community involvement, and a thorough look at projected populations and needs for aquatic facilities—not just swimming, but everything associated with the water, in terms of learning to swim, rehab and all sorts of aquatic sports. It needs to be looked at in a total way to see what would be the best way to have pool facilities, and potentially to associate it with other facilities, like other sports, arts or something like that, so that it becomes a hub for town centres and allows access for the whole community, particularly to aquatic facilities which cover everything, so they do not have to travel all over the place, or fear that it will be taken away from them in the future.

Other jurisdictions have looked at that, with surveys, and by looking at what each pool could provide. There would be perhaps one 50-metre pool, and maybe some other 25-metre pools and rehab pools, so that everyone has a go, and so that you know your town centre will be able to provide the facilities for you. That takes time. It takes money. But the planning would allow people in a city to have confidence that their needs were being listened to and addressed.

**Mr Miller:** That framework came out in 2013. It was supposed to be updated every five to 10 years, but so far nothing has happened.

**Ms Bryant:** Yes, it is out of date.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the ideal outcome of the strategy? What does Canberra look

like pool-wise if an ideal strategy is followed?

**Dr Luke-Evered:** I can only speak for me, but I would say that the coalition would agree that each town centre—so you would be looking at Belconnen, Woden, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong et cetera, and maybe Weston Creek—would have a 50-metre pool available either all year round or certainly outdoors, with an indoor pool also attached, with a rehab facility and, ideally with gym facilities for other exercise; that could be combined with rehabilitation as well as learn to swim, fitness and rehab, and potentially associated with an arts centre or other sports, so that it is a complete unit in each centre, like a wheel with spokes, and you had access to lots of things.

That is pie in the sky, I agree; but, from an aquatic point of view, there should be at least a 50-metre pool in each town centre available either all year, as I said, or outdoors, with a 25-metre indoor pool, covered, that could be available all year round. That gives the best of both worlds, with available green space. That is what I believe the community wants and needs.

**Ms Ransom:** There are some aquatic sports that are pretty under-served—diving, for example. The dive tower is currently at Civic pool, and there is no sense of where that might move to, once that facility is closed and the convention centre is built on that site. There are other sports like water polo, underwater hockey and underwater rugby; they are small sports, but they have a very strong following in the ACT. They need 50-metre pools because they need a certain amount of space and depth to participate in their sport. There are not the facilities available for these sports to get the time they need for training or for competition.

From my perspective, I agree with what Caroline said, but I think there is an equity issue about where facilities are located across the ACT. It needs to be looked at holistically, and we need to be open to questions like, “Does it make sense to have an all-year outdoor 50-metre pool somewhere in Canberra?” Melbourne does it. London does it. There are lots of places with worse climates than the ACT, and there is certainly a call for more outdoor swimming opportunities across Canberra. It could be a drawcard for the lucky town centre that gets to host that facility.

**Ms Raisin:** It could be Woden.

**Ms Ransom:** It could be Woden.

**Ms Raisin:** The pool in Woden is heated—when they switch the heating on, which they did not do last year—based on what is left over from the ice rink. Cooling the ice heats the pool. It is a unique situation. It is much more environmentally friendly. You do not have all of that heat going into the atmosphere from cooling the ice.

**Ms Bryant:** I think there is a very pressing issue especially with regard to the Phillip pool, because we are facing the prospect of development occurring very shortly, and it would appear to be premature prior to having a proper aquatic strategy. We would ask whether the committee has any ability to delay or hold the development until these sorts of questions are resolved and we have a better plan moving forward, before we lose a facility that will be very hard to reconstruct and redevelop elsewhere.

Also, we would like to know what assurance the government can give us that the Crown lease understandings and our access as a public group to that facility are still protected, so that we can still have access to the facility. Certainly, with the proposed new development, they are saying that it will be 25-metre pool and accessible, but no operating plan is being put up by the developers or government around how that would literally look.

With a lot of development of single-unit apartments, the question is whether it is even affordable or reasonable for the body corporate to manage a public facility, which is part of the Crown lease condition. It is a really odd fit, and there is no plan to move forward.

The pressing issue is that we might have this season left; obviously, the developers are moving forward very quickly. There needs to be some way in which some hold can occur until we have a more planned strategy around the future of swimming in the ACT.

**MS LEE:** Have you had any communication from the ACT government about the call for the aquatic strategy?

**Ms Bryant:** No.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** We have had lots of meetings with various ministers. With Minister Berry there was—I would not say a promise—an indication that, after completing the skateboarding framework, the next one on the list would be the aquatic strategy, and they said that would take two months. I then said, “That would be October,” but they said, “No, not until the end of the year.” I said, “That’s four months.” There seems to be an aquatic strategy potentially coming. We have just found that there is a framework; I am not sure. You said it is 2013?

**Ms Bryant:** 2013, since—

**Dr Luke-Evered:** That is 12 years old. Things have changed since then. An aquatic strategy would allow for every single aquatic sport to have their say. The problem at the moment is that it is a catch-22. The less facilities you have—even swimming, and even learning to swim, as well as underwater sports—the less people do it, because they do not hear about it; because we are not winning competitions that you hear about, less people do it. The less people do it, the more government and other people say, “You don’t need it.” But you need to have people doing things and getting involved, so that they think, “That would be great. Wouldn’t it be great if we had a pool here?” Even swimming lessons are reduced now. This is appalling.

**Ms Bryant:** And school carnivals.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** And carnivals. It is an Australian rite of passage, being a swimmer and going to the beach, and knowing that you are not going to drown—that someone will be able to save you. Swimming carnivals are always fun. Now, people just do not go into anything, because it is not available, and that is tragic.

**Ms Raisin:** There are a lot of issues around swimming capability. It has dropped.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is Phillip pool opening this summer?

**Dr Luke-Evered:** The 24th, apparently. According to their website, 24 October.

**Ms Raisin:** And Manuka will open on that day, too.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I want to ask about this indoor-outdoor question. I feel like there has been some different commentary, just in your evidence. Caroline, you spoke about the optimal result being both indoor and outdoor at each site. Is it really viable to have an outdoor pool in Canberra in winter?

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** How does that work?

**Ms Ransom:** People swim outdoors all year in Melbourne. There are three pools that are open all year. We have just found out that there is a pool in Adelaide that has had a winter trial; we could find out how that went. One way to find out is to just do it and see what happens—to do a trial. Phillip has probably Canberra's first example of circular engineering, where the waste heat from the ice rink is put back into the pool water, when it is working. There are emerging industries in the ACT that produce a lot of waste heat, and they are paying to get rid of that heat at the moment. I am talking about data centres. There are opportunities to combine things and to have the heat in the water, with a net benefit for everybody. I would swim outdoors. A lot of us would. There is a mix of views.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, hardy souls.

**Ms Ransom:** There is a mix of people involved in Save Phillip Pool, and not everybody is a hard-core winter swimmer. I think that is the point about the strategy: you need to have a mix. There is a different range of needs across the ACT. You need to have a mix of facilities to meet people's needs.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is there a reason why one of our existing pools has not trialled this? Dickson or Manuka could do this at the moment, presumably?

**Ms Ransom:** They are using gas heating. I do not know whether they have thought about it.

**Ms Bryant:** Maybe there are commercial considerations, too, because they are commercially run at this point.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure, yes.

**Ms Ransom:** There is even the heat from the shopping centre. Think how much heat Woden Plaza produces. It could be used.

**Mr Miller:** The Phillip pool used to be open for longer hours. I think it used to be open

between August—

**MR RATTENBURY:** More of the year, yes.

**Mr Miller:** and probably late April, or something like that.

**Ms Ransom:** April.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** And Manuka, too.

**Mr Miller:** It has become much narrower.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Manuka used to open in early October. Now it is late October, and it used to stay open until mid to late April, under previous management. I guess there are commercial reasons. Outdoor pools all year—particularly in Canberra, where we do not have the Melbourne weather, with all the cloud; we have beautiful sunshine—give you a connection to nature, with natural sunlight for vitamin D, and they provide more space for activities. Yes, sometimes there are bad weather days, but if the water is warm enough, you get in. I have swum all over the world. I was in Iceland and Norway recently, swimming in warm water. It was fantastic. It is a beautiful feeling. It really connects you, and it is very good for mindfulness. More and more people are finding particularly that swimming is very good for mindfulness, which is a real buzzword, I know, but it is very good for mental health.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Can I turn to the specifics of Phillip pool? Obviously, that site has been sold to a private owner and, for the government to purchase it back, it would be a very expensive exercise. Have you contemplated whether there is a site somewhere else in Woden where a pool could be built, if you could make that case to the government?

**Ms Ransom:** We wondered whether a land swap is more likely. Geocon has had three goes at trying to design an apartment building on that site that will work.

**Mr Miller:** Up to a third amendment.

**Ms Ransom:** A third amendment has gone through. Obviously, having to provide a swimming pool on that site is an encumbrance which they would probably rather do without. We wondered whether a land swap would be a better opportunity.

**Ms Raisin:** Another option is next to the Callam Offices. There is car parking there that goes around the back, towards Eddison Park, and it is fairly well connected to public transport, because that is an issue. As we said before, Stromlo feels hard to get to, and the town centres are designed to have all these facilities for culture, recreation et cetera. It is close to the bus terminal there, next to Callam Offices.

**Mr Miller:** But any new aquatic facility would be much more expensive.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Than what?

**Ms Ransom:** Keeping the current one.

**Ms Bryant:** Than revamping.

**Ms Raisin:** Yes, just upgrading.

**Mr Miller:** Negotiating a surrender of the current lease. They are looking at \$138 million for the Regatta Point pool. It is the same with the Macquarie pool. I have written to federal members to look at providing funding for that, and looking at whether they can negotiate the surrender of both those leases back to ACT government ownership. There are two facilities there. What is a new facility worth now? About \$40 million or \$50 million? A basic indoor facility now would be about that—\$40 million to \$50 million.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thereabouts, yes.

**Ms Bryant:** We also think that green space and the water body itself provide important environmental support in ever-growing density. We appreciate the need for urban infill. Of course, that is a no-brainer. The issue is how densely packed the Woden area currently is, and how much more intense development is sustainable and realistic in terms of thermal mass and those significant environmental impact issues. That green space right now is probably something that has great value, and even more so, as we move into the future.

**MR EMERSON:** Dr Luke-Evered, you mentioned earlier being in a meeting; we were talking about the existing framework, the aquatic facilities planning framework. You said you were told you could not have access to that. When was that meeting?

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Two months ago, just before I went away.

**Ms Ransom:** End of August, I think.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Yes. We met with Ms Berry.

**Ms Ransom:** Yvette Berry and one of her—

**Dr Luke-Evered:** It was actually her finance person.

**Mr Miller:** It was with a deputy director-general at the time.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Because I asked. I said, “I’d love some access.”

**MR EMERSON:** A government official?

**Mr Miller:** Yes. It is on the website now.

**MR EMERSON:** Yes, I have it in front of me.

**Mr Miller:** There is a bit of a caveat, if you read it. They are not really supporting that document anymore.

**MR EMERSON:** It is interesting, because there is also an FOI—it is perhaps courtesy of some of the other witnesses—which shows an email from Rebecca Kelley in sport and rec from August last year, saying, “The ACT government aquatic facilities framework continues to provide guidance in relation to relevant ACT aquatic facility matters.” You are getting mixed messaging over a 12-month period, whether it is internal or external.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** We were all there. I asked specifically for it. We said, “We’re here to help. We’d love to help you with whatever data you want. We could go out and do all this. It would be good, though, if we had the framework.” She said, “No, you can’t have that.”

**Ms Bryant:** Correct; it was then put off until the end of the year and we did not get any feeling of any real commitment to support—

**Dr Luke-Evered:** It was not a commitment; it was just an indication of intention.

**Mr Miller:** Yes, it is a public document, so I do not know why she—

**MR EMERSON:** Yes, it is available now, and it was before.

**Mr Miller:** Yes, it always has been a public document.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** That is disappointing, actually.

**MR EMERSON:** That is a bit strange. We can ask them about that, though.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** Yes, thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** We can ask about the inconsistency. In that document there is a line that says, “Residents of Molonglo, Weston Creek and Woden Valley will directly benefit from the construction of the future Weston Creek Molonglo facilities, the Stromlo Leisure Centre”—these are documents from 2013—“and the city aquatic facility in central Canberra,” which also, in that document in 2013, was identified as a high priority. Do you agree with that sentence?

**Mr Miller:** Stromlo was never built for Woden.

**Dr Luke-Evered:** No, it cannot be built for Woden. I do not go there. I go to Manuka.

**Mr Miller:** When they went to the 2012 election, it was for Weston Creek. It was a facility only for Weston Creek. Woden already has Phillip, so that was meant to be an extra one. It is probably one of the worst-located facilities for an aquatic facility—halfway up a hill, with no public transport directly to it. It is a silly position, really.

**Ms Bryant:** It is also hard to access. I have tried three times to swim there, without any success, because the lanes are fully booked. It is a well-used facility, and it is indoors, obviously, but it is very hard to get into, once you even get there.

**Ms Raisin:** We used to have two 50-metre pools in Woden.

**Mr Miller:** That is right, yes.

**Ms Raisin:** There was Oasis in Deakin, where you could swim in winter, and Phillip in summer.

**Ms Ransom:** You have to look at the benchmark. This is where the Royal Life Saving Society numbers are useful. It refers to a population of 40,000 to 70,000; that justifies a 50-metre pool in every town centre. If you are looking at a population of over 100,000, which Woden, the inner south and potentially Weston Creek could have, in 40 years time, that is a major facility. That is two pools, plus a program pool, plus a—

**Mr Miller:** How many councils around Australia with much lower populations have 50-metre pools?

**MS CARRICK:** Can I note that it is Weston Creek's town centre? If you look at all the old documents, they say "Woden/Weston Creek". Their buses all hub into Woden; they do not hub into Stromlo. Woden and Weston Creek: those population numbers go together, and that should not be forgotten.

**Mr Miller:** I agree with that.

**Ms Ransom:** That is 179,000 people.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. There were no questions taken on notice. Thank you very much, everyone.

**HAYWARD, MR TODD**, Member, Canberra Wild Swim Club  
**SHEFFIELD, MS KYLIE**, Swimmer, Canberra Open Water Swimmers

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome our witnesses. Please note as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. We have until five minutes past 12. Would you like to make brief opening statements? It is your time.

**Mr Hayward:** Sure, I can make a brief statement just to introduce what we are about. So Canberra Wild Swim Club and the Canberra open water swimming community are essentially an informal group of like-minded people that come together at various times of the week. Canberra Wild Swim Group swims out at the Red Shed at 6.30 every Friday all year round. We have a swell of numbers, obviously, in the warmer months, but a consistent number of around 10 to 15 through the colder period. The majority of us are wetsuit wearers, although some, such as Kylie, are the extreme that are very comfortable and well-trained in swimming in the cold conditions all year round. Yes, like-minded people. We are a group similar to what would be established at your Bondi or Manly ocean swimming group communities.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, thank you. Kylie? Do you have anything to add to that?

**Ms Sheffield:** Yes, everything that Todd has just said, but we have an additional group that meets every Sunday. Again, it is just an informal group. It was started during the COVID period when people did not have access to swimming pools, but people have been using the lake for years and years. I think what has changed this year is that we have all worked out that other people—that we do have like-minded people swimming there, and rather than swim as individuals where there is a higher risk, we have come together to make sure that everybody is safe. That is, as Todd said, all year round, so including the very low temperatures. I think the minimum was six degrees in the water and we all managed to swim safely throughout the year.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. I would like you to tell me a bit more about the swimmable cities initiative.

**Mr Hayward:** Yes. The Swimmable Cities alliance is an alliance of cities and countries from around the world that are recognising the value in cleaning up their urban waterways and establishing and recognising the right to swim in your urban community, and with that right to swim comes the recognition that maintaining healthy waterways maintains a healthy community, a healthy environment and nature all around. Similar to surfers in the ocean, the open water swimmers are the ones that see the water quality, look at it, feel it and wear the consequences on the days where it is not so great and are scratching throughout the day or, worse, getting sick.

The Swimmable Cities alliance came off the back of the Paris Olympics where they cleaned up the Seine River. There are countries such as the Netherlands and cities such as Rotterdam. Copenhagen has signed up. Paris has. London is looking to sign up. Multiple cities in the United States have. Melbourne is a signatory as is Sydney. We would be keen to see Canberra become a signatory of the Swimmable Cities alliance to

recognise the value that swimming in our urban environment provides the wider community and all the benefits that come with that: so to recognise safe access to swimming, water quality, the benefits that would come with tourism and people recognising that yes, you can actually come to Canberra and swim on a hot day rather than just walking around an air-conditioned mall.

**MR RATTENBURY:** If the ACT was to sign up, what are the implications? What is the government or the city then obliged to do?

**Mr Hayward:** I think it would add weight to things like cleaning up the urban waterways which impact the lake. Obviously, we specifically swim at Black Mountain Peninsula because the area where the rowing course is is a cleaner area of water, but there is no reason why we should not be able to swim in East Basin, Central Basin and West Basin. Cleaning up the streams that flow into those areas would be a major benefit to the lake and for the swimmers and all lake users, whether you are on a stand-up paddleboard, a rowboat or you are swimming. So yes, signing up as a signatory would add weight to ensuring that governments recognise the value of our waterways and the benefits it provides to the wider community.

**MR EMERSON:** It would probably require getting Queanbeyan council involved as well because a lot of the streams you are mentioning are inflow from New South Wales before they get to the ACT.

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, we also have Sullivans Creek and you have all the stormwater drains. The rewilding of stormwater drains would be a major benefit to the lake. Obviously, Sullivans Creek has been temporarily postponed or put on the backburner forever, but yes, that would have been a major benefit for cleaning the lake where we swim. I often swim in and around those islands in the middle there and you have really got to time when you do and do not do that swim because of the water quality.

**MS CARRICK:** So what infrastructure or equipment would make the lake more accessible?

**Mr Hayward:** Okay, so we swim—well, speaking for the Canberra Wild Swim Club that swims out of the Red Shed, the Red Shed is a fantastic facility. Predominantly or primarily set up for rowers, yet the management and the community and the group there have welcomed us with open arms, provided us with a locker for us to store our swim buoys—so we ensure that when people come and swim with us we have swim buoys for the safety of the rowers so they can see it, but also for our own personal safety. If you have a cramp in winter, you definitely want a swim buoy.

But the facilities there—having a clean and safe pontooned entry into the lake makes an enormous difference. Having a freshwater shower so that you can come out and rinse off straight away is a major benefit. And then the social aspect. You know, come for the swim, stay for the coffee. That is a really intrinsic part of community swimming groups. It is the social interaction that comes with—obviously swimming is very much an individual pursuit, but when you get out, you share your stories—how far did you go today, how cold was it, all those sorts of things and you just chat and that is the cohesion that it brings together.

So having that type of facility, whether it be where Kylie swims down at Scrivener, having a shelter that can protect you a little bit from the winds, or maybe even having some outdoor showers, or a safer pontoon than crawling down the bank of the lake and trying to go in and you do not know if there is going to be broken glass, or—I have found some random things like burnt coconuts in there. Obviously, they are not natural lake products—but yes, that type of infrastructure.

**Ms Sheffield:** I think safe access, safe entry is a big one because really there is hardly anywhere on the lake where you can enter the water safely. When the weather was warmer and before the algae got as bad as what it has been recently, we posted somewhere different every week. We swim from near the museum. We swim from Yarralumla very frequently but the algae have increased to the point that that is not advisable. Even without testing, a visual will tell you that it is not a good idea to swim in those areas at the moment. Hence going to Scrivener, which has been beautiful and clear throughout winter, but it is a bit dicey accessing the water from there, so a safe entry would make a big difference.

**MS CARRICK:** You mentioned Yarralumla. There are sheds there, there are pontoons, there is a little beachy area and I know that Yarralumla want wetlands to filter the water before it goes into the lake. Would filtering the water at Yarralumla, those wetlands that they want, would that create a better opportunity in that Yarralumla area where there is some amenity?

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, yes, it would. Obviously, there are the pontoons there. There is what is called the fenced area at Yarralumla.

**Ms Sheffield:** At Yarralumla Beach.

**Mr Hayward:** At Yarralumla Beach. The addition of a shower and some—I do not personally swim out of there but—

**Ms Sheffield:** There is no shed there at the moment. So there is the yacht club on one side and the sailing club and then there is the beach with the little safe swimming area. Nice sandy entry but there are not really any other facilities there.

**Mr Hayward:** I think also with facilities comes the ability to provide for accessible wheelchairs so people with disabilities could also benefit from the joy of coming and swimming in the lake. Surf clubs all through Australia offer disabled access through the matting they put down on the beaches. There is no reason why that could not occur associated with infrastructure and the ability for people with disabilities to access a floatable wheelchair to access the lake. It probably would not happen so much in winter, but I am sure in summer if that option was available for our disabled community that would be something that they would probably jump on.

**MS LEE:** I have had, yes, questions stolen, so I will go down a different route. Do Canberrans swim in other lakes, aside from Lake Ginninderra or Lake Tuggeranong as well?

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, they do.

**Ms Sheffield:** Well, certainly they are used for the triathlon series that we have several times a year. But just discussing it with other members of our groups, I do not believe they go and swim as an alternative to Lake BG, for some of the same reasons that we do not swim in part of our lake, because of the algae issue. But would we love to? Yes.

**MS LEE:** It was just timely, I think, because there was something on the news this morning about the algal outbreak where some dogs have been affected. There has been a lot of talk about, obviously, the leaves being swept in and all of that. So that is a massive task. Do you have access to good information to know when it is safe to go in? Like, are you satisfied on that front of it?

**Mr Hayward:** Water testing only occurs from October.

**Ms Sheffield:** Summer.

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, I think it starts next Monday, and then the results of that water testing do not come out until Thursday. So there is always going to be a delay. It is only through the summer months, which I guess are regarded as recreational months, whereas swimming is not a summer activity anymore. We have wetsuits. There is equipment that enables us to enjoy our pursuit all year round. It is no different to cycling, to parkruns and to things like that. It is an all year round activity.

So to have all year round water testing on the lake would be great. During the winter months we just have visual cues to check. Obviously if you walk around Central Basin you pretty much see the visual cue straight away. Do not go there. At Black Mountain Peninsula, yes, we just look and the Red Shed also gives us advice. You know, “This week we have got the test back, it is good to go.”

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am excited. I have spent years swimming in the lake and I am now discovering I am officially a wild swimmer, so this is good news. I wanted to come back to these issues of water quality. I am surprised. Historically, the algal blooms have tended to come late summer, going back over the years. You are suggesting they are sort of coming through already?

**Ms Sheffield:** Well, throughout winter I was checking Yarralumla fortnightly. I mean, I have photos. You could see it from space, I would suggest. It is very bright green. Not as bad as Central Basin, but quite thick on the shore. Admittedly, sometimes once you swim out it gets clearer, but it is a bit of a risk.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do you think that situation has got worse in recent years?

**Ms Sheffield:** I do not know. Apart from triathlons, I have only been a lake swimmer for two years regularly, so I really cannot compare it to anything.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is all right. I was not sure how long you had been doing it. I was interested in your anecdotal, essentially.

**Mr Hayward:** I think this summer will be interesting given the lake level has dropped 500 millilitres or so, so there is a lot less water to dilute the algae outbreaks. So yes, let's look and see.

**MR RATTENBURY:** You do have Central Basin with the construction of the new areas down there for recreation and a new beach has gone in there as well. I take it from your evidence that is not going to be very usable because of the algae concentrations in Central Basin? East Basin, sorry.

**Ms Sheffield:** Between the bridges has been dreadful. Every time I have walked past, I would not get in.

**MS LEE:** You can see it, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sorry, I was actually asking about West Basin. I was mistaken.

**Ms Sheffield:** Sorry.

**MR RATTENBURY:** The West Basin area where the new beach has just gone in.

**Ms Sheffield:** I have not looked.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is that an area you use at all?

**Mr Hayward:** No, we do not, although I have looked and thought it would be lovely to swim from that new pontoon across to the museum and do circular swims through there.

**Ms Sheffield:** So would the museum be included in West?

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, that is West Basin and East Basin is—

**Ms Sheffield:** Yes, so that was one of the first areas the algae became worse. We stopped swimming there at the beginning of winter and have not been recently.

**MR EMERSON:** I have some quick follow-ups on some of the questions that have been asked already on the level of the lake that you just mentioned. What is the reason for the lowering?

**Mr Hayward:** The lowering of the lake is to do rectification works on Scrivener Dam under the NCA's requirements, I believe.

**MR EMERSON:** Are you aware of any kind of conversations or consultation? Have you been involved in any—

**Mr Hayward:** No.

**MR EMERSON:** No. I understand this has an impact. In terms of accessibility, has that also impacted accessibility of the lake or is it just more the algae that you are concerned about?

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, look, it has made our—we have to do a bit more walking. So we hop off a pontoon at the Red Shed and we obviously walk out and there is a buoy that

informs us of where the deeper water starts so that we can swim from there. It definitely impacts the rowers, I would imagine. There are sections of the rowing pontoons where there are signs that they cannot pull their boats up to because it is too shallow. But yes, we have just got a bit more walking through the silty lake floor.

**MS LEE:** And burnt coconuts!

**MR EMERSON:** If you have issues related to the lake, whether it is things that need maintaining or upgrading, where do you go? How does it work between navigating the NCA and the ACT government?

**Mr Hayward:** Good question, and that is part of the discussions we have been having with our swim group: where do we go? Where do we take this idea of a swimmable city? Is it something that the NCA is responsible for, or is it something the ACT government is responsible for? Is it something that both are responsible for?

**THE CHAIR:** Well, the NCA is regulated. Sorry, the NCA regulates Lake Burley Griffin, so yes, the ACT could probably sign up on behalf of Lake Tuggeranong and Lake Ginninderra, but the NCA would have to as the commonwealth.

**Mr Hayward:** Exactly. We have had those discussions. So what happens if Lake Burley Griffin signs up? Then does the NCA then add further weight onto the ACT to fix up its waterways that are impacting the NCA? So it is a bit like the Queanbeyan discussion with the lake as well.

**MR EMERSON:** If we imagine an ideal world where having two governments having to agree on something like that was not as challenging as it is, how would you—if there was better collaboration between the NCA and ACT government when it comes to water quality, when it comes to what is happening for the lake, what would that look like from your perspective?

**Mr Hayward:** Perfect world? I think to go forward and say Canberra signs up as a signatory to the Swimmable Cities alliance, the same way that Paris has, the same way that London has, as Rotterdam has and it is seen as a city. It is something that the federal government can hang their hat on to say, as a swimming nation, we are behind it 100 per cent in making sure our man-made waterway and our urban waterway for our capital city is conducive to swimming. From an ACT government perspective, we are providing to our residents that the ACT has the best inland swimming environment in Australia.

**Ms Sheffield:** We do have the national capital swim at the end of the year, which is a 10 kilometre swim, ideally end-to-end of the lake. They have to adjust it regularly, so I would say every second year that becomes a lap, which we did last year. You know, several laps out of Black Mountain, quite a soul-destroying swim instead of your beautiful end-to-end, but people want to come from interstate to do that swim. They want to look up from their swim and see the capital buildings all around them and that is the attraction. So it would be awesome if we can see that happen. And I would see more regular swims of that type. Places like Tasmania and Northern Queensland host hundreds of swims a year for open water swimmers.

**Mr Hayward:** The national capital swim is a key qualifying swim for a lot of the coastal open water swims too. So the Rottnest Channel Swim, the Palm to Manly swim or the long distance Derwent River swim.

**Ms Sheffield:** The Capital Swim.

**MR EMERSON:** On the back of signing that, what would be the biggest kind of concrete action, so to speak? Is it the naturalisation of waterways to improve water quality? Is it using organic fertilisers so that the runoff is not as damaging? What are those practical steps that you would hope to see taken on the back of that?

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, I think first step would be the waterways, recognising that maintaining clean waterways to ensure that the citizens of Canberra have the right to swim when and where they will choose to and the benefits that come with that, yes.

**MS CARRICK:** With the cleaning up of the waterways, is it primarily the leaf nutrient that is coming through?

**Mr Hayward:** I am not a water—I am a swimmer, but—yes, look, I would not be able to answer that. I do not know if it is from the leaf litter itself. I think it is a contributing factor. I have heard about the stratification of the lake. You notice that when you swim. You do notice that the top layer is warmer and the next layer is colder and that is an issue in how the algae grows in the lake and the flow of water through the lake as well.

**MS CARRICK:** So presumably it is warmer when it is coming out of the concrete drains. So maybe—is that—

**Mr Hayward:** Quite possibly, but in the lake in general, the water stratifies down into different layers.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Very interesting, thanks.

**MS LEE:** We covered a lot.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. On behalf of the committee, thank you very, very much for coming along and having a conversation with us. No questions for taking on notice? No. In which case, have a lovely day.

**Short suspension.**

**REESON, MR DAVID PAUL**, President, Royals Volleyball Club

**THE CHAIR:** Please note that, as a witness in this inquiry, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, please.

**THE CHAIR:** Go ahead.

**Mr Reeson:** I will start with a question for you: if you were to rank the world's sports, where would volleyball sit in that ranking scheme?

**THE CHAIR:** On what metric?

**MS LEE:** Yes; participation?

**Mr Reeson:** From first to 100th.

**MS LEE:** No; is it numbers of people participating or—

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, numbers of people participating.

**MS CARRICK:** I see basketball, netball, volleyball and football as an indoor sport community that all participate together in that environment. That is how I see it.

**Mr Reeson:** The question is: as far as sports are concerned, independently, where does volleyball rank worldwide?

**THE CHAIR:** It would be top 20, minimum.

**Mr Reeson:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Big in Europe, big in America.

**MS CARRICK:** Big in Asia, wouldn't it be? I would say it would be very high in numbers in Asia.

**Mr Reeson:** Football, obviously, comes first—that is, soccer—and volleyball ranks sixth. Does that surprise you?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes.

**Mr Reeson:** It surprised me, because I know that volleyball in Australia is a very lowly ranked sport. It is probably one of the tier 3, as you would refer to it, in this instance.

Back in 2020, I founded a volleyball club in the Weston Creek-Woden area. We were hoping to get 60 members, and today we have 515. We have grown exponentially over the last six years, and we are very proud of what we have done.

Indoor space, or the lack of indoor facilities, is not a new thought that is being offered. This is decades old. I have been associated with sporting clubs for many years and administering sporting clubs for a long time as well. This is not a new conversation that I have had, and it is probably not a new conversation that you have heard, either.

Our association plays out of the Lyneham hockey centre. That is 40 years old, and that is a pretty old building as it is. We rent that building from hockey. We do not actually own our own building. We are at the mercy of the higher tiered associations.

That is my opening statement—where we sit as a club. I am here to answer any questions that you might have for me.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you had any engagement with the ACT government about the needs for your sport?

**Mr Reeson:** In what respect?

**MS CARRICK:** Have you been able to advocate to sports and rec and the minister for your needs?

**Mr Reeson:** Yes. We are pretty active in the grants domain, if that is what you are referring to. We have won some grants in that respect. We have also been in contact, many years ago—I will say it was early 2022—with Yvette Berry’s office. They suggested that we make an alliance, for want of a better word, with some other tier 3 sports. I went with badminton and table tennis, because we figured that presenting as a collective, as a larger mass, with our number bases, would be more effective. That went ahead pretty well; it kind of failed towards the end. That was to do with some associations’ lack of buy-in to that as well. I am not sure whether that answers your question.

**MS CARRICK:** You have a lot of submissions from across your community, which is very good. It all starts off with a facility for the Woden-Weston Creek area.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** The government has committed to an indoor sports stadium in the Woden town centre. Would you be able to work with the other sports in a multipurpose-type facility?

**Mr Reeson:** Absolutely. As I said, we tried to form an alliance previously. We are happy to do so again.

**MS CARRICK:** I suppose there is a manager; then there are access rights to the various sports.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes. That is the other sticking point. You have the tier 1 sports coming in—namely, basketball. I will give an example. Evelyn Scott School, which opened, probably, six or seven years ago, were granted the roller hockey people—complete access to that. Anything that was left over went to basketball. All other sports were shut

out from Evelyn Scott from the get-go.

**MS CARRICK:** What facilities do you use for training, and do you ever have to turn people away?

**Mr Reeson:** For training, we currently use Mount Stromlo High School. That is our go-to place. You can imagine that, with 515 members, we are there five days a week, and we would probably be there for six, because we stretch it out on a Saturday as well. That is also pushing our volunteer base.

**MS LEE:** You mentioned that you use Lyneham at the moment; do you have a standing booking? How does that work?

**Mr Reeson:** I cannot answer that. Our association books that. That is where we play out of, and all clubs play out of that centre. My guess is that they rent it out at a weekly rate, or however they do it. In saying that, I know that, when hockey has something on, they will take the booking away from us.

**MS LEE:** So there is a priority, and you are not—

**Mr Reeson:** Yes. It is their venue, so that makes sense. They have whatever is on at the time, and you think, “Okay.” We are at a disadvantage in that respect.

**MS LEE:** Following on from Ms Carrick’s question about your engagement with ACT government, not so much in the grant space but in terms of your need and request for the indoor facility in the Woden area, how has that been going? What has that process been like for you?

**Mr Reeson:** We were alerted by Fiona to make a submission. A couple of years ago, we spoke while Fiona was president of the Woden Community Council as well, so we go back a reasonable way from here. That was the link, having regard to my sitting here in front of you. That was the direct link from there. That is how we got the ball rolling. During that time I liaised with the Weston Creek Community Council, and they were also on board with helping out in whatever way, shape or form they could.

**MS CARRICK:** But we are not the government.

**MS LEE:** The question was more about the process with either the sports minister or any of the government officials through ACT sport and rec, for example.

**Mr Reeson:** The only one was through Yvette Berry’s office, and they suggested that we should get in—

**MS LEE:** The coalition.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** In terms of access to facilities, it sounds like you have a pretty rapidly growing membership. Are you being constrained? Do more people want to play, but you just do not have the space?

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, we try to squeeze them in, but that means we need to go later. Those of us that have kids know that we do not want them out beyond a certain time, and that time is very different. We are also constrained by when we can actually access the school. It is generally from 5.30-ish. We have this tight window in which we can be involved.

The other aspect is not being able to get in all the days that we want to get in as well, because there are other sports competing for that same space. That is very problematic. Every year there is the stress of figuring out: can we get our booking again? Can we maintain our booking? It is never certain.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do you think you could take more facilities if you could get your hands on them?

**Mr Reeson:** Absolutely, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Until what time do you currently train?

**Mr Reeson:** Some of the older groups go to nine.

**MR RATTENBURY:** It is quite late.

**Mr Reeson:** It is late, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Your growth in membership from 2020 to now is extraordinary. Do you have some idea of the proportion of membership—players, coaches, referees and volunteers—that are women?

**Mr Reeson:** 64 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you know how that female membership quotient compares across other sports in the ACT? It would feel to me to be leading. In terms of a multi-sex accessible sport, that would be doing pretty well.

**Mr Reeson:** I could only imagine comparing it to rugby, for example; we would be all over that.

**THE CHAIR:** Basketball would probably be a better comparison—another indoor sport.

**Mr Reeson:** Maybe. Again, I do not have the detail.

**THE CHAIR:** That is fair enough.

**Mr Reeson:** I know that we are very strong on women—

**THE CHAIR:** Was that 64 per cent at the start or has it been growing percentage wise?

**Mr Reeson:** Certainly, growing. It has probably grown by about 10 per cent over the

time. That is due to how we go about our business as a club and how we are very supportive, community based and nurturing of playing with friends and encouraging those that want to play at higher levels et cetera.

**THE CHAIR:** College scholarships, for instance, are an extraordinary pathway.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You are allowed to speculate here: do you think that that number is reflected in other volleyball clubs in the ACT?

**Mr Reeson:** I will guess and say yes. We have a men's league and a women's league in the recreational-type fun, not the high-level stuff. There would be 54 men's teams and maybe 82 women's teams. That is a significant factor. We have a large percentage of teams in that division, so that sways the numbers, of course. Overall, yes, there are more women than men.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the average size of a team—five or six plus?

**Mr Reeson:** Of a team, about eight. Eight to 10, depending on the team, of course.

**MS CARRICK:** Mr Reeson, what geographic area does your club cover?

**Mr Reeson:** We are based in Weston Creek and Woden, but there are no clubs in Tuggeranong, so we draw from anyone in Tuggeranong, and up. If you live in Lanyon, for example—

**THE CHAIR:** The Tuggeranong club folded.

**Mr Reeson:** They did, a long time ago. We are the closest club. We have a pretty big pool, and that is one of the reasons why we are successful.

**MS CARRICK:** What about the inner south and Molonglo? Do they have their own volleyball clubs?

**Mr Reeson:** No.

**MS CARRICK:** It is pretty much the whole of the south?

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, pretty much. I count Molonglo as Weston Creek—Weston Creek-Molonglo. Inner south would be taken up by another club called the Rangers.

**MS CARRICK:** Are the competitions played at Hedley Beare, Stromlo? That is Hedley Beare, isn't it?

**Mr Reeson:** No. We train at Mount Stromlo High School in Waramanga. Hedley Beare is in Stirling.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you play your competitions at Stromlo or do you have to go to Lyneham?

**Mr Reeson:** No, we just train there. We have to go to Lyneham. By way of an addendum, the games are at Lyneham, but the competition has grown so much that they have had to go to other venues—namely, Harrison School and Shirley Smith. Both of those, if you are aware of your geography, are further than Lyneham. For Tuggeranong people, 46 per cent of Volleyball ACT’s membership are south siders, but no games are played anywhere near the south. I have been advocating and pushing for that for many years.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that an ACT Volleyball decision?

**MS CARRICK:** That upsets me no end. It is so upsetting.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, but it is also about the availability of venues. Their counter-argument is, “We just can’t get into anywhere.” When the new schools open up, like Harrison School, for example, they jump in there; when Shirley Smith opened, they jump in there.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it always public schools that you have to rely on? Don’t private schools say, “Here’s an opportunity”?

**Mr Reeson:** We cannot get into them. We tried to get into them, when we first started—

**THE CHAIR:** Marist has a big hall.

**MS CARRICK:** It has two courts, but they have the biggest junior basketball club in Canberra, and it is packed. They overflow out of that.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes. We tried to get into one of the south side private schools. You had to have a kid at the school to even ask the question about hiring their venue. MacKillop: that is the one.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the biggest school in Canberra.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes. There are issues with getting in. If you do a call around, everything is fully booked all the time. As I mentioned before, there is the stress at the start of every season: can we maintain our bookings? If we cannot, we have to turn people away. This year we have been fortunate to maintain all our bookings, and book into Saturday as well. But we are there Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. If we lose one of those, we have to turn people away, and that is not on our radar.

**MS CARRICK:** With using Stromlo for training, for so many people from across the south, and having your competitions in the north, do people use public transport much?

**Mr Reeson:** A lot of kids do, to get to training, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Stromlo has decent bus routes.

**Mr Reeson:** With getting to Lyneham, I could not answer that, but I know that I am

always seeing kids sitting at bus stops or heading off, saying, “I’ve got to go; I’ve got to get my bus,” et cetera.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you use both halls or is it just the one there?

**Mr Reeson:** It is just one hall.

**THE CHAIR:** The big one?

**Mr Reeson:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** Where is that?

**THE CHAIR:** That would be the one on the street side, the assembly hall?

**Mr Reeson:** No, there is one further back.

**THE CHAIR:** The new one?

**Mr Reeson:** I would not say it is new. It was built in 2011.

**THE CHAIR:** Newer than the one when I was there.

**Mr Reeson:** Newish; right.

**MS CARRICK:** Which hall are we talking about?

**Mr Reeson:** There are two halls at Mount Stromlo high. One was the old gym; now it has been repurposed, because there was a new gymnasium built during the time of the education revolution. Belconnen high had the same footprint as Stromlo, and as did, I think, Melrose.

**MS CARRICK:** On public transport, while you say that people use it, it is not exactly convenient, because the service that runs from Woden through Waramanga would only be half-hourly at the most.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, if that, I reckon.

**MS CARRICK:** It is okay if you are coming from Woden or from the immediate area, but if you are coming from Isaacs or Garran, you have to get a bus to Woden; then you have to change buses, in order to get to Waramanga; then it gets dark. I do not know if I would call that terribly convenient. I guess parents would do a lot of driving.

**Mr Reeson:** Absolutely. There is a big impost on parents travelling from the south side to the north side, whether it be to Lyneham—that is the closest one to us—or further on, to Shirley Smith or Harrison.

**MS CARRICK:** I have heard in some sports that if training is after school, parents have to leave work to drive their kids to training—

**Mr Reeson:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** and sometimes it just does not happen, because it gets too much for the parents to have to leave work to get their kids to training.

**Mr Reeson:** With the explosion in the number of teams and members for the volleyball community, they have had to start some of the games at 4.30. I say to them, “A parent that’s a working parent needs literally to leave work at 3.30, pick their child up, then take them to the game. That’s impossible.”

The other end of it is that some of the games are finishing at 9.30. They start at 8.30 and finish at 9.30. I say to parents, “What do you want? Do you want a 4.30 start or a 9.30 finish?” In that case their kids are home much later, getting into bed much later, and there is a knock-on effect. That is one of the reasons why we are spreading to different venues. With that tight timeframe, it is either too early or too late. It is one of the two, so you are damned, either way.

**MS CARRICK:** I hope you do not end up like the Dodgers and be scattered across six school halls and a church hall, because the logistics are pretty awful.

**Mr Reeson:** Absolutely, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** How many volleyball clubs are there in Canberra?

**Mr Reeson:** Six; or five plus the Australian Volleyball Academy, which are affiliated with the Capital Volleyball League.

**MR RATTENBURY:** By the sound of it, most of them are on the north side. You and the Rangers are on the south side and the rest are on the north side.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes. The Belconnen Dragons, the UC Dragons, are on at Gungahlin as well.

**MS CARRICK:** I hope we can get you some facilities one day.

**Mr Reeson:** Yes, one day indeed.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Reeson. You did not take any questions on notice. Have a good afternoon.

**Mr Reeson:** Thanks for your time.

**THE CHAIR:** We appreciate your time and taking the trouble.

**Hearing suspended from 12.25 to 1.32 pm.**

**O'ROURKE**, Mr Richard, Treasurer, Dickson Squash Club  
**PHILLIPS**, Mr Benjamin, President, Dickson Squash Club

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome witnesses from the Dickson Squash Club to the inquiry. Thanks for coming along. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr Phillips:** I would. Thank you very much for having us along today. The Dickson Squash Club welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. We are a longstanding club in the ACT and we are deeply concerned about the growing barriers to participation in community sport here in the ACT, particularly arising from the erosion of facilities, the lack of strategic planning and ineffective investment models that rely more on commercial investment. These issues are exemplified by the potential demolition of the Dickson squash courts as part of the development application. It is well-known as the Tradies in Dickson. We would like to point out that we have a petition that has been supported by Thomas Emerson. It is urging the ACT government to address the shortfall in indoor sports on the north side of Canberra. At last count, that had 623 signatures, so there is certainly a lot of interest around the topic of indoor sports, particularly on the north side of Canberra.

I will give bit of background. I will try to keep this reasonably brief. The squash courts have been at Dickson since 1969. They were notably supported in their early years by Heather McKay, who is Canberra's own 11-time squash world champion and potentially one of the greatest sports men or women we have ever had in the country. Her involvement helped establish the club's strong foundation over the years. The club has grown into one of the most vibrant squash communities in Australia.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, Squash Australia ranked the Dickson Squash Club as the third-largest pennant squash club in the country. Currently, the club makes up about 50 per cent of players in the ACT in our senior pennant competition and boasts the largest squash nursery in the ACT, having produced players who have competed at international levels. I think the courts are used every night of the week for various purposes, but mostly for competitions and training. Around 50 players per night are involved in either masters, senior pennant, social competition, junior pennant, club practice or social squash.

The proposed redevelopment will demolish the existing squash courts and there are no plans for a replacement. The purpose of the Crown lease in that area is for a squash centre, gymnasium and a sports retail shop. Our advice from the ACT government is that it can be amended. The loss of the courts will have a significant impact on the Dickson Squash Club and the broader squash community. The courts are the only suitable venue in North Canberra for social and pennant squash. There are other alternatives but they are somewhat inadequate. The University of Canberra has four courts—that is two less than what is probably required for our club—and there is also a bit of a cloud hanging over those courts, as we expect the University of Canberra will be redeveloping that site. We do not know whether that will include squash at this stage. Potentially it will not. There used to be a squash club at the University of Canberra. That ceased five, six, seven or eight years ago. I have forgotten how long ago, but it has

been quite a while since that ceased.

The loss of squash facilities in Dickson without an immediate replacement will see the end of formal squash competition on the north side of Canberra and will significantly impact the operation of competitions, which will need to be run exclusively from the Woden Squash Centre. The Dickson Squash Club anticipates a significant decline in participation due to the lack of suitable alternative venues and the burden of travelling to the south side of Canberra.

I would like to note the lack of strategic planning. The ACT government's approach to indoor sports infrastructure lacks long-term vision, leading into a critical shortfall in North Canberra particularly. This manifests in several ways. There has been reactive development. Facilities are often lost before replacements are considered, displacing players and reducing participation. The redevelopment of the national squash courts at Lyneham, potentially the Dickson squash courts, and the Kaleen Indoor Sports Centre are prime examples of this. There is the failure to consider sports and recreation facilities in urban planning. There has been rapid growth in the population in North Canberra. And, while the 2015 Indoor Sports Facility Study identified the need for additional facilities in the north, there has been a lack of action, resulting in a shortfall of facilities.

There has been a loss of existing community based indoor sporting facilities. In spite of rapid growth in the population on the north side of Canberra over recent decades, there has been the loss of two major indoor sporting facilities: the National Sports Club at Lyneham and the Kaleen Indoor Sports Centre. Obviously, with that went all the squash courts. There were eight courts at Lyneham and at the moment there are six courts in Dickson, so that would be a total of 14 in total. At Kaleen and the National Sports Club, there were three indoor cricket facilities, so there has been the loss of indoor cricket facilities. Also, related to that is indoor soccer, indoor netball and indoor volleyball. There used to be a very vibrant community that surrounded all those sports. They are all niche sports individually, but in aggregate they were very popular in their total.

There has been a failure to protect existing infrastructure. The commercialisation of sports infrastructure leaves sports facilities at risk of redevelopment. The ACT government must ensure that safeguards are in place to protect existing infrastructure, especially where Crown lease provisions specify the use and restrictions of the land for sports and recreation. Our submission provides more detail. In short, the more niche sports, such as squash, are not necessarily commercially viable, especially in high-value areas such as the inner north of Canberra, where other uses such as unit developments and retail provide a greater financial return. While these are the commercial realities, it is important to remember that government business should not forget that a community is much more than just units and retail space, and community based organisations play a key role in developing community and social wellbeing.

Indoor sports in the Inner North and North Canberra in general are greatly diminished due to recent indoor sporting losses, and the loss of the Dickson Squash Club courts will only worsen that situation. The Squash Club urges the committee to reconsider the critical role that accessible, well-planned and publicly supported sports infrastructure plays in enabling community participation. We welcome further engagement to ensure

squash and all community sports can continue to enrich the lives of Canberrans for generations to come. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr O'Rourke?

**Mr O'Rourke:** I think Ben said it all, but I am here to support him. My main concern has been the lack of new squash courts and centres around Canberra. I have been playing with the Squash Club since 1973 and I have seen the demise of about 11 clubs in Canberra, simply because the courts have gone. The people are still playing squash, but they have drifted across to other sports, like pickleball, for instance, which has taken over at the moment—it has become quite popular—and tennis, because it is probably a simpler game to take part in. As Ben mentioned, squash is a niche sport. It is not an easy sport to learn to play, especially at a young age.

At Dickson, we have always had a good nursery of juniors that we have put through the system. At this point, they are playing a very high level of competition. If our centre goes away—and it has really been strong with juniors—we are not going to have a nursery in the way we have had since probably 1980, when we started that. We have a group of volunteer senior squash players that take part in the nursery. They are not paid for it. They put the juniors through the process. Every school term, at least 30 kids come through our system. Most of them come through when they are eight or nine years old, until we kick them out because they are not juniors anymore, once they turn 19. It is well supported by the community and we need to maintain that. With the possible demolition of the Dickson courts, that is probably going to fall by the wayside and no-one else will take up that mantle. It is a contribution to the system that we have.

Squash needs to be supported. We need to have new courts. The purpose clause for our centre specifically says it is only for squash and associated sports, like a gymnasium. It does not say anything about a high-rise building. I realise that can be overcome by paying a fee. I feel that the money that would be paid by the Tradies to the ACT government should go towards a new centre. I know it is not biscuits; I know it is a lot of money. The club itself is an institution; it is not just a club. It has been around forever and it has been supported by a lot of people. It needs to maintain its viability and be part of the Canberra community, for as long as I am alive, anyway. Thanks very much.

**THE CHAIR:** That is excellent. Thank you very much. It seems to me that the submission highlights that it is used a lot during the evenings. Is it used during the day? A squash court is not a multipurpose court.

**Mr O'Rourke:** No. The problem through the day is that, obviously, people are working. We get a reasonable amount of support from schools. At the moment, we have Daramalan College, because it is in the vicinity. I have been talking to the PE teacher at Dickson College. In the new term, they intend to bring in a group of students. It can be enlarged and we can do better, but the problem is that we have this hanging over us. We have known for 15 years, because the Tradies told us that it was going to go, but they were not sure when. So we have not been really keen to go ahead, dig right into it and go chasing, which is what we would have to do. We have to go to the schools. There are lots of schools around that we can get to come. We have the volunteer players that can help, but we need to know that we are stable and we can offer that.

**MS CARRICK:** I really like your submission. It is really fabulous. It hits on issues that are faced by sports across Canberra. One of the issues is commercialisation. The indoor sports facility in Tuggeranong is private. It is owned by the Southern Cross Club. The pool will be in a mixed-use commercial tenancy, in a residential tower. Would you be happy with the squash courts being put in the bottom of a development in Dickson—being part of a commercial tenancy in a residential tower?

**Mr Phillips:** We would be happy for squash courts to be anywhere in the inner north of Canberra. It does not need to be in the current redevelopment plans. It does not need to be part of that. That would be good. That is certainly something we would be very keen to be involved in. As I said, it could be anywhere on the north side. That is really where it needs to be. If it is part of the Dickson Tradies' proposal in the future, that would also be potentially viable. The club going alone and making money out of it would probably be challenging. It is probably something that would need to be subsidised. At the moment, it is owned by the Tradies. We give them money. We pay a quite considerable amount of money. We do not pay them rent; we provide them with the court hire fees, which are—

**Mr O'Rourke:** We organise everything for them.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes. We provide somewhere around \$100,000 a year or so in court hire fees to the Dickson Tradies. They are still subsidising it. You could probably make more money out of the use of that area, with units, retail or whatever. It is part of their arrangement, as I understand it. They have poker machines and, as a result of that, they need to provide a community investment. Part of their community investment is the squash centre.

We would certainly be keen to be involved in some way, but it is probably unlikely that a squash club itself would be able to run solely with volunteers. At the moment, we are lucky in that Richard has a squash shop out the front which assists in our position, but, in the longer term, it is something that needs some government support to make it viable, or potentially support from an organisation like the Tradies. They do not want to be involved with it into the future, as I understand it, but the sort of arrangement where a club is involved is another good alternative. Do you have anything else to add?

**Mr O'Rourke:** Yes. My real concern with squash centres that are run by the government is that the people who actually run them do not apply themselves in the way we would as a squash club. I will give you two examples. There is no club at the Erindale squash centre. It used to have the biggest squash club in Canberra—probably in the mid-80s. Two people who were squash enthusiasts were running it. They got on in years and they moved. No-one replaced them, so the club shut down. I am not exactly sure, but there are six or maybe eight courts there. They have one team in the competition, whereas they had something like 30 teams at one stage, because they had people running them. Now they have people who are employed by the government. At 9 o'clock, they just turn the lights off, whether you are playing in a competition or not. It does not matter to them. As a result, there is no club.

The other one is at Weston Creek. They have just spent a lot of money there. They have redone all the courts. They put glass front walls on to overcome the damage there. It is a great centre, but there is no club. Some of us support it and go there, but there is no

club that can be used as a base to promote the sport even further. We use it occasionally because there are courts there. They are mainly empty. If you are going to have a squash centre, it has to have a club with enthusiasts who will volunteer and create the atmosphere that is necessary to build on it.

**MS CARRICK:** I agree 100 per cent. To have a facility with which you can grow your community is very important.

**Mr O'Rourke:** Yes. Another one, and it is not in the ACT, is in Queanbeyan. They built two new courts with moving walls for doubles—a special sport—and they use it for childcare, because there is no club. It is the Heather McKay Court. It is not all that old. That was done probably about eight or nine years ago. It is a crying shame. That is why we need something. Our club would support it. We have always had great committees. They are hands-on people who create opportunities and draw people in.

**MS CARRICK:** Could you take your club to any of those facilities—run out of them and grow the base from those facilities?

**Mr O'Rourke:** We could if they were on the north side.

**Mr Phillips:** There is the Next Gen facility—

**MR RATTENBURY:** You have no idea what you just said!

**MS CARRICK:** We south-siders are all expected to drive to the north side for our sports! We all drive there for higher education, culture, theatre, sport—everything.

**THE CHAIR:** We will take that as a comment.

**MR EMERSON:** We have two Kurrajong members. Do not worry about it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I want to ask about the Next Gen gym, which you mentioned in your submission and you spoke about in your comments. I am interested in your observation that, when they built that facility, it replaced the existing club that was on the site. You say it is currently restricted to paying gym members. I cannot imagine that it is being fully utilised.

**Mr Phillips:** No; it is not. It is very quiet. The courts are great. They are quite nice courts. I have played there occasionally. I am not a member of Next Gen, but, if you go with someone who is, you can join them. In the past, we have very rarely used the courts for competition purposes, when there has been too much demand for our courts and we spill over. That has happened. There are a few issues. It is a private centre and it is very expensive. It is really only for high- and middle-income people who can afford it. Young students probably could not really afford to play there. The courts are not open at the sorts of hours that we need. We sometimes go beyond their closing hours, with competition squash at night. Their management is sometimes keen, but management changes there on a regular basis, so you do not have certainty. You need certainty around these things. It changes all the time. The old National Sports Centre was a very different beast to Next Gen. Next Gen is a private club.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I understand.

**Mr Phillips:** It is lovely, but it is not what the old centre was. The old centre was much more community based. You could go there any night of the week and it was full of people playing various indoor sports.

**Mr O'Rourke:** Also, it was run by Squash ACT. They had a hand in everything that was happening. They were promoting it.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes. I understand there are probably more commercially viable ways of using that land, but that was, from a community based perspective, hugely successful, as I saw it. I have been a Canberran for 28 years. I used to go there almost on a weekly basis, to play squash, indoor cricket or indoor soccer, or any number of other things. There were people there all the time. It was certainly very successful from a community perspective. I do not know about the financials of it, but there is always more money to be made outside of community based sport. The land will always be used for something else that is more viable.

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question really was: is there any opportunity for you to engage? You have gone to it a bit, but with Next Gen there is a different arrangement.

**Mr O'Rourke:** Four or five years ago, I approached Next Gen and made them an offer. Knowing what was happening at Dickson, I wanted to get a leg in. I offered them to play some of our home matches at Next Gen and they agreed. We gave them our premier teams and an A1 team, and they played there on a regular basis. We had to organise a time slot, because they close at 9 o'clock and that is it; you have to be out by 9 o'clock. Fortunately, at that time there was a good manager and he decided that he would extend the time. That worked quite well, but he left and, since then, as has been mentioned, they have probably had five or six managers. Every time, you have to negotiate things. It just did not work. The guys and the girls who were playing there had to get out by nine. They would go to the pub across the road for their supper, because that is a tradition. You play squash, you have a beer afterwards and someone brings supper. It is a quite social occasion as well. You stay fit. We keep people out of hospitals, so that helps the ACT government. There are lots of things that are a big plus with squash for the Canberra community, but we need a home, basically.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure. In your submission, and certainly in your remarks as well, you make reference to the lease requirements for the current site—explicitly including a squash centre, gymnasium and a sports retail shop. It says, “This clause can be amended.” Has the clause been amended?

**Mr Phillips:** No; it has not.

**Mr O'Rourke:** No.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is that part of the current application process that the Tradies club is running? Do you know?

**Mr Phillips:** I do not know. I am not an expert on the complexities of ACT planning.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is fair.

**MS LEE:** I do not think anyone is.

**Mr Phillips:** Most of us on the floor are not.

**MS CARRICK:** I have seen a lot of DAs for residential towers. Often, one of the conditions will be that the lease is changed.

**Mr O'Rourke:** It has to be changed. I have a copy of the current lease. It does not say anything about high-rises or residential. It says, "For only"—the word "only" sits in there—"squash, a gymnasium, a sauna bath and a retail shop."

**MS CARRICK:** For some reason, they change the lease after they do the DA process.

**THE CHAIR:** They approve it with a condition that you have to vary the lease.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes—that the lease is changed.

**MS LEE:** My question follows on from what Shane was asking about. You made reference—I think both of you have—to the Tradies not being interested, and that they have said they are not going to do it.

**Mr O'Rourke:** No.

**MS LEE:** Is that the consultation you have had so far—that they are not open to that?

**Mr O'Rourke:** At the last meeting we had with them, I specifically recall Jason O'Mara, who is with the CFMEU, looking at me and saying, "What do you want us to do, Dick?" I said, "Build us some new squash courts." He looked at me and said, "Well, it ain't going to happen." Didn't he?

**Mr Phillips:** Yes.

**Mr O'Rourke:** It was a fait accompli; it was not going to happen.

**MS LEE:** You mentioned, Mr O'Rourke, that there had been discussion about this for about 15 years. In that time has the club looked at other options, if this was going to happen? Have you explored where it might be? You mentioned, Mr Phillips, that it could be anywhere, as long as it is in the inner north; it does not necessarily have to be on that site.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** Have there been other options or alternatives canvassed in the past?

**Mr O'Rourke:** From our point of view, we were just waiting to see what was going to happen. Rod Driver, the original CEO of the Tradies, said to me, "I want you to know from me, and I don't want you to hear it from anyone else, that we're going to knock this place down, probably next year or the year after." I am talking about 18 years ago.

**Mr Phillips:** There has been a cloud hanging over the club for a long time, but there has been no real, firm plan. Now that the Tradies has a DA in place, I guess it has become serious. It is a difficult, big thing for a club of volunteers to do too much about it. We cannot just go and buy a block of land in a reasonable location that will probably cost multiple millions of dollars, spend millions of dollars on a squash court and just make that happen. Now that there are firm plans, it has got things moving, obviously.

We have been aware that there are other options, but some of those options have been slowly taken away—things like the Next Gen, which probably has not turned out to be as fruitful as we would have liked. That could have been quite a good alternative. It was not built in such a way that was conducive, for a whole range of reasons, like the lack of a clubhouse. It is not the sort of place where, in a competition, you can easily stand behind the court and referee, because you have lots of squash members going all the way through the place to use the toilets, which is fine for a gym but not great for squash. It is not the end of the world, but it is not—

**Mr O'Rourke:** We would fit in.

**Mr Phillips:** You could fit in, but it is not really the ideal set-up. Ideally, a bit more planning would have gone into those courts that would have made them much more viable for squash.

**Mr O'Rourke:** Next Gen, obviously, have other businesses throughout Australia. I do not know how many there are, but there are two that really support squash—one in Sydney and one in Adelaide. I have spoken to both of the squash centres there, and they said they are just fantastic. But it really depends on the individual manager. As we have said, they turn over managers quite regularly. That is the problem; otherwise we would probably jump at it. At least we would have a home to go to in the meantime.

I think we will have to do that, anyway, because if the change-of-purpose clause goes through, and the Tradies have officially told us that this time next year they will start knocking the place down, they are not going to build new squash courts between now and then, so we will not have a place in which to play squash and provide for the members.

**Mr Phillips:** The usual concern with it, though, is that it is a private operation, so any plans we make into the future will have to take into account that it is a private operation. If you want to have juniors training on a Sunday afternoon, would that be allowed? What would the costs be? Going to that gym is quite expensive; being a member there is very expensive. Would they have to be a member as well?

At the moment, if you want to come along to juniors training with Dick, or come along to club practice, it is very cheap. Anyone can do it. We can have schools during the week. There are no questions asked, really. It is relatively inexpensive. If it was Next Gen, we might have a manager who is keen for us to do that. We might not have a manager who is keen for it. It might be expensive. It might be quite a good set-up for a while, but it would be hard to plan for, I think.

**Mr O'Rourke:** The onus, firstly, is definitely on the Tradies and secondly on the ACT

government, because we need to have facilities for the community. It is that simple. We have been there since 1968-69; it is just one of those things. As I said, we are a community, we are an institution, and people are relying on us.

**MR EMERSON:** Going back to 2015, and the indoor sports facility study, the ACT government study that you mentioned, which identified the need back then for additional facilities in the north, recommendation 5 in that study was to encourage the sustainable provision of sport and squash facilities at the then current level. Has that been fulfilled?

**Mr Phillips:** No, it has certainly gone backwards. We all know that population growth in Canberra over the last 10 years has been about 1½ per cent every year, so it is probably about 15 or 20 per cent bigger. Squash court numbers have diminished. If you went back through that time, I cannot remember the exact dates when courts have closed down, but there would certainly be a lower number rather than a larger number.

**MR EMERSON:** I know you went through this, but I did not do the maths along the way. Currently, how many publicly accessible squash courts are there?

**Mr Phillips:** At the moment there are six with Dickson, and there are four with University of Canberra. That is the publicly accessible ones, so there are 10 on the north side. Of course, there is Next Gen, which has six great courts, but they are not really publicly accessible. If I went there now to have a hit with Dick, we could not do it.

**MR EMERSON:** What about across the rest of Canberra? This study said there were 31 publicly accessible squash courts in 2015.

**Mr Phillips:** On the south side, there are eight at Woden, a further four at Weston Creek, and I think there are six at the Vikings.

**THE CHAIR:** Active Leisure?

**Mr Phillips:** Active Leisure Centre, yes.

**MS CARRICK:** That is Erindale?

**Mr Phillips:** Erindale, yes.

**MR EMERSON:** There has definitely been a drop. In that study, they recommended that two to three new courts by 2020 would be required, and that by 2030 three to four additional courts would be required.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes. Specifically on the north side, if Dickson goes, you will have four courts at University of Canberra, and that will be it. And there is a cloud over University of Canberra.

**Mr O'Rourke:** There is.

**Mr Phillips:** In fact, there are only three there, because one of them gets used for indoor golf or something like that.

**Mr O'Rourke:** Yes, they have a machine there. The ANU have a couple as well.

**Mr Phillips:** They do. There are two courts at ANU.

**MR EMERSON:** I want to ask you about the Crown lease purpose clause variation. That is obviously a government decision that is yet to be made. Would making a decision that retained the squash club be one way to fulfil the recommendation from their own study in 2015? Do you think that is possible or do you think that it is likely that they will say, "We're an independent authority," and they then get a windfall gain?

**Mr Phillips:** I am not quite sure about the financial side of that, whether they do get a windfall gain or whether they have to pay a lease variation charge, which could be quite substantial.

**MR EMERSON:** By "they", I mean the government.

**Mr Phillips:** ACTPLA? I am not too sure about the details of that, to be honest. If six courts were to remain, I think we would still be well underneath where the original studies would suggest we needed to be, which is more substantial than what we were in 2015; so it would still be under.

**MR EMERSON:** Maybe on notice, if you have any correspondence or anything you have received since that study, from the government, whether there have been any commitments—you might not have anything—it could be helpful for the committee to know how that study took place.

**Mr Phillips:** Yes, okay.

**MR EMERSON:** Has anything really been done to deliver on what it recommended in the last 10 years or not?

**Mr Phillips:** There is talk; at Kaleen, Kaleen Indoor Sports did not have squash courts but it did have three indoor cricket facilities that were used for a wide range of sports. That will be knocked down and converted into units. There has been some talk that, for the commitments that they need to make for the community, there could be a set of squash courts put in there. But that would probably require government funding and/or Tradies or someone else to sponsor or fund it. We have been talking to the builder about that.

**Mr O'Rourke:** We have plans with squash courts in the plan. He is keen to get us in there, but I think we are talking about a lot of money.

**MR EMERSON:** Someone needs to come to the table, yes.

**Mr O'Rourke:** We have it all in writing. It is just that we need a benefactor to come along.

**Mr Phillips:** It includes things like underground parking, so it is quite expensive. It is not just courts; it is underground parking for the general area, so it is not something that

we could fund in any way.

**Mr O'Rourke:** He has even offered the club vendor finance, so he is pretty keen to get us in there. It is something that the ACT government could take on, with the Tradies. The Tradies know about it, because the Tradies know the developer, Bloc. In fact, Bloc approached us through the Tradies. The Tradies have been helpful.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you both for your attendance today and for making yourselves available. Once more, there were no questions taken on notice, from recollection. Thanks for your time.

**BOYD, MR STEVE**, Equestrian Park Management Group  
**CUMMING, MS FIA**, Vice President, ACT Endurance Riders Association  
**JORDAN, MR STEVE**, President, ACT Equestrian Association

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome witnesses from the ACT Endurance Riders Association and the ACT Equestrian Association. Do you have any comment to make on the capacity in which you are appearing today?

**Ms Cumming:** I ride under the name Hasko-Stewart. I am also president of B7 Events, which runs endurance horseriding activities in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** Please note that, as witnesses to the inquiry today, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and are bound as well by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement or are you happy to go straight to questions?

**Mr Jordan:** I will give a brief opening statement, followed by Steve, then we will go on to Fia.

**THE CHAIR:** Please go ahead.

**Mr Jordan:** The ACT Equestrian Association, ACTEA, was established in 1970 as an umbrella organisation to represent all equestrians in their endeavours at all levels of achievement. ACTEA's affiliated groups engage in structured and unstructured activities such as pony club, show jumping, trail riding, competitive dressage, eventing and endurance riding.

Under its constitution, ACTEA's objectives are to promote horseriding as a recognised healthy recreational activity, promote the development of equestrian facilities in the ACT, assist the efforts of affiliated associations and clubs to obtain and improve equipment and facilities, improve the standard of horsemanship in the ACT, promote the views of the equestrian public, and encourage the support of equestrian activities by the commonwealth and ACT government and other persons and organisations.

ACTEA actively pursues these objectives by participating in any opportunity to promote the cause of equestrian sport in both government and the community, and contributing to the development of ACT government standards applying to equestrian-specific and shared infrastructure throughout the territory. In partnership with Sport and Recreation, we maintain and develop Equestrian Park in Yarralumla as an elite facility for the benefit of horse riders and sporting clubs. We are a co-signatory to the memorandum of understanding between the Bicentennial National Trail and the ACT government concerning the maintenance of the National Trail route through Canberra.

The ACT has the largest number of recreational horses per head of population in any city in Australia. There are approximately 1,400 horses in the ACT. It contains 500 kilometres of designated riding trails in parks, reserves, plantation areas and other public land.

The thing we have with Equestrian Park in particular, and where it falls between the

cracks, is that it is an elite facility. It is similar, say, to a hockey association or club. The difference is that it is also a full public recreation ground. All recreational users can use it at any time. It is not locked up. We provide an elite avenue, which then creates its own dramas. We have tried to maintain an elite standard, where you have free use by the public. That is where we have a bit of a difficult scenario to try and balance.

We did have licensing, a five-year rolling licence, to occupy and utilise the land, in agreement with the government, from 2006. It was a five-year rolling licence. Two years ago, it was not negotiated as a five-year licence. It has been a one-year rolling licence. Currently, that makes it very difficult for us to obtain grants, because we do not have an active licence. Prior to that we were getting grants to maintain the level of the park. Now, the only way the park is maintained is through events, through the costs and whatnot being passed on from the events that we run in the park. Also, we get a \$34,000 subsidy from the government, but that \$34,000 has not changed since 2006. That \$34,000 is now a bit devalued.

That is my opening statement. All we are really after, from the standpoint of the Equestrian Park Management Group, is getting a standing push, and a resolution to the licence. We wonder why we have not been given a five-year licence again, because that is restricting our ability to earn money from the government through grants in order to maintain our facility at the elite level to which we need it to be.

There are now multiple national events, and it is reaching the stage where the sand pads and dressage arenas have pretty much reached the end of their life, when it comes to an elite level. It has been 12 years, I think.

**Mr Boyd:** 10 years.

**Mr Jordan:** Yes. From an endurance standpoint, the biggest issue we have is that we hold quite a few events at Stromlo park. Now, because of the influx of mountain biking, it has made it very difficult for us to hold our events and hold the land that we were using—the trails. They have been infiltrated by a lot of the mountain bikes, so it makes it somewhat dangerous on some occasions.

I will hand over to Steve, and he can go through the Equestrian Park Management Group side of it; we will then move on to Fia.

**Mr Boyd:** Thanks, everyone, for the opportunity to put our points forward. We really appreciate it. We are all very passionate about our sport. We love our horses. We manage a 58-hectare property with volunteers, as it has been done for the last 50 years. Those volunteers change over the years. A lot of the people that originally started managing the Equestrian Park have since passed away, and there are new generations coming through. Someone always seems to step up and take on the role.

For the last 19 years, our subsidy from ACT government has been \$36,000, and that has not increased by a dollar in that period. Considering the size of the property that we take care of, without some more funding, it is running down. The toilets are getting more dilapidated. We do not have any accessibility toilets for para riders, for showers. The current arenas which we built 14 years ago are at the end of life. We recently applied for a grant for just under \$1 million—\$980,000—to redo those arenas, but we

were told that we were not successful in that grant, because we are on a month-to-month lease. It is understandable, if you were to give someone \$980,000 to upgrade services, when you are on a month-to-month lease.

The number one priority for us is the ability to get our lease renegotiated for Equestrian Park back to five years again. In that way we can successfully put in grant applications to improve and upgrade the grounds. We would really appreciate some discussions to talk about a higher funding level for the park for our year-to-year agreement, because the volunteers are absolutely happy to do all the work. We have managed, ourselves, major capital works projects at the park.

At the same time as some beach volleyball courts were built in Canberra, which cost over \$1 million 14 years ago, we built seven dressage arenas, which are 20 by 60 metres in size, for \$360,000. We did it all by “beg, borrow and steal”, and volunteer labour. If the equivalent amount of works could have been done back in the day, it would have been \$1.5 million to \$2 million worth of works. We have people, and people with knowledge, that are willing to volunteer their time, effort and money, and help to improve the park. We just need a little bit more help from ACT government to help us to push through these barriers to our sport at the moment.

Firstly, it is about having our lease updated to a five-year lease. Secondly, we need the ability to have a discussion about increasing our yearly \$36,000 fee. Thirdly, we need to have discussions about improvements to the park—improvements to the current toilet and shower blocks, and making the facilities accessible for our para riders. At the moment our para riders cannot stay overnight because there are no accessibility showers. We have no accessibility ramps there for them to get on and off their horses. We run para competitions every single time that we run a competition, but we can only allow a para rider that has some ability to move around. We have no ability for a higher level of disability with the para riders.

We are very passionate about our sport. We are very passionate about the venue. We love the venue. It is an incredible place, near the Governor-General’s home. It is in a beautiful part of town, and we would just like to improve it. We need some help from you guys.

**Ms Cumming:** I would like to add some remarks about Equestrian Park. We used to run endurance rides—not me personally. The national championship used to be held there, a 160-kilometre ride. Of course, the events that have been held there in recent years, eventing, attract people like Shane Rose, who we all know from the Olympics—the guy who got squished by his horse and then came back and did so well. He was at a recent event at Equestrian Park with one of his new horses. He won it, of course.

This has always been a premier facility, and to have it run down is really sad. It is really sad for the ACT’s reputation. Sport is not just about individuals; it is about national pride as well. If we lose facilities like this because we say, “We can’t afford \$300,000,” we have nothing to go to the Olympics with, and no upcoming riders et cetera.

From our point of view, I would love to run endurance from Equestrian Park again, because it is a wonderful facility; but, of course, we have had all the houses put in. I think, “Maybe we could do it this way or that way.” Quite a while ago, we shifted the

ride out to block 514, which is west of Stromlo Forest Park, and it is actually under the umbrella of Stromlo Forest Park. I run rides there, and it is literally an empty paddock. We have to bring in everything. I persist with this, even though it is a lot of work, because otherwise—and I know one of the committee members is a bike guy—the bikes will overrun the world. Bikes are everywhere.

As you know, Stromlo Forest Park is a great biking venue; we know that—downhill, and everything. We have pretty much moved out of there. But the back of Stromlo, west Stromlo, is very important to us. We can ride through Stromlo Forest Park when we run events. I ran the New South Wales state championship there last year, because ACT, for insurance purposes, does not have its own division for endurance. The only reason I could do that was because our ride starts at midnight. There are not a lot of people on bikes, I am happy to say, at midnight, so we can get out. I ran a ride that went down to Tuggeranong and around the arboretum. It was amazing. You could not think of another capital city in the world where people can ride their horses and look out over Parliament House and the city. It was absolutely brilliant. I am not sure I can do it again. There were a lot of permissions needed.

These are extraordinary things that are going on in our capital, because it has always been a matter of pride to us that we are the bush capital. Now we are bush with a lot of townhouses, but we can still maintain that tradition.

My type of riding, endurance riding, of course, is quintessentially Australian. RM Williams set up the first Tom Quilty Gold Cup, the national championship. Could people still ride 100 miles in a day? I can assure you that they do; I just did it last Sunday, which is why I am a bit creaky and groany today.

There is a strong endurance community in the ACT; three of us just did the New South Wales state champs last Sunday, and we all got through. But we are a bit despondent about how much we have to struggle to be recognised. You could say, “You’re not very good lobbyists,” but that is partly because we have to earn money and do other things. We cannot employ people. Steve has many other things to lobby for, but he is doing his best.

From my point of view, I would like to not get squeezed out completely. There is a new flow trail, as they are calling it, under the Stromlo Forest Park master plan, which goes through west Stromlo. It goes through Stromlo Forest Park, west Stromlo and down to the Cotter. The bikes will come right through to where my training and my events go. We have been told we are going to have to look out for bikes, not the other way around. Collisions would be very bad, I can assure you. Again, we try and operate at hours when there are not a lot of people around. When I train, I get up early.

For example, they are putting in the money to build this flow trail to the Cotter and they will not countenance a horse trail. If we had that trail, I could run another 160-kilometre event that went down there, maybe through the pines near Uriarra and back. It would be sensational, but we are being boxed in.

I am persisting. As I said, people know, when they come to my ride—it is called “Scenic City” for a reason—that they are going to encounter bikes. I tell them, “We all have to coexist,” and we do co-exist, and it is lovely. They ride around Coombs, and there are

people out walking their dogs; they all love the horses and they take photos, because they are very fit, beautiful horses. I am trying to make it work and I hope that I can, although I am a bit despondent about the future.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move on to some questions now. Fiona?

**MS CARRICK:** Have you been able to engage with either the planning directorate or sports and rec about the future of Canberra, the growth and where you might fit into it? There is a strategic plan for Canberra. It does not sound like you have had any joy with—

**Ms Cumming:** ACTEA, the Equestrian Association, has tried to do that sort of stuff. The previous president, Christine Lawrence, was very active.

**Mr Jordan:** Yes, she was doing a lot of that.

**Ms Cumming:** A lot of times it comes down to reaction rather than being able to be on the front foot, I think. It is like saying, “We’re going to take away north Curtin horse paddocks,” and I was thinking, “No, don’t do that,” rather than having consultation beforehand.

**MS CARRICK:** Presumably, with a bit of planning, you could keep your trails connected. I read something in your submission about making sure that they are connected, so can you explain—

**Mr Jordan:** Was that the National Trail? Is that what you are talking about?

**MS CARRICK:** I do not know. I assumed it was just the local trails.

**Mr Jordan:** We have the BNT, the Bicentennial National Trail, which goes from Queensland all the way down to Victoria. You can ride your horse all the way from Queensland down to Victoria, if that is what you choose to do.

**Ms Cumming:** In terms of the local trails, yes, I do use them for the events.

**MS CARRICK:** Local trails.

**Mr Jordan:** Yes, and they are all used around there.

**Ms Cumming:** I have to say that, when I go out for training, it is scary, because I am not there at three in the morning.

**MS CARRICK:** How is densification impacting on the local trails—for example, getting from north Curtin horse paddocks to Equestrian Park?

**Ms Cumming:** That is only a very short distance, and I think that is okay.

**Mr Jordan:** Yes, that is okay now.

**Ms Cumming:** Riding, for example, from Stromlo Forest Park down to Kambah, there

is a very nice track. They are beautiful, and that is why I love showing them off with the rides. I tried to do that about four or five weeks ago and my horse was just going ballistic because there were bikes, runners and dogs. It was just too busy. I do not resent the people being out there, because we all want to enjoy these beautiful trails and the views are amazing, but it can get too busy on a weekend.

**MS CARRICK:** I guess more and more people are using them.

**Ms Cumming:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** I have one more before we go on. When you say that Equestrian Park is an elite facility but it is open to the public, is it open to the public for equestrian or open to the public for other—

**Mr Boyd:** Yes; equestrian. Well, the homestead is at the back of it as well.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes; the woolshed.

**Mr Boyd:** Yes, the woolshed is in the middle of it. Every day, people float their horses over there and ride, whether it is just for fun or they are practising dressage or they are doing a bit of jumping on the cross-country course. It is being used. I love it. Every time I drive by and see people out there on horses it makes me smile because it that is what the place is for. So, yes, it does cater for the elite, but 98 per cent of people that use it are just normal people. So it does both. We want to be able to run the highest level in dressage, showjumping and eventing at the venue but, at the same time, for it also to be used by someone who is just learning how to ride and taking their horse out for their very first outing.

**MS CARRICK:** As far as maintenance goes, if it is open to the public, does that cause maintenance issues to keep it at an elite standard? I know with the footy paddocks they do not let people in and use them.

**Mr Boyd:** Yes, it does—pure usage. Between our events, there would be as many people using the park between us running our events as people rocking up to our events. The wear and tear on the facility is the worst it has ever been because of usage. Every weekend is booked. In 2014, there were only 40 days of the park booked. It is booked every weekend these days.

**MS CARRICK:** How do you keep it at that elite standard?

**Mr Boyd:** Well, we are not. That is the problem now.

**Mr Jordan:** Yes, that is the problem. You can compare it to, say, Sydney Equestrian Centre. The gates are closed and no-one can access it unless it is a special appointment or they have special events. It is fully maintained by ground staff and ground crew. They have all the best jumps and all the best ground. The surface is correct for that standard. Whereas, ours was correct for the time and now it has reached a stage where it has done its time. It has done its usage. Because it gets used every day, there is a lot of wear and tear. But that is part of the agreement with Sport and Rec and how we have got it. It is like a joint scenario between—

**Ms Cumming:** I think you are particularly talking about the dressage paddocks, aren't you?

**Mr Jordan:** And cross-country.

**Mr Boyd:** They are just as bad. It is the whole venue—the cross-country course; the toilets. The toilet blocks are open for the public. It is just wear and tear on the venue.

**MS LEE:** The lease is month to month. That must make things very, very difficult—and you have already talked about not getting the grant. What is the reason that the government has told you for going to a month-to-month lease?

**Mr Jordan:** I spoke to—you'll have to forgive me now because I have forgotten. It is Wayne—

**MR RATTENBURY:** Lacey?

**Mr Jordan:** Yes, Wayne Lacey. Apparently, they were trying to determine—this has taken two years—whether it should be a licence or a lease. It is currently under licence—we are on a licence—but they are trying to work out where it should be a licence or a lease now. I understand there are discussions they need to have, but it has been two years. In that two years, if it were not for the volunteers it would not exist. It has basically been left in the hands of the gods.

**MS LEE:** What is the current status in terms of, like—

**Mr Boyd:** We are still month to month, and we still do not know—

**MS LEE:** That is it? And they have not given you any update about when you might get a decision?

**Mr Jordan:** No. I met with them three weeks ago—not met with them. I was at a Sport and Rec CEO's convention and they said they were going to be looking at it in the next couple of weeks. We have a request with Yvette Berry. There was an email sent to her four weeks ago and I met with her two weeks ago at the CEO's convention at Lyneham—and the same thing. We are still just waiting on a comeback on it. At the end of the day, once we get the ability to put a grant in—because there is one sitting there ready to go—

**MS CARRICK:** And this is to the ACT government? These are grants from the ACT government? So you cannot get an ACT government grant because they will not give you a lease?

**Mr Jordan:** They will not give us the licence, yes.

**MS LEE:** It seems extraordinary.

**Mr Jordan:** We had the licence. The licence had been in place since 2006 and every five years it just renewed. Then, two years ago, it just stopped.

**Mr Boyd:** We were advised that being on a month-to-month lease would not affect us applying for grants. But then it turned around and—

**Mr Jordan:** Yes, it was one of the first barriers you come against.

**MS LEE:** It is just extraordinary. This is sort of related but slightly off-topic. You also lost your status as a peak body.

**Mr Jordan:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** What was the criteria that you were not able to meet? What was the reason given?

**Mr Jordan:** Being a peak body also gave us another opportunity to go for grants, from a different standpoint. The reason why ACTEA is not a peak body is that we do not actually have funds coming in to us and run the sport.

**Mr Boyd:** So we do not meet the terminology.

**MS CARRICK:** So who does run it? Who is the peak body?

**Mr Boyd:** The individual clubs, which are members of ACTEA. ACTEA is still our peak body for our clubs.

**Mr Jordan:** We represent the Equestrian Association.

**Mr Boyd:** But the ACT government does not recognise ACTEA as a peak body.

**MS CARRICK:** So who gets the funding for the horse community as a peak body?

**Mr Jordan:** There is no peak body. That is the thing: there is no peak body anymore. ACTEA does not run events; the clubs run the events. We have affiliates, who we then represent in situations such as this.

**Ms Cumming:** You are our lobbyist, basically.

**Mr Boyd:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** So just quickly, the answer to that question was that, because you do not have, essentially, membership funding—funding from members—you cannot be a peak body?

**Mr Jordan:** That is correct. We do not receive money from memberships, yes.

**MR EMERSON:** Did they change the criteria or did they just decide in 2021 to—

**Mr Boyd:** They changed the criteria, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I have a quick follow-up question on the lease. In that

uncertainty, is there any suggestion the site be used for something else, or is it just this definitional question, do you think?

**Mr Jordan:** Sorry, what was that?

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is there any suggestion that, for Equestrian Park, the site might be used for something else? Or is it just a technical—

**Mr Jordan:** No, there has been no suggestion of that whatsoever. I think they are just trying to determine whether it still falls under the banner of a licence or whether it should be bannered as a lease.

**Mr Boyd:** Equestrian Park is being used as an offset area for that very rare species of moth.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes; the golden sun moth.

**Mr Boyd:** Yes, the golden sun moth. So it has been used for that. The majority of the park is for that. But, because it is equestrian, we can use it. Also, you have the woolshed there as well. So it is heritage and so forth. Then, also, you have the original arboretum for Canberra—all the original trees and so forth, where they were all grown. I do not believe it has been eyeballed for anything else. But, honestly, the longer this goes on with us not getting our lease, we are starting to wonder.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Don't let me start a rumour. I have not heard anything. I was just—

**Mr Boyd:** That is good to hear. That is a relief. We can breathe.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Just to be clear, I have not heard it either. I just wondered as to whether that was part of it.

**Mr Boyd:** No; I do not think so.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you. All my questions have already been asked. So please don't take my lack of questions as a lack of—

**Mr Jordan:** No worries; that is fine.

**MR EMERSON:** A lot of what I wanted to go with has been covered too. You mentioned being “eyeballed for something else”. I wanted to ask about the Western Edge investigation area, which was mentioned in the submission. Are you aware of any organisations like yours being asked about what you would like to see done with the Western Edge or any other investigation areas related to urban development?

**Mr Jordan:** No. When you consider that we have Curtin horse paddocks—which are just sort of like over there—which have been redesignated for other use and then, on the other side of it, we have the LDK retirement village, it does make you wonder, and there is that question in the back of your mind as we are sort of in between that. But, no, we have not been approached about the Western Edge at all.

**MR EMERSON:** Obviously, as a committee, we can make recommendations. What are the kinds of things that you would like to see recommended? How could the government take action to prevent further urban development from, I suppose, affecting the viability of your sport?

**Mr Jordan:** From an equestrian standpoint, it is like the hub of the equestrian community in the ACT. If you ask anybody who rides a horse or anyone even in New South Wales who rides a horse, “Where are the events held in the ACT?” they will answer, “They are at Equestrian Park.” So it is a recognised, iconic part of Canberra. From that standpoint, we just want to maintain it at the level that it should be maintained and be able to be proud to be Canberrans when people come down and share our facility. The fact that it is open, whereas the other ones are not, anyone can come down from anywhere in Sydney, park their car and park their float, get their horse out and can go for a ride—ride on the paddocks and do whatever you want on a cross-country course.

**MR RATTENBURY:** We were asking before about free public use. Do you get other people? Do people just walk their dogs there or anything?

**Mr Boyd:** Yes. Pushbike riders come through all the time. Riders come through, trail riders come through, people come out there specifically just to ride their horse at that venue—

**Mr Jordan:** Joggers.

**Mr Boyd:** Yes, joggers.

**Mr Jordan:** It has got a good track that goes round out through the Arboretum. It has straight access to the Arboretum and behind the zoo and up through the pines.

**Mr Boyd:** With the events that we all run there, a lot of people come in from interstate. We bring in judges and they stay in hotels. Competitors come and stay in hotels and so forth. So there is a high attendance as well of people coming from interstate to the venue as well whenever we run competitions. So Canberra is benefiting from the competitions that we run every weekend.

**MS CARRICK:** I just want to check one thing. We often find that the government only want to deal with the peak body or one organisation, and they do not like to deal with every soccer club or every basketball club. So, if you do not have a peak body, who does the government deal with?

**Mr Jordan:** Generally through ACTEA.

**Mr Boyd:** Still ACTEA.

**Mr Jordan:** It goes through ACTEA and then, if it is specific, we then direct. Equestrian Park, in particular, is still managed and overseen by Sport and Rec. Basically, we have been told that, if we want anything to be done there, we have to go through Sport and Rec.

**MS CARRICK:** And what about NCA? Do they have anything to do with it?

**Mr Jordan:** No; not the NCA.

**Mr Boyd:** If we did some major development work maybe we would have to talk to them because of where it is.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, because it is in that hatched area on the north of the Cotter Road.

**MR EMERSON:** Ms Cumming, did you have something to add?

**Ms Cumming:** Yes. In terms of what would make life easier for us, I would say better signage, better education for people and a little bit of separation on the trails—like walkers and bikes stay on one side and horses stay on the other side, or something like that. I am not sure there is anywhere else where it has been done but, let's face it, there is nowhere like Canberra. That would just make it a lot safer for us; so that if you go around a corner there is not something else coming at you right in front of you.

**MR EMERSON:** Sure.

**MS LEE:** I have one final question. There was a reference in, I think, your submission, Ms Cumming, about the agistment of horses on government-owned land.

**Ms Cumming:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** You were saying that there has been a decline because of development. Can you take us through that process? Do you get much notice? What is the consultation that takes place before that happens?

**Ms Cumming:** There is Territory Agistment.

**Mr Jordan:** I can answer that. We actually get plenty of notice if something is being looked at for further development. Territory Agistment, as Fia just mentioned, work for the rural part of the government. They are the ones who have the contract for horse agistment. I think there are about nine or 10 horse agistment facilities in the ACT currently. Curtin is the one that is currently under a bit of pressure and so is Parkwood, out in the northern fringes. Those two currently are being developed or are in close proximity to be being developed. But, yes, we do get notice, and it is usually plenty of notice. But, in saying that, it still encroaches on the available space—in areas of the green capital or the bush capital.

**MS LEE:** So is it fair to say that you might get notice but you do not get a say? Like, if it is going to happen, it is going to happen. It is not like—

**Mr Jordan:** No, it just happens. Even with Duntroon, for instance, when the RSPCA went into where Duntroon is, there was a lot of consultation about the paddock and whatnot there. But, once again, they were going there no matter what; it was just about how we were going to manage around that. But there was good consultation about it.

**Ms Cumming:** Could I just make one general point comment about equestrian?

**THE CHAIR:** Very, very briefly.

**Ms Cumming:** A lot of people think of equestrian as an elite sport, and it can be, but you may have also heard about horse therapy for disabled people. It is a really good sport for people with mental health issues—people of all types, people of all ages.

**Mr Jordan:** And the other thing, too, is that it is a female-dominated sport. It is 80 per cent to 85 per cent a female sport.

**Mr Boyd:** And they beat the boys on a regular basis, too.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. We appreciate your time. Have a lovely afternoon.

**Short suspension.**

**SCHUERMANN, MR OLAF**, President, Badminton ACT

**THE CHAIR:** We now welcome Mr Olaf Schuermann, from Badminton ACT. For the *Hansard* record, could you please state the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Schuermann:** I am President of Badminton ACT, which is the representative body that is affiliated with Badminton Australia, which in turn is the Australian representative body representing Badminton World Federation. So we are the SSO for ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Schuermann:** The submission I put in is self-explanatory, but I just want to highlight the fact that there is a complete lack of indoor sports centres in this city and there are some that have been torn down over recent years. Gungahlin is facing a massive crisis in indoor sports facilities. All my clubs are bursting at the seams, at capacity. I cannot take new members. One new club just started in Mount Stromlo, but that is a very tiny little school and it is a tiny little club, and they managed to find a slot on a Sunday afternoon. But, mostly, most of my clubs are now at capacity.

What I lament most is that there is no real opportunity other than for my juniors to play outside of school hours except for two or three junior-focused clubs, because most of my clubs are social and they cannot allocate one court just for juniors to play. So, while we have a lot of kids who want to play at schools, and we actually teach a lot of PE teachers out of the foundation badminton course, unfortunately, there is a bit of a lack of available opportunities and space there and also for families to play. If you are not a member of a club—and we have public liability insurance to hire school sports halls, individuals cannot play pretty much anywhere in Gungahlin—nowhere. There is a community centre in Belconnen and, if you are lucky, there is the Erindale Centre down south. That is why I lament. This is about community sport. Badminton is one of the strongest growing sports, reflecting our cultural background and the growth, as I mentioned in my report, and there is nowhere for them to play. I will leave it at that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. In your submission you suggested using public-private partnerships potentially to develop facilities but said that, at the current time, ACT grants forbid this. How would you see a private enterprise recouping its investment in a public-private partnership for a sports facility?

**Mr Schuermann:** In conjunction with a not-for-profit association like me?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. How would that be attractive to a private entity?

**Mr Schuermann:** For starters, they would be able to work with an organisation, a not-for-profit—albeit with us—and, if we were able to generate some public sector support to contribute with a private sector entity—say, it is half-half—for a fit-out of a badminton facility. They are normally ex-warehouses. I know that is a problem in Canberra, but, for the sake of it, that is the model they use in most other states and

territories. So there is an ex-warehouse. The fit-out would probably be about \$1.1 million to \$2 million dollars. If a government, through us, supports us for half that and the private agent provides the other half, we would have an agreement with them that we would provide a lot of players, we would have our competitions there and we would have clubs there. It would be the home of badminton. We do not have a home of badminton at the moment. We just scatter all over the place at public halls. They would also have a shop in there. There is no dedicated badminton shop selling dedicated badminton facilities. So that would also be another revenue earner for both the private sector plus us.

So we would have that agreement with them. We would get some discount, obviously—we are getting support from the government—and they would want something. Why are we supporting a private entity? What are we getting out of it, for them to get the profits? We intend to get some of the profits as well and to generate and to do our not-for-profit activities in terms of the juniors and the work that we do and the competitions that we do. So it is a quid pro quo: they would be entering an agreement with us; we would generate the capacity; and, quite frankly, that would be the only badminton facility in the ACT—if one is built. There will be no competitors.

In Sydney, some of them are within five kilometres of each other and there is intense competition to grab the clubs, to grab the individuals, to grab the coaches and to train there. There are a lot of ex-warehouses there that are trying to be repurposed. But here we do not have a lot of ex-warehouses to be repurposed. We are not an industrial city. But, when we do have a warehouse of some kind, whether it is built bespoke or converted, then there will be that joint opportunity. With the private sector supporting us, they would generate a profit, just like us—together.

**THE CHAIR:** So, regardless of where such a facility was built, you would see people would travel from wherever in Canberra to there?

**Mr Schuermann:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** So travel is not an issue?

**Mr Schuermann:** No. Canberra, even from the north and south, is not too bad—obviously, now that there dual carriageways that go around the back end. You also have to remember what the peak periods are. They are evenings, after work, weekends—when you are not going to be playing mostly during the day—and during early mornings when everyone is going to work. So the peak periods for indoor sport are those after six and on the weekends.

Also, people would be willing to travel to a dedicated badminton facility with the proper flooring, proper lighting and proper nets and a facility that is cleaned—so I do not have to have as many injuries as I have at public schools and use my liability insurance because they are not cleaned properly. Admittedly, kids use it. Obviously they are not the cleanest people, and the schools do not clean as well in the evenings. I do not think transport would be an issue, particularly for competitions and for probably the higher social players. It is not as if our clubs are going to disappear in schools. The juniors will stay there. The beginners will stay there. The social people will stay close to their suburbs. But, for those who really want to get competitive games and play competition,

which is what we would want to do—play in active competitions and grow the competitions element, not just the As and open but the D level as well—we would have that dedicated facility.

**THE CHAIR:** You talked about the link between clubs and schools. How many clubs are we talking about? Are they all primarily based at schools?

**Mr Schuermann:** Yes, we have 26 clubs of varying sizes. I mentioned Mount Stromlo but that is a small club. It only has three courts. It is an old school. But then we have the two newest schools that have been built in Gungahlin. That is where I appreciate the government now has a model for a model school sports hall, and finally that includes badminton. There were some schools that were built that excluded badminton, which was disappointing. The last two built—I cannot remember the names; it is in my submission—have eight dedicated badminton courts and they are very well patronised. I had to bid, like everybody else in all other indoor sports, to get slots. I wanted one every day of the week, but it is not possible. I did get two slots—thank you! I have one evening slot and one weekend slot. So a new club was formed. They have two sessions—two hours in the evening and two hours in the afternoon on Saturday. They have about 120 members, and that is about the capacity, because otherwise you will have people sitting around twiddling their thumbs and being upset that they cannot play in two hours.

**THE CHAIR:** On the clubs-school link, how many of those clubs are based in private schools?

**Mr Schuermann:** One.

**THE CHAIR:** Of 26?

**Mr Schuermann:** Canberra Grammar. We have had a really good relationship with them for over 40 years. They gave use free court hire up until recently, where we trained a lot of their students for free. So we got a bit of a quid pro quo with that school. Now they want to charge, not outrageously, given it is a private school. I have approached other schools, including my old school up in Marist and St Eddies and others, and, unfortunately, many of them do not have capacity, do not provide badminton in their schools, at least for the line marking, and they are more focused on other sports for their kids. So I have approached private schools.

**MS CARRICK:** Ideally, a dedicated badminton centre would be ideal—I can understand that—to bring everyone together and grow your sport, and I do understand that it is hard being scattered across schools. If there were multipurpose facilities in each district, would you be able to share with volleyball, netball and other sports if there were access rights given to people?

**Mr Schuermann:** For sure. Because there is such a lack of facilities, if it is multipurpose, I am more than happy to share with anybody else. I know we will obviously have to be fighting for slots and things, and we all want the peak evenings and weekends, but something is better than nothing and, quite frankly, at the moment there is a lot of nothing. Up north, there is the fastest-growing population—particularly the Indian and Chinese communities. You just have to go to Gungahlin to see the

cultural basis. Badminton is the second most popular sport in the entire world after soccer, reflecting the population of those countries—and we have had them here for the last 30 years.

Sharing is not an issue. I actually supported, I think, the opposition many elections ago. I was part of the announcement saying that they wanted to have one in Gungahlin, one in Molonglo and one in Woden somewhere, and I said, “Beauty; I’ll be in that. I will promote it.” There was an idea that the government are looking at potentially one at Casey. I do not know where that is up to—maybe they are thinking about it still—but I will be very supportive of that.

**MS CARRICK:** Molonglo, I guess, too, would have that cultural base for lot of a badminton out there. Is there nothing—

**Mr Schuermann:** There is no facility. With the one school there, I was saying, “Yes; I can hire that,” but it was like, “Sorry, no badminton line marking.” It is now the home for roller derby because their centre was destroyed in Woden. We played badminton in Woden there too. So that was one centre, and we said, “Other sports, well, can’t play there”.

**MS CARRICK:** They knocked down Woden, and so they gave them Evelyn Scott, because they put wider things so they did not hit the wall so quickly.

**MS LEE:** I want to go back to the proposal that you have made to the ACT government for a dedicated badminton facility as a bit of a partnership. Could you just expand on that a little bit more? Have you gone as far as having a business case? Where is that up to?

**Mr Schuermann:** I do not know if you are aware, but there is a private sector person who is currently working with a builder down in Fyshwick, and the builder is building a warehouse plus on the other side. A part of the DA, which I actually saw, actually specified that it was for a badminton facility—the first of its kind in this city—and it would provide for potentially 12 badminton courts. I spoke to the proponent a couple of months ago, and I said, “Why don’t we approach the government jointly in terms of a PPP, and he said, “There is no point, because they are not interested in private. They just want us, as the not-for-profit, to load ourselves up with debt or to find the funding from somewhere and then to join up the with the government, and then they might do a fifty-fifty under their sports infrastructure plan,” and he just stepped away.

I understand he is still trying to seek some financing from overseas sources. The last I heard is that it is still being built. He is still hoping that next year it will be built, But, if it does get built, it will be purely private—in which case, I will still want to hire it, obviously, but I do not think I will be getting any kind of a special arrangement, because I am not providing anything; I am just there as a hirer. Maybe by calling it the home of badminton in the ACT, I can get some licensing fees off them or something. But that is something that I will have to talk to them about as part of any agreement. I could obviously still provide competitions there and I could bid for national competitions, which I cannot at the moment as I do not have the facilities for it—and the AIS is very unreliable as a hirer—and the clubs can start there. But they will obviously just see me as just another hirer.

**MS LEE:** Where do you host competitions now?

**Mr Schuermann:** The main place that we can have the numbers and the facilities that are half-decent are the AIS. That is obviously the best. They repurposed their basketball facilities. On the end of it, they put line markings for badminton on two of the basketball courts, which equals eight badminton courts. So they actually put the physical stickers around, and we help them and all the rest of it. Through Badminton Australia, they already have nets supplied to them and that kind of thing. We actually had our ACT Open a couple of weeks ago. That is our one gold national tournament. We offer prize money and we get a lot of national competitors. We even got two from Hong Kong. We do not offer that much money. It is \$500 for the winner. Another place is the ANU. The UC are busy with basketball. They are largely the only two places.

**MS CARRICK:** Is there nowhere on the south side for competitions?

**Mr Schuermann:** No; they do not have the size or the capacity. Our competitions are held on the weekends. We sometimes get 250 people across all grades and all divisions—across singles, doubles and mixed—and we need a whole weekend, and we are run by volunteers, and we always limit competitions.

With the masters event coming up, we were very close to pulling out, because the masters organisers just shoved everything onto the sports, “You organise it; that’s it.” They did not provide any financial support—nothing. We said, “If we don’t get any support”—and given the volumes from previous tournaments and whether we can get a facility—“we’ll have to pull out.” But, luckily, the organiser, the general manager of the masters, and I worked with Badminton Australia, and they supplied us with the shuttles—that is \$6,000 worth of shuttles, so we can subsidise, through Badminton Australia’s support. He also organised for us to be able to get access to the University of Canberra, which is quite difficult because they are more focused on basketball. So we got the venue, we got a bit of help from BA and the numbers added up. We do not want to make losses on our competitions. We are a volunteer organisation. If the masters and the government are not giving us anything to help with the masters, obviously we have to try and find it, and Badminton Australia came to the party. So we are participating again.

**MR EMERSON:** On participation numbers, you said you have got solid juniors and enough groups, but then where do they play outside of school hours? Is there a cap on participation because of what is available? This has come up a couple of times today where organisations feel that the actual demand for their sport is not borne out in the participation numbers because of the lack of facilities. Is that an issue that you think is relevant to your sport?

**Mr Schuermann:** Yes, certainly. I keep getting inquiries, “Where can I play? Where can I play with families outside of clubs?” Well, not many places. Albury has a good facility, but that is a bit far to travel. But, as for the juniors, in particular, outside of school hours, we have two lovely, dedicated junior people. Daniel and Benson are godsend to me. As a volunteer organisation, we rely on some really key people and these two are focused. He said, “If I can’t have a place to play for my kids, I’ll try to set up a club.” He helped, and we now have two dedicated beginner-junior badminton

clubs. But they are full. They are also at capacity, and there is a wait queue to sign them.

We also have a more higher-level badminton junior, Northside Juniors, for those who want to try and get some juniors into our national competitions—into that elite level. We are trying to push a few of them. That is also at capacity. This is due to the lack of facilities—and, as you mentioned, we cannot have 150 people sitting off. Mostly, the bigger gyms are eight courts. So two hours, and 150 people max as members. That allows for 20 or 30 people sitting off waiting for a game. That means you only play one set—probably to 15, not to 21, and with no setting, so it turns around quicker. We want to allow the maximum number of people to play, even if it is not as much as they want to play.

**MR EMERSON:** Another thing that has come up today is the ACT government’s 2015 indoor sports facility study. One of the recommendations in that study was to ensure that small and emerging indoor sports are supported to find suitable locations for training and competition, and badminton was listed among those sports. Have you seen any evidence of that happening in the last 10 years?

**Mr Schuermann:** Not really. But, to be fair to Sport and Rec, as I mentioned before, they did do the model school. I was antagonising them about why a new school is being built without badminton line markings and told them, “It does not make sense; you’re wasting millions.” You go to some of those schools and you think, “My God; what’s going on here? The ceilings are too low, anyway, so what’s the point?” But now they have got the model schools and, then when we bid, they know I need slots. I do not know whether they give me favouritism, but they have to look at other sports, because they are in the same boat—they need spots. So they cannot just favour me and give me five slots in a week. But they give me one or two slots during peak periods; so I am grateful for that—for anything I can get.

But, in terms of something dedicated and helping us grow and all the rest of it, not really. I was looking at data, and according to the growth in our membership—let alone the data that says how many play badminton or say they play badminton—we are pretty much consistent with netball and cricket. Okay; they have got seasons and we do not—we are throughout the year. But, still, when you think about it, netball have got a few facilities—their own facilities—and we do not have any. We have to share with everybody else. On the growth in the numbers, we had 300 members about 15 years ago and we now have 1,300 members, and that is pretty much the amount—unless we get another school being built, and then I can slot lot in another 150, and that will be it. There are no more schools being built in Gungahlin. The last two have been built. There is hopefully going to be one in Molonglo, I understand, and I hope when the Lyneham schools and others are refurbished they provide for badminton—sports that we play now, not sports that were played in 1950 and 1960.

**MS CARRICK:** Garran is getting two primary schools. So you will have to put bids in for that, but you will be fighting all the other sports.

**Mr Schuermann:** Exactly. That is the thing. I have been president for over seven years and on the committee for over 20. I have played overseas. I have lived in London and I have lived in Germany. I do not expect the facilities of those places, but we should at least having multiuse facilities—and not just knocking them down and then having

nowhere to play—particularly for families or communities, and then they do not need to join clubs if they do not want to; they can just play. They can ring up and hire a court. They ring me up and I say, “Sorry, you can’t play. You’ve got to join a club.” It is good for us; we have got a bit of—

**MS CARRICK:** Monopoly?

**Mr Schuermann:** Yes, exactly. But you want kids and families to play. You can play badminton outside. You can play with the air shuttle, which they play in the Pacific Islands. But I think most people would want to play the usual badminton, which is an indoor sport.

**THE CHAIR:** We are perfectly on time. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. We appreciate you making the time.

**Short suspension.**

**BOWLES, Nicole**, Chief Executive Officer, Basketball ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Ms Bowles. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Ms Bowles:** If you would like, or I am happy to take questions.

**THE CHAIR:** It is entirely up to you. Most people have been, but we can go straight to questions.

**Ms Bowles:** I am happy to take questions straightaway. I think everyone knows where we are at with basketball as a sport and that sort of thing, and I think the submission speaks for itself. I am happy to talk in more detail and give some time to that.

**MS CARRICK:** I am very pleased to see your four-pillar strategy which includes Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong sports facilities. Belconnen is a dedicated facility.

**Ms Bowles:** It is—yes.

**MS CARRICK:** I would imagine that, in the south, in Woden, if we were ever lucky enough to get one, it would have to be a multipurpose facility, because we are not going to get one dedicated to every sport. We have just heard from representatives from volleyball and badminton that they do not have any competition space in the south, so, while they might train in some schools, they all have to go north for their competition space. When you put forward a proposal for a four-court facility as a minimum, does that include netball, volleyball, badminton, futsal, and all the rest of them?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes. We would obviously love to keep Belconnen as a main hub for basketball—that is our primary spot—but every other facility that comes to town needs to be a multisport facility, for lots of reasons. There is obviously limited space, limited land and limited resources that go into them. From a basketball perspective, if we have the four key community centres with four to six courts, it creates the ability to spread across the whole region and not need as many school facilities and those types of things. It would free them up for other sports. We have a challenge in the south when looking for facilities. At the moment, we have only five dedicated courts that are competition standard in Tuggeranong, within the whole of the south of Canberra. We are definitely a growing sport, so we are mindful of four, six or 10 courts. Indoor sports have growing participation across the region. Having a longer term facility strategy on how we build, develop and plan around our sporting infrastructure is really critical for indoor sports.

**MS CARRICK:** Has there been any analysis about the needs of all the sports—volleyball, badminton and everything else—to determine what size would be needed?

**Ms Bowles:** I do not think we have ever got together and had that conversation. This is where having a longer term facility plan on what is need in the territory is critical for us. We have done it from a basketball perspective. We know demand will increase by 40 per cent, on average, across all of our regions by 2030, if we are not about to reach

that at the moment. In the last 24 hours, we closed registrations for our junior season, and we have grown by 87 junior teams from winter to summer. That is a crazy amount of growth within just one season—a short time. We now need to have facilities to put them. Having lots of people wanting to participate in sport is a fantastic problem to have, but now it is about where we can play in a really safe and inclusive community way.

Definitely something that we need to do as a whole sporting sector is look at our long-term facility plan and how we can all come together and know that we have places for us all to play and compete. I know that for basketball, the biggest indoor sport here, it is a matter of: you build them and we will fill them. But that is definitely not what we want to do to other sports like volleyball and badminton. We know that we need to create space for them and their sports as well.

**MS CARRICK:** Do your clubs have to turn players away?

**Ms Bowles:** At the moment, yes. A couple of our clubs make conscious decisions to only re-register members within their clubs. They do not take a lot of external people. Other clubs are open. As I said, we are growing by 87 new teams. I do not know where these people are coming from, but it is great. We have other clubs that take on board different things. We definitely have clubs that are turning people away. As to whether we are able to fill those extra 87 teams, we will see how the summer season pans out. It is exciting but challenging at the same time.

**MS CARRICK:** I have more questions, but I will share.

**MS LEE:** Ms Bowles, in your submission you talk about some of the discrepancies that you see in terms of hiring school based facilities. Can you expand on that a little more?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes; definitely. When you compare indoor sports to outdoor sports, we run two different operating models and circumstances across the territory. I highly commend the ACT government for their investment in school infrastructure. You guys made the decision in 2018 to continue to invest. We have had great standardised models, in terms of new schools that have come online, but, with that, we have other pressures, such as increased court hire costs. There is the cost disparity between an outdoor field and an indoor court, in terms of subsidy. We have more limited space, in terms of where they can go, and we need much more competing space, as in how many people we can put somewhere. We would really like to see more transparency across our school infrastructure and communication with schools.

Dodgers made a submission. Perhaps you have had a chance to read that. They are a great case study. They run out of seven different school locations, so that means they have seven different business managers that need to negotiate across seven different contracts, plus keys, bills and processing—all those types of things. For a volunteer committee that is limited with time and resources, to be able to dedicate so much time to finding a venue and negotiating times and terms across seven different contracts is quite time-consuming. Then they steer away from things like participation enjoyment, engagement and satisfaction, which are the key things to community cohesion—all the things that we know sports do for the community. The admin burden that sits with sports and not having things like a centralised booking system is really tricky to manage,

because you have individual conversations for everything that you hire. I am sure it is frustrating for the business manager sitting at the other end who needs to negotiate with us all about time, plus we all have demands for different types of things. I definitely see that there is an opportunity for efficiencies within the school system as well, so that they are not spending so much time on us, organising and hiring for their extra-curricular activities. They can focus on things that are within their business strategies as well.

**MS LEE:** With the lack of a centralised booking system, how does it work practically and logistically? Does it mean that they could say, “That school seems to have a good court. I’ll just contact them with a cold call”?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes—a cold call. There are a couple of things. If they are existing schools, you can cold call, see what is available, and beg, borrow or steal off everyone. If you have a contact at a school that you can have some sort of conversation and negotiation with, that generally works in your favour as well. When a new school comes online, the Education Directorate and Sport have established a quite good process for us to put in a submission and bid for places. That starts quite well and easy, but that is a 12-month contract, and then you are back into a renegotiation phase, in terms of how that looks and feels. There could be many things as to why you need it or are moved on, in terms of time. We are forever renegotiating contracts—essentially every 12 months—which is a huge workload for our staff at Basketball ACT, but more so for clubs, in terms of the load that they need to carry. On average, our clubs are training out of at least three venues, if not more. There are seven in Dodgers’ case. You are easily looking at at least three different contracts that need to be negotiated at any one time.

**MS LEE:** Is it the same process when you are dealing with non-government schools?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes. We do a lot of individual negotiations with non-government schools. The schools generally do not do much external hiring, because they have their own basketball clubs and training. If you are hiring at government or independent schools, you need to do individual negotiation.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the split—basketball is such a big sport—in terms of accessing public school facilities versus private school facilities?

**Ms Bowles:** From a competition perspective, out of the nine courts across Tuggeranong and Belconnen, we are at a public school for one day, covering two courts, and then there are at least another two or three days at private schools. We have now opened it up because more government schools have come online that meet our community standards for competition-level courts and have the right infrastructure. We are able to move into public schools, especially in the north, with the new ones that have come online.

**THE CHAIR:** Badminton ACT said they use 26 public schools. They used to work with Canberra Grammar School, but no longer. On notice, are you able to give me a split on which public or private schools Basketball ACT uses?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** It does not have to be now; you can take it on notice.

**Ms Bowles:** I am happy to take it on notice and give you a list. I could try to rattle them all off for you, but—

**THE CHAIR:** Let's do that. I have not asked one question on notice, so that is the one for today.

**Ms Bowles:** I can get you that list easily.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you kindly.

**MR RATTENBURY:** From a barriers to support point of view, I want to ask about affordability and how families or participants are finding it. I am particularly interested in your take on that, and also how you deal with families that might be struggling financially and how you keep the kids engaged.

**Ms Bowles:** Definitely. The cost of delivering indoor sport is expensive, no matter where you are around the country. The cost for lights, flooring and all those types of things is definitely something that we need to address as a society. We know the benefits that sports bring to our lives, so how we make sure that we are providing accessibility to every Australian is critical. As a business, I have run some stats on our expenses as a whole. Our operating expenses from 2022 to 2024 have increased by 28 per cent overall, and, from last year to this year, we have seen a further 15 per cent increase in operating expenses.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is that for Basketball ACT, the clubs or—

**Ms Bowles:** For Basketball ACT, not our clubs. Lots of things drive that: insurance, venue hire, land and tax rates, and operating expenses, in terms of running the staff at Basketball ACT. As we can see, we are trending quite high on those different types of things to deliver a quality service and product to our community. We are very mindful of what that looks like and means and where we are up to with the cost of living and all those types of things. We are a member funded organisation; we cannot just keep saying, "Here is the price increase. This is what it looks like."

On the flipside of that, there are other things that we look at from a business model perspective, in terms of sponsorship, fundraising and donations. The Australian Sports Foundation is a really good asset that we have turned to, to be able to fundraise across the sports sector for our different programs, whether it be for our representative programs or our clubs. We are starting to lean on things like that to provide that. Also, our clubs, at a club level and community level, provide players with hardship an opportunity to play with reduced fees. It is not a standardised model; it is very much based on the club and the committee making those decisions and determinations across those things.

Basketball ACT partners with the Canberra Eagles Sports Association and provides them with support. They are a South Sudanese basketball association that is doing some really incredible things across the community. We partner with them to assist in their delivery of service, basketball knowledge and education. Where possible, we are

making sure that we can partner to make an impact across the community and make the sport accessible.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Basketball ACT does not really deal with the hardship cases; rather, it is done at the club level?

**Ms Bowles:** At the club level—yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** How do the clubs approach that? You sort of said it is a bit individualised, but do they tend to have policies or is it just that they know the families and they work it out?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes—it is about knowing the families and having relationships in order to build the connections or, where possible, lean on other community services around town to support and connect people. It is definitely very much about who you know and who knows what across the system, rather than it being centralised: “Here’s a really simple way for someone to be able to access some additional support to participate in sport.” That is a really critical opportunity that we have here in Canberra to lean on. Other states and territories have things in place like voucher schemes, which we have not looked at here. I am not saying that is the be all and end all and the solution of a silver bullet.

**MR RATTENBURY:** My next question was about voucher schemes. We hear them talked about. Do you have a view on their applicability or their effectiveness in engaging people, particularly those in hardship? Is it something that Basketball ACT is happy to look at?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes—we are definitely happy to look at it. We need to look at how we go about providing support. Is it the silver bullet that everyone is thinking of? I am not necessarily sold on that, but we definitely need a user-friendly and streamlined approach to how we can provide support to those who really need support to participate in sport and to stay engaged in community services.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I will go to a slightly different line of questioning. Basketball ACT is heading for an expansion of the Belconnen facility. Are you able to give us an update on what is happening with that?

**Ms Bowles:** We have partnered with the ACT government to look at that facility expansion. We are currently in the infrastructure and planning stage of that. That will take us to about February, when that planning and design will be finished, and then we will have a really good understanding about the cost model and the things we can actually fit within that expansion and undertake.

**MR RATTENBURY:** You do not have a formal agreement yet on how that project will go forward?

**Ms Bowles:** We have a high-level agreement. We are working towards three new indoor courts with up to 1,800 seats, a retractable stadium and extra car parking, but we do not have a figure on what it will cost and what it will look like. This planning and design phase will be critical to work through what it looks like.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Does that head agreement resolve the ownership model?

**Ms Bowles:** It talks about where we are heading for the ownership model. It has not solved the ownership model. The ownership model of that is the next thing we have to work through with the government.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** Given that there is a need across Canberra for more facilities, what underpinning work was done that led to the Belconnen expansion being the next project?

**Ms Bowles:** Basketball ACT did a feasibility study on where the best place would be in Canberra—where is the demand and where is the need? From the studies that were done back in 2021-22, we definitely saw that Belconnen and the north had that opportunity. We then presented a business case to the ACT government, which looked at it and did a deep dive from a business case perspective. The government then looked at what land was available across town, what was happening, and then determined that the lot alongside the basketball stadium, as it currently stands, which we currently own, is the best place for the next development site for a basketball stadium. That is how we landed on that.

**MS CARRICK:** Are we able to get that analysis?

**Ms Bowles:** I can provide you with the presentation that we gave to the government.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** I want to ask about the representative body for community sports. What is needed to address the multiple gaps?

**Ms Bowles:** We spoke before about everyone getting on the same page and aligning to advocate for what the facilities' footprints look like in the sector. Facilities planning and development is critical. It is also about looking at more social impact things, like sports behaviour, keeping sports safe, and what key inclusion practices look like. Having a much more collective approach and someone who is not necessary in the government to do that work alongside the sector will really increase the sector's ability to step forward in some of these critical areas, in order for us to come together rather than work in a bit of a siloed approach.

**MR EMERSON:** In terms of facilities planning and also investment, what are the inefficiencies that you see in using the grants process, lodging bids and that sort of thing? If you see inefficiencies, do you think a representative body could help with that?

**Ms Bowles:** Yes. I think our inefficiencies at the moment lie in the fact that we do not have a plan for the long term—forward thinking. The fact that we currently rely on election cycles to look at our planning, what is committed to and those types of things is flawed, especially when we know our size and that our land footprint is not changing in the foreseeable future, unless you guys can change borders or something like that.

**MS CARRICK:** I asked, but—

**MR RATTENBURY:** We are working on it!

**Ms Bowles:** We know that it takes time to invest and plan, and there are huge costs. We are not talking about just a couple of thousand dollars that the government can deal with; we are looking at big investment infrastructure. That needs to be well thought out and well planned. It needs to take into account the hubs and where we put them. Woden puts a perfect case forward about making sure that it is in a centralised hub, in Woden's centre, so that it is easy to access with public transport, for kids—all those types of things. Why does Belconnen and Tuggeranong work really well with stadiums? Because they are right alongside key infrastructure, around the centres, to support people coming and going, and do not necessarily rely on mum and dad to drop kids off all the time. It takes timing and planning to look at that. They are the critical things.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you have a sense—it might be hard to quantify it—about time saved for an organisation like Basketball ACT if you were not having to make submissions for facilities investment at every election cycle or every budget or grant round? Do you have a sense of how much of your time goes into that sort of stuff?

**Ms Bowles:** It would save so much time, and there is the cost of doing it and doing the surveys. We are a sporting organisation. We do not have the technical staff at hand to do that. We work with other sports or other bodies to lean into the key reporting and infrastructure that is needed. It would definitely save time and money in being able to plan where we are going to grow and to have some forward thinking around what that looks like and means for us. For example, at the moment we have 20 full-member clubs. If we knew that we had another facility coming online somewhere and we did not have a really strong club developed in that space, we would know that we would need to work with them to get them to a particular stage, and we would need to make sure that they have support to run that facility or handle a number of teams. It is not just about the facility itself; there is also all the governance and infrastructure to, as I said before, run a really good quality product that people want to keep participating in and engaging with.

**MS CARRICK:** I hear it is difficult to keep volunteers these days, to build up refs, umpires and managers, and keep everybody engaged. I do not know how the Dodgers build it up, being scattered across seven school halls. Can you explain why it is important to have stadiums where clubs can come together to build up the vibe and build up—

**Ms Bowles:** Cohesion and community connection.

**MS CARRICK:** the managers et cetera.

**Ms Bowles:** When you compare basketball to other sports, you definitely have a different sense of community. The AFL and the NRL have clubs where they play. They have a home ground. They have a different sense of ownership and connection to the space, as opposed to basketball, where it depends on the week, the team and the program you are in. You are forever going to facilities that are not yours or you do not have as

much connection to them. That puts a strain on it. You have one-off training, so you are not building up that community and the connection across teams or age groups, whereas other sports are able to, based on the way that their facilities are planned and interaction is designed. It leads to greater collaboration, shared responsibility across the organisation, and increased volunteering, because they know that they just have little loads. It is not: “You’re the team manager for this team and you need to open the venue, close the venue, know the security codes and everything else that goes with that.” There are definitely lots of opportunities from creating much stronger basketball hubs for us, as opposed to being so scattered across the place.

**MS CARRICK:** I do not know how many clubs do this, but the Dodgers basically dump their juniors because they have only one or two JBL teams. All those kids do not play anymore.

**Ms Bowles:** Something that Basketball ACT are working on in our next strategic plan and in looking at our competition framework is how we assist with the transition from junior basketball to senior basketball. We are working with our clubs on how that transition happens, how it works and what resources need to go around that. At the moment in the junior basketball space, you have a captured audience in terms of volunteers, with parents contributing to the sport. The problem with volunteerism at the moment is that, when players transition to the senior programs, they become a little more independent and do not necessarily want mum and dad around to support with that. As a sport, we need to make sure that we have the frameworks in place regarding how they can they still be supported, but not necessarily in the same way that they were as a junior athlete. How we can strengthen the transition from junior to senior basketball and keep them involved in our sport are things that we are definitely looking at as a sport over the next four years.

**MS CARRICK:** That would be great.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. You took a question on notice from me, so please provide your answer to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*, but I do not mind if you need to take longer.

**MS CARRICK:** I think there was one from me too.

**Ms Bowles:** Yes. I think there were two. The list and—

**THE CHAIR:** The presentation.

**Ms Bowles:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** The secretariat will confirm that with you. Thank you very much, Nicole. We appreciate your time.

**Hearing suspended from 3.31 to 3.42 pm.**

**MODDE, MS LORI**, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoors NSW & ACT

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome Ms Lori Modde from Outdoors NSW & ACT. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Ms Modde:** Yes, I would. Thank you for the opportunity to join in remotely. I just got back to Sydney, after a stint down in Canberra, so it is great to be able to join you virtually.

I am the CEO of Outdoors NSW & ACT, which is the peak body representing the outdoor sector in New South Wales and, increasingly, in the ACT. We support outdoor adventure, tourism, outdoor education, recreation, and nature-based wellbeing initiatives, such as nature therapy, probably the largest-growing sector of our industry.

In essence, we work with people to help to get people outdoors more often in an active, safe, sustainable and inclusive way. As a side note, I am also the secretary of the federal peak body, which is the Outdoor Council of Australia, which holds the Adventurous Activity Standard which all our operators look to comply with.

While we have a strong and growing footprint in the ACT, we are not formally recognised as a peak body there, even though we are in New South Wales. That lack of recognition is a key barrier to making sure that we can expand our resources and the support that is needed to deliver the same outcomes for Canberrans that we already achieve in New South Wales.

At present, our work in the ACT includes supporting local operators, educators—some of the schools are members in their own right—and running training and networking events. We also advocate for outdoor recreation—hence my being here today—as it is an essential complement to organised sport. This work is largely unfunded and, with recognition, we could search to do so much more.

Outdoor recreation is a vital part of the sport and active recreation ecosystem, providing flexible, inclusive and often intergenerational opportunities for participation, particularly for those who may not engage in traditional club-based sport, yet it is not fully reflected in ACT policy frameworks at this time.

One of the most pressing barriers that we see is the qualifications that we require for outdoor activities. These are essential for safety, workforce development and youth employment. Currently, CIT—the Canberra Institute of Technology—does not offer outdoor leadership qualifications, leaving aspiring leaders without local training pathways. Reinstating these qualifications would build the skilled workforce needed to lead outdoor activities and grow the sector sustainably.

If we were recognised as a peak body, we could extend proven participation programs to engage more schools, young people, certainly the culturally diverse communities and people with disabilities. Delivering non-accredited training would be another thing that we could do to build workforce capability. We could support preventive health

initiatives that use nature-based activity to support mental and physical wellbeing, strengthening collaboration as well between government, land managers and schools. I believe you might have heard from the Climbers Association this morning, one of our key colleagues, about some of the challenges of working with land managers, on which we would like to support them.

Our strategic imperatives are to grow active recreation, develop workforce, improve our sustainability by appreciating, acknowledging and understanding nature, and promoting equity and inclusion, aligning directly with the ACT government's objectives for participation in community sport and recreation.

In closing, recognition of Outdoors NSW & ACT as a formal peak body would certainly unlock that enormous potential for the territory. With that recognition and appropriate support, we can help more Canberrans to experience the proven physical, social and mental health benefits of getting outdoors. Thanks so much for your time, everyone. I welcome an ongoing discussion.

**MS CARRICK:** Who are your members in the ACT?

**Ms Modde:** Currently, as I said, the opportunity is larger than what we currently have. The resources enable me to come down only so often. However, quite a significant number of schools have joined our network. When I say "significant", we have everything from early learning through to primary schools and high schools, such as Canberra Grammar School, Blue Gum Community School, and Woden Valley Early Learning, to name a few.

We also have Outward Bound Australia, which is a key provider based in the Canberra region. We have the Child Safety Network Australia, which is providing immense services in child-safe standard delivery, in working with our operators. There are operators in the tourism sector, like Cycle Canberra, Mulga Bicycle Tours, Dynamic Motivation, which works out of Stromlo, and the like. I cannot think of any others off the top of my head.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you run programs through those organisations?

**Ms Modde:** Correct, and that is why we do not actually comply with the current definition of a peak body, because we do not run the programs ourselves. We help to facilitate, and we build that capacity by delivering education and professional development for those organisations. YMCA would deliver the programs; Birrigai Outdoor School would deliver the programs; Cycle Canberra might deliver the programs. We help to facilitate the connection to opportunities for them.

**MS CARRICK:** What sort of opportunities would you facilitate and what sort of education would you contribute?

**Ms Modde:** A great example was last weekend; hence my discussion about just returning back to Sydney. We ran an outdoor learning conference down at Birrigai Outdoor School, where we had 70 educators come onto the site. We developed a whole day and a half program, sharing practice and skills to get more kids outdoors more often. That is, as I say, for everything from early learning through to primary school and high

school—getting them to try some of the activities of the outdoor experiences. We tend to be a bit of a pathway for people to enter sport because the first time they get in a canoe is often on our programs in the schools.

**MS LEE:** Following on from that, in terms of the recognition as a peak body, are you recognised in New South Wales?

**Ms Modde:** Yes, correct. All the outdoor peak bodies across the country are recognised by their sport and recreation departments. Outdoors WA gets funding from Sport and Recreation Western Australia. I get capacity funding through the Office of Sport in New South Wales to deliver capacity development in recreation outcomes.

**MS LEE:** In terms of not being recognised in the ACT, is it because you are fairly new in the ACT or is it that you have actually requested it and you have been turned down because you do not deliver the programs directly?

**Ms Modde:** The latter. We do apply for the occasional grant to deliver some of the programs, but the programs are more on that education professional development level that I was just speaking to, not the on-the-ground facilitation of recreation. I have been able to get a little bit of support in that way. We applied to be a peak body, but because the definition was around how many programs we delivered, it was not defined in black and white, so we were not eligible.

**MS LEE:** In the ACT there is not the capacity element for which you mentioned New South Wales delivers funding to you?

**Ms Modde:** Yes, I believe the sport and recreation department have a fund where they support peak bodies. It is on either a two-year or three-year basis; I cannot confirm, but it is one or the other. We have applied for that, so that we could get some resources based in Canberra to do what we are doing across New South Wales. Unfortunately, that was rejected because we do not facilitate.

**MS LEE:** Your submission also calls on the ACT government to expand the definition of community sport to include active recreation.

**Ms Modde:** Yes.

**MS LEE:** Is it included in the New South Wales definition?

**Ms Modde:** Yes, correct. We heavily engage with the Office of Sport in New South Wales on their strategic planning every four years, and there is a high component of recreation. It recognises the transition of recreation as being a pathway to competitive sport and vice versa; it also recognises that a lot of that percentage of population do not want to participate competitively. Our statistics also tell us that people are wanting to do more than just recreating, when it comes to competitive activity.

**MS LEE:** Is it just because you have not been included historically, or is it that you have asked to be included and you have been rejected in the ACT?

**Ms Modde:** Yes. There are definitely some more opportunities for sport through the

programs that are offered by sport and recreation in the ACT. As I say, I love the team there. I think they are great. They work within the policy framework that they have, and they have supported things like our summit. We were able to send some ACT participants to that, with their support, which was fabulous. But we have not been able to get the capacity growth area, which means that we certainly could be doing more in the space of connecting people with recreation.

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question follows on from Ms Lee's question about the growth in this recreation space. Can you tell us about the kind of trends that you are seeing? You have touched on it a little bit, but it would be great for us to understand a bit more about what is happening in this space.

**Ms Modde:** I can give you a snapshot, certainly, of my whole industry, which is made up, as I say, of those different areas. I have pulled some data out of our census. By way of background, we complete a census every 12 months; it goes out to the broader industry for completion every January. I pulled all the ACT content out of there, and I can tell you whatever data you would like to know from that.

What we have seen generically across the board is the movement into recreation and out of sport. The Australian Sports Commission have verified this in their data: non-competitive, non-club-based activity has certainly risen outside COVID. That growth has certainly increased. I could probably get you the data from the Australian Sports Commission. I do not have that in front of me, but I am happy to send that post this meeting, so that you can see that verified.

From our statistics, in the ACT 31 per cent of all the activities that happen in the ACT are based in the territory, but 43.9 per cent of those that are based in New South Wales go to the territory for recreation activities. There is 17 per cent in Victoria and the rest is split between WA, Northern Territory and overseas. You have a bit of a tourism opportunity there, which I have spoken to Jonathan Kobus about a number of times.

In the outdoor recreation space, 22 per cent of all the activities are considered to be recreation, in the outdoors; 39 per cent is in education. They are coming here for an education outcome—doing the activities of recreation, but with an education outcome. The opportunity to grow that is quite large. In New South Wales, that is a lot closer. In the New South Wales figures, you see a very close sector split between education and recreation.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What is the nature of those recreation activities? Are there broad categories that you can describe to us?

**Ms Modde:** Certainly. Seventy-three per cent of all the activities do bushwalking, 73 per cent do camping—obviously, that is potentially combined—56 per cent is paddle craft, 43.9 per cent is mountain biking, 41.5 per cent is rock climbing, 41 per cent is nature play, conservation is 39 per cent, road cycling and cycle touring is 36 per cent, and the list goes down for another 15 or so activities. That gives you the top figures. I can send it to you. If you want the data, I can send you the break-up.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That would be handy. I am interested in what some of those categories are. Do you see particular gender or demographic profiles in that? Are we

seeing younger people, older people, more men or more women?

**Ms Modde:** That is a really great question. We are seeing a lot more women in our space than we have ever seen before. We have been traditionally very male-focused. With a lot of activity we have been doing in New South Wales, I am hoping I can claim we have seen a bit of a transition. That being said, we are seeing a lot more women come into the space. In the ACT, we have some great Facebook networks of women in the outdoors that are doing some magnificent stuff, which I have been supporting.

Yes, we have seen growth. We have just done our first cohort of the women in leadership program in the outdoors, which the New South Wales government funded. It was an amazing success. We had some ACT participants on that. I got permission for that from the New South Wales government; they approved it. In the second cohort, we have growth in the number of ACT women participating. It is great to see that we have up-and-coming leaders. That probably goes to that second point that I made around the qualifications; that is really lacking in the ACT, in order for them to progress their own careers.

**MR EMERSON:** In your submission, you mentioned that your remit includes nature-based health initiatives.

**Ms Modde:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** What sorts of initiatives are you referring to there?

**Ms Modde:** Outdoor health, or what is called nature therapy—it is sometimes called outdoor therapy—is probably the largest growing of all the sectors that we look after, but it is coming from a very small base. We are seeing this area of growth because of the mental health challenges and the growth of NDIS programs. Things like that have spurred on that activity, to look at natural health remedies in the outdoors.

I am sure you have all heard the term “forest bathing”. Japan and many other countries have been adopting this for quite some time. We are just starting to tap into it, which is great news from a health perspective. I think we all felt that way, coming out of 2021. The opportunity in that sector is enormous, and we are now starting to engage with therapists, psychologists and doctors, to really look at the opportunities of connecting with outdoor recreation, as part of that.

**MR EMERSON:** How has that progressed? I do not know whether there are jurisdictional comparisons, in terms of making nature prescriptions, and that sort of thing, or whether it is happening within either allied health or a GP-type setting. Where are we up to?

**Ms Modde:** It is still working off a very small base. I am involved in an organisation called Western Sydney Moving, in Sydney, which is the first health promotion charity of its type. We are investigating a nature prescription model with Western Sydney University. We have a long way to go. The unfortunate part is that we have a pharmaceutical industry that benefits greatly, and has for many years, and transitioning that into looking at other remedies will be a slow churn. We need to do so, for the sake of proactive health.

I am often in Canberra, wearing my federal peak hat, advocating for more proactive health budgets. At the moment, Australia-wide, two per cent of our whole health budget is spent on proactive health. This is looking at opportunities to increase that.

**MR EMERSON:** I want to ask about how you have managed with advocacy around that sort of thing. For instance, here in the ACT, we have an age-friendly city plan. It is focused on how we can make the city a better place for seniors. In the 2020-24 plan, there was a whole range of actions. The only one that was dropped from it was delivering the nature prescriptions program, and I have been trying to ask why that happened.

**Ms Modde:** Absolutely, yes.

**MR EMERSON:** It was on the basis that there were competing financial constraints; that was the reason given. How is that going? Are there places in Australia or abroad—you mentioned Japan—that are leaning more into that, and willing to look at how they can save money by investing more upstream?

**Ms Modde:** I cannot comment on specific case studies, but I can tell you that there is now a federal peak body called Outdoor Health Australia, which I work with, and that shows you the movement towards this type of activity. I can certainly get examples for you. Next weekend, the Outdoor Health Symposium will be held in Lennox Head. They come together to work on opportunities and trying to do more in this space. Again, we are running off a very small base. There is such an opportunity for the whole social environment.

I would be really keen to pull apart why that was pulled out as well, because I think that is groundbreaking. This is the future. We have to start getting into this space a lot more. AUSactive have been a colleague in this, knowing that they need to advocate for proactive health measures as well.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned outdoor leadership certificates in your submission. Are they a barrier to participation in outdoor recreation?

**Ms Modde:** No. When you say participation, as participants, they can come and conduct any of the activities without that qualification. It is the leaders that need that qualification.

**THE CHAIR:** Are those leaders volunteers most of the time?

**Ms Modde:** A lot of them are. I deal with ScoutsACT and Guides NSW and ACT, and all the leaders that conduct those must be assessed and qualified against their framework. With respect to my members, I will give you the example of Canberra Grammar School, where the head of outdoor learning has a Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership as well as a Diploma of Education. If you are conducting things like Duke of Ed or any outdoor education, that is the required qualification for planning, safety, environmental and cultural connections.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you had any contact with our Landcare groups? They are

outdoors. It is good for our health to be out there doing land care. We have quite a lot of those groups, so they are potentially a good network.

**Ms Modde:** Yes, I would love to connect with them. Unfortunately, due to the low capacity of being in Canberra a lot, I am often there for my members. At the moment I do not have any of those as members, so I have not connected with them. But we do in New South Wales, so I would love to explore that, because you are right; it is a massive opportunity. I am working with a lot of councils in New South Wales and connecting that opportunity with Landcare and some of the assets that they hold, and where they do not know the capacity or what the opportunities are for recreation.

**MS CARRICK:** They have a very big volunteer base. They have strong stewardship over their areas. They are working on mountains. We have a lot of hills, ridges and mountains around here.

**Ms Modde:** Yes. I am connected very much to your bushwalking clubs. A lot of them tend to be part of those Landcare groups. but I have not spoken to them at that level. I have spoken to them at the bushwalking club level; obviously, we support them with a lot of the activity that they do.

**THE CHAIR:** We will wrap it up. Were any questions taken on notice?

**MS LEE:** No. She was going to give us some data.

**Ms Modde:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Feel free to send that data through to the secretariat when you have the opportunity. Thank you very much.

**Ms Modde:** The Australian Sports Commission information, the growth of non-competitive sport, and I will send you the ACT activity data.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today.

**CALLAWAY, MS EMI**, Trainee Instructor, Canberra Parkour  
**MAYERSEN, MR ISAAH**, Trainee Instructor, Canberra Parkour  
**PALMER, MX BELLE**, Trainee Instructor, Canberra Parkour

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome witnesses from Canberra Parkour. Thank you very much for joining us. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make brief opening statement?

**Ms Callaway:** Yes, please.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; fire away.

**Ms Callaway:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It is an honour to be here to speak about our story on behalf of our community leaders and fellow members, who are currently in Adelaide at an annual National Parkour Gathering. Parkour has had a significant impact on my life. I have grown up here in Canberra and spent many years training in gymnastics and other sports, competing both nationally and internationally. But, after dealing with injuries, I had to reduce the intensity of my training. That is when I discovered a gap. While there were so many sporting and exercise options in Canberra, a lot of them are expensive or require consistent weekly commitments that just were not manageable while studying fulltime or now working as a registered nurse doing rotating shiftwork.

When I found parkour, I did not know what to expect. Like many people, I assumed it was something risky, a sport for people who seek adrenaline, or something only for the people who are very fit. But what I discovered could not have been more different. Parkour, at its core, is a movement underpinned by philosophy. It is about learning to move through your environment efficiently from point A to point B. It allows you to explore spaces using your body's movements with control, creativity and care. It involves refined, thoughtful movement, often slow, technical and very personal. More importantly, the Canberra parkour community welcomed me in. They supported me to train at my own capacity. Even while recovering from an injury unrelated to parkour, I was still able to participate, grow and feel like a part of the community.

Parkour is truly a movement discipline for everyone. In Adelaide, there have been classes run for people aged 55 and over. In London, there have been parkour sessions for people age 70 and over. Here in Canberra, our community already includes people of diverse backgrounds, genders, ages and abilities. We come together not just to train but also to connect, to challenge ourselves physically and mentally and to support one another. Our community is growing steadily. A major factor has been the addition of a purpose-built indoor space at BlocHaus in Mitchell. This allows newcomers to try parkour in a safe, controlled environment.

But parkour is fundamentally an outdoor practice. It is about interacting with the real world. Our free outdoor training sessions happen multiple times a week across various public spaces in Canberra. These are welcoming, accessible and community-led. Outdoors, we have many passersby who stop by to engage with us, and we are able to lead by example and show just incredible parkour is and how capable our bodies are

with movement.

We would love our community to grow and provide more options for Canberrans and the wider community to stay active and engaged. However, the quality and safety of these public spaces is holding us back. We often train in the dark after work, with little or no lighting. We train in rain, extreme sun and in cold winters. Our regular spots sometimes contain hazards like broken glass, sharp objects or used needles. There are loose rails or bricks, cracked concrete, or even uneven surfaces. These are barriers not just to our ability to do parkour but also to participation. It is already a very brave step for someone new to come out and try parkour. Add in unsafe or uninviting environments, and many simply just cannot take that step, even if they really want to.

That is why we are here today to ask for your support to improve our places and spaces. Upgrading lighting, cleaner environments, better public infrastructure or even purpose-built parkour features in existing parks would go a long way to making parkour more welcoming, safer and more sustainable for the wider Canberra community. What we are building is not a group of athletes; it is a community of people supporting each other to move, grow and thrive. Parkour allows people to start exactly where they are, physically, mentally or financially, and progress at their own pace with a community that is right behind them. That is pretty rare, and it is worth supporting. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sold.

**MS LEE:** Let's just sign up.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am in.

**THE CHAIR:** Canberra Parkour's submission mentioned elements like wobbly rails, loose bricks and hazardous waste. Is there a process within the club to report these through Fix My Street or get them flagged up with the government in some other way?

**Mr Mayersen:** Yes. We attempt to notify Access Canberra when there are these sorts of issues, particularly like wobbly rails and these sorts of damages. But the process can take quite a long time and does not always work out. Spaces like around libraries and things that we often train at quite frequently have broken glass. That goes away of its own accord, but it can be a week or two. We do try to report these things when possible, but not super frequently—and just as individuals, not in the capacity as a community. We also occasionally sweep up some stuff or remove dead branches and things like that ourselves.

**Ms Callaway:** We often take rubbish bags with us and tidy up areas that we are in for our own safety but also just tidying up the spaces for everyone as well, especially when there are rails that are loose or loose bricks or things like that in areas such as outside Belconnen Library and the amphitheatre area. That is part of the wheelchair ramps and things like that as well that is accessible and open to the whole community.

**MS CARRICK:** There are so many public spaces out there in the community. What attributes are desirable and why do libraries sort of feature?

**Mr Mayersen:** That is a great question. The kinds of spaces that are ideal to train in are ones with lots of obstacles that are close together. This makes them very accessible to beginners, and most of our community is on the more inexperienced side, training for, say, one to two years. So we are looking for spaces. Disabled access ramps tend to be really good, because, for example, at the Canberra Theatre Centre, there is concrete so you can jump between them. In other cases, there are rails you can jump over. Otherwise, lots of small walls provide the opportunity to jump between them, through them. Then, with a large combination of objects, you can come up with lots of challenges, lots of games, and a large group of people can be there for a long period of time.

Occasionally, there are good spots that might only have one or two challenges at your level and we might spend half an hour there. But, for most of our gatherings, because we want to be inclusive to people that have a really high skill level and a lower skill level, we look for areas with lots and lots of sort of smallish to low objects. For example, libraries are good because there is often like outdoor seating and staggered heights. Apartment buildings sometimes have gardens around them and those garden beds can be good to jump between. Otherwise, there are areas with lots of blocks. There are some parks in Canberra that have lots of bollards or blocks that can be used as well.

**MS CARRICK:** I noticed that you mentioned the Woden Library, and I was wondering about the Woden Town Square because it has lots of the stages fixed so you can go down the side of that, and big pots that I would assume you could jump. I think there are lots of things in there. Is that a spot that you use?

**Mr Mayersen:** It is, absolutely. We have major spots in the town centres. Woden Library is kind of the main one for Woden. We have one in Tuggeranong, Belconnen, and Gungahlin and several here in the city. The Woden spots are really terrific because there are those rocks that are very great for beginners to jump between. That large metal statue appeals to some more experienced practitioners. Then, around the corner—and it might not look so appealing—there is also a large utilities platform.

**MS CARRICK:** An electrical substation, by the look of it. It is all graffitied.

**Mr Mayersen:** Yes, that one. We can jump from that to the footpath and then there is a big ramp attached to the building next to it that is also quite useful. So there are lots to do there.

**MS CARRICK:** You guys would be very good at identifying where maintenance needs to be done.

**MS LEE:** She has a new policy idea.

**MS CARRICK:** You know, loose rails and loose bricks, as you say. Anyway, that was it.

**MS LEE:** This might be a bit weird because it probably goes against the grain of the whole using the environment around you, but are there jurisdictions that have dedicated sort of parkour training facilities that have been built?

**Mr Mayersen:** Absolutely there are—yes, 100 per cent. That very much feels like the way of the future for parkour. Increasingly, there are dedicated parks built in Australia and then there are plenty all over the world. These outdoor parks are some of the best because they allow people to come at all times of day, they are very welcoming and children can practise there. Whereas, for example, at our indoor facility in Canberra, which is part of BlocHaus, children are not able to participate without really high supervision requirements, which makes it prohibitive for kind of an after school thing. But parks make that possible. I think there are at least one or two dedicated parks in Sydney.

**Ms Callaway:** Yes. There is one big one called Ballam Park down in Melbourne. As a community, many of us went down last year when they ran a few days of games down at Ballam parkour park. It is quite a big facility. It is set up kind of like a playground—just a big adult version—that anyone can come and use. It was quite pleasant being there and being surrounded. I was injured at the time, so I could not really participate, but you saw adults jumping, you saw parents participating with their children, just using the space, having fun and being creative. Having a whole community come together like that is really something amazing.

There is one in Parramatta in Sydney that was quite recently built. We often travel up to Sydney to use the space and, whenever we go, there are always people there. Even if we do not contact any of the Sydney parkour community, we show up and there are people training using the space.

**MS LEE:** Fantastic. In terms of the spaces that you use around the ACT, do you have limitations like on the time of day that you can use it, for example? The example that came to mind was when you are talking about the ramp in front of Canberra Theatre. There would be times of the day that you probably cannot use it because there are people using it.

**Mr Mayersen:** Yes, of course. Being kind of a smaller area, the Theatre Centre is more of an evening training spot for us. The Canberra Theatre Centre are super helpful. They are totally fine with us training there. If they have an event or something going on inside, security comes out and lets us know 10 minutes beforehand that people might be leaving or coming. They are happy for us to do one or two last jumps and we leave and everyone is very happy. So that is definitely the case.

But then certain spots are pretty much always available. For example, one of our main spots that gives us our logo is just around the corner upstairs from Cafe Mingle. It is a courtyard that is pretty much always free. Occasionally, there are a few people having lunch, but it works as a great spot on the weekend. And, for example, at Gungahlin, there are some big rocks near the final tram stop. It is next to a playground, so there are kids around, and it is a lovely environment, and it is always free to jump.

**MS LEE:** Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What is the size of the parkour community in Canberra? I realise that is probably not super formal, but how many fellow parkours do you have?

**Ms Callaway:** We have a group chat that we use to let other people know when people are going out to training. In that, we have over 100 people.

**MR RATTENBURY:** How do people get involved?

**Mr Mayersen:** Parkour attracts a lot of different people through different ways. For some people that is video games, movies and media—they see it and they get interested. There is lots of online content and they reach out to us through social media, because we try to advertise ourselves that way. Many active members of the community that joined in the last year or so found their way to us through BlocHaus. It is mostly a climbing gym with a small parkour space and, if you are there to climb, you might see a couple people doing parkour and go over and say hi.

Less frequently, you might see us jumping around in public, because there are fairly public places, on a weekend, and people come over and say hi. They may not join in that time, but they might ask us if they could join the group chat. It is very inviting and of course completely free and so they might join us at a later date.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay. Thanks.

**MR EMERSON:** This is along the line of previous questions, but do you have any issues—you have not raised it in the submission; I do not think—about getting moved along or anything like that? Or does Canberra have enough space that it is not an issue?

**Mr Mayersen:** That is a really good question. In Canberra, we found to have very few problems in terms of sharing spaces like that. I know in other cities it is a much larger problem. We are very rarely moved along. At the main spaces we meet at, we know what times they are available and what times we are not clashing with anyone. So, no, I do not consider it a problem.

**MR EMERSON:** Great. You mentioned in the submission that the Newcastle City Council has partnered with Newcastle Parkour and making improvements in their CBD. What does that partnership look like and what would something similar look like in the ACT?

**Mr Mayersen:** Newcastle has a really, really strong parkour community. It is almost the home of parkour in Australia at the moment. A major parkour gym there collaborated with the city council and they rebuilt an outdoor space, I think, near the city centre. So they took what was an empty space and they installed chairs and plants with good wooden platforms and layout and then with a bunch of rails over it. It looks like a nice, lovely park, and everyone can sit down and have your lunch there during the day. But it is also perfect for doing parkour, because there are heaps of jumps and heaps of rail swinging stuff. We call them laches.

**THE CHAIR:** Happy with rail-swinging stuff.

**MR EMERSON:** I prefer laches.

**Mr Mayersen:** It is really terrific. If you do not do parkour, you are like, there are a few more bars here. It looks really beautiful. I would love to see something like that in

Canberra where we take a space that needs redevelopment but is a public space in some kind of a city centre and we put in strong and sturdy chairs and benches and rails and we make it accessible to people that want to have a picnic and people that want to do parkour. That is what the ideal parkour park kind of looks like.

**MR EMERSON:** You have mentioned sometimes cleaning up when you are out at certain spots. Do you ever do running repairs on public assets? If it is easy to fix a rail, will you fix it? Is stuff like that comes up?

**MS CARRICK:** Take a screwdriver with you.

**Mr Mayersen:** There is some discussion about these sorts of things, but it ends up being a bit tricky in terms of feasibility. In terms of putting some bricks in place, if there are a few loose bricks, we can put them in and we can kind of put some adhesive down. With loose rails, if it is missing a screw, we can screw it in, but often they are not very easy to repair. What these kinds of things might look like in practice is if a rail is loose but we want to do a jump, we will have two people bracing it so that the person can land on it safely if necessary. So we try, but it is not so easy.

**MR EMERSON:** I want to go back to the Fix My Street portal, where you can report issues. Can you provide a bit more detail about what your general experience has been when doing that—if you receive a meaningful response or any response, if you are reporting things multiple times over, how that unfolds?

**Mr Mayersen:** I cannot speak to that in detail myself, because I am not the one that makes most of those reports. That would be our more veteran members and community leaders. I know that, with major things—if a rail is really falling off or things are really broken—they tend to get repaired fairly quickly. But for things like broken glass and graffiti, we do not get terribly much of a response is my understanding. But I also cannot speak to that super authoritatively.

**MR EMERSON:** In your submission, you spoke about lighting. Obviously, you are practising at night. Are there locations where you go, “This spot is actually really good,” like model cases of “this is the kind of lighting we need in more locations,” or not really?

**Mr Mayersen:** I would not say there is anywhere really good. There are some places that are adequate for night and some places that are not. I have heard members of the community say that they simply do not want to train at night because they are too worried that they will not be able to see where they are landing when they are jumping, which I understand.

**MR EMERSON:** Seems pretty fair.

**Ms Callaway:** We have taken a battery candle out with us in the past to try and get a little bit more lighting, especially upstairs from the Cafe Mingle where we train quite often. The light there was broken for a very, very long time and we could not see anything aside from the apartment lights that gave us a little bit of lighting.

**Mr Mayersen:** There are a lot where the lighting is adequate but it might be like half

the space and we cannot use the other half at night because it is not well lit.

**MS CARRICK:** As a sport do you engage with the ACT government, the Sports and Rec Directorate?

**MS LEE:** Aside from Access Canberra.

**MS CARRICK:** Aside from Access Canberra, trying to get things fixed. But there is a sports and rec area in the government.

**Mr Mayersen:** Not to my knowledge, no, but I would not know for certain.

**Ms Callaway:** Our community leader could probably answer that question better than us.

**THE CHAIR:** It would probably be a more Transport or City Services or something like that because of the terrain is so different.

**MR RATTENBURY:** You have described a sport that sounds both very inclusive and low-cost, which in a world in which people are lonely, a bit isolated and broke a lot of the time, it sounds really ideal. But you are probably not very well-known, so it feels like a real gap there. Do you have any ideas on how to overcome that gap? Are you trying or are you just sort of doing your thing?

**Mr Mayersen:** No, we are very actively trying. A major challenge that our community faces is attracting new members. But it is something we very actively work towards and something that is deeply embedded in parkour culture. As I think we wrote in our submission, the key part of the philosophy is “be strong to be useful” and altruism. We find parkour really helpful to ourselves and we want to share that. Everyone that trains parkour wants other people to do parkour and to join them, but it is really hard because oftentimes it is challenging to convince someone to come out and train in the dark and the cold. On the weekend it is a little bit better, but it is still like, “Instead of going to a gym, we are going to go to a park and we are going to jump around and do strange and exciting things.” So advertising is definitely the challenge.

What limited research there is into parkour has shown that environments are an extremely deciding factor in take-up. Where there are parkour gyms—and there is one in Sydney, for example—they massively grow the community around them because that is a safe space. But dedicated parkour parks also result in massive growth in the community.

Yes, parkour is completely free—and to an extent that is hard to even believe, coming from other sports. If you come to a parkour training session, you will be taught by absolute experts completely for free. They are totally willing to share all their knowledge and you just join in on the challenges other people are participating in and everyone that can help you will help you and you can ask anyone for advice at any time. We go out for group lunches. We might go, for example, to a park or somewhere a bit further out of town that public transport is not accessible, but people will always drive you. Even if you are new to the community, you can get a lift. If you cannot pay for lunch, we will buy a meal to share. We could not be more supportive. We have many

students that are broke and everyone just gets along. It is very affordable.

**Ms Callaway:** Yes. Aside from the environmental barriers, with it being a bit scary to go out, I think there are a lot of misconceptions in the media about what parkour is. A lot of people hear “parkour” and they go, “Nah; I can’t do that.” Getting that gap closed would be one of our biggest challenges that we are working. We have tried to post videos of small to big jumps on our social media accounts so that people can see that a small jump is still parkour and the ways you can get engaged aside from the big media stuff that you see of—

**MR RATTENBURY:** I think it is many people’s perception quite a subculture—and probably the more extreme end of it, which is what you tend to see.

**MS LEE:** Like jumping over rooftops and stuff and flips.

**Ms Callaway:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Which is, do not get me wrong, spectacular, but it probably does not feel very accessible.

**Ms Callaway:** Yes. Tackling those misconceptions that the media especially portrays, as well as making our spaces more inviting and less scary to go to, so it is then just the barrier of trying a new movement, a new sport, as opposed to all these factors contributing.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thanks. It sounds like a lovely community.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, it does.

**Mr Mayersen:** Thank you.

**Ms Callaway:** It is.

**MS LEE:** Do you have just an anecdotal sort of gender split? Is it quite heavily dominated by blokes or women or anything like that?

**Mr Mayersen:** We do not have exact statistics, but there is a slight difference between indoor classes, which run twice a week at BlocHaus, and outdoor jams. With indoor classes, the gender split is typically between 50-50 to two-thirds male. In outdoor jams it varies from about two-thirds to maybe about three-quarters male. Especially at night we get more men than women, but we do actively encourage women to join the community and we have volunteers such as Emi who try to support other women really well.

**MR EMERSON:** Thanks. I am following you now; so you have one extra follower.

**MS CARRICK:** I want to see your video now. It looks awesome.

**MR EMERSON:** Next weekend.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, we thank the witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We thank Broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload it to the Parliamentary Portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today. The meeting is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 4.31 pm.**