



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25](#))

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2025

Acting Secretary to the committee:
Mr A Walker (Ph: 620 74843)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	20
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2.43 pm

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Starick, Ms Kate, Acting Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Bailey, Mr Daniel, Executive Group Manager, Operations, Economic Development

Kobus, Mr Jonathan, Executive Branch Manager, Tourism and Investment, Economic Development

Triffitt, Mr Ross, Executive Branch Manager, Events ACT, Economic Development

Smyth, Mr Brendan, Commissioner for International Engagement

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Economics Industry and Recreation for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024-2025. The committee will today hear from the Minister for Tourism and Trade, Mr Andrew Barr MLA, and officials.

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 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. This hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and web-streamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses use 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 welcome the Minister for Tourism and Trade and officials. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. It has been a big year for tourism in Canberra. Page 62 of the CMTEDD annual report shows that \$135.9 million in economic return was generated through events under the Major Event Fund. That is an 87 and one return on investment.

The aviation industry development acts as a key pillar, presumably, in our tourism strategy and making it cheaper and easier to travel here for such events. What has engagement with the aviation industry looked like in practice for 2024-25, and what is planned for the next 12 months?

Mr Barr: We obviously have a strong emphasis on aviation industry partnerships. Outside of the drive and bike market and those who catch the train, most other tourists are getting here on an aeroplane. Particularly for our Victorian, South East Queensland, South Australian and markets further afield flying is the way that most of our tourists

arrive. Then, clearly, anyone internationally—and perhaps a small exception of those who come in on a cruise ship—are likely to be flying either directly into Canberra or into Canberra via one of the major airports.

Our focus on aviation engagement includes participation in a number of the major annual aviation events. The Australian Tourism Exchange, which is really the biggest tourism sales event held annually, organised by Tourism Australia, with each state and territory having a presence, has an aviation section and a number of days of that near week-long event are dedicated to what I could describe in shorthand as aviation speed dating. There are often dozens of airlines and airline representatives, and nearly every major airport in Australia is represented. We use that opportunity, with really everyone in the industry gathered in the one place, together with Canberra Airport, to have an engagement with most of the major airlines, domestic and international, who service Australia.

The other major aviation event is the Centre for Aviation. The Australia Pacific Branch of CAPA hosts an annual event that provides an opportunity, again aviation specific, to hear directly from often the CEOs of airlines. The 2024-25 event was held in Cairns, and at that event I had the opportunity to meet directly with the CEO of Virgin Australia, with the head of Qantas Domestic and with a number of international airlines, including Air New Zealand. This is a very efficient way, frankly, for us to get in front of those airlines. Mr Kobus, as head of Visit Canberra, and Canberra Airport are also involved in those discussions. Part of this is around our joint marketing arrangements that are funded through Visit Canberra and the Aviation Stimulus Fund.

Other elements are around new route development. The areas that we are particularly focusing on in the domestic sense including further direct connections to and from Canberra with major regional population centres. The two that we are particularly focusing on, in partnership with the Queensland government, are the Sunshine Coast and Cairns. But we are also working with the South Australian government to improve Canberra/Adelaide services. We have been working with Virgin Australia as they bring the new Embraer E2s into their fleet, which are predominantly going to be based initially on the west coast, to look at Canberra/Perth connections potentially.

We are also working with smaller regional airlines, such as Link and FlyPelican, to get direct Canberra connections—including places in Tasmania and Avalon Airport; so a Geelong/Canberra connection—looking at obvious aviation routes that are, I guess, a stretch beyond what is drivable but that are linking key population centres and providing an inbound tourism opportunity for Canberra as well as allowing Canberrans visiting friends, relatives and the like to be able to travel by air to destinations that might be, for example, six- to eight-hour drives away but an hour-long flight, which makes them very viable for the smaller regional airlines.

In the international context, Qatar Airways will begin their daily services to Canberra next month. We continue our engagement with Fiji Airways around increasing the frequency of their existing service. Our international airline engagements are focusing particularly on Air New Zealand and Qantas in relation to services to New Zealand, and Singapore Airlines as it relates to an Asean connection from Canberra.

We will also continue to focus on partnerships with Jetstar—they really being the

predominant low-cost carrier in the Australian domestic market—and we will be working closely with them on new route developments or increasing the frequency of services to city pairs they already currently serve, which includes Brisbane, Melbourne and the Gold Coast.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MS CARRICK: I want to turn to table 33 on page 159 of the CMTEDD annual report. It is the ACT Event Fund recipients. It says that this fund is a “key mechanism for generating a range of positive economic, social and community outcomes for the Canberra region”. Would you be able to provide the location of this “positive economic, social and community outcomes” for each of these funding recipients?

Mr Barr: They are obviously ACT, but I presume your question is internally within the ACT.

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Mr Barr: For many of them, the benefit would be spread across the city, because Canberra is a relatively compact place, and so people who come to visit may stay at hotels in a variety of different locations in most parts of the ACT. Metropolitan Canberra obviously have accommodation centres. They also have hospitality venues that people who attend events may frequent. So I think it is going to be difficult on the granularity. I cannot break it down by suburb or street and probably not even—

MS CARRICK: What about district?

Mr Barr: Probably not, no. But we can get ACT level—

MS CARRICK: Where they are held.

Mr Barr: Where they are held?

MS CARRICK: Where these events are held—what district?

Mr Barr: We can certainly get some information in relation to that. Some obviously would be participation events—for example, fun runs—that might cover multiple districts.

MS CARRICK: That would be great; thank you. Many of these events are city-centric. How are you making sure that the town centres have the venues and the government support to develop a program of events there and that there are people in the government thinking about how to activate the public spaces in the town centres to have good events?

Mr Barr: We obviously support a range of events that are held in the town centres themselves or in district parks, including north and south of the lake. We encourage applications into the fund from a variety of sources and we seek to fund a wide variety of event types that support community participation across a variety of different demographics. Not everything is geographic, Ms Carrick. We also need to look at

different groups within Canberra and their opportunities to participate.

I think it is important to recognise that everywhere in Canberra is pretty close to each other. The maximum distance that you would travel for any event in the ACT is likely to be less than 40 kilometres and, in many instances, probably 15 to 20 kilometres would be the most distance most people would travel. Events that are held centrally, obviously, are more accessible for more people, because the distance required to travel to a centrally-held event is going to be less for the majority of people.

MS CARRICK: It would be great if you could provide the events that you have mentioned that you provide in the town centres, the annual events in each town centre and what annual events you provide. Will you take that on notice?

Mr Barr: Yes, I will take that on notice for you.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. Why does Dickson have support from the CRA for an annual event, the Lunar New Year Celebrations, whereas other areas outside of the CRA area do not have that government support?

Mr Barr: I think Dickson is recognised as Canberra's Chinatown. It has a very strong historical basis for that, going back to the 1960s. The City Renewal Authority is not part of this hearing, but I will answer the question anyway. That is a historical location, where there is a very strong Asian community and where the community itself, particularly in relation to Woolley Street, made application to the City Renewal Authority for that event with a view that it would recognise Lunar New Year each year. It is very well-attended event from people right across the ACT. I would say that, since the 1960s, that has been an area that has had a very strong Asian community focus.

MS CARRICK: Terrific, but there is a strong Asian focus in Gungahlin, Molonglo, Woden—all around. There are strong—

Mr Barr: Yes, but the history of Canberra's development—

MS CARRICK: But it does not matter; we are talking about now and activating areas now. Good town planning would say that our commercial hubs are vibrant, and events play a big part of creating a vibrant commercial hub. So the question is: what are we doing to ensure that our major hubs are vibrant?

Mr Barr: There are a number of events and activities that are supported through this events fund and through other programs of ACT government that seek to celebrate both cultural diversity and our communities' diversity that are held across different locations right across the Australian Capital Territory.

MS CARRICK: Thank you; I look forward to seeing that.

MS LEE: Mr Emerson asked whether I was going to defend Dickson. But, no, I do not need to do that. Chief Minister, in terms of the Event Fund, obviously there are a number of recipients and the amount varies. Is this a matter of everyone applying for different amounts? What is the, I suppose, ratio in terms of if people apply for \$30,000 and they get \$20,000 and that kind of thing?

Mr Barr: People do apply for different amounts. Generally speaking, the requested applications exceed the size of the fund. I do not think that would come as a surprise. The committee that makes the independent recommendations in relation to the allocation of funding will at times agree to 100 per cent of the request or in other instances will recommend an amount somewhat less than what has been requested but that would still allow the event to continue but perhaps not at the scale that the organisers might have requested. That is necessarily a balancing act to fairly distribute the available resources.

As I mentioned in the answer to Ms Carrick's question, the criteria are necessarily broader than just geographic; they need to encompass a variety of other factors, including diversity of event types, diversity of participants, and factoring in the reality that Canberra is a relatively small place and that the ability to participate in an event is broader than just its geographic location.

MS LEE: Of course. In terms of getting the notice out about the availability of these funds—just going to the success of that—do you have a breakdown of the percentage of applicants that renew each year?

Mr Barr: We would, and we can certainly—

MS LEE: You can take that on notice?

Mr Triffitt: Yes, we could certainly provide that. I do not have that information available but we can certainly provide that. I will take that on notice.

MS LEE: Thank you very much.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about the “There's more than they're telling us” campaign. The media buy for that campaign for 2024-25 shows ad purchases for domestic locations of Sydney, New South Wales more broadly, Melbourne, Victoria, Brisbane and South East Queensland more broadly. How are these locations chosen?

Mr Kobus: We base our media buy on key domestic markets where we see the greatest opportunity to generate overnight stays in Canberra. That is influenced by access. So, from the perspective of New South Wales, the drive market. Regional New South Wales and Sydney, being our dominant tourism market, makes up about 65 per cent of total overnight visitors to the ACT.

Then there are other places in Australia where it is easy to access Canberra—for example, where we are well connected by air. In South East Queensland we have very good aviation connections from South East Queensland. We have just spoken about some of those through Jetstar, for example, connecting us to Brisbane and the Gold Coast. But Qantas and Virgin are also well connected to South East Queensland and then to Melbourne as well. That also helps draw in a catchment from regional Victoria.

Understanding where it is the easiest and cheapest to get to Canberra from these places, we can then base media buy on those locations, put a proposition into the market and encourage those people to visit.

Mr Barr: It is also worth noting that they are the biggest cities. That is where the population is.

MR EMERSON: Has that been steady over recent years? Do you experiment and try a little bit in Tassie?

Mr Kobus: The drive market for Canberra is consistently the largest market, with 65 per cent coming from either Sydney or regional New South Wales. It makes it easier to come to Canberra because it is legitimately on the radar as a short-break destination, particularly that weekend market, and when there are things like events on it is easy to make a decision to come here.

We have seen some really strong growth from South East Queensland, which is really pleasing. A lot of the work that we are going is working with airline partners and doing specific campaign activity into that market, putting the Canberra proposition to the South East Queensland people. We are seeing a good response to that. We have seen some good exponential growth in that over the last few years.

Separate to Sydney and regional New South Wales, Melbourne and regional Victoria are the second-largest markets, with South East Queensland coming in third. If we manage to get better aviation connectivity to cities like Adelaide, we would absolutely consider how we do more into a market like that to encourage visitation from those places. But, whilst we have limited capacity to influence drive market from a place like Adelaide and aviation connections not being ideal, it is not efficient to continue to spend a lot of money targeting the South Australian market, as an example.

MR EMERSON: The international market chosen was India with targeted locations of Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. How was India selected? Why weren't other international locations chosen? Is the government considering or currently running this campaign at other locations in this financial year?

Mr Kobus: We have several international markets that we focus on. Our approach to international is slightly different, where we follow the lead of Tourism Australia and ensure that we can leverage effectively off where Australia is being sold as a place to visit with their campaign investment. The most efficient way for us to then work off the back of that is to come in just underneath to ensure that we can educate agents, do media programs and ensure that Canberra is considered as a place to visit as part of an Australian holiday rather than a destination in and of itself. Tourism Australia spend significant amounts of money in key markets like the US, China, India and the UK. Our best opportunity is to make sure we are following and working with them to ensure Canberra is on the radar when people are considering an Australian holiday.

MR EMERSON: I think maybe the answer I missed is why India was chosen for this specific "There's more than they're telling us" campaign unless it was followed into the Tourism Australia—

Mr Kobus: India is one of the strongest growth markets for Australia. We see significant opportunity for India to be a market that Canberra can capitalise on. India is a market not only from a leisure tourism perspective but also from a strong education

perspective. There is a significant Indian diaspora here. So the visiting friends and relatives market is really strong.

Mr Barr: The largest diaspora now is the Indian community.

Mr Kobus: India is a really important market for us to continue to grow to support our business case to return international flights—for example, with Singapore Airlines. India would be a significant market to make that service sustainable.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, I understand the Canberra Brave are a fairly significant drawcard with regard to tourism, following—

Mr Barr: Sorry, the?

MS CASTLEY: Canberra Brave. After their move to the AIS this year, where they had both regular and season games as well as Team USA, they brought significant international and obviously interstate visitors. As the Minister for Tourism, has an opportunity to discuss the tourism benefits with the Brave owner or to thank him for his contribution to the ACT economy popped up?

Mr Barr: Not with me, but I understand there have been members of the government who have participated in dropping the puck, I think, at a Brave game, and the Minister for Sport obviously—

MS CASTLEY: But you have not had any interaction?

Mr Barr: Personally, no, but I obviously cannot have personal interaction with every single tourism operator or, indeed, every single sporting team in the territory. Certainly when the Brave were established, I had a lot to do with them. Under the current owner, we were very supportive of their decision to rent the AIS Arena, and it has been tremendously successful for them. It is certainly built on a strong local following, and we wish them all the best for the coming season.

MS CASTLEY: As I understand, the ACT government provided significant funding for the 10 games of the 2025 NBL Blitz as well as marketing assistance from the ACT government, and this was because of the tourism benefits that it would create. In contrast, the Brave received significantly less funding but generated substantially larger benefits, particularly with respect to generating interstate tourism. Why are the two treated so differently?

Mr Barr: I am not sure that that is factually correct in relation to the different outcomes, noting of course that the NBL event was held over five nights; whereas, if there were more Brave games— Given that all of the NBL teams are interstate, there is obviously a greater network of travel in relation to that. The NBL, as the sponsoring entity, have a desire to re-establish a team in Canberra. We took a commitment to the last election to support that. So it was logical to continue our engagement with the NBL.

MS CASTLEY: Can we talk about per seat sold. Is it correct that the support provided to the NBL was in the order of \$5 or so per seat sold, compared with less than 50 cents for the Brave. Do you have that detail?

Mr Barr: Not at the moment, no, but we could take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you; that would be great. Did the government offer the Brave any marketing assistance or other promotional support as it did with NBL, or were they treated as—

Mr Barr: They are principally supported under the Sport and Recreation Program. The bulk of their audience is Canberra based. It is not like there were two and half thousand interstate and international visitors for each game. There were a lot of Canberrans who were part of the audience. If the Brave wish to have the focus on bringing interstate fans to Canberra, presumably the fans of the interstate teams who are playing here, then they are certainly welcome to approach government in that regard.

MS CASTLEY: So is it correct that the government has offered so little sponsorship that they have declined an offer? Have there been any discussions with the Brave about government sponsorship?

Mr Barr: As in government sponsorship of the Brave?

MS CASTLEY: Yes.

Mr Barr: Well, we certainly have under—

MS CASTLEY: Of the games –like making sure that it is a big deal for Canberra.

Mr Barr: The government has supported the Brave directly with funding.

MS CASTLEY: What about for 2026?

Mr Barr: That has not occurred at this point that I am aware of.

MS CASTLEY: No conversations?

Mr Kobus: Visit Canberra have not received any sponsorship proposal from the Brave specifically. But we do promote their games through the channels that we own—through our website, social media activities and other mechanisms—through the season, and we will continue to do that.

Mr Triffitt: That is certainly the same for Events ACT. We have had no approach from the Brave. We do support the games that are on through promotion through our channels.

MS CASTLEY: But do you wait for them to approach you or do you look at the benefit to the ACT and make an offer to—

Mr Barr: No; we would seek them to approach us. We do not have available funds to just splash around anywhere; we have to evaluate things.

MS CASTLEY: I understand. I am not asking to splash it around; I am just asking do

you go to people when you have considered the benefit to the ACT and say, “We’re willing to partner with you”? But no is obviously the answer.

Mr Barr: Generally, we do not. People will approach us in relation to seeking that support.

Mr Smyth: I have met with the Brave and, if there are any opportunities we have got to promote with them, we try and stay in touch.

MS CASTLEY: On the issue of iSports tourism, I note that the owner of the Brave has called for the Convention Centre to accommodate iSports. Is the government actually considering this proposal and, if so, could you give me some specifics about what actions you are taking?

Mr Barr: The short answer is no, because it would alienate the facility for use by anyone else for many months of the year, which is the experience of the AIS Arena. The purpose of the Convention Centre is for business events. The purpose of the Entertainment Centre is for entertainment, like music events. Its supplementary use is for convention of business events. The only way it could be used for iSports would be that a drop-in rink could be put in and out within a few days. It could not sit there for months by the end like it does at the AIS Arena. So it is not impossible for it to be utilised, but the bump in/bump out period would need to accommodate the hundreds of other events that the new Convention Centre will hold, and its principal purpose is a business event centre, not a sport centre.

MS CARRICK: My question is on output 1.3 “International engagement”. The budget has gone from \$2.3 million in 2024-25 to \$3.5 million in 2025-26. Why has there been like a 50 per cent increase?

Mr Smyth: It is because we have got an ever-expanding remit. Part of the problem with international engagement is that it is so open. For instance, we often come in very much over the number of events we plan and we often come in very much over the number of in-bound delegations we have, because we simply do not know who is coming. Then opportunities arise. For instance, recently in Fiji, we were asked to sponsor a thing called HOTEK, which is their largest hotel and tourism expo, in October last year. We worked very closely with Visit Canberra to support the flights. We also took industry there, because Fiji is looking to upgrade their food and beverage offering.

MS CARRICK: That is okay; I was just wondering why it had increased.

Mr Smyth: As a result of that, a Canberra firm has now—

Mr Barr: If I could just interrupt. The main factor was that the trade responsibilities were added to the international engagement area and moved out of another area. So Mr Smyth’s team took on a broader remit in relation to trade.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. With the \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million, what number of staff are employed, or what will it go from in 2024-25 to 2025-26?

Mr Smyth: I now have 10 full-time staff, and there is an additional staff member.

MS CARRICK: Out of the 10 full-time staff, why is that, in the performance indicators—the target and the outcome—it talks about at (b) that there were a number of ACT businesses exporting because of this, when the target was 10, but there was one ACT business exported because of essential support received from the Office of International Engagement?

Mr Smyth: As you would be aware, there is a lot of turmoil and upheaval in the international trade markets. A lot of our businesses look specifically to the US and, where there is uncertainty, people do not travel. The second factor was that we do a cooperative position with the commonwealth called the Trade Start Advisor. We had a Trade Start Advisor for many years and he decided to retire, so we recruited. We got a new chap and, after a couple of months, he had to move back home. So we then had to go through the recruitment phase again. So part of it is international turmoil and part of it is that we did not have the dedicated position to deliver that.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about Floriade About Town. I am on the page where it says, “Discover the 2025 Floriade participants here”. Unfortunately, that link does not work anymore, which is probably fair enough given it has already happened. But I was wondering how many participants there were in that program and how the effectiveness of the program or that initiative is measured and if you are tracking increased kind of attendance and that sort of thing.

Mr Triffitt: Approximately 80 businesses were involved this year. Last year we had approximately 40. We will do a survey of all of those businesses that have been involved to seek feedback from them as to whether there was any enhanced foot traffic and any feedback they may have about improving the program. But, essentially, it is designed to leverage off the Floriade audience and promote those local businesses and their offerings.

MR EMERSON: Is that survey—if it was done last year—available? Has that been done for this year? Might the results—

Mr Triffitt: I think it is just going out now.

MR EMERSON: I assume you have a summary of feedback from last year?

Mr Triffitt: Yes.

MR EMERSON: Would that be okay on notice?

Mr Triffitt: I can take that on notice, yes.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. Has any consideration been given to doing something similar with other events, like Enlighten?

Mr Triffitt: Yes. We have the Enlighten Beyond Program.

MR EMERSON: Of course, yes.

Mr Triffitt: The focus of that particular program is more on programming elements—for example, ticketed events. But we are considering how that might expand into other offerings that other businesses may have.

MR EMERSON: I guess I am thinking about you get to the end of the night and you have had a great event, but there is still more night left. How do we get these people kicking on, especially in the city?

Mr Triffitt: Obviously, the events are stimulating visitation. We are working with those city businesses or businesses in town centres on how they may be able to attract the audience that we have for Enlighten. Certainly night-time activities and the night-time economy are all considerations in that program as well.

MR EMERSON: With that question on notice, do you think you could share the survey questions from this year as well?

Mr Triffitt: Sure.

THE CHAIR: We have to wrap it up. On behalf of the committee, thank you all for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answer to the committee's secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. We also thank Broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 3.16 pm