



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND  
PLANNING**

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

**Members:**

**MS J CLAY (Chair)**  
**MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR P CAIN**  
**MS C TOUGH**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**MONDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2025**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mr J Bunce (Ph: 620 50199)**

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

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

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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## The committee met at 9.02 am

Appearances:

Orr, Ms Suzanne, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans

City and Environment Directorate

Engle, Mr Sam, Deputy Director-General

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Deputy Director-General

Wright, Ms Fiona, Executive Group Manager, Climate Change, Energy and Water

Burkevics, Mr Bren, Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Parks

Lawton, Mr Kieran, Executive Group Manager, Climate Change Energy and Water

Malouf, Ms Ros, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Programs

Sendaba, Ms Bethel, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Policy

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning for its inquiry into the annual and financial reports for 2024-25. This morning the committee will hear from the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, and the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs.

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 any other Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people who may be attending today's event or who may be watching from somewhere else.

We are recording and Hansard will transcribe proceedings, and they will be published. We are also broadcasting and web-streaming live. If you take a question on notice, it would be useful if you could say, "I will take that question on notice." That helps our secretariat track down the answers.

We welcome Ms Suzanne Orr, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, and officials. We have a lot of witnesses for this session. You do not need to state that you agree with the privilege statement. That statement applies to you, regardless of whether you agree with it or not. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not inviting opening statements, so we will proceed to questions. Minister, I will ask the first question. It is about emissions reduction targets. You recently said that we would not be meeting our 2025 legislated interim target for climate change. Is that correct—we are not meeting that target this year?

**Ms Orr:** Thank you, Chair. As I said, we are still finalising the report. I will be tabling

that in the final sitting week of the year. With the tracking to date and the information that we have through finalisation of the report, it is beyond doubt that we will not be hitting our target. I have Ms Wright and Ms Sendaba here if you have any further questions.

**THE CHAIR:** We have met that target for the last eight years. This would be the first year that we have not met it. Is that correct?

**Ms Orr:** That is my understanding—yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Why is that? Why have we failed to meet the target this year?

**Ms Orr:** I can ask the officials to run through the details, noting that we are still finalising the report. We have not tabled that yet. There is a range of factors. It is not one particular thing. Part of it is about changing the accountancy standards to LULUCF—there was one other thing as well—and that changed our historical performance for the whole period of the target being counted, against our favour.

There are other areas where we have seen a bit of progress but perhaps not as much progress as we would have liked. There are also areas where there are legacy emissions that are increasingly proving to be a challenge. They are things to which we would not necessarily have been able to put a policy response or things we have avoided creating, such as emissions from landfill that will increasingly become more significant—the gases that we need to respond to. That is the high-level part. I can have officials run through it in more detail, because they are the ones who count every day and keep me informed.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. I might check on a couple of those. If you changed the accountancy standards for the entire historical period, did we still meet our targets in other years? That would not have had a particular impact on this year over other years, would it?

**Ms Orr:** Ms Clay, I will have to defer to officials on that because that is not actually something that I have extensive advice on.

**Ms Wright:** Everything that the minister said is correct. I will add a bit of further detail on the question about past years' targets. To this point in time, our target has been 40 per cent emissions, which was the interim target met in 2021. When we achieved 100 per cent renewable electricity, we basically met that target. For 2025, the target in place was for 50 to 60 per cent. Whilst we were reporting last year that we had made 50 per cent, the new calculation methodology meant that last year we did not make 50 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** You will be updating that in December?

**Ms Wright:** We will update that when we publish the reports. I would stress that the new calculation is a reflection of the improvement in how we measure. It is not a reversal in progress.

**THE CHAIR:** In the annual report, our emissions decreased by four per cent between July 2024 and June 2025. Is that still correct?

**Ms Orr:** Do you have a page number that the officials can refer to? It might make it easier.

**THE CHAIR:** I will look for a page number. We are a little bit puzzled. The annual report does not mention that we have failed to meet our climate targets; it says that we decreased our emissions during the year.

**Ms Orr:** As I said, we are still finishing the greenhouse gas inventory. Finalising that and finalising the annual report were two different periods and will not necessarily have exactly the same metrics, because they are two different points in time. The information for the greenhouse gas inventory needs to be finalised before you can use it, so you use the next best available information from the annual report. Hopefully that has filled in enough time while Ms Wright is looking for the page.

**THE CHAIR:** Page 55, I believe.

**Ms Wright:** To confirm, the annual report has the 2023-24 data. What I was just talking about is work done subsequent to this report's publication.

**THE CHAIR:** Did emissions reduce between July 2024 and June 2025—

**Ms Wright:** Yes, they did.

**THE CHAIR:** or did they increase?

**Ms Wright:** No. We still saw a reduction in emissions. Even though we have an increase in population, we have still seen a downward trend in emissions.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, noting that you have said that you are still finalising the inventory, you have also said that we will miss the target. You must have a fair degree of confidence. Is there a reason that you are leading with that before actually revealing the inventory?

**Ms Orr:** As I said in the opening part of the question, the information we have at hand makes it clear that we will not hit the target. I have been clear in saying that. We are still finalising the report, but the information at hand is that we will not hit the target. I do not think there is a contradiction in that. I do not think that is unclear. I verified that with officials before saying anything publicly, and the advice to me was that that would be a factual statement to make.

**THE CHAIR:** We have been raising the alarm for a while about some of these legacy emissions. You mentioned emissions waste from landfill. When organic waste goes into landfill, it emits for 20 years after it has been interred. That is one of the reasons a lot of people were concerned about the delay of FOGO from 2023 to 2028. Do you have any plans to address that or are those legacy emissions going to continue? I have not seen any new policy from government that will divert organic waste from landfill.

**Ms Orr:** Ms Clay, we will continue to look at how we can reduce our future emissions and our current emissions. The approach needed for abatement of legacy emissions is a

bit different. Putting in FOGO now is not going to reduce, to the best of my understanding, the legacy emissions we have from existing landfill sites.

**THE CHAIR:** No, but it will reduce the legacy emissions for the next 20 years. It will reduce your legacy problems next year and the year after and the year after that—right?

**Ms Orr:** If we reduce them and they do not get established in the first place, it is not going to be a legacy emission. It will be an emission that we prevented from happening.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. We have a climate strategy that finishes this year. You have just begun consultation on the next one, so there will not be a new strategy until next year or the year after, I assume. There certainly will not be a new strategy this year, given that you have just commenced—

**Ms Orr:** There will not be one this year as we have gone out for consultation on the framework and will continue to work through how we respond and develop the next strategy.

**THE CHAIR:** I have not seen any new policies or programs for emissions reduction, for climate—

**Ms Orr:** No, Ms Clay. As I have said multiple times on the record, we have been taking a good look at the policies and settings that we have in place and are doing a lot of the groundwork and thinking around the things that are in place—whether we continue them, whether they are working, whether we need to adjust or better align some of the programs we have or whether we need to do something different. That is what we have been working through and that is what we will continue to work through in the development of the framework, which we have gone out for consultation on, and the action plans associated with that. Those two things together will make the new strategy.

**THE CHAIR:** In a climate emergency, when we have failed to meet our legislated emissions target, what emergency action are you taking to make sure that we get a different result next year?

**Ms Orr:** Ms Clay, in an emergency, you have two options: you can run around hastily and react and perhaps miss the point or you can take a deep breath, stay calm and refocus. We have taken a deep breath, we are staying calm and we are refocusing.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a third option of taking a deep breath, staying calm and taking action?

**Ms Orr:** Ms Clay, you could say that is what we are also doing. We are not doing nothing.

**THE CHAIR:** I will hand over to Ms Carrick.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, Chair. My question is about the discussion paper that you put out about climate change. I note it says, “Transport currently makes up about 65 per cent of ACT emissions, with 70 per cent of this coming from private transport.” My first question is: what work are you doing with the transport directorate to ensure

the network is attractive so that people move from their private cars to public transport?

**Ms Orr:** Mode shift?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes—mode shift.

**Ms Orr:** I can get the directorate to talk through that. It is probably also a question that Transport Canberra will have input to. Bruce is finding his way to the table. He is the lucky one who gets to cover both areas, even though I do not get to cover both areas. I will hand you to him and he can hopefully give you a good answer that his other minister would also approve of.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Thank you, Minister. I apologise. Are you able to repeat the question?

**MS CARRICK:** My question is: transport currently makes up 65 per cent of ACT emissions, with 70 per cent being from private vehicles. What work are you doing with the transport directorate to ensure the network is attractive to ensure mode shift?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Part of the reorganisation of the directorates—to bring the planning directorate, the transport directorate and the municipal services directorate together—was to do exactly that: make sure that, as we contemplate new developments, they are co-located with public-orientated transport to incentivise the use of public transport. We will pursue other opportunities such as that as part of the new directorate. Some of the changes are already starting to be applied. As we know, there is further work happening with the light rail corridor to incentivise additional patronage on the light rail corridor. We are always looking at our bus network to see how it can be better—how it can better respond to the needs of the community. With all of those elements, we are looking at how we can best also reduce emissions by incentivising through a better public transport system.

**Ms Orr:** Ms Carrick, would you mind if I added to that? You have hit on a quite good point. Ms Wright or Ms Sendaba can also take you through a bit of what we have been doing to address transport emissions. While you have gone to mode shift, there has also been quite a focus on getting people to shift to non-polluting vehicles—to EVs and the like. Certainly in the discussions that we have been having in consideration of where to go next, mode shift is increasingly forming part of the area that we want to look at. That goes to the work that Bruce highlighted in his answer.

**MS CARRICK:** I will stay on mode shift for the moment. I am interested to know what you are doing. For example, you will often hear people from Tuggeranong on talkback radio saying that the travel times are too long and therefore it is a disincentive to use public transport. The number of times people have to change buses is a disincentive. How are you working with Transport to try to minimise the number of changes? I have asked for a network by midyear. What work is being done to understand people's needs, such a stated preference survey to understand their needs and where there is a tipping point and they will not move to public transport?

**Ms Orr:** Ms Carrick, if it is a question about the operations of the transport network and the design of the transport network, it is probably a question for Transport Canberra. My officials would engage with them and provide feedback from our perspective of

emissions reduction tracking and where we would like to see improvements. We would take advice from Transport Canberra as to the substance of the question, as to how you can encourage more people onto public transport to reduce emissions reductions and so forth. We would not operationalise or design the system for them.

**MS CARRICK:** Assumably, you would be keeping a good eye on it to make sure that people are attracted to it. Sixty-five per cent are transport emissions. If you cannot crack that nut, then I do not know where meeting your targets ends up. It is pretty important to your portfolio.

**Ms Orr:** I can definitely agree that reducing transport emissions is important from the portfolio's perspective, as is wanting to reduce our overall emissions. As I said, it is one that officials will continue to work with Transport Canberra on, pressing the point that this is an area we need to reduce. It is not just about mode shift; there are other parts as well. But mode shift is increasingly an area we can push into a bit more. Again, we would provide the advice that we need to do more work in this area from an emissions perspective. The actual design and operation of the network would be done by Transport Canberra.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you asked for a report from them about the work they have done on looking at what they need to do to the network to encourage mode shift? Have you asked for a report about what will encourage mode shift?

**Ms Orr:** I have not specifically asked for a report. I would not necessarily focus on a report, because I think these conversations would still be happening and these topics would still be canvassed, even if they are not presented in a single document.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Mode shift to public transport is just one element, of course. There are multiple elements to an integrated transport system that we are looking through. We are actively investing in path networks to support mode shift to active travel options and other connectivity issues to try to resolve some of the questions that you have asked.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. I am interested in the governance arrangements to make sure that we know where we are heading and we are not just leaving it to chance.

**Mr Engele:** At the overarching governance level and strategy, the update of the Planning Strategy is scheduled to occur over the next 18 months. As part of that, the minister for planning has announced that it would be integrated with transport. It would be an integrated transport and planning strategy. That would include the multimodal transport networks. The climate change issues will be interwoven and the mode shift will be interwoven into that update of the strategy. As part of that, we have a policy alignment forum within the City and Environment Directorate, which is an opportunity to bring together the different elements of these strategies and objectives into a single forum, so we can identify where the trade-offs are across the directorate and provide advice to government. That will incorporate emissions reduction and mode shift issues.

**MS CARRICK:** You mentioned the paths. What governance arrangements do you have to ensure that the path network is developed as it needs to be? For example, Pedal Power did a ride from Eddison Park in Woden towards the city late last week, asking for a safe, dedicated cycleway between Woden and the city. It is only 10 kilometres.

People would ride, but they feel unsafe. This is a critical piece of infrastructure to connect the north and the south by cycleway. What priority and governance is around making sure that significant piece of infrastructure is actually planned and in the pipeline?

**Ms Orr:** Ms Carrick, again, this goes to Transport Canberra. I understand they are yet to appear, so there is plenty of opportunity to put that question to them.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. It is about governance arrangements around making sure that these things happen from an emissions perspective. That is what I am keen to know.

**Ms Orr:** Ms Wright can add a bit more. But I do think we have canvassed this.

**Ms Wright:** Please stop me if I am reiterating what has already been said. In the new Climate Change Strategy, which is out for discussion now, transport is obviously one of the main areas of interest in how we further reduce emissions, given it is such a large part of our emissions trajectory going forward. As we have talked about, there are lots of elements to that. There are the private vehicles; how we support the take-up of low-emissions or zero-emissions vehicles; how we switch to more active travel, as you have mentioned; how we switch to public transport that is electrified, such as the bus fleet and light rail; and transport-oriented development in the planning system. As Mr Engle spoke about, we are all working together to make sure that policy functions and all of those outcomes are prioritised and collaborative.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, the annual report notes continued investment in waste reduction and recycling initiatives, but recycling rates have remained flat for several years. Has the Climate Change Council or EPSDD undertaken any cost benefit on performance analysis to demonstrate that these programs are delivering value for money for Canberrans?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Recycling rates have largely plateaued. Our recovery rate is consistently around the 70 per cent mark. Our waste strategy had looked to a recovery rate of close to 90 per cent. We know that household recycling rates remain very strong. Our ability to recover waste from the household, from commercial, remains strong. Our biggest areas of concern at the moment are in commercial and demolition waste, which is a huge stream of material that is now coming through our waste system.

The other thing I would note is that, in the original waste strategy, we had proposed the opportunity to use energy from waste as the final element of the recovery process, which is to capture the residual waste that is not fit for recycling. That is not a position that we are pursuing. That is not a government-supported position, to generate energy from waste.

We are still looking at opportunities for us to improve recovery. Our Container Deposit Scheme is still one of the highest in terms of redemption rates across the country. Our resource recovery rate, at 70 per cent, is also one of the strongest across the country. While we would love to see more progress, it is still very strong in terms of what we can return from waste.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, when will Canberrans see measurable results from these expensive waste and recycling initiatives, particularly given that the government continues to miss its own resource recovery and landfill diversion targets?

**Ms Orr:** Mr Cain, there are some implicit assumptions there that I do not know that I agree with. One of the things I would point to is—

**MR CAIN:** Your office has just confirmed the failures.

**Ms Orr:** Mr Cain, one of the things that I would push back on is the idea that what we have put in place is not working and is not having an effect, which I do not think is correct. It might not necessarily have had the effect to the extent that we had hoped, but it is certainly not without benefit. We are seeing a reduction in waste based on what would otherwise be the case, if you did not have these things in place.

I also note the focus that you have on cost-benefit analysis. This came up during, I believe, estimates. There was quite a bit of inquiry as to whether we do a cost-benefit analysis of every climate change program that we have. There was quite a substantial discussion about that. I would draw members' attention back to that discussion, because we did clarify that it is not necessarily the case that we need to do a cost-benefit analysis on every project, and the cost of not acting on climate change—

**MR CAIN:** Minister, when don't you do a cost-benefit analysis?

**Ms Orr:** mitigation is also expensive. Mr Cain, because I was still talking when you spoke over me, I could not hear your question.

**MR CAIN:** When don't you do a cost-benefit analysis?

**Ms Orr:** Mr Cain, we prosecuted that in estimates. You can refer back to the hearings then.

**MR CAIN:** We are here now to hear that answer, on your particular projects, Minister.

**Ms Orr:** Mr Cain, it was a discussion more broadly. As I said, you can refer back to the hearings.

**MR CAIN:** No, you are here to answer questions, Minister.

**Ms Orr:** I can have the officials run through what analysis we do in putting forward business cases.

**MR CAIN:** When don't you do the cost-benefit analysis? That is my question—as you have indicated.

**Ms Orr:** Mr Cain, it is not as simple as saying we do it or not do it, here and there. There are different methodologies and different considerations that will go into all proposals that are put forward.

**MR CAIN:** What are those considerations?

**Ms Orr:** That was the substance of the discussion that we had in estimates.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, just one moment. Minister, do you want to take on notice when you do not do cost-benefit analysis in this portfolio? I think it is a reasonable question.

**Ms Orr:** I can refer the member back to the estimates hearings—

**MR CAIN:** No, this is a committee hearing, Minister.

**Ms Orr:** —as I said. I can take it on notice and provide a copy of the transcript pages, if that helps you.

**THE CHAIR:** If your answer is fully answered by the transcript pages, that is fine. If it is not, we cannot check the transcript during the hearing; that is why it is difficult.

**Ms Orr:** Ms Wright has said she is happy to provide a little bit more information, if that will—

**MR CAIN:** Again, in particular for your portfolio, not just general cost-benefit analysis discussions.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you, Mr Cain. I will attempt to answer your question and see how we go.

**MR CAIN:** I am happy to take the chair's direction that you take it on notice and provide us with a full answer.

**Ms Orr:** I think we can have a chance to try and answer it.

**MR CAIN:** Not if you are going to repeat what you have said in estimates. If you have more detail on your particular projects where you do not provide a cost-benefit analysis—

**Ms Orr:** Chair, we are in your hands. This is getting a bit circular.

**MR CAIN:** I am happy for it to be taken on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, is it a list on notice of which policies and programs did not have a cost-benefit analysis?

**MR CAIN:** Sure, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** Can we get a list on notice of which policies and programs did not?

**Ms Orr:** Chair, I think the question was more about when would it apply and when would it not apply, as opposed to what it has or has not been applied to.

**MR CAIN:** That would be useful.

**THE CHAIR:** I think Mr Cain has asked for a list of which projects and programs did not have one. Is that information that you provided?

**Ms Wright:** I do not have a list because our practice is always to conduct a cost-benefit analysis, and we then monitor and evaluate our programs. I do not have a list of things where we have not done that, because our general process is to do that.

**MR CAIN:** Chair, I would be happy for it to be taken on notice, relevant to this particular directorate and this particular committee hearing—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. I am sorry, Ms Wright; I am trying to get something useful. If the answer is, “We always do one,” that is okay; the question has been answered.

**MR CAIN:** But that is not the case.

**THE CHAIR:** If the answer is, “We almost always do one and we check back on progress with each one,” you would surely know which ones do not have—

**Ms Wright:** To my knowledge, we always do one.

**THE CHAIR:** Always; okay.

**MR CAIN:** Why did the minister say you do not do it sometimes?

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, the official has answered the question. It sounds like there is always a cost-benefit analysis.

**MR CAIN:** That is a different answer—different to what the minister said.

**Ms Orr:** I said we had a range of analysis that we apply. It would not—

**MR CAIN:** But you said you do not do cost-benefit analysis on some projects, Minister.

**Ms Orr:** necessarily be a report that is called a cost-benefit analysis.

**THE CHAIR:** I will stop everyone talking over the top. Mr Cain, is there a new question? Have you finished your line on that or is there some new information you are after? I think you got the answer from Ms Wright. I am certain that the directorate and the minister will correct the record if anything was not correctly stated in that.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you, Chair. I think it is worth noting that the minister gave a statement that is inconsistent with what she is getting from her senior officials.

**Ms Orr:** Chair, as I said, and as I made reference to, we use a lot of analysis. As to whether we would necessarily publish a document, a cost-benefit analysis, for every report, that is different.

**MR CAIN:** We will check the *Hansard* on that, Minister. I have another question.

**THE CHAIR:** On the same line, Mr Cain?

**MR CAIN:** Yes, it is. Will the next iteration of the waste policy finally include transparent cost-effectiveness metrics and reporting on outcomes for projects like the Container Deposit Scheme, or will it simply continue to promote the circular economy narrative without evidence of results?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** This strategy is still under development.

**MR CAIN:** And that is it?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** Of course, as part of the strategy, we will look at the basis for which actions are developed, as part of that strategy. Part of that will be an assessment of its value for money and its relative actions against the recycling targets that we are trying to achieve.

**Ms Orr:** I think it would be difficult, Mr Cain, for Mr Fitzgerald to answer in the definite when something is still being prepared.

**MR CAIN:** You can take it on notice and provide a full answer.

**Ms Orr:** No. Excuse me; let me finish. When a policy is still being developed and prepared, and it has not been before government and decisions have not been made, Mr Fitzgerald cannot really answer in the definite as to what will or will not be in something. I am not taking it on notice because it is hypothetical at this point.

**THE CHAIR:** We might be at the end of that line. We mentioned the increase in construction and demolition waste; that is since the last audit in 2022. Construction and demolition waste to landfill has increased by 53 per cent, and it has almost doubled at the transfer station. Is there a simple reason why that has gone up by so much? Are there any policies on foot to address that or is that just something that is increasing?

**Mr Fitzgerald:** It is tough to pinpoint an exact reason why we are seeing that increase. One of the substantial benefits that we have gained from our new waste reporting system is that we are now capturing data that we otherwise may have missed before. While I am reluctant to say that our figures in the past may have underestimated the construction and demolition waste, I feel at the moment that we are getting a much more accurate picture as to what construction and demolition material is actually flowing through.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any policies on foot that would address it? If the answer is that it is in development in the strategy, that is okay.

**Mr Fitzgerald:** The most relevant piece of policy would be our Circular Economy Strategy, which talks to adaptive reuse of buildings in which to limit construction and demolition waste, rather than seeking to recover it.

**MS TOUGH:** I am interested in Healthy Waterways. There is consultation underway on the next 10 years for Lake Tuggeranong. I am interested in what work and research have gone into this plan and what it is hoped to achieve with this consultation going

forward.

**Ms Orr:** The directorate is always very happy to talk about this one, because a lot of work, consideration and analysis have gone into what we are seeing. They can also probably provide some initial updates on the feedback we have had so far, because it is fair to say that this particular one has had quite a positive response from the get-go, which shows that people down your way, Ms Tough, might be quite keen to see this project and the next stage of it.

**Mr Lawton:** Thanks for your question, Ms Tough. Can you please repeat it?

**MS TOUGH:** Yes. I am interested in the research that has gone into forming this consultation plan—how we got to this point and what we are hoping for, in the next stage of Healthy Waterways and Lake Tuggeranong.

**Mr Lawton:** As you would know, the Lake Tuggeranong consultation is out now. I will go into what we have learned so far and what we have been doing. As far as the research goes, there have been many years of work leading up to this. We have done trials of work. We have done some asphalt building, where we trap incoming stormwater that has phosphorus in it; we trap that water so that the water can be slowed down and the phosphorus removed before it goes into the lake.

We have done work to understand, from across the catchment, where those sources of phosphorus are. It is phosphorus that leads to the water quality problems in the lake. There has been a lot of investment. We have a team of eight in the Healthy Waterways team. The government has invested around \$30 million since 2021 more broadly in the Healthy Waterways Program. Much of the research has been focused on the Lake Tuggeranong options, and the options are now out with the community for consultation.

**Ms Orr:** One of the key themes of this consultation about where to take the Healthy Waterways project next is focused on preventing phosphorus from being generated in the first place. It is fair to say that a lot of the previous projects have focused on removing the phosphorus once it is in the waterway. We would like to have a lot more focus on not generating phosphorus, for it to end up in the waterway in the first instance. It complements the work that has already been done and improves the effectiveness of those interventions, because they have less pressure on them and they can work more efficiently in what they are doing.

It involves things like asking people to use less fertiliser on their lawn. It is about looking at having less leaves making it into our river system, whether that be through people getting a second green bin and raking up more leaves in their front yard or looking at street sweeping, for the more urban streetscape. It could involve things like looking at the types of drains that we use, in the run-off facilities, and using castellated kerbs, so that stuff is going back into green strips rather than going into a drain and down into the water system.

It is about taking a step back and saying, “How do we stop phosphorus getting into the water system,” as opposed to just looking at how we treat it once it is in the water system. It is not to say that that has not been a consideration in the past; it is more about saying that this is being prioritised a little bit higher going forward.

**MS TOUGH:** You mentioned less leaves going into the drains. I know each year there is the program about the leaf bags—whatever they are called.

**Ms Orr:** The bags, yes.

**MS TOUGH:** What is the take-up of that program like?

**Ms Orr:** I am not sure. We do not have Ralph here, which is a bit of a shame, because he could talk for hours on this one. In lieu of not having Ralph present, Mr Lawton, do you want to have a go at running through that?

**Mr Lawton:** You are asking about the take-up of the community programs?

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, the take-up of those bags; people knowing that it is there and then getting those bags and using them.

**Ms Orr:** As far as I know, we ran out of the bags last year, so the uptake is 100 per cent; I think we can say that. We might need to take on notice, though, if you are after how quickly we ran out of bags.

**MS TOUGH:** Yes, if I could get the number of people getting the bags and, if possible, a breakdown of where in Canberra they are. It would be interesting to know the take-up of people in Tuggeranong using those bags.

**Mr Lawton:** It is a very popular program. Definitely, the bags go quickly. We will take on notice where they go.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Noting what you said about overall catchment health, reading through the plan, the consultation paper talks about how there are a number of things that could work, but none would be sufficient on their own; there need to be multiple things. I would like to ask about the creek line at Tuggeranong Homestead, which was the final stage 2 project in Healthy Waterways that has not been completed yet. Documents released through an order for the production of documents showed that, in November 2024, Minister, the directorate said to you—and I quote:

A project to naturalise an old Tuggeranong creek and a branch at the Tuggeranong Homestead is approved and awaiting your go-ahead to procure construction contractors. A brief is being prepared to seek your approval to progress this project.

This obviously implies that there was funding attached to the project and that the only barrier was your signing off on the project proceeding. Did you receive a brief from the directorate asking for your sign-off to commence the project?

**Ms Orr:** I might take that on notice so that I can go back and check my records.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Okay. I would be interested in understanding: is the project ready to go?

**Ms Wright:** I do not have the answer on that, Minister.

**Ms Orr:** We would have to take that on notice as well.

**Mr Lawton:** Yes, let us do that. I am not sure that we are across the actual status of that project. All the modelling and research that we have done is to understand what the most cost-effective options are for improving the water quality in the lake. As the minister said, the emphasis initially was on what the government could build to intercept the stormwater. The more research we do, the more we realise how much of a role the community has to play in reducing the amount of leaves and pollution going into those waterways. Now is the time to have a good, hard look and consult with the community on the best way forward.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I am interested because, presumably, that project was covered under the \$31 million that I believe you said was appropriated for Healthy Waterways, as part of stage 2. If there was no funding available—and this might be one to be taken on notice, too—was there funding that perhaps has since been re-appropriated for something else? I know the documents in the order for the production of documents showed that it was estimated to cost about a million dollars.

**Ms Orr:** Ms Wright has a bit more information that she can share with you.

**Ms Wright:** I have received some information. We were hoping to use some contingency from another project in order to fund that, but that did not eventuate, so we were not able to provide the funding for that project. It does, however, have DA approval. When we are able to progress that, as Mr Lawton said, we will look at it, in relation to cost-effectiveness of all the measures that we are taking in that area and how we can fund that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Given the project was ready to go and the minister was briefed, was a budget business case put forward to seek progress on this project?

**Ms Wright:** No, we did not get to that stage, Mr Rattenbury.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Why not?

**Ms Wright:** Because we did not have the funding to put forward in the current year, and in the following year we looked at it in totality, with the rest of the Lake Tuggeranong catchment, which is now out for consultation.

**Ms Orr:** Chair, it is a little bit awkward to ask officials about cabinet processes and budget cabinet processes.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we are talking about information that is in the public domain under the order for the production of documents. I think it is perfectly reasonable, but the secretary will jump in, any time he thinks we are going somewhere inappropriate. We have just been fleshing out some information that is in the public domain and trying to understand why—

**Ms Orr:** That part is fine, but Mr Rattenbury's question specifically went to whether a budget business case had been taken forward, which does go directly to cabinet

deliberations.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure, but you are sitting there, Minister. You could answer the question. I was not trying to put the officials in an unfortunate position.

**Ms Orr:** My answer would be that I am not going to comment on cabinet processes. What is in the budget will show what has gone through those processes being considered and decided by cabinet.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, have you sought to move the project forward?

**Ms Orr:** Mr Rattenbury, I continue to work on the advice from my directorate officials, and the advice to me around improving the quality of the water in the Tuggeranong catchment is to look at how we prevent phosphorus from getting into the network. That has been my focus, and that is what I have been giving my attention to.

**MR CAIN:** That is a non-answer.

**THE CHAIR:** I am not sure how to advance this. Do we lodge something on notice?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am happy to leave it there, Chair. I think we have clarity on the minister's approach.

**MR CAIN:** How would you characterise that?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I do not want to get into trouble with the Chair, Mr Cain. I want to ask about scope 3 emissions. The consultation paper for the new climate strategy says that you will "explore further opportunities to measure and report government scope 3 emissions".

The Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment did a report in 2021 for the ACT government on scope 3 emissions for the whole territory. At the time the government agreed in principle to such recommendations. Can you give us a status update on whether the government is moving forward on this or whether you are just exploring further opportunities?

**Ms Orr:** Ms Wright and Ms Sendaba will answer that one.

**Ms Wright:** I will ask Ms Sendaba to talk a little bit about the work that we are currently progressing and looking to the future.

**Ms Sendaba:** The work we have been doing with respect to scope 3 emissions has been focused on the government's own, and supply chains. We have done a study; we have had a report come in with some advice on opportunities for how we can reduce scope 3 emissions through the government's own operations, supporting industry and providing leadership.

We are digesting that report. We have spoken further to other agencies about how we might embed some of those recommendations and practices into their operations. We will complete those discussions and provide some advice to the minister about the next

steps. That is also forming part of the work on the development of the new climate change strategy. We are incorporating that and doing that together.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Has that analysis been publicly released at this time?

**Ms Sendaba:** No, not at this stage.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is that because it is still under consideration?

**Ms Sendaba:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** In terms of updates on strategies, the government had a Bushfire Smoke and Air Quality Strategy, which was developed and published by the government in 2021, following the Black Summer bushfires. It goes from 2021 to 2025. My question is: will there be another bushfire smoke and air quality strategy released, particularly with the fire season coming?

**Mr Burkevics:** You are indeed correct that the strategy was prepared following the Black Summer bushfires. The former minister for the environment provided an update to the Assembly in relation to the first action plan. As part of that statement, they advised that there would be further consideration of whether a new strategy would be prepared, or a second action plan. The directorate has prepared advice for the minister on that matter, and that is under consideration.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do we have a timeline for that consideration?

**Mr Burkevics:** I think it is fair to say that that matter will be considered by the government very soon.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, is it your view that we should have a new bushfire smoke and air quality strategy?

**Ms Orr:** Mr Rattenbury, I am hesitant to give you a yes-or-no answer, which is probably the obvious one to that question. I think it is a little more complex than that. In reading through some of the initial briefing that has already come to me around this strategy, a lot of it was focused on embedding actions within business as usual, and looking at how we could continue to improve our practice. There is a question there—and this is part of what will be forming my consideration—as to what further work would be needed, as opposed to what work we needed to do to embed our practices within our business as usual. It is about looking at whether we need to continue with a standalone strategy or whether we need to continue to improve business-as-usual practices, now that that initial capability and capacity have been further developed.

My understanding is that there is some national work that we align with on this, as well. There is a question there as to whether we would necessarily need to do our own work or whether we would be best placed to be in alignment. It is fair to say that the government is not ignoring this area, but what form the next response takes is an open question.

**MR RATTENBURY:** In terms of measuring progress, the strategy states that it will be

reviewed annually to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of its measures. Are you able to provide any advice on the most recent review, when it was conducted and what it showed?

**Mr Burkevics:** The current strategy is always under active management by the directorate. Of course, there is a range of parties to delivering the actions under that strategy. The most formal recent review would have been the statement made by the former minister last year, as part of the first action plan.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That was in 2024.

**Mr Burkevics:** 2024, correct. The advice that has been provided to the current minister wraps up the various activities. That is the next review that has been done. That is in terms of advice. As the minister indicated, that is under active consideration. I also highlight the fact that a number of bodies of work under that strategy are always in progress. We have spoken previously about this; it might have been during budget estimates when we spoke about ongoing work of the directorate on wood heaters, supporting a national policy on that issue and progressing the ACT's air quality assessment, with a view to moving into the regulatory impact assessment as well.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Will we get a final report updating the Assembly on progress under the strategy, given that it is now coming to an end? Will there be a summing up, I suppose?

**Ms Orr:** Those decisions are all part of the consideration that is going on. I will undertake to keep you informed on where we land on that.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I am keen to ask about private stewardship payments. The documents shared through the order of production of documents show that the government's work on private stewardship payments, or biodiversity financing mechanisms, was in the first stage of a longer project. What stage of the project are you currently up to?

**Mr Burkevics:** As you would have seen from the documents, the directorate undertook, essentially, a national scan of other good ideas in relation to stewardship payments. I think it is very important to note, of course, stewardship payments come at a cost, and they are a form of—or one strategy of—promoting care for the environment.

That national scan highlighted a number of areas that would support future policy development, and that has been considered in the development of the new Nature Conservation Strategy.

I would go as far as to say whilst national policy of stewardship payments is of interest, I do not think there are any plans by the government to move down that line at the moment. There would be considerable work and, of course, financial implications to do so. And, as I think we discussed last week, the land management agreements already engage rural lessees in relation to their responsibilities for managing rural lands.

But the exercise to review what is happening nationally was useful and has been factored into some elements of the Nature Conservation Strategy that government will

soon consider.

**MISS NUTTALL:** A brief from July last year says the University of Technology Sydney was engaged to examine legislative and regulatory barriers to establishing stewardship programs. Has this work been completed?

**Mr Burkevics:** I am not across the detail of that report or that activity, Miss Nuttall. I would be happy to take that on notice and get an update for you.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Okay. I think there are some strong links between the opportunities that private stewardship payments could provide; the need to revise our offsets policy, and the work being done on the Eastern Broadacre strategic assessment. Are you advocating for the trailing of private stewardship payments and zoning to the Minister for Planning?

**Ms Orr:** Miss Nuttall, I do not think Mr Burkevics is personally advocating to the Minister for Planning on these ones. As Mr Burkevics has pointed out, there are a range of considerations and we are focused on progressing the Nature Conservation Strategy which, I think it is fair to say, will be quite a significant piece of work. It is not just a little touch-up.

Once that is out, we will continue to look at other factors. Quite a few of the things you have spoken in reference to, you will probably see included in the document. I am hesitant to go into too much detail because it would be bordering on announcing policy that I am not in a position to announce right now. As I said, there will be some more information coming your way shortly into the public domain on that.

Another part of this is looking at what is happening federally—given that this is an increasingly contested space—and trying to get some certainty out of where federal reforms might go and what opportunities that might open for us, or what other factors we might have to consider within our own responses. There has certainly been a bit of: “Do we go now? Do we not go now? Do we wait? Do we not wait?”, in trying to figure out the right timing.

I think the point where we have landed is we can probably press ahead with a few things—because we might be waiting a while, and we probably do not want to wait any longer on some of these. But it is a bit of a juggling act trying to make sure that in moving ahead we are not doing so in a way that becomes contradictory or problematic, or misses an opportunity. So, I think what I am trying to say, in summary, is it is an ever evolving and shifting landscape and we will just be keeping eye on it as best we can.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, I am unclear at the end of all that. Since we last asked about this—I think it was in estimates hearings—we have had new federal environment laws starting to move through the parliament. I am trying to understand where the offsets policy is up to, because it has been sitting there for quite a while needing to be looked at.

**Ms Orr:** I think this is something that the former minister started potentially looking at quite a while ago, too. What is fair to say is offsets is not an easy policy area to crack

or do reform in. Many have come before and failed or not made the progress they would like to make. We will continue to look at what we can do.

The first step, Mr Rattenbury, is certainly the broader reform in the Nature Conservation Strategy and where we land with that. I think it is fair to say we will continue to inform where we go with more specific tranches of work that would sit within that broader one. Mr Burkevics, I think, is hoping to add a little bit to what I am saying, so I will hand over to him.

**Mr Burkevics:** Yes, I would say it is more than “being looked at”. There is active work underway. As the minister indicated, the offsets policy is a very, very complex policy. However, a number of bodies of work have been undertaken under the umbrella of the offsets policy. Colleagues in planning have progressed a review of offsets governance arrangements. They have implemented some strengthening of those decision-making practices of when an offset is to be decided and then accepted. It is really pleasing to see a strengthened whole-of-government approach around offsets and, in particular, the cost of them.

We have also undertaken a detailed review of the operations and arrangements within the offsets team in the parks and conservation service. That has been really useful to help us understand the quantum of all the offsets management plans and commitments that exist, how best we can service them, and the outlook moving forward. Because, of course, a lot of the offset management plans were decided many years ago and they are multidecade. So, there some significant challenges and pressures there with the changing environment, invasives, natural disasters, to ensure we are meeting our requirements under the offsets management plan.

We are reviewing options to progress a refresh of the offsets policy. We did have the offsets review that has been undertaken. That provided a range of helpful recommendations, but that body of work I think will take an extended time. And, of course, as we have previously discussed in hearings, seeing where the commonwealth goes under their environmental legislation—seeing that legislation now tabled before parliament—is a useful signal to how the ACT might then want to align its future offsets policy.

**MR RATTENBURY:** The ACT has a range of obligations to the commonwealth under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act for previous offsets. Is the ACT meeting its obligations under those various offsets?

**Mr Burkevics:** I would say that there are a number of challenges that the ACT faces in meeting its commitments under the offset management plans. The pressures on the environment, as you know, are significant. So, we are seeing some real challenges in upholding some of the various elements of those offset management plans. That work continues within the offset management team and by the parks and conservation service, but absolutely there are some challenges in upholding our obligations in the offset management plans.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What are those key challenges?

**Mr Burkevics:** I think there is a variety, Mr Rattenbury. The offsets commitments can

vary, for example at an individual species level, keeping weeds out, to at a landscape level. So, I think there are a range of pressures in all offset management plans. We are seeing weed incursions across the ACT—African lovegrass et cetera. They are all part of our responsibilities.

**Ms Orr:** I think the other bit that comes through quite strongly in briefings to me is how climate change is impacting established practices, and whether they remain the most effective or whether there need to be changes made based on how the environment is changing. That is also one of the challenges. The effectiveness we might have seen of things previously is perhaps not quite what it was, because—Mr Rattenbury, as I am sure you would agree—our climate is changing. We have already seen those impacts.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is there adequate funding for the agency to do the job? The government sold the land and got the revenue, but has adequate funding—or commensurate funding—then been put in place to meet our obligations to the commonwealth?

**Ms Orr:** When we have challenges such as whether our practices still hold true in the way that we think they do, the funding is not necessarily the first question. The funding is the response. I do not think it is as simple as distilling down to one particular aspect. Mr Burkevics could potentially add a little bit to that.

**Mr Burkevics:** I would reiterate your answer, minister: funding is just one of the many matters that has been considered. I am not going to stray into a line of answering around budgets, but we do have a very experienced team in the parks and conservation service that are doing their best to look after these offset areas. They do require a higher standard management as we are required to do under the EPBC Act.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Can a rural property be used as an offset while having an active rural lease?

**Mr Burkevics:** I would defer that question to the Territory Planning Authority. That is their area. There are a number of areas where offset land has overlaid with rural lessees, but I think it is more appropriate that the Territory Planning Authority is the responsible entity to provide advice on that one.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, is the current Labor government still committed to completely decommissioning Canberra's natural gas network by 2045?

**Ms Orr:** Yes.

**Ms CASTLEY:** Will there be any functioning natural gas lines left in Canberra in 2045?

**Ms Orr:** Again, some of these questions that sound like they should be a simple “yes” or “no” answer are actually not. So, I will get Ms Wright to work through the detail on that one.

**Ms Wright:** I would say the answer is, “We do not know yet.” That is the work that we are currently doing. We are working now on the plan for the next 20 years to get us to

2045. Things that may change that eventuality include that, as technology improves, as biogas or non-fossil fuel gas becomes available, that perhaps changes how planning might occur. But what we do know is that gas for use in most residential and commercial situations is not the most effective—either in cost or in an emissions sense. So, for residential and commercial situations it is a very clear path.

Where there might be some grey area is in the industrial areas. That is why our “no new gas” regulation shows that we are not allowing any new connections in any residential or commercial areas. However, in industrial zoned areas, people can still get a gas connection.

We will continue to work with the gas distribution authority, Evoenergy, on how the plan from here to 2045 works out.

**MS CASTLEY:** The 2024-2030 integrated energy plan states on page 17 that by 2030 no new gas connections to the fossil gas network will be occurring in most areas, unless approved by the minister. What do you define as being outside those “most areas”? Is that the industrial areas that you are talking about?

**Ms Wright:** Yes, that is correct. I can give you a very detailed rundown of which zones but, broadly speaking, any commercial or residential zone is not allowed to have a connection. Industrial does. But I do not know—Ms Sendaba, do you have that?

**Ms Sendaba:** That will have to be approved by the minister.

**Ms Wright:** So, that is correct. Yes.

**MS CASTLEY:** On page 19, the plan states that in 2035-2040 that phased sections of the gas network will be safely decommissioned. Can you confirm which sections will be decommissioned in that timeframe?

**Ms Wright:** I cannot currently confirm what that looks like. This is something that we are actively working on. In part, it will be governed by where we see movement in the network. So, at the moment, in this current phase of our plan, people are taking their own action; individuals are taking action. We are already seeing quite a significant number of people that are exiting the gas network at a time that is right for them. And as that individually led behaviour keeps going, we continue to monitor that and work with Evoenergy. So, where there are areas where there is less and less gas usage, we will work on what that process looks like. We do not have that definitively worked out as yet.

**MS CASTLEY:** That leads to my next question beautifully. Do you know how many residential properties have been disconnected from the natural gas network since the government announced its policy? And are people just getting rid of their gas appliances, and not switching off the gas network? I believe a lot of people get rid of their heater or their stove but do not actually disconnect from the gas network. Is that what we are seeing?

**Ms Wright:** I will just wait for some figures to come through to me. To answer the second part of your question: what we are seeing is that there is a mixture. There are

some people that are totally physically disconnecting their gas services once they totally electrify their homes. At the other end of the scale, we are seeing, as you mentioned, some people may replace some of their high gas-using appliances such as space heating, but retain some elements. In between, there might be people that totally electrify their home but, rather than physically disconnect, they might just stop their account.

**MS CASTLEY:** Why do they not? What is the barrier to completely disconnecting?

**Ms Wright:** In some cases, I think the barrier would be that there is a difference in the cost that you are charged for what is called abatement versus a cancellation. That is something that we are working with Evoenergy on, in terms of the appropriate policy. So, given we are in a situation where we do have a shrinking gas network, and we have, in the future, sections of the gas network that may be disconnected, we are working to make sure that we are putting forward something that is safe; that looks to the risks of keeping a physical connection in the property.

At the same time, we are looking at the cost impacts. That, obviously, is a cost that is regulated by the Australian energy regulator. So, we are working closely with Evoenergy and the AER and safety organisations, and the utilities technical regulator to understand what some of those barriers are, and also to make sure that we are putting forward the most safe program.

**MS CASTLEY:** With regard to the figures, if you could also get the commercial properties.

**Ms Wright:** Okay. I will just start with the figures that I have. We have got approximately 6,000 totally disconnected, and about 15,000 that we can see have been temporarily disconnected. So, where we are seeing no gas usage over 12 months, approximately 10 per cent of customers have left the gas network.

**MS CASTLEY:** What is the government's approach or response—I am asking maybe for an opinion—to residents installing bottled LPG at properties without natural gas connections? Are you hearing anything about that?

**Ms Wright:** I do not.

**Ms Sendaba:** I have not heard anything. We know that in some instances people will do that, but I have not in recent months had any specific engagement or correspondence with anybody who has said that they are going to do that. We have not seen anything in particular.

**MS CASTLEY:** Those figures that you just gave us on the 10 per cent that have left the network, is that just residential? Can you get the commercial figures?

**Ms Wright:** That is primarily residential. I will take on notice to get specific commercial figures. There are a number of different types of meters so it might be difficult to get the actual answers. Some commercial installs use a residential type meter. So, I will take it on notice.

Just to provide a little bit more detail, we have got our figures on LPG gas; data is stable.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you, Chair. I want to ask about Suburb Zero. In January, the federal government asked ARENA to consider funding suburb-wide electrification accelerator projects across Australia. In that announcement, it specified the ACT as a next opportunity—after something similar was done in Wollongong in October of last year. And, obviously, Electrify Canberra has been pushing this quite hard here in the ACT for a number of years. I wanted to ask where those plans are up to.

**Ms Orr:** I met with Electrify Canberra in the lead-up to their putting in their next application as part of this project. I wrote them a letter of support. The government's position is that we want to electrify. Certainly, if there are groups out there such as Electrify Canberra who want to contribute to that overall broader task, we will be happy to support them, liaise with them and work with them. We will continue to look at the ACT as a whole, as well, so the project is capturing the bigger objective.

**MR EMERSON:** The letter of support was in relation to an ARENA funding proposal? Is that what it was?

**Ms Orr:** I believe that is what it was, yes.

**MR EMERSON:** You may not want to give away exactly where you would hope for it to be, but it would certainly be my view that it would be better in a suburb where people would benefit the most from the cost saving—as opposed to, perhaps, a wealthier suburb. Is that likely?

**Ms Orr:** I think that is a question really for Electrify Canberra. My understanding is it was their decision as to where they focused the project. It is their project, not government's. The letter we wrote was saying that we were supportive of their intentions, and that was based on the discussions we have had with them and our understanding of the work that they have done, in the analysis and consideration in forming up their part. Again, it is their project; it is not a government's project. But, as I said, we are certainly supportive from the perspective of the overall task that we are looking at, and do not want to discourage them.

Through those discussions and in the meeting I had with them, I raised questions of equity and looking at where you could best support a fair and just transition. They have certainly taken that on board. I believe that the suburb that they have chosen certainly considers that. I am a little bit hesitant to say too much more than that, Mr Emerson, given it is not government's project and I do not entirely know what I am at liberty to disclose.

It does go to an issue which is in our consideration, which is how we do the transition and how we make it as equitable as possible across the board. Sometimes when choosing a particular suburb there is not one that sticks out. The need is across all of Canberra. Again, while we certainly would not discourage Electrify Canberra because they are taking great initiative, the government would not necessarily take that exact approach in our broader consideration across all of Canberra. I think Ros Malouf wants to add a little bit to this.

**Ms Malouf:** Ros Malouf, Executive Branch Manager of Program Delivery section in

Climate Change Energy and Water. My involvement in this project is a supportive role. We have been approached by the consortium and, as the minister said, without pre-empting a federal government process, we have been supportive in providing details of where those suburbs are that have had some electrification done already. It may be best to describe it as a suburb that is interested in having electrification done.

We have also provided details of what electrifications happen—both in our public housing space and through our sustainable household scheme—to help them see the size of the project and how big it would actually be, to get the best bang for their buck.

The other consideration is about network constraint; to make sure they choose the right suburb that is going to benefit the network as well and not be hindered by that. So those are the pieces of the puzzle that are all being put together. Besides the letter of support, the government has been providing lots of data to the group to help them make those good decisions, and to make sure it is a successful project.

**MR EMERSON:** Thanks for doing that. That is great. Back to your point, minister, about distributing benefit more broadly, not just to individual suburbs: is any active work going on in that area, especially insofar as it is related to accessing federal funding? I think that is one of the benefits here, right? In Wollongong, it was \$5.4 million of ARENA funding for the pilot. Is that something that the ACT government is pursuing?

**Ms Orr:** Mr Emerson, there were a few thoughts in that, and I am not quite sure I have understood the question.

**MR EMERSON:** Yes, fair enough. I understand there is a proponent; it is not the government, it is the advocacy group. Taking learnings off that, looking forward, is the government planning to do this in more suburbs, or seek federal funding in any other way to electrify more of the ACT, more quickly?

**Ms Orr:** As you have rightly pre-empted, I would make note that it was Electrify Canberra's project and, as I previously said, it is a suburb-by-suburb focus. It is not necessarily a focus the government would take, but I am not going to discourage Electrify Canberra from taking their good work and progressing what they are doing. We will continue as a government to look at the ACT as a whole, and into how we can do that. The question of equity will continue to be considered through the decisions we take and the different proposals that are brought forward for consideration.

I can get the director to talk you through this in more detail. Certainly we do look at every opportunity around working with our federal colleagues and funding opportunities, as to where we can add that into our response. There are a broad range of initiatives that we could go to on that—

Ms Malouf is also jumping off the edge of her seat. I think she wants to add something, so I will throw her into the hot seat.

**MR EMERSON:** Any specifics on federal funding initiatives that we could make as much money from as possible.

**Ms Malouf:** We have been quite successful across the country with a couple of projects. We got \$7.2 million in our social housing energy performance initiative, or SHEPI as we call it. That \$7.2 million from the commonwealth added to the funding that we already had in government to help accelerate our social and community housing—so, Housing ACT stock—to electrify those, and also our community housing stock in the ACT.

That funding was increased and that amount was announced earlier this year, in February, for \$12.9 million of additional funding. That funding for SHEPI2, as we are calling that one, is for solar and battery installations in public housing and community housing. So, that will help those households reduce energy costs: insulate them, electrify them, and then put solar and battery on those. That project is progressing. There is an advance tender notice out now.

That was \$12.9 million dollars; so a little over \$20 million in funding.

**Ms Orr:** Correct me if I am getting this wrong, Ms Malouf, but my understanding regarding SHEPI 2.0 is we were able to move faster than any jurisdiction because of the position we are in. So, it was not just necessarily harnessing the funding but just being in a position to actually do that, culturally.

**Ms Malouf:** That is correct Minister. On SHEPI1 and SHEPI2 we were allowed to almost structure what SHEPI looked like for the commonwealth. Some states and territories are still working out what SHEPI1 looks like. We will be finished the SHEPI1 funding in its entirety by January 2026. So, we can move faster because we can add them to existing programs that are already in play.

**THE CHAIR:** I am wondering if you can take this on notice: are you able to tell us, in the last two years how much commonwealth funding we got for electrification; and if we bid for any commonwealth funding and did not get it? Is that something that can be taken on notice?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes, I can tell you what we bid and did not get. I am not aware of any that we did not get.

**THE CHAIR:** Maybe just list, for electrification, what we did get for commonwealth funding and what we bid for and did not get. If the answer is, “We did not bid for anything” or “it was all successful”, then that is the answer.

**Ms Malouf:** I can definitely do that. So, it was the \$7.2 million to \$12.9 million.

**MR EMERSON:** This is fantastic, honestly, but what is on the horizon? This is what I am getting at. ARENA has got the funding there; they have specified a purpose for it. Is there anything else like that that we are looking at?

**MS CARRICK:** What is the plan?

**MR EMERSON:** Yes.

**Ms Orr:** There is always a plan. Given that we need to put in our considerations to

ARENA and ARENA needs to approve them, it is a little bit speculative as to what may come out the other end of those processes.

**MR EMERSON:** So, there is something under development to submit? I am not really asking you to pre-empt an outcome.

**Ms Orr:** Mr Emerson, I can certainly give you our assurances that we take every opportunity and we are definitely taking things forward where we have the opportunity to. That is definitely what we can say with confidence. As to what actually is going forward, I think that is probably a little bit premature and speculative if we were to say, “we are thinking about this” or “we are thinking about that”. There is a lot of due consideration that needs to go through into these projects. There is also the fact that ARENA needs to agree with our views.

**THE CHAIR:** Anything else on that, Mr Emerson?

**MR EMERSON:** I am just wondering if there is an opportunity that is being pursued, but I think there are other questions to ask. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. So, we are back to the beginning. We are going to try and get at least another couple of questions in, and it is okay to take things on notice rather than give us long answers that maybe do not have a lot of information in them, that is fine.

I just want to have a quick check-in about our community partnerships. We have got a lot of our strategies that are really reliant on community partners. What does it mean for a community organisation that is been identified as a government community partner? How is the nature of that relationship different from someone who is not a government community partner?

**Mr Burkevics:** Thank you, Ms Clay. Can you give us an example?

**THE CHAIR:** So, for example, maybe Waterwatch. Waterwatch is not a government program; is that right? It is a community partner program?

**Mr Burkevics:** Well, it is a program delivered by the community that receives funding from government.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, okay. We have got the term “community partner” in the annual report a lot, and I am trying to work out who is a community partner. Would Waterwatch be a community partner?

**Mr Burkevics:** I think that is open to the interpretation of the reader, Ms Clay. Of course, all of these programs receive funding from government. Government is going through that process of expression of interest at the moment, and that, all going well, will be soon closed and give certainty to those groups.

**THE CHAIR:** Maybe I will jump back. Can you tell me who in the environment sector are your community partners?

**Mr Burkevics:** Again, it is all open to the interpretation. I would like to think those

volunteer groups that are doing it voluntarily of their own time are the primary partners. How do you define groups that do receive funding from government? There is obviously a formal transaction that has occurred there, so I think you could interpret that one slightly different. The partners such as ParkCare groups, others—

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry; I did not mean this to be a complicated definitional question. The annual report talks about Waterwatch, FrogWatch and Landcare and Park Care Groups and Ginninderra. I think they are community partners.

**Ms Orr:** I think Ms Wright has something to add to this.

**Ms Wright:** I will ask Ms Malouf to talk in a second, but I believe in the annual report we use the term “community partner” for three organisations that we have ongoing funding agreements with; being the Conservation Council, SEE Change and the Environment Centre.

**Ms Orr:** Yes, that is correct.

**THE CHAIR:** Not the programs, just the other ones—those are the community partners?

**Ms Wright:** That is what I believe from the report, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; that is great. How is being a community partner different to being any other sort of private business or service provider in the community?

**Ms Malouf:** I think for the sake of the annual report we call it “community partner”. That is historical. For probably 25 to 30 years it has been called a community partner in that space. I think back to Mr Burkevics’ comment: going forward, at different times when we have funding and projects we want delivered, and we know the community can deliver maybe better than the government can, that is when the funding becomes available, and others may come forward at different times to say, “I am best placed to deliver that project.”

**THE CHAIR:** Does the Procurement Act or any of the guidelines recognise community partnership? Is the relationship different in any way or is this just a word that we use in the annual report?

**Ms Malouf:** For us, I think it is a word we use in the annual report.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; so it does not actually mean anything at all?

**Ms Malouf:** Except it is historical.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**MS CARRICK:** I want to ask about the accountability indicators, particularly for output 3.1, climate change and energy, on page 332 of the annual report. Accountability indicator C published an annual inventory of the greenhouse gas emissions. So you produced your report. But it is 2023-24 that I can see and then the accountability

indicator is that you have published it. I have a couple of questions. Is the 2024-25 one finalised—the inventory report? Assumably it is, because you would know what the outcome was for emissions.

**Ms Wright:** It is not finalised as yet. It will be it will be presented, and the minister will table it in the Assembly once it is finalised.

**MS CARRICK:** Why is it not finalised prior to the annual report? Why when we are looking for the 2024-25 outcomes for emissions we are looking at the 2023-24 outcomes? Why are we not looking at the current 2024-25 outcomes?

**Ms Wright:** It is a matter of timing. We talked through earlier some of the detailed mechanisms and methodologies that we have to go through in order to actually calculate the greenhouse gas inventory and we work with an independent authority as well in order to produce that. So, at the time of producing an annual report, we are working on the past year's data.

**MS CARRICK:** Can that process be speeded up, so that we can look at the previous year's data in the annual report?

**Ms Wright:** I believe we work as quickly as possible. After the end of the financial year we then have to go through all of those data sources and have those verified, and we also work within the legislative requirements. That is in the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act, which talks through the timing of the presentation of the reports.

**Ms Sendaba:** We are about 18 months ahead of the minimum legislative requirement. The act gives us a timeframe to receive the data and reconcile it and then undertake necessary calculations. Over time and experience we have been able to bring that process forward quite substantially; so we publish quite ahead of when the legislation says that we need to.

**MS CARRICK:** Is that ACT legislation or commonwealth legislation?

**Ms Sendaba:** It is ACT legislation.

**MS CARRICK:** Are there any further opportunities to have the financial year that we are looking at in the annual report?

**Ms Sendaba:** The timing really is the issue—just the logistics. The annual report obviously has to be prepared within a certain timeframe. I guess you could rebase the timings, but it is commonly accepted to report on financial years or calendar years, and so we stick within what is the known reporting period and then allow some time to undertake these necessary calculations.

**Mr Peffer:** I would add that that would be very challenging. We have a timetable that is actually set right across the public service that requires verification by the Auditor-General's office of the various indicators that we report on. So we have quite a strict timeframe to get the data in, for them to go through their own assurance process, to then include it in the annual report. So I do not think that is going to be possible.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. The Auditor-General has a big job to audit a lot of things before these annual reports are produced, which is why I think that they are given until October—four months after the end of the financial year—so that there is time for all this to happen. Are you looking at your accountability indicators to provide more transparency about the outcomes from the targets that you have set? For climate change there is three: that households participated; that businesses participated; and you publish the inventory. Are you looking at how you can enhance the value of these indicators?

**Ms Sendaba:** We are always reviewing the indicators. As we set new policies and programs, there is kind of a set process each year where we review and make sure the indicators are aligned with the objectives of the policies that we are implementing. It is a fairly general response, but I think that is fair across all the work that we do.

**MS CARRICK:** Would you foresee actually putting the target for the greenhouse emissions and the result as opposed to publishing the date you publish the—

**Ms Sendaba:** We publish the report, and we are able to report quite easily on that. But we publish a very detailed inventory report which sets out exactly the breakdown of all the emission sources and how we are tracking against our targets. That is what the minister will table it at the end of the year. That is our full inventory. As Ms Wright indicated, we have an independent party that undertakes and verifies that data and prepares that report.

**MS CARRICK:** When you look at these indicators you do not see much, and you have to then get referred to other documents. Could we have more targets and indicators in the annual report?

**Mr Peffer:** I do not think it is a reflection that the data is not made public; it is just that we are unable to make the data public with the timeline associated with the annual report. It is a commitment to do that. We follow through and that is done as—

**MS CARRICK:** If you cannot get 2024-25 you could put the 2023-24 targets and the result.

**Mr Peffer:** We could do that but it is a 2024-25 annual report. I suspect I know the line of questioning that would follow.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** What are the government's plans for increasing the uptake of the rebates under the Home Energy Support Program—given the shortfall in targets?

**Ms Wright:** The Home Energy Support Program covers a few banners. I assume, Mr Cain, you're talking about the rebates to private home owners.

**MR CAIN:** The rebate, yes.

**Ms Wright:** It is a program that has been running for a couple of years now. As we anticipate with most of these programs, we saw a stronger uptake in the first years. Now, as we get through the people that have received rebates in a position or with a

willingness to undertake the activities, we are seeing those numbers drop. But I will pass to Ros Malouf to talk through that a bit further.

**Ms Malouf:** Did you say the “shortfall” of the target?

**MR CAIN:** Yes. Page 91 indicates that the rebate uptake was lower than expected and may have been impacted by cost-of-living pressures.

**Ms Malouf:** As Ms Wright said, the program does have a bigger uptake to start with—and you only need to electrify or put a solar system on, God willing, once in a period of time—and there is only a limited amount of money people have available to pay either the other component of the costs or to get a loan for the other component. We run a regular campaign, and we are looking at different campaign methodologies to be able to get to the right people to let them know that these are available. It is a difficult cohort to connect with, because there is a lot of other issues in a low-income household that may become a bigger priority.

**MR CAIN:** Okay. I think we better leave it there.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. I am afraid we ran out of time, Minister, and we did not even get through one question for each committee member. Was there a reason that the 9.00 am start was difficult for you to attend? Is there something we need to do to make sure we can start on time?

**Ms Orr:** According to my clock I was two minutes late. The Assembly clocks are different to my clock, and I believe we have now gone two minutes over. So we have had the time that was allotted.

**THE CHAIR:** I wonder if you could perhaps adjust your clock for next year, so that you could be here for 9.00 am.

**Ms Orr:** I could, but it would then be consistent with the Assembly’s clocks but inconsistent with every other clock. I have an Apple phone. It is set by Apple and it updates.

**THE CHAIR:** Or you can come a couple of minutes early perhaps and just be ready to start.

**Ms Orr:** Sure, Ms Clay. But I would press the point again: we have gone a couple of minutes over and there has been no difference in the time that has been allotted to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** I think you were late, Minister. All your officials were here.

**Ms Orr:** Mr Cain, I have not disputed that. But, as I have said, the period of time that was allotted for this has been allowed.

**THE CHAIR:** We have had a number of questions taken on notice. If you can provide

your answers to the committee secretariate within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*, that would help us. Thank you.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation

Health and Community Services Directorate

Sabellico, Ms Anne Maree, Acting Deputy Director-General, Community Services  
Shields, Ms Penny, Acting Executive Group Manager, Housing Assistance

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Ms Yvette Berry, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Witnesses do not need to acknowledge the privilege statement. That statement applies to you regardless of whether you have acknowledged it. But I will remind you that as a witness you are protected by parliamentary privilege and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not inviting opening statements; so we will proceed straight to questions. Minister, I have a question about the public housing waitlist. We are getting quite alarmed about this. In November 2024, it was 2,975 households; in March this year it was 3,189; by June it was 3,402; and towards the end of last month you advised it was 3,486. So it is actually increasing steadily. Can you tell me why the number of households on our public housing waitlist this term is increasing when you are telling us that more public housing is available?

**Ms Berry:** Yes; because the number of people who are in need of public housing is growing. It is not just here in the ACT; it is growing across the country. We have a range of crisis that people are experiencing now, including affordable housing and, affordable rentals, and there is no doubt that everybody across the country is playing catch-up.

However, I would say that we are now in a unique position—where we have not been previously—where we have partnerships with a range of different organisations, including the federal government, which we did not have before under the previous government. We now have the HAFF funding, which is providing opportunities to build even more affordable homes and public housing, and we have a range of different grants and programs across the ACT government that are giving opportunities for partnerships to build more and more homes across a range of different areas. While the waitlist for public housing is growing, public housing on its own will not solve the challenges that our communities face, which is why all of these partnerships with community housing providers, the federal government, philanthropic and private developers—really anyone who is interested in building homes—in that affordable and social housing bracket is where we are all targeting to try and come at this from a number of different angles.

**THE CHAIR:** I am really happy to hear about those partnerships and the federal funding. I think most of those things have been around for a while. Are those things new since November last year or is that all of these funding sources and community partnerships?

**Ms Berry:** No. There were some delays with the HAFF funding, as you would know.

Now that that has come through and we have gone through the first and second tranches of funding for programs across the country, including here in the ACT, we have seen more homes on the pipeline. We have also come to a point in our housing growth and renewal program where the increase in public housing numbers has started to see an uplift. While we are seeing growth in the public housing waitlist, we have also prioritised working with people on the priority waitlist to get them into homes more quickly. So we are having some success there.

However, there were difficulties at the start of this program around construction—the construction workforce, construction material supply, the long tail of COVID still impacting the sector, weather with the La Nina—which was delaying the build of homes over a number of years. But now we are seeing the build of homes timeframes decreasing—so nine to 12 months.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you tell me about that recent change? All of the other things I have heard you talk about in, many, many hearings over many, many years. What is the decrease in times for build? What was it and what has the decreased to?

**Ms Berry:** In general, I think the broad build times that we were looking at previously—this was coming out of COVID and with the various war and unrest overseas that was impacting supplies—was upwards of around 18 months. We are now getting back to a more business-as-usual timeframe of nine to 12 months, depending on the build. Somebody can correct me if I am wrong here, but I think that is where we are at now. It means that our house builds are occurring more quickly. The sector is still challenged with workforce and supplies, but we do not have, at this moment in time, the challenges that we had three or four years ago.

**THE CHAIR:** So we have a nine to 12 month build time now, and we had under 3,000 on the waitlist in November. It takes 12 months to build homes. Why are we still increasing our waitlist? Is that because we are building lots more public homes, but the new incoming people on the waitlist is increasing that fast?

**Ms Berry:** The number of people who are applying for public homes is increasing across the country and here in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** That is probably going to be a trend, I would say. I cannot see anything that is likely to turn that around. Has the government changed its goals for how much public housing it will need to build, noting that there are now more and more people applying.

**Ms Berry:** No, but we think ensuring an increase in public housing in our future supply as well as affordable rentals—community and community housing—will address some of this crisis. We now have partnerships and, for us in the ACT, that is important, because we are not a big state or territory and we do not have the grants of other state or territories to be able to fund this all by ourselves, but we can, with these partnerships and working across the housing continuum, increase public housing, yes, absolutely—and that is increasing—but also increase community housing and affordable rentals, which will have an impact.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, thank you very much. We have heard most of those things

before.

**Ms Berry:** Maybe not everyone has.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; sure. You obviously know the trajectory of people applying for public housing—you must know this. Have you modelled the impact of your current planned government policies against that? Can you tell us that, when I ask what the public housing waitlist is in three months, six months, nine months and 12 months, it will not be neatly 200 and 300 more households every time?

**Ms Berry:** I do not know that you could predict the change in the public housing waitlist. We are aware that on the public housing waitlist, while it is not a centralised waitlist for affordable and community housing, people who are on the waitlist also may have their names with community housing providers. I think that has been—

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, it is a little bit predictable, though, because every three months it has gone up between 100 and 200 since November last year. That is a degree of predictability, is it not? Unless you have got something different happening, presumably it will go up by 100 to 200.

**Ms Berry:** We do have different things happening. We have HAFF funding from the federal government, which is making a difference to—

**THE CHAIR:** That was—

**Ms Berry:** No; this funding is going out now.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, great.

**Ms Berry:** It is increasing public housing supply but it is also increasing community housing and we will also see a growth in affordable rentals as well. On the waitlist, I think from the last time I saw it, there were around 500 individuals who indicated that they had their names down with community housing providers as well. Again, we do not have a centralised waitlist with community housing. We do not manage community housing waitlists, but we are seeing a significant growth in community housing in the ACT, more community housing providers coming and wanting to be part of the solution as well as a growth in our Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisations.

So, no, we have not solved it today and it will not be solved this year, because it will still take some time to build homes while the build time has decreased. It is still not something that can be resolved tomorrow, and that is why we have a pipeline of homes being built all across the ACT across a range of different needs.

**THE CHAIR:** I will ask one more and then I will lodge one on notice and hand over to my colleagues. I am really pleased to hear about working with the community housing sector. I think that is great. The community housing sector has often wanted a centralised waitlist where Housing ACT and the community housing sector can both sort of work out who needs to go where and that is segregated. I am interested in how you as Coordinator-General for Housing can gauge the housing need if you have only got access to Housing ACT and you do not know what the need is for the community

housing sector? Would it not be better if it were more coordinated?

**Ms Berry:** We do work with the community housing sector quite closely. We all recognise that we have our roles to play in this and that the best way for us to achieve outcomes for people in our communities is to work together. I would not say that community housing providers have always wanted a centralised list. I do not think that is factually correct. But that is not to say that we would not be happy to organise and work with the sector to do just that. We would absolutely open to having a centralised waitlist. But I would say that it might not be the case that every community housing provider would want to be on that list. So, without wanting to speak for them, the government and Housing ACT is absolutely open to that.

A very long time ago, before I was in the housing portfolio, when it was not centralised for, for example, housing providers in the crisis space or women's housing, I recall that it was challenging bringing that under a centralised model, for a range of different reasons. Going on that experience and where we are now, I would say that we are very happy to engage if the community housing sector wants to do that but I would not say that they have always wanted to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** I am happy to be corrected on that, Minister. You have been doing it longer than I have. I will get you to take these questions on notice so I can hand over to others, but I will do it live to make sure you can take them. You mentioned the pipeline of public housing. Are you able to provide us with some information about how many public homes are in that pipeline?

**Ms Berry:** Absolutely; yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Great. Maybe for the next 12 months?

**Ms Berry:** I can probably give you to the end of this program—from when the current growth and renewal program finishes 2026-27. We can definitely provide you with that information. A lot of that is public.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. That would be great. Also on notice, can you tell me what proportion of the ACT's housing stock is owned by government now—I think the latest we looked at it, it looked like about 5.7 per cent—and how that figure compares to 20 years ago? When we looked at that, it looked like about 13 per cent. I just want to make sure we have the right figures.

**Ms Berry:** Yes, that is fine; although, I would say that 20 years ago, or longer than that, as a public housing family myself, public housing was a different kettle of fish back in those days and was based on a range of different circumstances. Public housing across the country has moved to needs-based, focusing on those most in need, which means that the number of market renters in public housing has decreased over time.

**THE CHAIR:** Understood.

**Ms Berry:** What we did not have 20 years ago was community housing and purposeful, affordable rentals, which is what we are looking at doing more of now. So, while the public housing numbers have decreased for a range of different reasons, community

housing now exists, and we want to grow that as well, because there is a need for affordable rentals in that space as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. On notice is fine.

**MS CARRICK:** I notice in one of the QoNs from estimates that a lot of the applications for public housing, particularly for high needs and standard housing, were significantly high for one-bedroom apartments. For example, for high-needs housing, one bedroom was 1,219 and two bedrooms was 380, and then it got lower the more bedrooms. It was the same for standard housing, significantly higher for one-bedroom.

We have some small 50 square metre apartments that have been sitting on the market for over six months. I have had anecdotal evidence that in one apartment precinct there are 80 empty apartments and that people are forfeiting their deposits. They were bought off the plan and, rather than buying the place, they are just forfeiting their deposits. What are the barriers to accessing these empty apartments for public housing?

**Ms Berry:** Housing ACT already purchases off the market. I think one of the barriers would be ensuring that we do not have a high density of public housing within a development. It does not lead to the better outcomes that we want for our community and particularly for people who live in public housing.

We often buy off the market. For example, if a developer of a group of townhouses has not been able to sell them and get them started, Housing ACT, which is now ICBR, will purchase those off the market. So I think the barriers would be making sure that we are getting the right homes times that meet our needs and having the funding to purchase the homes. Also, making sure we have a mix of public housing across the ACT is an important part of that. I would say one of the other barriers is around the strata management of some of these developments or perhaps a reluctance for these to be sold to public housing, for whatever reason.

**MS CARRICK:** Is that barrier from the executive committee side or from the government side? Is the government happy to be involved with strata and pay strata fees?

**Ms Berry:** We would rather not, but we do.

**MS CARRICK:** What work has been done around the opportunities that are out there with empty apartments around town?

**Ms Berry:** I am not sure that we can answer this today, because—

**Ms Shields:** No; it might be tomorrow.

**Ms Berry:** It might be better for tomorrow, for the detail, but there is a team that does consider those purchases.

**Ms Shields:** I can probably speak to that. Ms Carrick, we have a team within Housing Assistance that looks after the strategic asset management, and that includes acquisitions for general management of the portfolio. Infrastructure Canberra now have

responsibility for the Growth and Renewal Program and the new 13,200 targets—those two components—and, along with our Internal Acquisitions team, look at the options that are available across the market at varying points in time, looking at what we already have in our stock in terms of number, density and our salt-and-pepper approach across the territory to make sure that we are not overpopulating one area with public housing, perhaps in one large apartment complex, for example. Moving forward, Housing Assistance will be working closely with Infrastructure Canberra to look at the best opportunities available moving forwards to make sure we are making the most of what is available but also considering that in the context of the existing portfolio.

**MS CARRICK:** How do you assure yourself that the planning framework is not providing too many 50 square metre apartments?

**Ms Shields:** Again, that might be a question for Infrastructure Canberra tomorrow. But we are also looking at matching what is on our waitlist—so making sure that we know what is coming in our pipeline from our waitlist—and making sure that what is being built or acquired also matches what the need of the community is.

**MS CARRICK:** The schedule talks about housing strategy and policy. So I am looking at it from a housing strategy and policy perspective as to how you ensure yourself that we are not over delivering on these small apartments that are difficult to sell.

**Ms Berry:** I think it could possibly be in the planning space, but I would say—and you have noted it yourself in the statistics that you have stated—that, on the waitlist, the need for one- and two-bedroom apartments is higher than for three- and four-plus bedroom homes. So that is that is the majority of our stock, and the need is growing in that space.

**MS CARRICK:** But, as mentioned, you cannot saturate it too much. When you salt and pepper it, you cannot saturate it too much. So how are we stopping this massive saturation of these small apartments that, frankly, nobody wants?

**Ms Berry:** Again, I think that is perhaps not an answer that I can provide you. It probably sits in the planning space more than mine.

**MS CARRICK:** Fair enough. But, being the Minister for Homes, I thought you might seek some assurance as to the stock.

**Ms Berry:** You are asking me for opinions. I just cannot give you an opinion on that.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay; thank you.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, in your first speech to the Assembly back in 2012 you spoke about putting your values into practice and particularly supporting low-income earners, who you described as some of the hardest workers, lowest paid and least secure in their employment. Given that housing is absolutely critical to the stability and wellbeing of low-income Canberrans and that home prices on your watch have become amongst the most expensive in the country, has the government got its policies and priorities right?

**Ms Berry:** Thank you for reading my first speech. Certainly in my areas of priority we

are seeing a growth in public housing that has never been seen before. So I would say that, yes, it has taken some time to build more public housing and more affordable rentals, for a range of reasons which we have talked about, but it is still my priority to keep building more public housing. While there have been challenges in the past, which I described earlier, we have also had a change of heart, I think, within our community. There are still some challenges with building public housing and we still get some communities who push back on that, but I have always been front and centre and defended more public housing in every suburban area of the ACT regardless of all of that. I am doing everything I can within my portfolio responsibilities, even when it is hard, to keep pushing and building more public housing.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you believe that the government's housing priorities are effectively supporting secure housing for low-income Canberrans—not just public housing but other low-income earners that want to buy their own home? What is your basis for that view?

**Ms Berry:** We are focusing a lot on public housing, which is appropriate—those are the people in our community that are most in need; however, that is not the only area where we need to build homes for people on lower incomes or no incomes. That is why we have a focus on building more community housing and opening up a market into affordable rentals. We are not alone in this. It is not unique to the ACT. Every state and territory are trying to figure out a way through this and grabbing at every opportunity that arises to build more and more of a range of different homes.

We are definitely playing catch-up—I am not denying that—but we are using every opportunity that we can, with those partnerships that I described earlier—which is unique and had not been the case previously—to provide everyone who wants to be part of solving this crisis the chance to build more homes for people who need them.

**MS CASTLEY:** The most recent rental affordability index report by National Shelter and SGS Economics found that Canberra's most vulnerable low income earners have been priced out of the city. This finding was recently confirmed by some Property Council research, showing the difficulty of housing affordability for essential and frontline workers. Does the government accept that these findings are true and, if so, can you talk about what your plans are for those workers?

**Ms Berry:** That has been the case for a number of years in the ACT. I saw some research more recently that suggested we were not the most expensive in the country. I think Brisbane took the first spot. Somebody might be able to correct me on that. That gives me heart that some of the things we are doing are making a difference.

Everybody will know that there is very little chance of housing prices or costs going down. The market is where the market has put itself. Now it is about looking at other opportunities to give people who cannot compete in that market and will never be able to compete in that market the chance to get into a home of their own, whether that is into a long-term affordable rental or by purchasing.

One of the projects that we are piloting here in the ACT is the first of its kind in the country. I do not think anyone else is doing it. It is a build-to-rent-to-buy project in Ginninderry. I think it is 20 units for women who are employed but who would not be

able to get into a home of their own. They can start with a rental property and then go into a purchasing scheme.

**MS CASTLEY:** In the last decade or so there have been significant rates of low income Canberrans moving out of the territory to satellite communities like Googong, Murrumbateman and Yass, primarily driven by the unaffordability and insecurity of local housing. Do you track movements out of town like that for low income Canberrans, and do you know what is driving their decisions?

**Ms Berry:** No. People move to different parts of the region for a variety of reasons. One of them could be affordability, although I would note that the challenges that councils around the region are beginning to face are not dissimilar to those in the ACT. Over the weekend or last week, we saw Yass council talking about an increase in rates of 40 per cent, which is quite a considerable increase. I imagine it will impact everybody in those communities in a range of different ways. However, the council has to do its job—repair roads, pick up rubbish and things like that. Queanbeyan, too, has some challenges that their community and council are facing.

Whilst I accept that there might be some people who have moved, we do not track it. It would have to be voluntary, if we did. I suspect that it would not just be for those reasons; people would have a range of different reasons for moving to different parts of the region.

**MS CASTLEY:** From looking at realestate.com, you can see that, with a block in Taylor, for instance, and if you look at Googong, it is at least \$100,000 less for a block of a very similar size. That is a decision that I think families are making. Even though rates are going up in those other satellite suburbs, it takes a lot of 40 per cent increases to get to an additional hundred grand on your house. If you are not tracking that, I wonder what the way forward for people is.

**Mr Davey:** From a land sales perspective, you are right; there are some distinct pricing differences across the currently available greenfield single residential blocks in Canberra and the region. We monitor this closely, from a Suburban Land Agency perspective. We set our pricing through independent valuations, as we are required to do under the legislation. We also aim to release as much land as we can. We do not land-bank or hold onto it. That is not how we operate; we are not able to do that. There is a slight nuance in terms of how we operate compared to other developers in Canberra and the region.

If you look at, say, the suburb of Jacka in Gungahlin, the price of those blocks, going back for the previous 12 months, was starting in the low 500s, which is pretty competitive with some of the regional areas. We also have land in Ginninderry and Macnamara through our joint venture. We have Whitlam, which is noticeably more expensive per metre than Jacka, but that is based on the geographical location and the demand.

The price of land is generally demand driven. That is how it works. We do look at the market quite closely. Land in Jacka has been selling very well. We currently do not have any available. We recently sold the last, currently available block. We will have more available soon.

**MS CASTLEY:** Despite the koalas.

**Mr Davey:** Yes, there are challenges like that. We may or may not have more land in the future in that particular area. We have seen an increase this year in sales of single residential land, which I think is promising. It does not necessarily mean that it is considered affordable by everyone, though.

**Ms Berry:** I can add something about the median price of some of those private developments. In Googong, the median price is \$899,000. In Denman Prospect it is \$1.9 million. Jumping Creek is \$830,000 and South Jerrabomberra is \$968,000. I cannot remember what our median is now. We will see whether we can get that for you.

**MS TOUGH:** In the CMTEDD annual report, it says that two deeds have been executed under the Affordable Housing fund for the affordable housing within the build-to-rent projects for CHC Australia and Marymead. These projects were announced in 2024. When were they signed and what is the timeframe for these homes being built—everything going forward?

**Ms Hall:** The CHC and Southern Cross one was signed on 11 September 2024. It is expected to be operational from 2027 at this point, although we are monitoring that. The Marymead CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn development was signed on 12 September 2024. It is expected to be operational at around the same time.

**MS TOUGH:** You said you were monitoring that; is that to make sure that building is starting, and keeping on top of the developers?

**Ms Hall:** Exactly; there is a range of things with these projects. Some of them, for example—not necessarily these projects—may have things like Housing Australia funding as well, so there is a range of processes that need to happen before construction can commence.

**MS TOUGH:** If the construction does not look like it is happening on time, what processes are there for the government to assist?

**Ms Hall:** In our area, we do offer assistance to help put people in contact with relevant areas of government, if there are any questions they have, for example. That is a core element of our business. Ultimately, if the projects are slightly delayed, it means that our commencement of payments—availability payments and those sorts of things—shifts out, so we still maintain the same—

**MS TOUGH:** If they do not get built, the payment gets withheld, until everything is on track and all built?

**Ms Hall:** Yes. We have milestone payments for anything that is up-front funding—any grant funding or LVC assistance—and ongoing availability payments only kick in once the dwellings are in service and operational.

**MS TOUGH:** Are there other projects like these ones potentially in the works? How does the government go about finding providers like this to work with?

**Ms Hall:** We have over 800 dwellings through the Affordable Housing Project Fund that are under development in the sense that they are projects that we are actively negotiating on or we have deeds for. We have also subsequently signed four additional deeds since the start of this financial year. Those are available on the CMTEDD website as soon as we sign them. We have had a fairly busy period of being able to finalise a range of deeds, and things are definitely flowing through.

**MS TOUGH:** Was it 800?

**Ms Hall:** Over 800, yes.

**MS CARRICK:** I have a question about affordable housing. Do you have a policy on the providers of affordable housing taking out—whether they are essential or not—parts of a development to make it cheaper? I refer, for example, to reducing the parking significantly. I have heard about taking out dishwashers, aircon and stuff to make the dwellings more affordable.

**Ms Hall:** Where we have an affordable rental deed, we require that it is the same standard as everything else in a unit. That is a key part of our affordable rental deeds.

**MS CARRICK:** There was one approved that has minimal parking and, in fact, the tenants that will move in there have to put their hand on their heart annually to say that they do not own a car. Is that not judgemental—that, if you are in affordable housing, you can catch public transport?

**Ms Hall:** Which development is that?

**MS CARRICK:** That is the Curtin one. It is MyHome. It is affordable housing attached to the MyHome. Residents are rightly concerned that the overflow onto the streets and into the Curtin shops will be significant, because we can see the overflow where there are multi-unit dwellings. It is a major concern that this is an outcome, and people do not have the choice. If you move in there, you sign up to say that, for many years, you will not have a car. If your circumstances change, what happens?

**Ms Hall:** The example we were talking about earlier was where we have affordable products as part of a broader market development. That one is more of a bespoke development. That question is probably best asked of the planning system, in terms of what requirements are approved for a development application.

**MS CARRICK:** Fair enough; but you guys are responsible for the policy around housing, and it is something that the community has been up in arms about. I have had multiple emails about it. The policy allows our local shops to become car parks for affordable housing; they are able to use our public spaces because, to make them affordable, they have minimal car parking, in this example. In order to be affordable, you are taking our public space.

**Ms Berry:** I do not think that is a true characterisation of affordable housing.

**MS CARRICK:** Don't you? I am talking about this particular situation.

**Ms Berry:** I understand your concerns and advocacy for the community around parking. That is not the responsibility of officials in this hearing today. It would be best put to somebody else, or a question on notice should be put to somebody else. I cannot provide you with the answers that you are after.

**MS CARRICK:** Fair enough, but you could put out a policy that affordable housing does not impinge on public space and the community's need for parking around their shops.

**Ms Berry:** We can have a range of policies, Ms Carrick, and you can recommend them, as part of the committee's work. But these officials cannot respond to that question in the way that I think you are after.

**MR RATTENBURY:** In the context of the ACT's Housing Strategy and policy, I want to ask about secondary dwellings on rural leases. Basically, farmers want to be able to operate their farms intergenerationally and have multiple generations living on and helping them to operate the farm. We have less than 200 rural lessees in the ACT, but there is a barrier at the moment where young farmers are either forced to share dwellings with their older parents—I think we know what young people think about that—or they have to move off the farm and into urban areas. Would it be consistent with the ACT's Housing Strategy to allow secondary dwellings on rural farms in this way, or is there some barrier to it, from a Housing Strategy point of view?

**Ms Berry:** That is a very unusual question.

**Mr Campbell:** There is a team within CED that is dealing with these leasing matters, so we might have to take it on notice and direct it to—

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure; thank you. I am conscious that there is a crossover with planning there. I am trying to explore, from a Housing Strategy point of view, whether there is any reason not to do it; then we can deal with the planning side of it.

**Ms Berry:** The planning side of it will probably come first, when it comes to what that means for a particular block, and whether it is leasehold for rural farming, until the end of time. Those are bigger decisions than just involving the Housing Strategy. I do not know that that will resolve the challenges that we are facing overall in the housing continuum. I do not think there is any reason why we would not look at it right now, but I do not think the decision on it would be with me, as to whether it could happen.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure. I am certainly not suggesting that it is some silver bullet for the ACT's Housing Strategy. We have a particular group in our community who are struggling with the current system and, if they are forced to move into town, will be competing in the market.

**Ms Berry:** It is a good question because, in the public housing space, when we are building new public housing, we are trialling a range of different initiatives. I know it is different to the circumstance that you are talking about, but I can refer to allowing family or carers to live nearby, or on the same block, in public housing; we will have a four- or five-bedroom home at the front and a two-bedroom home at the back, where

the grandparents or someone could live, and the large family or whatever could live at the front. Those are the kinds of things we are looking at, in trying to address the needs of everybody as much as we possibly can. I guess that is the sort of option that you are thinking about, except on rural leases.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, broadly. Can I ask about progress on the development of a program of prefabricated homes? You have advised previously that you are working on it. Are you able to give us an update?

**Ms Berry:** It might be an iCBR one for tomorrow.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay. I will come back to it tomorrow.

**Ms Berry:** I apologise for that, because we have just moved over, through the—

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is okay.

**MS CASTLEY:** There seems to be a lot of community and stakeholder concern about the government's ability to meet the target of 30,000 homes. Can you talk about how that figure was reached and what assumptions were relied on?

**Ms Berry:** It sits with planning, mostly. The first thing I would say, Ms Castley, is that you are right; 30,000 homes is ambitious, absolutely. We know it is. We know that land is finite, and it is becoming more complex and challenging, as we are seeing different and unique challenges appearing that we would never have been able to think would occur.

SLA's job is to work its way through those challenges and find opportunities with homes, as well as other opportunities. Again, this is about working with private development partners as well. One of the new ones that you might have seen last week was the railway or causeway; I am not sure what it is called.

**Mr Davey:** Kingston railway precinct.

**Ms Berry:** Kingston railway precinct, which is another opportunity for more homes to be built. Some of these are a bit into the future, but they are still part of the plan to increase our housing supply. It is about using those brownfield areas as much as we are using greenfield sites. The ACT government is only about two per cent of developable land home development. The rest is mostly through the private sector. The SLA's job is about making sure they have the land ready to be sold to private developers, who can then build more homes.

**Mr Davey:** With the 30,000 homes being derived through population forecasts, demand and that kind of thing, our role at SLA is looking at how to deliver against that. The Indicative Land Release Program, which you will all be familiar with, publishes where that number of dwellings is anticipated to come from, over a rolling five-year period.

If you look at the current ILRP, the Suburban Land Agency's work program accounts for somewhere in the order of 22,000, or maybe a bit more. If we add to that other government agencies, like the City Renewal Authority, CED et cetera, it brings the

numbers of dwellings forecast up. Of course, the private sector will play a pretty big role as well, in getting to that 30,000.

The minister talked about the Kingston railway precinct. There are other future pipelines of work on which we are undertaking due diligence and other work, to try and bring houses into that stream beyond the five years—in five to 10 years, or maybe even longer periods. Of course, we would expect by then that we will be over 30,000; that would all be by 2030. If there is anything we can do, from a preparation or planning readiness perspective, to bring more sites in earlier, to be ready for 2030, that is something that we are constantly looking at. I hope that gives you a bit of a sense of—

**MS CASTLEY:** Sure. We have touched on building approvals; they are at record lows, with only 91 dwelling approvals in the last reported month. It is usual for that level to be in the hundreds. Do you see that this slowdown in approvals is a concern for government as well as the private sector? Do you think it is hindering the ability to get to your target?

**Ms Berry:** Obviously, if homes are not being approved, yes, it does impact our ability. The question on the detail is probably for Minister Steel. My job, and the Suburban Land Agency's job, is the delivery of the process.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you have thoughts on what the consequences are, if the government fails to meet this target?

**Ms Berry:** Yes; we will not have built enough homes. I acknowledge that it will be challenging—possible but challenging. Some of the challenges that we are coming up against have not been able to be forecast or imagined, in some cases. The Suburban Land Agency is doing a great job in working through some of those.

**Mr Davey:** There was a question in relation to the rate per square metre, the median. The minister read out some of the currently available land. To round that off, with the land that the Suburban Land Agency is selling, the rate per square metre median for Jacka is \$993.40, for Whitlam, it is \$1,505—quite a price difference there—and in Ginninderry, it is \$1,066. We sit across that spectrum, with the private sector land at the lower end; then, towards the higher end—

**MS CARRICK:** With the 30,000 houses, I was wondering about the governance arrangements. Do you have a project group across SLA and other areas, a project plan and a risk register—how you might mitigate it when elements of your plan are not hit? Do you have that level of governance around it?

**Mr Davey:** Yes. If you look at SLA's role in the land release program that we are working on, we have in the order of 60 projects. There is a master schedule that we use internally. We have a portfolio steering committee that meets regularly and looks across our portfolio projects. We have project teams who will have project plans. Risk strategies feature in there. We report at least quarterly to government formally on progress. We meet regularly with various ministers. We meet probably weekly in a range of different fora across government, including with the City and Environment Directorate and colleagues in other agencies who have roles in helping with the delivery of land.

**MS CARRICK:** Is there one more broadly across government, with governance arrangements, terms of reference and a project plan across government, or is it just within the SLA?

**Mr Davey:** At the indicative land release level, that is in itself a program, and that is formally governed.

**MS CARRICK:** I thought you said that it was more than just SLA and the land release program; there was a range of things that would get us to the 30,000 houses. Are there governance arrangements across that range of different areas that will deliver the 30,000 houses, and a risk register across the whole thing?

**Mr Davey:** It is hard to articulate, when there are many moving pieces and different elements that contribute to it. There is the housing and infrastructure subcommittee of cabinet—it is probably an extremely formal setting—which has oversight of the delivery of housing and land supply. Underneath that, there is a formal committee, with terms of reference, that features the senior leaders of directorates and agencies. You can go below that to the finer grain of formal structures that are in place to manage the delivery, look at risks and work together to address those. There is quite a lot.

**MS CARRICK:** Are we allowed to get those terms of reference at the high level?

**Mr Davey:** I will take it on notice. There are a range of different groups, as you would imagine, looking at the various aspects. It might be infrastructure; it might be housing—

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, I am just trying to understand the governance for the whole 30,000.

**THE CHAIR:** You might take this on notice, Mr Davey. SLA has already reported that we are behind on our public, community and affordable targets. I do not know whether SLA has reported that we are behind on our residential and commercial land release targets as well. With those interim targets that we have missed, have you reported those to cabinet and the working group? Has that been reported up the line?

**Mr Davey:** Yes, we report quarterly; absolutely, we do.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you take on notice and tell us where you have reported, which targets you have missed and what governance body you have reported that to? Is that something you can take on notice?

**Mr Davey:** Yes, we can.

**MR EMERSON:** I have asked about this before, but I want to understand exactly how the government is coordinating its housing strategy with the Housing Australia Future Fund rounds, to capitalise on all the money that is there.

**Ms Hall:** When we have had rounds come out—the first round came out in 2024, I think—government made a decision to help support community housing providers by providing land and making that available, and doing things like having option deeds for

land, and a range of other support, but not actively submitting proposals itself.

We have worked with a range of community housing providers on that. We have also provided funding for a lot of those projects through our Affordable Housing Project Fund, which helps to get them off the ground, and it is a good way of leveraging both ACT and commonwealth funding.

For round 2, we took an approach of working across government, in the Office of the Coordinator-General, particularly with Housing ACT colleagues, about what was out there, noting that the focus of round 2 was very much on social housing—public housing—which was quite different from round 1.

That worked very effectively, in terms of bringing together different parts of government and making sure we had a plan. As you would have seen, we had an initiative and budget review last year, in the budget as well. That allowed us to take a staged approach to working through the options for the government and ultimately supporting a decision through last year's budget.

**MR EMERSON:** And round 3?

**Ms Hall:** Round 3 has not come out yet. We are actively looking. My team meets with Housing Australia every week. We keep asking, but there is no date yet.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you have a rough sense of when that might be open, and do you know why it has been delayed?

**Ms Hall:** I think there is a range of complexities on their side. These are really complex programs. I would not be able to speak to the reasons behind their decision-making. At this stage we are looking at early next year, but if something were to happen in the next month, we would be ready to help assist and work through with providers. In our recent Affordable Housing Project Fund, we supported a range of projects that would be good candidates for our HAFF round. We would work with our providers as well to help them, if there was anything needed in terms of working through those processes.

**MR EMERSON:** Hopefully, it is not coming to you right before Christmas—one of those government processes.

**Ms Hall:** It did last year.

**MR EMERSON:** I understand jurisdictions that have had the most success have put in direct bids to the HAFF. Obviously, they have contributed land, expedited approvals and novated across to CHPs through a subsequent EOI process. Has the ACT government done this or considered doing this?

**Ms Hall:** That is the approach for HAFF round 2. That is being managed through iCBR.

**MR EMERSON:** While we are on negotiations with the commonwealth, I want to check whether a business case has been provided to cabinet for developing the CSIRO Ginninderra site.

**Ms Berry:** I will take that on notice. I am not sure, because they are cabinet processes, but I would say probably not. Negotiations with the federal government are still continuing.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, you are welcome to take it on notice.

**Ms Berry:** I have taken it on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** If you come back and say that you cannot answer, you need to provide us with the explicit grounds for confidentiality.

**Ms Berry:** Yes, I understand all of that. I will take it on notice at this point in time. On CSIRO in particular, as you know, we are continuing negotiations with CSIRO for a potential future development of around 3,000 homes. By now, we are predicting success. If we were not getting somewhere, we would be very annoyed, like everybody else, at the time it has taken to negotiate this outcome. But we are close.

**MR EMERSON:** I believe you said, Minister, previously that CSIRO do not want to sell the entire site in one go. Why?

**Mr Davey:** That is largely a matter for CSIRO.

**Ms Berry:** Yes.

**Mr Davey:** I will put on the record that we are negotiating on the purchase of the eastern block. At this point in time, that is what is for sale.

**MR EMERSON:** Have you pushed back and sought to understand why they would not provide the entire block? The documents that you very kindly published recently, in response to one of my questions, showed that, as the minister has indicated, the first stage has capacity for just under 3,000 dwellings, but the second has capacity for 5,200 dwellings. I am wondering whether, during those negotiations, there has been a back and forth about securing the entire site in one go.

**Ms Berry:** We can probably talk in more detail about some of those conversations, where appropriate, once we finalise the current negotiations. As they are occurring right now, we probably cannot talk to what has been happening in those conversations. I would say, Mr Emerson, that the CSIRO site has been a matter of conversation and a process for CSIRO for over a decade—probably longer now. It is not a new thing that the federal government and the ACT government have started to negotiate. It is a complex process. Committees like this one in the past have interrogated, at a lengthy degree, purchases of land by the Suburban Land Agency. You will understand that we are making sure that everything that we are doing, for our part, is being done appropriately. As soon as we can, we will make sure that we update the community and provide as much detail as we can on that process. At the moment, because we are still in negotiations, there is not a lot of detail that we can provide, although we have made it public that we have been having those conversations for a number of years.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you have any concerns that they are essentially land-banking the second part of the site? Presumably, it will increase in value once the first part is

developed.

**Ms Berry:** That is a question for CSIRO. It is not our land.

**MR EMERSON:** No, but if we are going to—

**Ms Berry:** It is not our land.

**MR EMERSON:** I understand. I could ask them if they are land-banking, but I am wondering whether you are concerned about it, given that the government has an interest in that parcel of land, too. If they are, in order to increase its value, that would have an impact on the territory budget and any housing that you could build on that site. I would think that you would have a position on it.

**Ms Berry:** I probably cannot speak to how we feel about those things at the moment. As I said, this process was happening well before the conversations that we are having now with the federal government and CSIRO, regarding the decisions they have made on selling the land. CSIRO are an agency outside government but funded by government. We have now had a process that we have been working through to purchase the land.

We have to make sure that the ACT government is doing everything appropriately. With the interrogation of this matter, we want to get to a point where a decision is made, and we can announce a positive way forward. That is why we are taking the time to make sure we get it right and that we do not target any potential challenges, if we do disclose information or conversation detail at this point.

**MR EMERSON:** Fair enough. At what point in the last decade of conversations about the site did these negotiations become just about one part of the site? In what month or year?

**Ms Berry:** I will take that on notice, while noting everything I have just said about making sure that the integrity of the negotiations is upheld.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you know what is the focus of the funding for HAFF stage 3?

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

**MS CARRICK:** Do you have something in your bottom drawer, ready to go—a proposal?

**Ms Hall:** As I said, government supported a range of projects through the recent budget, through the Affordable Housing Project Fund, that would be very good candidates for HAFF funding. There was some land release in Moncrieff and Gungahlin, for example, two sites there, and other sites as well. We will be working very closely with iCBR colleagues on anything that might be in the public housing space as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Housing ACT would be in a position to bid. Presumably, they missed round 1.

**Ms Hall:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I assume Housing ACT would be bidding in round 3?

**Ms Hall:** Yes. On round 2, for example, that included public housing. It would be the same sort of process. We would need to go through, obviously, appropriate processes on this side.

**THE CHAIR:** Housing ACT would be in a position to bid for round 3?

**Ms Hall:** That would be a question for them. It would be iCBR, as the delivery area for government.

**THE CHAIR:** It is a question for iCBR for tomorrow?

**Ms Hall:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I have lots more questions but I think we have run out of time. Minister, thank you very much for your time and your expertise. Officials, thank you for coming in. Please provide your answers to questions taken on notice within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof transcript. Thank you, Hansard and broadcasting, as always. If anyone wants to ask a question on notice, upload it to the portal within five days. Our meeting is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 11.45 am**