



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2026-2027

**(Reference: [Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and
Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2026-2027](#))**

Members:

**MS C BARRY (Chair)
MR T EMERSON (Deputy Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK
MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 31 JULY 2026

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**Secretary to the committee:
Mr J Bunce (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.

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1085, 1104
Infrastructure Canberra	1085
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ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner	1197

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.01 am

Appearances:

Steel, Mr Chris, Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development,
Minister for Heritage, Minister for Sport and Recreation

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
Starick, Ms Kate, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development
Kelley, Ms Rebecca, Executive Branch Manager, Sport and Recreation, Economic
Development

Infrastructure Canberra

Khan, Mr Faheem, Executive Group Manager, Delivery—Places and Spaces

City and Environment Directorate

Clement, Ms Sophie, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure Development
Delivery

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027 for its inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027. 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 contributions they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

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

The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcasted 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 Mr Steel, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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, and I will give the first slot to Mr Milligan.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you, Chair. My question is in relation to the sporting infrastructure audit. We had a motion earlier in the year that was unanimously supported, but it has now been five months since that motion. I would like a bit of an

update on where that is at.

Ms Kelley: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for the question, Mr Milligan. It is certainly a piece of work that is high on our priority list. Back in February, the former Minister for Sport and Recreation held a roundtable with members of the Community Sport Alliance, initially to look at the terms and seek their input on the benefits and the perceptions or interpretation of what was being asked for.

From that, we have been working very closely with our colleagues in CED, noting that it sits across those primary areas of sport and rec delivery. We looked at breaking down what has been asked for and at what work is currently being undertaken that aligns with that piece of work. I will use the example of the irrigation audit, if it is okay to talk on CED's behalf. It was about starting to look at a picture in terms of what work is currently being done that addresses it and what needs to be done.

The key piece, obviously, is the independence. We have drafted terms of reference. That has not yet been consulted upon, because, as we went through that, we realised that there is a fair bit of resource that is required to undertake this work. Necessarily, we have had to look at prioritising the budget within this financial year, in order to do that. That is where we are currently at—looking at resources against that, before we then take that out to the community, to confirm the terms of reference and what work will be undertaken.

The former minister attended—it was independently facilitated—a session with the sector on 20 July. It was not specifically on the draft terms of reference but, again, to take the conversation a step further, and to ask: what is it that government needs to do to address this? What does the sector think is needed, when we talk about demand and the nature of the facilities?

With the way that we have looked at it, when we look at, say, the condition audit part of it, we can quite easily look at the ACT government asset base, but how would private facilities be handled within that? Is that achievable? Even within the ACT government asset base, what is the depth of audit that we need to undertake, noting that that could be this big or that big, and the associated risks with that?

It is definitely progressing. We will be briefing Minister Steel, as the new minister, to progress that as quickly as we can, in terms of having further terms of reference and getting it to procurement, to engage the independent consultant to undertake it.

MR MILLIGAN: Has there been any budget allocated in this year's cycle for this audit?

Ms Kelley: Not as a specific appropriation; certainly, within the sport and recreation recurrent budget, we have identified some funds, and we are still working through that process with CED in terms of what the collective resource is across the directorates that can be prioritised for this work.

MR MILLIGAN: Has the directorate looked at potential companies that can do this audit, that are located here, in this country? I would think that, when establishing the

terms of reference, you would maybe start a conversation in terms of what services they offer, ensuring that they can accommodate the terms of reference and, if there are any gaps, they would be able to advise you of that.

Ms Kelley: We are obviously conscious of probity matters with any procurement, in terms of service providers. We know, from work that has been done by other state and territory governments, that there is a range of providers. We would anticipate and hope that those specialist areas put their hand up, when the procurement goes to market.

MR MILLIGAN: Are you confident that we will be able to get a significant audit report by March next year, given you have not gone out to tender yet and you have not established the terms of reference? Obviously, there is a time period for that tender process, and there is the period of assessing all assets across the territory, then compiling a report. Are you confident that you will be able to get that done sufficiently by March next year, given it has taken five months to get to this point in time?

Ms Kelley: Yes, I certainly acknowledge that.

MR MILLIGAN: And this is the easier part of the audit, I would think.

Ms Kelley: I do not think any of this process is easy, because there is a lot of work in terms of what government has been called upon to do. We agree that it is all good work. But the reality is that it is likely that we will need to stage it. I do not want to pre-empt what can be completed by March next year; but, even with 100 or so ACT government assets, it is about the availability of a consultant, and what that would look like. Also, we would need to look at the timing of those audits. If we were to do them in the middle of winter, when they are having their highest usage—all those factors have to come into play, as to when we can get a common denominator of what an audit timeframe might look like. We would rely on the specialists for that advice.

MR MILLIGAN: In terms of a consultation, you have spoken with the Community Sport Alliance, which represents nine or so sporting bodies. There are a lot more sporting bodies out there in the community. How are you going to reach these different sporting associations and clubs? How do all the clubs across the territory contribute to this audit? Also, will there be an opportunity for participants to contribute?

Ms Kelley: Absolutely. With the session that was held on 20 July, all peak sporting organisations were invited to attend that. We had a lot of commentary from the likes of badminton and table tennis—the smaller organisations that were there. There was a far greater cross-section of the sports there, as opposed to just, say, the nine that are represented by the Community Sport Alliance.

Importantly, we know that the feedback, particularly around clubs and the functionality of our grounds, comes from clubland, in some cases, more accurately and effectively than from the peak body. We expect that the peak body is there for the journey, and understands their members, but it is really important that this work does get down to the club affiliates. We would be relying on the peaks to help filter that

down, because we do not have direct contact with every club.

MR BRADDOCK: Will you be including school sports facilities as part of the audit?

Ms Kelley: Where they are ACT government assets, yes. As I mentioned before, the scope of assets obviously includes school-based assets. Within that, there are ACT government assets and private school assets. That is part of the contemplation, absolutely. For quite some time, we have acknowledged that school-based assets are a very important part of the sport and recreation asset base for the community, not the least of which are the indoor courts.

MR BRADDOCK: Yes. And licensed club assets?

Ms Kelley: They are in the mix of the privately owned assets. That is where we need to assess what ability we have to audit privately owned facilities.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about the other audits that are ongoing of sporting facilities, or previous work that has been done, as well as the work that is happening nationally. How will that work be fed into it? Could you briefly detail the other pieces of work that are happening in this space and how they will be fed into the report?

Ms Kelley: Sorry, which pieces of work?

MR EMERSON: The ASC is doing its own national audit of sporting facilities. I know that, in sport and rec, you have done some of your own work in this area previously. With any of those threads, how will they be fed into this process, if at all?

Ms Kelley: The alignment of that work is yet to be determined. The national sport and recreation facility work, for which we are on the working group, is at a higher level than the work that we would be looking at here. Effectively, what we are doing here is almost council-level work, in terms of getting down into the functionality, service capability, suitability and the fit-for-purpose nature of our facilities. I think it provides an overarching alignment.

The other work that has been done previously was probably more in the sportsground space, around audits that the team do, in terms of cycles, as to what pavilions could be upgraded, which pavilions are up for female-friendly upgrades, and LED lighting. We will have that sort of work sitting ready, along with the irrigation audit report, and the sport and recreation priority register that we have for sports, from 2023, that we will be renewing in the next two months, when we go out to sports to update it. That will be a suite of information that will be provided to the consultant, to say, "Here's the base of work that's currently being done."

MS CARRICK: When you talk about whether or not you will include the private sector, the private sector is providing a lot of our sport and rec facilities, so presumably that has to be included—whether they are fit for purpose and the risk that is involved with the sale of them. We have seen a number of our private sector sports facilities sold for residential. Will you be including a bit of a risk analysis of relying on private-sector facilities?

Ms Kelley: I think that you make a really good point. With the mapping part of the project, it is certainly agreed that it is an easy part for us, to be able to capture the full scope of provision. Our uncertainty lies with what will be the likelihood that a private school or a privately owned facility would want a government-commissioned report to come in and do a risk analysis, or even a fit-for-purpose assessment, of their own facility. However, where there are levers for government to do that, that would certainly be explored. I take your point completely that, when we look at demand analysis, there is certainty over ACT government assets, and less certainty over the privately owned assets, and we need to be able to account for that in our future work.

MS CARRICK: And whether perhaps we should have government-funded public sport and rec facilities to service large communities. My other question is this: you can rely on the peak bodies to tell you what they want, but their facilities are primarily on the north side, so they have a tendency to want to maintain and look after those and expand them. How do you look across the community and determine what is needed across the whole community, from an objective point of view, as opposed to the peak bodies telling you?

Ms Kelley: When you say that peak bodies are based on the north side, that would probably only be two organisations, because not many peak bodies own their own—

MS CARRICK: Basketball ACT, Netball ACT, Hockey ACT and Tennis ACT.

Ms Kelley: Okay, fair point. Four out of the 40-odd, however.

MS CARRICK: For the indoor stuff, it is in the north.

Ms Kelley: Yes, but the peak bodies themselves certainly have an interest, in that their membership sits right across the territory, so they are also conscious of the fact, in terms of our discussions with them, that they want to be able to provide services close to their affiliates down south. Basketball ACT is heavily reliant, obviously, on the Tuggeranong Southern Cross Basketball Stadium for that purpose. It is part of the ongoing discussion, but I certainly take your point that—

MS CARRICK: Somebody needs to look after us.

Ms Kelley: Yes, absolutely.

MR PARTON: Ms Kelley, did I hear this correctly: in answering questions from Mr Milligan on the timeline, are you already flagging that it is unlikely that this full report will be delivered by March next year?

Ms Kelley: It is just that it is uncertain on our timeframe yet. We are yet to have that mapped out, and that will be fully programmed once we have appointed the consultant.

MR PARTON: It just appeared to me from your answer that there was already a concession that, potentially, it was unlikely that the full report would be delivered by March next year.

Ms Kelley: What I am saying is that the scope of the work is a very large piece of

work and, even if we had started it in February, it is the type of work that could take 12 months or it could take five years, depending on the extent of the work and the extent of the audit. That is what we have to narrow it down to—what can be achieved within the timeframe, and possibly looking at, if there is a further depth of work required, what can be delivered. But that needs to be discussed.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about pools—specifically, Dickson Pool. I have put in some questions about the pool and how that contract is managed. It is one of the pools where, on very hot days in summer, we end up with a one-in, one-out policy; there is a line at the front, people are standing out in the sun, often with their kids, and waiting to get in. The response to the questions that I put on notice said that there are three to four lifeguards on duty at any one time, but that can increase to six at times of higher patronage. I think that includes the duty manager, so I am not sure whether they are included in the next set of ratios.

Also, in that response, I learned that Belgravia staff support one lifeguard per 80 patrons. At absolute peak capacity, let us say there are six lifeguards; one per 80 means it is 480. But the pool has capacity for 1,200 people. This has been raised with me and people say, “There’s a one-in, one-out policy, but when I get in, it’s half-empty,” and it turns out that they are staffing way below capacity. Are there any obligations in contracts with Belgravia, in managing these public pools, to staff them sufficiently so that they can be full?

Mr Khan: Thank you, Mr Emerson, for the question. In the answer to the same question on notice that you are referring to, it outlines that there are capacities that are also specific to the pools themselves. While the capacity for Dickson Pool as a facility is higher than the capacity for each of the individual pools, the lifeguard ratios that you were referring to map against the capacities in each of those pools—the 50-metre outdoor pool, the learners pool and the toddler pool.

In terms of whether, contractually, there are any obligations for Belgravia, with the capacity constraint that is being hit, there is no evidence, from our perspective, in terms of managing the contract, that an increase in staffing would lead to an increase in that capacity. We know that it is a very well-utilised facility. We know that there is a lot of demand, particularly on really hot days, in the inner north for access to that facility, and at times that that capacity is met. But there is no evidence that we have at this point in time, and in our discussions with Belgravia, that it is the ratio or availability of lifeguards that is creating that capacity constraint. It is the capacity constraints within the pools themselves that is serving as the guidance for Belgravia, in managing the facility, to ensure its safe operation when a certain threshold is met. That is when they move to a one-in, one-out situation.

MR EMERSON: There are the three pools that were mentioned—the 50-metre pool, learners pool and toddler pool. It says that the swimmer capacity limits for those is 350. But there is also the splash area, which, on very hot days, is very full as well. There is all the green space as well, where people are lounging about, and people are at the kiosk getting food. I would think that the capacity would still be quite a bit higher than what is just possible within the pools.

Mr Khan: There is a balance here, in order to ensure the continued safe operation

inside the facility. As you mentioned, people will go in and out of the pool. Sometimes people will move to the grassed areas, they will move to the barbecue areas, and then they will re-enter the pools. We work closely with Belgravia to make sure that they are setting standards that ensure the continued safe operation, and where they feel comfortable in their capacity as managers. They are engaged as the experts in the management and operation of aquatic facilities. They work closely with the Royal Life Saving standards that are set Australia-wide, in order to set those capacities.

We are really conscious that this is a high-demand facility. In those discussions with Belgravia, we are always raising with them our understanding of what, if anything, can be done to facilitate increased access. As I said, I am confident, based on the discussions that the Infrastructure Canberra team has been having with Belgravia, that the constraint at this point is not a staffing provision one.

MR EMERSON: Okay. It is a little different from the conversations that I have had with people, where they have said, “We’ve had this pool operating for 20 years; there have never been any lines until this particular operator started operating there.” Is that feedback that you have heard at all—whether there has been a change in staffing ratios or in what is deemed to be the perceived capacity by Belgravia in particular?

Mr Khan: We have heard that same feedback. From the engagement that we have had with Belgravia, we are confident that they are maintaining the safety standards that we would expect them to be maintaining, in operating the facility, and that those are consistent with the Royal Life Saving Australia standards. I could not comment on what was happening prior to that, but I am aware of that perception that has been expressed to us. We undertake an annual survey; we have pop-up sessions in the community so that we are getting feedback across each of our different pools, and I am aware that that perception has been raised.

MR EMERSON: If they are essentially deeming that the maximum safe capacity is, let us say, 480, based on those staffing levels, but the actual capacity is 1,200, what is the point of having an actual capacity figure? Where has the 1,200 come from?

Mr Khan: That is the broader facilities capacity, and there are different capacity points here; that is important to emphasise. The first number that you referenced relates specifically to the pools themselves. It might—and this is where it does get right into the operations—

MR EMERSON: The first number is based on the staff—based on their maths. I am just making assumptions—six lifeguards, 80 times six, 480.

Mr Khan: It is just based on the maths, based on the staffing. You will note that the actual capacity in each of the pools is slightly lower than that number. What that affords, again, is that safe coverage, for the lifeguards that are around those pools. The management itself, though, of the facility and the operations at any one time should take account of what activities might be occurring inside the pool at a particular point in time.

Depending on types of events that may be being held—and we know that the

community do value the pool, in terms of its ability to host events—there may be the opportunity for Belgravia, on the day, when it is managing that facility, to allow that capacity to increase, because there might be a birthday party occurring in the lawned area, where it is relatively constrained. The duty manager and the people onsite can observe that they are not accessing one of the other pools and hitting up against that capacity constraint; therefore, they might be able to go above the lifeguard threshold, depending on that pool access. That is something that we leave to Belgravia to manage on a day-to-day basis. They make assessments and calls around when it is at capacity, guided by the Royal Life Saving Australia standards, in making those decisions.

MISS NUTTALL: Staying on aquatic facilities, on page 77 of the budget outlook, it looks like there is \$750,000 set aside for the development of the new ACT aquatic strategy. Page 77 says that “this funding will guide the direction of future aquatic investment in Canberra and undertake early activities to inform the delivery of a new government-owned 50-metre outdoor public pool in Woden”. What are the early activities that this is referring to?

Mr Khan: There are two parts to that initiative description, and there are two parts of government speaking to it. The aquatic strategy work is being led by colleagues in Sport and Recreation. I will let Ms Kelley talk to that in more detail. In terms of the progress for the Woden 50-metre outdoor pool that you referenced, funding has been allocated in the budget for a site option investigation, as well as investment logic development, and for that to then form further advice to government about the next steps for the delivery of that project. I will hand over to my colleague to speak more broadly about the aquatic strategy.

Ms Kelley: With the aquatic strategy more broadly, following government’s commitment to undertake this work, there have been two major processes with stakeholder engagement to date. That has called for feedback, most recently, on draft terms of reference. We had some really great feedback from over 30 organisations on the terms of reference, and the nature of that feedback has been taken on board.

Having regard to where the project is up to now, the procurement package, including the statement of requirements reflecting the terms of reference that were shared—taking into account the feedback from the aquatic stakeholders—is pending finalisation. We just have to brief Minister Steel, moving forward; then we are hoping to take that to market in August. A listening report on that consultation will come out at the same time. The reason that that work did not come out prior to the procurement package was to ensure the probity of the process around the procurement for the consultant.

MISS NUTTALL: That is really helpful to know. The community has expressed that, when it comes to Phillip pool, that replacement should proceed in parallel with the aquatic strategy, rather than waiting for its completion. Is that something that you remain committed to?

Mr Steel: That would be our expectation; it is a government commitment to progress with a government-owned 50-metre public outdoor pool, so that would be happening regardless. I think it would be reflected in the strategy that that commitment has been

made. My understanding, from the initial briefings that I have had thus far, as the Minister for Sport and Recreation, is that existing commitments around aquatic facilities generally are being incorporated into the aquatic strategy development.

MISS NUTTALL: Going to the nature of that, will long-term planning for facilities capable of hosting state and national competition, including competition-level diving facilities, be incorporated into that strategy?

Ms Kelley: Yes. That was certainly the feedback that was received from the stakeholders.

MISS NUTTALL: Given the Auditor-General's findings that the needs analysis for that 25-metre pool was never completed, and that the government has admitted to this, how can the community be assured that the process for this aquatic strategy, for the Woden pool and for that site determination, will be consultative?

Ms Kelley: As we have said previously, and as has been acknowledged in the audit report, the reference to the sport and recreation needs analysis did not characterise the nature of the work that was undertaken. That is not to say that there was not an analysis that the sport and recreation team took internally, based on the extensive knowledge within the team, as part of national networks and in terms of contemporary trends, the existing resource and developments in other areas—and all the things that have been spoken about previously. But we do acknowledge that it was not documented to the levels expected for transparency purposes.

The nature of this strategy is that an independent consultant will be engaged—specialist people that work in this area. They will be handling the development of the strategy and the consultation with the community on this. We are cognisant of trying to maintain continuity between existing consultation around the Canberra aquatic centre and going into the aquatic strategy, given that, with the stakeholders, in the main, there is an overlap of similarity. We do not want to cause frustration for them in needing to talk about these matters in a duplicative way. We are looking to have that incorporated as well, alongside the independent consultant's work.

Mr Steel: The ACT government, through the City and Environment Directorate, has also released the ACT Community, Recreation and Sports Facilities Needs Assessment and Social Infrastructure Audit, which is a territory-wide audit to help inform consultations going forward, both on the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, which is currently out for consultation, and on the future aquatic strategy.

MISS NUTTALL: I did not remember the exact wording before, but you mentioned that the sports and rec needs analysis was not in the form that was expected. I want to clarify something. Based on the Auditor-General's report, it looked like it did not exist at all and that it was never done. Can I confirm that that is correct and that it was simply never done?

Ms Kelley: That term, the sport and recreation needs analysis, referred to the advice that Sport and Recreation provided to EPSDD at the time that prompted the changes to the draft words. It did not characterise the work that had been undertaken. The

word “analysis” was true. There was analysis undertaken; it just did not fit a definition perhaps of that phrase that was referred to in the consultation report.

MS CARRICK: Why did you say it was a needs analysis when it was not?

Ms Kelley: That was the way it was referred to in the consultation report. We only ever referred to it as “advice”, but we note that that was the phrase that was used. We stand by the fact that there was internal analysis undertaken. It just was not documented, as I said, in the way that we would also agree that term would otherwise have been expected—that there was a documented report.

MS CARRICK: Can you provide the analysis that was internally undertaken?

Ms Kelley: This has been addressed through FOI previously. It was not documented.

MS CARRICK: You can say there was analysis, but there was no analysis, because you cannot provide us with any.

Ms Starick: I might jump in here. The government is providing a response to the Auditor-General’s report, and some of the questions that you are asking are better left until the government’s response.

MS CLAY: Is Big Splash being assessed as part of the strategy?

Ms Kelley: The aquatic needs in the Belconnen area will be addressed as part of the strategy. We anticipate that, as an existing facility, it would be picked up as part of the needs analysis—sorry, I guess the current provision and gap analysis moving forward.

MS CLAY: That is a yes, I think.

Ms Kelley: Yes, as I said.

MS CLAY: That is great. Will the government commit to making no irreversible changes at Big Splash until this strategy is complete? It will be a bit awkward if there is an analysis done that says we need a water park and meanwhile the site gets demolished. That would be slightly uncomfortable, I think.

Mr Steel: It is not a government-owned site. So, obviously, the decisions that are made about it by a private lessee are not necessarily within the control of the government. So I am not sure what you are suggesting.

MS CLAY: If the government is taking steps to enforce the conditions that are already there to make sure that the government does all it can to ensure there are no irreversible changes until the government has completed its current decision-making process.

Mr Steel: I cannot speak for the independent regulator, who makes their own independent decisions about enforcement of statutory provisions within the Planning Act that relate to leases. So I think it is just being clear that we have to work within the law and it would not be appropriate for me to direct particular regulatory action of

Access Canberra. But I do not know whether you wanted to—

MR EMERSON: There is \$750,000 budgeted for this new strategy. It seems like a lot of money for a strategy. Is that all going to go to a consultant to prepare this? Where did that number come from?

Ms Kelley: Of that, \$250,000, as Mr Khan spoke to previously, will be undertaken to look at the work relating to the new Woden pool. So that is specific. The \$500,000 for the aquatic strategy is accounting for the fact that the work associated with that includes an audit of all existing facilities. That work is generally pretty extensive.

MR EMERSON: Former Minister Berry committed during the community sport inquiry hearings that the government would publish a final report on the existing aquatic facilities planning framework, the 2013 one, which was set to run through to 2033. Has that been published?

Ms Kelley: Not yet, but it is being prepared.

MS CARRICK: While we are on pools, did you consult with the community before determining the type of pool in Woden that you want to build—like an outdoor pool? I get a lot of people saying to me that they want a hybrid one—that they want to be able to swim all year round. Who did you consult with to come up with an outdoor pool?

Mr Steel: This relates to matters that relate to the Draft Territory Plan and the Interim Territory Plan. I was not the planning minister at that time; so I cannot really comment on that.

MS CARRICK: No, this is the new pool. So this is post. This is only a recent announcement—the new outdoor 50-metre pool in Woden.

Mr Steel: Oh, you are talking about the 50-metre pool?

MS CARRICK: I am referring to the new commitment. How did you come up with an outdoor pool? Who did you consult with? There are a lot of members of the community that want to be able to swim all year round and have a hybrid—an indoor-outdoor type thing—and have some indoor and outdoor facilities. Where did we get this outdoor pool from? Who was consulted with?

Ms Starick: Ms Carrick, I might try in part to answer your question, but we will take part of this on notice. There has been significant feedback through the work that Infrastructure Canberra does—and I do not want to talk for Infrastructure Canberra on the consultation that has already been undertaken around pools. There was also feedback through—and, again, I do not want to talk for colleagues in CED—the Territory Plan Amendment. I will come back on notice with a response—

MS CARRICK: This does not have anything to do with the Territory Plan Amendment.

Ms Starick: I appreciate that.

MS CARRICK: This is the new commitment. What process did you go through to consult with the community to get their views? That is what I want to know.

Ms Starick: As I just said, I will take part of that question on notice.

MS CARRICK: Thank you.

Mr Steel: Yes, except that was quite extensive feedback, as I understand, in relation to the Interim Territory Plan, the Draft Territory Plan and in the development of the new Planning Act. So there was feedback coming from the community as it related to pools generally in Woden.

MS CARRICK: Yes, they did not want to lose Phillip. They did not want to lose a pool.

Mr Steel: Which was an outdoor pool.

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Mr Steel: There were strong views either way, as I understand it, and, from my recollections at the time as a local member, that people wanted to retain an outdoor pool. Obviously, because an indoor pool is now being developed on the current site, the opportunity to have an outdoor pool provides people with both options, which is sort of a hybrid arrangement that gives the community a choice.

MS CARRICK: A separated—a split pool.

MS CLAY: Will the strategy be ready to inform the 2027-28 budget?

Ms Kelley: We are anticipating the strategy to be complete by mid-2027. So, yes.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR EMERSON: When is that report coming on the old strategy? Do you have a timeline for that?

Ms Kelley: We would anticipate having that done by quarter 2, hopefully. We are anticipating to have that work done between September and December. So, as we go out for the new package, that work will be undertaken by our team and then published.

MR EMERSON: Thanks.

MR PARTON: Minister, Operation Kingfisher outlined the communication David Ferguson had with Mr Ceramidas in relation to the Campbell Primary School project. Is Mr Ferguson still employed as your chief of staff?

Mr Steel: Yes. Following the publication of the report, which made observations in relation to him, I commissioned a process under the LAMS employment framework into his conduct through the Chief Minister's office, which will ensure procedural

fairness and also make sure that public confidence is maintained. That is now underway.

MR PARTON: Minister, in August 2025, Mr Ferguson filed an application for an interim injunction to prevent the commission from reviewing data on his phone. Mr Ferguson withdrew his claim and was ordered to pay costs. Did Mr Ferguson discuss this legal action with you? If so, when?

Mr Steel: I will take that on notice.

MR PARTON: You do not know whether he discussed it with you?

Mr Steel: I will take that on notice and confirm, because you asked specifically when and, obviously, it was publicly reported at the time as well.

MR PARTON: Minister, have you read the Operation Kingfisher report?

Mr Steel: Yes, I have. But I do not intend to make further comments about it, given that there is a process underway in relation to the observations in the report under the LAMS employment framework.

MR PARTON: We have all seen numerous text messages between Mr Ferguson and Mr Ceramidas detailed in the report. The messages also show what appears to be Mr Ferguson's close relationship with the CFMEU. Have you had discussions with Mr Ferguson about his relationship with the CFMEU and if they are still in close contact?

Mr Steel: Again, I am not going to make comment in relation to the matter, given there is a process that is underway in relation to the LAMS framework, and it is important that procedural fairness is provided to participants.

MR PARTON: Just in closing, Chair: Minister, you are the Treasurer. You are one of the most senior members of the ACT government. Given what has now emerged about the Campbell Primary School project, are you genuinely concerned about your most senior staff member's relationship with the CFMEU?

Mr Steel: Obviously the observations made in the report about that person's conduct related to his time in another person's office, another minister's office, not mine. So I do not have any comments to make about conduct that did not occur during his time in my office—

MR PARTON: It is the same individual, though, Minister.

Mr Steel: Those matters will be looked at as part of an investigation. Obviously, that investigation will then help inform future decisions.

MISS NUTTALL: I am keen to ask about the Skate Strategy. The 2025-26 budget outlined a skatepark strategy to be developed. Why is there no mention of that in the 2026-27 budget? Is that work still progressing?

Ms Clement: The Skate Strategy is progressing. We engaged a consultant to

undertake the Skate Strategy and they developed a draft. We are, at the moment, preparing a consultation strategy around that, so that very soon we will be going out to consultation on that strategy.

MISS NUTTALL: Did the consultant consult with skatepark users? I am thinking of the Canberra Skateboarding Association, the Canberra BMX and people like that. Was that a part of their initial work to develop the draft of the strategy?

Ms Clement: That was definitely a part of their scope. There was targeted engagement with all of the local skateboarding groups and also with the BMX community, who are users of those facilities. The next stage of consultation will go out broadly to the full public, because we know that the skate facilities are used by those targeted user groups but they also have a much broader community benefit and use.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. Specifically on Tuggeranong, can you detail the planned upgrades? I know when we originally passed a motion on this last term, it was a full redevelopment. Can you let me know where that work is up to?

Ms Clement: That was also funded in the 2025-26 budget. We also have a consultant engaged, who is working on a feasibility study for an upgrade of the Tuggeranong Skatepark, consulting with those specific user groups as a part of developing that as well. That is progressing quite well. We anticipate we will be able to provide some briefing on where that is up to later this year.

MISS NUTTALL: Awesome. Is there a particular timeframe on that or is just by end of year the goal?

Ms Clement: I think at the moment I would say end of year, but we need to some briefing and make sure that we are comfortable with where things are heading.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. Within the Skate Strategy, are they assessing potential upgrades or redevelopments, or is that work looking to feed through that Tuggeranong Skatepark redevelopment process first?

Ms Clement: First it is thinking about how a Skate Strategy might link to a decision that has already been made around looking at an upgrade or a feasibility for an upgrade. The Skate Strategy looks broadly at skating as a sport activity in the ACT. So it does not give specific recommendations on infrastructure upgrades, but it gives us guidance on how we can make decisions around that and a framework.

MISS NUTTALL: That is really helpful to know. Thank you. When will the Skate Strategy commence at the current rate?

Ms Clement: We would hope to have it released early next year.

MISS NUTTALL: Awesome. Thank you.

MS CARRICK: While we are on skateparks, I am curious to know when Molonglo will get a skatepark, because they are pretty desperate for some activities for young

people.

Ms Clement: I think that is probably more with the Suburban Land Agency and the planning area. So I cannot provide a response on that.

MS CARRICK: Okay.

MR EMERSON: In 2018, a new skatepark near Dickson shops was promised, but that has not been delivered. Do you have any idea where that is up to or why that has not been delivered?

Ms Clement: There is no funding in the budget for a new skatepark in Dickson. With the development of the inner north destination playground at Watson, we did incorporate a skate kind of area into that as a part of that commitment, yes.

MR EMERSON: But there has been no funding in any of the budgets since 2018 for Dickson?

Ms Clement: No, not that I am aware of.

MR EMERSON: Okay. There was a mini ramp near the pool in Dickson that has disappeared. Do you know when and why that disappeared—noting that it just disappeared?

Ms Clement: I do not have the details on that. We would have to take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Okay.

MR MILLIGAN: What is the funding model that you use for our elite teams, such as Canberra Brave and the Cavalry? What is the grants funding that you use and how much do they get each year?

Ms Kelley: With the elite teams there are two programs: the Performance Partnership Program and the Performance Sponsorship Program. The Performance Partnership Program is also for the higher-profile teams, in terms of attendance and longevity. That is the Raiders, Brumbies, Giants, Canberra United and Canberra Capitals. Other teams, such as the Brave, the Meteors, the Canberra Heat, Canberra Chill and Canberra Cockatoos, are funded from within the Performance Sponsorship Program. So the funding associated with those programs is quite different.

The performance partnerships are negotiated based on proposals; whereas, the sponsorship program is an application process with four-year agreements being put in place. I note that, following the government's commitment to uplift women's funding, new agreements have been put in place for the Meteors, Canberra Chill and Canberra Heat women's teams to increase funding for those teams over the next three years.

As part of the sponsorship program with the Brave, as I said, and the Cavalry previously even, the application process looks at the nature of their competitions in terms of the representation nationally within their leagues, their community reach, the participation of the sports and the metrics in and around what they do. Typically, in

the past, those teams have been of a much smaller reach and a much smaller economic impact. So that program is less about economic impact and more about community benefit pathways and being able to provide that pathway for athletes in the ACT.

At the moment, the tier one teams within that get in the order of \$38,000. As I said, the women's teams that sit there are being increased. Obviously, we have seen the tremendous success of the Canberra Brave in recent seasons and the interest in the community and the attendance at those matches. Certainly where the direction of that sport is, we would anticipate that they may wish to put in a proposal to say that they have outgrown the sponsorship space. But, as I said, that remains to be seen. That is certainly the division of where those teams are funded at the moment. I can certainly give you more detail of the application process and take that on notice, if you would like, in terms of specific questions.

MR MILLIGAN: No, that is okay. Now that Canberra United is privately being funded, how does that affect their funding? How has their funding been affected by this new agreement?

Ms Kelley: So Canberra United as opposed to Capital Football. To date, the funding agreement for Canberra United has been shared directly with Capital Football as a community organisation. That agreement has now come to an end—and what a great outcome that there have been new owners announced for Canberra United moving forward. We have had initial discussions with the new ownership group and we anticipate a proposal from them with respect to ongoing support for Canberra United under a new partnership agreement. But it has been made clear to date with the group that the funding commitment to Canberra United at this stage remains in line with the commitment made of \$410,000 next year. That is the commitment for Canberra United.

MR MILLIGAN: How does that differ to the Brave and the Cavalry? Are they not of the same category and tier in terms of funding—yet those other two teams get \$34,000 or \$38,000 a year but Canberra United gets over \$400,000?

Ms Kelley: They are not in the same tier. Canberra United sits in the partnership program at the moment and the Brave sits in the sponsorship.

MR MILLIGAN: Is that with the new ownership?

Ms Kelley: No, that is how it has been. Since there was a government commitment to back women's sport that looked to increase funding—I am going to have to double-check where that goes back to—for the Canberra Capitals and Canberra United as the recognised highest profile women's teams in the territory and their track record of success in the pathway that they provide. That was a specific government commitment to increase the funding of those teams from the levels of sponsorship that they had received previously. But also in recognition that those particular leagues, being the A-League Women's and also the WNBL, were themselves lifting up the professionalism, and the expectations were actually going beyond the capability of the teams themselves to manage and operate and the sponsorships they were attracting. So that is where government support has been enabled those teams to keep pace with the league expectations.

MR MILLIGAN: Obviously the Brave are keen to know where the development is at for Greenway. Can you give us a bit of an update where that is sitting?

Ms Kelley: The process around the ice facility remains live. We expect an update imminently, but we cannot provide further comment at this point in time as it is under active consideration.

MR MILLIGAN: How much has the government spent on this proposal so far?

Ms Kelley: We can take on notice the probity investments that have been made in and around the process, but there has not been any funding beyond that provided to them.

MR MILLIGAN: But, obviously, the department has used resources to put this proposal together and come up with some sort of agreement. That does not come at no cost. How much has actually been put into this and no developments have happened?

Ms Kelley: We can take that on notice. As I said, it would probably be a difficult question to answer given that it has been part of our ongoing business for some time.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay. No worries.

MISS NUTTALL: With the recent closure of the Tuggeranong tenpin bowling facility, all of the local social bowlers and competition bowling leagues, including the seniors and disability league teams, have been relocated to the one remaining facility in Belconnen. The teams have had their practice time significantly reduced and, with the increased travel, it has sort of been affecting the sustainability of these teams in the bowling community. What alternative facilities can these teams practise in in the ACT? Does government have oversight of that?

Ms Kelley: Not at this time, other than the fact that we are very aware of it. I think it speaks to Ms Carrick's earlier question that this is a commercial facility that has made the decision to close and that has now impacted participation. But I would say that this particular matter and the needs of tenpin bowling will be picked up in the sport audit report and the needs of tenpin bowling moving forward.

MISS NUTTALL: I am encouraged to hear it will be picked up in the audit report. As part of that, would the ACT government consider funding a bowling facility for all bowler groups or refitting an existing building to cater for tenpin bowlers in the ACT, particularly in the south where there is currently nothing.

Ms Kelley: It is probably not something that we can project at this point in time in advance of that work.

MISS NUTTALL: Okay. It was worth a shot.

MS CARRICK: Yes, definitely. The Weston Creek Labor Club intends to close its doors and sell their site or redevelop the site, leading to the loss of the bowling greens. There is currently no plan for replacing these greens. What is your policy providing land for community sport clubs to use?

Ms Kelley: It is probably a planning matter with respect to the Weston Creek Bowls Club. Our input into that process, working with our planning colleagues, has been that we would recommend that the club itself commission an independent feasibility report for its aspirations—I understand for an indoor facility to protect or future proof that bowling participation in the future. We have noted that that type of work would be eligible for application under the Sport and Recreation Investment Scheme. That has been our involvement in the process to date.

MS CARRICK: They have received a letter—

Mr Steel: I do not know whether this came up in the planning session but I think it may have. Obviously, I have met with them as planning minister and our predecessor as sports and recreation minister met with them in the same meeting to discuss their needs and their concerns about needing to move to another location to continue their bowling activities should the current site close. I believe there is still further work being undertaken by the club in relation to future plans. I do not think everything is certain.

MS CARRICK: I am not sure that they really have the capability. It is a small club. I do not know if they have the capability to do that sort of work.

Mr Steel: They were talking to government about what alternative sites they could potentially move to, and that is certainly a possibility. Obviously, the government does release land through an expression of interest process for community groups who wish to have a direct sale of land provided to them as well.

MS CARRICK: They cannot afford to buy a block of land. Would it be possible down where the tennis courts are near McDonalds and the skatepark to put some bowling greens down there and a district playground and bring back the oval there for footy and make it a bit of a recreational precinct there in the middle of Weston Creek?

Mr Steel: Anything is possible, it is just that, at the moment, I think there is a bit of uncertainty about what is happening at the current site. So I would probably want to hear what the actual plans are. The clubs are generally speaking with government through CED, through the club's concierge, about what they intend to do or want to do on their sites. The government has been really clear, though, that in relation to any change of CZ6 sites in particular—and this is a CZ6 site—there should be no net loss of community and recreational facilities on those sites. So, if there is going to be residential permitted or a retirement village, there should be no net loss of community and recreation facilities as part of that.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. That is very interesting. We should be aware of that in the committee—no net loss of community facilities on CZ6 land.

Mr Steel: If there is going to be residential or retirement village use permitted through a change of the zoning. Obviously, if there is a change in zoning, that has a statutory process that has to occur through a major plan amendment, which has to go through the Assembly committee and has to be approved. So that is possible on that site. I have not heard of any plans to do that from the owner at this point in time.

Having said that, it is a private market lease and they can do things within their current lease conditions. So that may not necessarily be a problem. As a private lessee, they do have decisions that they can make and obviously they have made a decision not to continue, it seems, but it seems to be a little bit uncertain about what their future plans are for the site.

MS CARRICK: Yes, that is true. Thank you.

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:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Smyth, Mr Brendan, Commissioner for International Engagement

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

Kobus, Mr Jonathan, Acting Executive Group Manager, Strategy and Policy, Economic Development

THE CHAIR: We welcome Mr Andrew Barr as Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy and Minister for Tourism and Events, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth as 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 with questions. My first question is to the Commissioner for International Engagement. Welcome, Commissioner.

Mr Smyth: I have read and understand the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Commissioner, table 22 on page 33 of budget statements B shows that the accountability indicator for the number of ACT businesses exporting as a result of support from the Office of International Engagement has a 2025-26 target of 10 businesses, but the estimated outcome is only five businesses. What led to the outcome being 50 per cent below the target?

Mr Smyth: The export stream is a very long process. You do not just say, “I’ll be an exporter” and then the next day you are making money. Some firms can do it very quickly; for other firms it takes a lot longer. You would appreciate that world circumstances, whether it be the Strait of Hormuz or new tariffs in countries, have made the market increasingly difficult. We are hoping for a better outcome in the coming year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. How do you set the targets, then?

Mr Smyth: We are still gaining knowledge. The office has been there for 10 years. A lot of the early years were about just improving the profile of Canberra in an international context. In the early days, when we travelled overseas—as the Chief Minister would know—if you were lucky, they knew the War Memorial was here, and you were lucky if they knew the capital was here. The reputation has grown, particularly around things such as sustainability, addressing climate change, IT, tech, and AI. The city now has a growing reputation. It is about building on that reputation and making sure that you assist businesses overseas. We helped a lot of businesses get overseas. The complicator is how much they would report back to us. They are under no obligation to tell us what contracts they have signed and to what value the contracts are. We gather as much information as we can.

The Chief Minister, as minister for trade and investment, goes to the Ministerial

Council on Trade and Investment. When it was set up some years ago, one of the first things we did was ask that there be proper accounting on services. It is very easy to count bales of wool and tonnes of coal, but the service economy—and 95 per cent of what the ACT does is export services—is often very hard to track. Working with the ABS, working with the commonwealth and working with the other jurisdictions, there is no one project to fill the hole that currently exists in the whole country's understanding of service exports. So there are still difficulties, but we are working on them.

Mr Barr: There is one data source collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics: the international trade in services dataset. For the ACT, in 2024-25—this is an annual indicator—the value of our trade in services was \$2.664 billion.

THE CHAIR: Export?

Mr Barr: Yes.

Mr Smyth: For a physical good, there are problems. The ACT's number one export is gold, courtesy of the Mint, and that is kind of easy to count. But—

THE CHAIR: but services—

Mr Smyth: if something leaves Canberra on a truck, it goes to Sydney or Adelaide or Melbourne, and it is often counted from the port it leaves, so ACT exports are often attributed to other jurisdictions. The working group in MCTI has been working very hard to make sure that we get a better picture and a fuller picture of who is sending what and where, but they are physical things that you can count.

THE CHAIR: That is right.

Mr Smyth: For services, it is often much more difficult, and, as I said, 95 per cent of what the ACT exports is services.

THE CHAIR: And we do not have a port here, so we have to go through other jurisdictions, so it would be hard to capture. Commissioner, what is the total operating budget allocated to your Office of International Engagement for this financial year?

Mr Smyth: For the coming year, the total cost is \$3.791 million.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. And how many staff are employed in the office?

Mr Smyth: We have nine full-time staff, including me, and we purchase a service. We have a business service development manager in Singapore, which is a service that we purchase through Austrade.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. And how many overseas delegations did you, as commissioner, attend in the 2025-26 financial year?

Mr Smyth: For 2025-26, the Chief Minister went on trade missions to Bangkok last year and went to India earlier this year, and we have just returned from Vietnam.

THE CHAIR: So you went to Vietnam by yourself?

Mr Smyth: No—with the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister was on all of those trade missions. I did not go to Thailand as I had broken my ankle.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. So that was India and Thailand for you?

Mr Smyth: No—Vietnam and India for me. The Chief Minister also went to Thailand, accompanied by other officials.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR EMERSON: In terms of Telstra Tower, as you know, in 2023, Telstra and Ngunnawal custodians announced plans to transform the tower into a Ngunnawal-led cultural tourism destination. Ngunnawal custodian Richie Allan has been working on plans for this for almost a decade. I understand Telstra put hundreds of thousands of dollars into plans to make that happen and also put significant capital on the table for that purpose. Obviously, things have shifted since then. Were Ngunnawal custodians invited to sign the heads of agreement between Telstra and the ACT government announced this week?

Mr Kobus: I have read and understand the privilege statement. Ngunnawal custodians were not part of the heads of agreement between the ACT government and Telstra. The heads of agreement document is a mechanism to provide a pathway forward to enable both Telstra and the ACT government to operate with confidence to open the tower. The next phase for the tower for the ACT government is to bring a business case forward later this year for consideration by government to ensure that the tower is going to provide the appropriate return on investment for government and the community. The heads of agreement enables us to work with Telstra to understand the cost of remediation work for the tower and the cost of the fit-out for the experience, and enables us to work forward with a meaningful business case. There is ongoing engagement happening with the Ngunnawal community in parallel with that.

We had a community engagement session on 15 June at the National Botanic Gardens. There were 15 to 20 participants from the Ngunnawal community at that session. We provided a full update on the tower, its progress and what the next steps are. One of the outcomes from that session with the Ngunnawal community was providing an opportunity for the community to be involved in two separate work streams. One of those work streams is the opportunity for the community to be involved in working with government around governance and economic participation and ways of working together going forward. The other stream that we are running is around the development of the visitor experience—that is, working with the community to ensure that the First Nations' stories of this place can be effectively communicated through any visitor experience that we develop at the tower. We are due to hold a session next week. That is the first of the governance, economic participation and working together streams, and we have registrations for that. That provides the pathway forward to ensure that we develop a shared understanding of working together. The streams around experience development will follow in the weeks ahead as well.

MR EMERSON: Did Ngunnawal custodians ask to be part of the heads of agreement?

Mr Kobus: Ngunnawal custodians did not ask to be part of the heads of agreement document that we signed. Just to reinforce, the heads of agreement is a really important step to enable this project to move forward in a way that is sustainable and provides the right return on investment. Without that heads of agreement, we do not have the capacity to engage effectively with the Ngunnawal community to ensure that we can engage them effectively in the project. Telstra own the tower. We are looking at being the tenant in the tower and we have to have a constructive working relationship with them to enable other parts of the project to work effectively.

Ms Starick: I have read and understand the privilege statement. In our discussions with Richie and other Ngunnawal elders, they looked at signing onto an agreement with the ACT government. The work that Mr Kobus has just described around governance and economic participation is the work that we are doing to work towards an agreed way of working.

MR EMERSON: When were they told this heads of agreement was going to be signed?

Mr Kobus: The committee was told this week that the heads of agreement was being signed.

MR EMERSON: And you are certain there was—

Ms Starick: It was also discussed at the update that we had at the Botanic Gardens.

MR EMERSON: When did you say that was in June?

Mr Kobus: It was on 15 June.

MR EMERSON: When it was discussed on 15 June, you are telling me that no-one asked, “Could we be part of that agreement?”

Ms Starick: As I said, Ngunnawal people have asked to sign onto an agreement with government. As Jonathan has described, this agreement is between Telstra Tower and the ACT government for the services that the ACT government will be running out of Telstra Tower. That does not mean that there is not another opportunity for us to continue talking with Ngunnawal elders and people around agreeing a future way of working together.

MR EMERSON: Mr Kobus, you just said they did not ask to be part of the agreement.

Ms Starick: At that community engagement, but, in separate conversations—because that is not the only engagement we have had with Ngunnawal people—

MR EMERSON: But I did not ask whether it was at that engagement; I just asked: did they ask to be part of the agreement? I got one answer saying no and I got one

answer saying, “Kind of.”

Mr Kobus: To be clear, what I was talking about was the heads of agreement, which is what we signed between the ACT government and Telstra. We have spoken to them about being part of an agreement that provides the intent of how the government will work with the Ngunnawal community.

MR EMERSON: In February this year, the Prime Minister announced a huge package of reforms, or Closing the Gap commitments, and it was all about economic development and economic empowerment. I understand what you are saying about needing to sign a heads of agreement—I do not have an issue with that—and that it has to make it economically viable, but the exclusion of Ngunnawal custodians from that agreement sends a particular signal about whether we are serious about economic empowerment for traditional custodians.

Mr Kobus: We are setting up, as I described, the stream that will be facilitated that directly addresses governance, economic participation and ways of working together. That is the mechanism that we put in place to address those elements. The heads of agreement is a mechanism to ensure that Telstra, as the building owner and the company that is going to make a large investment in remediation and getting the tower ready, and the ACT government, which is also going to be investing capital in upgrading the tower, have a very clear way of working together with confidence so that we can take a business case forward to government for consideration later this year, to enable the project to move forward. Without that, we do not have the mechanism to work effectively with the Ngunnawal community to actually bring all of those great opportunities to life,. We have to have that strong business case and ability to go forward.

MR EMERSON: Understood. Do you think this is a missed opportunity? New laws came into effect on 1 July that require all senior government officials to play their part in implementing the provisions of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in their work. Core to that agreement is shared decision-making, and the biggest barrier to this seems to be consultation and ongoing engagement, about which we hear a lot of promises but not actual shared decision-making. At the end of the day, when those big decisions are being made, such as how this will be made commercially viable or what sort of business case can be put to government, traditional custodians are excluded from those conversations. How does this decision align with the new requirements imposed on senior executives within the ACT government?

Ms Starick: I will start in answering that. I do not think it is true to say that Ngunnawal people have been excluded from the works that are happening in Telstra Tower. There has been and is a commitment to include them in the development of the attractions and the works that will be happening out of Telstra Tower. We are working out a way for that to actually happen, because there might be other investments or parties that come to that. So we are working with them to work out what an enduring governance structure and economic participation would look like.

That is taking time and there has been a commitment to that. And it is not just in terms of the partnership with Telstra Tower through other portfolios; there is also consideration about, for example, how some of the works could include opportunities

for apprenticeships and trainees or other participation through the supply chain once we get the attractions and the different things that are going to be run out of Telstra Tower established. There is a commitment to work out joint decision-making and participation in those other attractions.

MR EMERSON: Finally, on 23 April the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation recommended that the ACT government take advantage of the pre-existing work done by Telstra in partnership with the Ngunnawal community on the future of Telstra Tower and ensure this other earlier body of work is reflected in the government's decisions about the site. I know the government response to that report has not come yet; it is due in late August. Does the heads of agreement that was signed—whenever it was signed—reflect an agreement with that recommendation? And have you received any feedback since that recommendation was made from Ngunnawal custodians about whether they feel excluded from this process?

Ms Starick: That did come up at the roundtable—the feedback that you provided and that prior to the roundtable that we had at the Botanic Gardens and our discussions with Ngunnawal families. They raised concerns about feeling excluded. We had a fairly open discussion about that at the roundtable, and we have also had, as I have said, other meetings where we heard concerns about where those two streams actually merge, regarding the work that Jonathan talked about—how we could make sure that they were included.

I go back to your question about the heads of agreement. That is a separate agreement, as Jonathan said, to progress the works. Regarding the work that you are talking about—the previous work that Telstra undertook; and they have provided us with copies of the work that was done before—we have been working through that and have provided that to the people who are working with us on the next phase of work. That has been taken into account. I would think it is fair to say that there have also been further iterations of that work since then that we will be talking with Ngunnawal families about as well.

MR PARTON: With regard to Telstra Tower and the announcement, I note in table 36, on page 53 of budget statements B, that the physical completion date is December 2026, but I also note that, in the previous year's budget papers, the physical completion date was June 2026, which is obviously not going to be met. Chief Minister, after having got to the previous two stated completion dates, how can we have any confidence that the new re-opening date of 2027-28, in the summer, will be achieved? You can understand the scepticism.

Mr Barr: Sure. It is obviously subject to various planning approvals and consultations that are underway. The announcement around the preliminary NCA works approval is important. I understand Telstra have been undertaking work that is internal to the tower and is not visible to the community at this point. Before any of the broader objectives can be achieved, the tower has to be in a position to accommodate those activities. That goes to everything around building operations, electrical systems, lifts—all the basic requirements for a functional facility. Those elements of work continue. Telstra, as the asset owner, are progressing that work.

Our role, and the reason that we can even have a project at all, is that we have stepped

in to endeavour to bridge what is a market failure around the curation, effectively, of the experience at the venue. That is where we saw a value-add opportunity for Visit Canberra. That is why there is an economic development opportunity and that is where there is a broader cultural project that can be undertaken, but we need to remember that this is not our asset.

MR PARTON: I get that, but, regarding the things that you have mentioned in terms of the possible roadblocks to fulfilling the promise, you knew those at the time that you made—they did not come up in the last couple of days. You obviously factored them into the suggestion of the summer of 2027-28. How confident are you? Do you think we will be sitting in estimates in a couple of years and I will be asking you or whoever follows you: what has gone wrong?

Mr Barr: We have progress. We are working with multiple stakeholders on an asset we do not own. It is not all within our control. The planning approvals do not sit with the ACT government either, so all we can do is continue to make progress. I appreciate that everyone would have liked it open yesterday. I think Telstra would like to get on with it as well, and that is clear from the engagements I have had with their most senior executives in relation to the project over a number of years—several CEOs and several senior executives. There have been some changes in the leadership of Telstra, both at the CEO level, from when I first engaged with them on this project, and at the head of their infrastructure area as well. We have had to deal with a new set of people through the journey, but the intent is clearly there. We want to get on with it, and that is the work that officials are undertaking now.

MR PARTON: So summer 2027-28 is a best guesstimate, with the sufficient get-out clauses that you have highlighted to scramble away if need be?

Mr Barr: Mr Parton, I would like it open as soon as it possibly can be, but I also need to be realistic, that it is not our project and we do not own the building. We have multiple stakeholders who have an interest, and Mr Emerson's line of questions reflects that as well. We are endeavouring to broker an outcome across multiple parties. The alternative is that we do nothing and the tower stays closed. They are the two options.

MR PARTON: And then we would be carping again—sorry! Thank you.

Mr Barr: Indeed; yes. We will do our best to manage all of the issues that have been raised here, and there are many in a building that is nearly 50 years old.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question about data centres. Is this something that the ACT government is pursuing, encouraging or fostering in the ACT?

Mr Barr: We certainly have a share of the national data centre market that is principally related to Australian government data centre requirements. We have some data centre requirements ourselves as a government. The ACT market is, I would say, less at the hyperscale commercial and non-government end; it is more at the national security government agency end of the market. We are attractive for data centres to

want to set up here, because we have 100 per cent renewable electricity, and that meets a number of their requirements in terms of those facilities.

We also have Canberra based data centre companies—Canberra headquartered ones—that have grown here into multibillion-dollar businesses. They meet and, in fact, often exceed international standards as far as energy and water usage go, and that is why they are winning business, because they are amongst the most sustainable data centres in the world. We will see that sector of the economy growing. However, there are obvious limitations in the ACT with regard to available land for hyperscale data centres. They are principally located in our industrial areas: in Hume, in Beard, in Fyshwick and in Mitchell. There is obviously room for some growth there, but let's be realistic: Australia is less than two per cent of the world's economy and the ACT is about two per cent of Australia's economy, so the world's data centre needs are not going to be met in Canberra, but there is certainly an opportunity for sustainable growth here.

We will support and, I imagine, exceed the Australian government's stated requirements in relation to both energy and water usage. The technologies of Canberra data centre operators of multiple different businesses, in terms of reticulated water use, is exceptional. It is world-leading, and that is why they are winning business. I am not concerned about water usage in data centres in the ACT. They are exceptional in that regard. Energy use becomes the challenge. Regarding any data centres that wish to draw upon the territory's energy network, we are also very strongly supportive of them supplementing that with new renewable supply. That would be a requirement. That is a process that certainly the Canberra based ones are already actively pursuing. Data centres can assist with overall energy network stability, particularly with the use of large battery storage, which they need for backup anyway. That can certainly help. The objective in the end would be new data centres being able to support augmentation of the energy networks within the ACT—stability in our power supplies and, hopefully, even putting downward pressure on power prices through significant new renewable energy generation, which, as we know, is the lowest cost form of new energy generation.

MR BRADDOCK: That is an interesting point, Chief Minister, because the risk is that, in other jurisdictions, power prices have increased due to the demands from these power centres. How are you drawing the opposite conclusion here in the ACT?

Mr Barr: It is given our compact nature, the fact that we have 100 per cent renewable electricity generation at this point, the capacity within our network to strategically place large-scale battery storage—utility-level battery storage—and augmentation of the energy networks across a relatively small footprint. For example, we are not needing to do thousands of kilometres of energy network upgrades in order to support the operation of data centres. And the data centre operators themselves are opening their chequebooks to ensure that the electricity infrastructure is supported and paid for by them rather than by households.

MR BRADDOCK: Going back to water, where you mentioned the practice of the current operators in the ACT, is part of ACT regulation or legislation driving that?

Mr Barr: It is ACT policy, and it is a good business decision for them. That is why

they are winning a number of Australian government and international contracts, because they are top of the world in relation to both energy usage—as in from renewable sources—and the minimal level of water usage through reticulated systems. It is also a fact that our climate is supportive. We have much lower humidity and it is very cold for seven months of the year, comparative to almost any other part of Australia.

MR BRADDOCK: You say that it is due to policy. If, let's say, less aspirational entrants in the market were to occur, there is a policy in place that would ensure that their water usage was acceptable?

Mr Barr: Yes, and they would be unlikely to win Australian government business, given the standards that the Australian government requires. This matter, around a national policy framework, goes to national cabinet in about a month. I have seen some debate from some jurisdictions not wanting, effectively, a renewable energy guarantee as part of data centre expansion. The ACT has the exact opposite position—that we will require renewable energy generation to be part of any increased demand on our energy networks, and it would be on data centres to achieve that.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a question about the Major Event Fund. The 2026-27 budget is expanding the Major Event Fund. How are the individual events funded through the Major Event Fund performed to warrant further investment? That is the first question. And do you have expectations, ambitions or evidence of what it means for jobs and economic activity in Canberra?

Mr Barr: The return on investment is very strong.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: As a rule or across all events?

Mr Barr: Certainly across events supported through the Major Event Fund over its duration, which spans more than a decade. In the last fiscal year, the nine events funded through the Major Events Fund generated \$157 million in direct spend and a return on investment of roughly 91 to one for the economy. That is very high. Combined, the events drew close to 780,000 attendees and 630,000 visitor nights, obviously assisted by the accommodation and hospitality sectors. Our population base would not, in and of itself, support the level of amenity that we have in this city, so we require visitors: domestic and international, business, visiting friends and relatives, students, leisure travellers—the full range. They enable Canberra to have the sort of hospitality offering that sits above any other city in Australia with an equivalent population. That reflects the strength of our visitor economy.

We have a very consistent pattern of FIFO workers coming into the city for roughly 22 to 26 weeks a year, when the federal parliament is in session. There can often be 5,000 to 10,000 people coming in each week, which is one to two per cent of the total territory economy. These are people with relatively high incomes and they are time-poor, so they definitely consume services in our economy. Beyond those particular elements, a key feature of the major events program is to look at the times when federal parliament is not sitting, with a focus particularly on school holiday periods,

for example, and other times of year when we do not have 5,000 to 10,000 people descending on Canberra for federal parliamentary sittings. This is how we can support the accommodation sector and it is how we can support our hospitality sector with more consistent business over the course of the year. I think the Major Events Fund does its job in that regard.

It is not the only policy tool that is deployed to try to ensure consistent flow of visitors into Canberra and consistent patterns of expenditure across our economy, but without it we would struggle to fill some of the gaps, from when the city is effectively full during federal parliamentary sitting weeks to the times when we do not have that. To put some perspective on it, we have just a little under 8,000 hotel rooms in the territory, so, when you think about federal parliamentary sittings and the accommodation required for that, that consumes a considerable amount of that accommodation. When parliament is not sitting, that creates a space that we endeavour to fill through tourism and events programming.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you. Regarding two events, the British & Irish Lions coming through and the NBL Blitz, are they MEF events or are they separate?

Mr Barr: We generally have a separate stream for what I would describe as one-off events. Sometimes an opportunity will emerge outside of a Major Event Fund funding round. In some instances, the fund will cover those sorts of events. In other instances, we will need to make an independent decision because of timeframes or when an event opportunity just emerges. We get a reasonable number of requests. We cannot fund all of them, and we are very strategic in our assessment of those event opportunities.

Another lens that needs to be applied across all of these things is diversity—not just the diversity of events within the sport arena, to cover as many different sports as possible, but also the reality that return on investment from arts and cultural events is generally significantly higher than from sporting events, largely because of their longer duration and their broader demographic appeal. It is very simple: a major exhibition running at the National—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I was only thinking about the sport stuff. What—

Mr Barr: For example, a one-night sporting event—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: What arts events are we talking about?

Mr Barr: Major exhibitions at the National Gallery that run for months; the National Museum; the national parliament gallery. Those sorts of longer-run events that will not get 20,000 people in one night but will get thousands over months often provide a better distribution of visitor impact into the economy, and they attract a broader range of people. Within sport, in a holistic sense, you get a pretty diverse range, but not everyone is a rugby fan, not everyone is a soccer fan and not everyone is an AFL fan.

MR PARTON: But they should be!

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Yes; I know. I pity them! The same return on

investment work is done on the singular events that are purchased or bid for or accepted as for the Major Events Fund events, as well as a whole range of other arts and cultural—

Mr Barr: Yes. We also need to look at mass participation events—for example, things like the Kanga Cup and the Canberra Marathon. Those sorts of events attract thousands of participants. The mix of events supported needs to consider active participation versus just watching, and we have to try to cover the widest range of activities and experiences. Not everything is strictly a return-on-investment decision; we also need to curate a diverse and interesting events experience to try to cater for a variety of tastes and experiences. You then overlay that with the demographic data around visitor spend: which age cohorts are spending more, who has discretionary income, and what sorts of people will travel for particular events and experiences? We get a rich array of data, via the banks and more data being collected by those who stage the events and where ticket sales are. All those sorts of things provide a much greater level of information to make investment decisions.

But, inevitably, you cannot fund every event. To give some practical examples, you do not want to spend over the odds attracting an event that would sit at exactly the same time as an existing event that you are already well-funding. A bit of a steer is that, whilst Floriade is on, which we are spending millions of dollars on, we are not looking at spending tens of millions of dollars more in that month-long period. Where we see gaps in our event calendar, that is where we are looking at attracting new events and opportunities. That is part of the approach of the Major Events Fund.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: This is potentially in confidence. What is happening next year? Is there anything that you are allowed to—

Mr Barr: Certainly. We have just announced a further partnership with Spilt Milk, in relation to live music festivals. That is a very different demographic—a younger one—that perhaps goes to National Gallery exhibitions. Another factor for us is to consider different demographic groups and then think about the overall marketing of Canberra and the particular demographics that we want to focus on. A real strength for Canberra is our ability to attract and retain people in their 20s. They come here for university and we want to build on that opportunity, and that is a particular focus for Study Canberra and Brand Canberra in the year ahead.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, the chair of the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum, David Marshall, raised significant concerns about the ongoing impact of the light rail work and other shortfalls he sees in Civic in the recent community hearing day. I am going to quote him directly. Dr Marshall said:

It is heartbreaking. It is absolutely heartbreaking to see businesses who have spent a lifetime working their butt off and then, through no fault of their own, are faced with financial ruin, in some cases. A number of restaurants have closed, and they had to close. The traffic in Civic at the moment is down about 15 per cent ... and that is serious. One of the pubs in Civic is down 30 per cent in turnover, and up 30 per cent in costs. It is just not sustainable. This will go on for another 12 to 18 months, at least. It is a serious worry.

Chief Minister, do you agree with Dr Marshall's assessment?

Mr Barr: He is certainly incorrect in relation to the final point. The works are not going to be continuing for 18 months. They are progressing very well—they are ahead of schedule—and we have already seen, in a number of parts of Civic, works completed. Fences have come down and the new infrastructure has been delivered. There obviously will be some ongoing construction work through the rest of this year and into 2027, but I think there has been a misunderstanding that there would be heavy construction activity all through 2027 and into 2028. That is not the case. The work has come to a conclusion and the area has opened as it relates to light rail.

In relation to private developments, certainly, there are a number of building sites where construction will be completed this year. Regarding the one closest to this building—the new office construction on Constitution Avenue—I understand that is scheduled for completion this calendar year, and there will be an end to the construction activity in that part of the city. The lyric theatre project is advancing well. We will have an opportunity to talk further about that next week, I imagine. Those construction projects are heading to completion and disruption is reducing. There were works in Garema Place that have now largely concluded. The new hotel will open in 2027, and the footprint and most disruptive elements of construction regarding that private sector investment have now passed.

I accept that any construction project is going to be disruptive. Multiple construction projects will also be disruptive, but they will come to an end in terms of the construction elements. We are left with an interesting dilemma. I understand about how much happens at once versus a sequence of projects happening one after the other. We could have gone down a path of less disruption but for a longer period of time or get it all done as quickly as you possibly can. I accept the first part of David's observations around the disruption. Yes, it is disruptive, but we are endeavouring to make it as short as possible and are undertaking a range of activities through this portfolio, particularly around tourism and events, that bring more people into Canberra.

MR PARTON: Dr Marshall also raised major concerns about the look of Civic and the public safety aspect. He said:

... evidence from the Kanga Cup ... was that families were coming into Civic, they were seeing some of the antisocial behaviour, and homelessness. They got frightened; their kids were not comfortable.

You have long trumpeted “Canberra: the cool little capital” scenario. When did we morph from “Canberra: the cool little capital” into “Canberra: gangster's paradise”? At what point did we decide to make that change and lean into that?

Mr Barr: In deference to Coolio and your quote, that was 1996, I think, or even earlier, and the fact that you and I both know that and no-one young probably does, Mark, tells us a lot.

MR PARTON: But you can understand Dr Marshall's concerns.

Mr Barr: On the substantive issue around improving amenity in Civic, that is the work that we have been undertaking. It is very difficult to improve the amenity of ageing infrastructure without some disruption, but the pretty clear view is that Garema Place is now much better than it was before as a result of the improvements: the increased lighting, the CCTV cameras and more activity. There are other parts of Civic where buildings are slated to be knocked down but have not yet been knocked down and they have attracted graffiti—that is true. We are working, principally through the City Renewal Authority, with the building owners to endeavour to see those projects expedited.

MR PARTON: That wasn't you over the road, was it?

Mr Barr: No. I can assure you it was not, in spite of your very mean accusation. No. I have no particular need, Mark, to engage in that sort of discourse with you. You and I get on reasonably well outside of our formal roles. I like and respect you, and I would not put graffiti on a building about that.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: That's what he would say!

MR PARTON: That is all I have.

MS LEE: There is the state and look of Civic, and you have probably heard concerns yourself—because it was discussed on radio, I think yesterday morning; and I have certainly been contacted by constituents—about the Jolimont Centre. I note that it is privately owned. We understand that, but are you concerned that, for a major transport hub which brings in more than 20 services directly from the international airport in Sydney, the first impression that a lot of visitors to our capital city get is that the toilet is not working very well, the lighting is shabby and they feel unsafe? And have you had discussions with the operators of the Jolimont Centre about that?

Mr Barr: This has certainly been an issue over multiple owners of that facility. It is, as you mentioned, privately owned. We need to be realistic that a bus depot is not going to be the—

MS LEE: I am sure no-one is expecting a Chairman's Lounge type of scenario, but—

Mr Barr: Indeed. I would say that, in terms of arrival points into Canberra, Canberra Airport sets a very high benchmark and is an experience that most travellers are supportive of. I have heard Jolimont described as functional but not—

MS LEE: Welcoming?

Mr Barr: at an elite level. I would not say it is not welcoming, but it is at the functional end rather than the elite end of bus depots and arrival points. This is something that—

MS LEE: Do you regularly engage with the operator or have you—

Mr Barr: Personally no, but officials have. We engage with the Novotel and the

Accor Group, who obviously have a big footprint in that precinct, and, through the City Renewal Authority, we have undertaken a range of works around the broader area so that, once you step out of the Jolimont Centre, there is significantly improved amenity in the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings. The median strip on Northbourne Avenue is better than it was, and, with the light rail stage 2A works, that will certainly be enhanced as well.

I am also focused on the Canberra Railway Station, as another point of arrival. That is an area where we have a greater level of control. We have a partnership with the commonwealth in relation to that urban precinct and work with the New South Wales government, who, through their transport entity, own Canberra Railway Station. As I look across those three main points of arrival, I give a gold star to Canberra Airport for their investment, we have a process underway in relation to Canberra Railway Station, and we will continue to engage with the owners of the Jolimont Centre in relation to amenity there. Yes, it could do with some updated lighting and furniture, and they could spend some money on the toilets.

MS LEE: Yes. Another aspect of the concerns that I hear quite often is the difficulty in parking, picking up and all that kind of stuff, which of course is within the remit of the ACT government. Is that something that you are looking at?

Mr Barr: There is already about a 200-metre-long pick-up and drop-off point on the front footage, facing Northbourne Avenue, in front of Novotel and the Jolimont Centre. There are taxi ranks and other on-street parking options within that immediate block. Obviously, it is very proximate to all of the other public transport routes, so anyone who needs to get to Jolimont can catch light rail, and almost any bus in Canberra will be able to get them literally to the front door of that venue. In terms of structured car parking nearby, there are a number of privately-run car parks. I am not sure that there is a lot of physical space for the government to add significantly more car parking, either below ground or above ground. I do not believe we have any sites in our ownership where we could do that, but we can certainly encourage the private sector in what is anticipated will be redevelopment, particularly across the road, opposite the Sydney Building, when those particular three buildings hit the market, which I think is soon. There may be some opportunity there.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MR EMERSON: Going back to the original question about light rail works, I understand the government has a business partnership policy for major projects that outlines how the ACT government may partner with nearby businesses during the construction phase of major projects to minimise disruption to the greatest extent possible. Have all the businesses impacted by the ongoing light rail works been made aware of this policy?

Mr Barr: That does not sit with this area; it is with Infrastructure Canberra. My appearance on that is next week. The project and this interface sit with Minister Steel. I will take that on notice ahead of next week's hearing. I imagine we will be able to have an answer before then, but it is not in my portfolio responsibilities and not part of this session.

MR EMERSON: I can raise it then. That is fine.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, ABS data from last quarter shows that private investment in the ACT fell by 10.4 per cent, yet, just across the border in New South Wales, it rose by 9.5 per cent. Can you speak to why private investment in the ACT has declined?

Mr Barr: I would not take quarterly data. It can be quite volatile in the ACT. Where we have seen significant private sector investment has been in data centres. That certainly has driven further activity, and we are seeing a degree of activity across the construction sector, both in residential and in non-residential. As I look at private sector investment, through-the-year growth is hovering at around \$1.6 billion. In some quarters, it will increase to \$1.75 billion, and in others it has been \$1.57 billion. I am looking at the data. More broadly, state final demand growth has been strong and GSP growth has been above the Australian average.

A quarterly figure will be very project-dependent. It will depend on where a particular project might be in its construction. Undoubtedly, we have a focus on inbound investment into the ACT. We have a very narrow capital base in the territory because we have 500,000 people and are only 115 or so years old. As has been Australia's economic development story, we rely on the importation of capital, and we have a focus on attracting capital investment into the ACT, both nationally and internationally. Regarding national investment in Australia, most of those investment decisions are made in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, in descending order of investment value. We spend a reasonable amount of time with the major Australian investors. Examples of that across the different city markets are: Telstra, which are Melbourne-based, are making an investment in their assets here; the Queensland Investment Corporation, which owns a large number of assets in the ACT, is Brisbane based; and organisations like Scentre Group, who operate Westfield Retail, are Sydney headquartered. We meet regularly with investors at that level.

Across tourism and hospitality, there are new investments like the Crystalbrook Hotel in Garema Place. That came about from a direct approach from me to them in Sydney several years ago—we were looking for new hotel investment and suggested they should consider the ACT. Similarly, in Sydney I have met with IHG, the hotel group. They have made announcements around bringing in both an Intercontinental and Hotel Indigo as part of a redevelopment of the Crowne Plaza Hotel precinct in the CBD. They are the sorts of investment facilitation and outreach activities that we undertake in an international sense. It is particularly focused on Singapore. Mr Smyth indicated earlier that we have a business development manager embedded with Austrade there, so there is a strong focus. Singapore is a very large investor in Australia, so we look at putting investment opportunities before those sorts of investors.

The nature of the opportunities here, particularly when they are project related, will mean that there will be some movement from quarter to quarter, but we continue to put those opportunities to the market. By and large, they are taken up—not every single one. If I turn my mind to aviation, I am still focused on Air New Zealand and Singapore Airlines to make investments in this market. We continue our engagement with Qantas, with Virgin and with Jetstar. These are all big Australian or international

companies that we want to have a greater presence in Canberra. That is the focus.

MR MILLIGAN: Do you see, from the feedback that you receive from all the conversations that you have with entities, that the ACT is competitive with other states and territories?

Mr Barr: Some of our challenges include our population size and the size of the market. In relation to aviation, for example, airlines need a certain number of passengers travelling or a certain amount of cargo in the belly of a plane before making an investment decision. In other instances, as they relate to the accommodation sector, for example, they want surety around demand drivers in the economy: events, conventions, and business events. There is a lot of interest in the new convention centre and entertainment precinct. There is always interest when the Australian government invests in national cultural institutions. There are the recently opened extensions to the Australian War Memorial. That is a real demand driver. It is one of the best attended tourist attractions in Australia and one of the highest rated. There are those sorts of things, as well as what the National Gallery is doing. They are all relevant for investors in this portfolio's areas.

Going more broadly to commercial property and residential and student accommodation, again there is a lot of interest with the expansion of UNSW Canberra and the new direction that the ANU is taking around student accommodation and wanting to increase its enrolments. That is another asset class that we think will be popular. It also coincides well with some building availability in the CBD for adaptive re-use. We have been very clear in signalling in the market that UNSW's expansion and the ANU growing again mean we will need more student accommodation. The Australian government has been very clear that increased enrolment rights have to be matched by student accommodation, so that is a really big investment opportunity and the city is a great place for that, given both UNSW and the ANU are located on the eastern and western sides of the CBD.

MR MILLIGAN: You made reference to tourism, but that is mainly focused around the federal government's assets that they have here, and it seems like you have taken a bit of credit for those off the back of the federal government. However, other investments—

Mr Barr: I am not going to ignore the presence of all of the national cultural institutions. It is—

MR MILLIGAN: I know. I am just seeing what role you can play in growing the economy and tourism.

Mr Barr: That is why are we pursuing a convention and entertainment centre project and Telstra Tower.

MR MILLIGAN: That is all well and good, but if you look at residential and commercial developments here, a lot of the feedback that we receive is that it is government policy and government tape that are forcing a lot of these investments and developments over the border, and that is directly related to ACT government policy, and red tape, blue tape and everything else. What are you doing on that front to attract

these entities back to the ACT to invest and to develop? We are losing a lot across the border.

Mr Barr: I am not sure that I accept the premise of that question. There will always be competition between states and territories. As it relates to bigger residential development, we have had a very big focus on, and we have been very successful in winning, more than twice our population share of Housing Australia Future Fund investments in new community and affordable housing. That is attracting new capital in. That is capital that has both a community sector and Australian government focus, and it delivers a social outcome that I think this committee would have examined in other hearings and would view as desirable.

Private sector investment in housing in the ACT has seen pretty significant growth in recent times. At the moment, though, the biggest area of growth is in first homebuyer investment. The first homebuyer share of the housing market, housing loans and, effectively, new construction, is at very high levels, which again reflects an ACT government policy setting to abolish stamp duty for first homebuyers, partnering with the commonwealth government in assistance around the five per cent deposit scheme and the land that is being set aside specifically for that purpose. That has generated hundreds of millions of dollars of investment flowing into the private housing market.

MR MILLIGAN: You have seen that already?

Mr Barr: Yes, we have. That is what the banks are showing; that is what they are reporting. Obviously, with that investment, the cumulative impact of that is thousands and thousands of young people getting into housing for the first time, but it is investment in our economy, into building homes for young people, and that is a great thing.

MR MILLIGAN: Thousands of young people getting into homes—that is a lot of people. Is that based on the figures that you have actually seen?

Mr Barr: Yes. We get data from the banks and mortgage brokers around what share of new lending is going to particular cohorts. You get the data in relation to the Housing Australia Future Fund. There are funding announcements and projects that are underway. One of our challenges, as I think we discussed at some length in the fiscal sustainability hearing, is workforce. We come up against capacity constraints, and there is an intersection there between the housing and energy projects, and general infrastructure as well, because electricians, for example, are in very high demand at the moment.

There are a range of factors that impact upon both the timing and pace of investment decisions, but I am confident that the direction that we are pursuing is attracting investment into the economy.

MS CARRICK: I am interested in the importation of capital and the investment opportunities in residential, in the context of the towers. Are international and interstate investing in the apartment market?

Mr Barr: It depends on the asset type. Foreign investment is particularly attracted to

student accommodation, build to rent and the like. The national-level investment certainly does come in the residential apartment market, as well as some local investment. Much of the financing comes through the Australian banks. In the end, the actual investment dollars are from the purchasers of those dwellings. Obviously, the constructor borrows the money in the first instance, but they sell the apartments to either investors or owner-occupiers and, increasingly, it is owner-occupiers.

We have about 3,000 to 4,000 new residents each year who come from overseas. Their housing purchases would be an overseas investment, if this is a migrant moving to Australia and to Canberra. There is interstate migration as well; that would be someone selling in another city and buying in Canberra, as an investment in Canberra.

MS CARRICK: My concern is where the developers can get international or interstate investment in their apartments. The Property Council says that we have 2½ thousand empty apartments. We are getting new apartment towers or precincts where half of the apartments can be 50 square metres or less. We are not seeing our downsizers or rightsizers wanting to go into this type of apartment. I spoke to—this is anecdotal—one executive committee—

THE CHAIR: Ms Carrick, I am not sure that this is the right session.

MS CARRICK: Yes, it is about investment, with 20 per cent of owner-occupiers in the towers. What are your settings to ensure that we get the developers building for the local community and not for the international community?

Mr Barr: That is a complex set of issues that are increasing.

MS CARRICK: You can see my point. They are doing it for the international market and—

Mr Barr: Sure.

MS CARRICK: Or the investor market and not the local market.

Mr Barr: Obviously, there is a diversity of developers, and there is a diversity of demand within the ACT housing market. Most new arrivals to Canberra are coming from overseas or interstate. Babies are born here, too, and there is an element of downsizing; that is true. It is not a central command economy, so the government does not say, “Right, there will be 2,000 one-bedroom apartments”—

MS CARRICK: But you have settings—the code and the LVC. The settings impact on whatever is built.

Mr Barr: Sure, but we do not dictate the exact number of each property type and each dwelling size that is built, and if—

MS CARRICK: Yes, the code does. It puts a minimum—

THE CHAIR: Ms Carrick, it is a supplementary question.

Mr Barr: The code does not dictate the number of each type across the entire ACT housing market. There are times when a particular block that is put for sale will have some minimum requirements, but there is generally a degree of flexibility to meet the market. With the fundamental point there, if there is a significant market mismatch, if that is the Property Council's view, the Property Council members are the developers, and they will adjust their developments to meet the market, because there is no particular value for them—in fact, it will cost them money—in building product that no-one is buying. That is fundamental capitalism at play, is it not? Why would a developer build something that no-one will buy?

MS CARRICK: There is a high investor market, as opposed to the owner-occupier. Anyway, let us move on.

MS LEE: My question goes back to aviation. You talked about how the airlines make a commercial decision, taking into consideration the demand and what have you, but have you identified, either because of your own initiative or because of the feedback from the discussions with the airlines, any infrastructure or regulatory barriers that are constraining more international flights direct to and from Canberra?

Mr Barr: Canberra airport have responded to some infrastructure requirements around the towing capacity of some of the tugs that are needed to move the very large aircraft. That was an issue that I believe Qatar raised with them in relation to their aircraft type, and that was resolved. I do not think there are any concerns about Canberra airport's capacity in terms of runway, available gates, aerobridges—the international component.

I believe they have capacity for significantly more passengers. From memory, the airport was built for something like 10 million to 12 million passengers a year, and it has between three million and five million. On the regulatory side, we benefit from various Australian government requirements and air service agreements. There are caps in many aviation bilaterals on the number of flights that airlines can take into the big four—Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. Frankly, one of the reasons we have the Qatar service is a regulatory intervention, in that Qatar can only get the additional flight into one of the major airports by flying to what is deemed to be a secondary airport.

There has been a considerable amount of discussion around the border force and border management issues. I will join the chorus of echoing absolute delight at the phasing out of the incoming passenger card.

MS LEE: You and every other Australian.

Mr Barr: Yes. There is the digitisation of border movement. Certainly, Canberra airport's international component is able to operate very efficiently with the digital boarding. All of those elements are in a pretty good place. Where we have a challenge is that we need somewhere between 50 and 100 extra passengers a day coming into Canberra across three main market segments—India, the ASEAN nations and Europe—to hub through Singapore airport to get a Singapore-Canberra direct flight. Fifty to 100 more passengers a day would make that a viable service. It was put to us in terms as simple as that.

Our objective, through Mr Kobus's team, is to work with Tourism Australia in India and across the major ASEAN countries, where it is a logical flight into Singapore, to then connect into Canberra. Our next focus has to be on that really big market for Australia, which is the old Kangaroo route, through London and some of the bigger European countries. They tend to be in our top 10 tourist markets. Across those three, if we can get between 50 and 100 extra people a day, we have a viable service. That seems achievable with the right Tourism Australia partnerships and marketing. It seems like something worth pursuing, given the economic benefit.

MS LEE: You talked about the benefit that we get because of the limitations in the four majors. With the second airport in Sydney, the one in Western Sydney, is that going to have an impact on that?

Mr Barr: It is early days there. Air New Zealand, Singapore Airlines, Qantas and Jetstar have made commitments. It is a competitor, yes. It is a slightly different market, though, in that, given that there are not immediate onward transport connections, the bulk of people coming into Australia at the higher end—business and diplomatic—will still go to Kingsford Smith, seeing as there are connecting flights from KSI to Canberra. I would be surprised if there are flights between Canberra and Western Sydney international airport; they are a shorter distance than KSI. It is hard to tell at this point, but we should not discount the fact that we may be in competition with that airport for some flights.

MS LEE: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Barr: But our markets are different.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, in terms of the visitor economy, what is the current value of the visitor economy, insofar as you can articulate it in figures?

Mr Kobus: The current value of the visitor economy to the ACT—we get yearly data, so the last set of data was for the year ending March 2026, so there is a bit of a lag—was \$3.3 billion.

MS LEE: What is the current visitor economy target for T2030—the ACT Tourism Strategy?

Mr Kobus: The objective in the strategy was to grow the total value of the visitor economy by \$1 billion; that was from the time of launch of that strategy in 2024. That amount, in terms of the number, in 2030 would be \$4.1 billion.

MS LEE: Is that figure that you are talking about—

Mr Kobus: We are on trend; we are growing by \$1 billion to 2030, so we have gone from \$3.1 billion to \$3.3 billion, as per the current data. There has been some volatility in the data that we are working through, with some change in datasets, particularly with domestic data that we are tracking. We are certainly trending upwards towards that target. Part of the strategy that we have in place is to ensure that the settings and the priorities we have in that strategy continue to be the focus, to

ensure that, ultimately, we drive more visitation from both key domestic and international markets, and do the work required to get overnight stays and extend length of stay, as well as diversify where our markets are coming from, particularly from a domestic perspective.

MS LEE: Has that target been revised at all or has that been the same since it was launched?

Mr Kobus: From when we launched, it was to grow the business economy by \$1 billion.

MS LEE: And that has stayed the same so far?

Mr Kobus: Yes.

MS LEE: In what circumstances would that need to be looked at and revised? I suppose COVID—

Mr Kobus: The current strategy was released post COVID. Major global shocks are probably something that comes into that equation. At the moment, we are focused on doing what we need to do to ensure that we achieve the target. Importantly, with having a target like that, it also provides a point of focus for our industry. It enables us to have meaningful and constructive conversations with the tourism industry. There is a role that the ACT government plays in achieving that target, through the programs that we do. By having a lighthouse on the end of the point to focus on, we can also garner support of our industry to work towards that, and ensure that we collaborate and do the things that are required to work in unison together.

MS LEE: You talked about overnight visitors—evenings—and how you count that. What is the target for that and what affects that target?

Mr Kobus: Largely, our focus is on the spend—growing total overnight stays gets that. The spend bit is influenced not only by the number of visitors but also by how long people stay and how much they spend when they are here. Our objective is to ensure that people understand that a visit to Canberra is worth more than a day trip or more than one night; it is worth multiple stays. It is about ensuring that, when they are here, there is dispersal through the industry as well, and people are visiting attractions, eating in restaurants, going to pubs, and doing a whole range of activities that increase that total spend while they are here.

Mr Barr: Putting some numbers on it is really useful for people to understand. Your average domestic visitor, overnight, all visitors combined, will spend about \$600 per trip. An international visitor will spend \$3,000 to \$3,200. An international visitor spends five times as much as a domestic visitor. International visitors account for about 16 or 17 per cent of total visitor expenditure, and they are four per cent of our market.

In terms of yield, that is why there is a focus on international. For each international visitor that we get, that is the equivalent of five domestic visitors. That is why I think it is worth pursuing the international end of the market.

I am also conscious that Canberrans love to travel. From an outbound perspective, any new international aviation route needs to work both ways. Going back to your earlier question around what airlines say are some of the hurdles—

MS LEE: They want the return flights, yes.

Mr Barr: they want outbound and inbound. When I think about the Singapore Airlines opportunity and the direct flights there, I mentioned that we need 50 to 100 a day extra. We would also need, ideally, 50 to 100 Canberrans who are currently going through Sydney or Melbourne to fly directly out of Canberra. When we had the flights, we did see that. We did see that outbound shift. I think Canberrans will embrace it. They did before, but it is the inbound that is the focus.

Having regard to what Tourism Australia have said, I think I heard it described at the CAPA aviation conference as a “Trump slump” out of America. There has been a bit of a decrease in Australia-US travel, but there are opportunities now out of India, and the growing ASEAN economies. Japan and Korea are very strong, and there is Europe. That is where we need to be.

MS LEE: You mentioned four per cent is international, so 96 per cent is domestic. Has that figure changed or has it been consistent for the last couple of years?

Mr Barr: Obviously, when we had the international flights—more of them than we do—that certainly drives—or flies—an increase in the international component. We do have a base level of travel that comes as a result of business, government—

MS LEE: Diplomacy, yes.

Mr Barr: diplomatic, defence, education, and visiting friends and relatives. It is very clear that the easier it is, and ideally the cheaper it is, to get here, is also a big factor.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, with the Economic Development Strategy and policy—I know you have told me this before, but I have seen no evidence of it—what is the economic development strategy for all of Canberra? You have talked about the tourism part of it and building up that element of it. Who does the rest of it?

Mr Barr: The Canberra 2030 Economic Development Strategy is whole-of-territory, and it focuses principally on the biggest industries in the ACT. They are, outside the public sector, higher education; it is our biggest export industry, our biggest—

MS CARRICK: I am not asking about that. I am asking: who does the rest of it? With the economic development of the centre, those industries are centrally located; who looks after the economic development of our town centres, basically?

Mr Barr: Of town centres?

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Mr Barr: It falls across two portfolio areas, broadly. One sits within CED; that has

the planning and land development streams. In that instance, in terms of particular urban renewal projects and land releases, that sits with the Suburban Land Agency, in town centres. There is then Minister Pettersson's role as minister for business, with arts and the night-time economy—those sorts of responsibilities. His portfolios touch on those sorts of developments. Economic development does sit at a whole-of-territory level.

MS CARRICK: Who takes the lead in the town centres to make sure something happens, rather than just having it fragmented, with people doing their bits? Who takes the lead on these things?

Mr Barr: As it relates to the broader planning framework, the regulatory settings and the like, that all sits within CED, with the exception of the Access Canberra regulatory components. They are right at the micro level, in terms of business licensing, food standards and safety, and the like. The land use settings all sit within CED, but the investment attraction sits within this portfolio. In response to Mr Milligan's question, I outlined a range of examples there.

The initial approaches and opportunities being presented to national and international investors sit in this portfolio. I have had one-on-one meetings with a number of those; that is what the trade missions are about. That is what the engagement in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane is about. I have met with QIC; I have met with Scentre Group. But I do not personally concierge the investment through to its ultimate outcome. It has to operate within the ACT planning framework, and their investments need to accord there.

The answer to the question around who is leading the work to attract the investment is that this portfolio manages the investment once it is here. It goes through the regulatory frameworks that are managed in the City and Environment Directorate, including the Planning Authority.

MS CARRICK: Do I talk to you about the economic development of the Woden town centre?

Mr Barr: It depends on which elements you are wanting to talk about.

MS CARRICK: Good lord! Okay, never mind.

Mr Barr: I am not—

MS CARRICK: We will try something else.

Mr Barr: I am not micromanaging each individual block. But if you want to talk to me about the discussions with Westfield, for example, as to whether we would have them or not—

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Mr Barr: obviously, I have done that, but I am not micromanaging their project now. I have got them to the table and willing to make an investment.

MS CARRICK: Can I arrange a meeting with you to discuss the Scentre Group proposal?

Mr Barr: No, because I am not the responsible minister now. I have got them to the table to make an investment. It then sits in the planning framework, because no one minister can do every single thing.

MS CARRICK: No, I know. But you have the lead on the—

Mr Barr: Yes. Think of it as a funnel. My job is to get things into the funnel. It then ends up with a—

MS CARRICK: I am just trying to see stuff coming out of the funnel. That is what I am trying to see.

Mr Barr: Absolutely. Frankly, investors pay attention to the local debates around these things. If you were the Scentre Group right now, and you have a choice to invest in 50 different projects in Australia, what is going to make Woden convincing for them? What do you think?

MS CARRICK: A good question. That is what I wanted to say. I want to have these discussions. Please let us have these discussions.

Mr Barr: We are. We have them all the bloody time.

MS CARRICK: I do not see them.

Mr Barr: You are not in the government, Fiona, so that is—

MS CARRICK: Okay, let us move on.

THE CHAIR: A question, Ms Carrick?

Mr Barr: Sorry, Ms Carrick. I should refer to you by your title.

MS CARRICK: I know. The community wants to be involved. We have 55 storeys, we have basketball above the loading zone at DJs. We want good outcomes, not just a “tick the box” of what suits Scentre Group.

Mr Barr: Yes, and they are planning matters that need to go through the planning process. The point I am making, which I hope is clear, is that getting them prepared to make an investment in Woden and in Canberra was my task, and I have achieved that. Now the detail needs to be undertaken through the planning system. I do not personally control the development approvals, and we know why. We do not have MLAs involved in independent planning decisions. That is the way our system works.

MS CARRICK: Anyway, you have on your list the community event fund.

Mr Barr: Yes. A different question, Chair?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I want to give Mr Emerson a really quick opportunity; then, in the next session, I will go to you, Mr Braddock.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about Canberra Innovation Network. They are normally on the fourth and fifth floor of 1 Moore Street; it is currently closed because of asbestos having been found there. Significant renovations recently occurred on the fourth floor. Did the government know about the asbestos in the building prior to those renovations? Do you have an asbestos register for all assets like this?

Mr Barr: The short answer is that any buildings of that age will contain some asbestos material. That is a reality of older buildings. In terms of the risk register, this building sits within the Infrastructure Canberra portfolio. I will take on notice the specific details around what was known, when. I understand that where the potentially troublesome material was found was not on levels 4 and 5 of the building, no.

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*. The committee will now suspend the proceedings for a lunch break.

Hearing suspended from 11.45 am to 12.45 pm

Appearances:

Orr, Ms Suzanne, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness and Minister for Equality

ACT Climate Change Council
Hunter, Dr Arnagretta, Chair

City and Environment Directorate
Peffer, Mr Dave, Director-General
Engele, Mr Sam, Deputy Director-General, Environment, Planning and Policy
Sendaba, Ms Bethel, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Policy, Environment, Planning and Policy
Lawton, Mr Kieran, Executive Branch Manager, Office of Water, Environment, Planning and Policy
Malouf, Ms Ros, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Programs, Environment, Planning and Policy
Wright, Ms Fiona, Executive Group Manager, Climate Change, Energy and Water, Environment, Planning and Policy
Burkevics, Mr Bren, Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Parks, Environment, Planning and Policy, and Conserver of Flora and Fauna
Brewata, Dr Renee, Acting Senior Director, Office of Nature Conservation, Environment, Heritage and Parks, Environment, Planning and Policy

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Suzanne Orr, as Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, and the Climate Change Council and officials. Please note that, as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth as 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. Mr Braddock, you have the floor.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, my question is on the government's climate change strategy pathway to net zero. Under pillar six, under hard-to-abate emissions, you have included organic waste. I have no problem with, let's say, medical waste incineration or refrigerants being part of hard-to-abate, but why is organic waste appearing as hard-to-abate, and hence eligible for offsets?

Ms Orr: Thank you, Mr Braddock. I will pass to the directorate to run you through the detail of that, but there is some waste that is already in the landfill, as opposed to waste that has not been generated, that will continue to decompose and to impact our emissions profile, and that will continue to be difficult to abate because it is already in landfill.

MR BRADDOCK: Even though we are continuing to put it into landfill due to the government's delays in implementing FOGO in the ACT?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, I understand the point you are making in that there are options.

I think we can draw a distinction between avoidance into the future, noting that you have some concerns around the timeline for that future, and what has already happened. Like I said, I will pass to the directorate for more detail around that.

Ms Sendaba: Building on what the minister has already outlined, the hard-to-abate emissions resulting from organic food waste is essentially the residual waste that is already in landfill that is not able to be abated through direct emissions reduction.

MR BRADDOCK: So you are talking about residual waste, which I might accept is waste that was already in the landfill, but we are still putting organic waste into our landfill because there is no food or organic waste treatment pathway currently available and we have seen the timeline slip. So it is not a residual. Why have we changed our policy to allow offsets for this particular waste emission stream?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, you will also note that, within the strategy and the first action plan, there is a pillar for the circular economy and waste. Again, I would draw the distinction between that which cannot be avoided and is already done and that which we have an opportunity to influence in the future. I dare say the answer to your question around whether offsets would be applied to things that we can avoid would actually be found in the fact that we have a pillar for the circular economy and waste and we will be looking to take that action.

I think the point you are picking up on there is that, under the action plan for the hard-to-abate emissions, we have a commitment to do an offsets policy. The advice that has come from my council, which the chair can speak to if she would like, is that that will only be where emissions cannot be avoided. So, I dare say, that probably gives you a clue as to what it will be applied to.

MR BRADDOCK: Are you able to give the assurance that emissions from food and organic waste which could be avoided will not be offset?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, I will stop short of announcing government policy and respect my own cabinet processes, but I would note that you have that question and will probably continue to ask until I provide you an answer.

MR BRADDOCK: Has the government evaluated the emissions that will be emanated as a result of the delay in the food and organic waste plant being rolled out?

Ms Orr: I will pass to the directorate.

Ms Sendaba: I will have to take that one on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: So you are making decisions about delaying of the projects which will have a climate impact which you are not aware of?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, I think questions as to the considerations of delivery for the FOGO facility would probably be best placed to the minister responsible, which is Minister Cheyne.

MS CLAY: Chair, if I might, we did ask questions about this last week with Minister

Cheyne and Minister Orr, and Minister Orr said, “Bring them back to me in this session on Friday.” So I am finding it a bit difficult that we are now not getting an answer.

THE CHAIR: I think I recall that, Minister Orr.

Ms Orr: Talking about the questions, they were going to broader waste emissions profiles; they were not necessarily going to the impacts of the delivery of the FOGO facility. But that is fine. Mr Braddock, if you can help me out with your question and perhaps rephrasing it so it is a little bit clearer within my portfolio I can see what I can do to help answer it. Otherwise, I will take it on notice and come back with an answer from Minister Cheyne.

MR BRADDOCK: I would be interested in what modelling the government has done in terms of the additional emissions that are produced from the delay in the rollout of FOGO in the ACT.

Ms Orr: Okay. I might get the directorate to talk you through what emissions modelling we do and how that goes into informing decisions across government.

Ms Sendaba: Just to reiterate: with respect to the question about the modelling of emissions from food waste that is going to landfill now while the new facility is being constructed, we will take that question on notice. But, but more broadly speaking, we have an emissions projections model for the ACT which allows us to predict out the emissions profile against of all the actions that we are taking across government and also informs as part of the annual greenhouse gas inventory that we take, which allows us to track how we are progressing on emissions reductions overall.

MR BRADDOCK: So can I just clarify: is “hard-to-abate” anything that the government has not done but could, which other states and territories and cities have already done?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, I think I would explain the hard-to-abate as exactly that; it is harder. There is not a clear option for any of these things in their entirety. But, certainly, there is work that we can continue to progress to minimise the impact of them. This would also go to refrigerants, air emissions from airplanes and everything that sits under that particular part. Again, if you are looking at waste, that will be dealt with through the waste pillar, where there are opportunities to take action. The hard-to-abate, looking at the waste, is really for that stuff that we cannot undo. It has already been done.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: We had the previous program to improve water quality in Lake Tuggeranong and a focus on infrastructure, the rain gardens and the creek restoration. There is a fairly distinct change in focus to other considerations in the new program—for instance, the anti-algae technology trials. Why is the government focusing on those or implementing those, since the rest of the measures are focusing on water catchment reduction pollution?

Ms Orr: Thank you, Mr Werner-Gibbings. With this particular iteration and this next phase of Healthy Waterways Lake Tuggeranong, the real focus has been on taking a multipronged approach and not just doing one thing but looking at all the contributing factors and how we can address those in unison and proportionate to where the need might sit. I think it is fair to say that the last program had a big focus on infrastructure and how that could play a part within the catchment for cleaning water as it went into the lake. But the advice that came to me is that what has been found is that if you are not addressing more and more pollutions going into the catchment, the infrastructure you are building is limited in what it can achieve because it has more to deal with. So we need to start looking at the whole process of where pollutants are generated to where they end up, not just treating it along the way. That has been, I think, the thinking that has really shaped this, but I can hand to the directorate to go through the detail more for you.

Mr Lawton: Thanks, Minster. The funding for the Lake Tuggeranong plan has a suite of options. It has \$1.422 million in this budget for enhanced street sweeping. The 10 years of science that has been done and the data collection to date have shown that that is the cheapest way. Bang for buck per kilograms of phosphorus, that is the cheapest way to do it. But we do realise that, in putting this plan forward, we have a target that is a stretch target. We are trying to get to reducing blue-green algae events in three out of four years, which is much better than it is now. We have to do a bunch of things. There is the street sweeping, which is the sort of flagship program. We are also working with the community. There is \$690,000 over three years for behaviour change. This is helping the residents of Tuggeranong to reduce, I guess, the leaf litter going down the drains that is contributing to phosphorus to the lake. Also, as you said, there is the \$550,000 for the trial of anti-algal technologies.

We have things that we know are going to work and we are putting them in place. But we are also cognisant that we should be trialling the new things that can have potentially a big impact at low cost—emerging technologies. So that is what that is all about.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: What are the expectations for the trial? Is it built on previous work or on recommendations from the work—

Mr Lawton: Yes, that is right.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I am looking at the studies that have been done recently by Dr Urbhien at UC.

Mr Lawton: We have been working closely with the strong research community on freshwater ecology and the lakes in Canberra—from the University of Canberra largely. There is a good evidence base that anti-algal technologies can potentially work. We have not used them at this scale before, but we think it is worth a go. That is why we put it forward for funding.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Okay. Moving from that element of the plan to something that is going to be, I think, observed a lot within the community, the street sweeping or the increase in street sweeping, how is that going to be deployed and targeted around Tuggeranong—the extra or more street sweeping activity?

Mr Lawton: The plan is to gradually accelerate over the next three years. We will target the areas of the catchment where there is more work to do. There is an adaptive management approach to this. We will step this up as we understand more about where there is the greatest leaf fall and in what seasons. There has been a lot of good work done on this, but we will continue to collect data as we go. The idea would be to step up the street sweeping and target the areas and the seasons that have the greatest leaf fall.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Do you have an idea of timing or timing frequency and locations that will be looked at?

Mr Lawton: I would have to take that on notice at the moment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: What locations will be targeted and the timing as well?

Mr Lawton: Yes, I will take the fine detail on notice. I can say that we will be stepping up and we will be spending that money in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment. But, if you want finer detail on that, I will have to take it on notice.

Ms Orr: Mr Werner-Gibbings, I would just add that, in putting forward this plan, it was determined that we would take an approach where we will scale up so that we can continue to evaluate and test the assumptions that have gone into the various measures that we are putting out. So, while we have done trials of street sweeping and we know it works well, in stepping it up and making sure that, as we increase it, we want to see that we are directing it to the places that we want to direct it to so that we can continue to get learnings and feed those into our response. With the street sweeping, when we look at some of the more leafy suburbs which have deciduous trees of a European nature, they are very much have an autumn and winter focus for dropping leaves. But other trees will drop stuff during summer. So it will end up being year-round but the focus will be different depending on what trees are in the area.

Ms Wright: If could just build a little bit further on Mr Lawton and the minister's answer, as the minister said, we already undertake the routine street sweeping all across Tuggeranong. The additional sweeping is going to start in the summer of this year over 2026-27 over a four-month period. That is to target when the eucalypt leaf fall is at its highest peak to reduce the amount of organic matter entering the drains and waterways. It will be targeted at specific areas of the Tuggeranong catchment. We will provide that level of detail on notice, as Mr Lawton has already said.

We have a current working group that is identifying those priority areas where the increased sweeping will provide the greatest water quality benefits. As the planning is underway, we do not have the final locations as yet and we have not identified the sweeping frequencies quite as yet. So the program will be progressively scaled up, as Mr Lawton said.

MS LEE: I want to go to the Climate Change Strategy, Minister, which delivers in the budget an allocation of \$10 million over the forward estimates committed to what you have called delivering the ACT's next climate strategy and action plan. Can you give us a breakdown of what that funding will be used for, including how much will be

spent on policy work, how much will be spent on practical programs and how much will be spent on administration of the strategy.

Ms Orr: I will get the directorate to talk you through the detail. What I would note about this is that this is specially two components of the strategy, noting that it is over a longer period of time and that there will be more and further actions to come and will be considered through future budgetary processes. I would also note that we have a lot of climate action that would already sit outside this particular initiative. So it needs to be within the context of that broader one too. But if Bethel or Fiona are ready, I will get them to run you through the detail.

Ms Wright: I can start working through the breakdown of the figures that I have got, Ms Lee. I am not sure if it is broken down exactly as you have requested, but perhaps if I start with this and we can take it from there. There is \$9.307 million over four years to undertake the actions under the First Action Plan—\$3.293 million for adaptation and resilience policy work; \$2.124 million to continue the work within the climate change and energy policy area on existing policy actions; \$1.13 million for adaptation for nature and land use emissions accounting; \$880,000 to engage the community on climate action; \$750,000 for data and research on mode shift and travel demand management; \$600,000 over three years for multi-contracts with community partners; \$325,000 over two years to extend support for community services organisations to manage their climate risks and undertake adaptation planning; and \$205,000 over two years for an ACT-wide climate change risk assessment to identify climate vulnerabilities.

MS LEE: So the \$880,000 was for community engagement?

Ms Wright: To engage the community on the climate action.

MS LEE: What is involved in that?

Ms Wright: I might pass to Ms Sendaba to provide a further breakdown on the community action and engagement.

Ms Sendaba: There are a different range of actions within the strategy which will involve community engagement. The \$880,000, in particular, is four years and it includes delivering targeted resources and information to support climate positive choices and helping foster and enhance social working connections, particularly in relation to First Nations and culturally linguistically diverse communities. I will break that down a little bit further, that \$880,000 includes \$350,000 for a pilot to develop three local area net zero climate ready community plans; \$280,000 for that targeted engagement with the CALD community; \$150,000 for further work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members; and \$100,00 to undertake needs analysis to inform climate actions.

MS LEE: Is any of that money actually going to the community groups or is it dedicated to the directorate to engage—

Ms Orr: Ms Lee, are you asking about the environmental community partners when you say “community groups”?

MS LEE: No, this \$880,000 specifically. Is any of that actually going to the groups or is it—

Ms Orr: This would not necessarily, but there is a different funding—

MS LEE: I understand that part, but I am just talking about the \$800,000. So that is not actually going to the groups, right, this is within the directorate?

Ms Orr: This is working with the community; this is not community group funding.

MS LEE: So it is not a grant thing. Minister, the strategy is described as a practical pathway to strengthen climate resilience and reduce emissions, but half of its 16 key milestones simply seem to be commitments to develop more strategies, more plans and more reports. How can Canberrans be confident that these are actually going to result in, as you say, a practical pathway over just more strategic and planning documents?

Ms Orr: Ms Lee, picking up on your characterisation of it as strategic and planning documents, I do not think that it is quite as simple as that. We have a lot of work across government that has been ongoing that this builds on, and we know that we have programs in place to support the transition to net zero. A lot of the work that is in here is very much-needed scoping work and understanding in a transition that we are leading the way on in a lot of regards and in a lot of areas and the thinking is new and that someone has to do it. A lot of this work is actually making sure that we have informed options for the areas we know we need to act in going forward. That is balanced against the actions that we are already taking and continuing to build so that we are getting to net zero by 2045.

MS LEE: I understand. Perhaps the next question might give you a bit more of the context. You released, as you mentioned, 30 new actions but only six of the 30 new actions are classified as a having a direct, as opposed to indirect, impact. In addition, each action is given a qualitative rating of its emissions reduction impact. There are multiple examples but there is one particular one on page 21 where you claim “the next generation statement of priorities will have a low emissions reduction and an indirect impact.”

Ms Orr: Yes.

MS LEE: Did you seek advice? Who did you consult with to designate these emissions impacts and why was qualitative indicators chosen over quantitative?

Ms Orr: I will let the officials run through the detail of that. But I think the key point to make here is that it is direct or indirect or an enabler based on whether it goes to direct emissions reductions or it is something that would enable or indirectly facilitate action for direct and both are needed. Not everything is going to be direct. There is a lot to do to get to that.

MS LEE: I understand, but it is only six out of 30. It just seems a bit high in that space.

Ms Orr: I can appreciate the position that you are coming from. I think that is reflective of where we are up to in the transition in that we have had a lot of work to date that has been the focus of implementing that, and now it is time to identify the next range of work. You are never going to get away from doing that thinking. Someone is going to have to do the thinking at some point. But certainly I can let either Fiona or Bethel run through those impacts.

Ms Wright: Thanks, Minister. I might just lead off to broadly address some of the observations about the actions and then I might pass to Bethel to talk a bit further about the nuances of quantitative measurement of some of the actions. Building on what the minister was just saying, I think the first phase of climate action, of which we have been quite successful on, was really characterised by those dedicated climate programs. We have done a lot of great work, which makes us really a leading jurisdiction in this place.

The next phase is really about mainstreaming those climate considerations into how government makes all of its decisions. Part of the independent review of the last climate change strategy really did point to having a framework that allows that consistent collaboration across government. A lot of these actions now seek to actually change the systems of how we operate. So they are, by their nature, enabling so that all of government can make those decisions and climate action can be taken across all of government.

We did think it was necessary to provide some guidance and to acknowledge that some of these actions are not direct actions, they are enabling, and what level of impact we seek to have. I might pass to Bethel on how we determined that quality rating.

Ms Sendaba: Further to what Ms Wright has outlined, it was important, we thought, to include in the strategy an indication for transparency as to what things were direct actions or direct emissions impact and others that were enabling. Further to that, a big component of the strategy is adaptation action. By its nature, that often is a more qualitative assessment as to the outcomes that are being achieved. Some of the actions address both an emissions impact and an adaptation impact. Hence, where we have perhaps, for example, the example that you gave around developing a next-generation statement of priorities, the intention in developing that statement is to further engage younger people and understand those intergenerational impacts of climate change. That was something that we heard directly through the consultation process; so that was included as a specific action to take forward. So, in essence, by undertaking that work and through that process, there will be a building of awareness and building of capacity amongst those engaged—hence the direct emissions is lower, but it will have an indirect impact.

To go to the point around qualitative assessment versus quantitative, there are a range of measures and specific targets. Obviously, the net zero target is the overarching goal. We produce a greenhouse gas inventory every year and measure against that. That is a really good indication that has to be published each year which shows progress against the targets. That is how we will continue to report against, qualitatively, what has been the impact.

Ms Orr: I would also just add quickly to that. If you think about it, say, in the context of transitioning off gas, there will be a range of things that we would need to do as part of that that would not necessarily have a direct emissions impact, but if we do not do those, the actions that would have a direct will not be possible.

MS LEE: Okay. My final question is on the draft strategy. There was quite a bit of feedback—and it is in the public arena as well—including the evidence that was provided during the community day, about the fact that there was concern about there being too many motherhood statements and not enough concrete action items, milestones or timeframes. Was that taken into consideration? If so, I am a bit concerned that the final strategy does not seem to have captured a lot of that.

Ms Orr: Ms Lee, I am a little bit baffled as to why people keep referring to it as a draft strategy, because it was a discussion paper and it was very clearly put out as a discussion paper. So it was never a draft version of something that was going to become the final climate change strategy. This is consistent as an approach—

MS LEE: That makes it worse, if you did not take into consideration the feedback.

Ms Orr: No; that is not correct. There has actually been a lot of feedback through the discussion paper and through the public consultation that is absolutely reflected within the Climate Change Strategy. We can take you through where that is reflected. But, as I was saying, the approach that has been taken is consistent with the development of the previous strategy, which also went out for a discussion paper and then a strategy and action plan came out.

In looking at it, we have always said in every release that we have put out that this is a discussion paper. We have not put it forward as a draft strategy—and I must say that I continue to be a little bit baffled why that is not being recognised. Bethel, did you have anything you wanted to add to perhaps the community input and how that has been incorporated into the strategy?

Ms Sendaba: Yes. On that point on motherhood statements, the statements that were put out in that discussion paper were draft visions and outcomes that were—

MS LEE: That is why they think it is draft that you—

Ms Sendaba: that were to inform, I guess, the direction and a shared agreement between the government and the community as to what the intentions were and what the agreed outcomes were for the strategy. There was a lot of focus put into those, and I think the feedback that we received through that process certainly refined those. They were adjusted. The pillars that are included in the final strategy were modified directly as result of consultation and there is a range of other areas. For example, I referenced earlier the intergenerational impacts of climate change. That was again something that we heard through the consultation. So there were specific actions addressed around those points. We had a lot of feedback from the community around actions that they can undertake—building capacity, the need to consider the vulnerable members in the community and how we can support them to adapt to climate change, and hence the strong focus on adaptation.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: Has the government done any quantitative modelling of the direct emissions impact of the actions identified in the action plan and should Canberrans have faith that this will get us to net zero by 2045?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, let me start with the last part of your question first in getting to net zero in 2045. Within the framework, I think we have been quite transparent and honest that we will need to continue to build on the action to date, and that will occur through this strategy. But no-one, not myself or my predecessors—noting that there are multiple, not just one—has so far put together a pathway that gets us to 2045. We are still identifying further actions that need to be taken as we work through particularly the more complex aspects of this and the more challenging aspects of this transition.

So, if the point you are going to is “Why don’t we just have a plan that says if we do this and this and this we will get to the end,” I think that it is an unhelpful way to look at the transition and the approach we need to take. Part of shifting to the approach we are doing with the shorter-term action plans and having the framework is so we can continue to compound and build on the actions we have taken to date in closing that gap between getting to net zero and where we are. I cannot remember the first part of your question. Can you just remind me?

MR BRADDOCK: I was just about to go there. Has the government done any quantitative modelling of the direct emissions impact of the actions identified in the action plan?

Ms Wright: As the minister outlined, in the strategy itself we have done some modelling to look at what happens under business-as-usual, planned and underway and then a pathway to net zero. In terms of the actions that we have put forward, we have done quantitative analysis on government run programs—for example, the impacts of electrifying all of the government’s own gas assets and the government’s zero emission vehicle transition. Those have been quantitatively analysed. As you can appreciate, some of the others are open to quite a few different scenarios. We have built in those forecasts, but we do not have quantitative modelling across the board.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. Thank you.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about 2 Dairy Road in Fyshwick. I understand Canberra City Farm’s original 10-year licence ran from 2015 to 2025 and there was a 10-year option, which was I think was removed perhaps last year. I was wondering why their 10-year licence was not renewed and who made that original decision.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I am going to pass to Bren Burkevics for this one.

MR EMERSON: Okay.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, Minister. Thanks for the question on Canberra City Farm. I think it is important that we note that negotiations with the preferred tender for that

site are still underway—and so it is a live procurement. I am therefore cautious about what we can talk about in relation to that matter. In relation, though, to the licence, which is a separate matter, the licence, as you indicated, was for 10 years, noting that there was an option for renewal approaching the end of the licence. There was a recommendation to the minister based on the opportunity to reset the opportunity and look for a new site opportunities and to invite opportunities for the use of the site to align with the Canberra Local Food Strategy, that recommendation was accepted.

MR EMERSON: When was the preferred tenderer informed they were the preferred tenderer?

Mr Burkevics: In terms of the exact date, I would need to take that on notice, but I may be able to get that to you. There was a meeting held this month that I attended personally.

MR EMERSON: Okay; so that is where the information was provided, not with a letter ahead of the meeting?

Mr Burkevics: I would need to check that fact, but I think the letter was afterwards.

MR EMERSON: Do you first inform the successful tenderer and then inform the unsuccessful tenderers?

Mr Burkevics: That is traditional practice, yes. The successful tenderer is normally notified that they are the preferred—and I think that is the key word here: they are “preferred”—negotiations get underway with the successful tenderer and then, of course, those that may not have been the preferred are then notified as well.

MR EMERSON: Okay. So you will find out when that first preferred tenderer, Southern Harvest, was told as much. Since the Southern Harvest Cooperative was also awarded a \$57,970 contract on 30 June—so a month ago—to identify urban agricultural sites within the ACT, is it considered a conflict of interest that someone who is conducting research into urban agricultural sites for the ACT government was also applying for a licence for an urban agricultural site?

Mr Burkevics: I note that they are different procurement processes that are evaluated separately. So I think in terms of that, it is entirely appropriate that anybody that has a desire to apply for a procurement can do so. That will be an important body of work to identify options to expand potentially underutilised areas of government land that may be suitable for community gardens.

MR EMERSON: Was it ever identified either by yourself or by the tenderer that there may be a conflict of interest in the two contracts?

Mr Burkevics: I would need to take that on notice. Of course, some of that may be commercial-in-confidence, so I would need to take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: I think when asking about a conflict of interest it is hard to use the commercial-in-confidence—

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, is the question you are asking because this group would perceivably be operating an urban agricultural sites and they therefore have a conflict in identifying urban agricultural sites?

MR EMERSON: No; my question is that they are very much timed at the same time, from what I can tell, and the same tenderer has won the contracts to both run an urban agriculture site and conduct research across ACT into urban agricultural sites. The answer might be that no conflict of interest was identified either by them or by the government, but I think it is a very fair question to ask.

Ms Orr: I am just trying to understand the conflict of interest, more specifically as to what you are going to do. But I will hand it to Mr Burkevics, because I actually do not have the detail on this.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks very much, Minister. Of course, as part of any procurement, any conflicts of interest are treated very, very seriously. The nature of the question that you have asked goes to the core of what was submitted and what was evaluated, and I would need to seek advice knowing that they are commercial in confidence.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Of course, we have a role in scrutinising the appropriateness of government processes. So I think it would be in the public interest to get a fulsome answer and, if not, for a very clear explanation to be provided in the response as to why this would not be in the committee's interest for it to be provided either publicly or in confidence. I accept it has been taken on notice. I just want that to be read into the Hansard when you are checking what your are—

Ms Orr: We will look to get you the response without prejudicing any processes that are underway.

Mr Burkevics: Mr Emerson, I can confirm that the date that the preferred vendor for the Canberra local precinct was advised was 15 July and the date that the Canberra City Farm was notified that they were not the preferred tenderer was 20 July.

MR EMERSON: Thank you. What was the level of coordination between these two concurrent processes—one for which a contract was awarded on 30 June 2026 and the other for which a preferred tenderer was informed they had been selected on 15 July 2026?

Mr Burkevics: Would you please define what you mean by a “level of coordination”?

MR EMERSON: Were they in any way run to terminate at a similar time? That is a good starting point.

Mr Burkevics: I think it is difficult to answer that question. They are both procurement exercises that are run as part of directorate arrangements. I would assume that they would be run concurrently and in accordance with the procurement requirements and laws of the ACT.

MR EMERSON: Did you know ahead of time that they were likely to conclude at a similar time?

Mr Burkevics: No.

MR EMERSON: I understand that, for the EOI process for the 2 Dairy Road site, there was a delay in that EOI outcome by around a month. Is that the case and what was the reason for that?

Mr Burkevics: I am not aware of any delay, Mr Emerson.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Had the preferred tenderer submitted an EOI before the original deadline for the EOI process?

Mr Burkevics: Sorry; could you say that again?

MR EMERSON: Did Southern Harvest submit an EOI before the original deadline for that process?

Mr Burkevics: I would need to take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Okay; thank you. While you are taking that on notice, if there was a delay in extension of the EOI process or if they submitted an application after the deadline, could you provide an explanation as to why that occurred?

Mr Burkevics: I am happy to have a look and provide advice that I can. Of course, it is all subject to procurement rules. I am advised, however, that, in relation to the procurement, there was no delay and it achieved its estimated timeframes.

MR EMERSON: All right. In relation to whether or not an EOI was submitted before the deadline, can you advise in your response whether the government engaged with them to encourage them to submit an EOI, if they did miss the original deadline? What priority was given in this process to the environmental values of the Jerrabomberra wetlands when approving the EOI? I understand in the proposal a semi-industrial activity is proposed. To what extent was that considered in determining the preferred tenderer?

Mr Burkevics: I think the best source of information of that in relation to the question would be the tender documentation. The EOIs were to be evaluated in accordance with the tender documentation, which is all available publicly.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Was any information sought as to whether there may be an impact on the ecology and amenity of the 2 Dairy Road site from a potential increase in traffic in the area if there is a food hub established on the site?

Mr Burkevics: Of course, at the moment, no contract has been confirmed. Contract negotiations are underway. So what is proposed for the site and how it will be used would be speculative.

MR EMERSON: Sure; but presumably the reason you preferred the tender was on the basis of what they have proposed. I would like to think that these sorts of matters would be considered before determining who would be the preferred tenderer.

Mr Burkevics: Of course, the tenderer will submit an EOI in accordance with the statement of requirements and then that is evaluated by a panel in accordance with the tender documentation. I have seen some public comments today by the preferred supplier in terms of some of their proposals. I am sure that will all be discussed as part of the contract negotiations.

MS LEE: You may have heard, Minister and Mr Burkevics, about a quote from Keith Colls, who is the president of Canberra City Farm, who raised significant concern about the way the government has gone about the tender process itself. It said, and this was on radio a couple of days ago:

Our argument is about the way the government has gone about this. That's the problem. The way they have been dealing with a lot of non-for-profit organisations like us that are run entirely by volunteers lately has been appalling.

He went on to say:

They are a pretty onerous process. It took us about 1,000 hours of volunteer time to actually do the—yes, it is a monster process. And the government is putting these small organisations through this, and this just destroys our volunteers and our volunteer base.

Have you got concerns, Minister, about that feedback? And have you given either direction, or are you in consideration, about how you can alleviate that level of onerous task on volunteer-run organisations.

Ms Orr: Ms Lee, the advice that was put to me in undertaking these processes was that it was appropriate to do a procurement, and to make sure that we are in line with our probity requirements. And that is certainly advice that I took.

As to learnings that can come through this process, any process will have an evaluation period, and we will be undertaking that evaluation period.

I would note that part of the reasoning, and part of my reasoning and the advice that came to me, was that a lot of these contracts and licenses had not been tested, or been made available across the community, for a very long period of time. And I think that goes a little bit to everyone finding this a newer experience.

MS LEE: Okay. And when will that evaluation be completed? And will you make that public?

Ms Orr: I will look to officials for that, because that is part of the process for the tender, which I do not manage.

Mr Pepper: Yes, I might just say a couple of things. Dave Pepper, Director-General. I think there is two parts to this, Ms Lee. One is the actual evaluation, which Mr Burkevics has been speaking about to the committee.

Separate to that is the question of whether it is, or is not, onerous for NGOs and community groups to participate in some of these procurement processes. We have

had an internal discussion about that very matter within our directorate, taking that feedback on. That is important to us. We do not want to exclude some of these groups. They make a really positive contribution to many of our activities, not just in this portfolio, but many.

So, that is something that we will engage with the central agencies on, about what improvements could be made to acknowledge the burden that can be placed to actually participate in some of these processes. That is certainly something we are focused on.

MS LEE: And in relation to the question that I asked just now, about the evaluation and whether it is going to be made public?

Mr Burkevics: It might be appropriate—Thank you, Ms Lee. I think, as the minister and the director-general have indicated, and the feedback that you had indicated from Mr Colls, he provided directly—and it was acknowledged at the meeting with me. I think, as the director-general has indicated, it is important that we take the feedback that—

MS LEE: Sorry, you are just not answering the question, which is the evaluation—

Mr Burkevics: What I am leading to Ms Lee—thank you, I will get to your point—is that it is important that the directorate—once the contract negotiations are complete, I think there will be a period of review and reflection. And I think relevant advice will be provided to the minister. And I think the most appropriate answer would be that the learnings from the directorate will be provided to the minister, and the minister can make a determination on how best to proceed.

Ms Orr: I think, Ms Lee, just picking up on what Mr Burkevics has just said, we would not necessarily publish every evaluation or learning review of a tender process. We do always need to be conscious that we are not prejudicing future processes.

Noting the particular circumstances around this, and, I think, from the testimony that officials have given today, there has been a real willingness and want to engage and to take that feedback on board. So I think we will note that down and continue to, where we can, look to how we can provide that to the community.

So, without necessarily making a decision before I have seen the information or had the advice put to me, I think I can give you an acknowledgement that it is certainly something we will endeavour to continue to work with the community on, and provide as much advice as we can. I will just need to wait for the advice to come to me as to what is appropriate to be putting on the public record.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MS CLAY: The City Farm decision, does this affect other stakeholders like Global Worming, who have been providing a food waste recycling service in the face of the ACT government's seven-year delay in providing services?

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, Ms Clay. It likely will, because ultimately all users of the site

fall under the license that Canberra City Farm has with the ACT government. So, if that license arrangement were to change, then those arrangements potentially will change. But of course, we are getting to speculative territory, because contract negotiations are underway with a preferred supplier. And I notice they have made public remarks today about their interest in working with people already on the site.

MS CLAY: Has government done any consideration of the impact of, for instance, losing one of the few private sector FOGO recycling businesses, whilst delaying the government FOGO recycling?

Mr Burkevics: Ms Clay, the focus, I think, for the procurement was to (a) comply with the law for a 10-year license of that site; and look at new opportunities that align with the Canberra Local Food Strategy.

MS CLAY: Thank you. Is that a “no”?

Mr Burkevics: I think that would be—and so, in terms of the question—an assessment on an individual’s services offer.

MS CLAY: Was there any analysis done? Is that a “no”?

Mr Burkevics: This was a focus solely on the license. So the answer is no.

MS CLAY: So “no”. Thank you.

Minister, regarding the catchment groups who have been providing services to Canberra for about 30 years, with a longstanding government commitment to fund them. Our environmental volunteer services have been valued at \$21 million, by the commissioner. So we get pretty good value for the \$155,000 we were giving to each of the three catchment groups. But you have changed that arrangement, and you have put that money through open procurement instead. Why did you decide to put those small amounts of money through open procurement?

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, I would refer you to my previous answer which was: for all of these contracts and EOIs, the advice from the directorate was that a procurement process was appropriate. And I took that advice. As to the specifics of the process and the tender to date, I can pass to Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, minister. Ms Clay, to put it into context, the total value of all procurements, moving forward over a six-year timeframe, is in excess of \$10 million. So for the catchment—

MS CLAY: Sorry, the catchment group round?

Mr Burkevics: So, the catchment group round: there are four programs under that, and that does include caring for injured wildlife. So, there are four programs that were advertised to the community. They total—

MS CLAY: Do we usually bundle other contracts like that? Like, with our sports funding, do we put every team into one and consider it one amount of money? It is a

very strange thing to say that ACT Wildlife—

Mr Burkevics: They were advertised as four programs, as part of that process.

MS CLAY: No, I understand that. I am just wondering why the directorate does not consider them as, like, environmental management is separate from FrogWatch, is separate from ACT Wildlife. That is a very strange way to bundle that many unrelated contracts together, to make a bigger number.

Mr Burkevics: Well, of course, there are four contracts involved in those four programs. And it provides for different organisations to consider what they would like to apply for. And of course, different organisations have applied for more than one. And so the total value of those four programs—there is the community stewardship, the upper Murrumbidgee, caring for our injured wildlife, and FrogWatch—is \$7.1 million.

MS CLAY: I am actually just asking about the community stewardship. If we can just talk about the CSEEP, that would actually really help, I think.

Mr Burkevics: Okay. That is \$3.1 million over the forward years. And so that, as part of the program, and a suite of the programs that had previously been under contract, it was appropriate to put it out to a tender process, to ensure that a longer license period could be offered—which is four plus one, plus one, is the objective. Which has been a message that has been relayed regularly to government; that the organisations would prefer longer contracts, to allow them to do more strategic and longer-term planning.

MS CLAY: Thank you. And minister, in August last year, you said that this decision to go to this different process followed an internal review. I asked you if you could table the review, and you said you could not, because you could not at that time. I then asked for it under FOI and it was refused because the tender was underway. I understand that tender is now over. Can we have that review tabled; the internal review that led to this decision?

Ms Orr: I will hand to Burkevics to talk about the internal review and the basic process.

MS CLAY: I actually do not want information about the internal review. The question is, can we have the internal review tabled?

Ms Orr: Mr Burkevics?

Mr Burkevics: Yes, Ms Clay, I think there has been some confusion about what is constituted by an internal review. The internal review was a review of compliance against the relevant laws, and what was needed moving forward to offer long-term contracts. I do note that a brief to the minister that contained that information, I believe was issued under FOI, because it is out in the public. So that essentially constitutes and describes the basis for proceeding with the tender process.

MS CLAY: Yes. In that FOI, we were not given most of the documents because the answer was, “It is under tender”. It is no longer under tender. Can that information be

provided now that the tender is complete?

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, some of the tenders are still under process.

MS CLAY: The catchment group tender, the CSEEP tender is the one that I am talking about.

Mr Pepper: I think we just have to take some advice on what we can release, but we can take it on notice and take some advice on what is appropriate to release.

MS CLAY: You can take that on notice. How about we take it on notice. That is a great answer. Thank you, Mr Pepper.

Minister, in August last year you said you could not answer questions about this tender because you had not made a decision yet. Shortly after that hearing, I assume you made a decision, because the tender went out, almost immediately after the hearing. Then in September, Shane and I asked you questions about it in parliament and you said you could not answer questions because the tender was underway.

That tender, the CSEEP tender, has now resolved. Can you now tell me the answer to the question we asked a year ago: why was that tender designed to deliver one supplier when the current services were being provided by three separate catchment groups that were all running three separate geographical services? What went into the thinking, to turn that into one?

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, the advice to me is that that particular tender process is still ongoing, but I will hand to Mr Burkevics and he may be able to provide you with more information.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, minister. Ms Clay, I understand the nature of your question to be specifically on why there was a preference for one versus the existing three.

MS CLAY: Yes.

Mr Burkevics: It was primarily to allow greater strategic approaches to the tender and to the program because, at the moment, as you say, it was geographically based under previous arrangements; geographically fixed, with fixed licenses. So that did provide limitations on how the resourcing could be best allocated across the ACT to suit the different priorities. So, there was a preference for a single provider, to ensure that the government priorities—particularly with the new Nature Conservation Strategy being developed—could be allocated efficiently and in a more dynamic way than having three fixed providers doing the role. So, it was an evolution of the program.

MS CLAY: Sure, and do you imagine that the delivery of the services under this contract will be delivered centrally, or do you think there is a chance that they might continue to be delivered with three different geographical areas of focus?

Mr Burkevics: That is absolutely a matter for the preferred provider.

MS CLAY: So, the decision to go to one may actually end up with services still being delivered by three?

Mr Burkevics: That is a matter for the preferred provider to work out, and those contract negotiations are underway.

MS CLAY: Sure. I understand two procurement processes were run in the CSEEP round. I am wondering if somebody can talk me through the precise nature, the name, like what types of processes they were, and just give me the dates of those processes?

Ms Orr: Sorry, I did not quite catch all that.

MS CLAY: I understand there were two procurement processes, and what I am looking for are the dates; what were the processes that were run; were they RFP; were they two single select? Can you just actually name what processes were run, and what the dates involved were?

Mr Burkevics: Yes. So just confirming: a high level summary of what occurred on what date.

MS CLAY: Yes, with CSEEP.

Mr Burkevics: Yes, I think that should be fine. That was all public at the time, and so we should be able to get that information that was used, from the tenders website.

MS CLAY: Have you taken that on notice?

Mr Burkevics: I will take that on notice. Thank you.

MS CLAY: Okay. That is great. Look, I understand the catchment groups now do not have any CSEEP funding in their 26-27 budget. Are you concerned that the catchment groups may just simply no longer exist, as a result of this series of decision-making?

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, I think Mr Burkevics potentially wants to answer but I think you are specifically looking for me to answer this one. Ms Clay, certainly taking this approach and working on the advice from the directorate, there is a threshold question around making sure that we are meeting our obligations under the Financial Management Act and under probity and procurement outlooks. Certainly, looking at the outcome, and there was always a level of risk in that providers who had previously had contracts would not necessarily continue to have those. That is inherent in every procurement and tender process that will happen across government, and it is always going to be a balance.

I think, in going to the question you are putting, or the next question that might come, is, you know, “Why didn’t we just stick with what had always been there?” But we would not have been compliant with our legal obligations if we had not undertaken the process that we have undertaken. So while I take no joy in, certainly, those who have not been successful and the impact on them, on the other hand, I could not justify not being in line with our legal obligations.

Mr Burkevics: I could add some more, thank you, minister. Absolutely fair, Ms Clay, to acknowledge that the process could have been taken in different ways. And I have received not only verbal representations but written representations about people in distress. The government has offered EAP to some of these organisations, to support them through a change, and so I think it is fair to say that there is absolute recognition that change is hard, particularly when there has been years of great work by volunteers and a lot of emotional investment.

MS CASTLEY: I think it is fair to say that the catchment groups feel that this change has been foisted on them, even though there was the term “the evolution of the program”. Minister, how involved have you personally been with this process and with the catchment groups?

Ms Orr: Ms Castley, let me start with the process. Certainly, advice was put to me for decision agreeing to the recommended approach. Once that decision has been made, it is over to the officials and the directorate. It is appropriate for me not to be involved in the actual process itself. Certainly, moving to the process, announcing it, I think there were representations prior to processes commencing. The catchment groups and their memberships certainly have emailed in to my office. I have had a meeting with the catchment groups.

My response has been consistent throughout, which is, if the advice to me from my directorate is to undertake a procurement, I will not be going against that advice. But certainly, in making that decision, offering the catchment groups an opportunity to meet with me and other groups as well, you know, and hear them out, out of respect for the work that they do.

MS CASTLEY: And so just back to the FMA, you said that things had to change because to align with the—

Ms Orr: The advice to me was that the processes had to be undertaken, to meet our obligations.

MS CASTLEY: So, it has been wrong until this point? What change occurred with regard to their contract needing to align with the Financial Management Act and proper government process?

Ms Orr: Mr Burkevics, did you want to run through this one?

Mr Burkevics: Yes, thanks, Ms Castley. Just to confirm, it was deemed that—based on the feedback that had been received, all of the groups were wanting longer-term licences; as well as to ensure compliance with the Procurement Act and the ACT’s Financial Management Act; they are going through an appropriate process to ensure equity, fairness and transparency, and access to long-term funding, which is as I mentioned, \$7.1 million just for those four programs that I have responsibility for—that it was entirely appropriate and legally necessary to proceed through a procurement process.

MS CARRICK: When you talked about the strategic review and the consultation, did you actually talk to the catchment groups in the consultation process? Because they

say that they did a survey and that there was not due process, as far as consultation goes.

Mr Burkevics: I am aware of a survey, and I would have to take on notice further details of what was in that survey. I think it is fair to say that the review—as mentioned earlier, there was an internal review and primarily it was about moving forward to ensure compliance with the Procurement Act and the law.

I know that there have been discussions with the team responsible within the City and Environment Directorate with those catchment groups over a period of time, about arrangements for upcoming licences. I cannot talk about the specifics as I was not involved. But in terms of the shift, it was a fairly straightforward recommendation after the assessment had been done, of what was legally necessary to proceed with longer term licences. And, as a part of the evolution of the program for efficiency, and to ensure that it will align well with the objectives of the draft nature conservation strategy, that a process was necessary.

MS CARRICK: Can you tell us about what procurement criteria you did, to ensure that you valued the volunteers? Because if we lose the volunteers out of those geographic areas, then you may not getting value for money at all. So, what emphasis was given to the stewardship that the volunteers have for their geographic areas?

Mr Burkevics: I think it is important to note that we are talking about the coordination, not specifically the volunteer groups individually. So, we are talking about entities that coordinate activities between. So, the activities the volunteer groups are themselves—because the catchment groups, we know, operate with paid employees. So, there is a slight difference there in terms of on-ground employees they engage, as they need to, with their catchment group.

In terms of the catchment groups, they do receive—they have been receiving under current arrangements—funding and, of course, they do have paid employees and they do have boards and committees that govern those catchment groups. So, this process was focused on the funding that was allocated for the various programs.

MS CARRICK: But the boards are volunteers. The boards do not get funded.

MR BRADDOCK: Was an appropriate adviser engaged on this procurement process? And, if yes, can you please table their advice?

Mr Burkevics: What I can say is that the procurement team within the City and Environment Directorate was engaged the whole way through this exercise and provided advice. Whether that specifically constituted a probity adviser, I would need to take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. I understand Landcare ACT won a tender—and, to be clear, I am not casting any aspersions of inappropriate conduct from Landcare ACT, I am just trying to get to the bottom of this. I understand their board was recently spilled. Do you know about it? When did you and the directorate find out? And what was your response?

Mr Burkevics: Just to clarify a point you made there, Mr Braddock, is that Landcare ACT are a preferred tenderer. Contract negotiations are underway.

MR BRADDOCK: Point taken.

Mr Burkevics: I am aware that Landcare have been through some board changes. That is a matter for Landcare and their board.

MR BRADDOCK: I understand that Landcare ACT may be seeking to subcontract service delivery back to those same catchment groups. Is that usual? Have we actually achieved anything, if that is the case?

Mr Burkevics: I do not think it is appropriate to speculate or talk about something that may be part of contract negotiations.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay.

MR EMERSON: Mr Burkevics, you said earlier that the EAP has been extended to some of these organisations due to the level of distress being experienced. On the community day for estimates we also spoke about this, for the separate process that was underway for the Conservation Council, the Canberra Environment Centre and SEE Change.

The Conservation Council said it was a pretty awful process. The Canberra Environment Centre said, “We were told we needed to go through this process because the government needed to be assured that it was getting value for money. But we are getting \$135,000 a year; a suggestion that the government might not be getting value for money is offensive.”

They were both clearly pretty upset about it. Was the risk of significant damage to relationships with these environmental groups and, through them, their many hundreds of volunteers considered? And was the potential loss of those volunteer contributions—to Ms Carrick's point—costed in any way, as part of the advice to run these procurement processes?

Mr Burkevics: I think, in terms of costing risks associated, I am not aware of any process to cost—noting that would be speculative, on something that has not happened. However, in terms of knowing that the directorate's process, and a tender process would likely cause a reaction, I think that is absolutely fair to say that was indeed recognised.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Finally, for the Minister: you said earlier the advice you received from the directorate was that an open procurement process was appropriate. We have heard now about damage experienced by the Canberra City Farm, by the three different catchment groups, by the Conservation Council of the ACT, by SEE Change and by the Canberra Environment Centre—pretty much all the key organisations involved with environmental conservation and delivery of the ACT government's own priorities, when it comes to that and also when it comes to climate change. Given the amount of damage caused, are you satisfied that was good advice?

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I will refer you back to the previous questions and answers, and the evidence that has been provided around the advice to the directorate on meeting our obligations under the various pieces of legislation. Certainly, I took the advice that it was appropriate, based on those considerations, that we should be going to a tender process. I have not been provided with any information that would suggest that that was not sound advice, in meeting our legal obligations.

And again, referring to my previous response, certainly, in balancing out the impact of any process and looking at also being compliant, again, we take no joy in the impacts that people are experiencing. At the same time though, it is not a justification for not being legally compliant with our obligations.

MR EMERSON: I think, going back to Ms Castley's point earlier, if we could take on notice any evidence that every one of these organisations was legally non-compliant with government requirements, prior to this tender process—

Mr Peffer: No, no.

Ms Orr: No, that is not—

Mr Peffer: No, sorry, that is not what is being suggested at all. The compliance is about the methods used for contracting and the terms of those contracts. We have obligations that are not optional as they apply to government directorates, and that is what has led us down a particular path, and that is what has sat behind the evidence given to the minister.

So, it is an unfortunate fact, and it has been very challenging, I think, for the parties involved, and I acknowledge that. But at no stage have we suggested that the entities providing the support in these valued services have been in some way non-compliant with government law.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, the contracts that were expiring, that have been the catalyst for undertaking a new process, were all coming to an end. They could not be extended any further. So, to continue funding, we had to do a new contractor processes.

MR EMERSON: But you could do a select tender. You do not have to do an open procurement, right? A closed tender process would have been an option.

Mr Peffer: Look, as the director-general in the organisation, my preference is that we follow best practice. And yes, we could do select tenders, and just pick and choose individual entities and just enter into long-term contracts. But that is not the way that we decided to do it. We decided to provide an open process.

In my view, that is more equitable. I think it was the right thing to do, notwithstanding the challenges for parties involved and some of the discussion that we have had about the extensive paperwork that is actually required to participate in some of these processes—which we have taken on board, and is something that we will discuss with Procurement ACT and the central agency.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what is the value of the EAP services offered, and was it

part of the costing of this project?

Ms Orr: Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: Thanks, Miss Nuttall. No, it was not part of the process. It was a request that was accommodated during the process and was responded to accordingly.

MISS NUTTALL: Can I clarify the cost of it?

Mr Burkevics: Well, that cost is not available to me because that is a matter for the catchment groups and those that have sought that sort of assistance—and of course that, generally, is provided. So I do not know the cost, because the details of who and how are confidential.

MS CLAY: I got confused in Mr Emerson's line of questioning. We heard a lot that government was running what they thought was the only legally confined process, and then we heard that maybe government could have run a single select tender or another legally compliant process. Can you take, perhaps, on notice: was this the only way to run a legally compliant process, or were there exemptions in the Procurement Act or other processes that could have been legally run?

Mr Pepper: Yes, I do not think I need to. Because I can tell you that there are provisions that provide for single-select in certain circumstance—that can be emergency circumstances, where there is single entity that is the only entity that can provide a service. And there is a range of other exemptions. They did not apply in this circumstance.

MS CLAY: So, none of the other exemptions applied?

Mr Pepper: I do not believe so, no.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: A slight change of topic. Over the last summer and probably then this summer as well, there has been a considerable uptake in fishing—just from anecdotal observation—and not just in and around the bigger lakes but also in some of the ponds and various areas. There are rules around compliance, and what can be fished and when can be fished, and who is fishing what and where. How many compliance officers are there? What is that person's—is it a person, is it a group, what is the role? How are they communicating with new and younger fishers?

Ms Orr: Thank you, Mr Werning-Gibbings. I think this is, fair to say, perhaps a lower profile part of the environmental response within the ACT but, based on the amount of correspondence I have received around fisheries compliance officers, a very valued and loved component of our response. Certainly one where, I think a few years ago, the government looked to put in a little bit of extra funding to explore some of these options. And through this budget, we have been able to make that more permanent. But I will hand to Dr Brewata to run you through some detail.

Dr Brewata: Thank you, minister. Dr Renee Brewata, I am Acting Senior Director of

the Office of Nature Conservation, and I have read and agree to the privilege statement. Yes, we do have a fisheries compliance officer. He is—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: So that is one?

Dr Brewata: We have one fisheries—but that sits within an aquatic team. So, we do have other aquatic ecologists. The fisheries officer, I believe, over the past 12 months has undertaken education engagement activities, including talking to fishing clubs, tackle retailers, tournament angler groups, and people just out enjoying fishing. They are out and about a lot in the west. You will see them along the Murrumbidgee.

There are 34 days of dedicated fisheries compliance controls that have been undertaken in the last 12 months, comprising of 311 interactions with 586 people. This equates to approximately nine interactions, with a total of 17 anglers per day. So, it is quite a large effort that has been undertaken.

And the average rate of noncompliance was around 20 per cent originally, but actually has fallen to 10 per cent. So, it has been an effective program.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: What does noncompliance mean?

Dr Brewata: I think it could vary. I would have to take the question on notice for details, but it could be anything from too many lines to—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Wrong fish?

Dr Brewata: Possibly. I think it would vary. I could get you the details if you would like.

Mr Burkevics: I am happy to answer that, Dr Brewata. Thanks, Mr Werner-Gibbings. Noncompliance would be essentially a breach—potential breach—of the Fisheries Act or the Nature Conservation Act.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Okay. Sorry, I had not heard of a fisheries compliance officer prior to doing some reading before the budget, after a couple of constituents sent some emails in. Is this a new role?

Dr Brewata: It commenced in November 2023.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Okay. Is the impact positive? If there is only one, is it a useful use of the—?

Mr Burkevics: The impact has been—and, of course, the focus for the officer is education, primarily, before you enforce. And that is sort of in keeping with normal regulatory practice. So, the officer has high levels of skills not only in regulation but most importantly fishing and engaging with the community. The initiative has been really received incredibly well. And so, that officer, with support of other conservation officers across Parks and Conservation, undertakes weekend patrols where they are engaging with the community.

Typical noncompliance activities that might be detected by conservation officers may be the usual—I will have to throw it in now—dogs off lead in an area where people should not have dogs at all, or they should be on a lead; people with too many rods in their position; or people with too many rods and lures in operation at a single time.

And I think, through positive engagement, some of the fishing regulations have evolved to better suit a change in fishing environment in the ACT. So, I think it is fair to say that the role, functions and purpose of that officer, and how the community have received them, has been overwhelmingly positive.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I cannot remember when because every day is the same, but at some point in the past 10 days I mentioned avian flu as a biosecurity issue and obviously—well, presumably—there are aquatic biosecurity risks as well. Does the compliance officer do any work, or is the fisheries team doing any work on aquatic biosecurity?

Mr Burkevics: All the time, and Dr Brewata’s team has a dedicated riparian and aquatic team that regularly reviews biosecurity risks to fish in the ACT.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Are there any clear and present threats?

Mr Burkevics: There are indeed. Dr Brewata?

Dr Brewata: I would have to take that one on notice, although I can say it is well managed, particularly in relation to translocations and moving fish around. And that we know of a few current diseases that occur within populations. But in terms of emerging threats from the avian flu, I am unaware of any emerging threats.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Not necessarily avian flu, but just aquatic.

Minister, the constituent correspondence is generally around, “It is good to see so many kiddies out fishing,” but the “but” is concern about refuse and leftover tackle, and rubbish and things like that.

Ms Orr: My correspondence? Or—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: No, to me. Is your directorate able to work with City Services, or doing some thinking about—like if this is a trend that continues, and it would be rubbish disposal, tackle disposal—

Ms Orr: Yes, certainly, it is something we work with. Ms Brewata, can run you through that detail?

Dr Brewata: Yes, certainly. The compliance actions also include community actions, communication actions, updating the ACT recreational fishing brochure, but also 12 new tackle bins have been installed across Lake Burley Griffin, the Murrumbidgee and the Molonglo River.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Are there ways for people to request tackle bins? Is that—

Ms Orr: How many are you planning on requesting, Mr Werner-Gibbings? Because that will determine how much information I think we—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Three.

Ms Orr: Three? Whereabouts?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Yes. Well, I mean, is it easy for members of the community, or through me, to say—

Ms Orr: The tackle bins are a new initiative, and I think, my understanding in putting those forward was, where we were seeing tackle having an impact, and that is what has determined where they go and the amount of them. Ms Brewata, did you want to add to that?

Dr Brewata: No, I think that is correct, minister. I certainly believe it has been a successful initiative. I have not had any updates on whether it is going to continue or expand, but it has been a successful one so far.

Ms Orr: It has been quite popular, and I think that would almost make us a little bit hesitant to have a “request your own place for a tackle bin” because we might have far too many requests. So, I think we will continue to look at where there is the greatest need in where we might put future ones. But if you have got suggestions, Mr Werner-Gibbings, you are always welcome to come forward.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thanks.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. I have got a bunch of water stuff to ask including a couple I did not quite manage to get in as a supp. When it comes to Lake Tuggeranong, on Budget Outlook page 91, “Delivering a 10-year plan for a healthier Lake Tuggeranong”. What is the \$50,000 at this financial year and the \$500,000 next financial year for? And did that money roll over from the previous Healthy Waterways stages 1 or 2, or is that new money from somewhere else?

Ms Orr: Thank you. I will just let Mr Lawton come to the table to talk you through that.

Mr Lawton: Okay. The question was about the funding for this year?

MISS NUTTALL: And next year; so \$50,000 this year, \$500,000 next year.

Mr Lawton: Okay. So, the breakdown—not by year—as I went through before, is 1.422 for street sweeping, over four years; \$690,000 over three years for community behaviour change, working with the residents to reduce fertiliser use and manage leaves better; \$550,000 in capital funding for two years of trial of anti-algal technologies, as we discussed earlier; and then \$400,000 for monitoring and reporting.

Ms Orr: Is it the \$550,000 over the two years for the capital funding for anti-algal, in particular? You are breaking down the five and the 50 to get to the 550?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, so this is specifically page 91 of the Budget Outlook where there is a table that just has, in thousands of dollars—

Mr Lawton: I suspect it is for the anti-algal technologies over two years, but we might be able to come back with the detail of that.

Ms Wright: I think we can confirm that. So, the capital funding of 550 is the only capital funding we have, so that is definitely for the anti-algal technologies.

MISS NUTTALL: Awesome, thank you. And is that new money, or did that come from leftover money from Healthy Waterways stages 1 and 2?

Ms Wright: That is new money.

MISS NUTTALL: New money. Fantastic; great to hear. We very much welcome the 10-year plan for Lake Tuggeranong, but is that replacing any Healthy Waterways stage 3?

Mr Lawton: So, that is all new money.

MISS NUTTALL: Got you. The previous stages of Healthy Waterways 1 and 2 were in the order of magnitudes of tens of million dollars, and happened all across the ACT. I suppose I am interested in whether there is going to be another phase of that funding, with co-funding from the commonwealth, to focus on the whole ACT catchment. Is that on the table?

Ms Orr: Certainly, in the funding from the commonwealth, I do not believe there is an active discussion around that particular approach. There are plenty of discussions around water, but not specifically to the program you are referring to.

I think, Miss Nuttall, in going to the part of your question around focusing on the whole of the ACT, not just on Lake Tuggeranong, I think we have previously provided evidence to the committee in various other inquiries, around the work program that is there for the broader ACT and other catchments within it. And Ms Wright or Mr Lawton are welcome to run you through some of that detail.

Mr Lawton: I can add a bit more colour. So, there has been significant investment in the Healthy Waterways programs since 2014, when there was a commonwealth initiative and ACT government both put in \$125 million—I have got it in front of me. Stage 1 was \$94 million—these are big numbers—and then stage 2, 2021, \$29.66 million, which was ACT government initiative funding. Now, this was across Canberra.

That work is ongoing. So, there is still work. So, under that funding we still have a team sitting in the office of water that are doing work at the moment. They have shifted their focus, from Lake Tuggeranong to Lake Burly Griffin and doing that similar kind of evidence-based, building a hydrological model, understanding where the water quality problems are coming from, in the catchment, and then they will start building out options and testing with stakeholders. That is a more complex catchment.

So, there is that work going on. That has not finished; that is ongoing. And the Lake Tuggeranong funding in this budget is on top of that.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you. How much is remaining on the existing Healthy Waterways funding.

Mr Lawton: I would have to take that on notice because—

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, can you also say what you mean by “existing”? How do you define that, just so we get you the right information.

MISS NUTTALL: The remaining money of the, I think, \$125 million that you said was secured through stages 1 and 2 of Healthy Waterways. If work is ongoing under the Healthy Waterways program, how much money have we spent so far and how much is left? But if that needs to be taken on notice—

Mr Lawton: Yes, just because there have been multiple streams of funding over various years. There have been rollovers on some occasions. So, I can talk to the new funding that is in this budget, but I would have to take it on notice what is remaining from the past.

MISS NUTTALL: Sweet. It is great to see the government acknowledging difficulties with a high level of phosphorus in waterways, particularly from leaf litter. I have also heard that water experts are concerned about the regulations allowing too much phosphorus to enter the waterways from the Queanbeyan sewage treatment plants upstream from Lake Burly Griffin. I understand that that sewage treatment plant is great at moving bacteria and particulate matter, but maybe not removing enough phosphorus. Are there regulations or just discharge standards that could be improved to further reduce the phosphorus entering the waterways from the sewage treatment plant at Queanbeyan?

Ms Orr: With two minutes to go, that is a very big question. Do you mind if we take that one on notice, Miss Nuttall? Unless Mr Lawton, who is looking at me, might have an answer straight off the top of his head, with the two minutes that are left.

Mr Lawton: I was just going to say it is a matter for the Environment Protection Authority, that regulates those outflows from a sewage treatment plant.

MISS NUTTALL: Okay.

Ms Orr: And Miss Nuttall, Ms Wright can offer some further information on the Healthy Waterways funding.

Ms Wright: For the Healthy Waterways, there has been no additional commonwealth money, and the Healthy Waterways program has now shifted into what we are doing for Lake Tuggeranong and also the plan to do a similar study for Lake Burly Griffin, and, again, looking at the cost-benefit analysis of what will yield the best results in terms of the water quality for the lake.

I think, of the earlier Healthy Waterways money, quite a lot of money was spent on

re-naturalising assets which, apart from providing water quality, I do understand provides other benefits to the community.

However, at the moment we are looking at what are the best outcomes in terms of water quality. And preventing the pollution at the source has been, I guess, the theme of what we are seeing, in order to provide those wider benefits to the community in those precincts.

MISS NUTTALL: And is that money that is funding that Lake Tuggeranong plan, had that already been appropriated from the ACT; so that is new money and a continuation of waterways stuff?

Ms Wright: That is correct. It is definitely new money and the earlier phases, I guess, of projects for Healthy Waterways re-naturalisations, all that money was expended. And the Belconnen oval wetland, I think, was the last of those projects.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

Ms Wright: Thank you.

Ms Orr: I think just before we finish, can I also just acknowledge my ministerial council chair who is a very busy person but has come for today's session. If I can just thank her.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The committee will now suspend proceedings for a break.

Hearing suspended from 2.15 pm to 3.02 pm.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027. We welcome back Ms Suzanne Orr as Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, and officials. Please note that, for any witness at the table, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Ms Castley?

MS CASTLEY: Thank you. I have questions on snakes. I know we discussed it in a previous session. I am hoping it is still appropriate, if that is okay. I have got some more information now, mainly around licences. We discussed people who can collect snakes, if they are out and about in the suburbs. What about people who want to educate the community on brown snakes in particular? Are there different licences?

Mr Burkevics: Under the Conservator guidelines for non-exempt animals, there is no provision, at the moment, for the keeping of venomous snakes, outside of particular environments. And that matter—as we discussed in previous hearings, Ms Castley, as you know—was responded to as part of a petition. It is a matter that is regulated under the Nature Conservation Act, and whilst there are mechanisms for people to educate the community using venomous snakes, there are very, very specific requirements about where those snakes must be stored when that activity is complete.

MS CASTLEY: So, who determines who is allowed to store those snakes for that education purpose?

Mr Burkevics: That would be the Conservator's guidelines—the Conservator of Flora and Fauna, my position and statutory role. That is a legal document which defines where venomous snakes can be kept.

MS CASTLEY: And how many people can keep venomous snakes for the purpose of educating? My understanding is that people can handle them, but if they want to go out and educate the community at the show, they cannot use snakes that they own. Is that right? They have to hire snakes from somewhere else?

Mr Burkevics: The Conservator guidelines is a document that is available online, and it lists what must occur with regard to the keeping of venomous snakes. It is all about the keeping of venomous snakes. There are provisions in there—and it does happen—for people to use venomous snakes for display purposes; however, in terms of keeping those snakes, particularly at night, there are specific requirements.

MS CASTLEY: And where did you get the advice? I will obviously have to go and look at your guidelines, but where did you get the advice to produce the guidelines that has it restricted in such a way?

Mr Burkevics: The guidelines have been in place and in force for a considerable number of years under the Nature Conservation Act. They were reviewed in response, I think, to a petition or a motion of the previous government, and an amendment was made that did allow the keeping of venomous snakes under certain circumstances by licence holders where it has been authorised by a veterinarian for recovery purposes, and I think I described that last time we spoke. Those arrangements have not changed, and it was an evolution of the Conservator's guidelines. The guidelines are really specific on where venomous snakes must be housed.

MS CASTLEY: And you said that that came out of an order from the previous government. Are we talking about a previous term or a previous non-Labor, 27-years-ago, government?

Mr Burkevics: I am just confirming that the Conservator guidelines are a statutory document that are agreed by the Conservator and the Conservator alone. The guidelines have been in place. They were reviewed in the last few years in response to an Assembly petition or motion, and that provision of allowing licensees to keep a snake for recovery purposes was included. But the guidelines have been in place for some time, and there are very specific requirements for where venomous snakes must be housed.

MS CASTLEY: Yes, I am not disputing that. I am trying to understand how you as the Conservator got to make the decision on how they are housed. Where did you get advice on that?

Mr Burkevics: I take advice from a wide range of people. In reviewing the guidelines, the Chief Veterinary Officer was consulted. I think we consulted with, at the time, all licensees on their views, and that was included.

MS CASTLEY: Were they supportive?

Mr Burkevics: Emergency Services and Health were also consulted, and ACT Policing as well, so it was wide consultation in relation to that update.

MS CASTLEY: And the licensees were happy?

Mr Burkevics: I know of a licensee for whom this is a matter of importance, and I think it would be fair to say they would like to see a change to the guidelines to allow the keeping of venomous snakes at people's houses. That is something that, at the moment, I am not comfortable with.

MS CASTLEY: My understanding is that the keeping of a venomous snake at a house—for these people concerned, with the licences to catch them—would be to, obviously, rehabilitate them and make sure they are okay, and then they can use them to go and, hopefully, train people. That is not the case—that training element. How did the decision get made that the people that we trust to handle the snakes are not allowed to hold them for training purposes or for rehabilitation?

Mr Burkevics: Any wild snake that is caught, as Conservator, I would like to see returned to the wild as soon as possible, and under certain conditions it is appropriate that a licensee may need to keep that snake for the purposes of recovery or treatment under veterinary guidance. There are mechanisms at the moment for snakes to be kept in particular locations, and those snakes, as long as they are returned to those facilities, can be used for a variety of purposes, whether it be training and education.

MS CASTLEY: And is there a cost to borrow them for training and education?

Mr Burkevics: That would be a matter for the keeper of those snakes.

MS CASTLEY: And when will the next review be held?

Mr Burkevics: At a point in time when it is necessary. I am aware that there is a government commitment in relation to a matter that relates to the discussion we are having.

MS CASTLEY: Yes.

Mr Burkevics: And, at the moment, there are discussions underway about the best approach to addressing that government commitment.

MS CASTLEY: Okay, thanks.

Mr Burkevics: You are welcome.

MS CARRICK: I want to go back to a previous line of questioning and go through a brief. I thought that there was a separation between the minister and the directorate when it comes to procurement. Is that true?

Mr Pepper: That is absolutely true. It is entirely appropriate, though, for the directorate to engage with the minister in terms of what the objectives are and what might be the timeframes for a particular procurement process. But then we hit a certain point in time where, essentially, it will go dark for the minister, and then we will come out the other side and then advise on the outcomes.

MS CARRICK: So, would “where you go dark” be how you undertake the procurement process? You have asked the minister to agree to an open and competitive procurement process, so what has the minister got to do with the type of procurement that you undertake?

Mr Pepper: At that point there is no open procurement, so it is entirely appropriate and open to the directorate to have those conversations with the minister. We might have conversations about what the minister or the government is looking for through a particular procurement process. We then reflect that in the documentation that goes out and that provides an even playing field for anyone who may have an interest in tendering for whatever the service or good might be. Those conversations happen on a regular basis, but once those decisions have been made and the procurement documentation is prepared, at that point it then becomes a directorate matter to progress until a decision is made.

MS CARRICK: Okay, interesting. Because I understand that you talk to the minister about what you are trying to achieve and what the objective is and all that, but I would have thought that then goes black, and then you go away and do it without asking the minister to agree to the type of procurement process that you are going to undertake. Anyway, I will move on.

Ms Orr: Ms Carrick, I am happy to clarify, for everyone’s benefit and for the benefit of the record. The advice that has been put to me throughout this process has gone to whether there should or should not be a tender; it has not been involvement in the tender process itself. So it has been—

MS CARRICK: No, but you were asked for the type of tender—you agreed to the type of tender, not whether there should be one or not.

Ms Orr: I agreed to the recommended approach.

MS CARRICK: Okay—moving along. In the brief it says that the current delivery of the stewardship program is by community-led environmental programs that are delivering high-impact outcomes across the ACT, and they are a relatively modest investment and are well-aligned with ACT government priorities. So, I just note that. Then it moves on to you wanting to test the market—fair enough. But then you start saying things like “the catchment groups are duplicating administrative overheads”. I am not sure what that has got to do with testing the market—or that there are other groups, such as Landcare ACT. It is like there is a predetermined outcome here. Why, when you are asking the minister about what sort of a tender process she wants, are you mentioning these things like “the groups are competitive”? There is a range of things that sit under the “proposing new ways to do things”. Why are the value judgements there?

Mr Burkevics: Ms Carrick, I think it is important that I clarify, please, the document you are referring to?

MS CARRICK: I have got the brief of, I think, July 25. It is a brief to the minister with recommendations. It talks about the outcomes of the strategic review and asks her to agree to an open, competitive tender process.

Mr Burkevics: I think I am aware of that brief, Ms Carrick. I think, if I am not mistaken, that is a brief released under FOI and is available on a catchment group's website.

MS CARRICK: Yes.

Mr Burkevics: I think making recommendations and providing advice was part of the review process in looking at how the existing contractual arrangements are working and the various arrangements for that. Just to clarify, I am talking specifically about the community stewardship programs only in relation to this matter. I think it was fair to reflect on the fact that, as we discussed earlier, there are three catchment groups that at the time had very specific areas, and the funding was allocated equally across those three catchment groups, so that provided a degree of inflexibility to the arrangements, and, again, the recognition that it required government to then engage with those three catchment groups. With one group to engage with, there would be efficiencies in that process. And we also note that all of the catchment groups—and this should not be taken as a criticism in any way—would of course be relying on accommodation and overheads to run their business, and there may be more efficient ways to do that. So, there are potential risks of duplication.

MS CARRICK: They will say that they are efficient. It says here in the brief, section 13:

EHP is satisfied that the programs remain aligned with government strategic environmental priorities and are good value for money.

Then, if we go to 15, it gives options. One option is to continue to fund the catchment groups under existing arrangements. It does not say there that it is good value for money, but when we go to the second option, which is to go to open tender, it says—this is the benefit—“strengthened accountability”; “improved value for money”; and “opportunity for innovation”. How do you know that the benefit of an open tender process is strengthened accountability and improved value for money? Value for money does not sit as a benefit in the existing arrangements, when in the brief it says it is value for money.

Mr Burkevics: I think I will go back to the previous answer and topic of discussion, which is that, at the legal end of things, this was an exercise designed to stay in accordance with the law—the procurement act and the Financial Management Act—and to appropriately test the market to ensure value for money. Of course, as part of that process, and allowing all entities that decide they want to apply, we have identified a preferred provider against the criteria that were advertised on the tender website.

MS CARRICK: I guess I am just highlighting an anomaly in the brief, where it says one thing here about the catchment groups and then another thing about the open tender. But as you quite rightly mention, in the Financial Management Act it says that Directorates are to ensure fair and equitable expenditure of public funds. So where is it that it says that you have to go to tender? Is it in the procurement act that you have to go to tender? Or are there other ways to ensure fair and equitable expenditure of public funds?

Mr Pepper: Probably the best place to start in answering that is underneath the procurement act, where there is the procurement regulation. Within the procurement regulation, section 9 sets out the exemption reasons where you could undertake a single select tender. For example, the sorts of exemptions that are provided for are where the goods or services to be procured are needed urgently as a result of an unforeseen event; where the need for a procurement has arisen unexpectedly and is not routine; where only one supplier can supply a particular good or service; or where it is related to an existing construction activity, for example, and it is a variation. So, the regulation steps out what is required.

MS CARRICK: Okay. Thank you; that is fine. As to point 38, I understand checking in to ensure funding continues to provide best practice outcomes and value for money, but if you do not know how the service is going to be delivered because you do not know whether you are working with the catchment groups or not, how do you know you are getting best practice outcomes and value for public money?

Mr Pepper: I guess the only way to determine that is through an open, transparent and equitable process. I mean—

MS CARRICK: But you have picked a provider now, and we do not know how the provider is going to deliver the projects.

Mr Pepper: Ms Carrick, you are asking for us to form a view or opinion absent a process to determine that something is value for money and satisfying the—

MS CARRICK: No, I am saying you have gone through a process. Landcare has put their proposal in, but if we do not know how Landcare proposes to deliver the projects that the catchments run—if they do not know if they are going to be working with the catchment groups and all their volunteers—how did you determine that they were the best ones to get the best practice outcomes and value for money?

Mr Burkevics: I absolutely acknowledge your interest, Ms Carrick. I think it is fair to say that we are straying into territory that is part of the contract negotiations, and that is part of those contract negotiations which remain live. Landcare ACT are the preferred provider, and they are engaging with government, and whomever they decide to, to progress the discussions that are underway. So, in terms of speculating on things, I think that would be risky and a bit unfair to Landcare.

MS CARRICK: I am not speculating. I am just wondering what the proposal was. With the money, will you be making savings with Landcare ACT? Will you be having to provide less money than you would with the catchment groups?

Mr Burkevics: If I am not mistaken, I think the value of the contract is actually higher than in previous years. There is a budget assigned to this tender process, so I am not seeing that there would be any need for savings. I think, if anything—and I have made these remarks previously—I am very keen in my role to ensure that as much funding that is allocated by government is used as efficiently and goes to the best outcomes for the environment that we can.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Clay?

MS CLAY: You spoke about the efficiency, from the government's point of view, of dealing with one provider, not three. I understand that in the first process, which is now closed, the catchment groups did tender together as one provider. Would that have offered government the efficiency they were looking for?

Mr Burkevics: I think the question is speculative. And of course—

MS CLAY: Did that offer government the efficiency they were looking for in one provider? It is not speculative. That process ran and closed, and you have just stated it did not in this—

Mr Burkevics: That was a tender decision that was made, and it would be inappropriate to discuss the outcomes or the process of decision-making that led to that tender outcome.

THE CHAIR: Mr Emerson?

MR EMERSON: I just want to understand this: the comment before we broke, was that this had to go to an open, competitive tender process in order for the territory to remain legally compliant with its obligations, so why in the advice to the minister were two options presented? One of the options was to progress through an open and competitive process, and the other was to continue to fund the catchment groups under existing arrangements.

Ms Orr: Sorry, Mr Emerson, can you just provide us with the document you are making reference to?

MR EMERSON: This is page 4, on the brief that was released through the FOI. It is page 120, of the FOI. There is a table with two options. The recommended option is to progress to an open and competitive process with a procurement, but the other option is to continue funding them under existing arrangements. I am struggling to square the evidence earlier that option 2 was the only option if in front of us we have a ministerial brief presenting option 1 as well as option 2? Is it true that this was the only option—to go to an open, competitive tender process?

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I think we are all just having a look at the document so that we can give you an answer that is informed.

MR EMERSON: Okay.

THE CHAIR: Do we want to come back when we have—

Ms Orr: Yes.

MR EMERSON: I am happy to linger in the awkward silence. I have summarised the table. You are not going to learn much more from—

MS LEE: Do you want to have a look at it? Pass it over—

Mr Burkevics: Mr Emerson, a reflection on that brief, which I think most of us now have open, is that I draw on the previous remarks: this is about compliance with the law. And as I think the director-general indicated before, the act provides mechanisms, but, ultimately, that is the law, so there were the options there in the brief presented.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, looking at this, what was asked of me as the minister signing off on this brief, was to:

Agree to the City and Environment Directorate progressing an open and competitive procurement process (recommended option) for the Community Stewardship and Environment Education program, Caring for Injured Wildlife, and Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch, and FrogWatch Programs.

That is the recommendation that was put to me—

MR EMERSON: Yes, it is the recommendation.

Ms Orr: Yes.

MR EMERSON: But what we heard before was that that was the only option, and it would not have been legally compliant to continue funding them under existing arrangements. So why was that option also presented, despite not being the recommended option?

Ms Orr: If you go to paragraph 15, which is the table I think you were referring to, it does have two options there. That is forming the basis of analysis. So it is through that analysis that a recommended option came through.

MR EMERSON: So why is there a decision point for the minister? If you are deciding between two options, you have got a recommended option, but why go to the minister if there is only one option?

MS CARRICK: And why does the minister get involved in what procurement method you use?

MR EMERSON: And why doesn't it say, "Option 1—illegal. Don't do this one. Option 2—only legal and compliant option."

MS CARRICK: With not even the other options for procurement are put in there—

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, if the point that you are getting to is this: did I ask for options to be put to me so that I could direct a particular outcome—

MR EMERSON: No. The point I am getting to is—

Ms Orr: I am happy to put on the record, that was not the case.

MR EMERSON: No. The point I am going to is that, before the break, we were told this was the only option that would have been legally compliant. Why were you given another option?

Ms Orr: Maybe, Mr Emerson, I could have chosen my words better—in that this is the one that will provide that assurance. I think Mr Pepper is really wanting to really speak—

Mr Pepper: That is okay. I think that is a fair point, and I think it is probably appropriate that we acknowledge that, in that table, we should have been clearer about what that meant. I think we felt—talking for the team now—the brief was clear in terms of the recommended way forward and what we put to the minister, but I acknowledge your point that is being made, and I think that is a fair criticism.

MS CLAY: Chair, I believe we have had two conflicting statements from Mr Pepper today. I do not know what the way to proceed is, but I wonder if Mr Pepper could reflect on the transcript and then come back and correct the record as to which of the two conflicting statements he has made?

THE CHAIR: Which of the two conflicting—

MS CLAY: Was there only legal option? He very clearly said in the last session that there was only one legal option. I do not know how you take that forward, but we have conflicting evidence.

MS CARRICK: And I want to ask why—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, one second, Ms Carrick. Can we come back afterwards—

Mr Pepper: Could I just respond to that, if I could please, Chair?

THE CHAIR: Yes, okay, if you are ready to respond to it now.

Mr Pepper: Ms Clay, I am not sure that my statement made just now is in conflict with my earlier statement. I think what I have done is acknowledge that, in the way the brief was put together, we could have done that differently and provided greater clarity. I am not suggesting that there are two options. I am not going back on that statement that I made earlier.

Ms Orr: I think what we most definitely could do is go away and review the transcript and have a look at the brief and, with the benefit of time, go over the documents properly—not just trying to read them at the same time as providing answers. We can give you clarity from what is there.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. And then the question, the primary question, would be the

question that led to that. That would be the primary question. I think that was a question from Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: Was there only one legal option?

THE CHAIR: That is the question that you would need to respond to.

MS CLAY: And then, if there was only one legal option, why did this brief that I discovered under FOI present two options to the minister, one of which appears to be illegal? I think that is the primary question—

THE CHAIR: That is the primary question.

MS CLAY: And if there are any conflicting statements, I suggest it is an excellent time for you to correct the record at the time at which you come back with that primary answer.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: But also, are there other procurement options that do not necessarily tender—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Carrick, we have got a—

MS CARRICK: But we just need to get it in the question on notice. This table says “options for program delivery”—

THE CHAIR: Ms Carrick—

MS LEE: With mine, it is slightly—

MS CARRICK: It is not complete—the table—so can we have complete options?

Mr Peffer: I think I understand the question that has been asked. I am happy to take that on notice and come back with something in writing

THE CHAIR: Yes. And your question, Ms Carrick, is another question, and it is a different question. It is completely different to this. So maybe we will do it in your session again.

MS CARRICK: Okay.

MS LEE: I have a question on a slightly different area. Can I confirm something? I am seeking some clarity. Mr Burkevics, there was a question earlier, from either Mr Braddock or Ms Clay—I cannot quite remember—about whether Landcare ACT, as the preferred tenderer, was going to be working with the catchment groups. You said, “That is actually nothing to do with me; it’s up to Landcare as to what they do.” Surely, for any organisation that is receiving a grant of public funds, we absolutely have the right to scrutinise this, not only as a parliament but as a committee. I want to clarify the basis on which you would say, as the person who is administering this, that

the executive who is administering it has nothing to do with what work, or what further subcontracts, an organisation that is in receipt of government funds has, and that you do not have any role in that?

Mr Burkevics: With the question in relation to Landcare—and picking up a point that you made before—Landcare have not been awarded a contract. Contract negotiations are underway. Just to clarify a point that you made there, they are not in receipt of public funds in relation to this matter at the moment.

MS LEE: Not yet, but they are the preferred tenderer.

Mr Burkevics: They are the preferred supplier.

MS LEE: Yes.

Mr Burkevics: Any comment by me that speculates on their ongoing contract negotiations with the government, or with anyone else, would be inappropriate.

MS LEE: Can I confirm this: it is not a matter of you, as the custodians of public funds, saying, “It’s not my business who Landcare, once they receive the funds, deal with.” You are trying to say, “We haven’t got to that point, so I can’t speculate at this point.”

Mr Burkevics: That is, indeed, correct.

MS LEE: Okay.

Mr Burkevics: It is very important that Landcare, as the preferred tenderer, be allowed to go through their processes and for that to be negotiated with the government.

MS LEE: Yes. I understand. I just wanted to clarify it because that is how it came across—that you were saying, “It’s nothing to do with us.”

Mr Burkevics: No.

MS LEE: Thank you. Minister, I want to ask a few questions in relation to a territory battery project.

Ms Orr: Yes.

MS LEE: A development application by Neoen was lodged in October 2024, and it was given conditional approval in April 2025 for the development of a large-scale battery energy storage system in Belconnen. It is classified as a territory battery. What is the current status of this project?

Ms Orr: I will hand over to Ms Sendaba.

Ms Sendaba: I believe that is a private proponent battery; there is no association with the territory government.

MS LEE: Even though it is being classified under the planning and development assessment report as a territory battery?

Ms Sendaba: I have not seen that report. They could be referring to the scale—whether it is utilities scale et cetera. I would have to take a look at the development application to understand what specifically—

MS LEE: All right. Are you taking that on notice?

Ms Wright: That is just the name of it; it is not—

Mr Burkevics: It is just the name.

Ms Sendaba: That is the name of it?

Ms Wright: It is just the name of it; it is not a classification.

MS LEE: It is not classified as a territory battery at all?

Ms Wright: No, I think that is just what the proponent has chosen to name it.

MS LEE: That is very confusing, isn't it?

Ms Wright: Yes.

MS LEE: That being the case, what is the government's role in relation to this, particularly when it comes to quantitatively looking at storage. Is there any role?

Ms Wright: No. The government has a role as a regulator, as the UTR. The government has a role in setting policy direction, working nationally with energy ministers to create the right environment for the AER, who is the economic regulator of distribution and transmission networks. The government does not have a direct role, though.

MS LEE: In terms of the environmental conditions, it would be the role of the government to set those. Have you had any feedback about the environmental conditions insofar as they have an impact on the viability of the project?

Mr Burkevics: Any project of that magnitude would be required to comply with the Planning Act and be subject to environmental impact approval mechanisms. I cannot recall exactly what occurred for that one, whether it was an environment significance opinion or an environmental impact statement. Certainly, any project follows, again, the Planning Act, and is considered accordingly.

MS LEE: Sure, but in this instance, with this specific project, are you able to take on notice what the result was, in terms of the environmental impact statement?

Mr Burkevics: Absolutely. Noting that the outcomes of projects that are approved by the Territory Planning Authority are available online, I would not be surprised if it

was on the development approvals website right now, potentially.

MS LEE: The development application is there. As I said, it seems a bit odd that approval was conditional in April 2025, and there seems to have been nothing further since then. As far as the government is concerned, you have not received any update whatsoever in relation to this project?

Mr Engele: In terms of the planning system, we would have to take on notice whether there have been any updates. It would not be unusual for there to be a period of time between the initial approvals and the design phase. Normally, development approval is given—and I am looking at the website now, to see what approval that is. There would then be a detailed design stage. That would normally come back, to satisfy the various conditions that have been required; then there would be the building of the system.

The experience with the territory battery in Williamsdale was that there was a considerable amount of time. The engineering question and the supplier were worked out after the development was approved. That just gives you a sense of, “It will be a battery; it will be this big, it will cover this size.” I can take on notice whether we have had any further submissions and come back on that.

MS LEE: That would be great. I think the original question that I had put to Mr Burkevics was about the feedback that you had received about the onerous nature of the environmental conditions. Was that taken on notice as well?

Mr Burkevics: I did not interpret the question in that way, about onerous conditions. I understand the—

MS LEE: Insofar as it may impact on the viability of a project; I think that is how I framed it.

Mr Burkevics: I refer to my previous answer. Of course, the Planning Act prescribes the way that development approvals must run.

MS LEE: I understand. On this specific one, did you take that on notice? I think you—

Mr Burkevics: I think the question was in relation to whether it was an EIS or an environment significant impact. I have been advised that it was an environmental impact statement, an EIS.

MS LEE: Okay.

Mr Burkevics: That would not be surprising, given a development of that magnitude.

MS LEE: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Engele: That EIS is listed on the website.

MS LEE: It is on the website?

Mr Engele: Yes.

MS CLAY: Minister, on the western edge, the Government Landscape Architect plan, and that area of work, last Friday, we heard from Minister Steel, who said that the Nature Conservation Strategy ecological mapping work and your work with the government landscape plan were the key documents that would do western edge protection. Do I have that right so far? Yes? Excellent; that is great.

The planning minister explained that western edge protection work is being led by you, as part of these projects. I gather that we now have a government landscape architect; that is fantastic. I am pleased to see that. In March this year, you announced that there was considerable work that had been done on the landscape plan. Can you tell me when you will release the first draft of the government landscape plan?

Ms Orr: Before we answer your question, Ms Clay, Mr Engele will clarify the western edge studies, who is responsible and where my role starts and stops and where Mr Steel's role starts and stops.

Mr Engele: The Government Landscape Architect was working one day a fortnight, while they were finalising their role at UC, and they commenced last week fulltime. They are in the process of doing the scoping document and setting up the office for the landscape plan.

I will explain to the committee the interface between the landscape plan and the western edge. There is work underway on the western edge, both by the planning agency, which we spoke about in the last session, and by proponents, including the Suburban Land Agency—not on the entirety of the western edge, but on particular portions of the western edge. Those environmental studies are underway, and they have not been presented. The proponents' work has not been presented to the City and Environment Directorate or the Planning Authority at this stage.

At the same time, the landscape plan is a territory-wide plan, and it is also looking at how various nature corridors connect across the ACT, which is the nature network. The work of the Landscape Architect is to consider all available information, which most likely will include the information that comes from proponents, about the environmental values in the western edge, as well as looking at it from a more strategic perspective and identifying which areas should be preserved, in terms of natural corridors, and where other areas that are possibly degraded should be retained for future restoration.

That work is only just starting up. We can come back, obviously, once we have more detail about the scope and how things will roll out in more detail. In terms of the work that has already been undertaken, I can pass to—

MS CLAY: I might come back to the original question.

Mr Engele: Yes, of course.

MS CLAY: Thank you for all of that information, but the question was: when will

you release the first draft of the government landscape plan?

Mr Engele: The scoping of that is being developed at the moment. I have not provided advice to the minister on the timeframes for that.

MS CLAY: Is this work likely to be completed in this term?

Ms Orr: Before going to that question, I will add to the previous answer. The government has taken the policy position that the work we have been doing to map environmentally significant matters across the ACT will be the foundation layer of the landscape plan. Certainly, that work, as you will be aware, has been ongoing for a number of years, and continues to be ongoing. That work, I believe, is available through ACTmapi; you can already see it.

Going to your question about putting more of a specific focus on what this is working around, with the landscape network, and how it interfaces with other parts, that is where the work of the Landscape Architect will come into play. We will be building on work, and we will continue to progress that, particularly now that the Landscape Architect is on board fulltime.

MS CLAY: Excellent. Will the protection of the western edge be completed this term?

Mr Engele: The final piece of work is the planning and transport strategy, which is the legislative document that sits at the top of the planning system. The work of the Landscape Architect will provide input into that. It will define the urban growth boundary, and it will, I think, answer many questions in relation to what areas should or should not be—

MS CLAY: On timing, though, will that work be completed this term?

Ms Orr: There are a number of components that feed into this work. Certainly, the intention is that that is the timeframe we are working towards.

MS CLAY: Excellent; thank you. Mr Engele, you might be able to help me out here, because you were there for the other session. I believe I heard Minister Steel say that Minister Orr was primarily responsible for protection of the western edge. I am trying to work out which minister we should direct questions to.

Ms Orr: I actually had a discussion with Minister Steel, because I was listening to the same hearing. His comments were in reference to environmentally significant matters within it, which would come under the Nature Conservation Act and would sit within my portfolio. The point you were going to, though, was the mapping and the studies underway.

MS CLAY: Which minister is responsible for protection of the western edge? Which minister do we direct questions to about protecting the western edge? It was not meant to be a stumper; we are just trying to work out where we get the information from. Who is responsible for the work? Who is responsible for the delivery? Who is responsible for the consultation, and First Nations consultation? There are lots of

questions that flow. Who do we send those to?

Mr Engele: In relation to the work for the planning and transport strategy, which includes the definition of an urban growth boundary, that sits in the planning space. In relation to matters around nature conservation, that sits with the minister for the environment.

MS CLAY: Public consultation and First Nations consultation on protection of the western edge: is that with Minister Orr?

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, are you asking this in the context of the studies that are currently underway?

MS CLAY: The questions I want to ask are: when will you run public consultation on which areas of the western edge will be protected? When will you run First Nations consultation on which areas of the western edge will be protected? We are not even asking the questions; we are still trying to find out which minister to ask.

Mr Engele: That will be defined in the project plan for the landscape plan. To date, there has been engagement between the Landscape Architect and CED's traditional custodian adviser. Probably, the focus will be on traditional custodian engagement, rather than broader First Nations—

Ms Orr: I think there is a step before getting to my role. Minister Steel currently has the responsibility for the studies that are going on, out in the western edge area, in identifying the environmental matters and significance under the Planning Act, because he is the one who declares—

Mr Engele: Yes.

Ms Orr: It is not my portfolio; if I get this wrong, Mr Engele, please tell me. With respect to any declaration of nature reserves—I think that is the question that is being asked, about whether, in looking at the western edge, there should be a nature reserve or not—it sits with the Chief Planner, under Minister Steel's planning portfolio. The studies that are currently occurring are to inform decisions around that. Once decisions are taken, certainly, any areas that are identified to be nature reserves or of environmental significance that we would want to bring into the conservation network and have as part of the landscape plan would then come under my oversight, under the landscape—

MS CLAY: I might lodge a bunch of questions on notice, to whichever minister is responsible for these, and we will get that to come back, so that we know who is responsible for the different bits.

Minister, can we get an update on when the Nature Conservation Act, with the changes that will protect the western edge, will be brought forward? Will it be in the first or the second tranche of that legislation that will cover the ecological mapping and the protection of the western edge work?

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, the most recent advice to me is that we are looking at progressing

reforms of the Nature Conservation Act, following the settlement of the Nature Conservation Strategy, which is being finalised. There are processes still happening and cabinet is still to make a decision as to what shape that takes.

Mr Engele: Could I clarify that the question relates specifically to the western edge?

MS CLAY: Yes. I understand that there are two tranches in the Nature Conservation Act work, and I understand that tranche 2 may well happen next term; please jump in, if I have any of that information wrong. I understand that the Nature Conservation Act work was one of the vessels that it was said would do the ecological mapping and the western edge protection. I am trying to work out whether the western edge protection and decision-making will be in tranche 1 or tranche 2.

Mr Engele: Could I clarify something? The Nature Conservation Act review is specifically on the legislation itself. It does not go to identification of geographic areas. The Nature Conservation Strategy does talk to a nature-positive approach, in doing the mapping work. The mapping work which has been undertaken thus far—and there will be more to occur—will be a product of the landscape plan. That work will then feed into the planning and transport strategy. The Nature Conservation Act review is looking at legislative powers and making those tweaks, but it does not go to a specific geographic area. There is work, as I have mentioned, in relation to mapping, the landscape plan and all those things that are looking at geospatial ACT and what areas should and should not be preserved.

Ms Orr: Noting that nothing has yet been put to me to take forward to cabinet, and cabinet has made no decisions. It is a very early part of the process.

MS CLAY: Yes, which is why I am concerned about timing, given how far through the term we are; hence the questions.

Ms Orr: Ms Clay, the questions you are asking go across multiple areas. You have already said that you will put a lot of questions on notice, and we can go away and have a look at those. I am sure the directorate can look, in their entirety, across all the portfolios and get you a response.

MS CLAY: Sure.

MS LEE: Can I go to microplastics? A New South Wales study showed 100 per cent of New South Wales rivers contaminated with microplastics. What monitoring is done by the ACT government, in terms of the presence of microplastics?

Ms Orr: While Mr Lawton is making his way to the table, would you like to repeat the question?

MS LEE: What monitoring is done in ACT waterways for the presence of microplastics?

Mr Lawton: We do not currently monitor for microplastics in the waterways.

MS LEE: If that is not being done, do you have access to any data that will indicate a

level of contamination in ACT waterways of microplastics?

Mr Lawton: Not as far as I am aware, no.

MS LEE: Is there a plan to do any assessment?

Ms Orr: It is possible that Icon Water does monitoring. As it is a little bit separate from us, we would not have information on that.

Mr Engele: Yes, we would have to take on notice whether Icon Water does monitor for microplastics. I am not sure, so I will have to take it on notice.

MS LEE: Sure. In terms of the directorate, you do not do it?

Ms Wright: No. It would be a matter for the EPA, for any contamination risk. We can take it on notice, as Mr Engele said, and provide further advice.

MS LEE: Okay. On risk, is it purely the EPA that looks at measures to prevent contamination or does the directorate have any role in that?

Mr Lawton: Yes, it is purely for the EPA, who will undertake water quality monitoring on behalf of the government. That is not something that this minister is responsible for.

MS LEE: In terms of broader contamination of water, is it the directorate's responsibility to look at it, in terms of stormwater run-off and that kind of thing?

Mr Lawton: Yes, that is right. We do monitor the state of the lakes and rivers in the ACT, under the Water Resources Act. But we are not monitoring for microplastics at the moment.

MS LEE: Who determines how you divide that up? You say that you look at it for other contaminants but not microplastics. How is that divided up?

Mr Lawton: Microplastics is an emerging issue, so we have not tackled that yet. We have a monitoring system that EPA runs. It looks at other pollutants in the waterways. On their monitoring advice, we would close a lake for blue-green algae. But we are not addressing microplastics in that way.

MS LEE: You get advice from EPA to close the lakes for things like blue-green algae, but there is nothing in place yet in terms of reporting to you about the presence of microplastics. Thank you.

MR EMERSON: I want to go back to some of the contract discussions, but I want to focus less on the catchment groups and more on the three organisations—Conservation Council, SEE-Change and the Canberra Environment Centre. Mr Pepper, you mentioned at the beginning of this session what the requirements for a single-select tender process were. Could you remind me of what they are?

Mr Pepper: I can. The exemptions provided for in the regulation to the act?

MR EMERSON: Yes.

Mr Peffer: Would you like me to read them out?

MR EMERSON: Just that one—what is required. What are any of the conditions that can be met for a single-source or select tender?

Mr Peffer: For example, the goods or services to be procured are needed urgently as a result of an unforeseen event outside the territory's control, or where the need for a procurement has arisen unexpectedly and is not routine. Mr Emerson, is there something in particular that you want to hear about?

MR EMERSON: There is one about where it is the only place that can provide that good or service.

Mr Peffer: Yes. If it is known that only one supplier or a limited number of suppliers can supply a particular good or service, because it is a procured artwork, there is a need to protect patents, copyrights or exclusive rights of proprietary information, or a supplier with specialist knowledge or equipment is required.

MR EMERSON: The Conservation Council's contract, which commenced on 30 March 2026 for \$210,000, is for "community advocacy and policy development in emissions reduction and the environment". That is the name of the contract. The short description is: "To support the ACT community to advocate for a safe climate and healthy environment and provide feedback to inform the development of government policy in emissions reduction and the environment." Does anyone know of any other organisation in the ACT that does community advocacy and policy development in emissions reduction and the environment?

Ms Wright: No, we do not, but that was the purpose of this process—to go out and invite all applicants that may be able to provide that service to come forward in this process. We had, as you are probably aware, a two-round process. The first round was for those entities to express interest. For those that were actually able to provide those services through that first round, they undertook the more detailed process.

MR EMERSON: Did you discover through that process any other organisation other than the Conservation Council that does community advocacy and policy development in emissions reduction and the environment?

Ms Malouf: I have read and understood the privilege statement. With regard to the procurement, I am not sure. I will have to take on notice whether we are allowed to divulge whether anyone else applied. I would like to check that, if that is okay. Certainly, they did apply for that. There were three different components to that work. As Fiona Wright said, it is an opportunity for testing the market, because it had not been done for many years.

MR EMERSON: It is quite a niche area, to advocate both for a safe climate and healthy environment, and to provide feedback to inform the development of government policy in emissions reduction and the environment. You could put,

“Conservation Council ACT, what do we do?” And that is what they would say. It would seem unlikely that there would be any other organisation that is doing that in the ACT.

Ms Malouf: “Unlikely” does not mean—we cannot assume.

MR EMERSON: This is the part of government responsible for this policy area. You would think you would be aware of any other organisation that was doing this kind of work. It is a pretty small town.

Ms Malouf: We have to test the market. That was what we had to do, to make sure there was not anyone else doing, or interested in doing, that work going forward.

MR EMERSON: You said there were three pieces of work. You are talking about the three different contracts?

Ms Malouf: The three different contracts.

MR EMERSON: Earlier, when we spoke about the catchment groups, we heard that the hope was that one provider would come forward, which happened, and Landcare has been selected as the preferred provider. Was it the same hope in this case, that one provider would bid for all three of the contracts?

Ms Malouf: We did not have a predetermined thought on what that would look like. We went out with deliverables that we needed, and how that looked was determined by who applied.

MR EMERSON: What do you mean by that last part—how the deliverables looked?

Ms Malouf: If one applied for all three, they would go through the same process as if three had applied for each one. We would determine that by the strength of the application and by certain criteria. We did not have a predetermined idea that it would go to one. We did not do that at all.

MR EMERSON: What analysis was done to determine for that tender process that no additional funding would be provided to these organisations or through these contracts?

Ms Malouf: We had to go out with the funding that was available to us.

MR EMERSON: And whose decision was that?

Ms Malouf: That is a decision of government on what funding is available.

MR EMERSON: Was a ministerial brief provided, asking whether more funding might be made available?

Ms Malouf: This went across—

Ms Orr: I think it is all right to say, because it is in all the FOI documents and it is

publicly available, that there is reference to budget processes and taking bids forward that were not successful.

MR EMERSON: Can you walk through that—

Ms Orr: Funding could not have been increased beyond what was available because, through budgetary processes, no additional funding was made available for community group funding, in line with the timing of these procurements.

MR EMERSON: It was considered, but it was decided, “No, there will be no extra funding”?

Ms Orr: I can take forward business cases to cabinet, to ERC, for consideration. Ultimately, what ERC decides to prioritise is for ERC. The decision they made, when I took forward my proposal, was that there were higher priorities at this point in time to increasing the funding, based on the business case proposal. Mr Emerson, where this gets a little bit confusing is that I acknowledge there is funding in this budget for community groups, but these were different budget processes.

MR EMERSON: Sure. I am just trying to understand whether funding was sought. It sounds like it was sought by you.

Ms Orr: Anything that was an increase would be new expenditure, and it would have to go through standard budgetary processes. Where there is an existing allocation, that is covered. That is my understanding.

MR EMERSON: In this case, you sought funding; no luck at ERC. We can give them a hard time about that, but we can thank you for trying.

Ms Orr: I am sure you can give them a hard time about many things that did not get through to the budget, because there are always more requests than there is money.

MR EMERSON: There was a two-stage process for this procurement, I understand. Stage 1 is an EOI, I guess, where you are seeing whether there is anyone else in the ACT who can do both climate and environment advocacy and policy development. What was the purpose of the second stage? I would be very interested to know—and I think you have said you will take this on notice—whether there was interest expressed for each of the three contracts after that first stage, the EOI process, by any organisation other than the organisations that won the tenders. The second question is contingent on that: what was the purpose of the second stage, once you knew, “It’s only the organisations that have essentially already got these funding packages”?

Ms Malouf: The two-stage process allowed us to explore what was out there, first. The second stage was much more specific on the requirements. The first EOI process does not give us the level of detail we need to say, “Yes, they can.” The activities are not mapped out in the EOI process. It is a two-stage one to allow the opportunity for others to participate, should any others want to participate or be able to participate, and maybe to rule out organisations that would potentially tender for the request for tender process but could not meet those. They had to meet stage 1, the REOI, to get to stage 2. That is why there were two stages.

MR EMERSON: Okay, I understand. If we imagine this other hypothetical scenario where it is just a select tender for those three suppliers, you are essentially skipping stage 1, and you would be going directly to stage 2; is that right?

Ms Malouf: A single-select requires a request for quote; that is what a single-select would do—a request to market. Because of the longer term funding for this, it was difficult to be able to do that, as we were trying to secure longer term funding. We have secured, for the three organisations, four-year funding, plus one, plus one—effectively, six years of funding. With the higher level of detail in the documentation, if it was a single-select, we would have to ask at the single-select stage.

MR EMERSON: Finally, I understand that one of the changes here was to make sure that everyone is complying with the Secure Local Jobs Code. During the community day, we heard from SEE-Change that, when they are applying for grants through the year, because they do not get all that much funding—this is courtesy of questioning from Mr Braddock—they are required not to use fulltime staff in the delivery of those extra grants, which seems to be in violation of the Secure Local Jobs Code. They said, “The contracts are arranged in a way where, for us to continue operating through these smaller grants, we’re basically violating the contract set out by the government, because of the requirements put into those grant rounds.” Are you aware of that conflict and confusion? Have they raised that with you? Is there any scope for addressing that?

Ms Malouf: Our community organisations are not 100 per cent voluntary. They do have paid positions as well, so that is where it gets a little blurry, for want of a better word. That requires us to hold them to the same standard, the Secure Local Jobs Code. That requires us, because they have paid employees as well, to meet our procurement guidelines as a public service.

Ms Wright: As Mr Pepper said earlier, we have heard that feedback from the organisations through this process. We are consolidating that feedback, and we are looking at the ways in which we can effectively carry out our obligations but still take on board some of that feedback from the organisations. That is under active consideration.

MR EMERSON: It might be about changing how the grants work, as opposed to scrapping the code. Other members might want to review the code; I am not sure.

MS LEE: No comment—not here, anyway!

Ms Orr: It is fair to say that the central policy sits with a different area, and it will ultimately be their decision.

MR EMERSON: Yes, sure.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, you were not definitive in your response to Mr Emerson’s question. Did you take forward a budget bid to increase the funding for this contract?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, again, as I said, it is in the documents that we did go through the budget process to increase funding for environmental groups. I cannot remember the exact title of the proposal that was taken forward, but it is reflected in the EOI documents. From memory, our proposal did not progress very far. It was clear very early that, in that financial year, there would not be additional funds available.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. Also, I am trying to understand why the environmental groups were not able to obtain an MOU similar to what applied with the horseracing MOU, which was for \$40 million over five years, but it did not have to go through any procurement process, as has been described today.

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, it is Friday afternoon; come on!

MR EMERSON: A perfect time for it!

MR BRADDOCK: Yes, I would love to hear the answer.

Ms Orr: The MOU sits with a different minister. My understanding—I have never held that portfolio and I do not have knowledge of the inner workings of it—is that it is a particular approach based on a whole range of reasons that would not apply to this.

MR BRADDOCK: In accordance with the same Financial Management Act to which you have been referring this afternoon?

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, I am not going to be drawn and make comments on the racing MOU. That is not in my portfolio. It is not my area for response.

MR BRADDOCK: Fair enough.

MS LEE: Ms Malouf, you talked about some organisations having paid employees, which is why they are held to the same standard in terms of the Secure Local Jobs Code. Are organisations that do not have paid employees held to the same standard as well?

Ms Malouf: I think it is about categories. If they have paid employees, the Secure Local Jobs is very prescriptive as to what we are allowed to do. For contracts over \$200,000, and if they have paid employees, we are required to go through a process. We were following the process that we have been given. I am not sure whether a different process would apply if you did not have paid employees. As far as I can see, it does not look like it, from looking at the secure local jobs act.

MS LEE: Certainly, we also received feedback from the community organisations during the community day that, for example, for some of the really small organisations that might receive \$100,000 from the government, it is very onerous for them to indicate that they comply with modern slavery laws—that kind of thing. Obviously, there will be a different standard that they have to comply with than, say, an Officeworks or whatever it might be, or making sure that they only have local people there—that kind of thing. Is the system flexible enough to ensure that those types of differences are taken into consideration, so that it is not an unnecessarily overbearing burden on these small organisations that are run mostly by volunteers?

Ms Malouf: I can speak a little bit to this. There have been some changes as of 1 July on a direct approach for procurement. These certainly were not under \$100,000; they are in excess of \$3 million between the three groups. Feedback has been taken on. The direct procurement approach allows government to seek quotes for between \$25,000 and \$500,000 for goods and services, or \$25,000 and \$1 million for construction work, where you can seek three quotes; one quote from a certified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander business; or one quote from a small to medium entity that is also located in the ACT region. I think that change potentially will help those organisations that you are talking about.

MS LEE: That was 1 July this year?

Ms Malouf: 1 July this year.

MR BRADDOCK: Going back to the climate strategy, I want to dig further into—

Ms Orr: Are you sure you don't want to talk about racing?

MR BRADDOCK: Well, you were not able to answer the question, so I will have to ask something else, Minister.

Ms Orr: It has been a long session.

MR BRADDOCK: Going back to the climate strategy and the validity or otherwise of the government's modelling of transport emissions, I want to understand whether we are actually on track to get towards net zero in that space.

Ms Orr: Ms Sendaba has come back to the table and is really enthusiastic about answering all of your questions, Mr Braddock. If you go to the overarching framework, there is a section there, on page 13, which will certainly start to show some of the more indicative modelling that is there. I think your specific question, though, goes to transport emissions?

MR BRADDOCK: It does. I question whether the modelling utilised on page 13 is realistic. I have in my possession, Chair—and I am quite happy to table it—an article by Dr Ben Elliston, from the Australian Electric Vehicle Association, ACT branch, saying that, based on the current trajectory, transport emissions in 2045 will be 10 times more than what you have modelled; hence my question.

Ms Orr: This is the beauty of modelling: it is based on assumptions, and everyone can have different views on what comes out from there. Once it is tabled, we can have a look at that. Bethel, do you want to have a bit of a discussion?

Ms Sendaba: Sure, I can speak to that. We have done our own modelling with respect to the trajectory for transport emissions, and we have been monitoring, through our greenhouse gas inventory each year, the results with respect to transport. We have also reached out to the author of the report, and the association, to have a conversation, to understand the assumptions that were built into their modelling, so that we can see what those points of difference are. We have not yet had that discussion, but I hope

that we will be able to shortly; then we can understand where the points of difference are.

MR BRADDOCK: I agree with the minister that assumptions can be deadly, in terms of modelling, but it appears that the ACT are assuming an 80 to 90 per cent EV share of new vehicle sales by 2030; is that correct?

Ms Sendaba: Within the ACT government modelling?

MR BRADDOCK: Yes.

Ms Sendaba: We have set a target for new sales for EVs, and that is what we have modelled against.

MR BRADDOCK: Do you think current policy settings will get you from the current EV sales percentage, which is, I believe, 34 per cent, up to that target in four years?

Ms Sendaba: There will be a range of factors that influence how we are able to achieve that outcome. We have made significant progress to date on EV sales. For the most recent month, it was in the 40s, in terms of percentage of new car sales being electric vehicles registered in the territory. We continue to undertake a range of different programs in support of EVs, especially through infrastructure and the like, to continue to see the outcomes there.

MR BRADDOCK: Instead of just relying on an external fuel crisis, over which the ACT government has no control, as it has repeatedly told me, what interventions is the ACT government planning to do in the market to achieve such a dramatic behavioural shift from 34 per cent to 80 to 90 per cent in four years? Do you have any modelling that supports those interventions?

Ms Wright: I will clarify something. The figure for June this year is 43 per cent. That has been growing month on month since prior to the fuel crisis. The fuel crisis definitely has brought that into sharper focus for many people in the community. What we are seeing now is that it is not a linear progression. We are seeing quite an exponential rise.

We have moved past the early adopters and we are now into the early majority of people taking on EVs. That will compound; people are seeing EVs as being very familiar now in the community. It is something that we are taking into consideration in our modelling. As Ms Sendaba said, we will seek to check with experts such as Dr Elliston as to what his assumptions have been in his modelling. We are always open to having those conversations and seeing how those assumptions may differ from the ones that we have included.

Especially in the EV sense, the work that has been undertaken and has been done for many years, since 2020, and the supports that have been put in place will continue to compound and provide that platform for more and more people to take up EVs. As you know, EVs are not a decision that someone takes overnight. It is usually a decision where people think, "When my vehicle needs to be replaced, this is something that I'll look at." We are now seeing some of those benefits arise and

people taking up those options.

MR BRADDOCK: Given the average age of a vehicle in the vehicle fleet is about 11 years and the used vehicle fleet is actually the greater proportion of the fleet in sales, what are you doing to incentivise ACT residents to ensure they also have a sufficient uptake in the used vehicle fleet?

Ms Wright: We think through direct action, through the ACT government having our own internal policy on making sure that we buy electric vehicles wherever fit for purpose, which means that, as those turn over, there are more used vehicles available in the market. I might also invite Ms Malouf to talk about some of the changes that have been made to the Sustainable Household Scheme to make sure that loans are available for people to make those purchases not just of new vehicles but also of used vehicles.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you for the offer, but I do not need further information on the Sustainable Household Scheme—which, by the way, was implemented under a Greens minister. I need more in terms of understanding what the actions are that are going to be able to drive the behavioural change necessary. Those programs are in place, but we need to get a very long way very quickly in terms of transport emissions if we are to achieve our emissions targets.

Ms Orr: Mr Braddock, if you will indulge me—because it is Friday afternoon—I believe the Sustainable Household Scheme was a Labor election commitment and was delivered by a former Greens minister and the Chief Minister.

MR BRADDOCK: If that is the case, I stand corrected, Minister. We need greater ambition than currently sits within the Sustainable Household Scheme if we are to achieve our emissions reduction targets. What is the plan and what is the modelling to show that we are actually on track to achieve that?

Ms Orr: I think we have been very transparent. The modelling shows that we are not on track to meet it, and that is why we need to take more actions. But the actions that we have, as I said in my previous answer, will continue to pay benefits and dividends in EV take-up.

I am just talking about EVs. I know that our strategy also talks further about mode shift and active travel, which will also be elements, but, in terms of EVs, apart from there being national incentives in terms of tax incentives for EVs, there are the local incentives in terms of stamp duty and registration benefits for emissions-based rego and also in terms of getting past some of the barriers to people buying EVs, such as charging infrastructure, where the government continues to play a role in advocating and incentivising EV charging infrastructure being installed.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. Noting that it is Friday afternoon, I am on my last question. I draw attention to the page 35 of the action plan, which refers to “continue to plan, construct and operate light rail”. Minister, was it seriously a consideration of the government to stop operating the light rail?

Ms Orr: No, it was not a consideration of government to do that. Mr Braddock, that

was included for the contextual information, because a lot of the feedback we received was that people would like to see the full suite of measures being taken. Obviously, it is a component of, even if not an initiative of, this particular action plan. It is painting that bigger contextual picture that it was included. I again confirm that we are not stopping it and we were not considering it. Others might, but not us.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: How is the government measuring sustainability of government services and assets across energy use, electrification, water climate resilience and circular procurement?

Ms Malouf: The ACT government has been looked after by CED, an enterprise sustainability platform, where all of the water, energy, electricity and gas bills from every government site are fed into a platform. That platform helps directorates to understand what their usage is at every site that they have. That can be as small as a government-owned community hall up to government buildings and the like. Directorates can have a look at that.

Our zero emission government team work with those directorates to identify anomalies. For example, if electricity use at a certain building has gone up substantially but there is no real reason why, they can actually send in our technical officers to have a look and determine if there is an error or there is some kind of problem with the building. If it is just increased usage, the team can then work with them. There is a zero emission government loan fund, where the emissions can be reduced and the sustainability can be improved in the building with a revolving loan fund available to directorates to improve the sustainability of that building. It has been going for several years.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Is the database an internal database or is that publicly accessible? Can people see what is going on?

Ms Malouf: It is an internal database which all the bills go into as they are provided by the energy water retailer.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Can any directorate see how other directorates are going, to see a whole of government—

Ms Malouf: Directorates can look at their own area, and it is all reported through the minister's annual report—which is where I will hand over to my colleague.

Ms Sendaba: It is reported through the minister's annual report. The government has its own net zero emissions targets and there are a range of specific projects and initiatives that go towards government sustainability both in terms of directly improving and impacting the government's own emissions but also using policy to, I guess, build capacity and support through purchasing power. For example, we run a pilot policy on low-carbon concrete which is used on infrastructure projects across the board for government. As part of the Canberra Big Battery Project, we have had the big utility scale battery. As well as that, we have installed behind-the-metre batteries at a number of other sites, government office buildings and schools. Of course, there is the electrification work that has been supported across different government buildings as well. They are just a few examples.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Am I right that the principal climate accountability measures, participation counts and the publication of an annual inventory—

Ms Sendaba: Yes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Where are the targets for actual emissions reduced, energy saved and household bill impacts? Are there targets for those?

Ms Sendaba: Each year, through the Greenhouse Gas Inventory, we—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: And that is a—

Ms Sendaba: That is an ACT-wide inventory that captures our emissions across the territory. It does not go as far as household, but it is broken down into four categories of emissions that are recorded, and that is reported annually. That is set up in the legislation as well. The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act sets out that we must produce an inventory and the timeframe upon which that must be published each year.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: The climate change, energy and water output as at 2026-27 has a total cost of \$65.152 million, but there is not a huge number of high-level accountability indicators. How is the value for that money accounted for across the expenditure? How is the value accounted for across that expenditure?

Ms Sendaba: So you are referring to the total dollars across that category in the budget and then the separate accountability indicators?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Yes.

Ms Sendaba: We assess on a project-by-project basis in terms of, I guess, assessment for establishing a particular initiative or project. Generally speaking, we are undertaking a cost-benefit analysis to determine what the amount of abatement is and how much that will cost. We look quite a lot at the co-benefits—for example, whole-of-lifecycle running costs and choosing to install batteries at specific government building sites, with the intention there to reduce operating costs as well as give us emissions benefits. There is a range of different ways in which we account for and report against the expenditure spent. But the key accountability indicator—and we do report against this—is that we have published that report, that greenhouse gas inventory, and the emissions against that; that is, how we have actually tracked against emissions.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

MS CLAY: Minister, millions of dollars from the ACT government, the commonwealth and the ACT community and two decades of volunteer effort have brought eastern bettongs, eastern quolls and bush-stone curlews back from local extinction out at Mulligans. It is a huge success. Canberra is really, really proud of the results. But now we have H5N1 coming in and those species face the risk of re-extinction in the ACT. What plans and preparation have the ACT government got in place for protection, evacuation, relocation and ongoing husbandry for those three

species in the event of an outbreak?

Ms Orr: Mr Burkevics, would you like to—

Mr Burkevics: Yes; thanks, Minister. Ms Clay, the threat of H5 bird flu is of course really concerning. We have seen some concerning developments in the last 24 hours with regard to local transmission between seabirds and an announcement that it is non-eradicable. Those risks are increasing, and the chance of local spread is definitely there.

With regard to the species at Mulligans Flat, I know that in Mulligans Flat, the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust, in particular, have applied for a grant to provide some shelters for their species of concern. I am aware that the Parks and Conservation Service has been supporting where necessary with the development of that. As to our local plans across the broader ACT and different areas, we are not completely clear on what the outcomes or impacts will be of the H5 bird flu on individual species. That will be something that will need to be monitored carefully. But there are indeed shelters that have been constructed out there in the event to house those species.

MS CLAY: By Woodlands Wetlands Trust?

Mr Burkevics: With support. Yes, they applied for a commonwealth grant as the—

MS CLAY: That is great. Is that the only work that the ACT government has in chain to protect these three species at the moment?

Mr Burkevics: There are a lot of work going on with all species. We have a biosecurity risk assessment, done by a biosecurity ecologist assessing the risk to all species; plans for the deployment of floating wetlands, across the ACT; the funding by government for a dedicated biosecurity response team over the forward years; close engagement with all of our wildlife and environmental groups about how to do the best we can to build resilience of existing species; and continue surveillance activities and respond accordingly in accordance with to our plans.

MS CLAY: What is the value of the commonwealth grant that the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust just got to protect these three species at risk?

Mr Burkevics: I would probably refer you to the commonwealth website. As the administering authority for that grant. I am sure that that would be available online.

MS CLAY: Okay. Is there any other funding that has been allocated by the ACT government to avoid the risk of re-extinction?

Mr Burkevics: In terms of those species or more broadly?

MS CLAY: For those species out at Mulligans?

Mr Burkevics: No.

MS CLAY: So the only funding that we have is that commonwealth funding through

the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust?

Mr Burkevics: That funding was applied for by the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust to build shelters and, of course, as I mentioned before, the government has invested over \$5 million more broadly in biosecurity response measures over \$5 million in the forwards to build a highly capable response team, in addition to the biosecurity assessment work that is ongoing.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MS LEE: Minister, in January 2025, you received a letter from Dr Peter Bridgewater from ANU, seeking support for Canberra to apply to become an international wetland city, and Dr Bridgewater cited many benefits to that. You responded in September 2025, rejecting this proposal and, in that response, you cited other government investment priorities in catchment management. What are some of those other priorities and how does that prevent the ACT from attaining an international wetland city status?

Ms Orr: I might ask Mr Lawton to come back to the table. Ms Lee, I hope you can appreciate that this correspondence exchange was a little while ago. I will get Mr Lawton to run you through some of the details as he works on this every day and, if there is anything further, we will take it on notice and get back to you.

MS LEE: Sure. I will give additional context. The other reason that was cited was the significant resourcing involved in this. What assessment did you do?

Ms Orr: From memory, the directorate went away and did what signing up to this commitment would undertake, the obligations that it would require and the work that would be under that, and then it was based on an assessment of those commitments involved in progressing this matter and where we would not necessarily have funding available and might need to look to redirect funding. That is my memory of what happened. But, again, given it was quite a bit away, I do not have the correspondence in front of me. Mr Lawton, do you have anything further to add?

Mr Lawton: Yes. I think the government's commitments to the Healthy Waterways Program are pretty clear. I could go through them. There is a long list of stuff that we have done and—

MS LEE: No, that is okay.

Mr Lawton: —that we have sort of put on the table what we are going to do. But I think your question is specifically why we did not sign this document.

MS LEE: Yes. There must have been an assessment behind “It is not worth it; so we are not going to go ahead with it.” I am going to the reason behind that.

Ms Orr: Ms Lee, I do not think we have that information on hand. How about I just take it on notice and we will get back to you?

MS LEE: Sure—and then you can review the letters as well.

Ms Orr: Yes, we can have a look at the source information.

MS LEE: Thank you.

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, Ms Wright has a correction to make.

Ms Wright: Yes. Miss Nuttall asked a question earlier on Healthy Waterways funding on the previous programs. I just wanted to make a slight clarification. I said earlier that all the previous funding has been expended. There is approximately \$38,000 remaining to be expended. But all major assets and project components have been delivered and there are only minor works remaining, which are final landscaping and vegetation establishment which are dependent on the spring growing conditions. It is a minor difference but worth noting.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Miss Nuttall, unless you have a really quick question—

MISS NUTTALL: I do not think mine is quick enough to ask in the time remaining.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to put it on notice?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. 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:

ACT Electoral Commission

Cantwell AM CSC, Mr Damian, Electoral Commissioner, ACT Electoral Commission

Spence, Mr Rohan, Deputy Electoral Commissioner, ACT Electoral Commission

Hickey CA, Mr Scott, Chief Finance Officer, ACT Electoral Commission

THE CHAIR: We welcome the Office of the Electoral Commissioner. Please note that, as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth, as 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.

Commissioner, one of the issues you raised in your 2024 election report was the titanic threat of artificial intelligence on the integrity of the electoral process. In particular, you noted that “the current regulatory framework in the ACT to combat the use of AI to influence the outcomes of an election is insufficient”. In this regard, what progress have you made in developing a strategy and a mechanism to mitigate or eliminate the negative impacts of AI on our electoral process, if any?

Mr Cantwell: Thank you, Chair. It is a very important topic and, as you have identified, one we identified and reported on in our 24 election report. In that context, I would add that, increasingly, I think electoral management bodies such as Elections ACT are finding that, on top of the management of processes over which we have more direct control—that is, wherever the community or candidates or stakeholders engage with us directly and we engage and provide electoral services—we have very limited reach or control as an electoral body over the information in which the community is working and living within, which is increasingly complex and increasingly dominated by information and misinformation. It is a much broader societal issue than just one related to us or indeed to electoral integrity. But our role is, of course, to ensure that we deliver the most trusted, transparent, secure and accessible electoral services. Having identified that in the context of its impact upon information that is available to community, to the voters and to all political stakeholders, it is a concern. It is changing rapidly, I think we can all identify that, and we are concerned about it so much in that it impacts trust in the electoral process, of which we have a statute responsibility.

What have we done about it? Firstly, we have identified it in the report. We have spoken about it in committees and again here today. We have engaged with our fellow jurisdictions across Australia and the AEC about this very emerging challenge. We have considered and shared across each other’s jurisdictions as to what we are seeing and how it is impacting how voters are informed or misinformed. We have looked at examples such as South Australia and Tasmania where there is a legislative response. We spoke about that in our, at that point, draft response to the Integrity Committee’s final report into the 2024 election inquiry. That will be tabled soon.

So, yes, we have identified it, we are engaging across the board, we are looking across where we get advice from federal and other security agencies as to how that is impacting the role of electoral management bodies and, again, offered to the

Assembly in our report that at least part of the solution, I think, rests in a legislative response. Again, those examples give some practical examples of how that has been applied in process. I have to say, though, that the South Australian example or the example of their election and how they have applied their legislation relates to an effective ban on deepfakes, AI-generated content, without authorisation by the person being depicted, but we are not clear on that yet. The result of the South Australian election as a process is under review and, rather than dig deeper into that for the time being, I did not want to interfere with their processes occurring in South Australia. Do I do not have any practical examples from their experience in the South Australian state election of late to bring back to the community or the committee here, but that is pending, after their inquiry has settled. That is where that stands at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Are there any plans for a strategy or is the recommendation just a legislative response?

Mr Cantwell: I think it is a combination of whatever we can all collectively do. Again, I go to the point that this is broader than just what we can do. Of course, it is in the context of electoral integrity and electoral services. Of course, we can make recommendations, and we would always be ready to contribute to the discussions and provide advice to the Assembly about the impact of any proposed legislation, how it would look and how it might impact the delivery of services here in the ACT. Again, to that aspect, a lot of that is detailed in our response to the Integrity Committee's inquiry report. I will wait until we table that until we can talk to it. But, effectively, it is along the lines of: there is a broad range of considerations that need to be taken into account; we do not want to impact or impinge upon freedom of political expression and the community's capacity and willingness to take part in electoral debate or political debate, but, at the same time, we are increasingly aware of the risks associated with mis- and disinformation super-generated by AI and how that might impact trusted information getting to the voter and the impact upon it.

As part of our information campaign that we will present to the community for the next election and our ongoing efforts to help inform the community through civics educations and other such engagements with school and other communities, we will be, again, bringing this aspect into those sorts of programs to ensure people, as always, stop and verify, check the source or stop to consider—whichever measure we are going to use next time around—as they engage in the political process: stop and think about the information they are receiving; consider its source and how they can verify it or otherwise, on top of those standard arrangements such as authorisation statements. Again, I would highlight the point that we are quite willing and ready to, as best we can, provide advice, as the ACT Assembly might consider this in a legislative aspect, how that might impact how we do our business. In the end, it is up to the policymakers to decide upon that approach.

THE CHAIR: Have you been provided with any resources to progress the matter? If so, where are these shown in your budget documents?

Mr Cantwell: We have not been resourced to address this particular aspect any more so than any other aspect of the Community Engagement Program. We have been resourced in large part along the lines as our budget bids were submitted and have been now approved within the current budget. Of course, with any other engagement

or activity, or indeed any activity across our preparation for election, we will have to risk-manage the resources against the tasks, as I have always had to do. If I see that there are additional resources required to support enactment of whatever legislation the Assembly might put in place prior to the 2028 election, then, yes, I will take steps to seek additional resources as might be required.

THE CHAIR: Okay; thank you.

MR EMERSON: I want to ask about gift disclosures. Currently the requirements that are in place do not require the disclosure of free facilities use in the kind of seven-day disclosure cycle. Is that accurate?

Mr Cantwell: Free facilities?

MR EMERSON: Yes.

Mr Cantwell: I think that is right. Is that right?

MR EMERSON: I believe there is an exemption for free facilities use.

Mr Spence: There is in regular gift reporting. It is the annual returns in which free facilities use must be reported.

Mr Cantwell: Yes.

MR EMERSON: How does that work? I guess without the exemption it would have to be reported everywhere. It does not specify in the annual returns that you must include free facilities use; it is just part of the obligation to disclose any kind of gift in kind.

Mr Spence: It is considered a receipt.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Do you know the background behind the exemption, including free facilities use, in that weekly disclosure?

Mr Spence: A little bit of it. It is testing my memory, but my understanding is that it was originally considered a gift for regular disclosure. This is back when gift disclosures were quarterly rather than seven days. My understanding is that the Assembly removed the requirement to report free facilities use from regular gift disclosure because of delays in receiving from the entities that provided those free facilities use the expected value and it was difficult to comply with the obligations to report in those periods. So the Assembly removed it from regular gift reporting to annual reporting within the annual return.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Is that a problem that emerges with other gifts in kind as well? How is that treated in terms of compliance by the Electoral Commission?

Mr Spence: It does not tend to be a problem with other gifts in kind, because the obligation is on the receiver of the gift to do some market research on what the value of that item might be. With free facilities use was deemed to be more difficult due to,

essentially, it is the value of the hiring-out of spaces, equipment and those kinds of elements. So, no, it does not tend to be such a concern with other types of gifts in kind.

MR EMERSON: Okay. What is the express intent of the administrative funding that is provided to either non-party MLAs or to the parties of party MLAs? What is it for?

Mr Cantwell: For admin funding?

MR EMERSON: The purpose of the admin funding.

Mr Cantwell: There is a definition between administrative funding and that for electoral purposes or election funding. I make it clear when I write to either the parties or MLAs in receipt of the administrative funding that it is for that express purpose. It is determined in accordance with the legislation and paid accordingly. As there is not a strict definition, we could look to that and define or grab the exact definition for its purpose, but it is other than for electoral expenditure.

MR EMERSON: I think we may have had an exchange in a previous hearing about how it came about and what the purpose of the funding was for.

Mr Cantwell: Yes, I think we did.

MR EMERSON: Obviously the Assembly can determine to fund its members in different ways. But was a significant part of that to fulfil these kind of gift disclosure obligations?

Mr Cantwell: I cannot talk to the history of it. I do recall we had such a discussion in an earlier inquiry or committee hearing. I think we left that with the agreement or the understanding that either the Assembly or we could do some research about its backgrounds, its genesis. I cannot recall where that went to at this point in time. We might have to have a think about that. But, if that is a standing question that you wish us to further look into, we could do our best to—and we could take it on notice if you wish—to understand from our recollection and from our records. We can do that.

MR EMERSON: That would be great.

Mr Cantwell: Having said that, I think it is probably a research effort on the Assembly's end as well, where the office of the Assembly might be able to help as well.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Are you happy to take that on notice and have a little look?

Mr Cantwell: We can do that.

MR EMERSON: I am trying to piece this together. When I started getting that funding I thought, "This is to fulfil my administrative obligations," and I suppose one of the main ones is to do the gift disclosures. Then I am looking at this—

Mr Spence: My understanding of the explanatory text when administrative funding was introduced was that a component of the justification for it was maintaining a

party's capacity to meet the complex obligations of gift disclosure and other forms of financial disclosure.

MR EMERSON: I understand you administer the obligations; you do not necessarily set them and go, "Well, free facilities use. You are getting a pile of money to make sure you are up-to-date with your disclosures." That might be something that could be included rather than excluded from the seven-day disclosures.

The new online portal has been introduced—and thanks very much; it is brilliant—and you are encouraging people to put all of their gifts in there and then you will publish whatever meets the \$1,000 threshold. I am wondering whether, with that addition of the free facilities use and other things that are being received along the way, you are expecting parties to just basically put in the portal as they go everything that would be considered a gift, so that it auto-populates their annual returns and, I guess, ultimately election returns at the end. Is that kind of your assumption?

Mr Cantwell: Extra transparency is always better than limited transparency; right? I would encourage any entity, organisation or person that has a reporting obligation to report to his or their fullest extent. In that regard, if that includes things beyond the obligations as are stipulated, then that would be welcome as well, in the interests of full transparency.

Mr Spence: In terms of achieving the most benefit of this new portal in the functionality that it provides, the recommendation is that all gifts are disclosed regardless of value. They will only be published by the system when those disclosure thresholds have been met. It allows parties to, essentially, no longer have to maintain their own amalgamation of gifts from a single donor in order to then publish or disclose at the time; it will do that for you. One of the comments that we had heard regularly from stakeholders was the difficulty in amalgamating small gifts across a financial year and multiple, potentially, MLAs receiving those gifts. There is no obligation to do this with the system but, if a party or a MLA wishes to benefit from the functionality, that is the best way to do it. But it will only be published if the amalgamation reaches that \$1,000 threshold.

MR EMERSON: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: Further on gifts, I am wondering if a valuation of a gift is in question whether there is a role for Elections ACT, or should you play a role, in challenging undervaluations of a gift?

Mr Cantwell: I think the end state is that what we will be looking for is accurate representation and a full disclosure and full compliance with obligations. I would not step into the space of seeking to determine valuations of gifts lightly as a commission. Ultimately, the system requires the entity, person or organisation with the reporting obligations to meet those obligations. We have an audit regime, as you know, in place that we have to verify that those obligations have been met, and we report against those audit outcomes. Clearly, if there is something which is at odds, the audit will pick that up and report that to me and then I will make a determination accordingly as to what actions might follow.

But I go back to a point I have often made—and Ro and the funding disclosure team have always presented this approach: we wish to seek to inform, to support, to encourage compliance and then to answer questions. We reach back to individual organisations that may have missed something or were not clear on something. We are open to questions at any time. The enforcement pathways open to me as the commissioner are much further down that path of obligations and compliance checks. I would rather see that the intent of the legislation and the funding disclosure provisions are met in the first instance.

MR BRADDOCK: I am not arguing with that. The example I am thinking of is the Chairman’s Lounge membership, which is also challenging because there is no commercial price. But I will note that their reporting has demonstrated that it has been valued at \$590 each since 2018. At what point does a re-evaluation need to occur in terms of the true value of a gift?

Mr Cantwell: It is worth considering. On the face of it, I can offer an opinion, but it is not a particular point that I have considered. I am not aware of that particular question having been asked before. I do not have a view or response to that question right now, and I would have to probably consider that further. If you wish, I could take that question on notice as you have framed it and come back to you with some views on the question of whether we should have a role in that matter. But I would probably reiterate that which I have already responded with.

MR BRADDOCK: I would be interested in your response in the broad in terms of whether that is a suitable role for the Elections Commission to play. If so, how should that play out? You might come up with an alternative view, and I would also appreciate the arguments that way.

Mr Cantwell: Okay; I can take that on notice and come back with a more considered response.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Good afternoon, everyone. The budget provides \$5 million in expenses and \$463,000 in capital over four years to modernise Elections ACT ICT systems and support enforcement activities. That is at page 61. But the bulk of that spend is not scheduled until 2028-29, which is the election year. Is 2028-29 a high-risk time to be implementing new election infrastructure?

Mr Cantwell: It would be, but that is not the plan. I do not think that approach would suggest or would mean that we are leaving ICT modernisation until late in the electoral cycle. Of course, that is something we do all the time. We would modernise the systems and continue to modernise them throughout the cycle. Of course, the budget ramps up during the election delivery itself or immediately before and thereafter, as per the normal electoral cycle, but the systems are never dormant. We are always testing, evaluating and improving that. Hence, the budget bid that we submitted, included a proposal that we allocated a dedicated funding line for continuous modernisation. That was not the outcome that the budget presented—and so be it.

We seek to continue to allocate the available funds throughout the electoral cycle across those priorities, and we prioritise those across each financial year accordingly. An example is the electoral management system known as TIGER. That capability is core to our electoral delivery and planning and preparedness. So we allocate a lot of effort and funding towards that outcome. But there are other initiatives. We just mentioned one: the Financial Disclosure and Nominations Portal. We have others in track as well to keep us in the position where we can deliver the most trusted electoral services. Clearly, that is important for us because we are heavily reliant upon ICT systems and delivery. I will throw to Scott, if you want to—

Mr Hickey: Sorry, could I just clarify: what year did you say the funding was?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Sorry; I moved on to the next question, because I was satisfied with the answer.

Mr Hickey: The funding is for 2026-27.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: So the bulk of the spend is not scheduled until 2028-29. Is that inaccurate?

Mr Hickey: The funding is for 2026-27 and our expectation is to spend the majority of the funding in 2026-27.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Okay; copy that. The financial statements look like they project operating deficits and cash declining from \$898,000 in 2026-27 to \$251,000 by 2029-30. Is that correct?

Mr Hickey: That is correct, yes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Great. Is the commission structurally underfunded in non-election years?

Mr Cantwell: We would like more money, yes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Sure.

Mr Cantwell: I am not being flippant; I am sorry.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: No; you are all right.

Mr Cantwell: Every budget submission that we make is very carefully calibrated to ensure that we are cognisant of the broader financial situations. We are not irresponsible with that money which we are attributed. We do not have small risks. Just like any other agency, we carry large risks. We have electoral integrity and quality of service as our key risks and we budget against those priorities.

We have also been careful to ensure that we do not over-accrue cash holdings; that we attribute that against priorities. When we engage with Treasury officials—Scott on our behalf as the CFO—the advice that we have worked to for a while now is to use the moneys allocated before we can begin to expect additional moneys allocated on

top that already provisioned. Do you want to—

Mr Hickey: Yes. As all agencies do, we face various cost pressures and things. The commission, for some period of time, has carried quite reasonable, for its size, cash balances and things. At the moment, we have considerable funding or additional FTE in the current process in the current budget round. As part of our post-budget review, we are looking at areas where we may have cost pressures—this is reflective obviously of a cost pressure with the reduction there in funding—and looking at how we can manage that and address it at the time of putting together the budget papers. Given that we find out about our funding in the May-June type period, we have not had time to fully consider what our options are to make sure that we are not having those problems.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: You have been very calibrating with your answers, and I appreciate that—but this is s your Hansard opportunity on cost pressures. Controlled recurrent payments rise sharply to \$12.778 million in the 2028-29 year, presumably for the election cycle. What capability must your organisation build before that year, and is the current funding profile sufficient to avoid rushed procurement or recruitment?

Mr Cantwell: The properties that sit around those systems and processes which work to mitigate the risks around election integrity and quality of services. That is a pretty poor answer, but I think it will always be accurate. The systems we run, the eVACS, TIGER and other new initiatives, such as the funding disclosure portal, are all about ensuring that we deliver the most trusted, transparent, secure and accessible collection. Yes, there are cost pressures. Yes, I would like more money. And, yes, there are means through the budget protocols and through other means—through Treasury and through the Speaker’s Office—where I can seek additional funding if needed.

If the commission sees financial risks emerging that relate to operational risks, we will absolutely seek additional funding. There is a number of those which were not met to our entire satisfaction in the budget outcome. One of those is for the support contracts for some of our systems. We need to take decisions, as Scott has mentioned, inside the budget arrangements we have now been advised of. Subsequent to that review which Scott and Rohan are leading, if I need to come back to government for additional funding to meet those priorities, I will absolutely make that request.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thanks.

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:

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner
Causon, Ms Barbara, Acting ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children
and Young People Commissioner

THE CHAIR: We welcome the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth as 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 hand my first lot to Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: Thanks for coming along. Last year, we were keen to have a conversation but we did not manage to get into very much. I am really keen to get an understanding of what the status of the commissioner's role is, because it seems to have been fairly turbulent over the last year, from when the commissioner was originally appointed. Am I correct that you are still acting?

Ms Causon: I agree to and understand the privilege statement. Yes; I am acting, and I have been acting in this role for about nine months. There is a recruitment process underway to fill the job permanently.

MR COCKS: Am I right that the acting arrangements have been extended multiple times?

Ms Causon: Yes; you are correct. I think there have been two extensions in this current acting period while that recruitment process takes place.

MR COCKS: One of my challenges is that a lot of the detail around the allocation for the office has disappeared out of the budget papers. It is not separately identified. It seems to have been rolled in with other things. I assume that you have a team behind you at the moment as well.

Ms Causon: Yes; I do. There are four team members, plus me.

MR COCKS: What is the appropriation for that team and you, for your office?

Ms Causon: It is about \$1.2-something million. I can get you the exact amount.

MR COCKS: Perhaps on notice, you can give us some numbers for recurrent funding, staffing, accommodation and any one-off capital.

Ms Causon: Yes; I can do that.

MR COCKS: Thank you. There used to be a separate identification of the allocation in the budget. Do you know why that is not visible anymore?

Ms Causon: No. I am sorry, I do not know why that is not visible to you.

MR COCKS: Is that something that you are able to take on notice or do we need to put that to the minister?

Ms Causon: I do not think I would be able to answer that question, even on notice.

MR COCKS: We will put it to the minister. There is a \$600,000 amount for accommodation that looks like it might be controlled by you. Do you know if that is right? Is the accommodation amount managed by your office or is it managed on your behalf by the directorate?

Ms Causon: It is managed on our behalf by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate.

MR COCKS: That brings me to a key question. Can you advise as to the reason you are located within the Justice and Community Safety Directorate? I understand that the creation of the commissioner role came out of the *Our booris, our way* report, but the intent of the role seems to be much broader than just having a justice focus. Can you tell me a bit more? Why, from your understanding, are you located there? And are you experiencing any limitations from that?

Ms Causon: I could not go into any detail about why the office is aligned with JACS, other than to say that my position is as an independent statutory officeholder. I am not a JACS staff member. I am not a public servant as such. However, my team are public servants, with their payroll, although we work very independently of JACS. But JACS provides a lot of our support in terms of a whole range of ways: payroll, HR and purchasing arrangements that a small office like this one would not be able to sustain on its own.

MR COCKS: Thank you, Chair. I understand others have questions.

MR EMERSON: We have spoken before about unaccompanied access to Bimberi. I understand this has been an issue for you, but also for other oversight entities. Is that an outstanding issue? Has that been resolved?

Ms Causon: We are not experiencing access issues as such. We certainly do not have unaccompanied access. We would prefer to have unaccompanied access, but at this stage we do not have that. We have a regular visiting schedule, plus we visit on an ad hoc basis if a young person wants us to or if there is a meeting in relation to a young person in detention at Bimberi. To date, I would not say we have access issues, but we do not have the unaccompanied access that some of the oversight bodies have.

MR EMERSON: You said you would prefer to have unaccompanied access. Why is that? What is the gap between what you are able to do currently and what you would do if you did not have to be accompanied there?

Ms Causon: It is really important that, as an oversight body, we are able to talk to young people in privacy and that we are able to spend as much or as little time as a young Aboriginal person might want or need with our office. In that way, having the independence of being able to move around the centre, obviously borrowing their security arrangements when moving between one place and another or when opening

doors et cetera, would give us more flexibility to spend the time we need with individuals.

MR EMERSON: What has been the nature of your discussions with the government about changing the current policy to enable you to have unaccompanied access at Bimberi?

Ms Causon: I would have to say it has been fairly superficial to this point. It has been raised at Bimberi oversight meetings. It is not just our office that is interested in being able to access unaccompanied entry into Bimberi. Obviously, there would still be a need to make sure Bimberi know we are coming. We would still need their control centre to know we are in the premises and that we are moving around et cetera. There would still be a relationship. There is sometimes negotiation. We would not be able to go in unaccompanied if there were codes going on at the time. There would still be some restrictions, but it would give us some greater flexibility, because we are reliant on a staff member being available to accompany us around the centre at the moment.

MR EMERSON: I am curious about what you are hearing from young people when you are at Bimberi and what you are seeing there. There is almost \$5 million over the next four years in this budget for Bimberi, and there is also the Youth Justice Strategic Plan that is being consulted on. I am sure you have engaged on that. What things have you seen needing funding the most? And does that strike you as a sufficient amount of funding to address those gaps?

Ms Causon: It is very expensive to detain a young person in Bimberi. From the perspective of the role that I have at the moment, I could see far greater value in spending those dollars on other sorts of programs, including diversion out of the youth justice system—programs that do not exist at the moment. In my mind, we need to consider how we can divert some of that funding away from the cost of detaining a young person and, instead, investing at the front end, in preventing our young people from entering the youth justice system, but also in the programs that divert them once they do enter the youth justice system.

MR EMERSON: That is a great response. Thank you. You mentioned not being able to visit during codes. I have put in some questions about the number of lockdowns that are occurring. Some are because of codes, some are probably for good reasons and sometimes there is a minor issue like a rolled ankle, and then there are lockdowns because of staffing issues, where the centre is locked down so staff can have lunch. What is your assessment of the impact of excessive lockdowns on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Bimberi? And would you support tracking time in cells, like we do in the adult prison?

Ms Causon: I would absolutely support tracking time in their cabins, as they are called. Regarding the idea that the whole centre is locked down because of an incident or because of staffing shortages, what we see is that young people miss opportunities. They miss education sessions and miss physical education sessions. They miss opportunities whenever there is a lockdown.

MR BRADDOCK: I am interested in your views on the Jumbunna report, its recommendations and the implementation of them. Are you satisfied with what is

contained in it and how recommendations have been implemented, or do you have alternative views?

Ms Causon: I think there is a lot more to be done on the implementation of the Jumbunna report. There is absolutely no doubt—the evidence is very clear in this jurisdiction and in every other—that there is a clear pipeline from the care and protection system to the youth justice system. When I look at the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people detained in Bimberi, more than half of them are on care and protection orders, and more than half of those are in residential care settings. We absolutely have a lot more work to do to address the findings of the Jumbunna report in relation to young people in this community.

MR BRADDOCK: Do you agree with, for example, the recommendation about extending the existing bail support services that are run by the Aboriginal Legal Service for children?

Ms Causon: Absolutely. It is illogical to me that the Bail Support program is not funded for young people in the same way that it is for adults.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I am looking at page 116 of the *Budget outlook* and it has “Intensive therapeutic places and extraordinary residential care”. That initiative is provided \$22.5 million in 2026-27, but there is nothing in the forward estimates alongside a flagged sustainability review of out-of-home care and expenditure. That is the context of my question. Given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain significantly over-represented in out-of-home care, can you tell the committee whether your office has been or will be consulted as part of the sustainability review?

Ms Causon: What I can say is that we do not have any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children or young people on ITOs, intensive therapy orders, at this point in time. We previously had one young person on an ITO, but we do not have any at this point in time.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Would you expect you would have views on ITOs and how they are implemented in terms of sustainability, as a—“tool” is the wrong word, but as a—

Ms Causon: The office has a clear oversight role in relation to ITOs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and certainly had a key oversight role in the previous order that was in place. I actually participated in intervening in court on that matter, to remove that ITO after a period of time.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: The question has not been quite sharp enough. What about you and your office’s view of the sustainability and utility of out-of-home care expenditure? Would you be expected to look at making a submission or input into that review?

Ms Causon: Our office is all about trying to prevent our children and young people from entering the out-of-home care system. We want to see improvements in the

wellbeing of our children who are already in the system, and we support trying to get as many children and young people re-united with their family as quickly as possible. Ideally, we want to see a sharper reduction in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children—and all children—in out-of-home care in this jurisdiction. To do that, we have to invest more at the front end. We have to do better in early support for families. We have to do better in programs that are available to keep families together.

THE CHAIR: How much engagement do you have around those care and protection orders? I think you said that there is a direct link between care and protection—“pipeline” is the word you used—and Bimberi. Ensuring that children do not get into the care and protection system in the first place would be a better solution, but how can we ensure that kids who, for whatever reason, end up in the care and protection system do not end up in Bimberi?

Ms Causon: As I indicated previously, what we see is that a lot of our young people who end up in Bimberi and have been in the out-of-home care system have been in residential care settings. There is no way anyone can convince me that a residential care setting is the best place for a child to be raised. It is not family. We have various residential care arrangements in this jurisdiction. Some have a strong therapeutic approach and some do not. But what we see is that most children and young people who end up in Bimberi from out-of-home care come out of residential care settings. We have to reduce that, and to reduce that we need different solutions, but we also need more work around family finding. We need to keep our children and young people connected to their family. If it cannot be mum and dad, Aboriginal children have huge family networks. We have to do the work to make sure we find the connection, where they can be safe and where they can be loved, because that is not what they get in residential care.

THE CHAIR: That is really useful: making sure they remain connected to family and community—kinship, essentially.

Ms Causon: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR COCKS: I want to come back to overall objectives for the office. Do you have a strategic plan in place yet?

Ms Causon: We have been doing some planning. I would not call it a strategic plan. Without trying to make excuses, I am holding a seat at the moment and am trying to get on with the job. We have rebuilt the office, we are fully staffed, and we have a case management system in place—things that we have been trying to do—but I think the incoming substantive commissioner has to have a say in what the priorities will be moving forward, in the shorter and the longer term.

MR COCKS: I understand that. That was kind of built into the start of the question that I left out for the sake of time. I think it is important to note that we are roughly 2½ years into the existence of the commissioner role. I am concerned that we do not have a strategic plan, there are no office-specific accountability indicators in the budget and, from what I see, most of the work seems to be heavily focused on justice

and the care and protection area. The original intent of this role was quite a bit broader. I am wondering whether there is any work underway to try to move beyond the negative aspects and towards more community services, and building positive supports around community and connection as well.

Ms Causon: Thank you, Mr Cocks. In response to that I would say that the demand for individual family advocacy continues to be very strong. We continue to prioritise meeting that demand. That may settle at some time in the future, but at this point in time we have over 90 cases. We never say no to a young person, a child or their family who needs our support to navigate, whether it is the child protection system, the youth justice system, disability or education. While we say that they are our two biggest systems, they are certainly not the only systems. At the same time as we are doing the individual supports, we are learning and we are talking to agencies about the systemic issues.

We have made submissions to the racism inquiry, ACT Bail Support, and the Northern Territory child protection amendment bill. We are trying to influence a broader space than just the child protection system or the youth justice system in the ACT. We have pushed for and brought along some other oversight agencies. We were seeing, for example, use of force being a problem in Bimberi. We were very concerned to the point of almost going to a formal inquiry, but we saw an opportunity to bring oversight organisations together to push to establish a use of force oversight committee in Bimberi, in the same way that we have it in the adult jail here in the ACT.

We are constantly trying to look at systemic issues, at where the gaps are in terms of services out there, how we plug those gaps and how we make sure that funding is going into the Aboriginal community controlled sector. We talk about having Aboriginal community controlled organisations, but most of them do not receive money for child protection work, education advocacy or disability advocacy. Yes, they are out there and, yes, they always try to help our families, our children and our young people, but they are not given the resources to do that work.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you. It sounds like you are doing everything you can with that \$1.2 million and four people.

Ms Causon: Yes.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: You are doing everything possible. I am worried that your role, like those in community organisations, potentially disappears amongst other funding targets that are grouped with you in the budget papers and that it becomes very difficult to see the forward direction. It sounds like that might improve once we have—

Ms Causon: I certainly have strong visibility and say over the money allocated to this office. I have not experienced any attempt to claw back any of that money. It is allocated to the office and we control how that money is expended.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: But it is still a big job for the amount of resources you have.

Ms Causon: Absolutely; it is.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

Ms Causon: We could do with some more.

THE CHAIR: That is where we wanted you to get to. That was the whole purpose of the question.

Ms Causon: Yes; absolutely.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard staff 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. 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*. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

The committee adjourned at 5 pm