



**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

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2025

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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	140
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 10.28 am.

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

Jeffress, Mr Stuart, Executive Branch Manager, National Arboretum and Stromlo Forest Park.

Elkins, Mr Matthew, Executive Branch Manager, Venues Canberra

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation for its Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25. The committee will today hear from Mr Andrew Barr MLA as Chief Minister and Minister for Economic Development 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 this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

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.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. Chief Minister, you have spoken over the past few months about the impact of the federal election on Canberra's economy and the expectations for the impact it will have on growth in the capital region. Can you discuss the quantum of recent commonwealth investment and the expected hopeful planned impact on the territory economy?

Mr Barr: Yes, thank you. I think members may be aware of the ABS data that was released yesterday in relation to Australia's national accounts and the detailed information by each state and territory. The pleasing news is that the ACT had the highest rate of increase in gross state product of all states and territories in Australia at 3.5 per cent in chain volume terms, and we also had an increase in GSP per capita too.

THE CHAIR: GSP being gross state product?

Mr Barr: Yes. State final demand also increased at a nation-leading level. So what we have seen is a commonwealth contribution to that outcome. The three main factors that led to that fastest rate of economic growth of any state or territory was the contribution from the commonwealth in the public administration and safety area of our economy. The next strongest performing sector was the education and training sector, and then the third strongest performing sector was health care and social assistance. So a number of commonwealth programs and policy setting adjustments have supported the growth of the

territory economy.

The alternate pathway, which was reasonably clear in the federal election earlier in the year, was one of significant contraction in the territory economy, principally driven by decisions that were to be made in relation to the size of the commonwealth employment base in the territory as well as the cancellation of a number of major infrastructure projects that would have resulted if the federal election result had gone a different way.

The commonwealth is obviously a major contributor to both our GSP and our state final demand and its spend both on the capital side as well as its consumption in our economy is very significant. The outcome in relation to GSP is that the journey for this economy this century has been that it has grown every year. In the year 2000 the ACT and Tasmanian economies were the same size. Our economy is now 25 per cent bigger than Tasmania's and the ACT's economy has grown faster than the other states and territories over that period. In a global context, there would not be many parts of the world that have had three decades of consecutive economic growth and that have also seen increased diversification of their economy.

I indicated those three main areas that had contributed to economic growth in the last 12 months: public administration and safety, which is, of course, the main part of our economy; education and training; and health care and social assistance. But there were also contributions to economic growth from electricity, gas, water and waste services; transport, postal and warehousing; information media and telecommunications; financial and insurance services; professional scientific and technical services; as well as the ownership of dwellings. So the increases and real industry value add have been quite significant.

That also extends into arts and recreational services and administrative and support services, and retail trade provided a small increase as well. That was largely reflected in the increase in private consumption. What we have seen over an extended period now is that real wage growth has been present in our economy—so wages increasing faster than inflation—and that combined with the interest rate reductions have increased the amount of disposable income in our economy. That is flowing through particularly into consumer spending in a number of areas.

I think there are some very positive things to focus on in that GSP data. There are some challenges as well, and so we need particularly to look at further encouragement of private investment. The government has a number of objectives contained within the economic development portfolio to encourage that.

Equally, in the context of the commonwealth's involvement in our economy there are a number of infrastructure and precinct partnerships that are part of this area of my portfolio responsibilities and, of course, the commonwealth makes significant investments in its own owned assets in the territory. Probably the biggest project in that context at the moment is the new National Security Precinct located in the National Triangle. I could talk for the next hour and a half on that, but I am sure the committee would prefer to go to other topics.

THE CHAIR: You talked about the increase in private investment. Is that linked to the territory's new venture capital fund? When I first heard about that my assumption was

that the fund would look to encourage or support not private investment but private ideas and private innovation. Is that how it is supposed to work?

Mr Barr: There is a private investment partnership associated with the procurement of the fund. There was not just a government contribution; there was also a matched private investment as part of the fund. The fund has only just been established, so its impact is not in the previous financial year of the annual report period but will be seen going forward.

THE CHAIR: What will its parameters be?

Mr Barr: Ms Starick who has been involved in the development of the fund, is the expert here.

THE CHAIR: Please, tell me about the parameters, who is engaged in it, how it is supposed to operate and what we hope to see from it.

Ms Starick: As the Chief Minister said, the outcomes that we are seeking from the fund are probably threefold. One is growing the small business and investment startup locally in the territory, so increasing the number of innovative early-stage commercialisation opportunities in local ACT businesses.

The second outcome is attracting inward investment by multiple pathways. One is that, as the Chief Minister said, the fund was established to match the territory's funding with inward investment. So currently there are a number of investment partners—UNSW, the ACT, as well as some local ACT family investors—but that is at first close. So at first close the fund is at \$23 million. The fund will grow at the second close to \$50 million. It is a registered early-stage venture capital limited partnership and it has been registered to \$50 million. So that ambition is to attract additional inward investment.

If we retain talent and businesses in the territory, we are an established, I guess, innovative precinct. That in itself attracts additional investment. In the ACT government, we have an investment concierge, as well as a close relationship with Austrade. So it is part of a broader ecosystem that we have established around attracting inwards investment in the ACT.

Early-stage venture capital limited partnerships have a life cycle, if you like, of about 15 years. The first stage is sourcing investment opportunities, then there is a period of investment management and then the fund towards the end of its lifecycle will divest. That brings us to the final aim of the venture capital fund, which is to provide a return for investors. All of the information about the internal rate of return and the parameters of the fund are in our investment plan and the responsible investment policy and the licence deed, which are all online currently.

THE CHAIR: Will there be enough information next year about how it has operated and the impact it is having to ask useful questions, or should I wait until 2027?

Ms Starick: There is performance reporting as there would be in any funding agreement.

THE CHAIR: Just sample size?

Ms Starick: Yes. What I can tell you now is that since the fund went live ACTivate Capital has a website and there is a form people can fill in with their investment opportunity. There have been more than 70 approaches already. The role of the investment committee is to assess those proposals. One thing venture capital funds do that perhaps other programs do not offer is that kind of close mentoring and business development. So there will be a process where that is done. And then probably early in the next year, as they move through that committee process and the board starts to look at the opportunities that come through, there will be some decisions made around investment opportunities.

MS CARRICK: Congratulations, Chief Minister, on your ABS data and your increasing GSP. That is good. How does that increasing GSP and the data take account of the increasing borrowings?

Mr Barr: They are not related, perhaps only to the extent that the ACT government's economic activity is a factor that the ABS would measure, so our borrowings would be measured in that data either on the capital side as it related to ACT government capex or as a measure of public consumption through our opex expenditure.

MS CARRICK: What did the ABS data say about how well we went with the capex side of things?

Mr Barr: When you say "how well", as in the volume of it?

MS CARRICK: I think you said we had the highest increase in GSP.

Mr Barr: That is correct, yes.

MS CARRICK: So how did we go relatively with the capex side?

Mr Barr: ACT government consumption added 0.3 of a percentage point to the growth in 2024-25, and ACT government invest capital investment through public corporations also added 0.3 per cent. The general government investment subtracted a little because the rate of capital expenditure was lower in 2024-25 than the previous year. But overall in public investment terms the ACT government was a net contributor to that economic growth figure, but a relatively small one given our share of the economy is smaller than the commonwealth obviously.

MS CARRICK: So you are responsible for a number of reasonably large projects in the central area. Are you able to tell us the indicative cost of each of those projects?

Mr Barr: Which ones are you referring to?

MS CARRICK: The Canberra Theatre Centre, the casino, the convention and entertainment centre, Exhibition Park, the new Canberra stadium as part of the Bruce Sports, Health and Education Precinct and Telstra Tower.

Mr Barr: The Canberra Theatre Centre is in the final stages of procurement, as we

discussed in the hearing with Infrastructure Canberra the other day.

MS CARRICK: Perhaps it would be a good one to take on notice.

Mr Barr: I can talk to it now.

MS CARRICK: No, because there are other questions.

MR RATTENBURY: I am going to ask the same question, so we may as well just roll through it.

Mr Barr: The Canberra Theatre will have a final cost and a contract, and we will publish that once that process is finalised. The Casino Canberra development is a private sector development, so there is no ACT government involvement. There is a regulatory focus and potentially a timing of land release component in relation to the Casino Canberra development, but that is not a government capital works project.

The convention and entertainment centre, as has been announced, is a project that is jointly funded for the next stages of development between the commonwealth and the territory government, and the fiscal allocations are in the budget papers. The Exhibition Park redevelopment is a project we are largely managing within existing resources. When we have further announcements on progress there we will make those public.

The Bruce Sports, Health and Education Precinct is again a commonwealth and territory partnership. It is being led by the commonwealth as they are the principal landholder in the precinct, but we are at the table. Officials have had three meetings to date. But it is largely commonwealth money and they are leading the process.

In relation to Telstra Tower, as we discussed in the previous hearing, that is largely a commercial project for Telstra, but our involvement is in relation to how much space we may lease within the facility and what degree of programming and activity we would support within our lease or any subleasing arrangements that we would enter into. The commercial negotiations are ongoing. It would be fair for me to say that some of the initial commercial offers from Telstra have not been acceptable for the territory in terms of a rate per square metre, and so we are continuing that negotiation. We want to see an outcome, but we are not going to pay over the odds on a per-square-metre basis for space that we would occupy within that facility.

The amounts allocated for each of those projects where they are not undertaken within existing resources are outlined in the budget papers for this year. Any further expenditure in those areas would unlock a provision that is held centrally and would be reported upon in either the budget review or next year's budget.

MS CARRICK: So you will not have to add further money to the budget? All of that is already covered in the budget?

Mr Barr: At this stage all the work we are undertaking is within the allocations in the budget or within provisions that have been set aside. If we need to make any further investments we will need to take that through the budget process and take it through the Assembly for approval. But at this point in relation to those projects I have no further

asks of the Treasurer at this point in time.

MS BARRY: Chief Minister, on the ABS data—forgive me this is not my space, so I am not across it—I think you mentioned that wages are growing above inflation?

Mr Barr: What we have seen is that the ACT has had amongst the highest levels in terms of what is measured as the wage price index. So that has been higher in the ACT. And the consumer price index, which is the accepted measure of inflation, has in fact been a touch lower than the national average. So when you subtract one from the other, wages are growing a little faster than inflation.

MS BARRY: Are we tracking that over productivity?

Mr Barr: Certainly the ABS also have measures of productivity, and what is contained within the national accounts is a measure of gross state product per capita. So that shows that the increase in the ACT was 2.1 per cent in fiscal 2024-25. The next largest increase for any state or territory was Tasmania, and that was 0.7 of 1 per cent, so our GSP per capita increased three times faster than the next highest. Australia wide GSP per capita went backwards by 0.3 of a per cent.

So there were only three jurisdictions that had GSP per capita growth: the ACT, number one at 2.1 per cent; Tasmania, number two at 0.7 of 1 per cent; and Queensland, number three at 0.4 of a per cent. All the other jurisdictions went backwards, and overall Australia went backwards by 0.3 of a per cent. So our performance relative to the other states and territories is three times faster and greater growth than the next on a per capita basis, and one of only three to increase, which is a pretty remarkable result for our economy.

MS CARRICK: Are you able to tell us not so much the private sector ones where there is no ACT government investment but the ones where the ACT is spending money and what the timeframes for these projects are?

Mr Barr: The Canberra Theatre Centre is in the final stages of its procurement, and once we release that contract that will have the construction timeframes. But suffice to say early works are already underway, so that is imminent. The casino development is a private sector one. The convention centre timeframe is that the focus in this next three years—so the balance of this parliamentary term—will be on getting the project to a shuttle-ready investment stage. Construction will not be commencing on the convention centre until the new aquatic facility is open.

MS CARRICK: What is the timeframe for the new aquatic centre?

Mr Barr: We are in the middle of community consultation at the moment around the features of that facility. We have a project budget, but we also need to work with the National Capital Authority. I will have some more definitive information once we know exactly what we are building and what requirements the NCA are going to place on the siting within Commonwealth Park.

MS CARRICK: Do you expect it to be this term if you want to be shovel ready for the—

Mr Barr: I would certainly expect that construction will be underway on the aquatic facility in this parliamentary term. In relation to the Exhibition Park redevelopment, there are a range of smaller projects underway within the precinct, but the larger scale ones will necessarily take a longer timeframe. When I have more information and exact dates on proposed projects within the precinct, I will update the Assembly.

The Bruce Sports, Health and Education Precinct sees a number of projects within that precinct. The commonwealth have funded the Australian Institute of Sport upgrades to the tune of about \$250 million, and I understand that construction on that element of the precinct will happen in the next few years. I think the desire is to have it ready for the Olympic cycle 2028-32 ahead of the Brisbane Olympics.

In relation to the health components—that is the North Canberra Hospital—this committee, or perhaps another committee, has discussed the timeframes associated with that. Our interests in the process with the commonwealth include a potential housing element within the precinct and some mixed-use activities. I would envisage that the planning work is going to continue over the next few years, and we will have some further announcements on progress in due course.

Then the Telstra process, we would have loved it to have been resolved already but, as I said in my earlier answer, we just cannot pay over the odds for the commercial space there. That is not a realistic prospect. I think Telstra understand that, and if I need to escalate matters to the head of their infrastructure group or the CEO as negotiations continue I would do that.

MS CARRICK: I am pleased to see a couple of things in my electorate—the Arboretum and the Stromlo Forest Park. What is the scope of works and the budgets on those spaces?

Mr Barr: Yes, there are tracks and trails works at Stromlo as well as some further works at the Arboretum. I will Stuart to come forward and talk a little more.

MS CARRICK: And the timeframes.

Mr Jeffress: In relation to Stromlo Forest Park we have a budget allocation for implementing tracks and trails master plan for stage 1 of \$900,000 over two years. We are commencing that work with the assistance of Infrastructure Canberra. A couple of key steps upfront will be to do the environmental and heritage clearance work so that we can undertake construction. That is currently out to market under procurement. And we have also undertaken consultation with our key user group and stakeholder, the Stromlo Forest Park Stakeholder Consultative Committee and we have got key priorities from that group. So for Stromlo our key priority is implementing that budget initiative of \$900,000 over this financial year and next financial year.

For the Arboretum, we have an asset renewal program, which also covers Stromlo a bit as well, and we are implementing that through budget funding. That looks at asset upgrades such as lighting in the car park and the deck next to the Arboretum. So basic infrastructure upgrades across the arboretum are also being implemented as well.

Mr Barr: Also understand that in another agency there has been a successful procurement of electric vehicle chargers for the Arboretum car park. Stuart, do you want to update the committee on that?

Mr Jeffress: Yes. NRMA are working with us on site through the climate change initiative to roll out some electric vehicle chargers at the Arboretum in the car park so that visitors when they arrive at the Arboretum will be able to charge their electric cars. Tis in the early stages, but that project is underway.

Mr Barr: As Mr Rattenbury will recall, we have a particular program to locate those EV chargers in locations where tourists would dwell to support a growing part of the drive market, which is people who take their EVs on road trips. I think it is important and will help the Arboretum attract more people as a result of having that charging infrastructure.

MR RATTENBURY: I want to follow on from the questions Ms Carrick was asking on some of those infrastructure projects. I want to check in on the commonwealth contribution on a few of them, so let me work through them. The convention and entertainment centre, the commonwealth has announced a \$100 million contribution so far.

Mr Barr: Yes, that includes the pool as well.

MR RATTENBURY: Across both projects?

Mr Barr: Yes. So the commonwealth contribution to the pool is a tad under \$70 million, leaving the balance for the convention precinct, and we are matching those. So that is how we get a pool budget of a tad under \$140 million and effectively around \$60 million for all of the works associated with the development of the Convention and Entertainment Centre Precinct.

MR RATTENBURY: Would you anticipate a commonwealth contribution to the convention and entertainment centre when that project proceeds past this initial phase?

Mr Barr: Certainly that is our expectation and what the Minister for Finance has said. When she was asked the question publicly said that, yes, the commonwealth contribution would continue beyond the project development phase into the construction phase.

MR RATTENBURY: So that should enable the project to, in a sense, come forward a little bit. In the previous discussions we identified the struggle for the ACT government to afford that alone.

Mr Barr: The caveat being we are going to keep the pool open until the new one. So really the start point on any construction timeline for the convention and entertainment precinct is completion of the aquatic centre. So the aquatic centre has capital funding from the commonwealth and from the territory government in the forward estimates.

MR RATTENBURY: On the EPIC redevelopment, I take it you are not intending to apply for any commonwealth funding given your earlier comments?

Mr Barr: Look, it will depend on the elements of the redevelopment and whether any would be eligible for commonwealth funding. In large part I would not anticipate they would unless there was a mixed use and potential housing component that might be eligible for Housing Australia Future Fund contributions. Obviously there is a range of conflict of use challenges that you would need to manage.

But the Exhibition Park site is very large, and its north-eastern extremity is adjacent to existing accommodation, being the student accommodation and the caravan park on the other side of Well Station Drive, I think it is. There is also the new suburb of Kenny that is sort of adjacent to Exhibition Park. In thinking about the broader precinct and range of activities that could occur there, there might be some that could attract commonwealth funding, and we will need to look at what we put forward.

In the end there is a reality around the ACT's likely share of the annual four-year and ten-year commonwealth infrastructure spend that is going to track reasonably close to our population share. To some extent we are agnostic about which projects they support as long as in theory, in a hypothetical example, in a billion-dollar ACT government infrastructure program a commonwealth contribution across a range of projects that was in the order of between \$200 million and \$300 million would broadly reflect our population share and would allow us to offset between 25 and 30 per cent of the total infrastructure program through commonwealth contributions.

The projects will vary. Clearly there are established infrastructure asset types that the commonwealth has a long history of being a funding partner for—roads, bridges and public transport, are examples. There is less of a history of commonwealth investment in hospitals. There is a reasonable history of some commonwealth investment in education facilities. We have seen that through various iterations of commonwealth schools funding; they have had infrastructure components. So it really depends on the project and the scale of the commonwealth contribution you are seeking.

As we discussed in the hearing the other day, once it is above a certain threshold, then there is an Infrastructure Australia process. So in terms of more immediate and quicker avenues to commonwealth funding, asking for relatively smaller contributions across a range of projects is a way to get that contribution up more quickly.

MR RATTENBURY: I want to clarify something you said in response to Ms Carrick's question when you were talking about the Bruce precinct. You made an observation about it being commonwealth led.

Mr Barr: That is correct, yes. The commonwealth government provided funding in the same budget that they allocated the \$250 million for infrastructure works at the AIS. They also allocated, from memory, about \$10 million for the precinct work. They own most of the land.

MR RATTENBURY: So how does that impact the potential development of a new stadium in Bruce? Is the commonwealth going to take a lead on that?

Mr Barr: They are certainly involved because they own the current facility and they own—

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, but you have said we will not use that site.

Mr Barr: Yes, and they own a number of potential sites for the facility. So there are options potentially for land swaps or divestment from the commonwealth to make land available for us. If, for example, a criteria that we set is that we need to own the land which the facility sits on so that we can capitalise the project or alternatively have a lease from the commonwealth of a duration sufficient to allow the project to be capitalised, then that is an element of discussion. So the work that we have been doing is due diligence on possible sites within that broader precinct on land that we own and land that they own.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, is it true that the government has recently started looking at other sites for a new Canberra stadium?

Mr Barr: Only sites in the Bruce precinct.

MS CASTLEY: So not outside the Bruce precinct?

Mr Barr: No.

MS CASTLEY: What other sites?

Mr Barr: In the Bruce precinct.

MS CASTLEY: Just in the Bruce precinct?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR EMERSON: I have asked previously about expanded feasibility studies and so on and you came back with a helpful table, one of which was the 2025 technical due diligence and site analysis, which says Indesco is currently engaged in undertaking a technical investigation of the preferred Bruce site to determine the site's development potential. Is that site still the preferred site?

Mr Barr: They are undertaking that work. I am yet to be briefed in detail on the results of that. But once I am we will then be in a position to make some further decisions on what further work can be required in partnership with the commonwealth.

MR EMERSON: Can you indicate which site is preferred, which site they are focusing on?

Mr Barr: We have been looking at sites that are on ACT government owned land in the precinct, but there are other sites that include land the commonwealth own that are at the moment in large part either utilised or dirt car parks. Another possible site is the site the stadium is currently on.

MR EMERSON: But the subject of that analysis makes clear they are focused on one site.

Mr Barr: Yes, that is correct, and that is on ACT government-owned land in the Bruce precinct.

MR EMERSON: Can you indicate which site that is?

Mr Barr: Yes, it is within the precinct that is currently the CIT Bruce and some car parks and some undeveloped land in that precinct.

MR RATTENBURY: I am surprised that this project has now become commonwealth led. You very much led the announcement this process and have talked about a health precinct driven by the ACT government. So I am surprised to hear you describe it now as being commonwealth led.

Mr Barr: Well, they have got the money.

MR RATTENBURY: Ten million bucks buys you the leadership of a project?

Mr Barr: Well, in terms of the available funding and the work that is principally being focused on—the AIS. Because when you look at that precinct and look at what is developable land, obviously we are the leader of our own hospital project on our own land. We will have views and we are investigating the totality of the land that sits between North Canberra Hospital and the AIS precinct. There is a former capped waste site that is the car park for the Bruce CIT. There is an oval and there is a range of other facilities there, so that is within our remit.

Almost all the other land, including the existing stadium site, all of the dirt car parks, all of the overflow car parking, everything else in that precinct is commonwealth land. Now, how can I best describe this? There are two commonwealth stakeholders—the Australia Sports Commission, which has a particular view about the future of the Institute of Sport, and then there is the infrastructure department, to whom the funding allocation was made to.

I do not think I am speaking out of school here in saying that from the central agency's commonwealth perspective they are looking at ways to finance further investment in the AIS through a different utilisation of some of the land. The Sports Commission's view is that they want to hang on to every square centimetre they can for potential future use. But I think the fiscal reality for the commonwealth is that a way to finance further investment in the AIS is to look at some alternate uses for the land within the precinct.

Our interest in this is that we need to be able to continue to operate the stadium. We need to ensure that we can prioritise public transport access, and that if the institute builds on any of those car parks then the car parking for the stadium continues to reduce. So one of the things that we are very interested in is that one of the early projects might be structured car parking and some improvements to the public transport accessibility for the precinct.

Regardless of exactly where the stadium is within the precinct, there is no doubt that a longer term investment in structured car parking is a more efficient use of land, and better public transport will support access to the precinct, because in any circumstance the precinct is going to attract a lot of users, and sometimes a lot in a small period of

time.

MR RATTENBURY: This committee also has been also looking at sports infrastructure more generally and talking to the Minister for Sport about that. We were asking her about a 10-year plan for sports infrastructure, some of sits in your remit and some of which sits in hers, which is why I am asking you this question. She basically said she did not support the notion of a 10-year strategy because if the government perhaps decided not to fund something the community would be upset because it had been put in a plan. That seems a surprising way to take decisions and a surprising basis to reject the notion of having a forward plan on infrastructure.

Mr Barr: Well, there is a forward plan on infrastructure and it is published. There is a specific chapter, if you like, or a whole document in relation to sports infrastructure. I think the issue perhaps where there is a point of delineation is between the facilities that we have largely been talking that are more at the elite end and those that are very grassroots.

If the definition of exactly what the committee is seeking in relation to whether this is a plan for every single neighbourhood oval, every single neighbourhood change room or are we talking about our elite sporting infrastructure—

MR RATTENBURY: We are interested in how community sports organisations know what is coming in the future rather than having to spend their time lobbying for it.

Mr Barr: There are elements of some of the infrastructure that is outlined in the arts, sports and entertainment chapter in the infrastructure plan that would touch on some of those things. But projects that are of a smaller scale that are perhaps a handful of millions of dollars are not within my remit or not detailed. It is not a list of a thousand projects which there could in theory be on small-scale community sporting infrastructure.

MS CARRICK: When we talk about the education part of the Bruce precinct, is that the CIT or UC or Radford?

Mr Barr: Obviously you have the UC facility across the road and you have the Bruce CIT campus, which would be now perhaps the older and least fit for purpose of all of the CIT infrastructure facilities. Once the Woden project was complete there really are two areas of infrastructure priority for CIT. This is not principally in my portfolio, but in the context of thinking about infrastructure planning it is in relation to the Fyshwick campus and the trade skills focus there. Then what is a little bit more in my remit is the conversation and collaboration we are seeking between our universities and the Canberra Institute of Technology.

You may have already seen the number of announcements that UC and CIT have made jointly around articulation frameworks, recognition of prior learning and a range of things they are going to do collaboratively. CIT also has relationships with UNSW Canberra and with other universities. So there does appear to be an opportunity for those two institutions to work together in relation to particular areas where they have either an overlapping or a progression of education and training opportunities. Allied health is an example there.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, we were talking earlier about buckets of commonwealth funding. Separate to the recent railway precinct announcement, are there any projects where funding has been sought or is being sought from the Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program?

Mr Barr: We did make a number of submissions across a number of different agencies. But as usual, there would have been about ten times the number of applications as there was available funding. We were obviously very pleased that one of our projects got up.

MR EMERSON: So there is not one the government thinks maybe it will get up next time? It will be a new round, new bids?

Mr Barr: The program is time limited, so unless the commonwealth continue the program, the program is largely done.

MR EMERSON: In 2023, the ABC had reported that Telstra Tower would be restored as the Ngunnawal cultural centre, including digitally enhanced viewing platforms to represent First Nations history, culturally inspired dining facilities and education programs on the Ngunnawal peoples' ties to the land. The ACT government is now working on a new plan for the site with Telstra with no mention of this earlier work. To what extent were you aware of this work and who was involved in it at the point of entering negotiations and making announcements about redeveloping Telstra Tower?

Mr Barr: When we approached Telstra this was one of the areas that we highlighted they should pursue, and they were very willing to do that as part of their reconciliation action plan. We indicated to them that we would be very supportive of including cultural elements in the tower's visitor experience and engagement with traditional custodians was an important part of that process. Telstra undertook some work in that regard. We also undertook work and I believe applied for a commonwealth funding program and were successful.

We firstly acknowledge the work that Telstra has undertaken. We also acknowledge the importance of a renewed facility having a strong Ngunnawal element. The remaining questions at this point are the actual space that Telstra will allocate and what funding contribution they will make. There is then a question for us around any space that we would lease, particularly as it relates to the visitor experience and incorporating the Ngunnawal into that. Telstra seem to be a logical partner in terms of digital given that is their core business. So there is a question around their capacity to supply some of the technology platforms that would enable that programming and audio visual and all the rest. That would seem a quite useful contribution that they would be best placed to make. We will obviously continue that engagement with them.

Ms Starick: With the commonwealth funding, notwithstanding that negotiations are still happening with Telstra Tower on the commercial arrangements, what we plan to do is set up a framework for joint decision-making and contributions going forward. So what the final Ngunnawal expression and activities will look like is yet to be determined because we want to work with local Ngunnawal members to develop that. But you could see it could be anywhere along the supply chain as well as an expression of history and story and what have you.

I cannot pre-empt what the outcome would be but it could be, as the Chief Minister said, a digital exhibition space, input into the look and feel of the space, input into food offerings or other suppliers, input into the tours. There is an opportunity for training and development in some of the attractions or businesses that locate there. So that is yet to be determined.

MR EMERSON: I am curious about the work that happened before this engagement between the government and Telstra. So in 2023 Telstra engaged Deloitte to develop plans for the site and consult with traditional owners to co-design those plans. Has the government seen this work from Deloitte? Have you received it?

Mr Barr: I think we have seen a high-level briefing on it, but we were not party to it and it was largely around what Telstra were going to do, their contribution to the tower restoration as part of their reconciliation plan, as I understand that was a matter between them and the community.

We are supportive of them making this project really an exemplar of their reconciliation agenda. Obviously there are going to be necessary commercial limitations and they have a project budget too I imagine. So they will be realistic, and no doubt if they are as tough as negotiators as they are with us, we will need to fit within their available resource allocation. But we have said that we believe there are opportunities within our contribution and any space we might take to be able to support some of these activities as well, and we already do in the visitor centre at Regatta Point.

MR EMERSON: And so in relation to that final report that Deloitte prepared for Telstra, have you asked them for a full copy of that? It seems to me to make sense given there has been all this consultation.

Mr Barr: Sure, but it is a matter for them to as to what status that has. But we did not commission it.

MR EMERSON: No, I understand.

Mr Barr: It is really about what commitments they are prepared to make. To be frank, there have been changes in the leadership of the organisation between now and then, both on their infrastructure side and the CEO, from memory. But I can check in on where they are at on that.

Ms Starick: I can answer to the Deloitte, if you like?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Ms Starick: So it has not been provided formally, but we have seen the final report. As the Chief Minister said, that was Telstra's work. With the work we are doing, it is a small number of families that we are working with, so obviously we will not be starting from scratch, but neither was the report a definitive final product. So yes, we have seen it, but it does not mean we do not have to do this piece of work which will be really important should the tower go ahead to properly engage local Ngunnawal families.

MR EMERSON: To that point, I am curious about the continuity of engagement with traditional owners. To what extent were they involved in any of those early conversations between the ACT government and Telstra? Were they also brought along on that journey?

Ms Starick: As the Chief Minister said, Telstra had already engaged with local Ngunnawal families. That work happened before we were approached and became engaged in the discussion. I will say that as we were working through the merits of the offer that Telstra had, that was the focus of our discussion. These were commercial discussions; they were not around what would the experiences be.

We have recently restarted meeting with some Ngunnawal family members, but not all of them though. So I would say that our engagement has not been all encompassing of everybody we would want to see engaged through the life of this next piece of work.

MR EMERSON: So that has been re-established that connection?

Ms Starick: I would say it is re-establishing. We are in the process of re-establishing it.

MR EMERSON: You mentioned earlier the commonwealth funding for a framework for shared decision-making, which I think is good. There is a feeling from the TO side of not having been part of a decision.

Ms Starick: Well, there is no decision made yet.

MR EMERSON: They were involved and they are now engaged, but in the middle there was a decision made about what kind of partnership was being built.

Ms Starick: There was a decision made to work together to develop a proposal, and that is what we are doing. So this next stage is to develop the framework to bring in Ngunnawal families into that discussion.

MR EMERSON: What commonwealth funding source is that, when was it sought, when was it received and how much is it for?

Ms Starick: We are in the process of working that through. I will take that on notice and have the area that we are working with provide any information I can before the end of the session.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, what is the proposed redevelopment of the Canberra Casino? Could you talk to us about that?

Mr Barr: At this point the owners of the casino are seeking a regulatory change in relation to their ability to operate poker machines. They are effectively seeking the same framework as the clubs in terms of operation of machines. The previous legislation, which has now lapsed, allowed them to access a machine entitlement by purchasing from the clubs. And as part of that process they would purchase more than they would be entitled to operate and those licences would exhaust as part of the process of reducing the number of machines in the city.

The benefit for the clubs who would sell to the casino is that they would get the revenue from the sale of the machines and we then support them to then invest in other activity. So there is a regulatory process and the Assembly will need to determine its support or otherwise for that element.

The casino is a slightly oddly shaped landholding where they own a parcel of undeveloped land directly behind the current convention centre and then they have the site that the casino is currently located. Their neighbour to the north is the Crowne Plaza hotel, and Salter Brothers, which own that land, have announced a redevelopment to replace the Crowne Plaza with two new hotels under the IHG brand.

The casino's approach to government was that with that happening and the new convention centre they felt they could add to the precinct by way of a redevelopment on the land they own. The inhibitor to that redevelopment is the regulatory framework around the gaming machine licences. Probably in the simplest of terms I would not envisage there being a casino redevelopment unless there is a change in their regulatory framework, and that is where it sits at the moment.

MS CASTLEY: So in order for them to redevelop the site and expand there will have to be a change in order for them to have more poker machines?

Mr Barr: That is the advice they have provided to government—they will not be in a position to have a financially viable investment pathway unless they get the chance to operate poker machines on the same basis as the club industry. From memory, the number was 200. The last time the Assembly considered the relevant legislation we voted in favour of that, but we put a range of requirements on the poker machine licences and they did not take up that opportunity.

They have come back and asked whether we are prepared to bring forward legislation that would be on the same basis as the clubs and they have said that that could trigger an investment decision. At this point it is unclear what the Assembly's views would be on that matter would be. Obviously at least 13 members of the Assembly would need to support a change to the current regulatory environment in order to facilitate that investment.

It is perfectly legitimate to hold the view that we do not want that investment. It is equally legitimate to say maybe it is worth changing the regulatory environment in order to support that investment. I know there will be arguments back and forth on that. But from an investor perspective the casino effectively has two areas of entry into ACT government—one is on the regulatory side and the other is on the investment facilitation side—and the project is listed for me on the investment facilitation side. But the yes or no on whether this goes ahead sits with the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY: Has the Minister for Gaming Reform been involved with any of these discussions?

Mr Barr: Indeed, yes.

MS CASTLEY: So what makes the casino a strategic economic development project?

Mr Barr: The proposal for redevelopment that the previous owners put forward before they sold to the current owners was a very significant investment beyond just the casino. It included a range of other housing, hotel and amenities in that precinct. In the end the question really is do we or do we not want hundreds of millions of dollars invested and potentially hundreds of extra jobs? That is the positive side. There will be construction jobs, there will be jobs operating a casino and entertainment precinct. There may well be an additional hotel which would be perfectly located across the road from the new convention centre. The other side of the equation, of course, is that that would be an increased concentration of gambling activity.

There was an argument that casinos are highly regulated areas and that entering into a casino is a known place of gambling. The government's view in the policy sense has been that any allocation of machine licences for the casino would need to come from clubs selling them as part of a reduction in the number of machines across the territory in totality and that the regulatory requirements on the casino would need to be stronger. The community's legitimate concerns about problem gambling and all of those other things that feature in this debate would need to be taken into account, and it is up to the Assembly ultimately to determine what the regulatory environment would be.

When we last considered this issue, we passed a piece of legislation and, from memory, set a \$2 bet limit on the machines in the casino. That is obviously different from the bet limit that applies to the machines that operate in our community clubs.

MS CARRICK: Yesterday we learned that the definition of a casino is the floor plan of the casino. Why does our legislation have that as the definition of a casino as opposed to the undertakings of a venue?

Mr Barr: That is an interesting question; I will seek some advice on that and come back to the committee.

MR BRADDOCK: You say this is a question for the Assembly. Will the government be bringing the question to the Assembly in a bill of some form?

Mr Barr: We certainly have done that in the past. I think at this point, rather than expend an excessive amount of energy and public service time and our own time on the matter, we would seek before we did so an understanding of what Assembly members would like to see in that legislation.

I would not intend to bring it forward to fail and I would not divert a massive amount of government resource to developing all of that with a view that it would not be supported. Frankly, there are a thousand other things you could spend your time on> This is not the first time that this has been discussed, so today should not be a revelation to anyone because we had precisely this debate on a piece of legislation not many years ago. Now probably half the members in the Assembly are different now than was the case then, and there are different leaders of the opposition parties and all of those things. We are open to a discussion. It may be that an Assembly committee may wish to inquire into the matter. If the view of the Assembly is that this is a real priority and we want to consider this then we are happy to pursue that. But if it is not and people's starting point is no, then let's just say no to them and move on.

MR BRADDOCK: So we should probably treat this as your call for the Assembly members to engage the government in a conversation about this issue?

Mr Barr: I have already raised this on previous occasions. This has come to cabinet when Mr Rattenbury was the minister I believe, and before as well. I have raised it with leaders of the opposition in the past as to what is their party's view. I do not expect an instant answer on that, but no-one has rushed back to me and said we absolutely must change this legislation to enable this investment.

MS CASTLEY: I am trying to understand the government's involvement here, Chief Minister. As to regulatory changes for the operator to proceed with an expansion of the casino—you touched on it, but I do not know that I stuck with it—the parcel of land that is adjacent to the convention centre, is that leased to the casino at the moment?

Mr Barr: The casino's lease historically includes a parcel of land that is, I think, largely—

MS CASTLEY: Is that block 16?

Mr Barr: I do not have the exact block and section number in front of me, but if it would be helpful to the committee we can take on notice the casino's existing landholdings and provide those block and section numbers and a map of the land own. Would that be helpful?

MS CASTLEY: Yes. Has this casino proposal had any impact or pushed the government into a decision about moving the pool or the convention centre?

Mr Barr: No, I can absolutely say that is unrelated. The size of a site necessary for a convention centre is why we are at the site we have chosen. And the commonwealth's very generous contribution of land and capital funding to build a new pool is very helpful for the community more broadly.

MS CASTLEY: What do you know of the total costs of the changes with regard to the casino? Do you have any idea of what that looks like yet?

Mr Barr: Cost to government?

MS CASTLEY: Yes.

Mr Barr: Well, almost none because we would not be making any capital funding allocation to the casino. This would simply be a regulatory change that would either facilitate or not a private investment.

MS BARRY: I have a question on venue hire for Exhibition Park. What are the community rates?

Mr Barr: We were anticipating this question.

MS BARRY: I have waited 12 months to ask this question.

Mr Barr: Yes, indeed. Matt is going to come forward and provide that information.

Mr Elkins: I acknowledge the privilege statement. We have community rates across all our buildings at Exhibition Park. Is there a specific building?

MS BARRY: The Fitzroy Pavilion.

Mr Elkins: That rate is \$2,370 a day.

MS BARRY: The rate I have been given is \$2,465. What is the difference? Is that additional cost?—

Mr Elkins: They are the rates we have. You can hire other equipment on the day. We have an extensive list of equipment that can be hired which would go onto the rate as charged. I can provide to the committee on notice the list of equipment that can be hired, but that is the daily rate.

MS BARRY: It will be useful to provide the list of the equipment and the additional cost as well. Are there additional costs, including the equipment, to the \$2,370 that you have quoted?

Mr Elkins: If other equipment is hired that would be added to the cost.

MS BARRY: Outside of the equipment hire, are there other costs?

Mr Elkins: There should not be other costs, no.

MS BARRY: So you do not charge catering fees for example? You do not charge for toilet paper? You do not charge for bin liners?

Mr Elkins: We make it available for community to come in and do their own cleaning, but if they hire a cleaner the cleaner will charge for the provision of that cleaning equipment.

MS BARRY: What is the \$90 per hour for the Friday to Sunday staffing rate?

Mr Elkins: I would have to take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Chief Minister, in a debate in the Assembly you said there are some services the government provides which are provided for to the benefit of the community for which there is no cost recovery. Do you think charging small community organisations \$2,465 or \$2,370 is fair?

Mr Barr: The facility has capacity for 1,750 people at an event, so that would be a little over \$1.50 per person to utilise the facility. So I would not recommend a small community organisation to hire a facility that has capacity for nearly 2,000 people.

MS BARRY: I do not think that is Fitzroy. Is that Fitzroy's capacity?

Mr Barr: Yes, that is Fitzroy.

MS BARRY: Community organisations have said to me that that is the only venue that will take the sort of activities they do. These activities are done on a voluntary basis; they do not charge.

Mr Barr: Certainly we have smaller facilities that would have a lower hire cost.

Mr Elkins: We have done hires for community groups across the whole of Exhibition Park, from really large events in the Budawang building to smaller events in our Coorong building and the Mallee building, which has a rental of around \$650. Coorong, Coorong Conference Centre. When we engage with community groups we very purposefully make sure we talk not only about the Fitzroy building, to which we have done upgrades to make it available to the community, but the right sizing for the community groups who come to us.

As I said, we have the Mallee building. We had the Sierra Leone Independence Day in May 2025 at a rental of \$658. The Coorong building has hosted multiple events and the Budawang building has hosted some really large events. We have an ongoing procedure to make sure we right size to the event as groups come to us.

MS BARRY: Just going back to the Fitzroy building for a minute, Chief Minister, you made a comment about \$1 per person for a capacity of 1,700. If you add those additional costs—for example, the \$90 per hour to rent whatever the staffing is with a minimum of 3 hours—the cost does blow up. So my question is: is it fair to small community groups? It does not matter how many people have been invited to these events; they are not-for-profit community organisations that are putting these events together on a voluntary basis, on a no-cost basis. Is it fair that they are paying in upwards of \$4,000 to rent that building?

Mr Barr: If there was a very small number of attendees, then they are probably in the wrong venue and we would find a smaller and cheaper option. The purpose of the Fitzroy Pavilion is to be able to host events that have 1,500, 1,700 people. There was a view that there was not a facility big enough in the ACT to host such large-scale events, and the Fitzroy Pavilion was refurbished for that specific purpose. So say it was \$3,000 for hire and you had 1,500 people there, that would be \$2 per person.

MS BARRY: Sorry, Chief Minister, again you are trying to put a dollar value to these activities and events. The Nepalese community is a large organisation, but that does not mean they have the financial capacity to pay. You are trying to put a dollar value on it, to say it is \$2 per person so it is worth it. The fact is that it does not matter how large the community organisation is; they are paying \$4,000 to rent the Fitzroy building when we were promised a multicultural centre.

Mr Barr: Well, we would be able to suggest lower cost alternatives.

MS BARRY: But it would not take the capacity. It would not take 1,700 people, for example.

Mr Barr: There are not that many events that have 1,700, but if there is, then that is the

cost. It is a heavily subsidised access to the facility, but we can provide alternate opportunities at a lower cost.

Mr Elkins: We have been very considered, and we are always willing to speak with groups as they come through. That is why we had the community kitchen installed—so groups could essentially have their own catering. That is why we allow community groups to do their own cleaning. We have had times where we have had to provide support through our cleaners, and that will come at a cost. But that is always through a discussion. And we provide assets such as conference chairs, round tables and trestle tables FOC as part of the hire.

Mr Barr: FOC being free of charge.

MS CARRICK: Do those smaller venues have kitchen facilities and a stage for the events.

Mr Elkins: No, they do not.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question on the Sydney-Canberra rail corridor. You answered a question from Mr Werner-Gibbins about the economic benefits of that and you mentioned the establishment of a steering committee to develop options. So as to prevent this turning into an episode of Utopia, can you please talk me through how we are going to go from that steering committee to actual improvements to that corridor?

Mr Barr: Sure. The committee involves the necessary stakeholders from the New South Wales government including includes Sydney Trains and Transport for NSW, the Australian Rail Track Corporation who own elements of the line, as well as from stakeholders from our side. It has been tasked to come up with a list of improvements, small and medium in their cost, that can be put forward to the New South Wales, ACT and commonwealth governments.

We have foreshadowed with the commonwealth government that this work is coming and that for the part of the line they own we would be seeking to submit those proposals to them for undertaking potentially as part of their routine maintenance and upgrade work as part of their asset portfolio, as well as where the New South Wales state government owns particular sections of the line. We obviously have a very small component that is physically inside the ACT.

The steering committee is also working on a range of scheduling and other recommendations that can shave time off the journey. Without getting too technical on all of this, that goes to issues of dwell time at particular stations, whether it is all stops to Sydney, and at what point the train arrives into the Sydney suburban network. The timing of that is crucial for the speed of the journey from Campbelltown to Central Station. If the train gets caught behind a slower moving suburban train, then that can add time to the journey.

There is quite a significant network timing exercise that Sydney Trains are best placed to be advising on. But the expectation is that there can be a series of recommendations that each one in itself might only save 30 seconds or a minute, but if you get 15 of them and get them done, then you have 15 minutes shaved off the journey time.

The other factor obviously relates to the new rolling stock the New South Wales government are progressively acquiring and deploying across their regional fleet. They have already begun replacing trains on the Sydney-Newcastle service. Having had the opportunity to catch that train, I can say it is certainly a better experience than what you experience on the current train between Canberra and Sydney.

You may also be aware that Transport for New South Wales recently commissioned a consumer survey in relation to the service, the current frequency and departure and arrival times and a range of other things. Our objective is once additional rolling stock and carriages become available as part of the New South Wales government's procurement that we would be able to see additional capacity and hopefully additional services between Canberra and Sydney and that the journey with the new trains would be shorter.

MR BRADDOCK: Goin back to that steering committee's recommendations, some of those will be operational matters. Some may be subject, I assume, to New South Wales government, federal government, ACT government budget process decision-making?

Mr Barr: Yes, principally New South Wales and commonwealth. We cannot spend money on someone else's asset. As we have successfully received funding from the commonwealth around the Kingston Railway Precinct our principal involvement is to work with the New South Wales government on the new Canberra railway station and the immediate precinct. We will continue to support New South Wales in their work with the commonwealth around the Australian Rail Track Corporation's element of the line between Canberra and Sydney.

MR BRADDOCK: Do we have grounds for optimism in terms of both the New South Wales and federal government's future budget decisions on this improvement?

Mr Barr: The minister, Jenny Aitchison, is a former Canberran who I have known for 35 years, so I have an avenue direct to the New South Wales minister. I did not miss the opportunity when standing on Canberra railway station with the commonwealth minister, Catherine King, when we announced the urban precincts program to indicate to her for the fifth time that this work is coming and that she can expect on her desk a request for the commonwealth to make a contribution. I am very, very realistic about the quantum of money we are talking about here; I am not going in asking for a billion dollars next year.

MR BRADDOCK: How much are you asking for?

Mr Barr: Well, the work will inform that, but the sorts of projects we are talking about here are a million dollars here, a million dollars there. We are talking millions and tens of millions, not hundreds and billions. Each individual project—improving a signal section, a railway crossing, reducing dwelling time—some things come at no cost; it is sort of an operational element. Other things may have a relatively small capital cost on an identified project.

MR BRADDOCK: Is there a timeframe for the outcomes from the steering committee, and will they be made public?

Mr Barr: We are certainly hopeful to be able to be submitting into next year's budget process and the year after and probably the year after that.

MR BRADDOCK: Will the recommendations coming out of that steering committee be made public?

Mr Barr: That is not for me to say because it involves other governments and there will be a degree of intergovernmental confidentiality, I imagine. But rest assured that any outcomes in terms of funding will clearly be public.

MR BRADDOCK: It is the options recommended that are not funded that I will be interested in.

Mr Barr: Okay.

MS CASTLEY: The ACT's current economic development strategy expires this year. Is the government developing a replacement? If so, where is that?

Mr Barr: Yes, and I will be announcing it very shortly.

MS CASTLEY: Will the government be commissioning any independent reviews on the current strategy?

Mr Barr: No, we have not commissioned independent reviews. The current strategy I think was launched in 2022, so it is a relatively short term.

MS CASTLEY: How are you determining the effectiveness?

Mr Barr: We have a range of data sources, but we are not proposing significant change. I took an economic development strategy to the election and I am going to implement it. You will see the updated strategy coming in the very near future.

MS CASTLEY: In previous hearings we have discussed the current strategy, and it is poorly defined in targeted aspirations, like giving back time. What are the underlying problems that the government is looking to solve with a new strategy?

Mr Barr: We will continue to build on the work that we have undertaken over this decade. In fact, as I indicated at the start of this year, we have had the fastest economic growth of any of the states and territories. So if you want an objective benchmark on actual economic growth data, we are doing very well.

MS CASTLEY: And has that given us back time?

Mr Barr: An element of the government's focus has been investment in infrastructure that supports the productive capacity of the economy. A key element of that has been to maintain the livability of Canberra. As we have seen, we are ranked number one in the world by a number of different independent assessments in relation to our city's livability.

MS CASTLEY: Does the government see the small and shrinking share of the private sector, including private sector investment, as an issue that will be addressed by the

government?

Mr Barr: We have a number of projects and programs to attract more private investment, some of which we have touched upon in these hearings. If the Assembly is of a mind to support regulatory changes, we can attract some private investment in the casino. We have an active program to attract direct foreign investment into a number of different areas of our economy, and there are plenty of projects underway right now that are the result of that direct foreign investment attraction process.

We have talked about the venture capital fund. We have talked about the growth of the Canberra Innovation Network. We have a particular focus on growing our biggest export sector, which is the higher education sector, and our second biggest export sector, which relates to our visitor economy.

MS CASTLEY: As part of the work for the next strategy, will the government be considering changes to ACT tax rates, regulatory burden, approvals processes or regulatory certainty to help promote economic development?

Mr Barr: We obviously have made a number of announcements regarding planning reform, taxation reform and regulatory reform. Those are proceeding, and there will be further announcements in the coming weeks and months.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, it has been great that we have had the opportunity to discuss the plan for economic development in the golden triangle—I had to get that in! For the purposes of transparency, could we also have the opportunity to discuss the with the minister the economic development and the planning for economic development of the town centres like we have for the central area?

Mr Barr: Yes. The territory's economic development strategy encompasses the entire territory, so there is an opportunity there. The planning and district strategies facilitate a variety of different land uses for economic development purposes, including commercial and industrial land use. I believe there are three factors of production—land, labour and capital. We have talked at length about our capital attraction strategies. We had quite an extensive discussion around our labour market and our focus on increasing the skills that our community has. And so land use becomes the other—

MS CARRICK: Can we have that opportunity to have a discussion like this about the town centres?

Mr Barr: We do in relation to land use.

MS CARRICK: Do we?

Mr Barr: I think I need to have a clearer understanding. Are you advocating for a change of land use in town centres? For example, rezoning commercial to light industrial? Do you want things that are currently zoned for Fyshwick and Mitchell, for example, to be relocated into town centres?

MS CARRICK: No. We have just gone through a whole heap of projects regarding the economic development of the central area. Can we have a similar discussion about the

town centres and their economic development?

Mr Barr: We certainly are having one in relation to a very significant investment and economic development proposal that has come from a major landholder in the Woden Town Centre, being the Scentre Group.

MS CARRICK: So at what point do we get to discuss that? It is a huge proposal; it is massive.

Mr Barr: There is an opportunity for the Assembly through both the planning committee and the planning minister in relation to that project. We can talk about that, and you could have talked about it in this hearing if you wanted to. But we are probably not quite far enough advanced in terms of consideration of the proposal. I think in the end I would direct your attention to land use. If there is a view that we want our town centres to have other economic activity then we are going to need to consider the zoning of that. It is open to a member of the Assembly to say our industrial zone should extend beyond Fyshwick, Mitchell and Hume and that town centres should become light, medium or heavy industrial usage.

MS CARRICK: Or have an entertainment precinct.

Mr Barr: Indeed.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, speaking about developments in the higher education space because universities are part of this committee, UNSW Canberra site has had its sod turned and there is the guaranteed pathways partnership between UC and CIT. What is the impact of that collaboration between, presumably, the ACT government and tertiary education providers.

Mr Barr: We effectively have created either special economic zones or development partnerships with each of the universities. The Assembly has supported legislation and/or land release or land zoning that supports a range of education and allied developments with each of our universities.

The most significant one relates to the University of Canberra, and their major endowment is their land assets. We have an investment pathway with them that has included building the University of Canberra public hospital on their campus. We have some further opportunities for that university to attract other investment, and I am anticipating some further announcements from the university in relation to that. The UNSW Canberra has committed a substantial amount of money to the establishment of their Canberra city campus. There are a number of commercial opportunities, particularly for startups. UNSW is the startup university of the nation—it has the most success in spinning out commercial ventures of any of the Australian universities. So that is probably the most significant economic development opportunity that comes from that campus and that partnership.

We have had a long-term partnership with the ANU, where over the last 25 years we have effectively supported the growth of their campus to bring its eastern edge to the western edge of the CBD. All the student accommodation, Childers Street, all of the activity when I was an ANU student—in the last century now I confess—none of that

was there. That was a barren wasteland with no activity. Nothing, except for the Dolly's late-night food caravan.

THE CHAIR: And a fine feed it was.

Mr Barr: Indeed. But now it is home to thousands of students. Thousands of people work in that precinct and it is a generator of consumer activity for our city. That stems off a development partnership and a precinct partnership with the ANU that, from memory, stems back to 2004. The UC partnership is a 2015 one, from memory. Alistair Coe was the opposition leader who opposed it at the time. Fortunately Mr Rattenbury and the Greens arty supported it and so it got through the Assembly. I thank you, Mr Rattenbury, for that support; I think it has been very important for the University of Canberra.

We have now obviously established and are well advanced on the UNSW partnership, and we have invested in new facilities for the CIT. So to go back to Ms Carrick's earlier point around economic development and those three factors of production—land, labour and capital—we are investing in each of those streams to improve the territory's capacity to attract capital, investing in our labour force to improve the skills and productivity, and seeking to facilitate capital investment. Then a further question really is around the land use, and we enabled more and more diversified use of that university land to attract investment.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, in 2015 I think Mr Hanson was the opposition leader.

Mr Barr: Well, maybe it was 2016 or 2017 then. My memory of exactly—

MS LEE: I was not sure whether the date or the person was wrong.

Mr Barr: Maybe Mr Coe was the opposition planning spokesperson.

MS LEE: Yes.

Mr Barr: I just recall that Liberals opposed the legislation.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, I understand there are some answers to questions on notice that can be provided before we wrap up, is that correct?

Mr Barr: Yes, absolutely.

Ms Starick: Mr Emerson, in response to your question, we have been working with the National Indigenous Australians Agency for funding of \$100,000 under the Strategic Indigenous Tourism Project. That funding, pending final agreements, will be this financial year, but I should say that we can progress the project that I have talked about ahead of the finalisation of that agreement. The first stage of the project is not dependent on it. I will take the other one on notice.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank witness for their attendance today. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 12.04 pm.