



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2025-2026**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and Appropriation  
\(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2025-2026](#))

**Members:**

**MR E COCKS (Chair)**  
**MR S RATTENBURY (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS F CARRICK**  
**MS C TOUGH**

**PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**MONDAY, 28 JULY 2025**

This is a **PROOF TRANSCRIPT** that is subject to suggested corrections by members and witnesses. The **FINAL TRANSCRIPT** will replace this transcript within 20 working days from the hearing date, subject to the receipt of corrections from members and witnesses.

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Dr D Monk (Ph: 620 50129)**

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

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

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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.00 am.**

Appearances:

ACT Integrity Commission

Adams, Hon Michael F, Commissioner

Lind, Ms Judy, Chief Executive Officer

Hickey, Mr Scott, Chief Financial Officer

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026 for its inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026. The committee will today hear from the ACT Integrity Commissioner; the Legal Aid Commission; the Public Trustee and Guardian; Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, the Minister for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence; Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, the Minister for the Public Service; Mr Andrew Barr MLA, the Minister for Tourism and Trade and the Minister for Economic Development; Ms Yvette Berry MLA, the Minister for Sport and Recreation; and Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries.

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 that they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. Therefore, today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome the ACT Integrity Commissioner. We also welcome the officials in attendance. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions.

The second special report relating to Operation Luna was tabled last week. What are the next steps in relation to this investigation?

**Mr Adams:** It has to be put on hold for the moment because I have other urgent investigations—and CIT is becoming historical. There is, however, one important aspect which I think, although egregious conduct—and therefore has lessons much more widely applicable than the public service—does need to be dealt with. But, for the moment, I am concentrating my efforts on Kingfisher, because that is the most urgent matter.

As you will see, in one sense, CIT's issues were extremely severe. My first report where a CEO, in effect, mislead the board in relation to the expenditure of millions of dollars over years, is egregious behaviour that you would hope would be rare. In this last report, where you got the actual fabrication of a basis for a procurement which was utterly false, because the true basis for a major part of the procurement could never have been justified, is also egregious that you would hope would be just a combination of particular personalities and particular situations and one-off.

What troubles me when you deal with that is that other senior public servants or officials, or our members, would see this as so serious, "That is not going to happen," and therefore dismiss it as relevant to their own experience of their own work. The important thing is that each of these cases have real lessons of much wider significance. Dealing with the relationship between employees and boards, CEOs and boards, boards and ministers and the need for candour in communications which are potentially embarrassing, and the way in which that relationship ought to be managed.

Let's be frank: there are times when ministers do not like to hear certain information, and, open to those vibes, senior public servants do not like to give them that information. But the information is important. Over the years—and this is as old as Julius Caesar—ways of communications have developed, wink, wink, nudge, nudge, and then, as the grey areas become wider and wider, one gets further and further away from frank, candid exchanges because of what are seen are the problems.

An extreme example is CIT. But there are lessons there of much wider application. Indeed, when it is finished—and I think there will be lessons also from Kingfisher—I am going to encourage or attempt to encourage some high-level discussions on a confidential basis where parties feel they can be candid about how to manage communications in a way that maintains balance and moderation but gives real candour.

The problem here, we know, in Canberra is we have limited resources of massive tasks. Every member of this committee, just by looking at your list of people you are seeing, has far more work than you can manage yourselves. You have to have staff and you do not have enough staff. You know this. Directorates have massive responsibilities, and they are plainly overworked. This is true of all public service in Australia, but Canberra has particularly problems with resources. Even in my small agency, we try to deliver a big kick but, frankly, the leg is not all that long.

It's management of business in a way that enables things to move forward. But I am not dealing with management; I am dealing with integrity and trying to focus on it, but they are related. I do not want to just make reports where people get slammed in the head and then it just moves on as an interesting historical fact but want to take more broad lessons and having wider discussions about how this problem can be dealt with.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like you believe that there are important matters arising from this that you would like to come back and deal with down the track?

**Mr Adams:** Yes. There is an important and different aspect which needs to be examined. So it has to be put on the long finger for the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** You made mention of Kingfisher as one of the reasons for that.

**Mr Adams:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there other inquiries that you have underway or broad timeframes you can provide us around when we would expect to see those matters—

**Mr Adams:** Mr Chair, I can only give aspirations, I am afraid, partly because we have two major ones. One I have already announced in the public domain relates to the ICT procurement in Health, which is a fraught and difficult area. It is worthwhile making a note that nowhere in Australia has any substantial public service digital reformation process taken effect on budget and in time. It has never been done. The statistics show that the departures in that area are greater than in any other area of substantial government procurement, partly because, I think, everything is promised on a basis that has still a great deal of hope.

My very first large case, when I was appointed to the Supreme Court, was the digitisation of ticketing for New South Wales transport—ferries, buses and rail. It was then over \$300 million. I am talking 20 years ago. I did a judgement, which is still the major judgement in this area on procurement, and I think over 300 pages. I went back and my eyes glazed over when I read it because of the important parallels with Kingfisher. But that is 20 years ago and New South Wales had massive resources. The ACT does not. So this area is extremely difficult.

That is one we are working on with the Auditor-General. He has done a great deal of work. We work in tandem to the extent that we can. I am hoping to move it forward in a significant way. I doubt that we will do anything really effective much before September-October, frankly. I also have five others which I do not wish to talk about in the public domain. Also, moving forward, we have to concentrate efforts. There are some which I hope in the next couple of months will pretty well reach closure. In Kingfisher, for example, on Friday, one of the witnesses who has taken objection to my looking at their phone has commenced legal proceedings. So that is a line in inquiry that has placed an obstacle in the road. It is the nature of the beast, I am afraid.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, I understand. I completely take your concern around speaking publicly. Is there any sort of indication you could give the committee confidentially around what the matters are or some scope of what the matters are and what the timeframes you are aspiring to are? It is largely for my purposes. I am very keen to understand what the workload pressure is looking like. I am conscious that I am going to have to pass onto other members to ask questions as well. So I am happy for you to consider something on notice and potentially provide it confidentially.

**Mr Adams:** Perhaps I can do that on notice under a confidentiality arrangement. I will still be careful in my language, but—

**THE CHAIR:** Absolutely; I would expect no less.

**Mr Adams:** but enough to give some information that might be helpful. Of course, if the committee wants further information, we can explore ways. I want to be as open as I possibly can. If I may say so, the problem is that, if unforeseen disclosures happen

people can be quite unjustifiably blamed. So if I may say so, with great respect, I think your seeking information needs to be carefully done with that in mind.

**THE CHAIR:** Absolutely.

**Mr Adams:** because some are very delicate and not all interlocutors are honourable.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I take it from the way you described the follow-up work on Luna that you see it as more of an educational part of your role now.

**Mr Adams:** No, no. It is a substantive area of a distinct area of problems with the procurement. It is not because it is serious in itself, which it is, it is because I see applications much more widely applicable that I have decided, even though it is to some degree only of historical relevance, it is important because it may be affecting future procurements, which in the territory is a fraught area.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you. Secondly, in the report you make reference to conduct of a potentially criminal nature.

**Mr Adams:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What happens now?

**Mr Adams:** I have brought my report to the attention of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Director of Public Prosecutions operates under their own scheme and process. I have not recommended, directed or in any way attempted to interfere with the exercise of that discretion. What I have done is outline the evidence and say, "It could amount to criminal offences. It is a matter for you to decide whether the evidence would justify bringing cases before a jury," and that I would help as much as I can. But I am not a prosecuting authority. That is a very important distinction. This is the first time we have done it under the Corruption Act.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is why I asked the question.

**Mr Adams:** So I think we will be having negotiations with the DPP. But I cannot in terms of resources and I cannot, I think, in terms of principle, take responsibilities in relation to prosecutions.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** I have a question relating to the timing of further work on Operation Luna. I know you know that you are going to focus on Kingfisher for the moment and come back to Luna, but do you know at this stage whether Luna will be another special report or a final report?

**Mr Adams:** Yes; it will be a special report. I think this will be the end of that CIT investigation. I am expecting this to be the last tranche.

**MS TOUGH:** So just one more special report?

**Mr Adams:** That is my expectation, and I am hoping that it will be completed before the end of the year.

**MS TOUGH:** That was going to be my follow-up: do you have a timeframe? So, perfect; thank you.

**Mr Adams:** We have already done a great deal of work on it. What happens is you have a wide jungle to traverse and, as you go knocking down some trees, on the way you are knocking down others, and you put that to one side, knowing it is something you are going to come back to. So it is not like I am starting off; I know pretty well where it needs to go.

**MS TOUGH:** Perfect. Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** The budget now has an allocation for an inquiry into lobbying by your commission. What is your plan for the execution of that inquiry?

**Mr Adams:** I did have a plan. I will be more specific. I had contacted a retired ACT public servant of great experience and seniority, who exhibited some interest in undertaking the work, but he has now indicated that he is retired and he is enjoying it. The Chief Minister has stated to me an expectation that I can fold lobbying into my other tasks with the financing available and I will be able to get some way forward with it.

The real problem is this: if it is going to be worthwhile, you need to have good discussions with, for example, members and with ministers and with senior public servants, because that is the pointy end. Frankly, if you have a junior investigator turning up to an officer, how much candour and how much maturity is going to be brought to a dialogue of that kind? So a great deal of research can be done but, at the hard end, what do people actually think works out? It has to be a dialogue. It has to be a dynamic process to be worthwhile. It requires me to find someone. I thought I had, and I am now looking again.

Subject to those kinds of practical issues, I am going to start it as soon as I can, and I will ensure that at least some work is going to start and go on. We are recruiting lawyers now. We are in the course of finalising recruitment of lawyers. I will assign one of them to that work. We are also recruiting investigators. So I will also assign one to that. But that is going to be essentially researching. There has been a great deal of work done in other jurisdictions and there is work available here. Frankly, I would like to go and speak to people personally, but I have other work I have to do. That is why I say that, if it is going to be worthwhile, it needs to be fair dinkum. To have an academic research job does not do much help. It has to grapple with actual problems.

One of the real problems here—and it is an obvious one already in the public domain—is Kingfisher, where you have the relationship between union officials and ministerial staff. Well, of course you do. The Labor Party, of course has union representatives and membership. That is exactly what you would expect. But how do you manage it? How do you manage it in a sensible way? Those are very difficult questions that require



candid discussions where people can speak confidentially and know they can trust who they are talking to. So that has to be carefully done. But, of course, it is not only unions; there are a whole lot of people with lobbying interests and a whole lot of financial donations made from a lot of different sources. Donations are the lifeblood of political parties for elections.

So, if one is going to sensibly have discussions, they have to be detailed, they have to be candid and they have to be with interlocutors who can be trusted, so that we can work out practical ways in which the issue can be resolved—well, you never resolve it, because human nature is human nature—and have practical ways in which guidelines at least can be developed. The guidelines that you mostly see are at such a high level of generality that they are little more than finger-wagging and record-keeping. When you look at 30 pages of guidelines those are the two bottom lines you get out of it. I do not think that is much use, myself. Anyway, sorry; I am stating the obvious. What I mean is: to be useful, I have to have the proper people or a proper individual identified, and I have not yet. That is what I need to do.

**MR BRADDOCK:** So, to summarise—and forgive me if I get this wrong—you are saying that you will have a lawyer and a researcher which are from existing recruitment rounds—

**Mr Adams:** Doing preparatory work, yes.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Doing the preparatory work, and you are looking for someone senior to also be involved in that team to come on board. The reason that I ask is that I cannot see any increase in the Integrity Commission's FTE but I can see the increase in the dollars. So I am just trying to understand what the—

**Ms Lind:** No; that is not correct. We have budget for seven FTEs, of \$1.331 million per year.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay; thank you for correcting me.

**Ms Lind:** The first process in the lobbying work is to produce a discussion paper, for want of a better word, which is articulating the key issues and questions—as the commissioner said, there has been substantial work done across every other Integrity Commission, producing some really good reports—and to use that as the basis to start triggering dialogue or submissions from all interested parties in relation to the framework in the ACT, whether there are gaps in that framework and whether there are opportunities to strengthen a lobbying framework in the ACT. That is the proposed course of action. But that first piece of work is doing the research, setting out the ACT framework, doing a compare and contrast to some of the other states and territories and then triggering requests for engagement in the debate.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Engagement from the community? They will be able to provide submissions?

**Ms Lind:** Correct; and all interested parties.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Sorry to ask this question: is there a rough timeframe as to when

that community consultation is likely to occur?

**Mr Adams:** As soon as we can do it. That is a difficult question, simply because of the priorities of the other work. But, hopefully, you would start that process before the end of the calendar year. I can assure you that I am extremely frustrated by delays as well, but one has to work within resources. I quite understand that this is an agency amongst a lot of other agencies who need resources for their work, and the government, I think, has been as generous as it could and we just have to work within it. But it does mean that we cannot do everything we want as soon as we would like it.

**MS CASTLEY:** You mentioned the Chief Minister earlier in your answer to Mr Braddock. Have the Chief Minister and have the Head of Service given any indication that they are happy to work with you for the lobbying inquiry?

**Mr Adams:** The Chief Minister certainly has. I have not had that conversation with the Head of Service, but I would expect that—

**MS CASTLEY:** Sure. Will you be publishing a terms of reference for the inquiry?

**Mr Adams:** Not yet. I could sit down and do it tomorrow but they would be in such general terms. They would be much like Ms Lind has just outlined; whereas, I think more detail would be more helpful.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** I am interested in the priorities to raise awareness and educate ACT directorates, strategic partners and the ACT community of the role of the commission and deepening the cooperative arrangements with the ACT public sector to identify and mitigate corruption risks. With the ones that involve the ACT government—and it might be all part of the lobbying we have just been discussing—where do vested interests come into all this and whether ministers are listening to a broad range of views from across different vested interests—because the community has vested interests too? How do you manage how vested interests are dealt with and ensure that ministers are listening to a range of views?

**Mr Adams:** That is a question of very general application. I am not looking at government administration; I am looking at integrity issues. That must be my focus. In our public education program, which is developing, we have had a significant number of interchanges with senior public servants and less senior. We have meetings, we have information on our website and we have other workshops. At those, we explain our role and their interactions with us—how they can be positive and how they can be useful—and we discuss the problems they have. For example, at the most basic level, in some respects, the Integrity Act is not clear. We are dealing with people who are not lawyers but good practical thinkers, but we need to translate those legal requirements into their work. So we focus on that.

**Ms Lind:** Several of the matters that come to us as allegations relate to allegations of inappropriate influence by someone over some decision-making process. In our assessment of allegations of that type, we are looking for disclosures of conflicts of interest, who has disclosed what, who knew about those conflicts of interest, whether

those conflicts of interest have been effectively managed to ensure that whatever is the decision at the end of the day—whether it is a public official or a ministerial decision—has been made appropriately and without any undue influence. I do not know whether that helps with your question, but that is certainly a very consistent allegation that we deal with. With a lot of them, there is nothing to see. Appropriate conflicts have been declared and managed. The decision-making process has been legitimate and at arm's-length. In cases where we are concerned that that is not the case, then that might proceed to some of our inquiries or investigations.

There is a network called Servers, and every directorate has an allocated executive who is a senior executive in charge of risk and business and integrity matters. Our prevention team has regular interactions with that network. We have daily interactions with Servers and officials in various directorates as we get allegations or as they identify issues of concern. So there is an ongoing dialogue about the nature of the issues and the allegations, how they are going to be dealt with, whether they are misconduct and whether they need to come to us. That is kind of part and parcel of the ongoing sort of function and interaction that the commission has with the broader public service.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. I think it is interesting that vested interests and how decisions are made are things that comes forward to you.

**Mr Adams:** I would make the point, though, which is quite important and that we are seeing, is that there is a significant lack of consistent understanding with problems of conflict of interest. Part of the problem is that it is, on the one hand, ignored or not adequately managed but, on the other hand, exaggerated. With public servants, rightly—and I think it is true well into the political sphere—it can be the case that decision-making is distorted by acting defensively, always seeking the lowest common denominator of less risk or being frightened of the risk of criticism, even where that risk is unreasonable or uninformed.

That stultifies decision-making and means that people are either unfairly criticised or act defensively to avoid that criticism. That is the other side of that coin. It is important when we are dealing with such questions as perceived bias or conflict of interest that we do not approach them in ways that mean that proper decisions responsibly made are not made because people are scared that there will be unreasonable criticism of them.

As the Integrity Commission, we get a lot of complaints alleging conflicts of interest which are not reasonable. It is, I think, important that people not think there is another policeman on the streets who is all too anxious to go around and bash heads. You have to take a reasonable view to encourage public servants and politicians, for that that matter, to make responsible decisions, stand up for them and explain them—and sometimes you get criticised and you have to put up with it. If it comes across my desk and I think that the criticisms are unreasonable, I say so. Indeed, in a recent report, that is exactly what I did. So that is the other side of this, where you can have too much sensitivity to outside criticism of decision-making, and that paralyses good decision-making.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like what you are saying is that it is very important, from your

end of things, to make sure that you are not just perceived as “out to get everyone”.

**Mr Adams:** Exactly.

**THE CHAIR:** But, at the same time, it is critical that you are able to act on those things that warrant that action.

**Mr Adams:** Thank you, Chair; that is exactly what I meant to convey but much more brief. I would just make one point, which is not known and it is not in here. In one investigation which has proved important, what we have done is, by and large, help the police. We are not exercising our own coercive powers, but we are gathering evidence to enable the police to take responsibility. It is an embezzlement. I will not say any more about it—though it is serious—but we are exploring ways in which we can work together with other interested participants.

**MS CARRICK:** When you are looking at conflicts of interest and vested interests and how decisions are made, is it about looking at the documentation of how the decision was made and the decision-making process?

**Mr Adams:** No. I have been in the law now since I was 17—and I am a great deal older now—and what you learn is that documents cannot be trusted. I will not say any more.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay.

**Ms Lind:** But it is both—where we use our coercive powers to ask people to come and talk to us.

**Mr Adams:** Of course. You start with the documents; you absolutely have to. It is trying to have processes that ensure the documents are reliable. That is the essence of the matter—of which Phase 2 CIT is an example.

**THE CHAIR:** Would an example of not being able to just trust documents be that you would use the documents to trigger where to look next and what questions to ask? Is that the sort of thing that you are talking about?

**Mr Adams:** Yes, that is true, and that is the resource sucking-up. On the phone I am talking about which is the subject of litigation there are 1.4 million items on it. And I say to the Solicitor-General, “You have to look at public interest immunity and the government’s legal professional privilege,” and there is silence at the end of the phone.

**MS TOUGH:** I want to go a bit broader than just public servants making complaints. I am interested in who is able to make a complaint and how many complaints you get and maybe what kind of complaints they are—the different categories.

**Ms Lind:** Anyone can make a complaint. That is under section 57—so any member of the public. Then that is supplemented by the mandatory reporting obligations, which is a different section. That is section 62. Generally speaking, and we are just in the process of finalising our end-of-year statistics—so this is give or take—we have had 150 corruption reports received. The large majority of those are our section 57—so members of the public complaining about things.

We have a bit of an overrepresentation from detainees within the justice system, from AMC. They use us as a general complaints-handling body—which we are not, of course—to complain about things that are happening to them within that environment that they are not happy about. The vast majority of those complaints have no indication of corrupt conduct by anyone, and we have a process where we work with the Corrections Commissioner to pass those through so that, to the extent that there are things that she needs to deal with within that environment, she is aware of those things.

There is another category of what I just call sort of disaffected citizens who have had a decision made by a directorate that they are not happy about—not happy about the process; not happy about the decision. Again, the large majority of those would be dismissed because they lack any indication of corrupt conduct. Again, we try and direct those individuals to any other relevant complaint-handling body, whether it is the Ombudsman, whether it is to go back to the directorate, whether it is the Human Rights Commissioner or whether it is the Health Commissioner.

We get some complaints from public officials who are unhappy about what they have seen within their immediate environment. In terms of the key categories of allegations, procurement features heavily, issues to do with recruitment feature heavily—again, that relates to “jobs for my old mates” and disclosures of conflicts not being disclosed et cetera—and there are just sort of broad concerns about public officials not acting honestly or impartially. But, again, they tend to loop back to either critical decisions in relation to the complainant or critical decisions to do with procurement. Those would be the broad categories.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you. You mentioned that, when a lot of these complaints come in that are not actually relevant to the Integrity Commission, you forward them on to different services where you can.

**Ms Lind:** Yes; that is right.

**MS TOUGH:** How are you placed resource-wise to be able to manage that?

**Ms Lind:** That is part and parcel of our daily work. We have got a team of six FTE. We are doing a couple of things. We are educating people to stop coming to us in the first place. We are continually improving our website to say, “If it is looking like you are going to complain about this, please do not come to us.” But we cannot stop that. So we are doing our best to try and direct people to the right area in the first place.

We have introduced this year what we are calling a rapid triage assessment process—because we have been criticised in the past for our sort of timeframes. That happens every week. We look at every matter that has come in in the prior week. We do a rapid assessment of what is actually being alleged here—is it within our remit or not; who else should be dealing with it; can we take some immediate actions to get back to the complainant and say, “This is not for us; go here.”?

As I said, that is part of our ongoing daily process. We want to weed out the matters that, on their face, appear to have substance in relation to potential for corrupt conduct and get the team focused on assessing those. That is not an easy process of sorting the

wheat from the chaff and trying to get to the guts of what the allegation is and what information we actually need to get to then determine whether we want to take it forward or whether we want to dismiss it.

**MS TOUGH:** The Ombudsman mentioned when appearing last week that they had previously investigated and reported back to the Integrity Commissioner about the process of when people hear back from the Integrity Commissioner and making sure that has information. Is that part of what that process is?

**Ms Lind:** Yes. He is never happy that we have communicated as effectively as we can. We are on a continuous improvement loop. We have done a lot of work with that particular team in terms of professional training on plain English and clear writing. We do not do template letters. Every letter has to be bespoke so the complainant understands that we understand what they said to us and why it is that we are dealing with it in a particular manner. They are still not happy about that.

**Mr Adams:** I do not think that is ever going to change. I think there is a cultural difference. I have a view about brevity and he has a view about detail.

**Ms Lind:** But, as I said, we are trying to give enough information to the person to say, “It has not met our threshold; you might have another avenue to get your concern dealt with.”

**MS TOUGH:** It sounds like, at your end, you are making sure it goes to someone where it can.

**Mr Adams:** It is a constructive dialogue.

**MS CASTLEY:** I just wanted to chat about the inspector’s report on procurement that you undertook involving the then commission’s CEO. Can you explain what work was undertaken as part of the contract and why this work could not be undertaken by the new CEO or by the commission’s staff?

**Mr Adams:** Sorry; would you mind repeating that question?

**MS CASTLEY:** Sure. It is on the inspector’s report into procurement that you undertook involving the commission’s then-CEO. Could you explain what work was undertaken as part of the contract and why this work could not be undertaken by the new CEO or by the commission’s staff?

**Mr Adams:** All right. The essential problem was this: at the time, the commission was very much in the process of development and a number of things were happening at the same time. We had relatively inexperienced staff—people who had come from other areas of interest, for example, police and others—doing investigations and doing assessments in a way that they had not done before. We had a complicated act. We were negotiating these things, at this time, pretty well ad hoc. We had got useful guidance from other agencies in relation to their own processes, but it is very jurisdictional-specific. The legislation is different, your resources are different and so on.

The CEO was deep into that and, as well, negotiating with government about resources

more generally, about our ICT arrangements and about interception, which was regarded as urgent. He then told me, for private reasons, which are not unreasonable, that he wanted to resign. The immediate problem was: who is going to do this work? He agreed to stay until we got a new CEO. How long that was going to take, I did not know. I had done three attempts for CEOs in my previous position as Chief Commissioner of LECC and, of course, I was involved in his appointment and I was involved in that appointment. So I knew it was not easy to find the right person. I did not know how long it would take.

The problem that I foresaw that concerned me was that he was not going to be over the hill with that, what I would call, fundamental foundational work, by the time the new CEO came, and the new CEO needed to put his or her feet under the desk and understand the organisation before taking up these other tasks. There were everyday tasks and everyday crises that needed to be dealt with. That meant that I needed, in effect, to have him or someone in his position carrying on with that foundational work while a CEO took charge and then was in a position herself or himself to take it over. Fortunately, we found a very competent CEO who worked well with the former CEO and was progressively able to address the more fundamental problems as well as the day-to-day administrative running of the organisation.

My view was that it was a no-brainer: I had someone who was fit; I had someone who knew the job; and it was obvious that they should continue if they could until we no longer needed them. That seemed to be sensible. In effect, I said this in the documentation: his experience was unique; an outsider would have to learn again—and for how long?—to put themselves in the same position; and I, who was busy with attempts to write reports, then have to take on the task of guiding that new CEO. For me, the practical solution was an obvious one.

I stated this, in effect, in words of like three sentences. The Ombudsman disagreed with me about that amount of information, and I said, “If you were an experienced administrator, you would look at those three sentences and you would know exactly what I meant.” My view was and still is—I am passionate about this, as you understand—that that was enough; a win to a blind horse.

His suggested solutions were all assumptions. I actually happened to know who was out there and available and, because I have personal relationships with other commissioners, I knew what was happening with them and there was the notion that I could ring up John McKechnie in Western Australia and say, “John, hey mate, do you have someone at this level who can come and help me; I need this foundational work done?” “Sure, Michael, when?” “Well, I don’t really know.” “How long for?” “Well, I am sorry, I don’t know that either.” “What work will he be doing?” “Well, I won’t know for another six months because I won’t know where we’re at.” What reaction? “Mike, when you’re in Perth, come and have a cup of tea.” That would be the reaction.

In the real world, I was not going to be like, “What do they know about integrity commissions? What do they know about interception powers? How many of them have studied each line of the Integrity Commission Act? This notion was, in that—I will not say “idle ivory tower”; that would be unfair to him—office which the Ombudsman inhabits, away from the real world. I am not sure if I answered your question, but that is what I did.

He said that, because I had worked with the proposed CEO for 17 months—much of which, by the way, was distant work because it was during COVID—gave rise to a personal relationship. Our personal relationship was a purely professional one. He never came to my house. I never went to his house. I think in all that 17 months, we shared one cup of tea. The notion that I was doing this as a favour for a mate was offensive, and I hope that is coming through. I found it truly offensive and utterly unreasonable. No reasonable person would think that two statutory officers tied together by the handcuffs of the legislation would be influenced by some notion of personal friendship to make a decision of this kind. It is just unreal.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Chair, point of order: noting this is a line of questioning in front of a separate committee, perhaps we should cease with this line of question.

**THE CHAIR:** Given where it has moved to, if you are comfortable, Ms Castley, we might call it there.

**MS CASTLEY:** Yes, thanks.

**Mr Adams:** I am sorry; in all events, I have finished. I perhaps have overstated some things, but it is a matter about which I personally feel strongly.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move on to Mr Braddock.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you. I did not do that for the purpose that I have a question. I have a question in terms of the centralisation of property management activities into Infrastructure Canberra—a line item in your budget—which included the facilities management for the Integrity Commission. As an independent officer of the Assembly, is this solution workable for you, or does it pose any risk to your commission?

**Mr Hickey:** Really, it is a status quo situation with that there. Previously, Infrastructure Canberra would invoice us and they would pay for our rent and things and they would sort of do that facilities management side of things. Really, this change is just the appropriation coming from us and an invoice process to them, getting the appropriation directly and still providing the exact same services. So there is no real change in how the system operates.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Do you still have some say or control over the works performed for the purposes of your commission?

**Mr Hickey:** Yes, very much so.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I saw the Witness Wellbeing Policy was notified through the legislation register last week. I am interested to understand the background of that. What prompted the creation of the policy and how do you expect it to support the work of the commission?

**Ms Lind:** We have had a Witness Welfare Policy for a while. The Govey review, the



statutory review of the act, recommended that our requirement to have a Witness Welfare Policy be codified in the act, which to that date it had not. That legislation change took place with effect from, I think, 19 March this year—section 295A. That part of the legislation requires us to consult with an appropriate expert. As we were going through the process for that legislation to be enacted, that was the trigger point for us to do a review of the existing policy. That review included getting a forensic psychologist to review our existing policy and to give us advice as to where we might be able to strengthen the policy. That advice was reflected in the policy that was notified last week.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you; I appreciate that context.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Short Suspension.**

Appearances:

Legal Aid ACT

Boersig, Dr John, Chief Executive Officer, Legal Aid ACT

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Dr Boersig from the Legal Aid Commission. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed directly to questions. I need to quickly consult with my colleagues on the committee. We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

**Hearing suspended from 10.00 to 10.10 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for your patience.

**Dr Boersig:** Could I say one thing on behalf of Mr Brett Monger. He is not here today; he is my CFO. He is retiring. He was to be here today but has the flu, so he sends his apologies to you all. Many of you know him quite well. He is my right-hand man. He deserves all the accolades we can give him. Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Will we expect any financial questions to be taken on notice?

**Dr Boersig:** I will do my best. I will probably take a few questions on notice, given the time.

**THE CHAIR:** We will see how we go. We will proceed with questions. On page 71 of budget statements D is “Accountability indicators”. The 2024-25 target for community legal education services provided was 575 and the estimated outcome was 311. That is roughly 54 per cent of the target. What was the reason for falling that far short?

**Dr Boersig:** We are highly aspirational when it comes to all of our targets. This comes after years of working with the Treasury and talking with the Treasury. We have had some staff movement and have now appointed a digital officer who has taken up a primary role, so we are doing much more online than we ever were. It is really about the redirection, and it was a staffing issue.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is an aspirational target. Do you have targets or standards that you expect to meet? From what you have said, it sounds like you do not expect to meet that target.

**Dr Boersig:** No. We aim to push out as much as possible and we try to set the targets as realistically as possible. You will see that in relation to some of the other targets, but, given the numbers, it is hard to be too accurate on them. When you are seeing 40,000-odd people, there can be a shift of 1,500 people within any particular year, depending on the services we are providing. I would have expected a better result for that particular one. I think it is partly because we are trying to do things differently now, recognising that we are in a new age.

**THE CHAIR:** A new age?

**Dr Boersig:** In a modern age with digital connectivity. Historically, our clients have been people without access to social media and so forth. What is happening now is that our client base is changing. It is becoming younger and more mobile and we need to become younger and more mobile. For example, I am chairing a national working group in relation to AI. We have never had to do that before, but clearly that is going to be the direction that we will have to go in the future. That will affect all of our services, particularly information and referral services. We have to do things smarter in terms of reaching people.

**THE CHAIR:** I am struggling a bit to see how digital connectivity makes it more difficult, but maybe we can move to—

**Dr Boersig:** It is about what the person does. We have had more people in outreach and preparing documentations. It has taken us a while to develop a strategy. It is really about the mechanics of getting the job done. I am disappointed by that result. We should have done better.

**THE CHAIR:** The 2025-26 target has been cut to 350.

**Dr Boersig:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that because the previous target was so aspirational?

**Dr Boersig:** Effectively, we need to be more realistic about what we can achieve and develop. We are having to win our resources for where we put people and efforts in the current climate. No doubt, we will talk about costings and the cost-of-living crisis as we go along.

**THE CHAIR:** Page 66 outlines the priority to roll out a legal education program in every public college in the ACT. Have you had conversations with the Education Directorate on this?

**Dr Boersig:** Yes. We are currently funded for a colleges program, where we embed a lawyer in each of the ACT colleges. Currently it is for one day a week. That program is currently under review and, as part of that, we are talking about the possibility of moving those programs out more widely and increasing them. We are mainly there to see young people and be available to young people for legal advice, but we are looking at other ways to optimise our lawyers around education. We run campaigns around, say, sexting that we unroll in the schools. So, yes, we are talking with them.

**THE CHAIR:** What will be included in the legal education program for colleges?

**Dr Boersig:** Contemporary issues: what are the major issues we are seeing? Currently, we are seeing domestic violence and family violence. Care and protection are real drivers of the needs of young people. That is what they are coming to see us about. It is also in relation to bullying and harassment. Those are some of the issues. Sexting is an example of that kind of behaviour, and there is a range of other things.

**THE CHAIR:** Is this entirely funded by the Legal Aid Commission or are there joint funding arrangements with Education?

**Dr Boersig:** In relation to the colleges program itself, we are on a contract with them. There is one FTE to deliver that. The rest is funded by Legal Aid ACT within our appropriation.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like there are joint funding arrangements. I assume that contract will continue.

**Dr Boersig:** It will.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that being offset by changes to the embedded lawyers that you were talking about or is that—

**Dr Boersig:** What do you mean by “offset”?

**THE CHAIR:** Were you saying that the embedded lawyers arrangement is not continuing in its current form and is moving to Education instead?

**Dr Boersig:** At the moment, we are providing primarily legal assistance, although from time to time we are asked to go to classrooms to talk to the students. That particular program is under review by the education department and, as part of that discussion, we are talking about the role they would like us to play inside the schools and whether it should extend beyond the colleges, perhaps into the senior parts of high school. It is a wonderful program. It really is.

**THE CHAIR:** I will hand on to Mr Rattenbury.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Boersig, this is obviously a matter we have discussed in the past in my previous roles. I am interested in the issue of the means test that Legal Aid is required to use and whether there is anything in this budget that has sought to assist with that, and then I want to particularly go to the discussion about the commonwealth. I might take those things in two parts.

**Dr Boersig:** The means test is historically set around the Henderson poverty line. For us in practice, that means having \$415 a week. That is generally the baseline for the means test. We have tried to push it up with the ACT government. A program that was started a couple of years ago has been continued, and that allows us some additional funds to keep pushing that up in the ACT. We argue that it should be at least 120 per cent, although I would argue strongly for 150 per cent. We are talking about people who have \$415 in their pocket at the end of the week, after expenses—deductions for mortgages and child care.

To get a grant of Legal Aid, you have to be really poor. Currently in the ACT, as it is elsewhere in Australia, people are struggling under cost-of-living pressures. To afford a lawyer when you are earning \$500 a week is pretty hard. There is what we call the missing middle or a justice gap that we are trying to push into. We are having the same discussion with the commonwealth as well about pushing that out. It is a very tight means test.

**MR RATTENBURY:** The question I have is: what does that mean for people in terms of access to justice? I guess the bottom line is that a bunch of people are described as the missing middle, which is a term being used in a lot of other contexts in the ACT at the moment, but in the legal context it means people are—

**Dr Boersig:** It means a couple of things. Sometimes people will self-select. They will not progress their application for Legal Aid. They are either going unrepresented or finding other ways and means to get private advice. The other pressures on us are in relation to our discrete services—for example, duty services and advice. You see us trying to help more people to empower them to act, because we cannot afford to give them a grant of aid. We have increased our grant of aid significantly, and you will see this in the data, to try to address some of this issue. It is unlikely that we can maintain that in the foreseeable future.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Last year, the commonwealth made an adjustment to the National Legal Assistance Partnership program.

**Dr Boersig:** They did.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That came in towards the end of last year, I think.

**Dr Boersig:** It started on 1 July. That is correct.

**MR RATTENBURY:** How much impact has that had on this issue for the ACT?

**Dr Boersig:** From my point of view, it was a tad underwhelming. Effectively, in real dollars, it was about \$69,000 more than we were previously getting. Fundamentally, that, of course, does not address issues around cost, the cost of living, wage increases, and the scale of fees for private practitioners we engage for about 30 per cent of our work, to pay them. All in all, our budget from the commonwealth in relation to that and some programs has been cut and that means we are down about a million dollars in our budget, which hits us hard in a small organisation.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What is your overall budget?

**Dr Boersig:** It is over \$24 million. That is for five people, and the programs were focused on NDIS recipients and refugees.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Those programs were previously funded by the commonwealth?

**Dr Boersig:** They were under contracts outside the NLAP. We were hoping to see a bigger investment in the NLAP. We put up our fees by 15 per cent for our private practitioners, for the first time in 10 years, and we were hoping to see more of that able to be covered and, essentially, it has not been. This is going to have a management impact for us. The bottom line is that it will affect the number of staff we have and it will affect the number of grants we can make.

**MR RATTENBURY:** So, whilst we saw a lot of fanfare around the increase in the NLAP, ACT Legal Aid actually went backwards.

**Dr Boersig:** Not only ACT Legal Aid; a number of other commissions also went backwards.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Around the country.

**Dr Boersig:** Around the country.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** My question is about the appropriations and the dollars. Even your appropriation is flatlining. It is not increasing with increasing demand or increasing costs or increasing wages. I note that. And I see that your grants and contributions are also decreasing. Presumably, those are the ones we have just been discussing. So your funding is not keeping up with the real cost pressures in the system?

**Dr Boersig:** That is the long and short of it. The ACT investment has stayed around the same. It is a little bit higher because of the temp magistrates funding. That has been welcomed. But the real loss for us has been around the commonwealth input in relation to refugees, and that is impacting our family law work. Roughly speaking, territory work is funded by the territory. Commonwealth work, like family law and so forth, is funded by the commonwealth. We have mixed funding.

**MS CARRICK:** National Access to Justice Partnership is around \$7 million. Is that what you are talking about?

**Dr Boersig:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** It has \$7 million or \$8 million a year, but I do not see how that comes into the financial statements.

**Dr Boersig:** Because we are reporting on the ACT government, you do not get the disaggregation in relation to commonwealth funding. The funding in relation to grants and contributions from the commonwealth is picked up at page 75. You will see there, on the third line down, “Grants and Contributions”. You will see that the drop between 2024-25 and 2025-26 is about a million dollars. That is the money I am talking about.

**MS CARRICK:** On page 72 is “Commonwealth Grant—National Access to Justice Partnership” at around \$7 million or \$8 million.

**Dr Boersig:** That is the national legal assistance payment. That is the commonwealth investment of money.

**MS CARRICK:** Can I see that in the financial statements on page 75?

**Dr Boersig:** You will not see that disaggregated, apart from the way it is shown there.

**MS CARRICK:** There is that \$7 million or \$8 million and the grants and contributions from the commonwealth are down to \$1 million.

**Dr Boersig:** That is right; yes. There are two different ways. You have appropriations and you have contracts. We are funded by appropriations from the commonwealth, through NLAP, through the territory Treasury, and by an appropriation from the ACT government. We also have contracts directly with the commonwealth government and the ACT government.

**MS CARRICK:** All right. I do not get where the \$7 million or \$8 million National Access to Justice Partnership money appears in the financial statements, but never mind.

**Dr Boersig:** Can I take that on notice and come back to you?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. That would be good.

**Dr Boersig:** If Brett were here, he would be able to give you a much more succinct answer than me.

**MS CARRICK:** I know you say that the federal money has dropped, but, when you have flatlining ACT government funding of around \$20½ million, how does that impact on staff? It erodes it if you cannot—

**Dr Boersig:** We keep talking with government about what they can invest. In the previous session, there was a reference: “This is the envelope of money, and my job is to optimise as best I can with the envelope of money.” The other thing I would raise is that a number of costs are now strongly attributed to us. I will give you an example. Each year, we are audited by the Auditor-General. It now costs us \$100,000 a year to pay that. Our workers comp premium has gone up to \$184,000 a year. That is the best part of \$300,000 a year. Costs for family reports have moved from about \$6,000 to \$9,000 to about \$15,000. We do a lot of family court work, and, because we are acting for vulnerable and disadvantaged people, they need those kinds of reports.

Those costs are well in excess of the cost-of-living charges that we are facing generally, but we have to meet them all, so it is going to be a challenge where we are seeking to grow capacity. Our clientele and staffing needs are changing. We are much more aware of vicarious trauma than we ever were when I first started practice—or Mr Adams, as he was talking about it—and we are having to spend more time and more money on inchoate costs than we ever have.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** I am interested in some of the day-to-day workings of Legal Aid. Do you have numbers on how many clients are assisted each year, how many cases are resolved, and whether they use grants or in-house assistance?

**Dr Boersig:** Yes. It is not in this material. We publish that data in our annual reports, and I can get back to you with the actual data.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you. How do you balance using in-house legal representation and then referrals and grants for private employers?

**Dr Boersig:** We run what is called a mixed practice and, as a rule of thumb, volume is cheaper to do in-house than referring out. We have a worker allocation guideline. If we have capacity and we are not conflicted, we do the matters in-house. In relation to crime, we would do about 75 per cent of the Legal Aid work in-house and about 25 per cent is put out. That changes; it is a flexible figure. In relation to family law, it is about 50-50. In relation to civil work, we do almost all in-house. Private practitioners do not do NDIS work, tenancy work or much human rights work. So it varies in relation to each of our practices. For domestic violence work, we essentially do 90-plus per cent. It is only if we have a conflict that we put that out.

**MS TOUGH:** Putting it out to a private lawyer is one of the ways of managing conflict?

**Dr Boersig:** It is, and that is what is done around Australia. Different commissions do that differently. It depends. The cost metrics are different for each commission.

**MS TOUGH:** How does that impact on the budget? Roughly, is it the same each year—how many matters go out and how many are in-house?

**Dr Boersig:** There is a range. If you combine those figures, we keep in-house about 65 per cent. That is what we generally aim to do. It fluctuates. In crime, it is generally much more. It has been tougher over winter. It is always tougher over winter—getting people to work and fielding 30 people every day. Getting to our courts and tribunals takes more than 30 people coming in.

**MS TOUGH:** Does it have an impact on the budget if you send more out?

**Dr Boersig:** It does. It is much more expensive for us generally to fund a large case like murder. If we send it out to appropriate practitioners, they can cost in excess of \$100,000.

**MS TOUGH:** Following up on that, how do you address complaints or concerns about service quality, both those in-house and the ones that are sent out?

**Dr Boersig:** We coordinate all complaints through our Client Services Unit. It does not matter whether the complaint is about our in-house lawyers or about external practitioners, they manage it independently. I have to say that, from our point of view, in terms of quality assurance, it is much easier doing that in-house, because we have mechanisms, hub models, very similar to public service models around supervision which look at workload, quality assurance and pastoral care. It is much easier for us to control. For example, when I first came to Legal Aid—10 years or so ago—the domestic violence work was mostly outsourced. It is now primarily done in-house by a host of really dedicated people who run a vibrant domestic violence service in the Family Court here in the ACT. I like that model because it gives us more control. That is no criticism of private practitioners, but they are run in different ways. We audit the private practitioners. We do about eight to 10 audits a year in relation to that.

**MS TOUGH:** If you have one practice or private lawyer who is constantly being complained about, do you have a mechanism for no longer sending them work?

**Dr Boersig:** Yes. To receive work from Legal Aid ACT, you have to be on the general



panel. That is an application. People generally get in. Because of changes in what we are doing—the money available, in particular—we now have practitioners in Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria on our panel, because we have to go outside to get the people. If they do not meet our requirements on assessment, they would be taken off the panel.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, do you have a question?

**MR CAIN:** Yes; I do. Thank you. Dr Boersig, I am interested in how your office manages the use of emails and what rules and compliance you have in place regarding the use of a work email address for personal or other professional purposes?

**Dr Boersig:** We are guided by ACT guidelines. We utilise those. Some people use email for private purposes from time to time. Generally that is innocuous.

**MR CAIN:** Ancillary use?

**Dr Boersig:** That is the same as in the ACT government.

**MR CAIN:** Do you have any monitoring processes in place for that or do you just rely on disclosure from your staff?

**Dr Boersig:** Disclosure or complaint, and then we follow it up and see if someone's use is inappropriate, or we may receive an email. It has happened occasionally in relation to, for example, staff who have a particularly strong political view around, say, Palestine and want to put emails out to put a point of view. We ask them not to do that kind of thing. Other people might send an email to a contractor who is mowing their lawns. There is a whole range of things like that. Generally, I find people abide and, when we sit down and have a talk, it is not a problem.

**MR CAIN:** Have you had any recent experiences where staff have perhaps not followed those guidelines?

**Dr Boersig:** It depends how recent. This year, no.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** That brings us to the end of this session, unless members have something super urgent they want to get to. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Dr Boersig:** Thanks for the opportunity.

**Hearing suspended from 10.35 am to 11.03 am.**

Appearances:

Public Trustee and Guardian

Hakelis, Ms Robyn, Public Trustee and Guardian

Lacey, Ms Danae, Senior Director, Client Services

**THE ACTING CHAIR** (Mr Rattenbury): Colleagues, we will commence. We welcome the now permanently appointed Public Trustee and Guardian. Congratulations, Ms Hakelis.

**Ms Hakelis:** Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** We also welcome the officials who are in attendance. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. I will go straight to Ms Carrick.

**MS CARRICK:** My question is about the accountability indicators on page 89. I suppose there will always be people that need guardianship and financial management, but the numbers do not reduce. Is there any ambition to have a reduced requirement for your services?

**Ms Hakelis:** Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in a community where that was the case? Unfortunately, it is something we cannot control, and we exist to fill that very great need of clients for whom guardians are appointed. It is a matter for ACAT as to who they do and do not appoint, once they go through a process of considering the legislation and whether someone needs to be under a guardianship order. I should note that we are guardian of last resort. For example, if there is a family member or someone else who is able to step into that role, that is certainly the first port of call. We are the appointee of last resort. But because it is something that we cannot control, we are not in a position to try and reduce the numbers.

We are in a position to try and enhance supported decision-making. Rather than substitute decision-making, where we are making decisions for someone, we are trying to, in a sense, communally make the decisions together, which is a much more effective way of enhancing self-determination for our clients. That is one thing we can control, but we cannot control the number of guardian appointments.

**MS CARRICK:** I suppose we should be thankful that you are not forecasting an increase, that it is sort of a flat line. What about your appropriation? It seems to be dropping off, and you do not get much in the way of grants and contributions. How will you manage if, as it looks like, your appropriation does not even keep up with the status quo?

**Ms Hakelis:** That is an excellent pick-up. After the most recent estimates, I had spoken about the fact that we had undertaken a fees and charges review. We are, to some extent, a self-funding organisation. We engaged an independent consultant and have

undertaken that body of work to understand where our fees and charges sit across the country. We are collating that work, and we are also collating some further work that we are undertaking at the moment. We will talk to government about whether our underlying appropriation is appropriate and whether it allows us to be a sustainable operation going into the future.

Whilst we are partially self-funded—for example, through trusts—through other parts of our work, such as our financial management clients or as guardians, we cannot be. We are 100 per cent reliant on government. Because of that, it means there is some cross-subsidisation taking place across the agency. We need to engage with government, have the conversation with government to check exactly what services they want us to deliver, and talk about our appropriation going forward.

**MS CARRICK:** How does that translate into staffing levels, when your appropriation is not increasing; in fact, it is decreasing over time?

**Ms Hakelis:** I do not necessarily have a vision to increase our staffing levels. I think we need to look closely at our overall appropriation increasing. We have undertaken a finance project to understand the cost of each service delivery that we are providing to the community, and that is the conversation we need to start to have with government.

Also, there has been historical, significant underfunding in futureproofing the agency's IT. Because of that, at present we do not have the most efficient operations. We are trying rapidly to roll out some IT that will help our staff to be far more efficient. Once we have those efficiencies rolled out, we will be in a better position to engage with government about what the cost is and the cost of each FTE delivering the services.

Because we are an independent statutory agency, we need to be quite creative in what we have access to. There is an interesting opportunity potentially to use artificial intelligence, for example. It is nothing to do with decision-making; I should say that at the outset. For example, how can we enhance the use of AI for some of those underlying administrative tasks that might be able to support our agency to operate more efficiently? We need to engage with some of those creative ideas.

**MS CARRICK:** Are you able to draw on the services of Digital Canberra to help with your IT, and Procurement ACT to help with the procurement of them?

**Ms Hakelis:** Yes, we have. We have actively engaged with Digital Canberra recently. We have completed a design and discovery initial engagement process with Digital Canberra. There is a publicly available audit report which indicates that we do have some challenging IT issues. It is one of the most immediate issues that I need to address. Our trust accounting software, which is fundamental to the operations of the agency, is almost at end of life. We are engaging very closely with the Chief Information Officer at JACS and Digital Canberra to figure out exactly how we can solve these IT issues going forward. We also have active engagement with Procurement ACT. I have a meeting with them this week to actively engage with them as well.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, because there are risks in IT development.

**Ms Hakelis:** Definitely. I think the agency has been subjected to that in the past, so we

will not be doing that on our own. We will actively engage with the experts to get to the places we need to go.

**MR RATTENBURY:** On supported decision-making, I would be interested to hear how that is progressing. The PTG set off on that path a number of years ago. I would be interested to hear how many clients are getting that support now, any difficulties you have encountered, your understanding of supported decision-making and how that has evolved over time.

**Ms Hakelis:** I might go to Ms Lacey to answer that question.

**Ms Lacey:** We have been undertaking supported decision-making for quite some years. We attend ACAT every Tuesday and Friday, and challenge ACAT applications where we believe there is a supported decision-making framework for a person, to avoid a very restrictive substitute decision-maker order being placed for that person.

We also see an important role in the promotion of supported decision-making. I believe I mentioned last time that we had established a new team to undertake private manager and private guardian training, upon the appointment of those roles by ACAT, to ensure that community members have more understanding of the obligations and the framework, to ensure that the person who is being represented is engaged in as many decisions as they possibly can be, and that reasonable adjustments are made.

We do not see guardianship and financial management orders as plenary. We want to ensure that clients are supported to make decisions, as far as they are able to do so. We also had success for 10 clients this year in promoting supported decision-making and independence. We were able to have 10 orders revoked for clients in the financial management and guardianship space.

The accountability indicators do not illustrate the churn that we have. We absolutely try and have guardianship and management orders revoked, where there are no decisions to be made to ensure that that person has independence or can be supported. On the back of that, we do get a consistent number of ACAT orders coming through, which keeps that number looking relatively steady. We do like to see the revocations coming through, so that people can have that independence and be supported in the community.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do you get any resistance from family members around supported decision-making, or are you finding that the community is embracing it?

**Ms Lacey:** The community is embracing it quite well. The barriers that we face are more with institutions, particularly financial institutions and banks, where they find it hard to understand that someone can be supported if there has been an indication of impaired decision-making. Institutions will have to look at how they engage with that risk, because we should all be able to make those decisions, as far as possible, for ourselves. That will be a bit of an ongoing challenge. When we consulted with the Human Rights Commission in the legal and policy space, that is something we highlighted as well; so it is a focus area.

**THE CHAIR:** I heard mention of some resourcing challenges. On page 86 of budget statements D, you mention a priority of improving service delivery for clients. Will

those resourcing challenges impact that priority?

**Ms Hakelis:** No, they do not. Effectively, the agency, over the last 18 months, has undergone a structure initiative, and that has been with a client-centred focus. For example, there used to be a team that dealt with guardian clients and a team that dealt with financial management clients. Quite often they would be exactly the same client, who would then have to meet with different teams and deal with two different people. That is just one example of how we have tried to streamline the agency. We are really focused on client service delivery, and the client only has to have one point of contact with us.

Our FTE numbers do not specifically impact any client service delivery. That is one thing we have specifically done to try and make ourselves more efficient, but with an eye on client service delivery.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like that has been a change from previous years. It would have been a challenge previously, and you have undertaken a restructure to address it.

**Ms Hakelis:** Yes, absolutely. Historically, the agency operated, effectively, in silos. Now we have joined the teams together. We now have representative decision-making, which is for guardians and financial management clients. There is cross-collaboration between the groups and cross-skilling, which is great for our staff. More importantly, it is better for our clients, who can engage with one person to get the answer that they want, whether it is about their money or about a decision that needs to be made in their lives.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you undertaken any evaluation of the client experience, before and after? Have you had any feedback?

**Ms Hakelis:** Not specifically in relation to the structure initiative. Most recently, we have undertaken a survey of client satisfaction, and we are going to have an ongoing survey. We are on a path of continuous improvement. We are just finalising the questions now, and that survey will always be publicly available, not only to our clients but to our stakeholders.

Our senior leadership group, every two weeks, will consider any feedback that comes in from that staff survey, because we want to be an agency of excellence and the best that we can be. We cannot be running away from complaints; we need to engage with them and constantly improve, regarding any complaints or compliments that are received.

**THE CHAIR:** I think you said staff survey. Are we talking about a client survey?

**Ms Hakelis:** Sorry, it is a client survey.

**THE CHAIR:** That is what I thought.

**Ms Hakelis:** Staff survey is on my mind because that is coming out later. It is a client and stakeholder survey.

**MS TOUGH:** Congratulations on permanently starting in the role.

**Ms Hakelis:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** There is often a lot of confusion in the community about what the Public Trustee and Guardian does. Can you explain, in plain English, what you do, the services and programs you run, and what you are doing to educate the community around your role?

**Ms Hakelis:** Yes. Part of our work is that representative decision-making—the guardian financial management work. That arises where, for example, and what easiest to understand, ACAT appoints us to help people make decisions or to make decisions in people’s lives where they do not necessarily have the ability to do so themselves. That is part of the agency.

Another part of the agency is estates. When someone passes away, and they leave a will, someone needs to make sure that the assets are distributed in the exact way that the person in that will wanted their assets to be distributed, and that can come to us. That is another example of the pieces of work we do.

The last very big team we have is trusts work. We will hold money on trust for various components of government. Most significantly, for example, if someone has a disability and receives money on trust, we will hold that money on trust and give the money to them in accordance with the trust, with what the document says.

That is an easy way to understand the various components of our work. I am very aware that we need to get out there and advertise ourselves. Recently, I have engaged very much with the Attorney-General about that. It is fair to say that, in the past, I do not think I fully understood what the PTG did. I had a vague understanding, but it is really important that the community understands what we do, and that we are there for them, if needed, in various capacities. I do worry that we have a bit of a scary façade, and that is only the case because people do not really understand what we do.

We are really keen to get out there and engage with the community to the extent that we can. It is also one of our strategic objectives that we need to be getting out there and promoting ourselves. We need to be promoting what people need to be doing to look after their affairs, such as establishing a will or thinking about how they want the management of their future estate to take place. We are actively considering internally how we can go forth and advertise ourselves.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to turn to page 86 of budget statements D, which outlines recommendations from your fees and charges review. Some constituents have raised some concerns that they can find it too expensive to work with the PTG. What were the recommendations of that review and will the PTG be implementing all of them?

**Ms Hakelis:** We are engaging with government, and we will be doing so going forward. Particularly, it is a component of our underlying appropriation; there is also the fees and charges review, and we will be engaging with government on both of those components.

With the fees and charges review, some of our fees and charges align with other jurisdictions. Because there are different underlying methodologies in each jurisdiction, sometimes we are cheaper; sometimes we are more expensive. We need to have a holistic consideration, which is what that fees and charges review proposed, about what our fees and charges are. In some instances, our fees might be higher than in other places. Also, it is smaller than other jurisdictions. We need to engage with government and ask government what services it wants us to deliver and what the government is willing for those fees to cost.

If people, for example, are in financial hardship, I have the ability to waive the fee. I do not do that extremely regularly, but it is good for the committee to know that that certainly is an option. We want any Canberran that is vulnerable, in financial hardship, to be aware that there is the opportunity for a submission to come to me, and I can make a decision, having regard to someone's financial circumstances, to waive the fees, and I do so.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the process around that waiver?

**Ms Hakelis:** The relevant client service officer will consider the financials, and it will only be on the basis that we have the financial information for the particular client. They will pull together the data and analyse the client's ability to pay. If they are of the view that they do not have the ability to pay, it will go through a supervisor, and a proposal will come to me outlining why they do not have the financial ability to pay whatever the relevant fee may be.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that triggered by an application by the client or is it just proactive?

**Ms Hakelis:** It is generally triggered—correct me if I am wrong, Ms Lacey—by the client service officer identifying that the person would not have the capability to pay.

**Ms Lacey:** That is correct. There can be cases with private managers who do request to have the fee waived. That can be client commenced, but often it is our staff who identify that the person is suffering financial hardship.

**MS TOUGH:** How are you engaging with disadvantaged groups, like First Nations people and older Canberrans, to make sure that they are aware of the services?

**Ms Hakelis:** Recently, we put out a letter through CSD, in the multicultural newspaper. We also put out a letter to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. We have done that through a different group at CSD, in order to engage with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

We are really passionate about trying to engage with those communities, so we offer the ability to access a free will drafting service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. We have recently developed a fact sheet and we have put it up online. We have sent it to the relevant team at CSD, who are getting it out to Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, to try and engage with the community.

In terms of older Canberrans, for example, Wills Week is coming up shortly. Normally, that is a national campaign, but this time jurisdictions are going it alone. Ms Lacey is

independently running our Wills Week campaign. We will be getting out there and engaging with the community. For example, we will go to libraries across Canberra, to try and engage with the community as best we can. I am really passionate about us getting out there and being able to speak to people, and for them to understand the services that we provide.

Of course, at a high level, in terms of policy work, we engage with the Council on the Ageing and other commonwealth bodies to make sure that we are having engagement with those various groups that are identified across the country as being relevant to the work of PTGs.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.



Appearances:

Paterson, Dr Marisa, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform

Health and Community Services Directorate  
Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General  
Hayward, Mr Lewis, Chief Financial Officer  
Bogiatzis, Ms Vasiliki, Acting Executive Group Manager, Inclusion

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. We also welcome the officials who are in attendance.

Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed directly to questions. I refer to budget statements C, Health and Community Services Directorate, page 25, where the payment for output 2.5 increases from approximately \$18 million in 2024-25 to \$30 million in 2025-26. Note 1 explains that the increase is mainly due to “transfer of baseline appropriation relating to domestic, family and sexual violence from output 2.1”. How much money is being transferred from output 2.1 to output 2.5 in 2025-26, and how much is additional funding for new initiatives?

**Dr Paterson:** That is quite a technical question, so I will hand over to officials.

**Mr Hayward:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. I might need to come back to you on the transfer of funding between the two outputs. In terms of the funding that is available for new initiatives, the largest of those is \$4.5 million for the Safer Families frontline services.

**THE CHAIR:** That is the largest of them?

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, that is correct.

**THE CHAIR:** If you need to take it on notice, I will understand, but perhaps you can provide a breakdown noting any others as well—

**Mr Hayward:** Yes, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** rather than just the largest of them. Does the transfer of money from output 2.1 involve a transfer of staff? If so, how many staff?

**Mr Hayward:** I would have to take that on notice as well. I note that both of these outputs remain inside the same agency. Effectively, even if there were staff associated with them, they remain inside the Health and Community Services Directorate.

**THE CHAIR:** Would any staff moving between functions be moving location as well?

**Mr Hayward:** I could not answer that at this point.

**Dr Paterson:** It is hypothetical.

**THE CHAIR:** It is not hypothetical, Minister. It is about whether you are moving staff. I am happy for it to be taken on notice, but I am interested in what is actually happening.

**Ms Rule:** In terms of movement, do you mean physical location where the staff work from?

**THE CHAIR:** Physical location; that is right.

**Ms Rule:** All of our staff work under the ACT public service flexible work arrangements. They are not tied to a physical location, depending on their work. Particularly in these kinds of areas, where they are not necessarily delivering frontline services, they can work out of any of the offices. It will not be the case that staff have physically moved locations, even if they are working on different things, or the accounting treatment of how we pay for those staff has changed. The staff will still work in the location of their choosing, depending on what it is that they are doing.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that the same across all staff in this function?

**Ms Rule:** Yes, it should be. Some of our staff, like Housing ACT staff who deliver shopfront services, are tied to a location, but most of the staff in the community services side of the directorate have flexibility around their location.

**THE CHAIR:** Again, you might need to take this on notice: do any of the new initiatives involve an increase in staffing?

**Mr Hayward:** I will take that on notice as well, Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Page 127 of the budget outlook shows additional funding for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office of about \$2 million per year from 2025-26 to 2028-29. What specifically does this fund?

**Ms Bogiatzis:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. That framing of the additional funding for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office is in fact a continuation of staffing already employed in the office. It includes the position of the coordinator-general. It includes 1.5 FTE to deliver the Domestic and Family Violence Review, otherwise known as the Death Review. It includes four staff to do the innovative pilot program, and another four staff within the Safer Families team.

**THE CHAIR:** That is continuation of staffing rather than a particular new initiative?

**Ms Rule:** The funding for those staff was lapsing, but this budget has provided funding for those staff to continue.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand. In answer to a question on notice in the February inquiry into annual and financial reports, it was noted that the staffing of that office was 36 and

the full-time equivalent staffing was 30.5. That included senior executive staff. What are the expected headcount and FTE numbers for 2025-26?

**Ms Bogiatzis:** Currently, staffing levels are funded for 30.5 FTE in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is the same; and are there any senior executive staff in the office?

**Ms Rule:** For a number of senior executives, part of their role is working on these matters. We can take on notice the exact proportion. At the deputy director-general level, we have the position of coordinator-general. At the executive general manager and executive branch manager level, we also have some proportion of senior executive staff time spent on these matters.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any that are dedicated?

**Ms Rule:** The executive branch manager is one FTE in this portfolio area.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I want to pick up on something Ms Rule said. Of the \$30 million that was announced in the budget, was any of that new or additional funding or was it all continuing funding? Are you able to give us a breakdown of that?

**Ms Bogiatzis:** Yes, I can. Of the \$30.5 million, \$24.5 million was new funding for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services, and \$12.9 million of that was contributed directly from the Safer Families Levy. On top of the \$24 million, \$6 million was going to ACCOs.

**MR RATTENBURY:** You said \$24.5 million is new money. So that my question is absolutely clear, does that mean it is funding all new programs, or is it money that is funding things that were previously operating and that were running out of money? Do you understand the distinction? Am I being clear?

**Ms Bogiatzis:** They are new initiatives in the 2025-26 budget.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, I understand that. If that money had not been provided, would services or programs have closed down?

**Ms Bogiatzis:** Some of them, yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** It is not a problem that some of this money comes along and keeps things going; that is a good outcome. I am trying to understand how much continued work was already happening and whether there is an increase in capacity in the sector.

**Ms Rule:** That is hard to quantify in the way that you are seeking, Mr Rattenbury. \$24.5 million is for frontline family, domestic and sexual violence services, which means largely that money is going to the sector to do service delivery. It is not up to us. We cannot quantify whether that would have gone up or down, because it is money that we give to somebody else.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I appreciate that. Let me reframe the question. Can you give us a comparison between last financial year and this financial year as to how much money went to the sector?

**Ms Rule:** Yes, we can do that. I am not sure whether we have that data at hand right now.

**MR RATTENBURY:** It would be reasonable to take it on notice.

**Dr Paterson:** The ACT budget fact sheet has a clear breakdown of where all the funding that we are discussing has been allocated, and what programs and initiatives within, for example, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, this funding will go towards. That might give you a clearer understanding.

There are programs like the Family Violence Safety Action Program; that is another one. Solid Ground is another one; funding in this budget allocation will allow it to continue to run. It was one of the innovative projects that was evaluated. This now provides four years of substantial funding to see Solid Ground continue. There is a bit of a mixture of things.

With the ACCOs' funding, a lot of their funding expires next year. The funding in this budget allows those programs to continue for the three years following next year. There is a mixture of different things. Ultimately, the purpose of this budget is to support our frontline services.

**MR RATTENBURY:** For the sake of clarity, I will have a look at the fact sheet. I have not decided whether I will lodge questions on notice later, but I note that the fact sheet does not compare last year's budget. There is no point of comparison, which is what I am trying to get to. I will look at the fact sheet and I will lodge a question on notice if I do not get the information I want from that, so that there are none being taken on notice now, and no extra work is being done.

**Ms Bogiatzis:** I can add a little bit more detail. In the 2024-25 financial year, \$12.246 million was committed for new initiatives in domestic, family and sexual violence. That is compared to the \$30.5 million in this financial year for new initiatives. I take the point around the distinction regarding things ending and continuing, and I do not have that information.

**THE CHAIR:** That comes back to where I was heading. There has been mention of terminating funding or lapsing funding around different programs. I would like to understand exactly what has come off, in terms of lapsing or terminating programs, and whether that has been replaced or not. Can you provide that breakdown?

**Dr Paterson:** What has come off?

**THE CHAIR:** What was coming off the budget that has been replaced or not replaced, in terms of lapsing programs.

**Dr Paterson:** Again, I would refer you to the fact sheet. That outlines a lot of the programs that have been funded, when they were funded to and what this budget

provides the next lot of funding for. There is quite a clear articulation of previous budgets and future budget funding for most of these programs and services.

**THE CHAIR:** I will go back and review that as well. I may need to lodge something on notice if it does not fully get to what I am looking for there.

**Dr Paterson:** Yes, sure.

**MR EMERSON:** In your ministerial statement in June, you spoke about a new national partnership. Are you able to provide any indication of where that funding is coming from or where it shows up in the budget? There is \$6.134 million over five years from the commonwealth, matched by the ACT government. It is a similar question.

**Dr Paterson:** We have to negotiate that one with the federal government around what contracts that funding will be allocated to. That is a process that is currently underway.

**MR EMERSON:** The \$24.5 million was for frontline services; was that the total budget announcement in this budget or will it appear in a future budget?

**Dr Paterson:** No, that appeared in this budget.

**MR EMERSON:** With respect to what it is used for, it is a provision of—

**Dr Paterson:** It is a provision which we have to negotiate with the federal government. They have a pretty clear articulation of rules around what that funding can be allocated to. We will work with them to work out which contracts that funding is allocated to.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Earlier, on community day, the committee heard an observation that much of the funding directed towards addressing family and domestic violence is oriented towards victims leaving. The suggestion was that we needed to make greater investment in services and programs that enable people to live in a safer household—seeking to change the behaviour of the perpetrator. Is that feedback that the government has received, and is there something you can point me to in the budget that seeks specifically to improve or increase work in that space?

**Dr Paterson:** Yes, there is quite significant work in that space at the moment, particularly around targeted programs for men who use violence and control. There is DVCS's Room4Change Program. EveryMan also delivers these types of perpetrator responses. The budget details \$3.4 million for federal government perpetrator response initiatives, which have gone to the Multicultural Hub to implement a pilot project, a CALD Men's Non-Violence Behaviour Program trial, which commenced early this year. Yedding Mura has received funding through the perpetrator responses program to implement a Caring Dads Program, which has been specifically adapted for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

This may be more relevant to tomorrow's hearing, with the safer youth and child responses. There is significant work undertaken within the child protection portfolio, with the safe and connected program, which—

**Ms Rule:** Safe and Together.

**Dr Paterson:** Safe and Together. A real premise around that program is working with the men who perpetrate violence in those homes and seeing their behaviour change. We can talk about that in the hearing tomorrow in more detail. There was also funding in this budget to go towards that program.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What is the capacity of the programs at DVCS and the men's service?

**Dr Paterson:** Room4Change?

**MR RATTENBURY:** EveryMan. What is the capacity in those programs? Are you able to tell me that? How many people?

**Ms Rule:** I think you will have to ask them that question. We give them a grant; then they work out how they can best utilise that grant, in terms of their own staffing and costs, and their capacity. We do not give them \$10 for 10 widgets. We give them \$10 and they decide how they can best spend that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** There are no KPIs in the contract in that program?

**Ms Rule:** There are performance metrics that we can talk to.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What are the performance metrics?

**Ms Bogiatzis:** I have some recent data from DVCS. The reporting is done in six-monthly periods. The most recent period of reporting is July, and we are yet to receive that. I can talk to the period between July and December 2024.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure.

**Ms Bogiatzis:** For the Room4Change Program in that time period, four men completed the residential program. Five men commenced but did not complete the program. Five men were provided with accommodation by the program, and that is important because it means safety is retained in the home for the victim and the children. Ten men joined the program as new participants.

A significant aspect of the Room4Change Program is partner support. While the men are participating in the Room4Change program, the partner, the victim, and any children receive support. That is around maintaining safety for the victim-survivor. In that time period 74 women and 125 children who were associated with the Room4Change participants were supported.

**Dr Paterson:** Mr Rattenbury, I also refer you to the budget fact sheet, which talks about Child and Youth Protection Services and DVCS's funding to be involved in that. That initiative was \$358,000 for this financial year and a total of \$1.5 million over four years. There is also funding in this which is intended to fund DVCS to provide two full-time staff to work at ACT Child and Youth Protection Services.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I was pleased to hear the reference to the Multicultural Hub in

that funding. You mentioned \$3.4 million from the commonwealth. Is that included in that announcement of \$30.5 million in this budget? Does that include that commonwealth funding or is that in addition?

**Dr Paterson:** I can talk about the Innovative Perpetrator Responses; that is a total of \$3.4 million, which is split between the two programs, MHub's program and Yedding Mura's Caring Dads Program.

**Ms Bogiatzis:** Innovative Perpetrator Responses is included in table H.3 in appendix H under "Complementary Initiatives" which I believe does not form part of the \$30.5 million.

**MS CARRICK:** My questions are around reporting. On page 32 of budget paper C, there is only "1", under the accountability indicator. Why is that? Why is it only "1"?

**Dr Paterson:** Again, it is a bit of a technical question.

**Ms Bogiatzis:** The accountability indicator to deliver a ministerial statement is "1" because the minister delivers one annual ministerial statement to the Assembly.

**MS CARRICK:** Surely, there is a range of other accountability indicators that could be included?

**Ms Rule:** That is true. There is always a balance in those things, having regard to the number, the complexity and what we can actually measure in a timely and meaningful way. We will do some work to review all of the accountability indicators as a result of the establishment of the new Health and Community Services Directorate. It may be that some of these need to change, to be a bit more meaningful. Certainly, in this budget, this is the accountability indicator, which involves the ministerial statement that outlines the work that we do. There is always a balance between what we can and should measure, and I would expect these to continue to evolve over time.

**MS CARRICK:** I appreciate that. If you look at the Chief Minister's accountability indicators for output 3, economic development, you will see that he manages to squeeze in a lot more, just as an example. On the reporting, I appreciate the fact sheet that you refer to, but it is very textual. Are you able to put things in tables so that we can see the dollars better? Can you break things down and show who is delivering? For example, in the budget outlook, there is a list of all the programs by year, which is terrific, but who delivers them?

**Dr Paterson:** That is exactly what we have tried to do in this budget fact sheet. You should put that question to Treasury. They have very clear articulation of what goes into budget papers and what does not. For example, the information that you wanted does not go into the budget papers, which is why we have the fact sheet, which contains exactly what you are looking for, in terms of a very clear articulation of the money that is spent, what programs it goes to and what those programs do.

**MS CARRICK:** It would be good if it was in a table, because it is very textual. Who delivers them and—

**Dr Paterson:** That is in there.

**MS CARRICK:** Is it?

**Dr Paterson:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** In the table?

**Dr Paterson:** No. Appendix H, as I said, is a very clear Treasury budget document to which we cannot add bits and pieces. This is the additional document to provide that information that you want. It goes through every single one of those programs in appendix H and clearly articulates them, in terms of what the money is, who it is going to, what the service does, and what they will be delivering.

**MS CARRICK:** Is there any way of grouping it into whether these are early intervention projects or recovery and healing projects?

**Dr Paterson:** Again, that is—

**MS CARRICK:** It is hard to—

**Dr Paterson:** To process; I get it. Again, you could have a chat to Treasury about that. We are also working on the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy which, I hope, in the future will have this document, and we can clearly articulate the expenditure that goes to prevention, early intervention, crisis response and healing response. I think this is the work that we are really focused on. We need that clear articulation of a strategy; that will then guide the expenditure through the budget processes going forward. But that is not a budget document, so—

**MS CARRICK:** No. Will the strategy that you are working on break it down further and show where the money is going, for what purpose and what the accountability indicators are, and a report on how things are travelling?

**Dr Paterson:** Yes. There will be reports to address the strategy and how that is progressing, as we do with the Women's Plan and other plans and strategies across ACT government.

**Ms Rule:** Again, I would expect in our annual reporting that we cover most of that information. There are appendices to the annual report that list all of the grants and funding that we make to community sector organisations, and how much that is. There is always a discussion of whether we have delivered on the commitments that we have made, including through strategies. There are a number of different ways in which we present the information.

With the fact sheet, we have tried to pull out the key things and explain some of those complicated budget tables in a way that is more meaningful for the sector. Of course, we could cut that in a thousand different ways, such as by tables and themes, but we have tried to keep it very simple and understandable. It is just one artefact, if you like, in the whole framework of how we are accountable for the money which goes to this, and all the other programs that we deliver.



**MS CARRICK:** The fact sheet is good, but it would be good to see some table breakdowns.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of the data that sits behind that fact sheet, do you keep a spreadsheet or any financial monitoring of the data that contributes to the financials that Ms Carrick has just been discussing?

**Ms Rule:** Yes.

**Dr Paterson:** It is significant.

**Ms Rule:** The fact sheet reflects the money which government has appropriated for us to deliver whatever program it is that we have been appropriated to deliver. We have to report regularly on how we have spent that money. We have to monitor our expenditure of that money. If we do not spend it, we have to work out what we do with it. It is all part of the financial framework of how we manage the appropriations that are made to the directorate for the purposes of these outputs.

**THE CHAIR:** I think Ms Carrick was trying to get to this: are you able to provide a breakdown of the information that she was discussing in a table form?

**Dr Paterson:** It is appendix H in the budget.

**THE CHAIR:** The comment was made that it is largely text rather than a table that breaks it down.

**Ms Rule:** There is a table in the budget. There is a text fact sheet that supports that table. The data is already in a table. I guess we would want something a bit more specific about what additional information the committee would want in a tabular form, so that we could take it on notice. But the financials are in a table in the budget, plus the fact sheet.

**MS CARRICK:** It is in there, but it is hard to process, because there is no breakdown of what it—

**THE CHAIR:** I understand. It is the breakdown, I think, that the committee is looking for.

**Ms Rule:** Again, we would be really interested—

**THE CHAIR:** We will have to provide something on notice.

**Ms Rule:** Can we be specific, Chair, so that we can make sure we are giving the committee what you are after? What additional breakdown—

**THE CHAIR:** That is okay. I think Ms—

**Ms Rule:** would the committee like, so that we can make sure we are providing that?

**THE CHAIR:** I understand. We might have to go away and make sure we send something through on notice, so that we are giving you something specific rather than taking something in the hearing.

**Ms Rule:** Thank you; I appreciate that.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of that one accountability indicator, in what way does the presentation of a statement to the Assembly actually measure the government's progress and achievements in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence, given that the only answer there is 1?

**Dr Paterson:** In the ministerial statement, it presents the entirety of policy work, fundings and programs that the government has been doing over the year. In a sense, that is the minister being accountable to the Assembly for the delivery of domestic and family violence initiatives in Canberra.

**THE CHAIR:** My point is the number 1 that is there for each year. One statement is not really a measure of government progress.

**Dr Paterson:** As Ms Rule said before, I am sure there is some work that we can do on these accountability measures. As I said, we have work happening on the strategy at the moment. There is a lot of thought going into the strategic direction of the territory in this space and the governance structure that sits underneath that. I would hope that we can form some more meaningful accountability measures.

**THE CHAIR:** So we can expect an update to something more meaningful in the future?

**Ms Rule:** That is speculative.

**THE CHAIR:** That seems to be the implication.

**MR RATTENBURY:** It is hypothetical, I believe.

**THE CHAIR:** It is hypothetical, I guess, but it does seem to be the implication.

**Dr Paterson:** I appreciate your questions on it. We are looking at all this very actively at the moment. We will work on this.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. The Auditor-General's report on the Safer Families Levy noted the lack of public reporting on the success or failure of the Safer Families program—that accurate and meaningful data is required. For example, ACT Policing data shows family violence related incidents have increased by 40 per cent since 2016-17 when the forerunner of the DFSVO was established. How have you taken on board the Auditor-General's information, and how are you moving towards looking at results rather than reports?

**Dr Paterson:** In a few ways. We provided the government response to the Assembly which detailed the answer to this question. Further work has progressed since then, and that is where we have the fact sheet which clearly articulates government expenditure and what programs that funding has been applied to, what the levy has been spent on

and what is expected to be delivered through that funding. We are also, as I said, working on the strategy which I think provides a more strategic direction of where funding from the levy should be allocated to ensure that we are looking at the broad spectrum of interventions to address domestic, family and sexual violence. A lot of work is currently underway and there is very clear articulation of the government's response to the Auditor-General's report.

**THE CHAIR:** I am aware that we are currently about two minutes past the expected wrap-up time for this session, but I am very keen to press on to make sure everyone gets to ask a question. Ms Tough.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you, Chair. I am interested in what support is being provided to Aboriginal community controlled organisations to ensure domestic, family and sexual violence responses are culturally appropriate and accessible.

**Dr Paterson:** We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience domestic, family and sexual violence at much more significant rates than the general population, so we need to invest in initiatives that seek to address that. This budget has very significant investment into Aboriginal community controlled organisations to address these issues. There is an initial investment of \$6 million over three years, which will be dedicated to implementing the recommendations of the *Long yarn* report. This includes funding for Yurwang Bullarn, which will receive \$3.2 million from May 2023 to June 2029. There is \$1.9 million out of this budget. This ensures that they have some longevity in their budget. They deliver a women's outreach program.

There is also \$2.3 million from July 2023 to June 2029 for Yerrabi Yurwang. There is \$1.6 million from this budget. That is for the NaraGanaWali Strengthening Families Program, which provides outreach, cultural support, clinical interventions and life skills to support Aboriginal families in the community. Yeddung Mura has been funded for two programs. One is the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Aboriginal Support Program. That is a trauma-informed community education program. That is not funded out of this budget, but we will work with them for future budget processes. They have \$960,000 from March this year to June 2027 to adapt the Caring Dads program.

Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation have received \$2.6 million from April 2023 to June 2029, and there is a \$1.6 million allocation in this budget. That is for culturally tailored systemic and individual advocacy. They are an emerging ACCO that is doing some really good work. And the WhISPers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Softball Corporation has received \$363,000 from April-June 2023 to June 2029, and \$182,000 has been provided in this budget. They run a community Healing Our Way program which provides community prevention and awareness activities. There is also the "Violence is not our way" community and professional education campaign which received \$600,000 in this year's budget. And we are also working very closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group in consultation with the development of the strategy going forward.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, is that statement somewhere in the budget papers? Could you show where they are?

**Dr Paterson:** Yes. It is in the budget fact sheet.

**MR EMERSON:** It has all the facts.

**Dr Paterson:** It does, and that is why we are very proud of it. It implements recommendations from the *Long yarn* report that looks at all the new initiatives. It refers to table H in the budget papers and outlines specifically the programs that I have just summarised.

**MR EMERSON:** We were talking about this before, but the gap that I am still seeing is for a specific ACCO for crisis—a hotline to call. Is there any funding provisioned for the development and support of such an ACCO, whether it is for family and domestic violence or sexual violence or both?

**Dr Paterson:** There is the funding that I just outlined—for Yurwang Bullarn in particular. They are an emerging ACCO. They have just been established as an ACCO, and there has been a lot of work over the last few years to support them to be in the position that they are in right now. We are working with them in terms of their aspirations as a service and what they have capacity to deliver. I understand your aspirations, but I think we need to work really closely with what is happening on the ground—appropriate ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people come into contact with services. There are also the general services: the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. They also have workers to work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

So there is a whole raft of ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may access services. We are working in supporting ACCOs to be in the best position to develop, but this is a long-term project to build their capacity and support them to get to a point potentially down the track with a dedicated crisis phone line, but, as you can appreciate, there are lots of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural sensitivities. A one-stop shop may not necessarily be the most appropriate service provision for our community here.

**MR EMERSON:** We have the provision of \$6.134 million. I am not sure how we are going to use it. If that capability is developed quickly, would we be able to fund it immediately or would we have to wait for another financial year for, say, Yurwang Bullarn to deliver a telephone crisis service? I know that is in the future. The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre might be uncertain. There is a lot of uncertainty about what will happen with—

**Ms Rule:** Mr Emerson, we also have the money under the Aboriginal Expansion Fund, which is in a different output. That is money for exactly that purpose, for capability of ACCO development. This is generally, not specific to this sector. As ACCOs emerge and their capability develops, we have a fund which we can invest in to support the growth of those ACCOs.

**MR EMERSON:** I can imagine them accessing that. I am wondering about the services. It is fine if the answer is no and we have to provide for it in a future budget. I am just curious as to whether there is any—do you know what I mean—such as unallocated service delivery funding.

**Dr Paterson:** I do not think we would want to set up a phone line overnight. This is something that would need significant planning and consultation. We need to work with the ACCOs to see that they have capacity to deliver it and who would want to deliver it. There are a lot of questions. And it would be a budget process. It is also about how that would work in conjunction with our current crisis lines, with the national crisis lines. There are all sorts of questions. That work would need to be pretty detailed, because we do not want to establish a phone line that does not end up supporting people or leaves people in a risky situation. A lot of capacity building and a lot of work needs to be done before we get to that point.

**MR EMERSON:** It could be a future budget decision and that is fine. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Barry, you have a question on this one?

**MS BARRY:** A really quick one because we are running out of time. Minister, I wanted to find out from you what is specifically in the budget for culturally and linguistically diverse women who are experiencing domestic and family violence.

**Dr Paterson:** As I said, we have the perpetrator response program. I will seek some support in answering this question while I get my papers.

**Ms Bogiatzis:** As the minister indicated, Ms Barry, the Multicultural Hub is receiving investment to deliver a perpetrator response. This is a gap that we were seeing in the community for dedicated perpetrator intervention that works with men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We saw that those men were not using or going to mainstream services. As well, those men wanted to use a service where they had trusted relationships with community leaders and mHub itself. That pilot has been established to deliver that function. Multicultural Hub Canberra is also delivering a service and receiving funding to deliver a service directly that supports women and children escaping domestic violence. That was provided in our previous budget.

**Dr Paterson:** There is also the \$439,000 to the Queanbeyan mHub, the Multicultural Women's Service, which provides services in Canberra.

**MS BARRY:** Thank you. You said that was provided in the 2023-2024 budget?

**Dr Paterson:** I will check that.

**MS BARRY:** Thanks. I am happy for it to be taken on notice.

**Ms Bogiatzis:** Ms Barry, we can take that on notice. Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** Strategic objective 5 is on, I believe, page 13 in budget statements C. It is about the proportion of women who feel safe alone at night. The target is 42 per cent, all the way from 2024-25 through to 2028-29.

**Dr Paterson:** Mr Emerson, I might stop you. I think that relates to tomorrow's hearing, not this office.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you know which specific office?

**Dr Paterson:** The Office for Women.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service

Infrastructure Canberra

Geraghty, Ms Gilian, Director-General

Khan, Mr Faheem, Acting Executive Group Manager Delivery – Places and Spaces

Kerkow, Ms Kyla, Acting Executive Group Manager Pipeline, Capability and Estate

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, the Minister for the Public Service. We also welcome the officials in attendance. We have many witnesses for this session. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed directly to questions.

**MS BARRY:** My question is around maintenance of community facilities. I have heard some very concerning comments from the community sector about unsafe facilities, gas leaks and inadequate pest management. I just wanted to know what you are doing to respond to maintenance requests for the Theo Notaras Centre and other centres, but we will start with that one first.

**Ms Geraghty:** Okay.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Decisions. I know.

**Ms Geraghty:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for the question, Ms Barry. I might pass to Faheem.

**Mr Khan:** I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. The age of community assets means that there is a significant investment program that we schedule out that is needed and we have both planned and reactive maintenance arms, as you would expect. Our intent is to outline, and based on priority need, have a clear planned program for investment into our community facilities, and also to ensure that there is funding available for those more reactive pieces of work that are necessary. There is a finite amount of resources that are available for a relatively large portfolio of assets, community assets that are across the city, and so a prioritisation process is undertaken for the planned works while leaving available funds for those reactive works as they become available. I think you might have asked about a specific centre, but I am not sure I caught it.

**MS BARRY:** The Theo Notaras Centre.

**Mr Khan:** I would have to take further advice on that centre on notice, if that is okay.

**MS BARRY:** I am happy for you to do that, and also, if there is anything, the Tuggeranong basketball courts and the Belconnen basketball courts as well.

**Mr Khan:** I think the basketball courts would fall into a different stream of funding in terms of the maintenance of those assets. They would sit under Sports and Recreation.

**MS BARRY:** Okay. Sports and Recreation, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned the prioritisation process. What does that look like?

**Ms Kerkow:** We have a prioritisation matrix for the allocation of our funding, both for asset repairs and maintenance, as well as our upgrades program. This looks at a number of factors including whether or not there is any immediate safety issues; WHS and related; if there is a HAZMAT issue that needs to be rectified; whether it is roof-related repairs, noting that they often contribute to supplementary issues if they are not rectified in a timely manner; and building compliance or immediate failures of assets. Those things would be allocated a high priority and be allocated funding and the time to undertake the procurement.

**THE CHAIR:** So that sounds like it is sort of a triage type process where you are allocating different jobs to a different category of priority. Do you undertake a process where you look across the spectrum of all of the requests that you have and what they have been, what level they have been allocated in terms of priority, what their cost is and when you expect them to be done?

**Ms Kerkow:** In terms of upgrades, yes, we take a whole portfolio view and undertake reassessment at various stages throughout the financial year and particularly if there are emergent issues that require allocation that we had not allocated funding to, we will look again at the whole portfolio and reprioritise as appropriate.

**THE CHAIR:** Does that include repairs? You said upgrades. Does it include repair works as well?

**Ms Kerkow:** I will have to pass to Faheem on the repair and maintenance prioritisation.

**Mr Khan:** So on repairs, we do a categorisation of where there are more urgent works. So there will be some instances, Chair, where works are required just to bring a building back online, so it might be that there has been an electrical fault and there is no longer power to a building. In that sort of circumstance, that is obviously classified as urgent and we will endeavour to get someone on site immediately for those types of works. Then there are priority works that need to be addressed within a day. Again, that depends on the utilisation or the ability to utilise the asset. Then there is a third category of R&M, which is where it would sit in the work program, where we try and get to those works as soon as possible.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess where I am trying to get to, do you have a list of all of the jobs, whether upgrades or repairs or maintenance, that have been lodged, whether they have been completed, when they are planned to be completed and what the cost is?

**Mr Khan:** So yes, that is something that we track through as part of our reactive piece of work.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you provide that maybe on notice to the committee?



**Mr Khan:** That would be a relatively extensive piece, but we could pull together summaries against each of the categories. There are quite a number of reactive work orders that are completed by the team on an annual basis.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, it sounded like you just said that you already have some visibility of all of those issues.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I think visibility of the planned work that is coming up, and then obviously reactive work happens when things occur, but not necessarily then a list kept in a presentable format of reactive work that has not happened.

**Ms Geraghty:** Maybe I might add to that. In 2024-25, we had 14,727 reactive maintenance work orders, to give you an order of the quantum of information we are talking about.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, maybe you can take that on notice and provide what you can, broken down according to those.

**Ms Geraghty:** We can provide that.

**THE CHAIR:** I am particularly interested in what is still outstanding, particularly given some of the feedback we have heard on Community Day around gas leaks, potential gas leaks in the Theo Notaras Centre, which now seems to be creating a bit of disutility.

**MS CLAY:** I want to have a chat about Infrastructure Canberra taking over the management of the arts facilities from ArtsACT. First of all, at what point are the new leases up to in that process at the moment?

**Mr Khan:** There are 13 operators of community arts facilities that we have been working with transitioning across as part of the new arrangements. We have had sessions with ArtsACT and with each of those community arts facilities operators, and we are now in the process of working through updating their leases. We are using this as an opportunity to standardise the leases across the 13 community arts facilities, and we have undertaken that we will complete that process by the end of this year.

**MS CLAY:** Will they all be on the same timing for leases—the same length of time?

**Mr Khan:** Yes; that is the intent.

**MS CLAY:** What are the start and end dates for those leases if they are all the same?

**Mr Khan:** To 31 December 2027. That is the conclusion of those leases. They have all started at different points.

**MS CLAY:** They all have an operating lease at the moment and those operating leases all finish on 31 December 2027?

**Mr Khan:** They will, once we have gone through the process.

**MS CLAY:** And they all have leases operating at the moment?

**Mr Khan:** Some are in holdover, where they are rolling over from month to month, and some are under current leases that may not be extended.

**MS CLAY:** Each organisation knows what the status of their own lease is?

**Mr Khan:** Yes. It would be my expectation that they would be aware.

**MS CLAY:** From 31 December 2027, they will all be on the same length of lease?

**Mr Khan:** From now until the end of this year, we are in the process of updating the leases, and those leases will run to 31 December.

**MS CLAY:** And what happens from January 2028?

**Mr Khan:** That would be subject to future decisions.

**MS CLAY:** It is all individual? I am trying to work out where the process is up to. Is everybody going to be on the same one-year, four-year or five-year lease? Is it all different?

**Mr Khan:** The intention is to bring all facilities on to the same duration and type of lease. That is the process that we are undertaking now. Then they would all be on that to 31 December 2027.

**MS CLAY:** That is great. What would be the duration of the lease from 2028? What period of lease would they get?

**Ms Geraghty:** We are in the process of resolving that now.

**MS CLAY:** It is still being discussed?

**Ms Geraghty:** They are still in discussions.

**MS CLAY:** That is fine.

**Ms Geraghty:** As we get closer to that, we will have—

**MS CLAY:** That is great. I am not asking about individual people's consultations, but were there any issues across the board that came up in these consultations? Have there been any teething problems with that changeover?

**Mr Khan:** From the feedback that I have received from the teams that have undertaken that, it was welcome to have the opportunity for consistency in the leases, requirements and expectations. That is probably the main piece of feedback that we have heard.

**MS CLAY:** It makes a lot of sense to have an infrastructure building maintenance expert maintaining buildings. I understand the shift away from ArtsACT. That makes a

lot of sense. Generally speaking, we have heard that it is going quite well. It is pretty responsive. Repairs and things like that are happening. One issue has come up from a few people when they had repairs. A lot of people are in very old heritage buildings. ArtsACT used to pay for any repairs that cost over \$500. What is happening now is that the centres are being asked to pay the first \$500 on all claims. I do not think that is consistent with the practice that used to happen. Has that been raised with you?

**Mr Khan:** That is something that we have heard some feedback on. I would have to take on notice any further specifics.

**MS CLAY:** It sounds like people have not budgeted to pay for the first \$500 on every claim, because that is not what they used to do with ArtsACT, so they have not been given budget funding for that, and now they are in the situation where it has been read a little bit differently. Could you take on notice whether that is, in fact, happening. And, if so, what is the government's response to that over the next couple of years when people may be paying? It sounds like a small amount, but they have small budgets and some of them have a lot of repairs because they are in quite old buildings, so it is probably a bigger issue than it sounds.

**THE CHAIR:** For the *Hansard*, there is a bit of nodding going on to take that on notice.

**Ms Geraghty:** I am happy to take the question on notice.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** At a broader level, though, for all of those organisations that are on peppercorn leases, it has been the general expectation. There is peppercorn rent of \$1 a year, but then the first \$500 of any maintenance cost is met by the tenant, but that has been inconsistently applied, even in what was Property Group. One of the aims is to get everybody on to the same agreement. That will be a change in circumstances for some organisations.

**MS CLAY:** I have heard that from a number of them. It is probably a change for most of them. The other one that has come up is that ArtsACT obviously has arts expertise and Infrastructure Canberra does not. They can be great on buildings. Have there been any conflicts raised—about whether Infrastructure Canberra has to be asked to make decisions about organisations or artistic decisions, about what happens in these buildings? Is it really obvious and clear that ArtsACT does arts engagement and Infrastructure Canberra only does the building?

**Mr Khan:** We are working very closely with our colleagues at ArtsACT to make sure that there is clarity around their retained responsibility for broader arts policy.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am interested in the decision to have all the contracts coming to a close at the same time. I think you said there are 13 arts organisations. They would come to a close on the same day in the middle of the Christmas break in a year and a half. Is this a risk point? What is the strategy behind having them all finish at that point?

**Mr Khan:** The intention is to align with the funding arrangements and agreements that are in place. That will be run by ArtsACT. Our intent would be for the conclusion of those processes to significantly precede that date so there is clarity around the funding source, and then clarity can be provided around facility agreements. That was the intent

about that time—to align with the funding for the organisations so that they can commit with that certainty.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** My questions are around infrastructure funding. I note that, in the current year, Infrastructure Canberra's budget is about \$814 million and there is a capital works reserve of \$265 million. That is around a billion dollars a year. Given that the investment in infrastructure impacts on the budget, the borrowings and the interest—it is a fundamental part of the structure of the budget—is there an ideal amount to spend each year? Is it about a billion dollars a year on infrastructure? How is the budget managed? Is it a matter of: "We will spend about this much a year. That is our aim"?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** At that high level, that is a question for the Treasury. Infrastructure Canberra's role is to deliver, although Ms Geraghty might be able to talk about the infrastructure pipeline that we take into account. I think the Chief Minister talked about it last week—the national infrastructure pipeline, to look at when might be a good time or a bad time to invest in particular types of infrastructure, depending on what is going on in the market. The overall decision around the amount of infrastructure funding in each year of the budget looks at a combination of deliverability, borrowing capacity and past experience—deliverability in terms of what we know is happening in the market now in the public and private sectors, but also our past capacity for the public service to support the delivery of infrastructure over time.

That amount has been going up over years, as you would expect, partly because delivering the same amount of infrastructure now costs more than it did five or 10 years ago. But our capacity with the establishment of Infrastructure Canberra—previously Major Projects Canberra—has improved our ability to manage investment. I think you are right, Ms Carrick. In the order of \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion a year would be allocated, but it does vary from year to year, depending on the project. As an example of that, if a major project is coming to finalisation, as the Canberra Hospital expansion did in 2024, the last year of building a major project is going to be a quite expensive year versus the other years. It also depends on peaks and troughs and when projects come to fruition.

**MS CARRICK:** If you look at page 24 of budget statements G, it has the total capital program. It drops off reasonably significantly down to \$18 million. The year before, \$799 million looks big, but it is made up of primarily \$528 million for a light rail payment, so it is only \$271 million. If you take out light rail, it is \$271 million. What I am getting at is that, I assume, as the forward estimates progress and more projects are committed to that pipeline, there will be additions to that amount and decisions will come as the years roll by.

**Ms Geraghty:** Ms Carrick, this might be a question for next Tuesday, for the Chief Minister at his hearing on infrastructure. I might add a couple of things. Yes, investments are made on a project by project basis. It is not looked at from maintaining a total pipeline point of view. The only thing that I would add to what Minister Stephen-Smith said is that we also work very closely with local industry about their capacity. We have seen, probably in the last two to three years, their capacity sit somewhere between \$1.1 billion and \$1.3 billion, in terms of what they can deliver.

You will see that some projects will have further investment that will lift up those numbers that you have just quoted, such as the new north-side hospital project and the Canberra Theatre redevelopment. They have not finalised their contract value. They are not in those numbers yet.

**MS CARRICK:** As far as the pipeline and providing certainty to the industry is concerned—what is coming through the pipeline and what projects are to be tendered for—having some level of certainty is good. I would think that the Treasury would have a common understanding with the people who deliver infrastructure as to what is coming and what their expectations are if you have about a billion dollars a year—how it is divvied up. There are roads, emergency services, hospitals and schools. Non-discretionary infrastructure has to be built for the community, and then there is the really big stuff coming through: the convention centre, the Lyric Theatre and the aquatic centre. How does it all unfold, so that there is room for the smaller pipeline—the medium sized community stuff?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** I really think that this is a question for the Chief Minister when he appears on 5 August, Ms Carrick. He has overall responsibility for the infrastructure pipeline.

**THE CHAIR:** We are probably at the end of that space. Do you have a supplementary question?

**MS CARRICK:** No. I just think it would be nice for everyone to have a common understanding of how it all unfolds.

**THE CHAIR:** We might keep moving. I am going to try to get to—

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Chair, I note that I have a meeting that was scheduled for 12.30 with a visiting international delegation.

**THE CHAIR:** I understand the schedule has been around for a while. If we can—

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Yes, and it was scheduled to finish at 12.30. I am just letting you know that I have a meeting. I am happy to be a bit late, but I cannot stay forever.

**THE CHAIR:** We will have to prioritise, as we discussed before, questions from the committee. Ms Tough.

**MS TOUGH:** In that case, Minister, I am happy to put my questions on notice, if that works better.

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** Thank you, Ms Tough.

**THE CHAIR:** In line with arrangements, we will go to questions from shadow ministers and party spokespeople. Ms Barry, do you have a quick question?

**MS BARRY:** I have a really quick one. Thank you. Minister, I appreciate you taking some time. I want to understand how you calculate rents for community sector

organisations?

**Mr Khan:** This is what we charge communities for their use of facilities?

**MS BARRY:** That is correct.

**Mr Khan:** There are three different charges. There are commercial rates which are reflective of what the market cost would be for the use of the facility, and that is typically determined through a property valuation report that would be undertaken. There are peppercorn arrangements. They are at the discretion of the minister. As the minister touched on before, that is a nominal figure. It is \$1 a year or, in some agreements, it is five cents, but it is a nominal annual figure—effectively zero rent for the year. Then a concessional rate is charged. I do not have the exact rate in front of me. It is a discount, obviously, on the commercial rate, and it is reflective of a cost recovery quantum for the use of that facility. That is how the rates are determined.

**MS BARRY:** Thank you. We have heard some concerns about how much it costs to rent the centre at EPIC—a mouth-watering \$12,000, I think, was the evidence we had. Was there any consultation with ATSD about charging community organisations those rates?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** EPIC is managed by Venues Canberra.

**MS BARRY:** So there is no engagement with the team on that?

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** It is part of the Chief Minister's directorate.

**MR EMERSON:** Just quickly on public housing growth, renewal and maintenance, which now sits with Infrastructure Canberra—

**Ms Stephen-Smith:** But not with me.

**Ms Geraghty:** We are happy to take that tomorrow at the hearing.

**MR EMERSON:** During the Housing ACT slot?

**Ms Geraghty:** Correct. We will be here for that.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We have managed to wrap up closer to time than I thought we would. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

**Hearing suspended from 12.35 pm to 2.01 pm.**

Appearances:

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General Economic Development

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

Elkins, Mr Matthew, Executive Branch Manager Venues Canberra Economic Development

Office of International Engagement

Smyth, Mr Brendan, Commissioner for International Engagement

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Mr Andrew Barr MLA, the Minister for Tourism and Trade and Minister for Economic Development. We also welcome the officials in attendance. We note that Ms Yvette Berry MLA, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, sends her apologies today. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions. Mr Milligan will kick us off.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I will start off with sport and recreation. My question is more or less in relation to the Amaroo Tennis Centre. The original budget for that was costed at around \$8.6 million. But, according to the infrastructure in this year's estimates, its cost will now be \$13.3 million. Are you able to talk to the increase in the original estimates to where it is today?

**Mr Barr:** I cannot, but I will see whether anyone here can.

**Ms Arthy:** I will start.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Okay; excellent.

**Ms Arthy:** Thank you so much for your question, Mr Milligan. We are looking at each other because, unfortunately, the head of sport and recreation is off sick today.

**MR MILLIGAN:** No worries.

**Ms Arthy:** But we do have some information which we can pass on. Between us, we will do our best. The increase is due to increased construction costs. This has happened on quite a few of our infrastructure projects. The budget of the \$13.834 million is made up of \$0.5 million for design, \$9.834 million, which is the previous funding, and then an additional \$3.5 million to cover the increased costs for construction.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I do not expect you to know this, but I know that Tennis ACT approached the minister some time ago to see if some of the design could be altered to allow for a bigger indoor centre from the original design. I was just wondering if that had been accommodated in this additional cost.

**Ms Arthy:** I will have to take that on notice about whether it has come from Tennis ACT. What I can tell you is that this development will have 10 full-size courts, hot shot courts, a hitting wall, LED floodlighting, parking and the pavilion. What I do not know is whether the size of the pavilion has been affected or increased, but we can take that on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Excellent. Given that, that we will be putting through some questions on notice in relation to this. Thank you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I want to ask about trade and investment statistics. Austrade produces a range of state and territory level data on source country and value of foreign direct investment as well as main export products and destinations—so that exists. How recently have you asked the relevant ACT relationship manager at Austrade for this data for the ACT so that we can target our international engagement work?

**Ms Arthy:** Thank you, Mr Rattenbury, for the question. We have been working with Chief Minister's office in relation to this to try and make sure we have got the right answer for you. As far as we can tell, based on some information that came through today, the information you are requesting is no longer provided. We know that the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not provide state and territory level breakdown. We have also confirmed with Austrade that they do not provide this for investment. I can only talk about investment.

We believe, based on the information that was provided this morning, that the document that has been referred to is one that was done by the National Investment Advisory Board. The last one we have is 2018-19, and that board no longer exists. We went back to, as I say, Austrade just to confirm that there are no other bits of information at a state basis, and they have confirmed that they have not. But we are happy to continue working with your office if we need to and track that down from an investment—

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth has some further information.

**Mr Smyth:** Mr Rattenbury, one of the problems with the data is that it is patchy and inconsistent and, because it is brought together from a number of sources, it tends to be dominated by products—goods—not services, and 95 per cent of what the ACT exports is services.

Under the leadership of the Chief Minister, the recently re-established Ministerial Council on Trade and Investment, when it set out its agenda for the things that it would like to achieve, three items were agreed upon. The first was to raise the profile of Indigenous businesses, get more Indigenous businesses overseas, and help them be more successful. The second was to take a Team Australia approach. The ACT had a trade mission, and you do not want it to overlap with the New South Wales one—or maybe you do. The third, at the request of the Chief Minister, was that all of the data that is being collected be examined so that jurisdictions like ours could get a much fuller understanding.

It then turned into kind of a Donald Rumsfeld approach to things. There were known knowns on exports, there were known unknowns on exports and then there were the



unknown unknowns. The process has been running now for some time, and we get reports at the ministerial council regularly. The first round allowed a greater knowledge of what was happening in exporting—who was exporting, where they were exporting to, how they were exporting and what had helped them get there and what had not. The second thing now is to address the things that we realised we did not know about exporting.

The third thing largely relates to the ACT. We believe services are about 20 per cent of the exports of Australia, depending on what source you go to. So, for us, all of that data was largely not available or not available in the detail. As the Deputy Director-General of Economic Development said, there is a lot of work to be done. The ABS are not collecting the data—they are very happy for other jurisdictions to pay for it—and it is not being integrated. A lot of this data is held by the ATO, for instance, but they do not release it on privacy grounds, even though they can deidentify it; Home Affairs has another database; individual jurisdictions have databases; individual industries have databases; and the other commonwealth departments have databases—and none of them really talk to each other.

The work that MCTI has been doing to try and alleviate that would answer your question I suspect, in conjunction with the material the DGG will provide, much better than—

**Mr Barr:** MCTI being the Ministerial Council on Trade and Investment. That is the acronym.

**Mr Smyth:** Yes; my apologies.

**Mr Barr:** There are two other points to make. I think there is reasonably robust data on tourism and on higher education exports. They are two very big ones for us, but they are not the totality of service exports.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you. I appreciate the research that has gone into answering that question. From that then, how do you ensure that the projects supported by the Office for International Engagement are delivering economic outcomes for Canberrans? What measures or metrics are you using to assess where to prioritise your focus?

**Mr Barr:** I will start. Obviously, we have, through the ministerial council and the Team Australia approach, an alignment associated with the national policy direction, and we have data on Australia's major trade partners. We also, obviously, in the development of our own international engagement strategy, recognise that, with limited resources, we needed to focus on a smaller number of countries and even areas within countries—because China and India, for example, are very large. So we have tended to align associated with capital regions, certainly in China and in India, for example, and we have focused on areas where we have a large international student intake and areas where we have reasonable inbound international tourism. That is sometimes driven by direct aviation connections. It makes sense, if the pathway is easier, to focus in those areas.

Then there is an element of pursuit of opportunity when, for example, a free trade

agreement is struck. There has been a particular focus over the last little while in relation to ASEAN countries. If Australia does land a free trade agreement with the European Union then there is another avenue. Obviously, we do have an agreement with the United Kingdom. I would have had the United States in that list, because there was a longstanding free trade agreement. There is obviously a change in policy there.

At a national level, there is close coordination between the Australian government and the states and territories around the alignment of our trade agenda with our international aid agenda and our diplomatic agenda. Those three have come together with a particular focus on the Pacific. Obviously, with a jurisdiction like the ACT, with its established connections, even at a parliamentary level, into the Pacific, there is a very strong view from DFAT and elsewhere that we can and should play a role in Australia's national effort in the Pacific. We have sought to do so through the establishment of the Council of Pacific Capitals, of which Canberra, Wellington and Suva are the founding cities, and we are aligning our efforts in those markets with the national effort.

From a very practical perspective, and this is where I will hand to the commissioner, we have focused on Fiji. One practical outcome is Fiji Airways flying to Canberra and sponsoring sporting teams, amongst other things, in our city. But we have also focused on export development into Fiji, and that includes in areas like health and in food and beverage and in tourism. Commissioner?

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Smyth, before you start, I might just add a layer that will go to your question. I would note, for example, that in 2023-24 your office supported 31 incoming delegations, including from some small countries like Malta and Laos as well as from some of our largest investment sources like the UK, the US, European member states and Singapore. I am interested in how you determine the level of service for each incoming delegation, to sort of match those points the Chief Minister was just making.

**Mr Smyth:** All of the efforts of international engagement are led by the International Engagement Strategy. Page 9 details the 12 programs that we undertake. Page 10 details what we are seeking, the vision for Canberra. Page 32 has a chart that lists the markets that we have chosen and the reason why. Down the column are very much what the Chief Minister was just saying: Who do we have an FTA with?; Who sends us students?; Who sends us investment?; Who sends us products?; and, vice versa, where do we send? If you look at the chart, most of the numbers against each of the countries, all rank in the top 10 and certainly in the top 20. One exception was the Pacific. The Pacific is our neighbourhood and we have to stop treating it as our backyard and make it our neighbourhood.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, indeed.

**Mr Smyth:** There is a real opportunity here. While we do well with the businesses that we send, in keeping with the government's ethos, we also do good as we travel. With a country like Laos there is perhaps not much that they can offer us in the way of trade, but there is much that we can offer them in terms of strategy and policy that we know work, particularly, say, in an area like the environment, particularly in economic development and innovation. We might spend an hour with a delegation from Laos; with somebody from one of the major partner countries, we might spend a day or two with.

We do tailor what we do. It is not, “Go and grab a flight and go somewhere.” It is working out what you want to do and why. For instance, when the Chief Minister refers to Fiji, we have done a number of trade missions to Fiji in the last couple of years. Fiji reached out to us. Their tourism industry had a report called, oddly enough, *Paddock to the plate*. A lot of people have used the expression. They are at a point now where the tourism industry must mature or it will get beaten by places like Bali. So they are trying to up their standard of service.

We have taken CIT representatives with us to Fiji, and they are looking at arrangements with the two universities and their TAFE system and providers. It is not about Australia going to less well-off countries or, indeed, the ACT going to less well-off countries and taking the best; we would like to leave something. On that particular trade mission we also took a number of businesses, all of whom signed contracts. So we are now exporting quality wine and products. There are a couple of firms who have not announced—so I will not steal their thunder—in the sustainability space who are going to do some good work in Fiji.

Also—and it is quite public; it is all over their website—Ona Coffee travelled with us on two of the trade missions. Ona Coffee has now bought a small primary school that was damaged in Cyclone Winston a decade ago. They have determined that the next great coffee in the world will be Fijian coffee. They are setting up a trade centre where they will teach people to plant and harvest coffee—so economic development at the lowest level. They will have a processing facility there which will do the ground and the capsule coffees. On the flight that the Chief Minister mentioned, we expect to see the best Fijian coffee coming to Canberra to be roasted here, to become a worldwide premium product. It took a little while to get it going, but Ona Coffee has now got an agreement with another ACT firm to actually solarise the whole plant. So we are going to do some good out of it and they are going to do well out of it as well. So there is a planning process to all trade missions. It is not just, “Grab a flight.” It is about making sure there are outcomes in the ACT in terms of jobs, two-way investment, two-way trade and more tourists.

**Mr Barr:** Just to conclude on the inbound, just to see if the question related to inbound: a lot of that is obviously referred to us from DFAT. As the national capital, we end up being a destination for many inbound foreign delegations. There is a constant stream of tree-planting at the National Arboretum—

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, indeed.

**Mr Smyth:** Tuvalu this morning.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, from heads of state or first ministers. There is quite a significant demand on the Office of International Engagement around “that is inbound”. That is just the work they do in Canberra with delegations that come in.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you.

**MS CASTLEY:** You touched on this, Mr Smyth: with the decision-making process prior to any international trip, can you walk us through it in a bit more detail? You

mentioned that Fiji came to us. Is that always the case, or do we reach out to other countries? What criteria do you use to evaluate a proposal, and who makes the decision to go?

**Mr Smyth:** Firstly, we do not call them trips. It is not a holiday. They are trade missions. There is a purpose in everything that we do. No, it is not based on who reaches out to us; otherwise I would be in many small cities in African nations and Chinese provinces, and there is not the time. We try and work out what is best value for the ACT, for the taxpayer. It is then based on the Chief Minister's availability. We look at the International Engagement Strategy and see that, over a period of time, we endeavour to get to every country or every region in the strategy.

It is ambitious. The Queensland government has something like 150 people overseas in 30 or 40 different locations. They run a parallel Austrade network. We cannot afford to do that, so we have to be smarter. For instance, the deputy director-general and I accompanied the Chief Minister to Singapore. The groundwork for that was that there was interest out of Singapore in their space industry and our space industry. There were similarities. Neither jurisdiction is going to launch rockets, but they will do ground sensing, mission control, comms and a few other things.

The Deputy Commissioner for International Engagement organised an online seminar where our industry talked to their industry, and vice versa. It culminated in the Deputy Director-General of Economic Development signing an agreement with SSTL, Singapore Space and Technology Ltd. We now have an arrangement where we have made introductions. They have made introductions, and we know that Canberra firms have done deals and are in collaboration with firms in Singapore.

Our view is that the two-way street does not work so well for us. We are not like New South Wales or Victoria, who turn up with a chequebook and buy something. We go and sell the city, and all of the attributes of the city. The process is quite involved. We would then determine whether or not the Chief Minister should go, whether I should travel or somebody else should travel. If the Chief Minister is going, who will travel with him? On some occasions he goes with a specialist in the area that we are highlighting at that stage. On other occasions he might travel with me and other public servants.

With the recent trade mission to Fiji and New Zealand, for instance, there was a three-pronged approach. The Chief Minister and I, and tourism folk, went to Fiji. The Deputy Commissioner for International Engagement took 20 Canberra businesses, with the Canberra Business Chamber and HMAS *Canberra*, to Wellington. We did what we had to do in Fiji, then joined them in Wellington. We did what we had to do in Wellington. The Deputy Commissioner and I came home, whereas the Chief Minister, accompanied by a different official, went to Auckland for other business. It is not just a matter of swanning around. We are very frugal with what we do; it is very targeted, and it is all guided by what is in the International Engagement Strategy.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth indicated Chief Minister's travel. That, certainly, is an element. I am also the Minister for Tourism and Trade. In some other jurisdictions there would be three different people undertaking that role. In some of the smaller jurisdictions like Tasmania, Premier Rockliff largely has the same set of portfolios as I do.

Every state and territory has a trade and investment minister. Sometimes it is the first minister; at other times it is the Treasurer. Sometimes it is someone else. That will vary across jurisdictions and from time to time. A common theme of any travel I undertake is that it is likely to be multifaceted, with a tourism, trade and first minister component. Some of that is quasi-diplomatic, to answer one element of why travel at a certain time. It may relate to a particular event or symbolic occasion.

This year, for example, is the 25th anniversary of the Canberra-Beijing sister city agreement. I travelled to our sister city principally as Chief Minister, but I undertook a range of trade and tourism-related activities, both in Beijing and in other parts of China.

Timing of a more recent trip related to Expo in Japan. There was a window available; it was largely dictated to us by the Expo Australian committee organisers that that was the available time for a week, to focus on Canberra-related activities. I was there and undertook what I would describe as sister city Chief Minister responsibilities, as well as trade and tourism-related activities.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you have business cases? Are they prepared for each visit?

**Mr Smyth:** It is not strictly a business case. The business case is in the International Engagement Strategy. We have done the pre-work to determine—I think it starts on page 15 of the strategy—what the ACT is good at. We interlock very closely with Economic Development, and we have identified in this latest version, which was published in December 2022, that there are 10 things that ACT industry is very good at and, working closely with Economic Development, we foster those.

We then look at the opportunities that are presented. As the Chief Minister said, for instance, we work closely with the commonwealth. There are big assets there. If they are running a function, sometimes there is the ability to travel with the Prime Minister, a minister relevant to trade or tourism, or another different minister.

I am not sure whether you are aware of Nicholas Moore's report on closer engagement with South-East Asia. It details a whole lot of activities that are very similar to what is in the International Engagement Strategy. The commonwealth's strategy on India, for instance, could have been lifted straight out of the ACT's strategy for all international engagement. The case is already made. What we are doing is implementing it.

**MS CASTLEY:** Once the visit has concluded, what reporting is there, other than what is in here? What evaluation do you go through to make sure that it has provided value for money for the ACT?

**Mr Smyth:** A lot of this takes a great deal of time. The very first ACT business that we saw, in September 2016, is about to land its first big deal in Singapore, a deal worth many tens of millions of dollars. It has only taken nine years. These things are not easy and usually they are not quick. Mind you, we went to Fiji and one of the firms sent several pallet loads of RTDs to Fiji two weeks later, and has done so several times.

**MS CASTLEY:** There is no formal reporting at the end of each trip—

**Mr Smyth:** No, there is—

**MS CASTLEY:** that says, “This is what we’re expecting”?

**Mr Smyth:** There is a ministerial statement. It details what we did, what the outcomes were and what the cost was.

**MS CARRICK:** My question is around the economic development accountability indicators on page 35. It says that you sample big events—Floriade, Enlighten, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular—to determine the contribution to the city’s vibrancy, community pride, social connection and value for money. It is estimated that the economic benefit of those events is 40 to one, so that is very good. That is a great outcome.

My question is: with big community events that bring in people from across Australia—for example, Kanga Cup and the Warriors NAIDOC basketball tournament—what economic benefit do they bring to the broader Canberra community?

**Mr Barr:** It would depend on the number of people travelling, the length of their stay, the nature of the accommodation and the other activities that they might undertake. A rule of thumb around a level of expenditure associated with an overnight stay would include a contribution, probably, of a couple of hundred dollars, as it relates to accommodation, plus any food and beverages they would consume. On a per person basis, you would get a rough rule of thumb on what their spending has been. You would then be able to multiple that by the number of people and the number of nights. That is a way in which a total figure is then arrived at.

**MS CARRICK:** Will you do some analysis around the benefits of these big community events to the districts?

**Mr Barr:** We do not do it at a subterritory level.

**Mr Triffitt:** I have read and understand the privilege statement. For some of the major community events or large participation events, we do commission specific economic impact studies, so that we can be informed directly on the economic return for those events. One example would be the UniSport Nationals that was held in September last year. That had over 6,700 student athletes representing 41 universities. Thirty sports were played at 33 venues, and the total direct and incremental expenditure was over \$9½ million for that event.

**MS CARRICK:** That is excellent. Do you have a policy to look at where the gaps are in infrastructure across Canberra, in bringing those benefits to the districts?

**Mr Triffitt:** It is certainly a consideration in the acquisition of events, as to how the ACT is uniquely positioned for events where we might be competing nationally. For example, the Australian Masters Games, which will be here in October 2025, and the UniSport Nationals, are both delivered by the same organisation, essentially. We were able to leverage the acquisition of the Australian Master Games to secure the UniSport Nationals. That was a very attractive event for the city, based on how easy it is to get around the city compared to other large cities that have suitable infrastructure. Of

course, with the community sport facilities, it is about ensuring that there are enough suitable facilities for them.

**MS CARRICK:** How do you ensure that, and how do you distribute that economic benefit across Canberra? I note that Kieren Perkins, the CEO of the Australian Sports Commission, talked about elite sport versus community sport. I note, in your accountability indicators for sport and rec, that two of them are about elite sport. One is the AIS, and one is the big footy teams that come here. Will you get an accountability indicator for the benefits of community sport?

**Mr Barr:** In an economic sense?

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, a social and economic sense.

**Mr Barr:** We can certainly look at that.

**Ms Arthy:** Yes, we can look at that.

**Mr Barr:** We need to be able to have a credible way of measuring it.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** We would need to look at the resource implications of that. I do not want to devote the budget that would be available to securing the events to spending it on researching what would happen if we could secure the events. In the end, I would prefer to spend the money on the actual event acquisition and getting the benefits of that, rather than just research. If we have to invent whole new datasets and spend a lot of money on collecting the data, that is not really worth doing, for the sake of an accountability indicator. But if it is straightforward and we can have a reliable bit of information—

**MS CARRICK:** It is basically about supporting community sport.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, and we do that, and we would continue to do so, regardless of whether there is an accountability indicator in the budget papers.

**MS CARRICK:** Also, in the context of social and economic benefits, and bringing in things like Kanga Cup, basketball and netball, being the nation's capital, we can have events here and spread the benefit across Canberra, in the various stadiums that are around. When you have these big events, you cannot just hold them in one stadium; they have to be spread around.

**Mr Barr:** Sometimes you can, and where that is what the event organiser prefers. But in other instances, yes, you would have multiple venues.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. There are the examples I was using. NAIDOC basketball had multiple venues. The question is: who is responsible for the policy for venues for community sport?

**Mr Barr:** Principally, it would sit with Minister Berry, in sport and recreation.

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

**MR MILLIGAN:** I am interested to know what the methodology is. How do you determine what government is willing to invest in these events that come to the ACT, like Kanga Cup, the Masters and the like? Is there a dollar-for-dollar return? How is that managed? When they go to the government and ask for money, how do you work that out?

**Mr Barr:** There is an evaluation undertaken that is pretty strongly linked to the number of participants, the expected economic contribution, offset essentially against the cost of either acquiring or staging the event. There is also room for some other criteria to apply, other than just a strict return on investment analysis.

An example of that might be in relation to a particular sport that might attract a greater level of participation, for example, amongst women, amongst people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or amongst people with disability. There would be a variety of other reasons that you would seek to host an event where the pure economic return would not be the only criterion that the government would look at.

**MR MILLIGAN:** The government determines or sets that agenda in terms of those special events that may not have a bigger economic return, but it suits the government's narrative?

**Mr Barr:** Sometimes the approach will be made to government by the ACT's peak sporting body that is looking to host the national competition in their particular sport, for example, and need some government assistance to make that possible. I can think of examples where that would occur. Depending on the scale of the event, it might find its way more into the economic development tourism assessment process. In other instances, it would sit pretty much within sport and recreation and their available grants programs that sit with Minister Berry.

It needs to have a significant economic impact before we would be pouring tourism and economic development dollars into it. But there are other sources of funding—community events and community sport funding—for smaller events where there would not be a significant economic impact, but there might be a significant community benefit or benefit for that sport.

**MS CARRICK:** When Minister Berry is looking at the policy, does she look at the social and economic benefit of sports and rec facilities across Canberra?

**Mr Barr:** I believe so, but we will take that on notice for Minister Berry.

**Ms Arthy:** I can answer this one. In terms of events of this nature, they are not funded, typically, through the sport and rec program. Anything that is government funded for this would be coming through our community event fund. We provide funding to sports organisations, and the sports organisations decide how they spend that funding for their participants. We do not fund events directly through the sports, through Minister Berry. We do fund a number of sporting things through the community event fund.

**MS CARRICK:** I am looking at the policy, and it is Minister Berry. It is not fragmented



across different directorates and different outputs?

**Ms Arthy:** No.

**MS CARRICK:** We do not want that fragmentation. When she is looking at sports and rec policy, does she look at it in terms of the social benefit and the economic benefit? There is a whole range of health benefits.

**Mr Barr:** We will take that on notice for Minister Berry.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** With the criteria, and how everything is being graded, within both Ms Berry's portfolio and the tourism portfolio, how often are the criteria reassessed and evaluated? Is that also communicated with the stakeholders who typically apply for that type of funding?

**Mr Triffitt:** Yes, that is correct. The ACT Event Fund guidelines are established every year. There is a process of doing stakeholder consultation in the development of the guidelines. The Event Fund opened on Friday of last week. This Friday, we have an information session with everyone involved. As we go through the process, obviously, we are engaging with the proponents that are successful. Those that are unsuccessful are always very keen to understand why, and how they can improve. All of that feedback is fed back into the development of the guidelines.

Under the criteria in the assessment of the ACT Event Fund, there are considerations around social benefits as well as economic benefits: demonstrated opportunities for local community involvement and participation; demonstrated opportunities for local business engagement, including partnerships to drive local and interstate visitation, and other opportunities that enable local business to benefit and leverage off the event; demonstrated enhancement of city vibrancy, community pride and social cohesion; and a clear rationale for event timing, including the ability to fill event calendar gaps and complement existing events or experiences in the Canberra region.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Leading on quite nicely from that, on that willingness to consider criteria beyond economic return, does that extend to, for example, funding for women's elite sporting teams, like Canberra United, noting they do not receive as much money from the ACT government as the Raiders or the Brumbies, for example?

**Mr Barr:** The short answer is yes. I will take the detail on notice for Minister Berry. Just to be clear around the nature of funding, there is a venue subsidy. That is the part of this portfolio that sits with me, within territory venues, which include the Arboretum, Exhibition Park, Stromlo Forest Park, as well as Canberra Stadium and Manuka Oval.

For major hirers of those venues, there is inevitably a subsidy associated with that. That is rolled into a total performance agreement that often includes a brand Canberra or tourism marketing element. All of that produces the totality of a government support package for a particular sport. That is, in part, driven by the level of subsidy that is required to have the content at one of our venues.

The tourism and marketing component is relevant. The size of that is very relevant to the number of eyeballs that it reaches. Is the particular sport on free-to-air television? Does it have an audience of millions of people? They are all factors. Because we have limited sponsorship dollars, we have to get branding in front of the most number of eyeballs. That is changing, in terms of where brand and marketing dollars are now best spent. There has been a post-COVID shift, certainly, in the sporting landscape.

Our tourism and branding promotions extend well beyond sport. Frankly, more Australians are interested in arts and cultural activities, and attend and participate in arts and cultural activities, than in sport. Even though the media coverage probably makes it feel like it is 99 per cent sport and one per cent arts and culture, that is certainly not the basis on which we are able to attract tourists or promote Canberra's brand. It needs to be more diverse than just sport.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Taking into account that, I suspect, there is possibly a bit of chicken and egg happening, in that the more you invest, the more eyeballs ultimately end up on the screen, are you able to indicate—

**Mr Barr:** Not really. We are too small. The audience for the Australian Football League is not driven by the ACT. We are too small. Similarly, with the NRL or cricket, or any of the other major Australian sporting codes, the audience that we are marketing to there is the rest of the nation. It is not here.

The bigger shift, frankly, has been the change in attitude of those sports themselves. Obviously, the gold star there goes to Football Australia, for whom it is arguable now that in fact the Matildas are a more marketable product than the Socceroos. In terms of audiences, certainly, getting your brand associated with the Matildas is very significant.

**MS TOUGH:** Chief Minister, this year the budget shows the government is continuing the Aviation Stimulus Fund. I am interested in what this fund is supporting?

**Mr Barr:** It is supporting marketing amongst our existing services, both international and domestic. It is also available to attract new direct flights to Canberra. The way that traditionally happens is that there would be a package of support offered to an airline to commence a service. The stimulus fund, through Mr Kobus's area, Visit Canberra, is essentially a commitment that we would make to work with that airline through both their marketing channels and our own to promote Canberra as a destination and the means in which to get here, via that airline, as a component of a total package. The other contributors would potentially, if it is international, be Tourism Australia and Canberra Airport.

We also seek to line up the equivalent range of partners at the other end of the route. For example, our work in Fiji has involved engagement with Fiji Tourism, Fiji Airport, Fiji Airways and the Fijian government to ensure that they are marketing and spending in our economy as well. A very practical example of that is the Fiji Airways sponsorship of some of our football teams. That has been a way to attract new money from outside the city into those teams. But it also is a marketing exercise for that airline.

We have undertaken an assessment of major population centres in Australia that we do not currently have a direct service to Canberra from and have had a number of market

soundings and engagements with airlines around their willingness to look at those particular markets. To start in the top north, there is not a Canberra to Cairns direct service. It is principally a leisure market. Cairns is a hub for Jetstar, for services that come in from overseas. It is also a reasonably popular outbound destination for Canberrans. So, in order to establish a Canberra-Cairns service, we would need to line up their airport, the North Queensland Tourism Authorities and the Queensland government, and then we would go jointly to the airline and say, “There is support at both ends of this route.” This is where the Aviation Stimulus Fund would be a source of funding for us.

The Sunshine Coast is another such example in Queensland. We have direct services to the Gold Coast and Brisbane. The next two biggest population areas are the Sunshine Coast and Cairns. Our two Queensland targets are those two markets—possibly the same airline or possibly a different one. We would be agnostic in that regard. We have been working with the Sunshine Coast Council and the Sunshine Coast Airport in a joint approach to the airlines to consider that service.

In New South Wales, really the one region that we are not as well connected is, I guess, the Ballina Byron precinct or area. We have seasonal services to Coffs Harbour, we have Newcastle services and we have Sydney services. In Victoria, it is principally Melbourne. In Tasmania, we currently have Canberra-Hobart, but we do not have a Launceston connection. So that would be the opportunity in partnership with the Tasmanian government.

In South Australia, we made a commitment to work with the South Australian government, and we are doing so on a low-cost carrier to make it cheaper to fly between Canberra and Adelaide and we have Canberra-Perth connections. Finally, the Northern Territory government has in fact approached us. Their Minister for Trade and Investment was in Canberra a few weeks ago. They are interested in working with us to expand the number of Canberra-Darwin direct flights, which are currently seasonal and three times a week.

So, in a domestic sense, that would be our focus. In an international sense, we have the Fiji hub established. Qatar Airways will commence their daily flights into Canberra in December. So we have an east and a west. We really do need a connection into Asia, and so—

**MS TOUGH:** So trying to get back to Singapore or somewhere similar?

**Mr Barr:** Singapore and Hong Kong have been the two areas that we have wanted to focus—Hong Kong as a gateway into North Asia and China, in particular. It is a major international hub airport and, similarly, Singapore for Southeast Asia. We retain and we have had an ongoing desire to have a direct flight into New Zealand. That would be the spectrum of focus.

It tends to be airline agnostic, but often in aviation it makes sense for an airline for whom the hub is their home airport: Air New Zealand for Auckland; Singapore Airlines for Singapore; Cathay Pacific for Hong Kong; Fiji Airways for Nadi; and Qatar for Doha. That makes sense. But it would also be nice if our national carrier, Qantas, would fly internationally from Canberra, which is a point I make to them every time I meet

with them.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** I have a bit of a change of focus, I guess—moving to business. Hopefully, we have some officials here for that, particularly the support that the government is planning on giving the local hospitality industry here in Canberra but also through building on existing reforms—and I note a 50 per cent decrease in liquor licenses.

**Mr Barr:** This is all in Minister Cheyne's area. I think she is appearing on Thursday.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister Cheyne?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it is night-time economy and Access Canberra, and all those fees and everything that you have referred to is in her area, and she is appearing, I think, on Thursday, from memory.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Okay.

**MS CASTLEY:** Mr Barr, you said in an interview with the *Canberra Times* that the latest trade mission to Beijing was part of an Australian effort to normalise relations with China. When did the commonwealth propose that the ACT assist in this normalising of the relationship with China?

**Mr Barr:** Through both the Ministerial Council on Trade and Investment and National Cabinet, there have been discussions in both fora in relation to Australia's relations with China. I noted in both forums that Canberra and Beijing are sister cities, and that, it being the 25th anniversary of that sister city relationship, I would travel to China to mark that occasion. That was at the invitation of the Chinese Ambassador to Australia, who said a visit would be most welcome. That visit was supported and in fact largely organised by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Austrade and Tourism Australia representatives.

I did note that my program, with the exception of Chengdu and the pandas, was largely the same as the Prime Minister's. We both went to see Trip and we both signed an indicated agreement around a partnership with them. The Prime Minister overseeing the signing of the Tourism Australia agreement. We were there three months earlier, with that same organisation. The engagement in Beijing was supported by our ambassador. He hosted a reception on our behalf at the Australian Embassy, and my engagement with the mayor of Beijing was facilitated and supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

All of our international engagement missions are supported by DFAT and Austrade. We do not have the resources to be doing things independently of the Australian government in that regard. Often, because I am the tourism minister, Tourism Australia will also be involved in supporting our activities.

**MS CASTLEY:** So why was it the same trip, really, for you and the Prime Minister? Was there much discussion about the embarking on his trip and what you found out

from yours?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, yes. We shared information and feedback with the Australian government officials. I will not go into that publicly here, obviously. They also accompanied me on all of those engagements with Chinese government counterparts or, in the tourism space, we had the head of Tourism Australia and China present. They were guiding and supporting our activities and providing feedback before, during and after. We also undertake post-mission security debriefings. Obviously, again, these are things I cannot go into here for national security reasons. These are all elements of our engagement. I need to be clear—

**MS CASTLEY:** So you had a discussion with the foreign minister about the effectiveness of your trip?

**Mr Barr:** I have not yet spoken with the foreign minister, but we certainly have with the head of our mission in that country—the Australian ambassador, who personally briefed me ahead of and during the mission. It is common practice in each of our trade missions for engagement with ambassadors, high commissioners or consuls-general, if we are not in the capital city.

**MS CASTLEY:** You mentioned that you met with the Mayor of Beijing. Were they the most senior official that you met?

**Mr Barr:** In the Chinese government, yes.

**MS CASTLEY:** How much authority does the mayor possess with regard to China's foreign policy?

**Mr Barr:** I can unpack the CCP, but the Mayor of Beijing is certainly on your way to having a significant role in the future governance of that country.

**MS CASTLEY:** Great. So you are happy to satisfy the initial interest from the group that you are part of that you have signed off on everything that you are required to with regard to that last trip?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, we were extensively briefed. I would never go overseas and into an environment or context where there was not support from the Australian government to do so.

**MS CASTLEY:** Great. Thanks.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I would love to talk about the GIO Stadium and the broader Bruce precinct. From budget statement B, page 58, it looks like the extensive investment in the GIO Stadium is \$200,000 for this financial year for the hardstand replacement, painting and rekeying of the security system. Can you confirm whether that is the only upgrade for the GIO Stadium over the forward estimates right now?

**Mr Barr:** There will not be over the forward estimates. There is an annual allocation as part of the Asset Renewal Program for Canberra Stadium. Mr Elkins may be able to give some history on previous, current and projected Asset Renewal Program funded

initiatives.

**Mr Elkins:** Absolutely. GIO Stadium will have over the ARP a range of works that will be happening in the continuation of what we are doing. We have been working through some works on hardstands and rekeying. We are looking at some minor upgrades through our hospitality areas. We have done upgrades to our IPTV system, which is the whole-of-system TV to allow us to provide commercial but way-finding assets for the stadium. We will also be doing some upgrades to accessibility. Key to that is the nosings on our stairs. We are redoing all our stair nosings around the stadium, which will give it better accessibility for people coming into the stadium and using that part.

**MISS NUTTALL:** That is encouraging to hear; fantastic. The Chief Minister, I think, tabled a document in the Assembly last year that outlined costings options for the Canberra Stadium. You mentioned a few that do not appear to be outlined in these budget papers. Would any of the upgrades that are earmarked over the forward estimates as part of the Asset Renewal Program correspond to any of the upgrades listed in option A, which is a sort of refurbishment option?

**Mr Barr:** No. The Asset Renewal Program is small. The options that you refer to there would be considered major capital works that would cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Got you. One of the risks identified in the costings document—and I take your point that these would be major works—was that the refurbishments to the existing stadium would bring considerable risks and costs to bring the stadium up to the current code of compliance, including DDA and ESD. That was on page 4. Is the GIO Stadium currently compliant with those codes?

**Mr Barr:** It would be. But, once you undertake any significant upgrade work, under the codes, you trigger a new level, I guess, requirement.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Okay. So, for now, we are confident that it is compliant with code and that these are sort of quality-of-life upgrades, essentially?

**Mr Barr:** Yes; they reflect wear and tear on the asset principally.

**Mr Elkins:** Yes; these are more around the asset is aged. As we continually go through, we maintain that asset—for example, stair nosing need to be replaced because they have wiped off, which we assess ongoing.

**MISS NUTTALL:** It looks like the existing GIO Stadium has also achieved the target revenue in the last budget and in fact may well look to exceed it, based on one particular game, which is awesome. With that in mind, what is the current financial justification for a new stadium, at this point in time?

**Mr Barr:** Right now there is not one. There is not a project. There is still obviously usable life within Canberra Stadium. Bits of the stadium were constructed in 1977, I think from memory, so are coming up on 50 years. But there was a major refurbishment in the late 1990s associated with the Sydney Olympics. It is the government's view that

the facility is still fit for purpose. It has some design limitations, because it was an adapted athletics track, and certainly its proportion of undercover seating, for example, is lower than many contemporary facilities. There will be a need in time for a new facility. But that need was not so pressing as to abandon many other more worthy infrastructure projects to fast-track a new stadium. The time will come when a new stadium is needed, and we have indicated the process that we are undertaking to get to that point.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I understand that a new stadium would eventually be built as part of the Bruce precinct. Is that still the case?

**Mr Barr:** That is certainly the preferred viable location.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Again, this probably goes to your point: when we looked through the budget papers we did struggle to find any specific funding allocated for the new stadium. Am I right in assuming that there is no funding in this budget specifically for the new stadium?

**Mr Barr:** There was previous year funding that extends across into this financial year.

**MISS NUTTALL:** What, in particular, is that funding for—that is extended?

**Mr Barr:** A range of technical due diligence work around appropriate siting for a new facility. There is also funding that the commonwealth have provided around broader precinct planning. That is associated with the \$250 million investment the commonwealth is making in improving the facilities at the Institute of Sport. Given the stadium is an asset of the Australian government, and we are simply a tenant in it, there is an interest in the broader precinct and what that commonwealth funded redevelopment would entail and enable and what would be useful complementary investment in that precinct.

We own some of the land around it. So we are having sensible conversations with the commonwealth about what the future needs are for that precinct, which include non-sporting infrastructure that would support the precinct's viability and support the vitality and more consistent use of that precinct. That includes a range of hospitality, accommodation, retail, commercial and housing opportunities.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Education as well?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. Obviously, it is proximate to the University of Canberra and the Bruce CIT campus.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Understanding that the commonwealth would be investing in the AIS precinct, would you be expecting a fifty-fifty funding split across the whole precinct or just for certain elements?

**Mr Barr:** It would depend on the infrastructure that is being proposed. In some instances, I think the land availability for private sector investment would be the appropriate outcome. That would be relevant for, say, hotels, commercial, hospitality, and retail type commercial construction. I would imagine that any element of housing

that was built in the precinct would have a private funding source. But it may also be appropriate for the commonwealth to contribute, through the Housing Australia Future Fund for community housing in the precinct, and it may be appropriate for available funds for new public housing to be directed into housing in the precinct.

But, in terms of the AIS facilities, I would expect the commonwealth to contribute 100 per cent of the funding for those. It would not be reasonable for the territory government to be investing in the Australian Institute of Sport. That is an Australian government responsibility. In relation to other sporting infrastructure that might be utilised more locally than nationally, there certainly is precedent elsewhere in Australia for the commonwealth to make a co-contribution. Perhaps the most high-profile examples of that at the moment are the commonwealth's co-contribution to Olympic stadium facilities in Brisbane for the 2032 Olympics and the commonwealth's co-contribution towards the proposed Tasmanian stadium.

**THE CHAIR:** You made mention that you believe there is still life left in the current stadium. Have you undertaken analysis into how much life is left? If so, how much life is left?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly the facility remains fit for purpose. The playing surface is considered amongst the best in the country, if not the world. The hirers are using the facility, as we have seen this year with rugby union, rugby league and football. So we certainly do not have any difficulty hiring the venue for those purposes.

**THE CHAIR:** If we can come around to the question. Have you undertaken a sort of time-based estimate?

**Mr Barr:** We have a facilities assessment.

**Mr Elkins:** We do a facilities assessment across the venue and we maintain an ongoing role in maintenance schedule for the venue. In the outyears, we are viewing what we need to do in the current 12 months but also what we have in the out 12 months. Like any facility, whether it is brand new or 50 years old, there will be certain things that happen that are unexpected. When they opened Optus Stadium, they had major renovations on an oil leak that happened on the first day. So it is a busy working piece of infrastructure. We are really conscious to always be working with our hirers to make sure that the asset is getting used in the best possible way but also reflecting back to the community—

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, in the interest of time, can I bring you back to the question: do you have an estimate of the amount of years—

**Mr Barr:** More than a decade but—

**THE CHAIR:** More than a decade?

**Mr Barr:** But I would remind you that it is not our asset; it is owned by the Australian government through the Australian Sports Commission. We are only tenants.

**THE CHAIR:** I certainly understand that. It was the answer to the other piece of the



equation. There was a question as to whether it was compliant with code. I do not think I heard an answer to that piece of the question specifically. I would like to know which version of the building code is it compliant with?

**Mr Barr:** We will take that part on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you very much.

**Mr Barr:** But, yes, it is compliant.

**THE CHAIR:** I am assuming so, but there are many versions of the building code it could be.

**MR EMERSON:** I have a supplementary on that related to it being fit for purpose. The Matildas played there earlier this year—which was incredible and it broke attendance records. But, of course, there were a number of pretty well-publicised issues with parking and access. Is there a plan to address those issues for similar events like this in the near future—and funding?

**Mr Elkins:** Each event is reasonably unique, and we work through things with the hirers. With the Matildas match, we found that we had a really high level of unique access—people who had not been to the stadium before. We brought together ourselves, Roads ACT and Transport Canberra, and we will continue to work—I believe there is a meeting happening now on site at the moment—to look at how we can continue to improve that access.

One of the things we are looking at is the mix of buses that we can use. We use buses from Transport Canberra, which give us better access through the articulated buses and larger numbers move. But are also getting other buses to continue to increase that volume. We are also looking at how we continue to advertise other places that can be used for parking and how we service those with buses as they come past. We have opened up parking at the University of Canberra to provide an overflow service, which has a bus that comes down to the venue. We will continue to do that. One thing we are working on is how we promote that not only through our channels but also through the event hirer's channels?

So we are continuing to look at other opportunities not just in what we do infrastructure wise but also in how we communicate things we are doing through our channels and, more importantly, are leaning into those users and making sure that we are getting direct to the people who are attending.

**MR EMERSON:** Reading between the lines, more people were driving than anticipated—is that what happened—or is it that more people were taking public transport in that specific instance?

**Mr Elkins:** No. There was a mix of configuration of people coming and it was a timing thing on that day. A lot of people arrived late. That lateness, both on bus ingress and car ingress, provided for conflicts. We are working through how we do that to provide the best service but also the best timing to get people in.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you. So it is a more technical issue than an infrastructure—

**Mr Elkins:** A more technical issue and also about working to spread our communications through more channels.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you. Chief Minister, you kind of mentioned the Bruce precinct master plan. You mentioned that there is now also \$10 million in federal funding, since last May. Was that matched by the ACT government in last year's budget?

**Mr Barr:** No. We were not required to match that funding. The commonwealth very generously provided all of the funding to essentially plan a precinct that is mostly theirs. I would have been a little peeved if we had been expected to pay for AIS precinct master planning.

**MR EMERSON:** Where is that piece of work sitting? Is it with the SLA in ACT government?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. We have a number of ACT government agencies around the table, but SLA are leading that.

**MR EMERSON:** Do you know where that is up to? It is relevant to the question of where the stadium—

**Mr Barr:** I am aware of at least two meetings with the commonwealth to date.

**MR EMERSON:** But not on detailed design and development?

**Mr Barr:** I will take on notice exactly where that is up to.

**MR EMERSON:** That work has not substantially commenced, I suppose, to get into the detail?

**Mr Barr:** The commonwealth has multiple areas of government interest. The Sports Commission is principally focused on the delivery of the \$250 million in upgrades that were funded, I think two commonwealth budgets ago. They maintain a broader interest in the undeveloped part of their landholdings. Some of that abuts against ACT government owned land. The commonwealth department of infrastructure is, I guess, the lead agency from the commonwealth's perspective. I will be diplomatic. The commonwealth's interests are broader than just the Sports Commission's interests in the precinct.

**MR EMERSON:** Part of why I am asking is that, in media reporting a month ago, Minister Berry indicated a new stadium location would be announced within weeks. I think that, when that masterplan funding announcement was made, the idea was that we need to do the planning of the precinct in order to then determine the location for a stadium.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I think there was a degree of licence in the reporting of Minister Berry's statements that might have expanded on it. We are undertaking technical due diligence on sites within the precinct, as to their suitability to locate the stadium. In effect, we

will be able to rule out certain areas or rule in certain areas on the basis that it is technically feasible and there is not contaminated land or a range of things that would preclude a stadium being built. That work is reaching conclusion but is not yet finalised. Rest assured, when we have something further to say, we will. I just cannot get into ruling in or ruling out games at this point.

**MR EMERSON:** Can you rule out the current site?

**Mr Barr:** We know it can host a stadium, but we also know that the current site, if redeveloped, would be out of action for—

**MR EMERSON:** It would be hugely disruptive.

**Mr Barr:** Yes—for a period of time. That is a downside of just knocking down all the stands around the existing stadium. It would remain, in theory, a feasible option because we know it can accommodate a stadium, because it currently does.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Elkins, you spoke about the issues of getting people in and out of games. Do buses that transport people get priority into the ground?

**Mr Elkins:** They do not get priority. We have the time of 2 pm facilitating buses entering the ground, but, when they come off the GDE and into the eastern car park, where we have our bus overlay, there are three lanes. We need to maintain two incoming lanes for traffic and have one always available for egress, just from a safety point of view. The challenge we would have, and we have explored it many times, is that, if we took the two lanes and made one of those lanes a priority lane for buses, the buses would still be caught on the outside, because we would be forcing traffic further back onto the road network. It is a very fine balance in that, if we move it, we might be able to open up one lane for buses, but that would change the dynamics of how traffic operated and that would move the buses back further, just by the nature of having to enter that car park queue. We are working with Transport Canberra and Roads ACT to look at anything we can do to configure some priority access and sections of that road to hasten the entry of buses. We have just started initial conversations on what that looks like, but some early conversations are happening.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I urge you to continue that work. The last time I went to the stadium by bus, I sat in the traffic as long as anybody. There was no motivation to take the bus. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. There is no point in taking the bus.

**Mr Barr:** I appreciate that. With crowds of sub-20,000, there is less problem. When it is a full house, that is the largest number of people you will ever have to move for that venue. We are certainly aware of the issue and are looking at solutions, but the very simple one of just making a lane for buses creates a different set of problems. If there were an easy solution, it would definitely have been applied, let me assure you of that.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I am glad to hear that. Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** I want to ask about economic activity as a result of supporting local elite teams, seeing that we have a bit of a trend here. There was \$14 million in 2024-25 and we are shooting for \$18 million this financial year. What is the basis of that

anticipated increase? It is on page 35. The target for the year just gone was \$14 million and we are shooting for \$18 million this financial year.

**Mr Barr:** I thought you were talking about investment in the teams but it is about economic outcomes.

**MR EMERSON:** Economic activity generated. It is great that we are expecting it to increase, but why is that?

**Ms Arthy:** We are basing it on the reports from the teams last year. Every year we get a report about what the expected contribution is. We know that, over time, the contribution from the elite teams has been going up. We have increased the target accordingly.

**MR EMERSON:** Is there a similar line item that indicates investment in the elite teams? I understand it is a breakdown of different kinds of support, but—

**Ms Arthy:** It is not an accountability indicator, but I am sure we can provide you with the funding that we provide the teams. I do not think it is commercial-in-confidence. There are some elements that are commercial-in-confidence. We can certainly provide you with a breakdown of the funding that we can.

**MR EMERSON:** That would be great.

**Ms Arthy:** As the Chief Minister mentioned, we provide a mixture of funding. There is partnership funding, sponsorship funding and venue agreements. We provide a whole range of things. We can certainly give you what we can, noting that some of it is commercial-in-confidence.

**MR EMERSON:** I imagine that, with those commercial agreements, you have in-kind estimates: “We think this is worth X.”

**Ms Arthy:** It is not that straightforward. For the Brumbies and the Raiders, we look at a whole range of things. As well as the straight partnership fee, as the Chief Minister said, some of them have an element which we have nominated for the tourism and media sides. For example, the Giants have a very strong one around media and tourism. We also have elements of sponsorship on jerseys, for example, which are different, depending on what it is. Each team is different, depending on where the commercial part is on the jersey. It is complicated around the commercial side of the teams. We will provide you what we can. We do not tend to look at in-kind support for the elites, because we are very much after as much tangible outcome as we can—

**MR EMERSON:** In-kind and outside, I suppose. You would have to—

**Mr Barr:** Yes; certainly.

**MR EMERSON:** put a value on how much the—

**Ms Arthy:** I misunderstood. I am sorry, Mr Emerson.

**Mr Barr:** For example, Mr Elkins' team, which runs the stadium, is providing in-kind support for everyone who uses the stadium. That is not just for football teams; it is also for stadium golf, concerts or local competitions that have their finals, for example, at the stadium.

**THE CHAIR:** Regarding the question you have taken on notice, could you please indicate clearly anywhere you are claiming commercial-in-confidence.

**Ms Arthy:** We definitely will. There are only a couple of elements where I think we will have to do that, but we will definitely say that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** Here we have the estimated return on ACT government investment. That is supported under the Major Event Fund. Great, 40:1—amazing. And then we have a submitted activity for which we do not know the investment—a local sporting team. A similar line item would be great. It is certainly not my position that it has to be purely about economic returns. You might be able to capture everything. I think it would be helpful.

**Ms Arthy:** We will do our best in terms of the elites. Doing the second and third tiers is a bit more difficult.

**MR EMERSON:** For the elites is fine. It corresponds to this indicator.

**Ms Arthy:** Will do.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you. How much funding has been provisioned for securing Canberra United's future?

**Ms Arthy:** In the budget, it is \$800,000 over two years—that is, \$400,000 this financial year and \$400,000 next financial year.

**MR EMERSON:** And, after that, we will have to revisit what it looks like from there on? Is that because of the commercial—

**Ms Arthy:** We have just two years of funding. We are aware that investors are looking—

**MR EMERSON:** There is uncertainty.

**Ms Arthy:** There is too much uncertainty.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you. And in terms of attracting major national and international sporting events to the ACT, is that a component of the Major Events Fund? Is there a separate funding allocation or line item?

**Mr Barr:** It will tend to be a case-by-case assessment based on a proposition that is put to us.

**MR EMERSON:** Where does that funding come from?

**Mr Barr:** We have to appropriate it separately. There would be some examples in the budget papers where we have, for example, a national basketball league or a Matildas game. We endeavour to strike a commercial arrangement that sees some return to the territory through the venue. Commercial arrangements can include risk-sharing on ticket sales. They will include revenue sharing on pourage and food. They can often include either a full or a partial subsidy on venue hire.

To the transport question from Mr Rattenbury, we will endeavour to bundle up free transport to ticket holders as part of the commercial package that is offered. It is fair to say that it is very well engrained with usual hire—for the Raiders and the Brumbies, for example. Where we end up with slightly more difficulty at times can be on those once-in-12-years events, like the British and Irish Lions or Football Australia, who are not regular users of the venue. We are certainly very focused on those occasional hirers, trying to get the same standard of communications and community engagement around access and egress from the stadium from them as we do from the ones who are using it, between them, 20 times a year.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I will pass my question to Ms Castley.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you, Chair. I would like to chat about Floriade parking. The Acton Park car park can accommodate 600 cars, but, due to the closures for light rail, it is much smaller now. Has the government considered how the closure will affect patrons attempting to drive to Floriade? We are only six weeks away.

**Mr Barr:** There is a Floriade transport strategy that the team has been working on. That includes providing alternative parking options within walking distance of Commonwealth Park. Fortunately, a major 10-storey structured carpark is about to open just across the road from here, which is walking distance over the Commonwealth Park footbridge. That will help offset some of that lost—

**MS CASTLEY:** That will be open in time?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. It is opening in August.

**MS CASTLEY:** Great.

**Mr Barr:** Floriade is from the middle of September to the middle of October. That is one such example. There are others. I will let Mr Triffitt talk further about the broader strategies. It is not just about car parking; it is also about shuttle services, park and ride, and there is even going to be a ferry.

**Mr Triffitt:** Thank you, Chief Minister. The strategy effectively focuses on proactively redirecting attendees away from the congested areas on Commonwealth Avenue to alternative parking locations and increasing and extending shuttle services to those areas. It is about encouraging the use of public transport and active travel options. We are focused on a targeted communications plan around all of those changes. Where car

parks may be closed, new ones have opened. There will also be increased real-time updates on parking availability and redirecting of traffic to those available parking locations.

The new measures include an expanded bus network. We will be running a weekend service from Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Woden interchanges. There will be increased shuttle services to the City, the National Triangle and Floriade. That is to provide a continuous loop and increase the frequency of the shuttle bus services to utilise city car parking, but also the new car parking in the National Triangle. And we are looking at other measures in terms of managing the traffic, such as temporary traffic lights, expanding our variable messaging signage, and CCTV at key car parks so we can monitor whether they are full and how we can redirect people to available parks. We have branded directional signage that we use particularly for people driving from Sydney. We will have new signs and will change that signage to reflect the changes in car parking activity, and there will be external car park signage that identifies what the travel options are from those car parks—whether it is for active travel, scooter travel, walking or access by the shuttle services for the wider city and the National Triangle. And we have been working with the ferry service as well. They will continue to operate a private service, which will also complement what we are doing in terms of the subsidised Floriade services.

**MS CASTLEY:** Will the strategy be published? Can we see all of it or will it just be bits and pieces?

**Mr Barr:** We will have a big focus on this: “If you want to go to Floriade, here is where you can park and these are the transport options”—all of that. We will have a pretty extensive communications campaign. Half of the attendants are Canberrans. They are certainly front and centre. But we obviously have a reasonably big driving market from Sydney as well.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thanks.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Will the Floriade transport strategy include provision for accessibility measures? For example, if you are making the trek and you have low vision or you are blind or you use mobility aids, is that going to be factored in ahead of time?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. There is the parking that is most proximate to the main entrance to Floriade. I think it is almost entirely dedicated to—

**Mr Triffitt:** That is correct. We re-mark the car park at the main entrance at Regatta Point to increase the accessibility parking options there. And all of the shuttle services are fully accessible.

**MISS NUTTALL:** That is great to know. Thank you.

**MR EMERSON:** Is it the first time Floriade About Town has been run or is it similar to what was happening during COVID or is this something that has happened the entire time and I have just—

**Mr Triffitt:** There are essentially two programs. Floriade Community is—

**MR EMERSON:** Virtually hosting the flowers—

**Mr Triffitt:** Correct. There are 300,000 bulbs and annuals provided to community organisations. There is also a grant program for those community organisations to hold events and activate those locations. Floriade About Town is a way to stimulate interest for local businesses. They can leverage off the Floriade brand by having Floriade-specific offers and product service that we promote through our website and our generals. Last year, we had just over 40 participants. This will be its third year.

**MR EMERSON:** It is about trying to get people to kick on at a bar or something like that at the end of the day.

**Mr Triffitt:** Yes—to expand the economic footprint of the spending and encourage longer stays as well.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee will now suspend proceedings.

**Hearing suspended from 3.32 pm to 3.53 pm.**



Appearances:

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General Economic Development

Starick, Ms Kate, Executive Group Manager Policy and Strategy Economic Development

Bailey, Mr Daniel, Executive Group Manager Operations Economic Development

Elkins, Mr Matthew, Executive Branch Manager Venues Canberra Economic Development

Jeffress, Mr Stuart, Executive Branch Manager National Arboretum Canberra and Stromlo Forest Park Economic Development

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome back Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Tourism and Trade and Minister for Economic Development. We also welcome back the officials in attendance. We note that the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Ms Yvette Berry, sends her apologies today. We have many witnesses for this session. Please note that as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. We will now continue.

**Mr Barr:** Excuse me, Chair. Might we also lodge Minister Pettersson's apologies? I think this is actually his session.

**THE CHAIR:** We will note that Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries sends his apologies today also. We will move directly to questions. I think, Mr Rattenbury, we were up to you.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Chief Minister, the ANU has attracted students domestically and internationally to move to Canberra to study and contribute to our local economy, and they often stay here once they have completed their degree. Given the recent restructuring that is still happening at the ANU and the loss of certain courses, subjects, and research schools and units, has the ACT government conducted or received any analysis on how these changes will impact enrolments or on the economic impact they will have on the ACT more broadly?

**Mr Barr:** No, we have not. The university has provided periodic updates on its internal process. The Vice-Chancellor, at her request, is coming in for a meeting with me tomorrow, so I imagine we will get a further update then. But, no, we are not really in a position to undertake the sort of detailed analysis you have outlined. I think there is a broader policy decision that the ANU made pre-COVID to, effectively, cap its size and stay as what they described as a small university. Other universities in the city do not appear to have a self-imposed cap on their growth.

There are some ANU-specific issues, clearly, but when looking at the university sector as a whole, there is obviously significant expansion coming with UNSW. I am not sure

whether the committee is going to hear from the University of Canberra, but the Vice-Chancellor, I think, in his latest public comments indicated the stabilisation of UC's position, so I think the next conversation that we will have with the University of Canberra will be about their future growth trajectory for 2026 onwards.

I make possibly the statement of the bleeding obvious, but an antidote to cuts is revenue growth, so we stand ready to work with ANU, UC, UNSW and other universities with a presence in the territory if they are seeking to grow their student enrolments, both domestic and international. We recognise a key element to that is available student accommodation, and we are happy to facilitate a de-risked model, where student accommodation is supported but is not institution specific—it is available for students at any of the institutions. That may be a way of de-risking that investment both for student accommodation providers and for the universities. If they seek to build it on their own campus, there is a risk that it may not be fully subscribed, but for a shared facility—and there is already an example in the CBD that is independently owned, student accommodation that is accessible for students of UC, ANU, UNSW, CIT, whomever—and more of that, there is definitely market interest for. In fact, spreading the risk and demand across multiple institutions probably makes more sense.

To the extent that the lack of accommodation has been seen as an inhibitor to interstate or international student growth, I think we can play a role in assisting there. We will focus on that, together with one of my standing agenda items with the universities—both their national and international enrolment strategies. We are, through StudyCanberra and brand CBR and our international engagement, very happy to work with them in areas of the market, either domestically or internationally, where they are looking to attract new students.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you. And in that vein, obviously with the university sector being an important part of this city's economy, have you had engagement with the federal government around the issues of university funding generally? We see a difficult environment for universities.

**Mr Barr:** Sure, yes. There are a number of intersecting factors here. The migration and visa policies—I will certainly discuss those with federal ministers. There is also a particular focus through the Universities Accord and Minister Clare's focus on governance. ANU is a federally mandated university, so its governing legislation is federal. We have been engaging on those questions. The issue fundamentally comes down to this: if extra revenue is to be generated for the sector, where is it coming from? It is either from increased taxes for Australians, or we have a focus on international revenue sources, and that is both in an undergraduate and postgraduate sense, but also in research funding, which is obviously particularly important for ANU.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Speaking of ANU again, the ACT has an aspiration to make the ACT the arts capital. With the school of music being impacted by the changes at ANU, with significant cuts coming through there, how do we imagine—

**Mr Barr:** I cannot see it as a positive.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, exactly, so what are we going to do to overcome that?

**Mr Barr:** I think I have said that the ANU have their own internal process—their Renew ANU program. We cannot force the ANU to do anything. Let's not try and pretend that the ACT government can dictate to the ANU. We cannot. But we can make our views known in relation to their renewal process. We recognise they have a significant financial deficit, and they cannot do nothing. That is clear. They either have to grow their revenue or reduce their expenditure or do a combination of both. I am not an expert in the structure of each ANU faculty, and I will not pretend to be, but I do recognise that there is a degree of community concern and particular stakeholder concern about the proposal that has come forward. I understand the consultation period has been extended, and I will seek an update from the Vice-Chancellor tomorrow.

**MR RATTENBURY:** What is the status of the land arrangements with the ANU? One way in which the ACT government does have leverage over the university is that the university has sought various pieces of land in recent years.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I think most of those transactions are complete, and an outstanding concern for me would be that the purpose of at least one of the transactions, being land for the centre for disease control, proceeds.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Do we have any indication on that project's status?

**Mr Barr:** I have heard nothing to date to say it would not be, but that will be something I will raise tomorrow.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay. And just lastly on universities, the University of New South Wales new campus—

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** It has been delayed at various times. Are we able to get an update on its progress?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. Obviously with the opening of the CIT Woden facility, the University of New South Wales is now moving apace. Ms Arthy will provide some updates.

**Ms Arthy:** Thank you. The process has been managed through the CRA, so when you meet with the CRA, they can give you more detail because they are managing the actual development. But what I can say to you is that we are going through final stages of approval, and they are looking to be in a position to break ground and put in their first construction for stage 1 within the next six months or so.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay.

**Ms Arthy:** It is going at pace. It is not just the new construction, which is on the car park at CIT—that dirt car park. Stage 1 is going to be at Coranderrk, Constitution Avenue and Parkes Way—in there.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes.

**Ms Arthy:** UNSW have also taken over a fair bit of the old CIT site, and they are going

to be building up their campus there in the existing building. They have already started doing some programs—I think in cyber; I want to say, but I cannot remember. They are gearing up to do teaching out of the CIT. I think they are also forming partnerships based off their launch on Northbourne to bring some startups in as well.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Okay, thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** When you talk to the universities, do you encourage them to direct their students to the south to find accommodation? We have got the highest vacancy rate, and Geocon is providing incentives for people to live there, so there are options there.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. The universities have the majority of their student accommodation on their own campuses. I think it is the Y Suites that is on Moore Street in the city that is a purpose-built student accommodation facility. I am aware of other property owners looking at building more student accommodation, and there would be no barrier to that occurring in Woden or indeed elsewhere.

There would be some students for whom renting apartments would be what they are looking for. In other instances, the student accommodation model tends to be either individual-room type arrangements, or with six or eight or 10 rooms with a shared kitchen and living facilities, and the like, that is a little bit more purpose built than—

**MS CARRICK:** I am just noting that there are options.

**Mr Barr:** We always appreciate when supply exceeds demand in relation to housing.

**THE CHAIR:** I did not hear us get to the heart of one of Mr Rattenbury's questions around the arts capital vision. In particular, have you identified any impact on that objective and what the ACT doing, not in respect of ANU but to make up for that shift and the de-prioritisation of the arts?

**Mr Barr:** I will take the question on notice for the arts minister, but make the observation that, really, until there is a final decision from the ANU, we will not know what we are making up for. Obviously, the broader objectives for the arts go beyond just the School of Music and the School of Art at ANU.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Carrick?

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. My question is also about the arts—and I have got other ones too—and the benefits of social and economic development of the arts. The policy is for Canberra to be Australia's arts capital. This is the statement of ambition. And one of the key strategies is to “create amazing art and culture—everywhere, at any time, for everyone”. I am wondering what your policy is to create art across Canberra and what your policy is for the distribution of art facilities, given that Woden, Weston Creek, and Molonglo do not have an artsACT facility.

**Mr Barr:** I will take that on notice for the arts minister.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. I am going to ask about public versus private ownership

of community facilities—for example, the pool in Woden. The proposed 25-metre pool will be a commercial tenancy in a mixed-use precinct. How will you ensure it stays open?

**Mr Barr:** I will take that on notice for the relevant minister.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay.

**Mr Barr:** It is not this hearing.

**MS CARRICK:** It is still a social and economic development within our areas. I mean—

**Mr Barr:** The policy responsibility and the regulatory responsibility sit elsewhere in government, but I will take the question on notice.

**MS CARRICK:** All right. What about this one: when I look at the infrastructure forecast for venues, for example, the aquatic centre is in Infrastructure Canberra, but the Convention Centre and the entertainment precinct are in this portfolio. These are venues that will create economic development, and they only have forecasts in the first couple of years, and there is nothing in the out-years.

My concern, when I look into the whole infrastructure across the ACT government, is that the numbers drop off fairly significantly in the out-years.

**Mr Barr:** Sure, yes.

**MS CARRICK:** While I appreciate that as the years roll on you will make more commitments that will fill up that pipeline of projects and the numbers, my concern is the impact on the budget, because as you fill it up, that will create more borrowings and more interest in the out-years.

**Mr Barr:** Mostly, that is a Treasury and Infrastructure question. I am appearing next week on infrastructure, but I may as well provide part of the answer now. The government has, really, four sources of funding for infrastructure: we have commonwealth grants; we have asset sales; we have operating cash surpluses, and we have borrowings. Across those four funding sources is how the territory's infrastructure has been funded since self-government.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. But—

**Mr Barr:** And they would continue to be four sources of funding for infrastructure, I imagine, well into the future. The other element that your question does not consider is the nature of a particular procurement for a particular infrastructure asset. The public-private partnership model would be another example of how a major infrastructure project may be financed, and rather than a lump sum payment being made, or a series of lump sum payments made over a three or four-year period, you may in fact make a series of smaller payments over a much longer period.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, I appreciate that. It is interesting you mention an operating

surplus—cash surplus—because we are running deficits. So there may be some operating cash surpluses in the budget, but the reality is that the money needs to be borrowed, even for PPPs when it stretches for 20 years—the payments. There are still borrowings to pay those availability payments.

**Mr Barr:** No, not necessarily, and the territory has on a couple of occasions over the last 30 years had operating cash deficits, but our operating cash position has largely been in surplus over the last 30 years. There has been an after-capital deficit.

**MS CARRICK:** Once you pay for capital?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. But that does not mean that the entirety of the infrastructure program is financed by borrowings. It is often elements of the contribution, and I heard the discussion just before lunch with Minister Stephen-Smith. For example, in a hypothetical billion-dollar annual infrastructure program, it is possible and would be demonstrable that \$200 to \$250 million of that would be a commonwealth contribution, and it is entirely possible that an equivalent amount would be sourced from asset sales—that is, principally land associated with a particular development or project—and then another contribution would be an operating cash surplus, and then a further contribution could be from borrowings or some form of public-private partnership. Sometimes, that PPP arrangement can involve private equity, which would be maintained over the life of an asset, so—

**MS CARRICK:** You mean like the Phillip pool? The 25-metre pool.

**Mr Barr:** in effect, the taxpayer would not be required at any point. Another example is the CISAC facility in Belconnen.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. So, when you add to the pipeline—when you add estimates in and when you commit to construction—will you then say where the funding is coming from?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. We would show through the budget papers a commonwealth contribution, an asset sale, or a borrowing, and most likely, depending on the timing of a PPP payment, that would also be in the forward estimates. An example in relation to a public-private partnership might be that we would not make any payments until the construction of the project was complete, and light rail stage 1 was an example of that. For the stage 2A extension, also, we will make a payment—a large capital payment—at the conclusion of the construction, not progressive payments along the way.

This is largely next Tuesday morning's hearings that we are now doing now. I think I have answered the questions, and we can explore it in a little bit more detail next week.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Emerson?

**MR EMERSON:** In the pipeline of planning an infrastructure project, Ms Carrick mentioned some will sit with Infrastructure Canberra and some will sit elsewhere.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR EMERSON:** When in that pipeline does something move from, say, CMTEDD to Infrastructure Canberra?

**Mr Barr:** Infrastructure Canberra is a delivery agency, and they will deliver a project generally in partnership with a client agency. The client agency would generally be the one that undertakes the preliminary work around the scope and the nature of the project, and what need it is addressing, and would maintain a degree of subject matter expertise. An example is the new Lyric Theatre. We want input from the current theatre management and also the Cultural Facilities Corporation, because they will end up being the operators of the facility once it is built. In the example from Ms Carrick's question, in time, once we have completed the work around the scope of the convention entertainment centre, that will then transfer to Infrastructure Canberra to be the manager of the delivery of the project, but the client, in effect, is Economic Development. Without making a pre-emptive decision on the procurement methodology for that project, I would note that every convention centre built in Australia this century has been a public-private partnership. So it is likely, subject to our work over the next few years that is jointly funded between the commonwealth and the territory, that we would go down that pathway, but that is not determined yet.

**MS CARRICK:** Who would own it at the end—the Convention Centre—if you do a PPP?

**Mr Barr:** Again, that is the subject of the detailed work, but the arrangements generally are that the asset at the conclusion of a concession period transfers to the jurisdiction. That is certainly the case with light rail stage 1. Currently, we own the physical building that is our Convention Centre, but we do not operate it. It is operated under a management contract. We would not be intending to operate a new Convention Centre. That is something that, I think, is best done by the private sector, so in thinking about the procurement of this new asset, it would be beneficial to have potential operators involved so that we are not building something that is inoperable, and we are building something that will maximise revenue and economic return for the venue owners and the territory economy.

**MR EMERSON:** This is probably one to take on notice, but I am wondering if you could provide, say, the three to five projects from Economic Development that were most recently sent into the delivery pipeline with Infrastructure Canberra?

**Mr Barr:** CIT would be—

**Ms Arthy:** That is right—CIT. We have had several sporting ones: Throsby, Gungahlin Tennis, Stromlo playing fields. In terms of the major ones, Canberra Convention Centre is the one we are working on at the moment as well as—

**MR EMERSON:** The pool?

**Ms Arthy:** The pool is Infrastructure Canberra's responsibility because, under the admin arrangements, they have got responsibility for pools.

**MR EMERSON:** Okay. So from the outset, is that with them?

**Ms Arthy:** Yes. I think they are the main—

**MR EMERSON:** What about looking forward? Are there three to five for which you can say, “These are the ones that we have got rough deadlines for, and we expect to engage Infrastructure Canberra soon”?

**Ms Arthy:** It is nearly an impossible question, because projects come up all the time. The ones we have got at the moment are the Convention Centre, the stadium and the EPIC redevelopment as well. They are, really, the big ones. As I said, the sporting ones have already gone—the Throsby one and the Gungahlin one. I cannot think of any others off the top of my head that would be in that category.

**MR EMERSON:** Thanks,

**MS CARRICK:** With this PPP stuff, isn’t it cheaper for the territory to borrow the money than to use the borrowings of the private PPP partner?

**Mr Barr:** Generally speaking, it would be, so there is a competing tension there. The challenge often is that we can borrow the money, but unless the contractual arrangements are such, all the risk sits with us on cost overruns and project delays. An advantage of a PPP procurement model is that that risk is transferred to the private sector.

Experience would show that, on certain projects where we have no in-house capacity—we have never done them before—it is better to transfer that risk. Yes, you might pay more during the construction period, but the project risk then sits with the private sector partner. With light rail, as soon as it was operational, we made an immediate pay-down of that debt. That model, in fact, came out under budget and pretty well on time.

Effectively, what you buy is the risk transfer. That is why it works only for certain asset types. In the ACT context, I would posit that it is the case that we do not build assets frequently. We build schools every year. We build a range of things every year. There are some projects that we would only build once in a century or once in 50 years, and we have no in-house capability there. They are the sorts of projects that lend themselves to this procurement methodology. You are exactly right: you have to weigh up the increased cost of capital against the other risk transfer elements.

**MS CARRICK:** And you cannot transfer risk with the design and construct?

**Mr Barr:** It gets more difficult. I think that, with the experience of governments in Australia, that has been quite challenging. The process of contractual arrangement means that more of the risk sits with government.

**THE CHAIR:** With the risk transfer, I assume that comes as part of the contractual arrangement with the partner?

**Mr Barr:** It would, yes.



**THE CHAIR:** I do not believe that any of that information has been provided to the Assembly at this stage.

**Mr Barr:** Not in relation to procurements we have not undertaken, but there have been two PPPs in the history of the territory—light rail, and the Supreme and the courts precinct, and there is information available on them, probably.

**THE CHAIR:** That includes those particular clauses? I will be interested to see how they work. Ms Tough?

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you, Chair. I am interested in Stromlo Forest Park. The government will deliver stage 1 of the Stromlo Forest Park Tracks and Trails Master Plan in this budget. What does delivery look like, and what can be expected in future stages?

**Mr Jeffress:** We received funding in the budget to commence implementation of the Tracks and Trails Master Plan through stage 1. That is a \$900,000 commitment. We will commence some environmental planning works before we go to trail construction, to find out where the ecological values are and to look at the cultural elements of the landscape. We will do an ecological assessment and a cultural survey. That will lead into some detailed design for some of these key concepts.

We are looking at doing those planning works. That will be a focus for the next 12 months. After that, within stage 1, we will look at some of the quick wins as to some of the works that we can do on the ground to improve trails and that do not have a significant impact. It is a matter of looking at what are the easier trails to construct. We will also look at some signage and how we can improve our signage onsite, and we will also look at improvements to some running tracks.

We have actively worked with the Stromlo stakeholder consultative committee. That is a group that brings together the key clubs and interest bodies for Stromlo Forest Park. It includes groups like AusCycling, triathlon, runners and ACT Equestrian; we have them together. We have worked with them on what our key, immediate priorities are to deliver stage 1 of the master plan. We are moving on with that.

A key one, and an easy one that they wanted us to start with as well, which we have agreed to, was to develop some defined running loops on Stromlo. We can use the existing management trails to have five, 10 and 15-kilometre running loops on that.

That is stage 1. The master plan is online, and it includes another two stages. In those stages, we will look at the more complex trail construction, so that we have an improved asset there that Canberrans can use for their regular recreation, and so that we can, hopefully, attract increased events as well. That will come through future stages, when we get there.

**MS TOUGH:** Skateboarding fits in there, too, doesn't it?

**Mr Jeffress:** The tracks and trails master plan did not specifically focus on skateboarding. It looks more at our facilities for mountain bikes, our facilities for running and walking in the park, equestrians and cycling. That was the key focus.

**THE CHAIR:** What relationship does the work on the Stromlo Forest Park master plan have with the work around the Stromlo Park district playing fields and progress in that space?

**Ms Arthy:** They are separate pieces of work, even though they are in the same location. The district playing fields are proceeding. It has its own master plan and its own program. It is separate to the work that the team is doing, which is about the tracks and trails within the existing Stromlo Forest Park boundaries.

**THE CHAIR:** Has community consultation just wound up, or is it about to wind up, around the development application?

**Ms Arthy:** From memory, I think it is out for public consultation at the moment. Infrastructure Canberra is the delivery partner on that. At the hearings next week, I believe, for Infrastructure Canberra, they will be able to provide an answer. We can also take it on notice and follow it up. I am sorry; I have received a message that the DA has just closed, so the consultation has finished.

**MS CARRICK:** My understanding, from looking at that plan for the playing fields, is that there is an oval and a rectangle—an AFL, cricket-type one, and a Rugby-type and soccer one. Is that right?

**Ms Arthy:** I will have to take that on notice because my expert is not here. I am not across that level of detail, but we can easily provide you with an overview of what is going on.

**MS CARRICK:** That would be good. Could you take this on notice as well? My understanding is that, with district playing fields—when I look at Mawson or Waramanga, or when I have taken the kids to soccer—there is an expanse of fields and, on Saturday mornings, there are heaps of kids running around. Where will that be in Molonglo, the district playing fields, where you have lots of them for—

**Ms Arthy:** We are only responsible for the district playing fields in that location. The DA was out, so you would be able to see what is planned for there.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, I know there are only two.

**Ms Arthy:** In terms of the broader Molonglo area, that is either a question for City and Environment—

**Mr Barr:** On their website, there are two stages to the project. You have described the first stage; the second stage involves further ovals.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay.

**MS CASTLEY:** I would like to talk about property investment, Chief Minister. Following your most recent trip to Japan, you said that there were potential investors that had been excited about land release in the ACT. What aspects of land releases in the ACT excited them?

**Mr Barr:** There is particular interest in residential, commercial and hospitality-related. The land releases that are in focus are the ones in the forward land release program. There is already Japanese investment or involvement in build-to-rent housing on Northbourne Avenue. There is Japanese interest and investment in commercial property associated with both Australian government tenancy and ACT government.

A Japanese investment firm, MM Capital, has bought into the courts PPP; they have effectively bought into that. There is Japanese investment in other commercial property in the territory, and interest as it relates to some of the sites that are coming up for land release.

**MS CASTLEY:** Have they expressed their interest, or did you go out seeking foreign investment?

**Mr Barr:** Both. Some of the investment has already occurred. In other instances, an Australian company that has a Japanese parent company is involved. That is particularly the case in housing, where a number of the major Australian housing construction companies are, in fact, subsidiaries of larger Japanese companies, and it is also the case in relation to some of the major constructors. I got to meet with the parent company of Icon builders, who have built most of our schools. That is another example.

The final area of investment interest is in electrification and batteries. There are already some well-known examples. ActewAGL had a longstanding partnership with Panasonic in relation to batteries. There remains interest from Japanese investors in Australia's transition to net zero.

**MS CASTLEY:** When you talk about land release to foreign investors, is this land that we are releasing, anyway, or are you holding back specific blocks?

**Mr Barr:** No, this is land that we are releasing, anyway, and we are looking for the maximum amount of interest in that land release. In some instances, there will be partnerships formed regarding, for example, a local developer with Japanese capital, because at the moment Japan is awash with capital needing places to be invested in. Their cost of capital is considerably lower, as a result of some of their domestic economic conditions. In fact, I understand you almost have to pay banks to deposit money with them—the cost of capital is that low. That is why there is very considerable investment interest.

As a broader geopolitical statement, Australia is seen as an incredibly reliable and supportive economic partner for Japan. It was quite palpable, in my time there, having regard to their experience with the United States and some of the trade policies that were being implemented by the US, that we were quite different in terms of both reliability and predictability.

The other context for the Japanese economy that is worth pointing out is that, of course, their population is declining. In certain industry sectors, in order to even maintain their current level of economic output, they need export markets, and housing is one such example. There is not a lot of demand for new housing in Japan because the population is declining; hence, they are expanding, and they are very well aware of Australia's

national target of 1.2 million additional homes.

**MS CASTLEY:** With the foreign residential property developers that we are hoping to attract, partnering with the government, will they be required to obtain developer licensing?

**Mr Barr:** If they were to undertake development activity in the ACT, they would need to meet our regulatory requirements. I think there is a point of distinction here between investing and actually being the developer and the builder.

**MS CASTLEY:** They are all aware, though?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. They are very astute in making their investment decisions.

**MS CASTLEY:** Of course, they are. Do you also meet with Australian domestic investors?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. In fact, as recently as Thursday of last week, I met with an investment firm that owns property in the territory.

**MS CASTLEY:** Is that ongoing or is it a one-off?

**Mr Barr:** That would be a regular part of our engagement. There are superannuation funds, principally in Australia, but also some general property trusts that invest and own property in our city. When we take land to market, there is also very strong domestic marketing engagement.

Principally, the three key markets domestically that we will focus on are Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. That tends to be where most of the Australian capital sits, and where investment decisions are made, including, for example, the Queensland Investment Incorporation, who own the Canberra Centre and a number of other landholdings, together with Lendlease, Mirvac and AMP. Also, most of the super funds are Melbourne based.

**MS CASTLEY:** It does not bring out the sparkle as much as Japanese investors.

**Mr Barr:** There is just the volume of capital internationally. Australia has imported capital since 1788, and it will continue to do so.

**MR EMERSON:** How does the government measure the economic impact of our arts funding, artsACT funding?

**Mr Barr:** I will take that on notice for the arts minister.

**MR EMERSON:** Of the local artists that are provided with funding, are we tracking how many of these artists have gone on to become commercially viable and self-sustaining?

**Mr Barr:** I will take that on notice for the minister.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I believe we are going to have the arts minister coming back.

**MR EMERSON:** Give it back to me. Don't take it on notice.

**Mr Barr:** I will "un-notice" them, and you can ask when—

**MR EMERSON:** I was not sure whether that was the case or not.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That is the intent of the committee at this time.

**Mr Barr:** I think that is a good idea because I am not in a position to help you with that level of detail.

**MR EMERSON:** On the ACT venture capital fund, when will this fund start investing?

**Ms Arthy:** At the moment the fund is still in the establishment phase, so we are still going through the regulatory phase. I cannot give you a timeframe for when it will start investing.

**Mr Barr:** They will make a public announcement; and, hopefully, sooner rather than later.

**Ms Arthy:** That is right. There is the commonwealth regulatory process. We are at their mercy.

**MR EMERSON:** Is there a clear plan for how it will all interact with the work of the Canberra Innovation Network?

**Ms Arthy:** Not so much a clear plan; they are separate functions. However, the proponents of the venture capital fund have a long history with CBRIN. Part of the objective of the venture capital fund is to be able to provide those funds to those start-ups, or even other companies, that require capital to expand.

It is not just CBRIN; the fund will look at where innovation ideas are across the ACT. As I said, the proponents have a long history with CBRIN, so there will be a natural relationship. There will not be any formal relationship because that is not the nature of the venture capital fund, but they are definitely closely aligned.

**MR EMERSON:** Will they seek to attract start-ups from interstate and to bring them into the ACT?

**Ms Arthy:** No. The fund is purely for ACT-based start-ups. The main part of the set-up is that it is to advantage people with ideas who are here and who need support to expand.

**MS CASTLEY:** Can you tell us how the government expects that the fund will deliver on its objectives? Do you have any information on how it will be measured?

**Ms Arthy:** I am the delegate for this; I am trying to think through whether I can answer that. Can I take that on notice? I think we are still working through that level of detail.

Kate, you can you answer that?

**Ms Starick:** Thank you for the question. There will be an investment plan that is released as part of this venture capital fund. It is a requirement under the Financial Management Act. Under that it talks about the goals that we are going to achieve, as part of this fund. Of course, the fund will be required to have annual reports and do all the public reporting that any corporation is required to do.

**MS CASTLEY:** Are you at the stage where you are able to understand the staffing of the fund? How will it make sure that it has people with relevant knowledge, skills and expertise? Has that been mapped out?

**Ms Starick:** It is part of the requirement for this organisation that is managing the fund to demonstrate that they have people with the right skills, knowledge of the local ACT ecosystem and venture capital, and the right governance structure to ensure that it is transparent and meets all the requirements, and that all those aspects are in place.

**MS CASTLEY:** Will you be looking to attract personnel from venture capital funds that already exist, in terms of the private sector, to start the fund? Is that what I am hearing?

**Ms Starick:** I probably cannot answer that, but I can say that the people that are engaged have knowledge of venture capital from previous funds, and not just in the ACT. They have knowledge of the ACT innovation ecosystem, and that might be links to universities, or they might be on the board of directors or staffing. They have knowledge financially in early start-up—series A and pre-series A, financial—and how to coach organisations through that early stage.

**MS CASTLEY:** Will the fund be remunerated at levels consistent with the ACT public sector or equivalent financial institutions?

**Ms Starick:** It is a private organisation.

**MS CASTLEY:** What criteria will businesses be evaluated against when determining whether they will be suitable for investment with the fund?

**Ms Starick:** That is a decision for the investment committee, which is part of the governance arrangements. There are a range of criteria that they will consider, as well as their own knowledge of investment. The only other guidance that we have is the responsible investment plan, which establishes the things that the fund cannot invest in. Ms Arthy has already talked about this: if an organisation is largely based outside the ACT, they would not be eligible; or if the organisation is involved in tobacco and other such investments.

**MS CASTLEY:** What characteristics would a business need to have to make it an ideal investment for the fund?

**Ms Starick:** Again, that would be a decision for the investment committee. There is a lot of information that is available online. As the fund steps up, they will be promoting what they do, so that businesses or people that have an idea at the early

commercialisation stage will be wanting to contact them.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do we understand what is the government's tolerance for risk, regarding investments made by the fund? In deciding what investments to make, do we know whether they will weigh the risk of an investment against the potential return?

**Ms Starick:** It is a pretty standard approach for any venture capital to weigh up—

**MS CASTLEY:** Those risks.

**Ms Starick:** the risks and return. As I said, the reason for engaging the fund manager is that they have the expertise to make those decisions and calls.

**THE CHAIR:** I am interested in how the principle of competitive neutrality is built into this fund and whether the government will have a financial interest in the businesses that are invested in.

**Ms Starick:** The structure of the fund is that the government will be a full commercial partner in the early-stage venture capital limited partnership arrangement.

**THE CHAIR:** Will there be a conscious effort to ensure competitive neutrality in this?

**Ms Starick:** The quantum of investment and any investment decisions, apart from those ones that I have talked about around restrictions, are not the decisions of the government. There is no influence that the government has. Does that answer your question?

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, but it is government funding.

**Ms Starick:** We are an investor, but the premise of the fund is that, with the ACT investing, it attracts other investors, and there will come a time when our investment will be part of a much larger investment pool.

**THE CHAIR:** Clearly there are already opportunities for private capital in the market. What is the extra value that having the government operating as an investor brings to the market?

**Ms Starick:** As I said, there are no benefits in having government in an early-stage venture capital limited partnership that there are not in the whole range. That is a structure of a venture capital fund. The same tax benefits would be in any ESVCLP. We are all operating on an even playing field. I can say that.

**Ms Arthy:** To add to Ms Starick's answer, in the market for commercialisation of ideas, there are multiple funding sources. This is going to be just another one which allows a very concerted focus with a significant fund behind it to target some of those businesses that have the chance to be unicorns. For example, we know that there are a lot of angel investors that work with CBRIN to provide a scale of investment to help some businesses go up. If you have companies that start by coming out of a university and end up being bought out by US multinationals, you need a certain scale of fund behind that, which is what this venture capital fund is. It is just another way of being able to

provide funding in the system to commercialise ideas.

**THE CHAIR:** In a lot of ways, the heart of my question is in economics. What is the market failure?

**Ms Arthy:** The market failure is when one of those companies is not getting funded and they leave Canberra. They follow the money, and the money is in Melbourne, Sydney and even overseas. We want to try to keep those companies here. You might think that capital goes, but a lot of other schemes require companies to be physically located in the region. If you have a scheme in another state or territory, they will require you to be located there. We want to keep them here.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like competitive positioning against other jurisdictions and regions.

**Mr Barr:** That is one of the market failures.

**Ms Arthy:** That is part of it.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you have any underpinning reports or reviews to back that up that you could table for us?

**Ms Arthy:** Not so much reports or reviews. We meet with a lot of companies who come to us with the same problem over and over again, where they are seeking funding from government, otherwise they will be forced to leave to grow, because they cannot attract the capital to enable them to stay. They want to stay, but they find they cannot.

**Mr Barr:** Canberra has a limited capital base. That is the market failure. It will not be too hard to find examples in other jurisdictions where they require the business to move in order to access capital under their schemes. That is reasonably well-known. I presume that is why Mr Emerson asked the earlier question.

**MR EMERSON:** Yes. Breakthrough Victoria has \$2 billion in their fund. Has Epicorp put a certain amount of funding on the table? I have heard whispers.

**Ms Arthy:** We cannot answer that right now, because of where we are up to in the formation of the whole fund.

**MR EMERSON:** At least \$10 million was in the contract. They had to at least match—is that right?

**Ms Starick:** In the procurement documentation, we were looking for at least matched funding at first close.

**MR EMERSON:** Thank you.

**MS CASTLEY:** The commonwealth Treasury studied opportunities for public venture capital funds in Australia and concluded that they would be unlikely to produce positive outcomes, so I am wondering what you guys know that is different to the commonwealth.



**Ms Starick:** I am interested in that because I met with the commonwealth officials last week about the venture capital funds that they are promoting and that we are sharing investment opportunities with. The way that a venture capital fund works is unique to, say, a straight grant program. It offers benefits that a grant program does not, in terms of mentoring and, as I said, early ideation, if you like, to investment, to an idea, to putting up a commercial product and growing a business. You potentially do not get that benefit from a straight grant program.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I note that we are likely to run over time at this stage.

**Mr Barr:** That is remarkable given we are two ministers down.

**THE CHAIR:** It is indeed.

**Mr Barr:** I like chatting with you guys!

**MS CARRICK:** Good, because I have more questions to chat about.

**THE CHAIR:** I am happy to throw my question to Ms Castley.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you, Chair. We have talked about people leaving, but I would like to talk about the private sector share of our economy. Over the last 10 to 15 years, the private sector has shrunk from 43 per cent in the ACT to about 39 per cent. Are you concerned about the decline?

**Mr Barr:** The private sector has grown; it is just that the public sector has grown faster. Part of that is COVID related and part of it is growth in the health and care economy. It is principally about the public and community sector rather than the private sector. Comparative share is probably less important than actual quantum of activity, because you could close down the government and the private sector would be 100 per cent, but the economy would be half the size, so what have you achieved?

**MS CASTLEY:** Are you concerned about the relative decline?

**Mr Barr:** No. As long as both sectors are growing, it means we have a bigger economy overall. I am not going to seek to artificially constrain, for example, the education sector or the care sector, because—

**MS CASTLEY:** That is not what I am asking, Chief Minister, to be clear.

**Mr Barr:** That is what is driving the growth in the public sector—also defence and national security. I am not going to say, “That shouldn’t happen so that the private sector’s share of the economy can be higher.” As long as both are growing, that is a good outcome for the territory.

**MS CASTLEY:** Ms Arthy just mentioned that people are leaving town. That is why you need to have the government venture capital fund. I am wondering whether you

have considered the role of growing business taxes and regulation on the private sector and growth in investment.

**Mr Barr:** We certainly have had the fastest economic growth of any state or territory over an extended period and the longest run of continuous economic growth of any state or territory. We have also seen some elements of the public sector grow very strongly due to the combined policy decisions of Australian and territory governments over this century. Again, we have the fastest rate of business growth.

**MS CASTLEY:** But also the fastest rate of business closure.

**Mr Barr:** No. The difference between us and the national average on business survival is about one per cent. It equates, over a five-year period, to the difference of a few hundred businesses to the national average, but our rate of growth is considerably higher.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you track why businesses are relocating outside the territory to understand why that happens?

**Mr Barr:** It does not happen very often. In fact, our rate of growth is faster than other jurisdictions, but, if it does happen, it will happen because that is where they principally see their market.

**MS CASTLEY:** It does happen. Do you know how often it happens or are you just hoping it does not happen?

**Mr Barr:** There is a degree of data about new business formation for each state and territory, and our data is very strong and we see more new businesses than others.

**MS CASTLEY:** Existing businesses that decide that regulation and increased workers compensation—all of those expenses—are too much and move across the border. Do you track that?

**Mr Barr:** And then they pay more payroll tax in New South Wales.

**MS CASTLEY:** That is not the question. I am asking if you track that.

**Mr Barr:** We do not, but I can check whether there is a data source on that. I will take that on notice for you.

**MS CASTLEY:** Okay. The period when the private sector went into decline—I am sticking with that—is the same period when the government funded a number of economic development diversification strategies, presumably to diversify away from just relying on the public sector. Do you maintain that has been effective?

**Mr Barr:** There is more diversity within both the public sector and the private sector than there was 25 years ago, so the nature of both is more diverse, as in there are significantly more professional, scientific and technical services in the private sector.

**MS CASTLEY:** I know what you mean. Thank you. I appreciate it. You do not need

to mansplain it. I get what you mean; I understand.

**Mr Barr:** There are more universities.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you, Chief Minister.

**THE CHAIR:** Supplementary to that line, have you done any analysis of the impact of federal and ACT government insourcing agendas on economic diversity, particularly on the balance between the private and public sector—

**Mr Barr:** Logically, it means a transition of employment from private to public in the areas that are insourced, but it does not impact on economic diversification, because the same task is being performed, just by a different sector.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess we are looking at different approaches to the diversification of the economy to some extent, because one of the big—

**Mr Barr:** If by “diversification” you mean privatisation, then no, we are not supporting that.

**THE CHAIR:** That is not what I am saying, Chief Minister. What I am saying is that the balance between the public and private sector is another way to look at it, rather than particular areas of the economy in terms of activity. That balance between the public and private sector has to present some risks as well. The ACT is now more dependent on the will of federal governments to continue investing in the ACT than it has been previously, from the perspective of a share of the economy.

**Mr Barr:** In the end, if private sector activity is entirely funded by the commonwealth government, then it is exactly the same. The ultimate funding source is the commonwealth. Whilst I am not allowed to ask questions, I would pose: where we see the community sector in this public-private mix. For example, the NDIS shifted a lot of government disability employment into the community sector and also, to some extent, into the private sector. On the other hand, you have seen some consultancy work undertaken by big consultancy firms brought back to the government at a federal level. There has been an interesting bidirectional flow of ICT and national security related services. Do you consider the university sector to be private or public?

**THE CHAIR:** You are actually touching on the next question that I was moving to. There are commentators who observe that a lot of the growth across Australia, in terms of jobs and economic activity, has been—

**Mr Barr:** Public sector driven. Yes; absolutely. It has been.

**THE CHAIR:** public sector driven. The NDIS is a massive proportion. Have you undertaken any analysis of any risks that could present to the ACT’s economy?

**Mr Barr:** Not about the rest of Australia—

**THE CHAIR:** But those general patterns would apply in the ACT too.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. Well, yes and no, depending on, I guess, the relative density or specialisation of this jurisdiction compared to others. We are certainly not exposed to the fluctuations of the mining industry, but we are heavily exposed to the fluctuations of commonwealth government decisions. There is no doubting that. The care economy could be subject to the risk of a complete policy reversal at a federal level that says that the government will no longer subsidise any child care, will no longer provide any injection into aged care and will no longer provide health funding; all health will be privatised. At that extreme, we would certainly be at risk, but—

**THE CHAIR:** I guess the concerns are more around so much of the growth being in areas like the NDIS, and there is clearly a move at the moment to constrain—

**Mr Barr:** The rate of growth.

**THE CHAIR:** the growth in expenditure around the NDIS. We have already spoken about some of the contraction in funding around the ANU. I am interested in whether you have done any quantification of what those risks look like for the ACT.

**Mr Barr:** In relation to the NDIS, it has been growing at 16 per cent a year. That is obviously growing far faster than the economy. That would be eight times faster than the rate of economic growth in recent times. Slowing that to eight per cent per annum would mean it would be growing four times faster, or perhaps, in the ideal world of the commonwealth Treasury, they would love the national economy to grow between three and four per cent a year. Even at NDIS growth of eight per cent, it would be growing twice as fast as the rest of the economy.

There is no doubting that growth in the broader care sector—that is, aged care and child care—will be demographically driven. In the end, it is more a quality assurance question regarding which sector is delivering it, rather than: “Will it be delivered?” The demand will be there for aged care; the question is about whether that is privately delivered, delivered by the community sector or delivered by the government or some combination thereof. The same would be said of child care. There is the care economy across the NDIS, aged care and child care. The health related sector is going to continue to grow based on population and demographic shifts. We are then left with the education sector. There is evidently internationally tradable services exposure around how many international students there are, and there is a regulatory risk associated with migration policy and visa processing. Then you have the domestic student risk.

**THE CHAIR:** I might try to reach back. The question was: have officials undertaken any specific quantification of those risks?

**Mr Barr:** No, because the cost of that would be infinite for infinite scenarios like—

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Maybe you can correct me but, if I recall correctly, you have previously said that you do not subscribe to the idea that the public sector out competes the private sector and has detrimental impacts on the economy.

**Mr Barr:** In our economy, as in the territory economy, there is not a lot of evidence of crowding out—perhaps in some sections of the labour market, maybe. But, if the government withdrew all of its investment, I do not see that being replaced by the

private sector. To take Ms Carrick's earlier line of questioning, if we did not proceed with an infrastructure program, I do not know that the private sector is going to step in and fund all of the things that we do need.

**THE CHAIR:** My concern is more from the other angle. Do you have any concerns that the government focus can take away the capacity for the private sector to access the labour market?

**Mr Barr:** Probably only the labour market. The antidote to that is investment in skills and training to address skills gaps. But I think it is reasonably well established that some sections of the ACT private sector lose out in the wages, working conditions, salaries and other benefits that come from public sector employment. There is no doubting that some sections of the private sector cannot compete with some elements of government employment. But then, at the other end of the spectrum, there are some areas where government employment simply cannot compete with what the private market is offering. So across our economy that would be the case. The alternate scenario there is that you have a section of Canberrans who get paid less because they are accepting lower conditions and salaries in the private sector. It is a competitive market, isn't it?

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, when you talk about diversification strategies, am I right in understanding that the purpose of that was for you to just have a more diverse public service?

**Mr Barr:** No. The advantage or the purpose was to have a more diverse private sector and public sector. For example—and I feel like I have said this 15 times in the last 15 years—if all of our public sector employment was, say, in defence and not spread across all of the diverse areas that the public sector operates in, we would have a less diverse public sector and there would be greater risk. If all of our private sector activity was, say, in mining or in tourism and in nothing else, then we would run the risk if there was a downturn in that sector that our private economy would suffer. So the more diverse our private sector is, the better. That means in more industry sectors—professional, scientific and technical, in tourism, accommodation, hospitality, in health care, in education, in transport and warehousing. The more diverse that is, the better.

**MS CASTLEY:** I understand what “diverse” means. I appreciate it; thanks.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I wanted to ask about Exhibition Park. Are the right folks here?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I thought so. I want to ask about what it costs for the public to hire the Fitzroy Pavilion?

**Mr Barr:** There is a concessional rate, I believe—and we will find it out.

**Mr Elkins:** We do have a concessional rate for the Fitzroy Pavilion. The value of that is 40 per cent off our commercial rate. It is a bit of a matrix in what the rental rate is. The commercial day rate, Friday to Sunday, for Fitzroy is \$3,950. So the equivalent thereof—just allow me to go through it so I get it right—is \$2,251.

**MR RATTENBURY:** We were given evidence on community day, and I have been told this personally, that a hire fee for a large multicultural event for the day into the evening is \$12,000. Why have I been told that then? Actually, you cannot answer that question.

**Mr Elkins:** I cannot.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Let me reframe the question. Why would people have the impression that is the price, given what you have just said, which is obviously materially less than that?

**Mr Elkins:** I cannot answer that without the details of who it was et cetera, but that is our rental rate.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Is that information publicly available? Is it on the website or something?

**Mr Elkins:** It is not published on our website, but it is available to anyone who comes up—and it is consistent all the way through.

**Mr Barr:** And cheaper Monday to Thursday.

**Mr Elkins:** Yes, that is right.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I imagine so, yes.

**Mr Elkins:** We have a cheaper rate for Monday to Thursday and we also have a much cheaper rate for bump-in days. So, if you need to book it to bump in, there is a 70 per cent reduction on that again. We have lots of concessions to think about how we can be effective, and we have had a lot of success giving that concession to community groups using Fitzroy. I am a little surprised at that number but I would be happy—

**MR RATTENBURY:** I was too, so I am interested in the answer. I will go and check that source. Are there additional costs on top of the hire fee? For example, is there an additional charge for electricity, security staff and other matters?

**Mr Elkins:** Certainly there are charges for electricity. We have tried to pare back the costs so that if someone comes in and says, “I want to use very minimal and bring my own stuff, “we have created it so you can bring your own stuff and we have created a kitchen and community groups can provide their own food. So we have been really conscious to pare that back. But, if you want to hire some equipment, there will be equipment rates for hire. If you want to have the heaters on all day, there are costs for electricity. But we have been very conscious to really pare back so community groups can choose to opt in and use what is effective for them. We did not want to say, “Here is everything and it comes with all this cost.” We have been really conscious to do that.

We have been really successful over the last 12 months with multiple weddings—not only in the Fitzroy but have been able to extend that to other parts of the Epic precinct and right size our use. Fitzroy is 1,500 but we just did a dinner for the Muslim community in Coorong which gave them an extra couple of hundred people. So we

have been able to right size use across the precinct and make sure that the community groups have access, not just to Fitzroy but we have a community rate across all our assets.

**MR RATTENBURY:** I appreciate that. I asked around Fitzroy as it was sort of set up with that focus in mind. If people want a stage or seats—those plastic seats—do they hire them from yourselves or do they hire them from an external provider and bring them in?

**Mr Elkins:** In Fitzroy, we do have a base provision of stages and some seats. But they can bring their own; they do not have to come through us. That can be through arrangements that they have made for what they need or that is more affordable. But we absolutely make the base asset available as well.

**MR RATTENBURY:** And are they part of that hire price you gave me earlier—the stage and the light features?

**Mr Elkins:** I cannot give you the specifics—like so many seats and so on—but I can definitely get it.

**MR RATTENBURY:** That would be great if you could on notice. It might be an important education exercise here. The version I have heard is being permeated in the community, I fear that will be discouraging some of your potential hires as well. So there is a piece of work to do here, I think. If you are able to provide that breakdown list on notice, that will be most helpful.

If I can just ask one other quick question then. When did the Fitzroy Pavilion in its refurbished form become available for public hire? There was an exercise to do it up and prepare it.

**Mr Elkins:** I will have to take that on notice. It has been nearly opened 12 months that I think we have been in operation. It really has been quite successful in the number of community events we have run through there—and also, as I said, not just in Fitzroy but being able to right size and say Fitzroy or other parts of the asset.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Sure, I appreciate that. In my question when I asked about available for hire, I did not mean available to book but available to actually use—just so I am clear with my question.

**Mr Barr:** I have a feeling it was about August last year but it could have been—

**Mr Bailey:** Practical completion was 2 October 2024.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** You might need to take this on notice, but have any groups or individuals been provided with, as in told, a price which is higher than the one that you have just outlined?

**Mr Elkins:** Not to my knowledge.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you perhaps like to go back and check on notice?

**Ms Arthy:** I think it is a hard question to answer because, as Mr Elkins said, we sort of customise the price to meet what they want. If you have got examples of concern, please give it to us and we can follow it up.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps you could take on notice to have a look at the concerns raised here on the community day and see if that is an area that has been advised—

**MR RATTENBURY:** Just to help, that was right at the end of the day with the Multicultural Action Network. They appeared at about 4.30, just to help you find the relevant bit.

**THE CHAIR:** And, indeed, if any groups have been told that there is not a stage available in that base price—because that seemed to be a distinct concern as well.

**Mr Elkins:** I will definitely look at it.

**MS CARRICK:** I have a couple of questions on light rail. The other day, I asked about Infrastructure Australia and its assessment, and you said it had been done, and I cannot find it. Could you provide me the document and the link, the page?

**Mr Barr:** Sure; we will see what we can do. That is an Infrastructure question for next week.

**MS CARRICK:** For Infrastructure Australia?

**M Barr:** I will take it on notice in advance of next Tuesday.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. With respect to the GST relativities we were talking about the other day—this is economic development—we increased by \$35 million but our population has gone down compared to the rest of Australia, and so that is decreasing. Interestingly enough, we get an extra \$55 million because we do not have mining—so that is good—and we actually get more for net borrowings because of our decrease in our ability to service our liabilities. So we get an extra 26 for our borrowings. So maybe we could just borrow a lot more and we can get some more GST. And, because we got more in commonwealth payments, we went down and we lost 24. But, interestingly, with the changes to urban transport assessment we lost 49 in one—and they do it twice; I do not know why—and then they say that because we reduced the ACT's need for urban transport investment, reducing its assessed GST needs—this is another one—and we lost another 27. So all in all we lost, from what I can see, \$76 million on our urban transport.

**THE CHAIR:** Are we coming to the economic development point?

**MS CARRICK:** The economic development point is about the GST relativities. Am I reading that correctly, that we have lost—

**Mr Barr:** I do not know which year you are referring to?



**MS CARRICK:** 2025-26.

**Mr Barr:** That is a question for Treasury, not for Economic Development. I cannot be certain what you read out to me. I would need to have a look at the document but, again, it sits with the Treasurer. It came up—

**MS CARRICK:** I was asking whether we lost money because of being on network or off network with light rail, and then you looked it up and said, “Office holders, we have got an extra \$35 million.” It seems to me that for urban transport we have gone backwards.

**Mr Barr:** No; there was a section in that grants commission document that referred to adjustments from our per capita allocation, and there was a line item there that referred to rail investment.

**MS CARRICK:** All right; I need to find that then. I am just looking at urban transport.

**Mr Barr:** It pointed out that the commonwealth had made significant investments in, from memory, Western Australia and New South Wales, and there were positive adjustments to other states and territories as a result of that as part of the equalisation process.

**MS CARRICK:** I will dig deeper.

**MS TOUGH:** In the interests of time, I am happy to submit my questions on notice later and let everyone finish.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Again, on behalf of the committee, I thank all our witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge today. We also thank Broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today.

**The committee adjourned at 5.16 pm.**