



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND CITY
SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the provision of municipal services in Canberra](#))

Members:

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK (Deputy Chair)
MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2026

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

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

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Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.16 am

BUTLER, MR LACHLAN, Chair, Belconnen Community Council

HERRICK, MR ROBERT JOHN, Member, Yarralumla Residents Association

JELACIC, DR AMY, Member, Braddon Collective

MOBBS, MR CHRISTOPHER JAMES, Convenor, Bragg Street Park Hackett Volunteers

WRIGHT, DR DIANA, President, Yarralumla Residents Association

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services for its inquiry into the provision of municipal services in the ACT.

The committee will today hear from community groups, other stakeholders and the ACT Human Rights Commission. In our last session today, we will hear from Tara Cheyne MLA, Minister for City and Government Services, and Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution that they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

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

The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used the 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 witnesses from the Belconnen Community Council, Yarralumla Residents Association, the Bragg Street Park Hackett Volunteers, and the Braddon Collective. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

As we have limited time, I am wondering whether the individual groups would like to kick off, very briefly, with the most important thing that you would like to impress upon the committee today.

Mr Mobbs: Thank you very much for having this inquiry. The essence of our submission relates to the maintenance and upkeep of public spaces, such as playgrounds, sportsgrounds and in our park, which is one of the largest open spaces in Hackett. It is a largely natural area. Our community group has been quite active over the last 10 years in terms of improving its natural features.

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The main activity has been through a grant that we received from the Nature in the City grant program in 2020-21. That was \$9,100 to construct seven swales. The idea of those swales is that they are basically mini-dams across the landscape, and they have captured the water. They have stopped the water rushing down through the park, blocking the stormwater drain downhill from the park and causing minor flooding.

Following that, we received various grants under the Adopt-A-Park program, to do planting in those swales and elsewhere in the park. We are also very keen about improving the play facilities, keeping with the natural feel of the park. We have applied for grants over the years, but we did not get any. Fortunately, in 2018, there was a Better Suburbs Play Spaces Forum run by the government, and they allocated \$5,000 for our park, to have some logs and rocks put in. They have been fantastic—really good.

In 2022, we applied under the Nature Play program for additional play elements. The urban parks area could not support the application because the existing equipment did not meet the new recreational facilities municipal and structure standards released in September 2021. The key issue was that play equipment must be no closer than 20 metres to streets. Unfortunately, one of the little swings, a rocking bike, is about six metres from the street, and the big slippery dip is about 13 metres away.

We wanted to put in more natural features, like rocks, wobble logs, teepees and various things like that. We have raised some money for it, about \$2½ thousand, which is not enough. We are very keen to add those things, but the government has said no, as what is existing does not meet the requirements.

The essence of our submission is that, if they do not meet the guidelines that the government have set up, they should come and amend it. It is not going to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars—maybe \$10,000—to move a couple of things. We could then proceed with having some additional things.

Mr Herrick: Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. The evidence provided in our submission is drawn from over 20 years experience by the Yarralumla Residents Association in our suburb. Our focus is on infrastructure maintenance and provision.

Our views on the reactive nature of service delivery and the widening divergence between rates growth and service outcomes are supported by ACT budget papers, ACT Revenue Office data, Auditor-General reports, ABS CPI statistics and resident case studies.

For example, the ACT Auditor-General's 2017 report into road infrastructure identified incomplete and unreliable asset condition data, limiting the territory's ability to prioritise maintenance effectively. It further observed that approximately 50 per cent of maintenance activity was undertaken in response to asset failure or complaint, rather than through structured preventive programs.

This report also observed that delayed maintenance accelerates deterioration and increased long-term renewal costs. Our experience is one of delays of five to 10 years for maintenance and infrastructure projects and general streetscape repairs. The approach taken has been to outsource infrastructure maintenance to the community

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through Fix My Street. This shifts the focus onto the community, resulting in reactive problem-fixing rather than preventive maintenance.

The community has seen considerable residential rate growth compared to inflation over the last decade, but not a commensurate increase in the services related to infrastructure maintenance and provision. ABS CPI data shows cumulative inflation over the past decade of around 30 to 35 per cent. Inner south case studies show individual residential rate notices with cumulative increases of approximately 120 to 220 per cent over the same period.

Given this rate growth, it would be reasonable to expect commensurate improvement in maintenance and upkeep of roads, footpaths, canopy replacements, parks and/or local traffic management, but this has not been observed, leading to the perception that improved service is not occurring. Indeed, our local experience indicates the opposite to be true, and maintenance remains reactive rather than preventive. We ask the committee to consider the need for rebalancing to preventive maintenance and having a clear relationship between rates growth and service outcomes.

In closing, the Yarralumla Residents Association acknowledges and thanks the many public servants and contractors who diligently deliver municipal services across the ACT. Our submission is not a criticism of individual or collective effort; rather, it seeks stronger transparency, measurable standards and clear accountability within the system itself.

Mr Butler: Municipal services is always a challenging one. It is one that always comes up with the Belconnen Community Council and all the associations that are here today. It is important that we and the committee note that it is easy to yearn for the old days, when the rest of Australia subsidised our municipal services, but it is not the case anymore. We have to pay our own way. I do not want to be a government apologist here, but I think we do have to be quite practical in how we respond to challenges. There are real challenges in the municipal services space.

One that comes up for us is abandoned vehicles. People call up Access Canberra and say, "There's an abandoned vehicle." They say, "It's a police problem." The police say that they only respond if there is an active safety issue. They go back to Access Canberra, and Access Canberra says it is a police issue. That is a big challenge. It relates to the Fix My Street points that we made in our submission to the previous inquiry.

We need to focus on the genuine challenges. One that comes up as well is mowing. A couple of people from Kaleen called me and said, "Kaleen has never been mowed." I said, "That's terrible. I'm going to follow up on that." I do my due diligence. I go onto the City Services website, and it says it has been mowed in the last week. I go back to them and say, "Is there something missing? Is this inaccurate?" Then they just do not respond.

I think it is very easy to point out problems, but we do have to identify the genuine problems and the genuine challenges; otherwise, we will not solve them.

THE CHAIR: That is a good one, because Kaleen is on everyone's mind. Would you like to take us through the Braddon perspective?

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Dr Jelacic: Thanks for having me. I understand that my invitation today comes out of our submission to the Fix My Street inquiry. One of the key points is that we would love to see that system fixed, so that communication loops are happening and are active. People need to feel heard and acknowledged when they are submitting through that system. That is one point.

As the Braddon Collective, we are all about creating and maintaining a really fantastic suburb that is comfortable for all demographics and all user groups. We focus a lot on great pedestrian access, cycling access, and being able to use public transport stops in the area. Of course, that means we are very concerned about a lot of city services.

We think it is important to manage community expectations around costs and capacity. In our advocacy, we have done a lot of work to understand what has currently been done and how much it costs, and how those resources that City Services have are apportioned across the whole community. That is a really difficult discussion to have and a really difficult task to undertake—that apportionment.

It is great to see people like Minister Tara Cheyne, who does a lot of work on communicating quite actively around that. Again, setting expectations with the community is really important.

I do note that the ACT government submission to this inquiry is a really good document that gives a great picture of the scope and the cost involved. We know it is huge. We know that every demand or every request that we have is coming from every other suburb.

Something to be considered might be looking at other models for managing certain aspects of municipal service delivery in the ACT. There is a very strong volunteer culture in Canberra. There are many volunteer groups that are already doing a lot of amazing things, not just in advocating but in physically doing the work. It is about looking at whether there is support that can be offered to leverage those groups, support them more and enable them more.

Also, it is about looking at things like private industry participation. It is a bit of a tangential example, but our light rail stops always look really beautiful. That is because, in the public-private partnership that governs light rail operations in the ACT, there are cleanliness standards built into that contract. Essentially, the ACT government can look at maybe a bit of graffiti or some rubbish at a light rail stop and say to CMET, “This needs to be rectified.”

Those are some things to consider, in terms of looking at how to balance and appropriately manage demands on the public purse.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Braddock?

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Butler, going to your submission to the Fix My Street inquiry, you talk about confusion in the public’s mind about which entity is actually responsible for what work. Do you envisage a solution that might be able to address that confusion and assist the public in accessing the services they are looking for?

Mr Butler: I think Fix My Street can be improved, in order to educate, as well as being a reporting tool. If you are trying to report graffiti, it should be able to prompt you, and have a few questions, such as, “Is it on private property, like a shop? Is it on a utility? If so, it is the utility’s responsibility.” It should prompt those questions, so that you know that you only have to go to Fix My Street, and Fix My Street can say, “Thanks for coming to us with this; here’s the more appropriate way to go.”

Instead, we have this process of putting something through Fix My Street and, weeks later, you get back an email—if you do get back an email—and it says, “Contact ActewAGL,” or “Contact Icon Water.” That is a terrible experience. But if you can be prompted and informed along the way, “You should be contacting Icon Water,” then it can get resolved more quickly.

MR BRADDOCK: Is there validity in having a no-wrong-door policy and, if it just comes through Fix My Street, it can be forwarded to Icon Water, ActewAGL or even NCA? The person would only have to report it once and not have to duplicate their effort.

Mr Butler: If someone does go through that process and it does go to Fix My Street, they should pass it along to Icon Water. They should not completely reject it out of hand. If we can inform the public of where they should be going, that means next time they know, and they will go straight to Icon Water, and it will not take weeks to get to Icon Water. It should not just be completely ignored. If we can inform people of what is the quickest way to get their problem resolved, that is of benefit for all.

THE CHAIR: I have a question on something you mentioned about Fix My Street. We briefly chatted about the last inquiry that we had, and the evidence from the government is that there has been so much work done on the Fix My Street website. Have you recently logged jobs, and have you found that it is still not working better than it was a couple of years ago?

Dr Jelacic: I am not sure.

THE CHAIR: I have not used it recently. I am wondering whether you have noticed an improvement in the experience that you have seen.

Mr Butler: Personally, I am not a big Fix My Street user. From what I have heard and seen, there have been some improvements, but I think there is still work to be done.

THE CHAIR: Mr Mobbs, I had not understood that there were regulations with regard to the six metres and 13 metres, and that it should actually be 20 metres. In a lot of suburbs, and where I grew up, the parks have not changed in years. I am from Fraser. With the grants you have requested to get those things moved or upgraded, what exactly did they say was the reason that they could not do it?

Mr Mobbs: They could not support our grant application because two of the existing things did not meet the guidelines, and they did not have the budget for it.

THE CHAIR: Did they respond and explain why they were not going to come and

remove them because they do not meet current standards?

Mr Mobbs: It should be a case of just moving them.

THE CHAIR: I understand.

Mr Mobbs: They did not have the budget to do that. Okay, I can understand, but for how long will it be like that? I wonder how many other playgrounds there are like this across Canberra, since those new regulations came in. My recommendation would be to undertake an audit of all existing playgrounds to see how they meet, or do not meet, the new guidelines.

If the government bring in guidelines and standards for things, I think they have an obligation to make sure that the playgrounds that they manage meet those guidelines; otherwise, it is just another pile of paper that does not mean anything. I think it is important to have an audit of all playgrounds; then they can go back and say that over the next one or five years—or whatever it is—they will undertake action to make sure those facilities meet the guidelines.

As I mentioned, the community volunteers are quite active. In our case, where we have some money, and we are probably happy to get more money from other grant programs, be it government or non-government, we can go ahead and get that, and work with the government to improve the facilities we have there.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is a good thought. I had wondered how they managed all the old playgrounds.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a further question for you, Mr Mobbs, in terms of the use of natural playgrounds, or nature-based playgrounds, which you indicated in your submission were very popular. I also imagine they have lower administrative overheads than the typical equipment-based playgrounds that the government uses. What has been your experience about the use of nature playgrounds?

Mr Mobbs: About the playgrounds we have there?

MR BRADDOCK: Yes.

Mr Mobbs: They put in these 12 rocks; they are about half-a-metre high, and you see kids walking along them. Even grandparents get on there and walk along with the kids. At Watson, they have put in a lovely, new, multi-million-dollar playground—it is fantastic—but we do not need that type of thing in our natural area. With things like rocks, logs and some climbing things, that sort of stuff, it is in keeping with the natural feel of the place and it really gets people to come along.

With places like Watson, from where we live, you have to get in the car and drive there. With these little local parks, they need to have a variety of equipment—natural play elements or whatever—that make it interesting for people to get out there and enjoy the fresh air, the environment and things like that.

MR BRADDOCK: From your submission, I understand that you applied for a grant

for a nature-based playground but were unsuccessful.

Mr Mobbs: That is right.

MR BRADDOCK: Then, literally in the same year, the government built a nature-based playground in the same spot.

Mr Mobbs: Yes, they put in some rocks and logs, which was great. But we then applied for a grant to do some further things. They could not support it. We then got a grant from the Dickson Tradies Club to engage a landscape architect, Paul Barnett, from O'Connor, and he prepared a plan. We sent that in to the department and they said, "Overall, we can support it, but we can't do anything because the existing equipment does not meet the guidelines, and we don't have the budget to fix that." Until that is done, we cannot go ahead and add some more things in our park.

MR BRADDOCK: In terms of where you say the existing play equipment does not meet those guidelines, it is purely due to the location—that is, proximity to the road. It is not in terms of the actual design of the nature-based playground?

Mr Mobbs: Yes, it is simply the case that they are too close to Bragg Street. One is six metres from Bragg Street and one is 13 metres. They have to be a minimum of 20 metres.

MR BRADDOCK: Does that include the nature-based play elements?

Mr Mobbs: The nature-play elements that the government put in, the rocks, are close; they are about six metres from the street. They put them in; maybe they did not see them as recreational facilities.

MR BRADDOCK: It is an interesting question. With the proximity, that is why you are saying the volunteer group is in limbo, because they are unable basically to move forward, in terms of—

Mr Mobbs: Sorry, what was that?

MR BRADDOCK: I am just trying to make sure I understand your submission correctly. Your group is in limbo because it cannot be installed, due to its proximity to Bragg Street?

Mr Mobbs: That is right—the two things, yes. Unfortunately, we cannot go and dig up the little rocking bike. It is a solid bit of concrete. It is not like it would cost \$100,000 to move it. The slippery dip is a bit bigger. Again, if they were moved, we could go ahead and put in additional things. We would not turn the whole park into a recreational area, but we could add a few things.

THE CHAIR: I have questions about the gross pollutant traps. In the submission from the Yarralumla Residents Association, you had some photos from a couple of different years. As far as you are aware, is there a schedule for when those things should be cleaned out?

Dr Wright: No. The photographs you are referring to are of the stormwater culvert that
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Mr L Butler, Mr R Herrick,
Dr A Jelacic, Mr C Mobbs
and Dr D Wright

runs from Adelaide Avenue down to the lake, through Mueller Street. There is what is called a gross pollutant trap there, next to the tennis courts, which stops trees, logs and rubbish going into the lake. After every single rainfall, that is clogged, and it only gets cleaned when people put in a request through Fix My Street, with a photograph. The photographs that I sent last night show you what happened with the rainfall two weeks ago, when there was major flooding in Canberra. Because that GPT was clogged, it caused lots of flooding. The rainfall was heavy and, as a result, big areas of the culvert, the concrete and the rocks, were washed away. The fact that there is no regular maintenance has caused additional costs and additional maintenance requirements for the ACT government.

I frequently walk along there and send in a photograph to Fix My Street. In the summer, all the vegetation rots, so it is actually really disgusting to walk past. It is next to the bike path. But other people do as well. The reporting is serial, and it is constant. If there was a regular maintenance schedule, or if they said, “Yes, there’s been rain; we’ll go and clean that up,” it would save a lot of money and be much more efficient.

THE CHAIR: Preventive rather than reactive.

Dr Wright: Yes.

Mr Herrick: Exactly. That is the tenor of what we are trying to say. It happens frequently. I have lived in Yarralumla for 10 years and that culvert runs literally over the road from me, and it floods on a regular basis. It is not a question of whether it is not fit for design; it is more about having the regular maintenance to make sure that that does not happen. Reporting it on Fix My Street is the wrong way to manage that issue.

Mr Butler: The ACT government submission does touch on when they do maintenance on the GPTs. I think there is a valid question about whether that trigger for when they go and check that stuff is adequate, and whether they are meeting their timeframes, when they do respond to those triggers.

Dr Wright: This is the second time in two years, and there has been major flooding. It is not just the rocks that line the culvert; also, the big areas of concrete are just being washed away. In Curtin, it is even more serious. In the last lot of rain, the bridge was damaged—the pedestrian bridge across the culvert.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we had a similar thing in Kaleen.

Dr Wright: There is an issue there that could be addressed. One of the photographs in our submission shows a road sign at Yarralumla shops, a give-way sign on a roundabout, which is leaning into the road. You asked whether the update to the website had improved Fix My Street. The lady who runs the shop on the corner there has reported that six times, because she is waiting for a van to come around and hit it, because it is leaning into the road. She is not alone in having reported it, but it has not been addressed in six months.

THE CHAIR: Six months. And she has reported it six times?

Dr Wright: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Mobbs, your submission talks about the negative effects of loose soil and erosion on drainage.

Mr Mobbs: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: We have large areas of the territory that we just mow, and we do not pay any further attention to them. Do we need to examine what we have in those spaces and encourage native grasses or understorey, to reduce that need to mow and have more viable nature space? Is that something that you might be looking for in your area to address this issue that you described?

Mr Mobbs: They do come in and mow it. We have a lot of exotic grasses in there; our aim is to remove those. Certainly, with the recent dry, hot weather, a lot of those have disappeared. Ideally, we would like native grasses and small plants as ground cover. But it is a lot of work to do that in an area such as the size that we have. A lot of plants have been put on the swales—shrubs, ground covers and things like that—and they are going quite well.

The other thing is about striking a balance regarding people who like to kick a football around and things like that. It is a matter of striking a balance between encouraging a diverse range of plants and allowing for human activity.

Mr Butler: I might add something on the question about no mowing zones versus mowing zones. This is an issue that has come up with some of the Landcare groups in our area. This was more of an issue before Minister Cheyne's time. I think she did respond to and fix this quite early on.

Landcare groups are developing these no-mow zones; then people put in a bunch of Fix My Street inquiries, saying, "Please mow this area," not knowing that it is a no-mow zone. They then come through and mow it all. You have a Landcare group that put a lot of effort into creating this habitat which has just been mowed down. There are challenges with no-mow zones and how we communicate the benefit of them. It should not just be a case of saying, "Let's mow everything."

MR BRADDOCK: Yes. As Mr Mobbs said, it is about having that balance between the grassy space to kick a football versus greater vegetation and not having to mow some areas.

THE CHAIR: We hear about it from all over. I have mentioned to the minister areas that used to get mowed that are not getting mowed, and what those reasons were. Education for communities is really helpful.

Dr Wright: That can also help with run-off, and the issue we were just talking about. In the Yarralumla Bay master plan, the NCA wants to turn the area between Schlich Street and the lake into a wetland. In the last round of grants, we put in a submission to kick that off, but we were not successful because our submission was not innovative enough—having worked out what would assist in taking the floodwaters, cleaning the lake and stopping blue-green algae. There is another reason for looking at naturalisation.

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THE CHAIR: I have really appreciated your submissions. They have helped to inform a lot of my questions this afternoon. Is there anything else that you want to press on with?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I will put it on notice.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything that you want to leave us with—anyone that we have not touched on, or some significant—

Dr Wright: We would like to emphasise the point that there seems to be some disparity between rates increases and regular maintenance. We have heard from other community groups. The community is really active. We have a tree group that meets every Tuesday and does pruning around the suburb. There are 10 to 11 people that do this. They have been doing it for seven years. We do invest, and we are happy to help with maintenance, but we cannot help with things like cleaning the pavers in front of the shops, because there is no access to water, to use a pressure cleaner, or no access to power.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for what you do. I have a few people in my electorate that do it.

Dr Wright: If we could see a move to preventive maintenance and have Fix My Street for the smaller things that need to be dealt with, that would be really helpful.

Dr Jelacic: I am inspired by Lachlan's comment about abandoned cars, and who deals with that. I want to bring up parking issues and how illegal parking is managed in the ACT. In Braddon, this has a really significant impact on the built environment in a few ways. I think this is repeated across the whole city. People parking on verges results in grass and plants dying, which means compacted soil, which means water running off very quickly, which then means muddy footpaths. In a suburb like Braddon, where we want visitors and tourists to be able to walk around easily and comfortably, it is just horrible. It also becomes an issue when we have illegal parking that encroaches on people being able to use footpaths and kerb cuts easily. It becomes a big accessibility issue as well. I could go on and on, but I will spare you.

In terms of dealing with that, I could walk around the streets of my suburb probably on any night and see really blatant cases of people parking inappropriately. The actual mechanism to deal with that is not entirely clear to me. I can certainly lodge a Fix My Street request. At certain times of the day, you can contact Access Canberra, but this is often happening at night-time—at times when we would like the footpaths to be open for people to use when they are out and about, having a drink or whatever.

I have had some good discussions about this with different parts of the public service. This might be something that could be looked into. There is a new approach that has been adopted in recent times. It involves parking inspectors not necessarily being really proactive in going out and looking for offences, but looking at areas where offences are most likely to be occurring and paying attention to those places.

I understand that things like operational costs and labour costs of having a million parking inspectors running around mean that it is not really feasible in this geographic area. That is where we can be looking at things like bollards or physical impediments to stop people parking inappropriately. We can look at improving public transport

access to places, to discourage the need to drive everywhere.

I bring this issue up particularly because it is a big one. A lot of people in the community are really concerned about it, on a range of issues, including environmental and accessibility issues. On the bureaucratic side of things, the actual mechanisms for dealing with it, as a community member, are opaque at best. I think that is an important one for the committee to consider.

Dr Wright: We have considerable experience with that issue, particularly in Novar Street, where all the street trees are heritage listed, and have been since 2012. There is constant parking on the nature strips. There is a house on the corner which is social housing, where some tenants had up to 14 cars parked on the nature strip over a period of two years. It was constantly reported through Fix My Street.

The issue is that the rangers come along; if they can catch the cars on the nature strip, the people are told to move them. They disappear for two days; then they are back again. It is not a permanent solution. It is a tricky issue. I do not know how you could effectively deal with it. But it is really damaging the roots of heritage-listed trees.

Mr Butler: I think that 14 cars, regardless of the tenant type, is probably problematic. That felt a bit weird to me.

Dr Jelacic: Yes, I am not sure how that is relevant.

Mr Butler: I definitely agree with everything Amy said around Access Canberra and parking. That ties into our Fix My Street submission—the comms side of things and making it easy for people to engage with the system.

On mowing, if you went to Ms Cheyne, and said, “Instead of every four weeks, we want everything mowed within two weeks,” I imagine she could very quickly come up with a solution. It just costs money. There are finite resources, and it is about how we effectively use them. I think Amy touched on this: how do we approach using these resources differently?

One issue, touching on the transparency side of our submission, is that the City Services website for mowing will show you if something has been mowed within the last week, the last two weeks or more than two weeks. If the metric is that everything is mowed every four weeks, you cannot tell if something has been mowed three or four weeks ago, or five or six weeks ago. There are a few things where we can improve the data and transparency, so that it is more accountable.

THE CHAIR: If there is nothing else, we will bring this part of the hearing to a close. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your attendance today. There were no questions taken on notice. We will now suspend the proceedings for a break and reconvene at 10.45 am.

Hearing suspended from 9.54 to 10.45 am

KRISHNAMURTHY, MR RAVI, President, Australian Multicultural Action Network

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ravi Krishnamurthy, from the Australian Multicultural Action Network. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Krishnamurthy: I will. Thanks for the opportunity to appear here today. Once again, it is fantastic. I have attended some of these hearings in the past. Once again, thanks for the opportunity. Our network represents mainly the CALD and the more diverse communities across Canberra. That is our primary goal.

I am trying to strengthen inclusion and have equitable access and community participation for everyone. Our main interest in this inquiry is ensuring that municipal services are delivered not just efficiently but equitably. It is about making sure it is inclusive of all suburbs and communities. Thanks once again for the opportunity.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. That goes to my first question—your recommendation about the need for more equitable services. Can you talk to us a little bit more about the concerns that informed that recommendation? Can we have a bit more of the detail of what you are seeing in your community that could be improved?

Mr Krishnamurthy: To start with, I would say that if the public spaces are not there, in multiculturalism, it becomes visible. Cultural inclusion in public spaces is very important. It is something that we have made very clear. Also, mainly for the CALD seniors, there is the issue of waste management, how they treat different things and what to use. With that sort of information, at the moment we are hearing that there is a bit of a language barrier there. That is something that we mentioned in our submission.

When it comes to graffiti and different sorts of expression, mainly, with the youngsters, they want to present it. That needs to be made very clear: what is civic expression and what is graffiti? That sort of difference needs to be made very clear to the public. That is, again, another key point that we have mentioned in the submission.

Overall, it is about having benchmarking and transparency. Success metrics should have the inclusion of community satisfaction, as I have mentioned before, not just that it is done efficiently. What gets measured should definitely be prioritised. That is one more point.

The last one is that consultation without cultural accessibility is not true consultation at all. That is, again, another key point that we mentioned in our submission.

THE CHAIR: When you say cultural inclusion in our suburbs, what does that actually look like? What are you hoping for? Is it signage?

Mr Krishnamurthy: In public spaces, it should reflect what the people in the area that they live around are after. That is the key point here. Cultural representation can be naming, design and different types of programs that we do. These are all currently

limited; that is the feedback that we are receiving from most of our community members.

The other part is the urban art. In the city and in other areas we can see a lot of urban art and design. Having more inclusive and multicultural urban art and design projects would strengthen that. I do know that there is a place-making project open for grants at the moment, and that is very welcome. More of that sort of initiative is always welcome.

In our submission we mention the harmony gardens, which are not there at the moment, and some sort of symbolic representation where cultures can share their identity through harmony gardens in different areas and districts. It would be appreciated if that could be done.

Another recommendation is having streamlined permits, for example, for events held in the Salthouse Community Centre in Braddon. We need more state-of-the-art community spaces where seniors and migrants can share our values and enjoy our evenings. Again, that would be welcome.

As I said before, it is about having public spaces where multiculturalism is more visible.

MR BRADDOCK: Building a bit more on Ms Castley's question, you talked about multicultural participation indicators in performance frameworks. Do you have any specific measures or indicators in mind that you think the government should be adopting?

Mr Krishnamurthy: Thank you for the question. We do come across a lot of surveys being run through Your Say and other panels. Those measurements are something to which we would like to contribute a bit more, because Canberra definitely has the opportunity to set a national benchmark for inclusive municipal governments. It is about having that inclusion, transparency and the shared stewardship, as we mentioned in our submission. This is where we can strengthen that trust more.

The indicators that we are looking for are in a different language in the same survey, and it could be presented in different public spaces as well. For example, a lot of multicultural members regularly go to the Theo Notaras function hall; pretty much every fortnight there are events happening. There could be a shared QR code in different languages, or materials or pamphlets could be distributed across different areas. That would be very helpful. It would make sure that members of different communities come forward together and share their views.

Digital-friendly access is fantastic. Everything is digital these days—education, hospitals and everything else. Having a written form of the presentation, or a pamphlet, would also be very helpful.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question about your proposal for multicultural urban art and design projects. Do you have any project ideas that the community may be looking to pursue or is it more about having a consistent program to consult with the community and develop these projects? What do you have in mind when you propose that idea?

Mr Krishnamurthy: One of the arts programs that we discussed with our members is a community street art program, where we encourage our members to come forward

and draw a poster or pictures in their own way about how they grew up in their country, and share it here. Not everyone is across what others are trying to present here. That sort of community street art program is what we are promoting at the moment.

Also, it is about having hot spots, for example, where we can display the artwork in a public space. That would be helpful. I know that some of the migrant arts are presented once or twice a year in the Belconnen Arts Centre. I visit that place very regularly for all sorts of events and festivals—different celebrations. Having a public hot-spot space where we can display a community based and multicultural arts program would be very helpful.

We know that youth have a lot of energy. The main reason for graffiti in different areas is mainly because of that. Channelling their energy and bringing it into some form of curated cultural space, again, is another form in which we can bring them along and for them to create something. For example, in the Gungahlin town centre, near the restroom areas at the Gungahlin College, all of that artwork is displayed on the wall, which is a fantastic initiative. More of that sort of thing would be very helpful.

When we are creating any policies in art and other areas, it is always good to have an inclusive policy, so that all the ideas are discussed and a core design happens, rather than people being told what they should do. The key thing I mentioned in my submission is that managed creativity basically reduces unmanaged vandalism.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: On page 3 of your submission, there is a recommendation that recycling and waste management information be provided in major community languages. This is a fairly short question, rather than a philosophical discursion. What languages would you recommend that the information be translated into? Do you have an understanding or an assessment of the most useful set of languages for which translation would be appropriate?

Mr Krishnamurthy: Definitely. Many of our members, the vast percentage, are from Chinese and Indian backgrounds. We have a small percentage of African members, from the African region, and South Americans. However, if we are looking to expand to languages other than English, I would say Chinese and Hindi. These are preferred.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chinese Mandarin or Chinese Cantonese?

Mr Krishnamurthy: Mandarin, and Hindi, which is a widely spoken language in India. These are the two primary languages that I would like to mention here. Expanding Fix My Street, even by using the “easy read” option, would be helpful, too. Having more pictures rather than pages of information written in text, again, would be useful, because a picture can talk in any language and to anyone. That sort of thing is always helpful. There are lots of community groups; we are ready to partner in this sort of initiative, and we would be happy to work with whoever is in need of those services.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you very much. You have actually answered my follow-up—maybe you could expand on it—on improving Fix My Street, to improve access by CALD groups. I am looking for more information specifically on what you had in mind. You mentioned having more of a graphic approach and expanding “easy read”. Are there any other elements of Fix My Street where it could be made more user-

friendly for CALD groups?

Mr Krishnamurthy: Thanks for the question. I am not sure whether this would be practical to implement: we are talking a lot in digital language these days. Some CALD members who are seniors are not “computer standards”, which is what I call them. Having a printable form for them to use to put in their submissions, or issues that they want to raise with the government, in a written form, would be very helpful.

For example, the feedback that we hear from our community members is that, with some of the forms that they post, they do not know whether they have been received by Access Canberra. Having a clear indication, where these documents are being posted, of how many are waiting in the queue and that sort of information available to the public would be very helpful.

THE CHAIR: That touches on my next question. Does the Australian Multicultural Action Network get any government funding, or are you just a group representing the CALD community?

Mr Krishnamurthy: We receive some grants. For example, I think there is the Multicultural Inclusion Grant. We were very active over the weekend at the Multicultural Festival. We had a cultural showcase. The name of the showcase was *Echoes from Delta: A Cultural Odyssey*. Many MLAs attended the event. Peter Cain is a close friend; he is always there, at all the events. The Multicultural Inclusion Grant is open at the moment, so we are discussing as a committee how we can utilise the grant and what sort of program we can deliver.

Apparently, there are two different forms. One is a community program; another is cultural celebration, which we are always involved in. There are also a few other grants that we do make use of, as and when they are available. Most recently, some projects we did were for CALD seniors. Last year, we did this by way of the Seniors Grant, so that we could make use of the money from that program.

We are being run mainly through using the grant, as well as the membership fees that we collect from our members. Apart from that, we do have some simple fundraising programs, but we are not able to generate much money that way. Most of our activities are run through the grants.

THE CHAIR: I know the government are struggling for funding. If we were to ask them to add graphics or flyers on recycling et cetera, there might be a grant that you could apply for, to help members in your community. Is that the sort of thing that you look at?

Mr Krishnamurthy: It is a fantastic opportunity. I welcome that, and we are very happy to work with the government through that process. That is most welcome. Thank you; we appreciate that.

THE CHAIR: I am not offering government money, but I am trying to find ways to get around things.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Page 4 of the submission talks about “the use of

community ambassadors to bridge communication between CALD residents and TCCS officers”. Could you tell me more about how a scheme of community ambassadors might work?

Mr Krishnamurthy: There are different community leaders that we always engage with in the various projects that we do. For example, there is transport safety; most recently, we have been running one on gambling harm prevention. With all those projects, community leaders from different backgrounds come together and support us in these various initiatives.

These community leaders are definitely those community ambassadors, because the information that we share with them spreads into their communities, and we can see a lot of inquiries coming back to us, saying, “We heard that you are running a program for youth about road safety; is there a way that we can bring our kids and teenagers into the program?” There are things like that. When these community leaders are engaged in initiatives like this, the information goes far; it spreads across the community, and it becomes very useful for everyone. That is what I mentioned in my submission, based on what we heard from the community.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything that you would like to leave us with, before we close this session?

Mr Krishnamurthy: Thank you once again for the opportunity to present here. As I mentioned at the beginning, multicultural services are the everyday expression of how much a city values its people, so they are very important. That is my closing statement.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, thanks for your attendance today and for your submission. There were no questions taken on notice, so we will wrap up this session now.

Mr Krishnamurthy: Thanks once again.

JACOMB, MS PHILLIPA, Human Rights Legal Adviser, ACT Human Rights Commission

MATHEW, DR PENNY, President and Human Rights Commissioner, ACT Human Rights Commission

THE CHAIR: We now welcome witnesses from the ACT Human Rights Commission. As witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Dr Mathew: Not really. I do not think so. We are here to answer any questions you have. I do not know whether we will take up the whole time allotted, but we are happy to help if we can.

THE CHAIR: Appreciate that; thank you. Based on your work, what are the main concerns about the provision of municipal services in the ACT? What would you most like to press upon us?

Dr Mathew: We would encourage the committee to try and think in terms of human rights—obviously, being the Human Rights Commission. There are many human rights that we could have talked about. You will be receiving submissions from people with disability, for example. Equality is a lens that you could run over things. How does the physical environment disable people from participating in the community?

But, given that we have a very new right, the right to a healthy environment in our act, we are now trying to look at a whole range of things with that right in mind. Our submission has really homed in on the right to a healthy environment. We have made three basic points in the submission. First, we have talked about public spaces and active travel infrastructure. We really want to stress the idea of equity there: making sure that the planning benchmarks in terms of access to green space and so on are actually monitored and complied with.

One example that we came up with was the issue of the school oval in the fairly new suburb of Strathnairn. There was a community petition and the government responded very favourably to that. But there might be an issue about how are we complying with the relevant standards in terms of access to green space. I note the government has put in a very, very comprehensive submission. So that might be a question that you ask there. Obviously, that is very important to people's ability to get out and enjoy an environment that contributes to their health and wellbeing.

The second point we have made is on waste management and pollution control. We have talked about monitoring pollution. Obviously, if we have overflowing bins and so on that can contribute to a toxic environment, and that is part of the right to a healthy environment. We have suggested that the committee focus on how those things are monitored. We have talked about the terrific pilot on organic waste collection. I think the community is keen to see that rolled out further—that will contribute to a healthy environment—and to think about circular economy initiatives to really take that forward.

The final point we have made is about benchmarking and accountability. I had a good look at the very comprehensive submission from the government, where they do talk about benchmarking, but it is not necessarily about environmental standards. They are looking at other jurisdictions and how well they do. There was a mention of active travel. I think there is a mention of a survey that is done every few years. Those are the sorts of things we want to see focused upon. So what is the uptake of active travel—meaning that there are fewer vehicle emissions and that people are also healthier? We are trying to run the right to a healthy environment lens over areas that we might not have looked at in the past as the Human Rights Commission and invite the committee to think in those terms as well. Does that make sense?

THE CHAIR: Yes. One of my questions was about the benchmarking. Is it not happening now and where you see a shortfall, if any?

Dr Mathew: I guess we would encourage more to happen. Obviously, representatives of government are best placed to answer what benchmarking they do. They have talked a lot about benchmarking, but it is not always about the environment and protection of the environment.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: I will just keep building on this—firstly, about the equity of access for those who might be experiencing disability and access to the environment. Is there a minimum standard that could be applied?

Dr Mathew: That is a really tough question. I think we have focused more on the standards we have set. I think, in general, this jurisdiction is very attuned to the need for access to green space, having an urban forest, an adequate tree canopy and so on. It is really more about how those standards are monitored and complied with.

MR BRADDOCK: We have a range of suburbs built over the past hundred years to a different standard. Are there any of those that raise concerns for you in terms of equity of access to the urban environment or accessibility in general that we need to improve?

Dr Mathew: The only example we really came up with was the Strathnairn example. I think you would need to speak to community groups about what they are experiencing. We were thinking about the actual standards in terms of what kind of distance is imposed between suburban blocks and a park and whether that had been complied with in that particular example of the Strathnairn oval. But we certainly have not done a look overall at the whole of the ACT to think about whether that is being complied with.

MR BRADDOCK: Has the ACT government consulted with the Human Rights Commission in any way on how to apply the right to a healthy environment and accessibility in its suburban infrastructure?

Dr Mathew: We, as you know, I am sure, are doing a series of audits to really try and put some more flesh on what the right to a healthy environment means and we are consulting with government to try and make that very meaningful.

MR BRADDOCK: As part of that work, or one of those audits, would that be

examining accessibility in the suburban environment?

Dr Mathew: Not necessarily. It is a huge area. If you think about the substantive components of the right to a healthy environment and things like a safe climate that is an enormous topic on its own, and that is just one of six elements. So far we have homed in on one element, clean air, because we thought that would be relatively discreet. When we actually get into the work, as Philippa, who is the main person working on it, has found out, it is actually quite vast in and of itself.

We are thinking about the standards that are set. There is a big debate about the national standards and whether there is any safe limit of air pollution, for example; how that is implemented in the ACT; and how many monitoring stations we have for air pollution. We are going to look at the very controversial or hot topic of wood burning heaters, for example. We have done a little community consultation at the Tuggeranong Community Council about that to get people talking with us about it. Mr Werner-Gibbings was actually at that session with the Tuggeranong Community Council. So far, we have a reasonable draft on that. That is just one element. We are now thinking about what recommendations and commendations we will make, and we need to do a lot more consultation. That is just one element.

MR BRADDOCK: Moving off the right to a healthier environment and back to accessibility for those with a disability, are there any of your pieces of work that examine how the territory is set up and whether it does meet that accessibility standard or not?

Dr Mathew: Not in my area. Obviously, there might be complaints going to Karen Toohey on those sorts of issues in her capacity as Discrimination Commissioner. As a human rights commissioner with an FTE of 2.5 working with me I really need to pick what I focus upon. As you are probably aware, we have a wide range of functions. There is the legislative scrutiny function that is not set out in legislation but we have taken on because we think it is better to get involved with the passage of new legislation before it becomes public and positions are entrenched. That is an incredibly time consuming and quite reactive piece of work. We are not in control of the legislative agenda, obviously; the Assembly is.

We intervene in litigation, and we have a very small budget to do that. We have the review power which, in the past, as you are probably aware, we have used for Corrective Services facilities. Given that we have an Office for the Inspector of Custodial Service, I am not focusing on that any longer. I get called into that as part of the National Preventive Mechanism, as one of the oversight bodies for the jail, for example. We are focusing on a right to healthy environment. I have one staff member helping me with that. So there are limits on exactly how many issues we can take on and look at.

MR BRADDOCK: Can you please take on notice, and please pass on my apologies to Ms Toohey for creating work for her—

Dr Mathew: She is unwell today. I hope she is not watching.

MR BRADDOCK: I would appreciate some information on recent complaint trends in

terms of accessibility of the urban environment and if there is anything this committee should be aware of in that space.

Dr Mathew: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Page 2 of your submission asked for consideration of current monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for the regulation of pollution. What did you have in mind with this? What are the commission's suggestions for improving monitoring and enforcement mechanisms?

Dr Mathew: We did have one thing about that. Do you want to talk, Phillipa?

Ms Jacomb: No.

Dr Mathew: I do not think we have come up with concrete suggestions on that.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: If it is more of a general sort of advice to the government to begin or carry on doing some thinking about that, that is fine. I have another question—a slightly different question—around the comment that the government could invest in further opportunities in circular economy initiatives to reduce landfill dependency. Are there specific ideas that you have come across in research or while looking at the issue that are worthwhile?

Dr Mathew: I do not think so as yet; no.

Ms Jacomb: It is not an area we are focused on yet.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: But you may be looking at it down the track, and it is worthwhile for the government to be thinking about it as well.

Dr Mathew: It is really an invitation to the committee to think about that and ask about what is happening in the circular economy space. There are certainly papers from government but how well that is working—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: How strong is a circle; yes.

Dr Mathew: It contributes to a healthy environment, and we are suggesting that some questions be asked about that. It is not as though we have done that work at this point in time.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Understood.

THE CHAIR: On that note, how is it that the problem has been presented to you? If you are asking us to consider these, what is the problem that you are hoping we answer?

Dr Mathew: It is not as though I am reacting to complaints. I had a look at the submissions that were put to the inquiry. It was more us thinking there is an inquiry going on; we have a new right to a healthy environment; how do we run that lens over it and encourage the committee to ask questions actively about what will contribute to a healthy environment? Things like access to green space and active travel all seem to

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be part of municipal services, waste collection and so on. It is really about trying to put the lens of a right to a healthy environment over it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Is there anything that you would like to close with or bring up that we have possibly not asked yet?

Dr Mathew: I am not sure I can think of anything at this point. Phillipa, can you?

Ms Jacomb: No; thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, we really appreciate your time today and the submission that you have made. There was one question taken on notice. That will need to be provided to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. Thank you.

Hearing suspended from 11.19 am to 11 37 am

IBBOTSON, MR JEFF, Advocacy Team Member, Pedal Power ACT
KING, MS GILLIAN MARGARET, Convenor, Living Streets Canberra
SNOW, MR MALCOLM CHARLES, Member, Living Streets Canberra
WATSON, MR MICHAEL IAN, Advocacy Coordinator, Pedal Power ACT

THE CHAIR: We now welcome witnesses from Pedal Power ACT and Living Streets Canberra. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would anyone like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Ibbotson: I will be very brief. The Pedal Power submission is fairly plain and clear as to what we see in the terms of reference for the inquiry. On the appropriateness and geographical spread of facilities, we say that there are a number of areas that are really in need of attention. They are West Belconnen, Weston Creek and Tuggeranong. They are the more periphery areas where the servicing of bike paths has not been keeping pace with the growth in those areas. We would say that Belconnen is probably the main one that we would focus on in particular.

In relation to maintenance, we say that the maintenance funding has not kept pace over the last couple of years with the amount of work that needs to be done. Mr Emerson asked for some figures on what has been spent on maintenance for the last couple of years, and it seems to be between about \$6 million and \$8 million a year on maintenance. We say that is a shortfall of about \$3 million shortfall. Pedal Power did some research some years ago and ran it past the officials at the time, and there was not any great difference of opinion about that. So we are short of maintenance funding. The approach of the directorate to maintenance of paths is it is a breakdown of bad gain and trying to fix what the problems are. So it is a responsive rather than being proactive.

I think every house owner would say that prevention is better than cure. So we would be urging that there be more money allocated to prevent having to renew paths—as they seem to approach it at the moment. That said, the directorate is at the moment doing a pilot on some prevention methods and ascertaining what needs to be done, and we would urge that to be extended. From what I understand, that is not funded the current pilot—because, of course, they are waiting for the outcome of the pilot. I think it is a good initiative from the directorate, and we would ask them to spend more on that sort of prevention funding.

As a little observation of the submissions lodged by the directorate, or the government's response to the submission to the committee, I think they did not quite read it very well or that it is a symptom of them not really understanding how paths fit into the scheme of things. One of the terms of reference talks about verges. Paths are part of those verges, but they said nothing about paths in that section of their submission and they did not say much about the appropriateness of the geographical spread of the network. They said, "We have got paths here and we have got paths there, and we have got paired paths over here, and we classify them in this particular way," but they did not really say much about the appropriateness of it. So I would be asking you to ask them about that when they come before the committee. Mike has a couple of words he would like to say about governance.

Mr Watson: I like the fact that we are looking at municipal services as a whole. Working as an advocacy, if there is a big picture strategy saying what you are trying to achieve, it means that, when there is a decision or an implementation covering a municipal service, we have something to actually measure it against and say, “This is going to do a good job.”, or “It could be done better in this way or that way.” We frequently find that, if you ask for a strategy and what you are trying to achieve, it is not clear and explicit to start with, “I know you said we are going to do this but we changed the goal posts.” If the strategic goal posts are changed, that is perfectly okay, but it is better to have the big picture of what governments and us trying to achieve and compare and contrast.

Ms King: Just picking up on that, there is a whole raft of policies and legal requirements that the Minister for Infrastructure needs to deliver against, particularly the transport infrastructure. All our streets, paths and crossings need to be safe and accessible, not just some of them. Separated paths and so on are needed in some areas, but people have to get to and from those separated paths. Similarly with public transport, people have to be able to get to and from the public transport. If we look at the ACT crash maps, we see that they are almost identical to the road maps. So it is all our streets; it is not just some bits and pieces.

The second point is that it is really important in terms of priority that walkability needs to be top. That is safe, accessible, comfortable, convenient walkability. Our infrastructure needs to reflect that and our budget needs to reflect that. We need to pay attention to how humans have evolved. Humans have evolved to look for the most efficient way of doing things, and that includes things like where to walk and where to cross. Just because you build a path in a certain area does not mean that is where people will walk or where they will cross. We had an example of that yesterday, unfortunately.

The third issue is time—the time it takes to initiate works and to deliver them. It is really slow. It takes a long time. With replacement or upgrading of paths, I have no idea how long the lead time is but it is years and years in many circumstances—two arrows marked, three in some cases, with the arrows being worn off, and then the path will be closed for three weeks. That would never happen with the road surface. We have also got paths being closed or severely damaged for weeks or months and sometimes years for construction projects. Again, that would never happen for road surfaces.

Everybody walks—unless they are in a wheelchair—at least for some part of their journey. About 40 per cent of people in Australia do not drive, for whatever reason—they are too young, they are too old, they have a disability or they choose not to—and everybody is walking at some point. That is why walking must be the top priority, and delivery of the infrastructure for getting around must be done in a timely way. It also must be delivered to standards.

We have accessibility standards. We have various other standards—Australian standards. Austroads has also put out a raft of standards. The ACT is supposed to be the nation’s capital. It was set up as a showcase. At the very least, it must comply with those standards and preferably exceed them in order to be a showcase. It needs to be done with a systematic approach to bring the whole of the infrastructure up to scratch, not just little bit by little bit, and it needs to be maintained. I absolutely support my colleagues in Pedal Power about the maintenance issue. There are people that cannot leave their properties except in a vehicle as they cannot walk on the street outside

because they do not have a path or the path is blocked or in such poor condition or there is overhanging branches or whatever it is.

We have our six principles that were in the submission and they are in the joint statement, joint policy statement, which I have also shared with you. The fifth statement is about resources in the budget. I think it was the United Nations who called for 20 per cent of transport budgets to be spent on active transport, because it is an equity issue and a safety issue. It is a whole raft of issues. Allowing the community to contribute to the planning work and the delivery work, is free labour and people love doing things in their community, especially if it is making it better—for example, if it is painting or if it is planting things. It brings the community together and it is a way of upgrading the infrastructure in a quick way and getting ownership of the local community and the local community know where things are needed.

Another one is around transparency about what is in the budget because. A lot of the stuff is unclear when you try to divide up the budget. It was very good last year to have a spreadsheet of the budget line items, but it was very unclear what category a lot of them were in. Were they active travel or not? Was it road safety or not? Who knows?

Coming back to resources, there is a global move to making 30 kilometres an hour the default in urban areas. Above that, road noise goes up, the chances of anybody surviving being hit goes down dramatically and it does not make much difference to the travel time. If an area is 30 kilometres an hour, compliance goes up, because people know it is just a 30 kilometre an hour area and you are not having to pay attention to what the signs are—“Oh, did I miss a sign?” and then people complain about getting fined. It also means you have fewer signs.

Importantly, it means that you only need to maintain one asset and adapt one asset. The road design also needs changing, because our streets are designed for speed, but, if you are looking after one asset, it is a lot cheaper than having to look after two assets, which is the road service and the paths—where there are paths. Then any savings can actually be put to upgrading the paths and crossings on the streets where they are needed, where you need to have separation because of the amount of traffic—foot, bike, scooter or car traffic.

The sixth is trees. They must be looked after. They are an asset. They help to cool our streets. They help make our city a lot more comfortable and convenient for people to get around. They provide habitat. They improve the look of our street. People parking under them compresses the soil and makes it very, very hard for the trees to grow and for the water to get in, which also affects buildings. It is just not good. The amount of parking on verges is going through the roof. Basically, they need to be looked after.

But it all comes down to having equitable cities. Everybody should be given the opportunity to have a choice in how they move around. People who do not have a choice need to be able to get around safely, conveniently and easily. Everybody walks at some point. That is why our infrastructure, where people walk, needs to be dramatically improved and come up to standard, and that includes lights.

THE CHAIR: I would like to understand the highest impact changes the government should consider to active transport infrastructure.

Mr Ibbotson: I have mentioned a bit about the Belconnen bikeway, which has been on the books for a little while. That is a key measure for getting people from western Belconnen and Ginninderry into the town centre, and there are gaps. The directorate are looking at that area at the moment. They are looking at feasibility, but it needs to go further than that. I think what is known as the Belconnen bikeway is probably the biggest one there.

From our perspective, of course, Northbourne Avenue is a big issue as well, but that is a road issue rather than a path issue. In the south, in the Weston area, there is some work being looked at on what is called the C5, which is the principal group that goes from Tuggeranong through to Belconnen. There is a section of the C5 between Coolamon Court and the Cotter Road that is basically a broken up footpath. There is some work being done on what the options are there. We think that needs to be a priority for funding. Pedal Power has made some suggestions about a slightly alternative route that would replace the footpath and be in the green belt that is next to it. They are probably the two that I can identify as specifics. There are also projects in Tuggeranong, but I am just not across all of those at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Sure. Anything else?

Ms King: I think, for us, it would be the priority given to active transport. That would be to make walking as the top priority and bike riding as the next one down in all of the decision-making, the funding, the design and the implementation. An interim step would be to at least treat that the same as driving.

THE CHAIR: So you do not believe that that is happening at the moment?

Ms King: Absolutely not. Driving is always given top priority.

Mr Ibbotson: There were attempts in previous strategies to put what they call the inverted hierarchy in. But, invariably, it does not get put in. I think there is a general sense of timidity on the part of government to take on not the car lobby—because there is not so much of a car lobby—but the voters who are very happy driving their cars to work and they do not want to antagonise them. I think that timidity is a—

Ms King: The previous transport strategy had the transport hierarchy triangle in it. The draft of the current one did but it did not make it to the final one. That is a good question to ask. There is a lot of guidance around, nationally, through Austroads, of which ACT is a member. It is a government organisation. They have called for lowering speed limits.

Canberra has been built for driving from the get-go and driving at speed. So our streets need changing. A lot of Canberra has been built without paths. Whole swathes of Canberra do not have any paths. We have got these wide, curving streets with large radius corners. The message it is giving people when we are driving is to drive fast and not pay attention to other people who might be around. This is where modifications are needed, and this is where the community can help with that—with bump-outs, wiggles and whatever it happens to be.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Mr Snow?

Mr Snow: I want to make a comment around the prioritisation of asset management. I think we all understand the budget is under pressure, but I would like to see a stronger nexus between what the land-use planners are proposing in terms of increased density and therefore greater population together with the prioritisation of the existing assets within those locations. I cannot see evidence that the land-use and transport planners are talking to each other about those priorities. I think, given the increased tax revenue that the government enjoys through this increased density, there is a strong financial case to be put as to where the prioritisation should be. If it is earned in the location it should be spent in the location.

Ms King: The developers can be required to upgrade the walking infrastructure or the paths around them as part of their development approvals.

THE CHAIR: That is very helpful. I want to go back to something that you said, Ms King: that things need to be delivered to a certain standard. Can you give me some examples of where that is not happening?

Ms King: Yes; just accessibility of paths—the width, the maintenance of them and the lighting. Lighting has got worse, particularly in the older areas, since the switch to LEDs, to the extent that you wonder what the purpose is of the lighting. They switched the older lights—the ones that are on a more decorative pole that used to have a lantern at the top that shone light out sideways—to ones that put a bright light straight down; so it is dark in between. Often it will be onto grass or into a gutter or into a tree. Who is it saving? There is a very clear Australian standard for that, and it is where the lighting on the paths must serve the path. It is separate to the lighting for the roads.

THE CHAIR: Okay; thank you.

Mr Ibbotson: Another quick example of standards goes to the old issue of bollards, which litter a lot of our paths. They are meant to be a last resort. They are unavoidable in some situations but it seems to be the default: “Let’s just put a bollard in there; that will keep the cars out,” whether it is driving down to the edge of the lake or wherever. Whereas, if they thought about it, they could take other measures. Bollards are the last resort, and they should be, rather than the first measure.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a series of questions on equality of access and also performance against standards and benchmarks. I will start with you, Mr Ibbotson. You mentioned the worst suburbs for accessibility for bike paths. Is there a standard that you could pin against which the ACT government should be performing in terms of what all suburbs should have?

Mr Ibbotson: We talked about this before we came in and we were trying to find some examples that we could come up with. The City of Sydney has done a lot of work in the inner city. But, as to printed standards, the municipal infrastructure standards are there, and that is what you should be measuring it against. The difficulty that we have is that the standards have changed. They have been upgraded, as they should have been, but the paths have not been. I am afraid I cannot throw much more light on it than that.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. In terms of benchmarking our performance against other

cities or jurisdictions that might be similar. I have had various quotes thrown at me saying we are best performing and others saying we are quite poorly performing. Do you have any views or any data that might be able to help us to articulate where Canberra sits in terms of similar jurisdictions?

Mr Watson: In the submission we put in a link. Montreal has put in some very good fine-grained infrastructure linkages. It is worth five minutes to sit down and enjoy a YouTube to see that.

MR BRADDOCK: Would that be an example of best practice or middle of the pack?

Mr Watson: It is very good. There is no real cause for complaint there. We have been comparing London against Canberra and realising the geographic difference. London is just so crushed with so much humanity and built-up areas. We have miles and miles of nothing in between suburbs, which means that our needs are different. However, in particular, in Montreal and Ontario, the Canadians have a wide range of stuff that is coming. Vancouver have recently come up in the news as a success story. They have invested money over 10 years and there has been a massive increase in use. I can provide links when I get home. Again, I use YouTube, because there is a very good commentary act in Canada that provides commonsense information. I am happy to provide that.

Mr Ibbotson: There is another measure, Copenhagenize, which rates cities around the world for their overall facilities in cycling. They have released their city ratings for the world. Canberra is the only city in Australia that they have rated, and it is in the low thirties. The aspiring European cities are up in the 99 or 100 area. I am waiting to get a download of Canberra's report on that. When that comes through, I can also forward that to the committee.

MR BRADDOCK: I would appreciate that. Ms King, it would be a similar question for you on walkability. Is there a standard? Noting we have suburbs that were built over 100 years ago to a very different standard at the time, from a quality of access in terms of benchmarking weighing all of those other suburbs against the current standard, do you have a recommended standard we should follow? Then, on the strategy, how do we address those that were built to a different standard?

Ms King: The Austroads accessibility standards, even though they fall far short—and that has been a topic of discussion in the Transport Canberra Accessibility Reference Group. Craig and the Advocacy for Inclusion will probably be able to comment on that in the next round. The Austroads standards is a combined thing, and the ACT is part of it. The 100 years ago sort of thing does not necessarily stack up. I have a sister who lives in Auckland, which, like Canberra, was big on cars. She is in an older-ish suburb, like a lot of Canberra. The paths in her local low-density street are three metres wide. They are the original paths. I would second Copenhagenize and Vancouver. Portland might be another one.

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Watson, you seem to be keen to contribute.

Mr Watson: I forgot to add that you are looking at a new concept being developed in London, where over 50 per cent of vehicles in the city of London are now bikes. There

are more bikes than there are cars. The difference is that, where we put in incentives with nice streets in some places, they put in effective disincentives to cars going through. They have made low-traffic neighbourhoods so that you have got access to places but you cannot go through.

But not only that; they also put adjacents; there are through opportunities. They do not prevent people getting through. So all people going fast are funnelled into short roads. That has been tremendously successful. The actual cost of that is relatively insignificant, because you are not taking up paths; you are just putting in posters to say cars cannot go through. That has been outstandingly successful for very little money.

Ms King: Other cities have done similar sorts of things—for example, Paris, Barcelona and a lot of South American cities. It is the quick, cheap stuff like paint, planters and bits of rubber. There is a whole manual about how to do it. That is where you can involve the community—that free labour, community building and recycling.

Mr Snow: I think an example closer to home would be what Sydney did during the pandemic, which was to take the opportunity when road traffic had disappeared—well, not completely—to take over carriageway space and take over a lane beside the kerb. It was so successful in terms of how the community responded to that shift that they have now been made permanent. So the doom and gloom that we get from traffic engineers all the time about civilisation will stop if we take away asphalt has proven completely not true.

The other example I give is the city of Melbourne, where more than 90 hectares of asphalt has been converted into public space. In Melbourne, where you would imagine there are massive traffic volumes—and there are—but the traffic finds its way to negotiate and get through. The community is better off for 90 hectares of green space that were created by looking at asphalt quite differently.

Ms King: The city of Melbourne and the surrounding municipalities have done a variety of stuff, which is absolutely fantastic. “Tactical urbanism” is the sort of make do, have fun, beautify—whatever you want to call it—term, and I am happy to share the manual and other things with that sort of great stuff in there.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. I have a further question around that benchmarking against other similar jurisdictions, particularly in Australia. I know there is the walkability score. I am not sure if that is a suitable benchmark to be utilised.

Ms King: Absolutely. I wrote it down here and I forgot to say it.

MR BRADDOCK: Are there any other benchmarks that we could potentially look at to see how Canberra compares to similar jurisdictions?

Ms King: I think it is just things that we have seen, just being around. Brisbane is interesting. I spent some time a few years ago in Brisbane. They have some really good stuff—often right beside some appalling stuff. They are on a river, so they have to get across the river—but we have several lakes, slightly wider. They have several non-driving bridges. They were built for walking, cycling and scooting. They have just built another one. They are absolutely fantastic. There is one that goes across to the university.

On one side it has bikes, in the middle it has buses and on the other side it has walking, with shelter and benches all the way along. It is absolutely fabulous.

On Victoria Bridge, which was the main link between south Brisbane and Brisbane City, many years ago they converted half of it to be public transport so it had buses going each way on half of it and cars going each way on the other half with a path on either side. At the time, I was living there it was like Commonwealth Avenue Bridge and anybody could go on either side and, on the other side, the path was walking only—though the scooter riders totally ignored that. Now it is completely public transport and active transport. There is no need for cars, and it is functioning perfectly well.

MR BRADDOCK: Can I just confirm that the walkability score would be a suitable benchmark for this committee to use as part of its inquiry to compare ourselves and other jurisdictions?

Ms King: Yes, although it does focus on distances and gradients—so how far it is to the destination.

Mr Snow: As opposed to the quality of the walking experience. The other comment I would make is that what characterises a lot of what has happened in those more informed places, particularly in municipal councils, is that the maxim is “we put it back better”. We do not replace footpaths with the same footpaths. It is back to that concept of integrated design thinking with the traffic engineers, the transport engineers and the urban designers saying, “Okay; before we just put back what is broken, let’s actually think about this precinct and the way it can work,” particularly with that pressure created by density, as I said earlier.

Ms King: With the replacement of paths, they probably say that they are putting it back better, because now it is thicker and it is reinforced so people who are driving fast over it will not smash it. But that is not what we have said in previous submissions. It is the width and the smoothness of the connections.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Funnily enough my question is about the comments in the Pedal Power submission on page 4: “Amongst other places, South Tuggeranong suburbs of Banks, Conder and Gordon have worse active travel infrastructure than most other parts of Canberra. Solutions—what would they be?” You mentioned access and feeder paths are not normally available between the principal or main routes and local streets close to home destinations. What infrastructure are you suggesting? Do you have a rough number for the kilometres of pathways that you are talking about? You do not have to cost them.

Mr Watson: I defer to the Montreal study. If you look on the bottom of page 5, I have mimicked what they did. For the same time it takes to walk 750 metres, they are working on the basis that, if you have an ordinary bike, you will ride two and a half kilometres. Therefore, you want a viable alternative for people—to put in a network, so people can get from their homes into the stations for Tuggeranong, some significant distance into the future when you have the train.

Ms King: A few years ago—I am not sure if it was in the census or the household travel survey or one of those sorts of things—south Tuggeranong had basically nobody walking to school or to work. I suspect what is happening is that, because of the lack of suitable infrastructure, people are driving and they are dropping their kids to school.

For those of us who have had kids, it can be really stressful getting out in the morning. If the kids can get themselves to school on their own safely, that is one less hassle for the parents. It is much better for the kids' development socially and physically and for their eyesight and so on. But parents often will not let their kids get themselves to school because they perceive it is too dangerous.

As an example, when I stopped going to work, there were two houses very close to my kids' school, only a few houses away—in one case, across two busy streets and, another case, across one and only three houses. The kids were getting bored out of their brains, playing in the driveway and waiting for their parents. If the parents had just taken them those few steps, 10 minutes or whatever, and dropped them at the oval, the kids could have kept on walking, but they did not want to because, the standard is to drive and drop your kids. If the streets are safe for the kids to walk themselves or ride or scoot themselves, then everybody benefits.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Sure. I guess that becomes a point about social nudging as well, because streets might be very, very safe—and some are—and yet there is a lot more driving regardless. The streets have not gotten less safe since the eighties, but fewer people or kiddies are riding and walking to school. So that is an inverse sort of thing.

Ms King: That is right.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: The government would be able to do a fair bit, but changing the approach of society to the perceived safety of their children is harder.

Ms King: By doing things like modifying the streets to make it easier for people to drive slower—where there are no paths in particular—and having that slower default speed limit, that 30 kilometre an hour default speed limit, plus the modifications, particularly at corners, can make a big difference.

Mr Ibbotson: I can talk to our Brindabella team about specific examples in the Tuggeranong area, if you like, and send something through to you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: It is more south Tuggeranong. I have recently done a little bit of riding with Pedal Power around the north-eastern and western areas—south Lanyon.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all for your attendance today. The submission was really very helpful. I appreciate it so much. There were no questions taken on notice as such, but I do believe, Mr Watson, you, or both of you, were going to provide some links on some further information.

Ms King: We will, too.

THE CHAIR: Excellent; thank you very much. We look forward to that. If you could send it through to the committee secretary as soon as practicable that would be appreciated by all. Thank you.

Short suspension

JOHNSON, MISS JESSICA, Senior Lead, Policy and Advocacy, Carers ACT
WALLACE, MR CRAIG, Head of Policy, Advocacy for Inclusion

THE CHAIR: We welcome witnesses from Carers ACT and Advocacy for Inclusion. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would either of you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Wallace: I would. We welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee to speak to our joint submission with Carers ACT. I will make a brief statement and then Jess and I will be happy to take questions. Local infrastructure and municipal services are not peripheral for people with disabilities and carers; they are highly consequential for us. When they do not work, people can experience adverse outcomes which range from feeling trapped, being trapped in their homes and communities, social isolation, falls, trip hazards, a risk of homelessness if their waste disposal is not able to be arranged and managed properly within their caring arrangements, people being injured, winding up in care prematurely, to even dying. Whether someone can reach their home, reach a bus stop, access a playground or manage their household in a dignified way is determined by the quality and accessibility of municipal services.

Canberra has a significant population of people with disabilities. Around one in five Canberrans has a disability. That is approximately 87,000 people. But, when you grow that to the group of people who experience chronic illness and are ageing, and when you consider the multiplier effect of people existing within families and carer arrangements, the number is much greater than that. The current approach to municipal services largely relies on those people to report and identify problems themselves. We need to rethink this sort of reactive, complaints-driven model that places a burden on those people in their already busy and complex lives.

What our submission calls for is a shift to a proactive program of risk based footpath maintenance that prioritises routes to transport, shops and community facilities. It means continuous auditing of playgrounds and sporting facilities against genuine accessibility standards and acting on those findings. It also requires us to strengthen some of the arrangements which give us intelligence and information on where access issues fall, and our submission suggests making use of community councils for this.

We note as a general observation that the situation is uneven in Canberra. The places around the lakes tend to get a lot of attention, but it is uneven in some of the suburbs. We think there is also a real difference in newer areas of Canberra, like Gungahlin. You can clearly see it is a new suburb that has been designed to an access footprint, in contrast to some of the older parts of the city. There are particular stressors at the moment. We have had above-average rainfall—not this year but across a number of years—which means we have tree roots, fraying infrastructure and bike paths that are becoming a problem. We have also had a lot of building and construction around the city which has interrupted the usual paths of travel and the wayfinding that people experience.

I have been listening to the hearing throughout the day. I think that Living Streets have a good handle on the regulatory environment, but we would note that the National

Construction Code talks about what needs to happen in this space. We have said that accessibility should be mandated within the Territory Plan, the territory planning framework and the work that certifiers do to sign off on buildings and public spaces. At the moment, it operates, to our understanding, as a sort of advisory. That structure mainly attends to new development. If we build a new suburb, it says what has to happen. We need to attend to older parts of the city as well.

I will finish by talking briefly about waste services. Households with disability-related care needs generate more waste, often due to the caring arrangements, support and the nature of people's disability, such as incontinence products and so on, and they can also involve a more complicated relationship with waste management. Some people have fared quite badly within the FOGO—I am struggling to remember the acronym—the trial which involves waste sorting. They have been unable to wrangle with it, and that has been quite consequential. We have called for a just transition approach, with a disability rights lens on waste reduction as well.

That ends my statement, but Jess may add something.

Miss Johnson: I will keep it brief because you have covered most of the issues that we were hoping to address today. At the end of the day, what we are raising is not concrete and bins; it is people. It is about a carer trying to plan a simple day out or a partner who hopes their loved one can get to an appointment safely. It is about a child with a disability who feels excited about the Canberra Show this weekend. That child should be able to get there without barriers, but at the moment they face cracked footpaths that can tip their wheelchair. If they live in my suburb, they face two buses and a tram before they even get to the grounds, even though it is only a 16-minute drive away. They face a weekend forecast of 35 degrees with no shelter at the local stop.

This is what carers are managing and what families are navigating every day, not just special occasions like the show. So, when the ACT government chooses to invest in the basics that help people move, connect and participate with dignity, we are not just improving infrastructure; we are also making each day a little safer, a little calmer and a little fairer, and letting carers and people with disability know that the city sees them and that we want to see them out and about as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I will start. We have heard so much about footpaths today, which is no surprise. On the Carers ACT side of things, you have talked about scheduled footpath maintenance. Are there specific points? Mr Wallace, you mentioned the older suburbs, but can you point to specific areas that you would like to impress upon the government to look at as a matter of urgency?

Mr Wallace: Was that a question to me and then perhaps to Jess?

THE CHAIR: I was noting that you had discussed it, but, Miss Johnson, could you talk about your thoughts with regard to where initial action needs to be taken?

Miss Johnson: It is in the suburbs. I think you guys have heard that many times today. We have wonderful footpaths in the city and around the lake, but it is more about: "How will I get there if I cannot get to the bus stop in my suburb safely?" I live in Fraser. It is a lovely suburb, but my mum cannot walk around without tripping over. We have a

lovely new section of footpath right next to my house. It goes for about five metres, and then it joins up to a very overgrown and very cracked footpath. It is about the suburbs. In the heatwave that we had the other week, my mum really wanted to catch a bus to the library, which it is air-conditioned, but to get there she had to stand at the bus stop in the sun and she had to walk on a footpath that is overgrown. It is about the connecting footpaths that take someone from their house to a bus stop or their local shop, or to go somewhere where there are nice footpaths.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question for Mr Wallace. You raised older suburbs that were constructed to a standard that is lower than the current accessibility standard. Is there any way of evaluating those suburbs against the Disability Discrimination Act for accessibility to ensure they meet a minimum accessibility standard? Is that possible?

Mr Wallace: Thank you for that question. It is a good question. Yes, there is. There is a written standard. There is a class of professionals who are access consultants, many of whom have a disability, so they have direct experience of it. They can go out with a light and a tape measure, and everything else they need, and they can measure the camber. They can basically do an assessment of whether a piece of infrastructure meets the Construction Code.

If I may add to the answer before, we would say that sort of attention needs to be a kind of a laser-like focus, particularly on the approaches to some of the suburban group centres. You can also do it around places like assisted living and aged-care residential. My brother is in an aged-care facility, and there is basically no footpath. The footpath that is there has an active travel sign painted on a bit of a cracked footpath, which is sort of hilarious. Residents of that retirement village are not able to get from their village to the local shops. The footpath is simply too cracked and there are gaps. Suddenly the footpath disappears and there is a grass verge. You could focus on some of those areas and use commercial expertise. There is a class of professionals who can do it.

MR BRADDOCK: To the best of your knowledge, has the ACT government undertaken such an audit of its existing infrastructure to ensure it is accessible?

Mr Wallace: To the best of my knowledge, they are using the Fix My Street framework, which relies on people with disabilities, carers and others making reports about a place that is broken, insufficient or inaccessible. They would then go there and, presumably against the access standards, fix it. But that is different from what we are calling for, which is a systemic, sustained review of places and spaces, using that expertise.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Page 3 of the joint submission suggests community education campaigns, staff training and support for respectful use of reserved seating. Could you expand on that? What are ideas for supporting the respectful use of reserved seating? How is this done? I have seen it at football stadiums—there are signs and it ideally relies on people being aware—and on buses, but is there a framework used elsewhere or in some parts of Canberra that could be expanded and would work better? I do not mind who starts.

Miss Johnson: I will jump in. I do not know if you have been to Cairns Airport. They

have done this really well, in that they have quite explicit signage that says: “Not all disabilities are physical or visible”. There is repeated messaging all throughout Cairns. It is at the bus stops, it is at the airport and it is at the local shopping centres. It is a nice, constant reminder to the whole community that not all disability is visible.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: So constant reinforcement of a positive message?

Miss Johnson: Yes. It is not rocket science; it is about a repeated message at priority areas on buses and priority seating—a simple one-liner. The libraries are doing a lot of stuff with the sunflower lanyard project, and that is great, but not everybody wants to wear a big lanyard to say that they maybe need a bit of extra space or that they do not want to make eye contact in a crowded room. It is about teaching society that everyone is different and some people need a bit more support and kindness.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: That is something to think about.

THE CHAIR: I wanted to touch on waste, but you covered that already, Mr Wallace. Do you have any questions, Mr Braddock?

MR BRADDOCK: Yes. Your submission talks about improvements to bus shelters, lighting around the stops and paths, and integration with travel infrastructure. Is this based on feedback from carers and people living with a disability? Is there some further evidence I can utilise that is sitting behind your recommendation?

Miss Johnson: I can certainly send you some notes from our carer focus groups, if that is what you are interested in.

MR BRADDOCK: Not so much the notes. I am trying to understand the evidence base from which you draw that particular recommendation.

Miss Johnson: Carers ACT operates the Carer Gateway, where we receive phone calls from carers every day. That is a really great source of evidence from carers who tell us what is going on. But we also hold frequent focus groups with our carers to ask them what is going on and what they would like to see done better. In about May last year, we asked about the Age-Friendly City Plan—in particular, what would help people get out and about. That was where the majority of our feedback came from around footpaths and lighting at bus shelters. Regarding the Age-Friendly City Plan, we were not just talking about how to make things more accessible for people who were older; we were also talking about carers who are older themselves or are supporting someone who is older. All of that feedback, from both younger carers and older carers, was: “Gosh, it would be nice to catch a bus.”

Mr Wallace: I can add to that a bit in terms of evidence. Advocacy for Inclusion, in conjunction with our colleague organisations and the Inner South Canberra Community Council, held a forum on planning needs in the lead-up to the ACT election. That was one of the issues that was raised. Also, the Women’s Centre for Health Matters—and I think this is historic, as in a couple of years ago—did a women’s safety audit of Canberra, and one of the themes was lighting around the tram hubs and bus shelters.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. You also raised public swimming pools and their

accessibility and talked about design features that aid accessibility. Are you aware of any audit or what the current state of Canberra's public pools is in terms of accessibility?

Miss Johnson: I am not aware of any audits. Once again, I know that there are a lot of efforts to make sure that our new pools are quite accessible, and that is great, but in Canberra we do not have all that many pools to make accessible. We are asking for existing pools to be upgraded and have things like an adult change table and a ramp—really basic things—but also more swimming pools. We established in our submission that carers and people with disability have significantly lower incomes. They do not live in lovely houses that have a swimming pool and a tennis court. You cannot necessarily drive out to the Cotter and go for a swim. And public swimming pools are few and far between in suburbs where carers and people with disability live.

Do you know what is really great for therapy and a low-impact sport for people with disability? Swimming. Do you know what is a great stress reliever? Swimming. Do you know what is a really lovely family day out in Canberra in summer? Swimming. Do you know what we lack? Swimming pools. And what we lack even more is accessible swimming pools.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. In your recommendations you talk about accessible community spaces being distributed across suburbs to reduce travel time, financial strain and isolation. What are you envisaging? Is it literally a space per suburb or couple of suburbs or even down to a block level? What are you talking about there?

Miss Johnson: I will let Craig answer.

Mr Wallace: That partly touches on the need for upgrades to community facilities, given that a number of them are located in older schools that are fraying and do not have good access features—not even modern disability toilets in some of them. It also goes to parking and adjacency to transport hubs. The Pearce Community Centre, for instance, is a bit off a bus route.

If I may pivot a bit to the answer on pools, what I would add about swimming pool access is that it is not just about having a hoist and facilities at the swimming pool itself; it is also about parking and accessibility. Getting there is the hardest thing. I must admit, we are a bit flummoxed by the announcement about an indoor swimming pool at Commonwealth Park, because parking and the ability for people with disabilities to get to Commonwealth Park is not good. So, in addition to the comment Jess made—"Where are the pools?"—planning needs to not just ensure that the pool is accessible; we also need to think about how people are actually going to get there.

MR BRADDOCK: I have one more question. In her evidence, Ms King from Living Streets mentioned lighting standards and how that might impact in terms of accessibility in a suburb. Can you please articulate, from the perspective of people living with a disability, the impact lighting can have and why it is so important?

Mr Wallace: I think that might be directed to me, but I am sure there are carer implications as well. There is a range. I can certainly articulate that. It is about the interplay between, say, a cracked footpath and low vision. It can potentially be really

hazardous. With good lighting conditions, somebody like me who uses a wheelchair can maybe navigate around or avoid potential pitfalls, but, if the lighting conditions are poor, there is potentially a dangerous area at night. There are also people with low vision who are at risk in those environments, as well as people who are elderly, or perhaps someone's vision has changed and they do not realise it; it only becomes evident in those kinds of situations, at night. Often the response of the person might simply be: "I'm not going to go out and have a walk around my community anymore, because I don't feel safe." It also goes to perception of safety and risk of harm. Unfortunately, that is a factor in Canberra, even in open spaces. If people do not feel safe, they do not feel that they are able to go to places. We have more people who are losing their licences and, as Living Streets said, need to make the most of being able to travel around their community for exercise and wellbeing.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you. I have no further questions.

THE CHAIR: Is there anything that either of you would like to raise that we have not touched on?

Miss Johnson: From the perspective of Carers ACT, when you make Canberra more accessible for people with disability, you make Canberra more accessible for carers. If there is anything you can do that makes our communities more accessible, please do it.

Mr Wallace: One of the themes of our submission is to not just have a reactive approach but also get better at foresight and understanding of what the issues are in Canberra. If we were in New South Wales or another state, you would have a local council that has a dedicated access committee, often comprised of volunteers. Gill King would be on it. You would have people with disability on it whose only job is to go around spotting and highlighting access problems in their community. Because of the way the ACT's governance is arranged, we do not have that here. We think that the community councils could be good vehicles to do this. There are often older people with mobility challenges and an interest in this area, but they need to be resourced to connect with the disability community and do it. We think that would be a really smart, tactical use of the community councils, but we and they would need to be resourced to do it.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. It is wonderful to have those ideas to put to government. Thank you both for your attendance today and for your submission to this inquiry. There were no questions taken on notice, but I believe Carers ACT will be sending some information through regarding a question Mr Braddock asked. Please send that through to the committee secretary.

Miss Johnson: Thank you very much.

Mr Wallace: Thank you.

The committee suspended from 12.40 pm to 1.54 pm

HARFORD, MR GREG, Chief Executive, Canberra Business Chamber

THE CHAIR: We welcome the Canberra Business Chamber. Please note that, as a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Harford: Sure. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today and to talk about municipal services in the ACT. Overall, as a business chamber, just to give you some context, our membership is very diverse. We cover everything from big multinational firms down to mum-and-dad owner-operators and sole traders, and everything between. A lot of our members come from retail, hospitality services and businesses here in the city, or indeed throughout the territory. It is fair to say we have some concerns about the way municipal services are maintained.

You have read our submission, so I will not go through too much detail, but there is damage around the city and there is graffiti. There is badly maintained road signage and road markings. There is a perception of safety issues in some parts of the city, particularly here in Civic. Part of that comes from the homelessness issue, but part of it is also about graffiti and the generally downtrodden nature of parts of the city. That is a real problem. It impacts the visitor economy and it impacts businesses that are located in and around the areas of unkemptness. We would like to see more action being taken to resolve the issues and get on top of the maintenance problems that are there.

We have suggested that the government could look at putting a taskforce in place to identify and resolve those issues. Some of it is happening. Things can be reported to Fix My Street, but the feedback we get is that it takes a very long time to get some of that stuff fixed, if at all. Actually, it relies on citizens to report issues, whereas we think that, between the various people who work for the ACT government, there must be people driving past or walking past these issues every day. Getting a way of capturing those issues would be positive.

Dead animals and rubbish along the roads are ongoing issues. It probably goes to questions about what can be done to keep animals away from the roads, but they unfortunately do. There is a lot of roadkill and carnage along the roads which creates an issue. And we think there probably needs to be some funding for repair of vandalism to private property. We understand that private property is private property, but property owners, in many cases, are being victimised by criminal activity, and often the cost of covering that is very significant. There is a building across the road from the Assembly which is a classic example of one that really needs some support given to it to deal with some of the issues. We also think a greater police presence in Civic would be positive but more focused on antisocial behaviour, and probably some strong messaging from government that antisocial behaviour and graffiti are not acceptable would be really positive.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate that. You mentioned a taskforce. Could you go into a bit more detail about what informed this recommendation? Do you have specific measures of what you would like the taskforce to deliver? Is it mainly focused around the city or are you seeing this from businesses across all the different areas?

Mr Harford: It is across the territory, not just here in Civic. There are many parts of the city where maintenance does not appear to be happening or things take a very long time to fix. The city centre is an important part of that, but it is a suburban issue as well. It is affecting suburban town centres, and it is affecting industrial areas around the city as well.

THE CHAIR: So the taskforce idea is more of a proactive response?

Mr Harford: That is right. We think the government needs to be better at proactively identifying the problems and fixing them, rather than relying on the public to report issues through Fix My Street.

THE CHAIR: Either or both?

Mr Harford: Absolutely, you would want to run both. I appreciate there are obviously resourcing challenges, but some issues take a very long time with Fix My Street.

THE CHAIR: There is the idea of the government funding repair of vandalism to private property, for instance. Do you have an idea of what the cost is to business? Has the chamber done any—

Mr Harford: I do not have good numbers on that. It can be very significant if you are looking at a multistorey building, for example, with graffiti going up several floors. You are potentially looking at scaffolding to deal with issues, and that can potentially amount to tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

MR BRADDOCK: A lot of your commentary went to the CBD. I am not arguing with that. Does that same commentary apply to group centres in town centres as well?

Mr Harford: Yes, it does. We get feedback from members throughout the whole of the city, not just the CBD, about upkeep issues. Ultimately, investment in town centres is probably overdue. I appreciate that there are resourcing challenges with that. Tuggeranong is perhaps an example of a town centre that looks a bit shabby and needs a bit of revitalisation. When you couple things like graffiti on top of it, it starts to look distinctly unsavoury, and that is not a good environment for business or the community.

MR BRADDOCK: You are talking about two elements there. One is maintenance and upkeep, or graffiti removal and fixing footpaths, and you are also talking about investment and improving the quality of that urban realm as well.

Mr Harford: Yes. We certainly would be supportive of investment and improving the centres. A lot of them are quite dated, because they were built at some point over the last 50 years or so, and need a bit of work. Some of that, of course, is the responsibility of private businesses, so I am not suggesting it is entirely a government responsibility, but there is certainly value in looking at those things.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: You have probably addressed this already, but I will see if we can tease out a bit more about the dedicated taskforce for city presentation—how that works in practice. Could you elaborate on what you think would be the most

effective—if it were one or the other: a team actively looking for issues or rapid response from issues of Fix My Street. Twenty streets a day, assuming there is no rubbish or anything like that, might take three years for a team to get through.

Mr Harford: Absolutely. It is about both, and you need to triage, obviously. It would seem to me that there is a difference between a personal safety issue or a road safety issue and a street pipe that is possibly out, although one contributes to the other, potentially. There is obviously a need to prioritise—I understand that—but we would like to see more focus on it and more resourcing going into it.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: You raised the example of the building across the road which is privately owned. How hard does government lean on business to fix, appropriately use, clean up and maintain their properties?

Mr Harford: Part of the question is: what is the cause of the issue in the first place? We would look at—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Non-use?

Mr Harford: Non-use is part of it. There are a whole lot of questions about why buildings might remain empty. That is a whole discussion in itself. We are very tolerant to graffiti in the city. When you have an environment where vandalism is not condoned, but there is certainly not a lot of action taken to it, and where police presence is not necessarily always visible, you kind of create a situation where private property owners struggle to keep on top of the issues and maintain their buildings. There are plenty of occupied buildings around the city and the territory as a whole where you get the same sorts of issues happening.

THE CHAIR: I want to touch on point 6. There are all sorts of anecdotal comments about the state of Canberra, but could you give us some reflections, purely from a business perspective, about the impact that the unkempt look of Canberra or the signs—dead animals on the side of the road—have on businesses and what your members are telling you.

Mr Harford: Some of those are macro issues and some are micro issues, but, overall, what I am hearing is that, where you have an environment that is unkempt, dirty, full of rubbish and full of graffiti, it acts as a deterrent to customers. It is helping to encourage customers to look elsewhere, to places that are perhaps cleaner, better lit and better kept. That is obviously a problem for those businesses. And, for the territory as a whole, particularly if you have visitors coming into the city, we want them to have a great time and feel awed by the experience. Canberra is a beautiful environment for them, but we do not want them to go away thinking, “That was a bit unsavoury” or “It didn’t feel very safe to me” or “It looked really dirty.” That experience starts the moment they get off the plane at the airport or they drive in from Sydney, Melbourne or wherever. We want to encourage repeat business, and the risk is that we will lose some of that if we do not provide a great visitor experience overall.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I think we could talk forever. Business is a big passion of mine, so I was really thrilled that you put in a submission to this inquiry. I have also heard that businesses are concerned about safety—lighting at Mitchell and things like

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that. Is there anything that we have not touched on in your submission that you would like us to consider in our report for the government?

Mr Harford: We have probably covered most of the issues. I think messaging is important into the community, from the government and the police—from everyone—that you do not have the right to smash up a building and you do not have the right to graffiti someone else's property. Those are really important messages. And dealing with some of the maintenance issues and the streetscapes would be of benefit as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will wrap up this session. On behalf of the committee, thank you for the Business Chamber's submission and attendance today. I do not believe any questions were taken on notice.

Short suspension

BOURDET, MS MICHELLE, Team Representative, Murrumbidgee Neighbourhood Team, ACT Greens

CARTER, MR SAM, Team Leader, Murrumbidgee Neighbourhood Team, ACT Greens

THE CHAIR: We welcome the Murrumbidgee Greens. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Carter: Yes, I would. Thank you very much for your time today and for allowing us to speak on our submission. We represent the ACT Greens Murrumbidgee Neighbourhood Team, which is a collective of citizens from a range of demographics that are, broadly speaking, interested in and passionate about our community's right to a clean and healthy environment, and sustainability.

In terms of our submission today, of particular note and concern to the Greens Murrumbidgee Neighbourhood Team are the urban boundary and the preservation of the western edge, the implementation of infrastructure relating to community sport, especially the implementation of artificial turf, and our concerns around that, as well as future-proofing our region into a future that is set to be more affected by climate change.

MR BRADDOCK: Firstly, Mr Carter, you mentioned artificial turf. I would be interested in terms of the concerns that you raised in your petition about the Molonglo artificial turf ovals and why you think that is not appropriate in our urban environment.

Mr Carter: Thank you for your question. In relation to the artificial turf, our concerns are around the ecological impacts of it. There is a significant body of research coming out now that these turfs leach chemicals and microplastics into the surrounding ecosystems and waterways, the surrounding area of which is home to a number of endangered species that are set to be negatively affected by this chemical and microplastic leaching.

I also note that there is more and more evidence coming to light that these turfs result in microplastics entering the systems of the athletes and the people who use them through contact. We note that they are being phased out in a number of different jurisdictions, and we question whether it is appropriate that this style of artificial turf is advantageous over a more natural grass turf.

Ms Bourdet: Can I add to that?

MR BRADDOCK: Absolutely.

Ms Bourdet: We also looked at the research overseas, and there are countries that are banning it. The Asia Pacific Games did not use it for their tournament because the artificial turf was damaging athletes' feet. There is also direct evidence about the temperature rise in artificial turf, in terms of using it all year round. Some sporting groups think, "Okay, it's wet weather; we can use the ovals for longer," but it is not the case, because it gets waterlogged, the underlay gets mouldy and, unless it is well

maintained, it does not have a long life span. Also, it is not recyclable. It goes to landfill.

Particularly in the Stromlo example, that is very close to a waterway. There are platypuses there, and wildlife, and it is leaching into those grounds. It is about the fauna, flora and the human impact, so we are against the artificial turf. New South Wales is phasing it out; as I said, the Asia games did not use it; parts of the USA are not using it. The research is coming in that it is not appropriate.

MR BRADDOCK: Just for clarification, with the Asia games, you were saying it was damaging their feet?

Ms Bourdet: Athletes' feet.

MR BRADDOCK: How was that occurring?

Ms Bourdet: It seems to be the hard surfaces, and it depends on the underlay. A lot of it seems to be that the increase in the temperature affects the feet, so they banned it for their ovals for the tournament.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I might send through some questions on notice about the artificial turf. A previous witness talked about graffiti as well. The submission speaks about the impact of graffiti on private residences and businesses, and that you think support from the government would be useful. Can you explain to the committee the best ways and mechanisms for this support? I refer to providing information on how to correctly remove graffiti, providing supplies for removal, or paying a small fee for City Services workers to come and clean it quicker than they normally would. What sort of support do you think would work best?

Ms Bourdet: We are not opposed to street art, artists in residence and set programs like that. It is where there is offensive graffiti. The issue, as I understand it, is that if it is on a private wall or a business wall, the government does not assist in any way. If you report it, they will come and clean it up, if it is on government property. Considering the economic climate and some of the challenges businesses have, that is an additional cost that they have to absorb, plus the time, plus the people power to clean that up.

It could be as simple as doing the clean-up, because quite often there are shared walls, and having products available for them. Mainly, it is a cost issue, when they are already juggling enough things. It is my understanding that they do not get any assistance at all at the moment, if it is a private wall. We would see that they would need assistance with that, in the clean-up itself, and there are ways around that—making the supplies available, and doing general maintenance, basically, so that the area does not look shabby in the first place.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: The preference would be for the cost of supplies and the resourcing issue to be borne by the government?

Ms Bourdet: In terms of maintenance, yes.

MR BRADDOCK: In terms of the benchmarking of food organics and waste collection, in your submission you talk about Wollongong being a case of best practice. Do you

have any further information on any other benchmarking, beyond the city of Wollongong, that could be useful for the ACT to look at, in terms of where it should be in food organics and waste recycling and recovery?

Ms Bourdet: The successful one that I know about is Wollongong. I have experienced that; I also know people there. Another one is Sweden, apparently. It is very good in terms of recycling completely, and not just food waste. It is also very good in the circular economy—clothing, all sorts of things. But the one that I know about is Illawarra. Do you know of any others?

Mr Carter: No, I think you have covered the ones that I am aware of.

Ms Bourdet: Sweden is a benchmark for recycling, though.

MR BRADDOCK: Murrumbidgee is made up of both newer suburbs in the Molonglo Valley and older suburbs—for example, in the Woden Valley. A topic that has been coming up repeatedly is the equity of access to active transport networks. Is that something that you see in Murrumbidgee, between those two centres? Is there a minimum standard that you think should apply to all suburbs, regardless of their age?

Mr Carter: Being long-time residents of the area, Michelle and I see the various different issues there are with public transport and infrastructure in the area. I live in Wright, and Cotter Road becomes very congested during certain times. Of particular interest to us is that we believe that the light rail should be extended to Mawson. We think that represents good value and it would be a worthy investment for the community.

Ms Bourdet: One of the issues in the Murrumbidgee electorate is that some of the older suburbs do not even have pathways, where I am, so you are forced to walk on the road. Active travel is about changing behaviours as well. If you want people to be on public transport, bicycles, wheels and travelling by foot, the areas have to be well maintained and connected. For instance, with getting the bus here today, I had to make a decision, “Do I walk through a potholed park and turn my ankle, or do I go on the very uneven pathway that isn’t maintained and has cracks in it?” I was lucky, when I got to the bus stop, because it is a covered shelter. A lot of them out our way are not, and they are quite exposed—even at the interchange.

It is about having safe travel to those places. The connecting pathways are not well maintained. With the underpasses, a few of them that directly connect to the bus interchange flood; they do not have lighting. The women’s health survey, which is maybe a little bit dated, but it is the most recent research that I have, showed that there were seven locations in Weston Creek alone that were identified by women to be unsafe for travel. A lot of that is because they are not activated, they are not easily accessible and there is no lighting.

It is about having all those connections and making it easier for people. It is not just for those people travelling by foot; it is people with prams, it is children going to school, so that they are not getting dropped off by car and they can get there themselves. In my street alone, there are a couple of people on mobile scooters, and they cannot get up the pathway because it is so uneven. It is about addressing all those maintenance issues, as well as the connection issues, so that it is easily accessible.

MR BRADDOCK: With those seven places that you mentioned where women feel unsafe, was that via the Canberra Safety Map or is that another data source?

Ms Bourdet: It was the women's health survey, and they used the Canberra map, yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you for clarifying that. In your submission, you also talk about the Weston and Holder ovals, and ovals in Mawson, for reactivation. Are they dryland ovals that you would seek to be irrigated? Is that what you are talking about, in terms of activation?

Ms Bourdet: Holder oval is. The one at Mawson arose from a group that came to one of our team meetings. I would have to check that for you, but it is a large area. Also, down near the tennis courts at Weston, which was in the original master plan, which has long gone—there are the district strategies, on which I have not seen much—that was a designated area, and you could activate those areas that were in the plan, but nothing seems to happen. One gets cancelled out before it is even activated. I know that people in our area are feeling quite neglected. Yes, the Holder oval definitely is a dry oval. With Mawson, I would have to check, but it is a large area and it would take an indoor facility, apparently.

MR BRADDOCK: As well as or instead of?

Ms Bourdet: The people that were speaking to us were open to either. With the heating of the climate, indoor facilities will be needed. You cannot always be outside in the heat.

MR BRADDOCK: By reactivation, are you talking about irrigation, to bring it up to sportsground standards?

Ms Bourdet: Holder oval would need irrigation. Also, it is just an oval. It does not have any goalposts, a cricket pitch or anything like that, so it would be about activating it. I know Rivett oval got some change rooms, because that has also been an issue in the area. There have not been change rooms for females. The netball courts only got lighting, I think, quite recently. It was promised in about three budgets, but it only got it recently. It is about activating it so that it is usable for family groups and a number of groups, and so that it is multipurpose.

MR BRADDOCK: In your submission you also talk about shop leases, particularly where they have been sitting vacant for a number of years, to the detriment of the local community and the local area. What do you recommend that the government do for those?

Ms Bourdet: Use the call-in powers that they have, because there are things that are available to them. Duffy shops were vacant for as long as I can remember. I think it has just been gutted recently, and it might be going out for lease. Everyone in the area knew that people were living in there, but nothing was done about it. With the Coombs shops, I am sure there was land banking. There are powers that the government has to move people on. In Molonglo, particularly, they did not even have shops; then you have a vacant shop there. In Denman Prospect, with the shared spaces, what goes in the plan

and gets approved is not actually what gets installed. The square metreage changes—what they get. They might get a smaller shop, a smaller café. The multipurpose use changes, and people are not getting the services they need.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question in terms of playgrounds. I am interested in terms of nature-based playgrounds versus equipment based. Do you have any thoughts on what should be suitable for our city? Do we have the balance right or do we need more nature or equipment-based playgrounds?

Ms Bourdet: We definitely need more sensory-style playgrounds with a natural feel. The one at Curtin park is very good, and there is one at Waramanga. The interesting thing is that they are beautiful play areas, and they are completely done by volunteers. Tanbark, which gets thrown in a lot of the government ones, is not good for asthmatics. A lot of the equipment heats up and it is very hot, so you have to check the slippery dip before you let your kids slide down. It is more about having that free play, with pathways and rocks that they can climb over. Sensory play is what we would really like to see.

MR BRADDOCK: Are there any further points that you have not been able to make today that you might like to add?

Ms Bourdet: With the two issues that are really close to my heart, there is the concern about the microplastics. I do not understand why they are still being allowed. There is a current DA—it is closed now for comment—for the Stromlo playing fields, and they are considering a football field to have artificial turf. To me, it just defies logic.

The other one is the western edge. It is a very significant area for fauna and flora. It is also very close to a waterway, and waterways are part of the infrastructure that need to be protected. We do not have a definitive answer about that. It is still being investigated, which is of great concern to me. Yes, Blewitt's Block is being protected, but the whole western edge, from Belconnen right down to Tuggeranong, needs to be protected. It is also significant for our Indigenous communities. It is a very significant waterway, and we need to protect it. We need to have an urban limit so that these areas are not lost for future generations.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance today. I do not believe any questions were taken on notice, but if there were, please provide the answers to the committee secretariat within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. We will wrap the session up. Thank you.

NOTARAS, MR HARRY, Private citizen

PURTILL, MR GARRETT, Canberra Labor Club in association with Clubs ACT

SHANNON, MR CRAIG, Chief Executive Officer, Clubs ACT

THE CHAIR: We welcome witnesses from Clubs ACT.

Mr Shannon: I am the CEO of Clubs ACT and I prepared the submission in conjunction with members.

Mr Purtill: I appear on behalf of the Central Social Club.

Mr Notaras: I am a member of the public who had an incident at the front of the club, but I am also a local in the city and I have a lot to say.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to start with an opening statement?

Mr Shannon: Yes, and we would like to thank the committee for inviting us along to give evidence today and for the opportunity to make a submission on this matter. I would also like to mention to the committee that the current inquiry into the night-time economy, we are putting a submission in on that as well, which sort of dovetails in thematically to some of the same issues. So I am not sure if you see some value in us referring a copy of that submission to this committee as well, but happy to do so if that is of use.

THE CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

Mr Shannon: If I could just say, when we prepared our submission it was done in conjunction with our members Canberra wide. So while there is some city-centricity to the content to some extent because it is a very topical matter at the moment and there has obviously been a lot of focus on the CBD area, a lot of our recommendations, if not all of them, relate more broadly across the ACT. We are concerned that sometimes a lot of the other parts of Canberra outside of the CBD do tend to get a bit overlooked. So we urge the committee to keep an open mind about some of those sort of issues.

I guess the two key things that we are very keen to emphasise today are the issues in relation to the establishment of a city standards taskforce and certainly getting some more rapid response into some of the issues that we have identified around the city area. But the concerns about safety also play a very significant role in terms of the municipal elements of the CBD's operation.

From our point of view, we obviously have a club, Central Social Club, right next door to the carousel, which plays a fairly fundamental part in that city precinct. As far as the issues have been identified in regard to the CBD, they have played a significant role in providing us that information, which is why I asked Garrett to attend today. Harry is here obviously because he has been directly involved in an incident recently that relates directly to the safety issues that we have raised in this report.

THE CHAIR: The taskforce is on my mind, and you talked about a whole-of-government approach to municipal upkeep. Can you explain for the committee why you believe that is not currently happening and why you believe it is

necessary and what it actually means in practice?

Mr Shannon: I might go to Garrett for some of this as well. Part of the problem with the way things operate at the moment is there is often a bit of overlay between different directorates or agencies in regard to responsibility. That often does not lend itself to a clear delineation on who is responsible. While we have raised this issue, we do not see our members as not having a role in these processes; we are very keen to work with the government agencies in terms of dealing with these matters. So we are not just trying to push the responsibility back onto the government, but we do think that there is some value in actually clearly delineating who is responsible for which matters so that the patrons and the business owners within their precincts can have some clear responsiveness in terms of getting matters resolved.

Mr Purtill: I will just give you a very, very quick example of the difficulties that we have with the fractured nature of the ACT government. We have been trying for three years to get outside dining as part of our facility—three years. So we are patient. And on Monday the machinery turned up and is now working to excavate the area in order to extend so that we can then access outside dining. So that is three years after we started the process.

Why is that? Because every time we thought we were dealing with the right agency, another agency would appear. Even when an agency presented itself as the lead agency, we still had other agencies presenting themselves. We are not the ACT government; we are just a business. And we would like to be able to deal with one agency, which may deal with other subagencies, but we do not see our role as having to muster up all of those other subagencies who may have a role in some shape or order, large or small.

So all of that has come to pass over the course of three years as we have followed the bird seed to one agency who sends us to another one who sends us to another one who sends us back because they have to sign off on something and then somebody else has to send somebody out and so it goes on. So that makes it difficult just in that particular exercise. But even in relation to reporting incidents and so on, who do you report to? Do you report to the City Renewal Authority? Do you report to TCCS, as it was known, because the unlicensed public space is covered by that organisation? Or do you refer to Access Canberra because there is a licensing issue or there is some other issue? So all these things mount up and create quite a burden when an incident arises for our staff to chase along not just in terms of an additional burden, but it is an impost on time as well.

So we would like to see some means by which some central agency is the go-to for everything—everything—and then who behind the wall are the go-tos is not a matter for us. We go there, fill out the required paperwork, put it in the slot, or whatever we do with it, and it goes to that agency and it then deals with the respective authorities and it comes back with whatever it comes back with. That way we only have to deal with one.

It is not just us saying this; there are many businesses who are affected. Recently when we had a whole lot of people in Petrie Plaza, which is where our business is, who do you contact when you have a whole lot of homeless people gathered in one place? Do you contact Community Services? Do you contact the City Renewal Authority? Do you contact the police? Do you contact Access Canberra? Who do you actually go to in

order to find the right person, the right agency and has the expertise and all the stuff that is needed? So that is one of the big obstacles that we confront I will not say daily, but on a regular basis. Even with our experience you still do not get it right the first time because of a policy change or whatever. That is just as an example of what Craig has been saying.

Mr Shannon: Just as a further example, the issues of safety fall very much into this problem as well. There is obviously lighting and other issues that relate to safety directly. But then there is a crossover between homeless services and the police function in regard to those requirements as well. Particularly dealing with critical scenarios, you should not have to wade through a morass of different contact points to try and figure out who is going to take responsibility for a matter.

THE CHAIR: Mr Notaras, would you like to talk about your incident?

Mr Notaras: Yes. I was contacted by Clubs ACT because they helped me on a particular day in December. I had my daughter and son in town with my wife to see Santa. We had lunch up on London Circuit. My wife went ahead. I said, "I'll take the kids down," and the seating area in Petrie Plaza behind the carousel, that is notorious. We walked past there because we had to go to David Jones. My children were a bit behind me. I cannot remember if I was on the phone or not, but I turned around and my children had moved away because there was a chap in that group that was trying to talk to my daughter and he kept saying things to her. I could not hear it, but she was visibly distressed as she ran off and came around in a bit of an arc to get behind me. He followed her and he followed my son as well, and they came behind. He walked around the carousel.

I recognised him; I have seen him for years in this area and he was goading my children. Two passersby stopped—I think they work for the government—and they were very kind. They said, "You've got to get out of here." He came right up to us, so we walked away and a staff member of Central Social Club came out and took us inside and they tried to call the police. This guy walked up to the door laughing at my kids and the staff locked the doors and we just stayed in there.

That is one of many incidents that I have personally witnessed and experienced in that area. It is enormously detrimental to the club. I say that and I am interested in that because the club is the only sign of life on that strip. They have put a lot of money into it. I was very happy that they had opened. My office is nearby, I can go for a drink. I stopped doing that when the encampment was there. That encampment was not entirely a homeless encampment.

I do not want to go off track here, but that was a centre for a lot of crime. I witnessed the crime. The crime continues. The safety of the public is very poor. Nothing is going to change there unless there is a wholesale review of how the government sees that area and sees law and order in general in Canberra.

The city in particular post-2022, post work from home, has really declined. Understandably there are budgetary issues, maintenance and the like. But in 2022 there was a similar incident on Petrie Plaza opposite Canberra Centre when that chap abducted a child and took them into the laneway. He has been incarcerated, I believe.

That is what went through my mind when this happened. And these things unfold very quickly. One minute I was just walking along and the next minute I have got this guy up with my children. It could have been worse.

Jim is the manager of the social club and I have known him for years from our joint efforts to increase the level of policing or service in the area. This is not a case of homelessness; the homeless people have dignity, they stick to themselves. These are interlopers that come and they impact club.

I have seen footage of them damaging club property that we have seen in police videos. So that is why I came along because Jim thought we needed someone to give their direct experience of being in that vicinity. I have a raft of examples. It has been recommended that I lodge a supplementary submission.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is possible and if you would like to.

Mr Shannon: Yes. Because he has got a lot of good detail around the city area.

Mr Notaras: Especially in this area, and people just do not realise what is happening.

Mr Shannon: Part of the reason we address safety pretty heavily in our submission came off the back of the Kanga Cup particularly when we got a lot of feedback from families that they felt very unsafe in the city area, particularly after dark. It concerned us also that our staff were getting increasingly accosted by drug users, frankly, when they were being rejected from entering facilities. That has become an increasing concern of safety for our members of staff.

Garrett and I both went to see the Minister for Police at one point about what I used to refer to as the meth tent embassy that sat behind that carousel where children are meant to play. We requested that it be moved as a matter of urgency because it had ceased to become a homeless problem and had become a law and order problem. The sort of crap that seems to occur in regard to that had been there for a year. So if it was a homeless problem, there should be greater prioritisation to assisting those people to get out of those locations.

Mr Purtill: Just to give you a quick snapshot of how we face into this, the operation in the city has been going since 2006 and in its current location since April 2023. We operate on a Monday to Wednesday basis from 9 o'clock in the morning until 2 o'clock in the morning. We operate from Thursday to Saturday from 10 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the morning and on public holidays from 10 o'clock until 1 o'clock in the morning. So that gives us a face into the day-time economy and into the night-time economy, and they are cheese and chalk. We have a staff of 51. We have security guards, and part of their job is to escort our staff to either their own transport or public transport when they finish shift, which as you can see from the times that I have given you as the end of our operations there is not much of that.

Our club management are pretty good observers, and we noticed from our relocation period in April 2023 that we had really good visitation which we were very pleased about because it was after COVID, quite a considerable expense, all the usual stuff. We have noticed a decline in the city generally but in our area in particular. We have noticed

a decline in the general standard and upkeep and amenity of the area.

Our management this morning have just written me a quick note saying that there has been a distinct decline over the past twelve months in patronage due to city precinct issues, including negative media coverage of violence, theft and stabbings, some of which were reported by us. We have CCTV, so it is there. There is a perceived lack of safety at night, and that is partly attributable to there being no police presence but also the lighting is inadequate for people conducting business in that area.

As Craig indicated, we are sort of at the perimeter to indicate that there is still life beyond Petrie Plaza. Elderly patrons, of whom we have quite a few because the place is available for everybody at any time, are reluctant to attend. People who we were expecting to come from the theatre are reluctant to enter into Petrie Plaza because opposite us is a huge black thing, unlit at night—that is the carousel. So when people are on London Circuit and they look down having crossed the road from the theatre and they want to venture in either to us or to restaurants in our vicinity, they are confronted with pitch black darkness.

There is a limited police presence. We have had deaths in the area. With all of the construction work that has been taking place there is limited convenient parking, which again carries over not only to our visitors but also to our staff. When the security people are required to escort staff to wherever their transport is, that diminishes the security at the club. So you might be taking someone to the Canberra Centre where they would have previously just gone up the back of the theatre or they would have gone to the back of Mooseheads. All that adds an impost in time and in money for us and it means that we have no way of mitigating that.

It is lovely that Harry was able to seek sanctuary in our place, and that is one of the things that we actually advertise—that our club is there for people, particularly on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. Late at night they may be waiting for an Uber, they may be waiting for their tram, or whatever it is that they are waiting for, we are happy to have them. But people are increasingly being driven to us because of circumstances that they see as challenging or threatening in Garema Place, in Petrie Plaza, in that whole stretch.

Joining the recommendations that Clubs ACT have put in, we would support all of those. We would suggest one further one: we do not want people who are bona fide homeless being jackbooted by the police. I use that term advisedly, but we do not want people heavied. Happy for others to be heavied, but not the homeless. Most of them are citizens of Canberra and they should be treated with respect. But we think that in addition to the police presence there should be a community organisation in the fashion of the early morning centre over at the cathedral or the facility that operates further in town in the early evenings providing meals and other counselling.

We have offered to make a contribution to that, given that there are some shopfronts that are unoccupied, but so far our invitation has not been taken up and we have seen no amelioration of the challenge. For the genuine homeless etcetera there would be an opportunity there for a government conduit to access people and go there. That way there could be a winnowing of the problem issues into their separate populations and they can be directed into the appropriate channels and we would be a safer destination.

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Shannon, point nine I your submission about clubs as partners in municipal stewardship, I am particularly interested in some more detail about how that could work around sports grounds.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Similar question.

MR BRADDOCK: Hopefully I hit points you want to hit. Are you we talking about sports fields that are owned and run by Clubs ACT or are you talking about government owned and run grounds?

Mr Shannon: A combination. We are immune to the idea of having a greater role with government in facilities not currently provided or maintained by our members. But there are a significant number of those facilities around town as well.

MR BRADDOCK: So the current issue is those facilities are not maintained to the standard your members would be looking for?

Mr Shannon: Yes, and ,again, lighting becomes an issue in terms of a lot of those facilities. A number of clubs have spent a significant amount of money upgrading the safety features around sporting locations, facilities, women's toilet facilities particularly, and lighting in those areas.

MR BRADDOCK: Does that also go to the actual playing service maintenance?

Mr Shannon: Yes. There are certain facilities where our clubs are almost exclusively responsible for the provision of that outcome anyway. There is a degree of sophistication, obviously, in our marketplace in being able to provide those services. So we think there is an opportunity for partnership there with government.

I think there was recently some identification of a number of sporting ovals that had gone into disuse, so I think there are some opportunities there for us to work more collegiately with government to look at the opportunities to provide better facilities around the community across the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK: Would that also include some of the infrastructure, for example, dressing rooms, storage sheds, stands and so forth?

Mr Shannon: Yes, because the storage of sporting equipment is a pretty significant issue, as you know. I think there might have been an inquiry announced recently into sports facilities, so we would be specifically looking at making submission to that.

We work very closely with Michael Brady—I am pretty confident you would know him—and organisation and their members' interests in sports facilities, particularly. There is a lot of crossover between our two groups in terms of those matters, and we will be working with them in regard to making submission into that inquiry.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Recommendation 3 in your submission is that the ACT government introduce a co-funded graffiti and vandalism remediation scheme. Could you outline how you think that work? What levels of support would make a tangible

difference? Are you aware of other jurisdictions that have implemented a similar scheme of success or otherwise?

Mr Shannon: My understanding is there are some other programs and other jurisdictions where that occurs.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Australian?

Mr Shannon: Australian, yes. I will see if I can find some detail on that for you. More specifically—Garrett may supplement this a bit as well—we already have a situation in the ACT CBD area where all the traders largely contribute into a fund that contributes to the maintenance or otherwise of those facilities around that area.

Clubs are already up for significant individual expenditure on their own facilities when graffiti takes place. But as graffiti becomes an increasing feature of a lack of perception or safety around areas—and certainly in regard to the rapid response and identification of these sort of issues—our members would worked quite happily with government to try and identify areas of priority and work with them to either co-fund or otherwise. They are already doing it in part—they are either picking up the cost exclusively or they are doing it in part through contributions in the city area. I think Garrett has a good example of that—I think it was \$90,000?

Mr Purtill: It was quite a bit. The CCMIL—please do not ask me to translate; it is the levy group—the government matches its contribution and it totals over \$5 million. It pays for a number of things. One of them is an eight-person morning clean-up crew, and that crew is supposed to be looking after graffiti. We get attacked by graffiti artists on a regular basis, as does everybody else in town. There has to be some way to mitigate this not just in terms of perpetration, but there must be some science that can be discovered to allow for the efficient removal of graffiti. We can put a white wall up and we can guarantee—guarantee—that it will be graffitied overnight. So you finally give up and just leave it.

So those are sorts of things that we think the government could help by its procurement regime to help discover some remedies that are not already available or, alternatively, to get some remedies that are available and put them in the right place.

Mr Shannon: I also think there is a direct relationship between the lack of appropriate lighting around a lot of these areas and the explosion of graffiti that takes place in them. At one point there were some very mediocre at best lighting strung down the area near the carousel. I think I said at the time that my watch produced more light than those lights did. We think if there was a greater emphasis on a lot of the lighting issues around the CBD area it would help mitigate some of the graffiti explosion that we are seeing.

THE CHAIR: Your submission is fairly similar in some ways to the business chamber. It mentioned waste, dead animal removal, lighting. Obviously that is not just in the city; we are talking everywhere all over Canberra. If you if you could talk to the impact this is having on clubs that would be helpful.

Mr Shannon: It has started to become an issue of trade around our facilities, and not just for us. That is why there is a commonality with the chamber because all of the

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businesses in these areas are seeing this explosion of graffiti, safety concerns, bad behaviour and whatever. Part of my concern generically is we are building a tram to a location that people increasingly do not want to come to. The city area should be the key feature of family life in this town on weekends, and it is increasingly not, particularly in the evenings.

As someone who grew up in Canberra, it distresses me when I see that you cannot meaningfully wander around the city area anymore and feel safe. I have got a young daughter. She has frequently expressed concerns about the Dickson area, for instance, and going down there a young woman and being accosted and not feeling safe by herself. She refuses to go down there by herself. I think we often lose site of the fact that the appearance of the cityscape has a very direct relationship not only to patron use but the perception or concerns about safety that people have, and it tends to breed a lot of the issues that we are now trying to address through these submissions.

So we are asking about a partnership. We are not saying we expect the government has to pick up the whole tab for this; our members are more than willing to pay their contribution or do their bit to assist and work with government to deal with these matters. But we are concerned that it is not getting the focus it deserves.

In part I think that is because of the nature of the ACT government where we do not actually have a municipal council-type model, so the Assembly is basically burdened with two tiers of government in one. Sadly, the municipal element seems to be disappearing in terms of priority in this town as a result. I think that is a structural issue to some extent. I will give you an example. Even walking outside the Assembly here, nearly every single stone or paver out the front of this building is cracked or broken. I do not know how women wear high heels anyway, but I would hate to think of how many women are falling over out there trying to navigate that death trap.

That is the front yard of our seat of government, and so what does that say to people who come into this town to visit? It takes gravitas away from the nature of this building and the people in it. I think there is a perception or concern from our members and other traders in the city area that many of the members in this building do not seem to walk across the road. You are just not seeing what we see or what the average punter is seeing in this town. It might be instructive for a study tour of people from this building to take a wander across the road to see what is going on over there.

THE CHAIR: There is a bit going on. I really appreciate you all coming today and your submission; it has been extremely helpful. You are going to get us some further information and we might get a submission from you.

Mr Shannon: Yes, and I will get Harry to provide a further submission on detail that we will submit on his behalf through to the committee's secretariat.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, and we will close off this session now.

BERRY, MS YVETTE, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation

CHEYNE, MS TARA, Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy

FITZGERALD, Mr Bruce, Deputy Director-General, City and Environment Directorate.

KAMARUL, MR MATTHEW, Executive Branch Manager, Roads ACT, Transport, Territory and Municipal Services, City and Environment Directorate

MARRIAGE, MS SUE, Acting Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation, Transport, Territory and Municipal Services, City and Environment Directorate

RAMPTON, MR TIM, Executive Branch Manager, Roads ACT, Transport, Territory and Municipal Services, City and Environment Directorate

THE CHAIR: This afternoon we welcome Tara Cheyne MLA, in her capacity as Minister for City and Government Services, and Yvette Berry MLA, in her capacity as Minister for Sport and Recreation, and officials that have joined us today. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. As there are no opening statements, we will go straight to questions.

I do not have many questions on sport and rec, but I was wondering about upgrades to ovals, the actual physical ground. Do upgrades on those and the facilities around happen on a usage basis or on a group advocacy basis? How does the government manage fixing football ovals?

Ms Berry: It depends what kinds of upgrades, because maintenance and upgrade work happens across the year and, in particular, during the shutdown periods where all the fertilisation goes on, sprinkler systems are checked and coring of the grass. While they are not being played on gives them a moment to recover from sport. All that happens as a matter of course on every field.

For more significant upgrades, like a pavilion, for example, that might be through checking on the asset and then prioritised based on the state of the asset and whether it can be renewed or not. Some of them are short-term and some of them are much longer term. Some people have very gold-plated aspirations that need a little bit of time to get to. Others are a much shorter term, like the female-friendly upgrades, for example, at all ACT government-owned pavilions. The ACT government is going through all of those upgrades. I cannot remember how many we have left of the female-friendly, but I might ask Ms Marriage to talk to those. If you have specific questions, we can—

THE CHAIR: Information on the female-friendly changerooms would be great. How many have we done and how many do we have to go? I have one specific question about Hall. I feel I probably asked this earlier in my time here, but I am interested in how different ovals are getting different attention.

Ms Marriage: There is a detailed list of female-friendly upgrades and what the commitment is for us to be able to deliver them in this term of government. I would say

that it is probably about 65 per cent delivered at the moment, and that is not including the ones that are in this future commitment as well. I do not have my list here, but I can certainly take that on notice and provide that information to you.

Also, where we are talking about other types of upgrades, lighting upgrades are really relevant to us because we are trying to look at optimising the facilities that you have currently got so that they can be extended for the amount of time that is available to sporting groups. There are drainage and irrigation upgrades. While they are not the sexy piece that sporting groups need to look at, a lot of our irrigation systems and our subsoil activity is there. It is 30 or 40 years of age. When you want to be able to maintain your turf, when we are getting into drought periods like we currently are, the challenge is that it does not matter how much water you are putting onto it if you do not have that soil that is of a suitable nature and you have not been able to look at the irrigation system being able to put the volume on there. They are the challenges that you have.

Then, of course, we have all the other general facility upgrades that occur. The main way that we look at that is where the usage patterns are across Canberra. We keep all of that usage data for each of the grounds so that we are able to look at that through our booking system. It is also a relationship that you have with the stakeholder groups, because they obviously have their priorities around what they want to do and where they want to develop their sport, where they have more junior development and where they want to be able to grow their membership base. We have to work with them as well to try and do that. It is a bit of a complicated thing. You have to look at the venues that you have and see whether you can optimise those further or whether you have to look at some of those upgrades that need to be done, and some of those are below the ground and some of those are above.

MR BRADDOCK: Just going to sportsgrounds, firstly, page 7 of the government submission says:

These grants are distributed across Canberra suburbs, ensuring equitable access for residents and sporting organisations.

Do you have evidence to back up that equitable access? I am sure many residents of Gungahlin and Molonglo Valley may have a different view as to whether they have equitable access.

Ms Berry: I would say that every single sport in the ACT would want more facilities. There is not a single sport that would not want more facilities to help grow their sport. It is a bit like swimming pools; everybody wants their own lane in an empty 50 metre pool. I think equitable access is making sure that everybody has access to a field. It might not be all of the time when they want it, but the access is there.

MR BRADDOCK: Do you have a benchmark or any measurement that you utilise to assess the equitability of access?

Ms Berry: There is a range of different data that is used. As Ms Marriage talked to, there is the usage data and the hiring data that sports use as well as working with individual sports on their particular needs and growth that they are seeing or forecasting for their sports. The sport and rec team then react to that going forward in providing

more opportunities through things like lighting upgrades.

MR BRADDOCK: Does that include the geographical spread of facilities, not just in terms of which sports but also where the facilities will be?

Ms Berry: There are fields that get a lot more use than other fields, because of participation and/or population numbers. That occurs across the city. You will see areas in Gungahlin, in particular, that did have significant population growth over the years—it has stabilised now, but there was significant growth—and there is still a very large number of junior sports and junior sport participation and growth in Gungahlin and not so much, again, in Tuggeranong as demographics change. All of those things are considered in the work that sport and rec does.

MR BRADDOCK: Are there any benchmarks that the government uses to evaluate its performance against other jurisdictions to ensure we are delivering what would be expected for a standard community?

Ms Berry: There are the participation rates. We have the highest sports participation rates in the country in the ACT. I guess that is a benchmark everybody else would set themselves against. Is there a review?

Ms Marriage: There is also very much anecdotal evidence between Sydney councils where a lot of the sports do not get the chance to even do training. The only thing that they get to do is competition because of their access to venues. Whereas, here, we focus on trying to make sure that the training opportunities are there for our clubs as well. That is how you look at what sites do not have lighting. Some of them might have training lighting but other ones do not have any lighting at all. Then you are managing the facilities that have the lighting and can be for competition. It is an exercise of being able to move people across.

Benchmarking-wise, there is the Yardstick benchmarking that we do for Parks and Recreation. That is international and national benchmarking where the ACT government provides information about all of its hectares and its assets. That is done by an independent group of Yardstick to identify the comparison of provision for the ACT against a whole lot of councils that are also participating in that Yardstick review.

MR BRADDOCK: So Yardstick includes sporting grounds, does it?

Ms Marriage: It does; it does include sportsgrounds—parklands and sportsgrounds, yes.

MR BRADDOCK: I note that your submission says a Yardstick benchmark report could not be provided due to terms and conditions. I have not had the time to read those terms and conditions. Would it be possible to obtain a copy of that report in confidence for the committee?

Ms Marriage: I will have to check with the Yardstick organisation, because there are a lot of privacy clauses that are in there. I did not seek that advice from them before we came into this committee, but I can certainly do that for us.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: This is a little bit specific in focus, Minister. It is about resources. Line marking of sports fields, I understand, is a fairly lengthy process. The government has previously reported that it takes sometimes a whole day or two for two people to mark a single ground, and then that is weather dependent, because rain, cold and frost will impact that. Are fields still manually marked? Is the government looking at new technology to speed up the process?

Ms Berry: We have invested in new technology—robot line marking.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I had heard of robot line marking.

Ms Berry: We named one of the robot line markers after Steve Doszpot, recognising his continued advocacy around the removal of diesel line marking. It was something that he was a very strong advocate around. Those are going really well, I understand. Do we have an update? I do not know how much they do or anything or how many we have.

Ms Marriage: Robotic line marking is done at a proportion of our sites at the moment. You are absolutely correct: the manual line marking does take a number of people a whole day to be able to mark one field. The robotic gives us that opportunity to be able to do it differently. I have details about the robotic line marking. I cannot access it, which is not very helpful at the moment. Those are the kinds of dynamics that we want to be changing in the efficiency, because of the number of staff that we have in sportsground management. You want it to be a more efficient service. Being able to use something that is new technology, smart technology, actually makes it a lot easier for us to do it.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Can you take on notice the detail that you have? I would like to see it.

Ms Marriage: I will take that on notice.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: From a general perspective, is it having the impact that you would hope? Is it providing efficiencies; is it working effectively; and are users happy with it?

Ms Marriage: Yes; definitely.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: From a simple perspective, there may be fewer rolled ankles than in diesel marking, if nothing else.

Mr Fitzgerald: On the line marking robot, we were previously taking two to three hours per field, and that has gone down to just over half an hour per field. So it does actually offer a significant benefit to be able to go down that pathway.

Ms Berry: I understand—and correct me if I am wrong—they can be programmed to do a range of different kinds of sports activities. So, rather than having to figure all that out on a field, you can have multiple line markings programmed into the machine.

Mr Fitzgerald: Correct.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: A junior soccer field, athletic field, proper football field and whatever.

Mr Fitzgerald: That is right. We still have the manual systems available. They are available for use by community groups and sporting groups. Bespoke line marking is required on occasions. By having the flexibility to offer both services, we have seen that there has been good engagement with that.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: This is purely a question that is not going to help the committee in its report, but I will be able to take it back to a couple of organisations that have raised it with me. Is there a reason why black line paint seems to be preferred over white line paint? The black lasts longer but is more difficult to see.

Ms Berry: I do not know. We can find out for you.

Mr Fitzgerald: Potentially cheaper in bulk.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Fair enough.

THE CHAIR: There are no further sporting type questions.

Ms Berry: Does that mean I can go?

THE CHAIR: You can go. Thank you for coming. We appreciate your time.

Ms Berry: You are my favourite committee.

THE CHAIR: We have had a few themes today, and it will be no surprise to anybody that the issue of footpaths has come up—everything from the appropriateness of footpaths to a proactive scheme to review and audit to having a slogan that says, “We are not just fixing it; we are making things better.” I am wondering whether you could explain for the committee what the footpath process looks like. How many streets in Canberra do not have them—and I know Mr Emerson has raised this before; what that looks like; what happens when we need something to be repaired; and how we make the decision on whether one little bit gets fixed and an extra little bit of concrete gets added to the full footpath? If you can talk the committee through that, I would appreciate that.

Ms Cheyne: I can start—and I appreciate the interest in this area—and then I will hand over to officials for some of the more granular responses to those questions. In terms of suburbs that have footpaths on every street and suburbs that have very few, it quite literally is because we had several different planning approaches over the history of the ACT. Cook is a great example of a suburb that has very few footpaths. I think the thinking at the time was that it was going to be a dense suburb—and it is a dense suburb—and that there would not be a lot of vehicle traffic and, as a result, people would be walking on the roads or on their nature strips.

Overall, I think we inherited a lot of planning decisions over 70 or 80 years that were highly variable. So it has been less an ACT government position—notwithstanding we have developed our own suburbs—but more that we have inherited an historical variation across our suburbs and, as a result, it is actually very hard to install footpaths where people have not had them for 50 years—like in, for example, Cook. As much as they should not, we do have people who have built or most likely planted or at least landscaped or created a driveway or a parking area on their nature strip, sometimes to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars, and so it can be difficult to reverse engineer in terms of installing footpaths.

That said, we do have a lot of work underway in terms of connecting gaps in our network, especially where we know that areas are being travelled through frequently or could be travelled through more frequently. One of the biggest ones that there was a motion on at the end of last year—it is also an ACT government commitment—is the West Belconnen bikeway; connecting the Belconnen town centre bikeway work right through to West Belconnen.

THE CHAIR: That was raised today.

Ms Cheyne: Right; there you go. It is a bit of a jumble at the moment in getting from West Belconnen into the City. It is much easier from Florey into the city.

I am happy to talk more about how those decisions are made but, in terms of footpath repairs, which I feel has come up mostly, I will probably hand to Mr Rampton to talk in detail. Effectively, there are some things that we can fix quickly and apply a quick fix, and often you will see concrete panels that will then have a bitumen make-safe fix at the bottom. That is to make safe. That is not usually the long-term fix that we are going to apply, but if the rest of the network on that street, for example, is pretty good, it may make sense for us to wait or to put together a package of works to go out to tender for to replace those panels more fully. But Mr Rampton can tell you all about it.

THE CHAIR: So there is an internal government team that does some work and then, for the bigger stuff, you go to tender to get those bigger works done.

Mr Rampton: With respect to path repairs, we take a risk-based approach on our network. We have thousands of kilometres of path network out there. I have approximately five inspectors that I have divvied up across the regions that are responsible for inspecting our path network. Our focus is definitely on the trip and fall and those sorts of harmful defects that we have on our network. As the minister mentioned, if we get a report of that or we spot something like that out in the network, there will be a make-safe treatment which will be either a cold mix treatment or we may even grind some of that path away. We actually have our own internal team now that we can do some grinding. So we have that combination of our internal team and an external contractor that can do those initial make-safe treatments for us. Typically at that same time, if that section of path needs to be replaced, we will also create another work order for another date so that, when we are in that area—or we can package up a series of path works in that location or in that region—we would look to go back at a later date and replace that path in its entirety or in that section.

We may have a section of path, for example, that could be in good condition—as in it

is not in cracks and it is not undulating much—but there could be one defect on it. We will focus on that. On the flipside, there could be a path that may come across to the public as looking very poor. There could be a lot of surface cracks, but not that vertical or horizontal deflection or trip hazard in there. It would be a lower priority for us to go and take action on sort of surface cracking on those sections of path.

Having said that, we have also been undertaking a pilot study at the moment, and we are just starting to get reports back in from that piece of work. We went out to market for a consultant to effectively run a scooter along paths in 25 suburbs throughout Canberra. We selected different ages, different undulations and different types of suburbs. We are just starting to get that feedback back. They were using AI to take pictures and identify the conditions of those paths and also identify where they saw defects. That is quite promising. We are starting to get that information through. We have identified a few hiccups in the defect identification. But the path condition, or the cracking in the overall condition of the paths, seems to be giving some quite good results.

As I said, it is very early days on that. When we get more and we can recalibrate that piece of work, that will then feed into our asset management system, which is where we then generate our work orders. Those work orders can be for our internal crews—and I have a small concrete crew now where we actually go out and rip up sections of path and lay new sections of path. That is a new skill that we have had in the last year. We also put a lot of it out to external contractors, because there is a lot of work to do out there. So it is a combination of those two resources. My internal crews obviously have a lot of control over it, and I can point them in the direction and prioritise them where we need to. But, for a lot of the packages that go out to market, those contractors will have about three months to do that piece of work or that set of work orders and then they will prioritise them amongst themselves so that they can get the work done efficiently.

THE CHAIR: Is there a budget for that every single year? How do you afford the contractors? I am coming from the point of view that I have heard from a few people that they might log a job and notice that the extra bit of bitumen gets put down or there is a bit of a grinding but then it could be years until it is fixed or the crew comes back. Why is there that delay? I assume it is budget.

Mr Rampton: All of that piece of work that I was pointing to around maintenance comes out of the recurrent budget from Roads ACT. We have money allocated to that. In recent budgets, the government has announced regional path funds. We are working through that at the moment and planning for the next few years. The focus of that will include implementing some of those known missing links. The minister talked about those connections between paths, and you see the goat tracks that are formed, and we try to connect some of those. Also, with the sections of path that we know may be a little bit substandard—for example, they might be a bit narrow or in poor condition—we will look to not just replace them with what is there now but also potentially widen them. We are just working through that at the moment to identify sites on what we will do with that program.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, I appreciate what you said about the legacy of 100 years of different design philosophies in terms of our path network. How do we go about

ensuring equity of access, particularly for those living with a disability, in those suburbs which may have a long-dated design philosophy?

Ms Cheyne: It is a great question and one that I do not think I can answer simply. I think we do rely quite a bit on hearing user experiences. Of course, we now have a positive duty regarding discrimination and ensuring that we are taking practical measures ourselves to not have things in place, whether it is access to a venue or footpath or whatever it might be, that does not provide for people with a protected attribute like a disability. That is new for us, but I think that will start to help and change some of our overall thinking.

I think historically—and I can definitely be corrected here—we have really relied on people with a disability letting us know about their experiences that might not be immediately obvious. There have been some examples—for example, Redfern Street in Cook-Macquarie, where there is a blind gentleman crosses the road and the curvature of the road is an issue. We have heard a lot through the—what was it called?

Mr Rampton: Age friendly.

Ms Cheyne: Age friendly. Age friendly did not mean old age friendly; it meant every age friendly—so, no matter who you are and how you get around, it is safe for you to get around. I will hand to officials for some more detail, but, more broadly than footpaths, I think it is also about how our suburbs are designed and things like lower speed limits. We have a review of the speed limit guidelines that is close to finalised that looks at what are some of the opportunities here to support walkability and liveability for people no matter how they are getting around. That might be part of the solution depending on the area.

MR BRADDOCK: Would that positive duty imply or indicate that we need some sort of minimum standard to meet and, rather than just be reliant on feedback from the community as to where it may not be suitable for those with a disability, at least proactively having a standard in place?

Ms Cheyne: In terms of the interpretation of the legislation, there are exceptions and it can depend on where the need is justifiable and reasonable in the circumstances. So I am not sure that a minimum standard necessarily would address that, because a minimum standard might be perfect in one area and not good enough in another. I think having flexibility is still preferable and understanding how people are living their experiences. Certainly with the Fix My Street data, we have trend analysis that can inform some of the future works that we undertake.

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Rampton, I have some follow-up questions from what you mentioned before. Firstly, on those path funds that you referred to, we received evidence from Pedal Power, who indicated those funds would only be sufficient for repairs and not for new infrastructure. But you seemed to indicate there might be scope under those funds for more than just repairs. Is that correct?

Mr Rampton: The focus of those funds will be on upgrades or new missing links—the installation of new infrastructure. We will continue with the recurrent funding within Roads ACT to focus on maintenance.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. Secondly, you mentioned that repairs was based on risk. I wondered whether any assessment of equitability of access was considered as part of that process as well.

Mr Rampton: It ties in, I guess, nicely with the question you just asked of the minister. As you would be aware, all our paths would have been designed and installed based on the standards of the day. Many of our suburbs are getting older now, and it is those older suburbs where we see that accessibility issue. Simple things like dropped kerbs, pram ramps and things like that are just missing in some sections. They are certainly some of the missing type links that we are looking to install. There are thousands of those out there.

The beauty about having the internal crew now is I can focus them on particular tasks. For example, if we do get representation from a member of the community that may have a disability that is struggling to get to the shop or to the park because there is not a pram crossing, I have been able to point them in that direction and we will go and install one, rather than have to wait to go out to an external contractor.

MR BRADDOCK: You also mentioned the AI being used on the path condition. Is that also making an assessment in terms of accessibility for those living with a disability?

Mr Rampton: Not accessibility, no; just the condition of the path.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay; thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have one thing to finish off this section. We hear anecdotal comments and complaints from people that it takes years. I am just wondering whether you have a list of the backlog? Do you have a list of thousands? How long can the average Joe expect to see a change when they make a Fix My Street inquiry?

Ms Cheyne: The short answer is it depends. It depends on what the risk is and what the damage is. There are some that are not in an area of particularly high use and are very visible—so you would know to avoid them, for example. It might just be one person that has raised it and there are others where everyone is like, “This is a problem we are tripping every time,” or whatever it might be. But there are some standards that we work to that I think Mr Rampton can expand on.

Mr Rampton: We do find it can occur anywhere between six to 18 months. That is sort of where that band is.

THE CHAIR: That is fair.

Mr Rampton: We may have something earmarked for replacement but then something of a higher risk pops up in the next six months and we focus our energy on that, which then puts that down the list. It is a dynamic type of list, based on the risk.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: You sort of actually answered the question I was going to ask. It was about path remediation expectation. As opposed to the process per se in

the timeframes, is there anything that could be done or is the government thinking about to increase awareness of understanding of what people in the community who make reports can expect during the process once reports are made?

Ms Cheyne: We do have some of those timeframes published, which we do try to point people to and try to reference or at least link to, in our Fix My Street responses. I think the biggest issue that I have and find with Fix My Street—and it is exactly the example that Mr Rampton gave, but it applies everywhere and especially to trees—is that we will say, “Yes, it has been allocated to a program of works and, based on our assessment, we expect it is going to take this amount of time for us to get to it.” Then storm season usually does something wacky or wild, sometimes hyper-concentrated in a particular suburb and sometimes an entire region, and that can really throw out that program of works.

Then it is: how do we update people who have an expectation that their job was going to be attended to, with the update or information that we have much higher responses that we need to undertake due to safety reasons or whatever it is? While Fix My Street does allow us to provide that update, part of the issue for us is sometimes we do not know quickly. So it is not until we fully understand the extent of the damage or the cleanup. With one of the recent storms, but not the most recent, the cleanup of the branches and the leaf litter was more than six months. That included all sorts of things, but some people were like, “There are branches that I can see lying two metres away from this path and it is really unsightly.” But that was not causing a risk to anybody and so that would have taken longer to get addressed. Whereas, a tree on someone’s car a tree blocking a bike path and those sorts of things would get prioritised. So that is tricky for us.

But, back to footpaths, it is the same thing. We could have an earthquake—touch wood—and suddenly we have to attend a particular area, and that is where we have got to invest our funds. A very real example for us at the moment is the stormwater damage in Curtin. It is considerable. It is a cost pressure. We still do not know what the exact amount is going to be. But you have seen the photos and the videos that have been published. It is extensive. Then it is like, “Is there another part of our works program that might need to be rejigged,” or “Is there another approach that we might take in terms of stormwater?”—noting the work on the re-naturalisation motion from last year.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: Just one question in terms of the benchmarking of the path condition that we have here in Canberra versus other jurisdictions: is there any way we measure that and could compare our performance?

Mr Rampton: I will have to take that one on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: There was some conversation about mowing. I understand that it is done on a cycle. Can you tell me what the cycles are, and the explanations around them, please?

Ms Cheyne: That is a great question. I might wax a little lyrical here, and I certainly invite Ms Marriage to do so as well—you have full authority—because we were just doing a bit of thinking at the moment about cycles, and appropriateness of cycles in different circumstances.

Yes, we do have a cycle and that is published, and it is that we do our suburbs every 20 working days on a cycle.

They are not all done every 20 days. Some suburbs are massive and they are split, or they might take two weeks in a 20-day cycle. Dunlop, great example; Kambah, another example—massive suburbs that take us longer than a week that is otherwise programmed for other suburbs. Then, for our arterial roads it is 25 working days.

I think there are questions for us on multiple levels. One of them is that having that standard does not always suit the weather conditions that we are dealing with. So, the first one—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: It was going to efficiency. Are the cycles efficient as far as—

Ms Cheyne: And that is exactly the question. And we have seen it in two different ways. The first one was what I still refer to, and always will, as “the mowing crisis of 23-24” when the ground was saturated. We could not do anything. And then it was hot, and so suddenly we have perfect growing conditions and, you know, the city did not look great. And everyone’s wellbeing—particularly our crews’—was affected because they like mowing and they want to do a good job, and seeing the city look as it did was devastating for them. So, us having public, published, codified cycles sets an expectation even when the conditions are simply not allowing for it, and does not give us that flexibility, I guess, to account for it.

On the other hand, it is pretty dry this season. Certainly, early on, there were some decisions made—which I absolutely endorsed—which were that because the grass is not growing very quickly in some suburbs, we are delaying that cycle, or we are going to skip the cycle for that suburb. It just made no sense; no point having a mower go around and there be no discernible difference, because the grass was not long enough in first place.

Otherwise, though, we do try to have a standard that we keep. But I think there is a question there about how we have a KPI for ourselves, but one that responds to the circumstances of the weather conditions we are experiencing.

Then, probably the other big one for me is: do all the areas that we mow need to be mown, or mown in the cycle that they are? We hear a lot—and I think you hear it from the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum often—that the arterial roads, the entrances to the city, should look the best. But, as you have heard, they are on a 25-day cycle, not 20. So, should, actually, that be flipped, and that be where we put our attention? And some of those areas that might not be as well-used or whatever it might be, should they be more re-naturalised or be on quite a different mowing cycle? These are things that we are actively considering.

What I can say is that, for the first time in years, our crews had a great Christmas break in terms of all of our mowing cycles having been completed for the first time in years, without any major disruptions. And that is not just due to the weather. The weather was a big part of it, but we have invested in a baseline for our crews, and they do have new equipment as well. Equipment breaking down, that is another thing. But that was a great achievement, and we are really grateful for their efforts.

Ms Marriage, if there is anything that I have not said, you are welcome to say it.

Ms Marriage: There are a couple of things on the planning of the mowing season. There is the long-term weather forecast in the off-season. We consider our peak season between September and March of every year. In the last three years that has been extended out to even late April because of the weather that we have had. So, that leaves us less of a window to be able to plan for the next season. In the off-season, what we do is we look at the long-term weather forecast and try and predict what that grass growth will be at the start of the season, so that we can prepare our crews and our machines and everything ready for that.

Also, in that off-season we have our training for our staff. So, in May and August of each year they go and do their refresher training of their machines. We have all the servicing that is done at the same time, so that we have got ourselves all ready. There is also a GPS system that is on the mowers so that we can keep tabs on how we are servicing them effectively. As the minister said, that allows us to do that mowing map that is on the website and be able to give some forewarning to the community that the mowing is coming into their area. Just being able to do that in the last season has meant that in the Fix My Street requests where a lot of people were saying, “I need my suburb mowed,” they were able to look at the mowing map and realise, “Hang on, that is going to happen in a week’s time.”

Ms Cheyne: Our mowing-related Fix My Street requests—this is not an invitation—are negligible compared to what it was two years ago.

Ms Marriage: Diminished significantly. So, a couple of years ago they were around 3,900 for the main peak season. Obviously, we were struggling to keep up with the rapid grass growth that we had at that point in time. But also, the wear and tear on the machines is phenomenal when you have got to go back two or three times to mow the same strip of grass to be able to get that thick thatch down—and be able to displace it on the areas as well. So, we were finding that the machines were getting up to their mechanical hours, or their service hours, a lot quicker. We were also getting damage to those. We had boggings in those wet seasons as well, and we had to train staff to deal with that.

The important part for us is that the number of hectares that we are doing now, in comparison to the number of hectares over the last three years, has reduced and been quite comfortable for us to be able to work as a baseline operation. But the challenge will be again next year, whether we are in that same situation based on winter rain. In that off-season, as well, we then start to prepare what the program is going to be like. We get the GPS tracking systems ready and everything, and then we are all ready to start the season.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, did you or anyone in your team cop a John Purcell submission? There were quite a lot of claims about the challenges, and there were some recommendations. What is your view on the recommendations? All good? All bad? Some fine?

Ms Cheyne: I think it is an excellent submission, except for the recommendations.

I am happy to go into this in more detail because, in my usual deep-dive way, I have found some chilling things from the first ACT government—and decisions that were made, or forced on us, at the time. But I think he really clearly articulates the structural budgeting issue that municipal services have had since self-government. I am not sure that subcommittees of all MLAs for an electorate getting together and working through issues is going to be efficient or, you know, politically fun.

I would love to hear more from John, actually. I thought it was a great submission, but I did not see so much of a link between the recommendations and the structural deficit that formed, I guess, the biggest part of that submission.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: A couple of supplementaries. Firstly, when we go through peak season but we are not encountering as high-growth conditions as we expected, and we can reduce our frequency, what are the crews doing? Are they being reallocated to other jobs or something else in that period of time?

Ms Cheyne: You may have noticed that we have got a lot of trees and a lot of green space. It is kind of the same question as, “What is happening for that other six or four months, or whatever it is, of the year when grass is not growing?” That is, “a lot of horticultural work”.

Due to the length of some of these seasons, having actually a very short period for horticultural proactive maintenance has then translated into a horrible mowing season, because crews have not been able to clear undergrowth. They have not been able to appropriately identify where there might be some areas that they should not be mowing, or should be mowing, because the estate that we have got is growing every year in terms of what we have responsibility for.

And edging. Edging is something that I do not think we have been able to undertake for years and years. But last year, in particular, that work has been able to be undertaken in a big way—and I think you can see it with at least the state of the grass across the city. Edging helps us in the mowing season, but it also looks better.

Mr Fitzgerald: Some of the other work that happens during this period are things that are pretty obvious to the community that have, unfortunately, been left for considerable amounts of time. Things like underpasses; being able to clear away the leaves that build up over many, unfortunately, years, in some instances. What that does is it also takes pressure off our stormwater network as well. So, it has a dual benefit for us. This year in particular we are very excited to see the teams have been able to clean the mowers; to pack them up for a small amount of time, and to get to some of those other tasks.

MR BRADDOCK: Great. Minister, you were referring to looking at revegetation of various areas—and I am sure you are aware of John Giacom's efforts within Belconnen—

Ms Cheyne: Very.

MR BRADDOCK: Has there been any consideration of how we might do that at scale across the ACT, to reduce the amount of mowing area that we have?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. In a number of different ways. First of all, we do have our legitimate and established groups—and I think there has been a lot of work over recent years to understand the boundaries of those plantings, because the last thing that we want is to undo their hard work.

However, there are some people who also go rogue and plant in areas where we do need to mow. And so we get it in both ways. There is an established guideline—which I think is up for review from the conservator of flora and fauna—about different areas that City Services might be maintaining. There are definitely some in your electorate—both of you—such as Crace, Amaroo, maybe some others, which do have a particular biodiversity value to them, and we need to mow at a higher height or whatever it might be. So, it does look different.

In terms of the rewilding, though, this is definitely being contemplated in the draft urban open space management plan—an update to urban open space management plans of many years ago. However, there is also work, you would know, on the landscape plan. A lot of this is not duplicative, but it is certainly that one thing affects the other.

I think one of the benefits of the organisation of CED coming together as it has, is we can draw on the expertise from our land managers right across the directorate about: "Actually, would it be more sensible if this nature reserve is extended and we treat it differently?" or, "Is this an obvious area where we should be planting because it is actually a real bugger to mow?" Those sorts of things.

So, yes, it has been contemplated. Is it at a stage of maturity for a territory-wide rollout, at scale? No.

MR BRADDOCK: There was a trial in Forde in terms of replacing some grassed areas with tanbark or similar, to reduce the amount of mowing area. Have there been results of that trial produced by the government?

Ms Marriage: I would have to take that one on notice and check into it for you.

Ms Cheyne: We will let you know either way, but we will try and give you as much detail as we can, if it is done.

THE CHAIR: I have a question almost opposite to that. It has been noted that there are certain areas that were mown before the wet season which I think you called the mowing crisis, and now what has been told to the community is that they are out of scope. So, things that were being mowed could not be mowed during the crisis, and now they are just not. They never went back up to that level. It is usually that the road

gets done to maybe one or two mowers wide, and then there is a big grassy area leading into the suburb where that suburb area used to get done. Who makes those decisions? Have there been active decisions not to bring those areas back in scope? If so, who is auditing that for snakes, and then maybe if those areas are appropriate for more planting and to never go back to that way?

Ms Cheyne: So, we have a lot of—no, we do not have a lot—we have some incredibly endangered, sensitive grassland areas. And for some we learn about what we have, because they might be surrounded by other plantings, or whatever it might be. The short answer is in reference to what I was mentioning before that the conservator publishes, essentially, a look-through of all the areas of land that have a level of biodiversity value that is above normal grass, I guess, and provides recommendations to our crews about how they should be approaching that type of land.

I will ask Ms Marriage to clarify, but I do not think it was so much that the mowing crisis changed where we would mow. I think it is actually a dovetailing of when the conservator's last guidelines were issued, which may be a year before. But 2022 was also a year of lots of rain, and that is when they were last issued. So, it may just be that it looks like it rained a lot and then we were like, "Oh, do not want to do that." But I think it actually was on the advice of the conservator.

Ms Marriage: The report that the Minister is referring to is the City and Parks Mowing Management Guidelines, which are for urban native grasslands and woodland sites. It guides us in some areas of conservation significance that we have. We train our staff that those areas are either mown, not mown at all, or not mown as regularly. So, we look after that.

Some other areas are actually just too steep, or there are trees too close together and things like that. So, if you are looking at roadsides and then you go, "Well, why didn't they mow that piece that is down there?" Potentially there is a safety risk of being able to manage a mower along those. It is probably some of those wet seasons that have helped us discover those things, as we got a little bit too excited trying to be able to deal with rapid grass growth that is leading onto suburban areas.

Also, there are just some unmown areas that are around your water bodies—so there is that purposeful piece where we do not mow it. If you look around Yerrabi Pond, there is that strip that we do not mow and then, of course, our mowers go right up to that. That is just to stop any of that erosion, or any of the unnecessary things that go into the water body—because then we have got a team that has to take that responsibility to clean that water body. So, it is about the areas of our business working together.

THE CHAIR: So how would someone find out, if they have a particular spot that they feel is not getting mown, if the conservator is having a look at it?

Ms Marriage: What we encourage people to do is put it through Fix My Street anyway. Because, at the end of every season, what we do is we examine if there are sites that we have missed off the map. We do a reassessment of the map. There might be decisions that are being made about feedback from staff that areas are too difficult to get into, or that it is just a constricted area that is too risky for them to deal with.

Also, the fact that laneways were one of those areas that, during the period that the minister is talking about, we did not have the opportunity to really keep up with because we were just trying to keep up with open grassed areas. And so the community then started to put in feedback about various laneways, and we have spent a lot of time in the last two seasons activating laneways into the system. So, either we have been able to mow them, but if they are gravel ones, et cetera, we spend our time then going, "Okay, what are the other opportunities to do that?" So, we take that feedback from the community via Fix My Street.

THE CHAIR: Okay, one last thing on grass and mowing. Minister, you mentioned edging and that sort of work. I am wondering if, as Canberra has grown, the bucket of money has grown in order to not stretch your resources to be able to do the edging and the weeding and the mowing. Do you think you will be able to answer that?

Ms Cheyne: How much time do we have?

THE CHAIR: Yes, okay. I would hope that, as additional suburbs have been brought in, your directorate would have been given more money to expand teams in order to cope with that growth. Has that occurred?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. However—and none of this is presented as an excuse, but more "this is what we are dealing with here". I think it was Mr Purcell's submission that said, Canberra, for potentially all of its life until self-government—and a few years preceding self-government—was a city to be of monumental significance and so, effectively, we got a monumental asset base.

It was gold plated in terms of maintenance and attendance to it. And I absolutely understand the people who voted "no" to self-government, and why they refer to those times as the halcyon days—but that is because the states and the Northern Territory were funding it.

That was not going down particularly well in the 80s when there was a financial downturn generally and, obviously, we were costing the commonwealth a lot of money—and costing ultimately the states and the Northern Territory money as well. So, we all know what happened: we got self-government. However, there were immediate issues and decisions that we have never, I think, been able to fully get properly on top of—as much as we have tried.

So, I think the first one—and these are public, but I can send them through to Mr Bunce if it is helpful—old cabinet submissions, from the first few weeks of self-government when they are like, "Okay, great. We have inherited a shortfall not just for this year, but into the recurrent years." And they immediately had to find savings.

It is chilling, I think is the word I would use about the savings that were put forward. Basically, seven million dollars of savings needed to be found, and a good chunk of that was from what was, at the time, called the office of city management. The office of city management, of course, is the maintenance area. And so, immediately a decision was made—I have only just learned this, but I think you would like to learn too—to reduce the service standards for street cleaning, tip management, traffic and engineering.

So, that is where I think about \$4.2 million of that seven million dollar saving target were found. That was just for the first year. Then they had a recurrent budget problem where they had to put forward opportunities for how they were going to find more savings.

Then, I think—yes, so the exact quote is: "Other savings will be achieved in street cleaning, tip management and traffic engineering where previous standards will not be maintained."

"High profile tourist areas will not be affected."

But that was \$1.8 million of savings, and that was pretty big for the late 80s.

Then we had obviously "the recession that we had to have", but I think in that same year, the ACT government put in a bid to the commonwealth grants commission for \$55 million—and \$22 million of that was for municipal services, another \$22 million was for Action. Do you think that we got that?

And so, we have been in that difficult position ever since. However, eventually the commonwealth came to the table and started funding us for the extra municipal services and responsibilities that we have, and standards we need to have, and particularly the fact that we do have a level of government that we have to deal with that no other states do, which is them; with the NCA.

I do not think the formula was ever quite right, and there have been lots of attempts, including by other states, to say, "Do away with supporting the ACT with this." Effectively every time we inherit an asset—so, if the SLA develops a suburb and there is a new playground and then we get the playground to maintain—there is a percentage that is applied to the recurrent funding every year, to take that into account.

But, in my view, the formula for that is not quite right. So, effectively, we inherited a structural deficit and then there have been other things that have compounded that. Then we have got some complications like climate; rising costs everywhere; we have been hit with all the insurance too; costs to fuel—you know, devastating; several other things. Then, yes, we keep having some surprising climate experiences. So, that is kind of the long history of the "yes, however".

To answer your question about what other funding we have got: there have been multiple reviews over the years of self-government, particularly into city services. But, ultimately, most of those reviews have found there are very little savings that you can make without making a decision that will change the services that the community is getting, or changing the amenity that is serviced. So that has been tricky.

Unfortunately, there have been quite a few efforts over the years to top up funding or to re-baseline. And so, I think mowing is a great example of that; where we effectively increased the numbers of staff and said that is the new baseline. But it is hard, and, historically, we have not been particularly good at life-cycle funding for an asset.

Toilets is the one example I use all the time. You know, well-meaning governments and breakfast shows say there should be a toilet here or a brand-new toilet here, or an

upgrade, or whatever it might be. But if there is going to be a bigger, better toilet or a new toilet, the ongoing maintenance costs or service costs of that are significant. There are some, like in Haig Park, which are serviced four times a day. Most are serviced once a day—almost all are serviced once a day—and that requires people. People then become the recurrent service in cost, and that has not always accounted for when we pick a new piece of infrastructure to install.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I think it is time to move on. If I can go first, we talked with Clubs ACT and the business chamber. It sort of shifted this afternoon in what we heard from their submissions to safety, and the look-and-feel effects of people coming to Canberra. Obviously, you have just explained what the budgetary pressures are and why. Graffiti was a big one; the tagging on public and private land. What is the government able to do to help businesses deal with that, if anything? Also lighting—we are talking about the safety aspect. And signage—I think, sort of, beauty, the prettiness of our city.

You did touch on it in your submission, but I am wondering if you could talk to the committee about what plans there are with regard to graffiti? I know we have discussed it in the past, but what would you consider when we have got significant people, and many complaints about the way the city looks, on those three areas.

Ms Cheyne: There is a graffiti management plan that is being developed but is not yet signed off by me—but I hope that will be imminent. I certainly recognise, you know, we have a very prominent example diagonally across the road from us, that is, I think, a constant area of concern. I am also a big subscriber to the broken window theory that, you know, once you have got a piece of graffiti or once you have an area where clearly people are illegally dumping, then it is just going to happen over and over and over until you clean it up.

There are challenges for us with businesses, and we do look to support where we can—as well as private property; residents' back fences. I think, in some cases, our crews have been very well-meaning and have gone, "This is annoying us as much as it is annoying everyone else, and we will get to it and clean it, or we will repaint the fence," or whatever it might be. But people are very particular about paint colour, we have learned. And so sometimes that results in more complaints, and crews doing a good deed are suddenly, you know, not particularly appreciated. That has been tricky.

We do have an election commitment on providing graffiti cleaning packs to private households. That has not yet— It will have a budget impact, and a decision for this term of government. We also have a commitment about some—effectively, I think we have seen that where we have genuine street art—genuine murals—we see a lot less graffiti. So there are some areas in my mind, particularly some of our arterial roads, that are terrifying to clean and equally very unsightly—and you see them every day and they give a certain impression—where I think, you know, we could probably shut the road for a weekend and get a whole heap of people out there and do a lovely mural, and put an end to it being where it is tagged.

There is a question for me—and this is not in the submission—but I was just with the only-other-in-the-world night-time economy minister in Newtown the other week. Newtown is just like graffiti everywhere. And yet Enmore Road, is very popular; live music, very lively, very hip—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Gritty.

Ms Cheyne: Gritty; hip. I was looking around and said to my chief of staff, “Look at all the graffiti.” It is there, and none of the business owners that we went to mentioned it at all. It is kind of: “This is what being in a city is like.” I am not saying I want to have graffiti everywhere that is untouched. I think there is a lot to love about Canberra looking pristine and, obviously, having national capital status, but there is perhaps a balance in terms of how much the government should be investing in removing graffiti, particularly because it is costly and time-consuming. Some of the submissions I have seen talked about having people roving all day, every day, with things in their car, but it is not a good use of resources to wander around looking for an issue.

THE CHAIR: The concern raised was safety in the areas with graffiti. It is dark, so the perception is that there is a lack of policing, so it turns into a gritty area but an unsafe one. The Central Social Club could paint their wall white and that night it would be graffitied due to lack of lighting, security and police presence. So, from a municipal services perspective, is lighting something that could possibly be looked at? I know there is a cost to everything, but is that on the radar to fix areas like the city? I have walked through there and never gave it a second thought, but it is pretty rowdy and dark at certain times.

Ms Cheyne: Definitely. Graffiti does not always proliferate in the dark. I walked to my bus stop this morning and saw that someone—I think his name is “Garb”—had tagged repeatedly with his marker pen. I thought, “Of course it is today that he has done this!” Bus stops and the bus interchange where I go are very well lit, but clearly he went hell-for-leather until his pen ran out. On lighting, though, I take those points. There are perceptions of safety for many people. We have a minor new works budget for lighting. Our gender-sensitive urban design areas that we want people to feel safe in and paths that we want people to travel are areas that we are prioritising. We are having another look at the areas for this year, based on some of the pretty horrific experiences that women have reported over the last year and some of the feedback we have heard. It is about where can we get the best bang for our buck.

Mr Fitzgerald: We also work with the City Renewal Authority, particularly in the city. There is an upgrade program along Petrie Plaza to do exactly that—to upgrade the lighting to make it feel a lot safer than it currently does. That will also extend along City Walk so that we can actually have the vibrancy that we need around that area and remove some of those issues regarding safety. We have also heard that around Ainslie Avenue there are similar issues—a perception as people cross the road from the theatre precinct. There are opportunities through our streetlight contract to make low-cost interventions. That might be to upgrade bulbs and make sure that all the bulbs are actually lit. From time to time, we find that they are not. We can also, depending on the existing infrastructure, add additional luminaires to brighten the area. We look at those requests and we work with the City Renewal Authority, particularly in the city area, to fix those things. We also go to other city centres to make sure that, where we can, those upgrades are done in a timely way.

THE CHAIR: Mr Braddock, do you have a substantive question you would like to ask?

MR BRADDOCK: I do.

Ms Cheyne: If you want to ask about signs, Mr Fitzgerald can definitely talk about signs too.

THE CHAIR: Signs are good, and trees, if we have time.

MR BRADDOCK: I was hoping to ask about playgrounds. On page 17 of your submission, you talk about the Play Space Strategy and prioritising district and central playgrounds. It goes to some detail about the strategy and what to do with the local playgrounds that we have inherited. What is the actual strategy, given we have requirements such as: residential use must be within 300 metres of a local neighbourhood park? What is the strategy with the local playgrounds?

Ms Cheyne: I will hand to Ms Marriage to talk about this in detail. Our playgrounds everywhere and our per capita playgrounds are unlike those anywhere else in Australia, to be honest. We have rightly acknowledged how positive that is. But, in terms of things that we have inherited that are coming to end of life or whatever it might be, the vast majority of our 530 or so playgrounds are local ones and they usually have two or three pieces of equipment. They are also the ones about which we get hyper local requests to upgrade them. It is the worst job in the world for me to say, “No; we cannot,” effectively because we are looking at getting the most bang for our buck and responding to where we see demographic changes, but also: where is the best value for anyone who wants to enjoy the playgrounds?

There is simply no way for all of them to be upgraded, so we have deliberately made a decision through the Play Space Strategy. This came about through the Better Suburbs work, which was an incredible, citizen-led engagement experience and effectively told us that people get very attached to their local playground and want to see the best for it. But, ultimately if you really go down into the weeds of it, the consistent feedback is: “We would prefer one bigger, better playground that has more amenity and more things to do and to travel a bit further to it than three local ones with three bits of equipment.” That has been guiding our decisions and our election commitments. Effectively, our election commitments go to the playgrounds that we are upgrading over this term. There is a particular focus on some of the smaller ones in Tuggeranong, but that is because of the suburb design in Tuggeranong, having a whole lot of cul-de-sacs and being able to walk between the cul-de-sacs. Ms Marriage was heavily involved in the Better Suburbs work and the Play Space Strategy, so I will hand over to the expert.

Ms Marriage: The minister is correct. There was the Better Suburbs process and the Citizens’ Forum. The main finding of that group was that they wanted quality over quantity, and there was a concern that we were stretching the budget to try to manage a whole lot of playgrounds, with some of them giving very little play value. It was not to say that the green space was not still valuable to the local community. In fact, with infill and generational change in communities, that green space may be considered a play space but may not necessarily have a playground in it. That was the first piece of work that was done through Better Suburbs. That led to the Play Space Strategy, which was done in 2022. The commitment to the Better Suburbs committee or group was that we would do that. In 2022, that Play Space Strategy talked about all the different

components of play, recognising that play spaces are different. There is not just a rocker in an area or a swing in an area; there are also nature play activities and green spaces where kids can kick a ball safely in their local suburb. They may not have a backyard anymore because they are in a high-rise building, a duplex or something like that.

The important part of all of that was to also look at inclusiveness and the accessibility of them. The minister is quite correct in that there was a recognition that we needed to explore the district play spaces, the community play spaces, and recognise that they were for a longer experience and that people would come along and play—that there is amenity at the site that encourages all generations of families to connect, and that the pocket of green space that might be in the neighbourhood is still available for play, but is not necessarily as controlled as having a playground in it.

The other part of that is being able to explore diversity of play across Canberra. The feedback from the community was very much—and it sort of disagrees with itself in some way: “We want our kids to play and we want them to have risky play, but not too risky.” But then you talk about nature play, and it is about: “We want it to be structured. We would like to have a formal nature play area.” In fact, some of the conversations we have been having with the Suburban Land Agency and other developers is about the natural environment—encouraging the families that go there to just accept that it is green space where they can explore and connect together, as opposed to organising a natural play area for people to participate in.

MR BRADDOCK: As play equipment in some of the older local playgrounds reaches end of life, is there consideration of replacing them with that nature based play experience, whether it might be a fallen log, a bunch of boulders or whatever it may be?

Ms Marriage: Yes. There is the part about having to educate the community as well. When we were kids, we would go to the local creek, play for hours and then go home. For the generation that we have now, we are nervous about letting kids play in those areas. Also, there is the fact that we want to have a bit more of a controlled environment so that you can manage those things and have a safer environment. There is a piece to this about educating the community about what is allowed and what is not allowed, and then releasing them to accept that. The challenge with any playground is that, the minute you put in a built environment, you have an asset. You then have to manage the risk that applies to that asset and the maintenance of it. Whether it is a nature play site or a full-on structured amenity, you still have those same responsibilities.

MR BRADDOCK: Even if it is just a boulder plonked on the ground?

Ms Marriage: If you are technically calling it a playground. If it is considered by the community to be a natural play area, you have the responsibility of being able to maintain that.

Ms Cheyne: Going to some of the contributions from the community members this morning and the boulder conversation—boulders in a row—I am not sure that is for nature play purposes. I think that is to stop people riding there, cutting up the grass and things like that, or going in on a vehicle. I need to look at exactly the place that we are talking about. I am conscious that it is actually quite close to the road, and to me it

sounds like it is a natural-looking fence.

MR BRADDOCK: Does it have multiple uses?

Ms Cheyne: Exactly.

THE CHAIR: They mentioned a standard. Those particular things are too close to the road or something, and now the standard is 20 metres. How does that factor in?

Ms Cheyne: It depends on what its purpose is. If the primary purpose—

THE CHAIR: If it is a rocking horse.

Ms Cheyne: We have a row of boulders that are all a similar size, and that is almost certainly to try to stop people doing dumb stuff that costs us. It is not everywhere. It is not something that we employ, but we definitely have examples. Regarding new nature play, I cannot imagine that we have an example that would be that close to a road edge. Depending on what the primary purpose is, that will determine where stuff would go. For new playgrounds, we are adhering to the standards as they are now rather than the standards as they were.

THE CHAIR: I think the point was that it was a rocking horse six metres from the road. They asked for an audit, which would have been one of our recommendations, but you said in the submission that you do annual audits. What happens in that instance? Is it removed or does it stay there until it is broken? People were very concerned about the standards and that we are not currently living up to them.

Ms Cheyne: Let me be absolutely frank. The standards that we have now are vastly different to what they were when most of the playgrounds were built, but the standards do not come in and effectively say that, overnight, you need to raze all the playgrounds to the ground and replace them, exactly meeting the standards. We are looking at what we inherited and the risk. We have to look closely at the rocker horse. It could be that it was the standard at the time, but we would be looking at it against our risk principles. We have some weird and wonderful play equipment. It may just be that the risk assessment has determined that the location is not great and, if it deteriorates and we decide to replace it, we will definitely not put it in the same spot. It may not be at the use level, or whatever it might be, that the risk is high enough. We will look at the transcript for those exact locations and we can update you, if you like.

THE CHAIR: Thanks.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: We are thinking about an inquiry later on regarding how dogs are managed in the ACT. I am using that as a too-many-words intro. It is about how DAS operates. What constraints is it under? What is it trying to achieve? How do rangers interact or engage with people who make complaints about dogs? How are they interacting with people who own dogs? There are rehoming rates and that sort of thing. Where is DAS situated at the moment?

Ms Cheyne: I have just invited Mr Kamarul to the table. He is the EBM for that area. What I can start with is that DAS has a number of different functions. Because it is

thought of as “the pound”, some of its amazing functions—all of which are amazing, actually—can be a bit diminished in people’s minds. In the last year and a bit, we have tried to change that profile, particularly with CBRtails on Instagram, and really focus on the effort that DAS and its partnership with ACT Rescue and Foster go to in order to rehome dogs.

You may notice that Australia has a staffy problem, but staffies are also amazing dogs and they are all subject to a behavioural assessment. On top of that, we have rangers who do the most incredible job in some of the most horrific, nightmarish circumstances. They are incredible people. We have been looking at staffing levels there as well, because the ACT has a very high rate of dog ownership and that brings with it its own challenges. The final bit to that—apart from the RSPCA, which has a new facility, and that is a whole other issue; a good issue—is that DAS’s facilities need investment. That is an election commitment. It reflects its time as well, and we have more dogs being surrendered than ever before.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Really?

Ms Cheyne: Yes—which is exactly why we are so focused on rehoming as well. I give a big shout-out to River, a blue heeler. River’s stay is coming up to 10 months, I think, and we would love to get River rehomed. Some dogs stay longer than others, for whatever reason. Mr Kamarul can fill in any gaps.

Mr Kamarul: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Mr Werner-Gibbings, in terms of general remarks, the ACT government has made significant investments in the Domestic Animal Service over the last two years, including reviewing and re-aligning resources to ensure animal management and welfare services are better supported. To go to the points made by the minister, a range of activities is engaged in by the Domestic Animal Service. They start with frontline services provided by our rangers when they respond to complaints from the community, predominantly in relation to dogs. To put that in context, since July 2025—so far in the financial year—91 animal nuisance complaints have been reported to the Domestic Animal Service and 83 related to barking dogs. That is the low end of the range of the types of the complaints that have been received. So far this year, 308 dog attacks have been reported to the Domestic Animal Service. That is compared to 486 for the last financial year.

The Domestic Animal Service, through applying a particular scale in relation to the seriousness of dog attacks, will then look at taking these matters through to the declaration of the dog as a dangerous dog or, in certain cases, a declaration requiring the dog to be euthanised. That is very serious and takes some time. It goes through a process which also includes an ACAT process. For this financial year, there were 19 applications made to the tribunal requesting a review of decision by the Domestic Animals Registrar or a deputy registrar, relating to the selling of a dangerous dog, the destroying of a dog or declaring a dog to be dangerous. Of those, five applications were upheld by the tribunal, six applications were mediated or substituted, one was dismissed by ACAT or withdrawn by the applicant, and seven are still under review.

At the high end, we have rangers and investigators doing very serious work in terms of both protecting the community from dangerous dogs and taking into account the rights

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of owners and animal welfare considerations for the dogs. That is the difficult and most challenging side of the work that they do. As the minister said, that is what people see and perceive as “the pound”. There are also significant good-news stories and a very high percentage of rehoming success stories that the team at the Domestic Animal Service have been able to work through, utilising the website but also word of mouth through the community. I am speaking more broadly about the work that the animal service provides. Mr Werner-Gibbings, was there anything specific that I can address for you?

Ms Cheyne: That has perhaps given you some ideas on where an inquiry might go.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Yes; that is right.

THE CHAIR: I thank you all very much for your attendance today. I am sure we could have got to every one of you if we had another hour or so. Your submission was really helpful. Some questions were taken on notice. Please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. Again, thank you for attending, and we thank those who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard staff, the committee, and, of course, the committee secretariat.

The committee adjourned at 4.44 pm.