

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES**

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2004-2005)**

**Members:**

**MR B STEFANIAK (The Chair)  
MS K MacDONALD (The Deputy Chair)  
MS R DUNDAS  
MRS V DUNNE  
MR J HARGREAVES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**MONDAY, 24 MAY 2004**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms S Leyne (Ph: 6205 0490)**

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

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

**The committee met at 9.19 am.**

Appearances

Mr Jon Stanhope, MLA, Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Environment, and Minister for Community Affairs

Environment portfolio

Mr Alan Thompson, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Urban Services

Mr Allan Eggins, Executive Director, Corporate, Department of Urban Services

Dr Maxine Cooper, Executive Director, Environment ACT, Department of Urban Services

Dr Helen Sims, Manager, Office of the Commissioner for the Environment

Ms Elizabeth Fowler, Executive Director, Environment Protection/Environment ACT, Department of Urban Services

Mr John Heinemann, Manager Finance, Environment ACT, Department of Urban Services

Mr Geoffrey Wells, Manager, Parks & Conservation, Environment ACT

**THE CHAIR** Just before we start, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Assembly, backed by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections and also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a very serious matter. Do you understand that?

If witnesses are going to take a question on notice, please identify that you are doing so. It is then your responsibility to check the transcript and to respond to the question. As you are probably aware, responses to questions on notice are required to be within three full working days. The transcript will be emailed to the minister and the departmental contact officer for distribution to witnesses as soon as it is available. Could members clearly identify if they want a question to be taken on notice and please give any page references. The proceedings are broadcast to specified government offices and the media may record proceedings and take visual footage. Are there any issues for the day? Firstly, are there any areas where members do not want to ask questions, so we do not needlessly have departmental officers waiting around?

We will deal with the Commissioner for the Environment first, which is EBT 1 in budget paper 4 at page 234. The representative of the Commissioner for the Environment has to go to an urgent meeting—there is a lack of staff—so she will be on first. After that we will have general questions until the morning tea break. When we reconvene we will go to output classes 3.1 and 3.2. Welcome, Dr Sims.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, we have recently made a new appointment of Commissioner for the Environment. On two or three occasions in the last little while the Planning and Environment Committee has been consulted on extensions to the previous commissioner's appointment. On various occasions, including on annual reports, the

24 May 2004

Planning and Environment Committee has made recommendations about increasing the resources and the hours per month available to the Commissioner for the Environment. What progress has the government made, if any, in increasing the resources and the time for the Commissioner for the Environment?

**Mr Stanhope:** As you are aware, the government has completed a review in relation to the role and function of the Commissioner for the Environment and in relation to the legislation. That process has not been completed.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, you started the sentence by saying, "As you are aware, the government has completed" and then you said that the process has not been completed.

**Mr Stanhope:** It has not been implemented, but the review has been undertaken. Final decisions have not been made. There was not additional funding in this budget for the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment. A new commissioner has been appointed. I propose to meet with the new commissioner when she is available. I will discuss with her her view and attitude to some of the issues that were raised in the review and some of the issues around resourcing and the nature of the terms and conditions of her appointment.

**MRS DUNNE:** Has the commissioner taken up the position yet? I gather that she is overseas.

**Mr Stanhope:** She has taken up the position, but she is overseas.

**MRS DUNNE:** She has formally commenced in the position?

**Mr Stanhope:** As far as I am concerned. Cabinet has agreed to the appointment, as has the Assembly. I do not know whether the formal appointment has been made. If it has not I would have expected that it would have. I do not know whether I have a role in that, but, if I do, I will appoint her as soon as the formalities are concluded.

**MRS DUNNE:** On 30 March in question time in the Assembly, Minister, you had a bit to say about the commissioner in her former life before she was appointed commissioner. You said that, up until that day, you had had enormous respect for Dr Purdy and other people. Have you found again your lost respect or have you just failed to recall that you lost it?

**Mr Stanhope:** I did not say that I had lost that respect.

**MRS DUNNE:** You did say that you had lost respect for Dr Purdy and other scientists. Have you found that respect again?

**Mr Stanhope:** Where did I say that?

**MRS DUNNE:** On 30 March in question time.

**Mr Stanhope:** I am not aware of what I said and I am not prepared to answer it without access to the transcript and what I did say.

24 May 2004

**MRS DUNNE:** You said:

So, it will be to the enduring embarrassment of Rosemary Purdy—  
and others; I won't name them—

people for whom I have had, up until today, enormous respect ...

Have you found that respect again?

**MS TUCKER:** That would have been a question I asked, I think.

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes, it was. I remember the question, but Mrs Dunne has just said that I stated that I had lost respect. I am looking for the statement where I say I have lost respect. I would just like Mrs Dunne to read it out.

**MRS DUNNE:** Which part? "... people for whom I have had, up until today, enormous respect".

**Mr Stanhope:** Just read out for me, Mrs Dunne—you just said that I said that I had lost respect; you just said that and it is on the record—that part of my answer in which I say I have lost respect.

**MRS DUNNE:** You said that up until today you had—

**Mr Stanhope:** You put words into my mouth, didn't you, Mrs Dunne?

**THE CHAIR:** Let her read it out, Mr Stanhope.

**Mr Stanhope:** Read out the words where I said I have lost respect.

**MRS DUNNE:** I will read out the words that you said. You said that, up until today, you have had enormous respect for these people—"people for whom I have had, up until today, enormous respect." Minister, have you found that respect again or did you forget that you said it?

**Mr Stanhope:** Mr Chair, a few minutes ago Mrs Dunne said that I had said I had lost respect for these people. I would like Mrs Dunne to withdraw that. She was not telling the truth.

**THE CHAIR:** She has actually read part of a transcript. Minister, if—

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes. But I said, "Did I say I had lost respect?" and Mrs Dunne said, "Yes, you did say that." That is in your transcript, the transcript of this hearing, Mr Chair. I would like Mrs Dunne to now withdraw that untrue statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne has actually read out part of a transcript of the proceedings of the Assembly on 30 March.

**Mr Stanhope:** In which I do not say I have lost respect.

**THE CHAIR:** Just read it out again, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** You said:

So, it will be to the enduring embarrassment of Rosemary Purdy—  
and others—

people for whom I have had, up until today, enormous respect ...

Does this mean that the minister has suddenly—

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Chairman, on a point of order: Mrs Dunne certainly did read that out. But the Chief Minister is referring to comments made leading up to that and not to what is in the transcript. I support the minister's call for that to be withdrawn.

**THE CHAIR:** I think it is fairly clear what she has read out. What is the sentence immediately after that? That is often quite important.

**MRS DUNNE:** It goes on to talk about how they did not get briefings when they were entitled to briefings. The point that needs to—

**Mr Stanhope:** No, it goes on to say that they did get a briefing, which they claimed they did not get—the reverse.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is right. Sorry, I stand corrected.

**Mr Stanhope:** A briefing which Dr Purdy, regretfully, forgot about but which she now acknowledges.

**MRS DUNNE:** Chief Minister, my question is that on 30 March you said that “up until today” you had had respect for them, meaning that from that day you did not have respect for them. Have you found your respect for Dr Purdy again?

**Mr Stanhope:** No, it does not mean that at all.

**THE CHAIR:** What does it mean then, Chief Minister?

**MRS DUNNE:** What does it mean then?

**Mr Stanhope:** It means that up to that day I was considering. I did not make a statement one way or the other about whether or not they had lost my respect. I said that up until that day they certainly had my respect. They continue to have my respect. Mrs Dunne is seeking to put words into my mouth. I refuse to allow Mrs Dunne to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne does not want to pursue that any further. Have you got another question?

**Mr Stanhope:** Mrs Dunne has made a misleading statement, which is in the transcript of

this particular hearing of this estimates committee. I want the record to note that the claim and the statement that Mrs Dunne made that I had said that I had lost respect for Dr Purdy is not correct. Mrs Dunne does not have the grace to withdraw the fact that she made that claim. I just want the record to note both that she did make an erroneous statement and that she does not have the grace to acknowledge it.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. I think we have clarified that, Chief Minister, in the last bit of reading out.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, do I read from your statements that you will be discussing with Dr Purdy the nature of her tenure, her role as the commissioner and the nature of the review and that you anticipate that there may be some increased resources for the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment?

**Mr Stanhope:** It is always possible. There are no additional resources for that office in this budget. It is something that we will consider in the future.

**MS TUCKER:** Can I ask a follow up question on that?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, certainly. You can ask several questions.

**MS TUCKER:** When I look at total cost of investigations, on page 234, in the outputs you have \$96,000, \$96,000 and then \$78,000. The explanation is:

Increase in 2003-04 estimated outcome due to additional costs incurred in relation to preparation and publication of the 2003 State of the Environment Report. Funding carried forward from 2003-04.

I just do not understand. Are you are saying that, because total cost of state of the environment reporting is not happening in 2004-05, that is why you do not have that output? There is nothing for total cost of state of the environment reporting in the 2004-05, which is reasonable, and you are not doing it—although I do not know if it is reasonable. I would not mind asking Helen Sims whether that work is continuing throughout the years. Even though the actual report is not tabled in a particular year, are you not working towards it in the alternative years? Also, why do we see the total cost of investigations decreasing? I do not quite follow that explanation in budget note 2.

**Mr Stanhope:** Mr Heinemann might be in the best position to answer that question.

**Mr Heinemann:** I am the Finance Manager of Environment ACT. There is a typo in the comment that says, "Funding carried forward from 2003-04." It should have said 2002-03. Basically in the years in which the state of the environment reporting process takes place, which usually spans two financial years, additional resources have been provided to the office to fulfil those responsibilities. An amount was provided in 2002-03 and a second amount in 2003-04. The full amount that was provided in 2002-03 was not spent in that year and was carried forward to 2003-04, hence the total cost of state of the environment reporting line reading \$435,000 as the estimated outcome. The original target was \$340,000.

**MS TUCKER:** That is helpful. My other question for you is about the \$78,000.

**Mr Heinemann:** Why it has declined to \$78,000 from \$96,000?

**MS TUCKER:** Yes.

**Mr Heinemann:** Basically in determining the targets for each year, I guess an estimation has been made of the proportion of resources of the office of the commissioner that will be devoted to investigations in that particular year and \$78,000 has been estimated as the appropriate figure in 2004-05.

**MS TUCKER:** Why is it less?

**Mr Heinemann:** It is just the estimated workload.

**Dr Sims:** It is the 80-20 difference.

**Mr Heinemann:** Yes. For some time the split between normal operations and investigations has been about 80 per cent normal operations, 20 per cent investigations. As the year progresses, if additional investigations were required the split obviously would change.

**MS TUCKER:** But wouldn't the 80-20 apply in 2002-03 and 2003-04 as well?

**Mr Heinemann:** It did in the original target for 2003-04, but as the workload of the year transpired, because of the carry over from the previous year, more resources than the 80 per cent were devoted to reporting.

**MS TUCKER:** I am sorry: it is early and I am not understanding. If the 2003-04 target was \$96,000—that is the estimated outcome—then why is the target less for 2004-05?

**Mr Heinemann:** The overall funding for the operations in 2004-05 is less because it is a non-reporting year.

**MS TUCKER:** But there is a different cost line for the state of the environment reporting.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is the point. Helen, can you shed some light on this?

**Dr Sims:** I am from the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment. It is probably an artefact of a standardised 80-20 split. Early in the reporting period, in the days when we first started doing output reporting and had to do this split between outputs of state of environment reporting and investigations, we calculated that as a general rule state of environment reporting took 80 per cent of our resources and investigations took about 20 per cent. We have maintained that split. There have been times when we had a very heavy investigations workload that would have taken more than 20 per cent and times when we do almost 100 per cent of state of environment reporting. I think what has occurred there is a sort of an artefact of that standardising to meet the output reporting requirements in budget terms. We have always kept specific costs against what costs externally for state of environment reporting and what costs externally for investigations. Does that make any more sense, Ms Tucker?

**MS TUCKER:** A bit. I still do not understand though why the figures decreased.

**Dr Sims:** Because our money has decreased. We get two years out of three with increased funding so that we can complete our state of environment report.

**MS DUNDAS:** Maybe an easier question to get the answer is: which are state of the environment year reporting years? You get funding for the year the report is tabled and the year before. Is that correct?

**Mr Heinemann:** That is correct, yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** What are the state of the environment reporting years?

**Mr Heinemann:** The two years with the increased funding were 2002-03 and 2003-04; 2004-05 is not a reporting year, hence the—

**Dr Sims:** Yes. We crank up, actually. It takes over two years in the period.

**MS DUNDAS:** So we expect the next state of the environment report in 2005-06?

**Dr Sims:** In 2006-07.

**Mr Heinemann:** In 2006-07.

**Dr Sims:** We call it 2006 at the moment.

**MS DUNDAS:** Sorry, 2006-07.

**Mr Heinemann:** It will be during the calendar year 2006.

**Dr Sims:** It is generally tied to the electoral period.

**MS DUNDAS:** Which is changing.

**Dr Sims:** Yes. The legislation is written so that, if the electoral period changes to four years, that can be accommodated in our reporting. The wording is something like “not more than four years apart”.

**MS DUNDAS:** Why are they tied to the election cycle?

**Dr Sims:** That was a philosophical reason so that in the lifetime of every Assembly there would be one state of the environment report. That is an accountability factor.

**MS TUCKER:** Just picking up on the earlier questions from Mrs Dunne, I wanted to ask Mr Stanhope about the review of the office. Perhaps this is a policy announcement that you do not want to make. I am interested to know if you can tell us now whether you are committed to ensuring the independence of the office?

**Mr Stanhope:** I am certainly committed to ensuring the independence of the office,



yes—absolutely.

**MS TUCKER:** It would stay as an independent statutory body?

**Mr Stanhope:** Absolutely.

**MS DUNDAS:** With a continuing ombudsman role?

**Mr Stanhope:** There will be no diminishing of the role, functions or statutory independence of the Commissioner for the Environment whatsoever. The government has no intention of diminishing the role. There is a range of other issues that we have not finalised, but neither the role of the commissioner nor the independence of the commissioner will be compromised at all.

**MS TUCKER:** Can I ask a question of Dr Sims about the state of the environment reporting and the regional work that that involves? Do you have any comments to make generally about how that has developed over the years—the sophistication of the regional input that involves, if you like, and the workload on your office?

**Dr Sims:** It has had a very significant impact on us and on the office. We do get funding from the councils to prepare the state of environment reports. I am going to a meeting with them now to say “This is what we will do in the office” and “This is what we want you to do” to get the next state of environment report done for them.

That report officially is due at the end of November this year, but people in the region have already received a letter from the New South Wales director-general of local government to say that it does not need to be in until 30 June 2005. That is an acknowledgement of the workload and the extent of the report. We have sent one lot of invoices out and we have about \$120,000 back from councils. We will be sending another invoice out in the new financial year to cover that. We are getting quite significant funding coming in to cover it. We do spend some of our own money because there is a regional component to it, so we do contribute from our own office as well. It never goes outside our office.

**MS TUCKER:** What proportion of our money goes into it?

**Dr Sims:** Ms Tucker, I cannot tell you that. I do not know the answer to that.

**MS TUCKER:** I was just interested to know. We are really charged with the fundamental responsibility for this—the ACT has taken that on, to its credit—so do we take the greatest share of financial responsibility for doing it or does it work out pretty equally?

**Dr Sims:** The legislation in New South Wales is different from that here so the due dates of our reports do not always coincide. The last report we did for the ACT was due at the end of December 2003. We were three months late with that. Local government reports are due at the end of November 2004. As I explained before, ours is due roughly every three years. Theirs is due—it is fixed in legislation—every four years. A comprehensive report is due every four years and we have to juggle those due dates. We did the ACT report this time and that is sitting there waiting to be plugged in to the regional report

that gets done during this year. That will then form the next 2004 regional state of environment report. When we do it all together, as we did for 1997 and 2000, it is very difficult to work out what is an ACT cost and what is a council cost because they are all blended in together. We work on an indicator at a time.

The ACT report is much bigger than any of the reports we do for other councils. So, yes, it takes a lot more of the resources when we do it all together. The ACT report is done now. The one that we are working on now is an all-councils report, except for the regional component, which we all have a share in.

**MS DUNDAS:** The Australian Capital Region State of the Environment Report is basically the ACT State of the Environment Report plus all the other regional reports?

**Dr Sims:** Yes.

**MS DUNDAS:** Because you have already done the ACT State of the Environment Report is that why funding has dropped for the development of the Australian Capital Region report?

**Dr Sims:** No, it is not. I do not know where the idea came from. We had, in our office, asked for increased funding over three years to allow for preparation of state of environment reports for the ACT. But it was only given to us in two lots: two out of every three years. It would be easier to manage if we had it as a general thing because after completing each report we always do what worked, what didn't work and how we are going to do the next report. We will especially have to do that this time around with a new commissioner.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have another question about the review. Was that review in any way looked at in conjunction with the statutory body's oversight review?

**Mr Stanhope:** No, it was not. The role of the Commissioner for the Environment was not incorporated in the review of other complaints mechanisms, no.

**MS TUCKER:** I have just one more. This question is for Mr Stanhope, so if Dr Sims has to go, that is fine.

**Dr Sims:** I will stay and listen if that is okay. Then I will go.

**MS TUCKER:** I just wanted to follow up on the initial questions. You said, as I understood it, that the new commissioner's input will be sought for the review itself of the office. I am just interested to understand what the employment arrangement or contract is. It is a very part-time position at the moment and that has obviously been raised as a matter of concern over the years. People have advocated giving this position more time. So is Dr Rosemary Purdy—is that her name?

**Mr Stanhope:** Rosemary Purdy.

**Mr Thompson:** Rosemary Purdy, yes.

**MS TUCKER:** Is Dr Purdy being invited to make a comment about the resourcing and

her own employment: the days that she would be working and how part time the position is? I want confirmation from you that that is still open.

**Mr Stanhope:** I certainly expect to discuss those things with Dr Purdy, yes. When I spoke with her at the time that she accepted the position we agreed to meet on her return to the ACT. I agreed with her in that conversation that I looked forward to discussing all aspects of the review and the operations of the office with her. I did not specifically mention hours of work or whether it should be part time or full time, but we agreed that we would discuss the review in detail and the operations of the office. I did not go into detail about the elements that we might discuss, but I have every expectation that she will raise resourcing and work issues.

**MS TUCKER:** So the employment contract is flexible?

**Mr Stanhope:** At this stage the offer was made on the basis of the status quo. But, as I say, I expect those issues to be raised by Dr Purdy.

**MS DUNDAS:** If the review recommends, through discussions, that the resources to the office and the days that the commissioner works be increased, will that be part of the supplementary appropriation?

**Mr Stanhope:** If we were to make that decision it could be, yes. That could be the case with any decision we might make in relation to additional resourcing.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have a question for Dr Sims specifically. The commissioner puts out an annual report that is quite detailed, actually going back and seeing how previous recommendations have been implemented. I think that is a very good thing to do. I do not want this to be a leading question: are you continually frustrated that, with the work the office is doing, it appears that the recommendations are not prioritised or followed through? I did say I did not want to ask a leading question, but I cannot think of an easier way to put it.

**Dr Sims:** I think one of the things we have always wanted to do is get a tighter relationship between the recommendations that are made and the government responses and budget appropriations—how the money is to be allocated for those things. That is something we have not managed to do. To be fair, we have not really pushed it lately either. We pushed it a while ago but we have not pushed it for a while. We thought that would be a better solution.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you think the growing of the relationship and more synthesis will come through this ongoing review of the role and the functions of the office—that there is an opportunity there to bring those things into tighter focus?

**Dr Sims:** I do not know if the review would do that. I think that part of it is finished.

**Mr Stanhope:** I should say that I am advised that we do not know a single recommendation that has not been actioned or is not in the process of being actioned at the moment. I think we need to be careful about claims we make about the extent to which reports to the commissioner are or are not actioned. My advice from Dr Cooper is that we are not aware of a single recommendation at the moment that has not been

actioned or is not in the process of being actioned.

**MS TUCKER:** Yes, but that is a matter of progress checks.

**Mr Stanhope:** Certainly, but the question—

**MS TUCKER:** You can say that we are going towards reaching a particular target but—

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes, we are.

**MS DUNDAS:** I was talking over the last number of years, Minister, where it has taken a number of years for some recommendations to be picked up.

**Mr Stanhope:** Certainly. But I must say that it was a leading question that left an impression that we are not responsive to the commissioner, and we are.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I just follow that up?

**THE CHAIR:** Very briefly.

**MRS DUNNE:** If necessary it can be taken on notice. Did the commissioner make specific recommendations to Environment ACT in relation to the Nettlefold Street trees? Were they followed up?

**Mr Stanhope:** The answer is yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Specific recommendations were made and followed up?

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes.

**Dr Cooper:** I am from Environment ACT. The specific recommendations that affected Environment ACT were definitely followed up, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Were they acted on in the way that the Commissioner for the Environment required?

**Dr Cooper:** I would have to go back and look at the specifics, but I would say that we followed them up.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you take that on notice. There being nothing further for Dr Sims, thank you very much for attending. Enjoy whatever meeting it is that you have to go to. We will now have general questions. We will finish at 10.30 am. If we finish earlier we will go to output class 3.1.

**MRS DUNNE:** We are going through the initiatives for capital works and then we will go to the output classes?

**THE CHAIR:** We will go to output class 3.1 after morning tea. We will now deal with

capital works and any general questions.

**MS MacDONALD:** I want to ask about indigenous employment opportunities. I applaud the government for taking this initiative on board. Obviously I am a big supporter of vocational education and training. All traineeships are very much welcome, especially indigenous traineeships. Indigenous employment opportunities within Environment ACT are a great way to get indigenous traineeships going. I am curious to know: approximately how many traineeships will take place each year? How they will be administered? Could you give me just a bit of information about the program generally?

**Mr Stanhope:** Thanks very much, Ms MacDonald. I think it is a very good initiative too. It is, of course, consistent with our commitment to joint management for Namadgi National Park. I will ask Dr Cooper to give you the detail of the program and how we envisaged operating it.

**Dr Cooper:** We currently have three indigenous trainees at the moment. We did it as a pilot project. We have actually looked at what works for the indigenous people. What we are looking at over the next four years is for two traineeships every two years. At the end of that we hope to have four trainees. It is a two-part program: one is on the field experience—being out on the field and learning—and then coming into the office environment and learning how to work in that as well.

**MS MacDONALD:** How will you be advertising it? How will you get people involved? Who will be running it?

**Dr Cooper:** We have a very good network with the indigenous groups and we work through that network. So we certainly target the indigenous people through the networks we have. We have a particularly strong one with the Ngunnawal community and we focus through all of those networks.

**MS TUCKER:** On page 160, the initiative for improved catchment management—

**THE CHAIR:** That is BP 3.

**MS TUCKER:** Yes. You are talking about water quality in the Cotter and Googong catchments. I am interested to know a little more detail—you could take it on notice if that is better—about the modelling that was used when you decided to put pines in the Cotter catchment, in the likelihood of landscape fires and extreme rainstorm events, that is, big rains.

**Mr Thompson:** I am the Chief Executive of the Department of Urban Services. The funding here is primarily, if you like, targeted at the Googong catchment and the Cotter catchment above Bendora Dam—the Bendora catchment and Corin catchment. As to the land below Bendora, there were fairly extensive pine plantations there. We are in the process of restoring that landscape right now. There are small planting programs happening even as we speak. The current proposals are to have a mixture of pine on the gentler slopes, eucalypts and other native species on the steep slopes and also eucalypts and native species down each of the riparian zones.

The design is being developed by an expert group, which involves people from

Environment ACT and the ANU, from a couple of different faculties there. The plan is to, if you like, design the replanting so that we can then model it in a longitudinal way year on year. At this stage, it does cost a huge amount of money to fully restore a landscape back to eucalypt when it had been previously planted with pine. We know that from our own experience up at Bobyan and we know it from interstate. We are doing some pine and some eucalypt, but we are putting the eucalypt where we believe it is of most value, which is, as I say, on the steep slopes and along the riparian zones.

**MS TUCKER:** You could take this question on notice: I still want to know what your projections were, the modelling you did on climate, extreme fire events and extreme rain events and the percentage probability you have used to inform this particular decision? I understand and I accept that this was a decision that was informed by a number of stakeholders, including scientists, but I also understand—tell me if I am wrong—that this was a compromise that you came up with, taking into account pressures, such as cost pressures that you just outlined, as well as jobs. That has not been mentioned this morning but was also something government said at the time was being discussed. I am particularly interested in the climate modelling, fire modelling and the percentage probability you have used to inform your decision.

**Mr Thompson:** Ms Tucker, I can take that on notice but I definitely should make the observation that the redesign of the plantation areas is one where the capacity to combat fire will be greatly enhanced. We have been the victims of the earlier planting regime in that catchment and further south in the Gibraltar area of pine plantations being run straight up the slope and then stop and then eucalypt forests start—with no road and no firebreak along the margin.

The redesign that they are going through—you can see it out in Pearce's Creek right now—is to have eucalypt on the steep slopes, then to have a good road along the margin, and then to have the pine downhill from there, which will give a lot better capacity to fight fire, if it ever happens again, in an effective way.

The other thing is that, particularly in the Pearce's Creek, Uriarra areas, we are very aware of the erodability of the soils and the need to get something back into those soils very quickly by way of effective plantings. That is why some of the Greening Australia type programs are being run out there, even as we speak. Subject to what happens today, we will probably have to do a lot of hand watering of some of those plantings. We are very keen, particularly on the riparian zones, to get all the new plantings in now to try to control erosion in those catchments.

**Dr Sims:** Ms Tucker, if I could just add for your information: the essence of this particular program is that there will be a forest ecologist position established. That position will actually help all agencies. In a sense, this is the keeper of the catchment. That is a new initiative that should help on the ground actions.

**MS TUCKER:** Thank you. The point remains, though, that if you are planting pines they are going to be harvested.

**Mr Thompson:** At some point well down the track, yes.

**MS TUCKER:** The modelling that I want to see is still related to not only fire events but

also rain events for that purpose. The keeper of the catchment position is obviously good but that is being done after this decision has been made. The keeper of the catchment, whoever that is, might have had input into the decisions that have already been made for pragmatic reasons to a degree. I would like to see that modelling.

**MS DUNDAS:** I want to talk about water and water efficiency. We are getting in a possible \$11 million revenue from the water extraction charge. Is there any plan to turn that money around and spend it on water saving initiatives?

**Mr Stanhope:** We are not hypothecating it, Ms Dundas, if that is your question. There are significant costs to water initiatives, water saving initiatives and the water strategy through the third appropriation and consuming, of course, through all of our appropriations. But, no, the water extraction charge has not been hypothecated.

**MS DUNDAS:** How much money are you spending on the water strategy and water efficiency?

**Dr Cooper:** Over the four years of the program, \$8.418 million. In this coming financial year we are spending \$2.071 million.

**MS DUNDAS:** For the 2004-05 financial year?

**Dr Cooper:** Correct.

**MS DUNDAS:** Queanbeyan City Council in 2003 spent \$1.5 million on a water conservation program, which per capita was about \$45 per head. Just over \$2 million for the 2004-05 financial year for the ACT works out at about \$7 per head in the ACT. Considering that Queanbeyan and Canberra are experiencing the same drought, why are we not spending more money on water efficiency and water programs?

**Dr Cooper:** Liz Fowler, the Director of Environment Protection/Environment ACT will address that.

**Ms Fowler:** The ACT is dedicating quite a lot to water efficiency. In fact, it is going to run a lot of the complementary programs to what is being run in Queanbeyan. Queanbeyan have another driver, I guess, in the amount of money they're putting into that. By saving water efficiency over there, they're trying to delay the investment they need to make in their infrastructure. We have very good infrastructure here so the water efficiency programs the government is committed to now complement the programs in Queanbeyan. We come from a base of having very good infrastructure in place to build on.

**MS DUNDAS:** How will the money that you've allocated—the amount of over \$2 million—be spent in the coming year?

**Dr Cooper:** It is going to be spent in five major components. The first component is what you can refer to as the domestic component, which is the indoor water tune-up. There will be just over half a million dollars on that. That half a million dollars also covers garden water tune-ups.

**MRS DUNNE:** How much for the garden water tune-ups?

**Dr Cooper:** We haven't split it. For the indoor and the garden water tune-ups, it is just over half a million dollars. We've also got, for the domestic area, a rainwater tank rebate—that is just over \$100 million—\$119,500, I am sorry.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is a lot of rainwater tanks!

**Dr Cooper:** A lot of rainwater tanks!

**MS TUCKER:** They are expensive!

**Dr Cooper:** There is a showerhead rebate of \$200,000. For the second component, public information and awareness, we've got \$300,000. We have a government implementation program whereby we look at the major water users in the government such as schools and our sports and irrigation areas. Then in the commercial sector we've got \$324,000 to look at hospitals, universities, shopping centres and office buildings. Going back, in the government sector we've got \$294,000.

**MS DUNDAS:** The showerhead rebate and the rain tank rebate are only percentage rebates, aren't they, in respect of the amount of money you outlay for a showerhead?

**Dr Cooper:** We are looking at the next program of getting a \$20-rebate for a triple-A showerhead, with a maximum of two showerheads per household. We are assuming we'll get an uptake of around 7,000 on that.

**MS DUNDAS:** Because 30 per cent of houses in the ACT are rented, you don't have landlords wanting to put in that kind of investment, because they usually pass the water charges on to the tenants, and the tenants don't have either the capital or the desire to improve a house which they're not going to be living in for more than 12 months. So having only a \$20 rebate for showerheads doesn't benefit 30 per cent of houses. Have you explored how you can provide water efficiency support to people who are renting?

**Dr Cooper:** We are going to focus on that issue through the public awareness campaign. At the moment, we've got a pilot program to examine how we can best reach exactly those kinds of people. We've certainly got that as one of the objectives—to try and penetrate that area.

**MS DUNDAS:** What is the pilot program doing—the research program?

**Dr Cooper:** It is defining exactly where we can target the expenditure of these initiatives.

**Mr Thompson:** What has happened within the ACT is that there is a series of incentives, which Dr Cooper has outlined, in respect of providing grants and that sort of thing. But the other really important part of our water conservation program is the changed tariff regime. That is sending very strong signals to high water users to find more efficient ways of using water and reduce their water consumption. That will drive a lot of the behaviours that Queanbeyan achieved by handing out grants to people, if you like. I guess we've just got a different mix of incentives to encourage the community to use



water more efficiently.

**MS DUNDAS:** That still leaves the people who are renting and not able to put out the capital outlay at a disadvantage.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes. I was just responding to the earlier question.

**MS TUCKER:** You said that the driver for Queanbeyan to do this was to reduce the need for them to spend significant amounts of money, but obviously you could argue that we've got a driver, which is water conservation, that should be put on as high a level as the Queanbeyan need to save money for renovating or building new infrastructure. That is a comment obviously, not a question.

My question is: as I understand it, Queanbeyan attempted to bring about change in this area by offering rebates, but the take-up was very small compared to the take-up once they said, "You can do it for nothing." Master plumbers come in and do the audit for nothing. You can get a showerhead and dual flush toilet installed for nothing. The take-up was very large compared to when they were just offering a rebate.

In respect of Ms Dundas's question about rental accommodation, can I suggest that, if you're researching how to address this part of the market, you look at what Queanbeyan did for nothing, and look at the difference in take-up. I can't remember exactly what the percentage difference was but it was very significant. That is why they decided, "We'll do this for nothing." People will do it if it is for nothing. They get the information included with their rates: you can have this done for nothing. Master plumbers will come in for nothing and do this. People go, "Wow! Okay!" The human behaviour part of this came out really clearly from the Queanbeyan experience. Maybe, for the committee's interest, you could take this as a question on notice and ask: what happened? What was the percentage difference in Queanbeyan?

**MRS DUNNE:** Dr Cooper, you said there is half a million dollars for the indoor and garden tune-ups. That is over and above the rebates for the showerheads and the water tanks. Is that right?

**Dr Cooper:** Correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** What do you propose to do with the tune-ups?

**Dr Cooper:** We propose that a plumber will visit households, advising on water efficiency, repairing leaky taps, installing a water efficient showerhead, two tap valves, flow regulators and two washers. They'll be doing work within the houses while they're doing that.

**MRS DUNNE:** How much do you envisage that being per house?

**Ms Fowler:** It is \$30 per owner.

**Dr Cooper:** \$150 per household for the indoor tune-ups, and for the garden tune-ups \$130 per household. Some people will choose to have the indoors done and others will choose to have the outdoors done.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is an either/or situation?

**Dr Cooper:** No. They can have both. For a house it is up to \$280.

**MRS DUNNE:** How will we select these people?

**Ms Fowler:** The pilot study being done is making a selection of different types of households and different types of establishments across Canberra—so different types of water users—from the Actew database. There'll be some that are large houses with large gardens, some will be smaller and some will be apartments. It will try to take a selection across the board. When we've done that we will move on, see what that pilot study tells us and get a selection, in the same way, off that database. We will then put out an expression of interest as to how that can be done, but we will make sure it is targeted right across all of those different types of users.

**MRS DUNNE:** When do you envisage that that will commence?

**Ms Fowler:** We should get the results of the pilot study in early July. This program kicks off with this budget commitment from July onwards.

**MRS DUNNE:** Where did the money come from for the pilot study? That came out of the \$280,000?

**Ms Fowler:** The third appropriation.

**MRS DUNNE:** The pilot study is selecting people off the Actew database. How many people are you selecting and actually going out to?

**Ms Fowler:** Out of the pilot study, there are about 225.

**MRS DUNNE:** So 225 are getting the water tune-up with the bits and pieces?

**Ms Fowler:** Yes, as a pilot. We can research that and see that the program is correctly targeted.

**MRS DUNNE:** You said a showerhead, two flow-limiting valves, and two washers?

**Dr Cooper:** The information I've got is that advice will be given on water efficiency in general; leaky taps will be repaired and there will be the installation of a water efficient showerhead, two tap valve flow regulators, and two washers. Householders will be required to make some form of contribution to that, which will be negotiated.

**MRS DUNNE:** You don't know what the householder will contribute?

**Dr Cooper:** That is what the auditor will come up with. We are looking at an investment of around \$150 in each household. Given the cost of calling out the plumber, they may wish to add another \$20 to do a few additional things that the plumber may suggest, which ultimately will save them money on their bills.

24 May 2004

**MR SMYTH:** Ms Tucker asked some questions about the clearing and replanting. How much residue timber from the fires has been destroyed, and how much is to be burnt off?

**Mr Thompson:** In terms of the windrows?

**MR SMYTH:** Yes.

**Mr Thompson:** As of the end of this financial year we've got about 4,000 hectares cleared and we have about 6,500 to go. Just where we are across that 4,000 or so hectares with the windrow burn offs, I couldn't say, but we are well advanced. We made a lot of progress last week when we used a helicopter to help us. We did about 700 hectares in one go. We'll be approaching 4,000 fully cleared and ready to be replanted.

**MR SMYTH:** What sort of tonnage of residue is that? Do we know?

**Mr Thompson:** No, I couldn't give you the figure. As you know, early on we harvested as much as we could. We sold it off for saw logs, and the residual saw logs went to China. It is beyond that now. The majority of it is just being windrowed and then burnt.

**MR SMYTH:** Questions were asked in estimates last year about alternatives to just cutting it down and burning it—whether it could be chipped and ploughed back in as biological material, or whether other options were put forward. Chief Minister, was an offer made to purchase the residue from the fires?

**Mr Stanhope:** I am not aware. I would have to take that on notice.

**MR SMYTH:** There wasn't an offer to buy all the damaged trees and turn them into biomass?

**Mr Stanhope:** Mr Thompson says he is able to answer that. That is a matter that would have been dealt with by Mr Wood. I am afraid that is not something I am aware of. Mr Thompson may be able to assist.

**Mr Thompson:** We've had offers to take the wood away. "Buy" is probably the wrong word; it was more like pay to have it taken away at substantial cost, to be used as boiler fuel in the various timber plants at Tumut. The end effect of the whole transaction was a significant cost to the ACT rather than a net benefit. Unfortunately, once you've got charcoal around this wood, it is simply no use for woodchip, newsprint or particle board. It is only really viably useful as a fuel. The end effect of the transaction was that we were going to end up paying a significant amount of money. From memory, we did a limited amount for a small margin but the rest of it simply did not stack up financially—and it was still going to be burnt.

**MR SMYTH:** I've been contacted, Chief Minister, by a gentleman who said he had a meeting with you on 14 May last year, when he offered to purchase all of the burnt logs. But he said that you'd expressed a preference to bulldoze and burn the damaged material, rather than look at other strategies for the sale of this material.

**Mr Stanhope:** I have to confess I don't recall the detail of that. I am more than happy, however, to get the briefing I was provided with at the time. I imagine it was consistent

with what Mr Thompson has just said in relation to the issue of clean up and disposal of burnt forest area. I would be happy to provide you with a copy of that briefing but I would wish to refresh myself on the issues that were raised. I know there are significant costs involved in the clean up. I am happy to take the question on notice and provide you with a response in the next couple of days. I would prefer an opportunity to refresh myself on the issues, and on the nature of the meeting and the briefing that I would have been given at the time.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you. I'll take you up on that. We might get you in on the recall day.

**Mr Thompson:** We had a number of people come and make offers to us last year. All the ones I saw were predominantly hinged around the fact that we would be paid some money if we could deliver this to their door. The catch is that that involved us clearing the land, loading the trucks, loading the logs onto trucks or rail or whatever and paying the transport costs to wherever. When you add all that up, and then getting a small offset back by being paid at the sawmill door or the factory door, the figures I saw did not stack up.

**MR SMYTH:** Chief Minister, the meeting was on 14 May 2003. Apparently you attended, together with Judith Downey, Hugh Davidson, Hilton Taylor, John Kelly and Brent Demnar.

**Mr Stanhope:** I do recall the meeting, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think I asked a similar question this time last year: was any modelling done, not only about the costs; because it seems that a lot of modelling was done on the costs in economic terms—but was any calculation done of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would be released by the burning of however many thousand tonnes of windrow timber? Do we have any idea?

**Mr Thompson:** No special modelling has been done. We did a lot of scouting all around the world to try to find places or companies that could use this wood in a durable way for particle board or whatever. The major export opportunity we had was to export a fair amount of log to China but the other opportunities we identified—Korea, Italy and so on—didn't amount to anything.

**MRS DUNNE:** I was really concerned about the refuse.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes, I appreciate that. I am coming to the point that, in the end, all the other uses we've found for that is simply to use it as boiler fuel, so it ends up being burnt at any rate.

**MRS DUNNE:** No-one ever came to you and suggested it could be used for fuel for biomass generators at any time?

**Mr Thompson:** Various ideas have been put forward for it to be used as a fuel, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** No. I don't mean as a fuel itself but to be used as biomass to generate electricity, therefore not releasing the carbon dioxide?

**Mr Thompson:** That still generates carbon dioxide.

**MRS DUNNE:** In a way that you can trap it and convert it—that is the whole point. You are saying that no-one came to the government with a proposal like that?

**Mr Thompson:** I've got some recollection of somebody offering to somehow put a small generating plant on site. From memory, we said to them, "Look, go away and see if you can do a deal with an electricity company so they can hook that up into a grid." I don't think we had anything—I don't think they ever came back to us after that. The other propositions were about sending this off to Pratts, Visy or the like to use as boiler fuel. Sometimes that does convert back into electricity but, as far as I am aware, they all involve burning that material so it all ultimately goes into the atmosphere.

**MS TUCKER:** On the greenhouse strategy initiative on page 160 of BP3, there is \$300,000. On the program itself we had an interesting conversation here on Friday about the fact that ACT Housing are providing curtains for people moving out of the multiunit flats—the Currong Flats—and there were apparently three options given to the residents to choose from. I wanted to know whether the energy efficiency of the curtains was part of this.

The committee has asked on notice to see exactly what these three options looked like to the tenants—and then they were enabled to make their own choice. It was interesting that the result was that they apparently chose vertical blinds with pelmets. Vertical blinds are not particularly good insulation—in fact, that is an understatement. It is even a bit bizarre having pelmets on something that waves around and lets the air just flow in and out anyway. I don't know what the pelmets are capturing, or stopping from flowing.

I am really concerned to understand how you can address these kinds of oversights. If it isn't an oversight, then there are other questions. If the three models presented did have energy ratings with them for the window coverings and the tenants chose, for some reason, to say, "We would still prefer to have window dressing that is really not energy efficient at all"—then I think there are still some questions as to how much the conversation was around why having window coverings that work would benefit them. There is money going into this "energise your home" program and I am interested to know how you are coordinating this kind of initiative with housing.

**Dr Cooper:** We are most certainly liaising and working with housing on those issues. The kinds of facts you've just raised come into the education component. I understand that housing have a quarterly journal in which they promote energy, water and all kinds of corporate-type environmental initiatives. We are working with them on those sorts of issues.

**MS TUCKER:** Were you consulted and involved in this particular exercise of the curtains for the Currong people who were moving out?

**Dr Cooper:** I am not sure whether we were involved in that particular issue but we are certainly talking to them about our policies and the way we are heading. We have what is called the home energy advisory service. In that case we would have hoped that maybe they would have been consulted if we weren't. I can take that on notice and find out.

**MS TUCKER:** If you could take that on notice, to see exactly what your relationship was with that exercise, that would be useful. Also, as far as I can work out, we've got \$300,000 in this initiative for the greenhouse strategy. I think you've acknowledged publicly, Mr Stanhope, that we are way behind in reaching the self-imposed target for reducing greenhouse emissions. When I look at the figures here, it looks like we've got \$100,000 extra only in the implementation of the greenhouse strategy, but this is worth \$300,000. I am interested to know where the other \$200,000 is coming from.

**Mr Stanhope:** Which figure are you relying on there?

**MS TUCKER:** I am looking at page 223 of BP4, which is the output class. It shows "cost of implementation of greenhouse strategy" and we've got \$100,000 extra.

**Dr Cooper:** The \$200,000 that you're referring to there includes a one-off expenditure for the program that you may recall, called Travel Smart, which we are doing with ACTPLA. That \$200,000 has gone over to ACTPLA for the implementation of that program.

**MS TUCKER:** ACTPLA is now covering the cost of that; Travel Smart is continuing; and that is why you've got another \$200,000?

**Dr Cooper:** We'll take that one on notice, but that is our assumption.

**MRS DUNNE:** You've got \$100,000 in BP4, output 3.1, for the cost of implementing the greenhouse strategy but there is \$300,000 here in the "energise your home" program new initiative; and you're saying that \$200,000 has gone to ACTPLA?

**Dr Cooper:** No. Last year, in 2003-04, there was \$200,000 in the budget for Travel Smart, which went to ACTPLA. This year we've got a suite of programs.

**MS TUCKER:** The \$200,000 is still there because you don't have responsibility to Travel Smart? That is why you can put \$300,000 into this greenhouse strategy?

**Mr Stanhope:** No. This is a new program.

**MS TUCKER:** I know it is a new program but it is not new money.

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes it is.

**MS TUCKER:** Then why can't we see it on page 223?

**Mr Stanhope:** I don't know the answer to that, but this is new money.

**MS TUCKER:** You've only got \$100,000 extra here.

**Mr Stanhope:** Mr Heinemann might be able to assist.

**Mr Heinemann:** The outcome for 2003-04 includes a one-off contribution to the Travel Smart program from the greenhouse budget. The base figure, which carries forward into

24 May 2004

2004-05, is \$737,000, to which the \$300,000 of new money is added, giving the \$1,036,000 target for 2004-05.

**MS TUCKER:** Yes. So you're no longer spending \$200,000 on Travel Smart?

**Mr Heinemann:** Out of the greenhouse budget—that is correct.

**MS TUCKER:** That is where this \$300,000 has come from—because you're spending it on this, instead of on Travel Smart?

**MRS DUNNE:** If that is the answer, Mr Heinemann, why was the 2002-03 budget \$831,000, which is only \$100,000 less, and the estimated outcome in fact \$1.453 million? Perhaps I can suggest, Mr Chairman, that Environment ACT need to go back and have a look at their figures, take that question on notice and give us a breakdown on what has been spent on greenhouse since 2002-03.

**THE CHAIR:** I think that would be sensible.

**Mr Heinemann:** Certainly.

**MS DUNDAS:** Perhaps you could give us a breakdown of this \$1.03 million. We know where \$300,000 of it is going but can we have a breakdown on where the rest of it is going?

**Dr Cooper:** I can give that now, if it would help.

**MRS DUNNE:** Something has already been taken out. In the 2002-03 year the final outcome was \$1.453 million. There is something missing.

**Mr Heinemann:** Yes. Since the commencement of the greenhouse project there have been a number of delays with various components of it. In 2002-03 the outcome reflected a catch up on a number of components. Some of the extra expenditure in that year was generated by the very successful showerhead rebate scheme that ran over that December/January period.

**MRS DUNNE:** That was a greenhouse initiative, not a water efficiency initiative—you're telling us now?

**Mr Heinemann:** No. The showerhead subsidy that ran in December 2002-January 2003 was a greenhouse initiative.

**Dr Cooper:** As you would appreciate, it covers both water and the greenhouse.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes I do but, at the time, it was touted as a water efficiency measure—certainly in the public mind. I don't have a problem with which bucket of money it comes out of. I think sometimes we have artificial silos.

**Mr Thompson:** I think we would be best to take the whole thing on notice.

**MRS DUNNE:** Absolutely.

**Mr Thompson:** The Travel Smart funding has been continuing. It is a bit the same. When successful, it is a very good contributor to greenhouse savings, as well as reducing road traffic congestion. We should take part of that into account, even if it is with ACTPLA rather than with Environment ACT.

**MS TUCKER:** On this “energise your home” program, you’ve got \$300,000. I am interested to know how you think the spending of this \$300,000 is going to deal with the problem you’ve got in reaching the self-imposed greenhouse emission target. Why did you think this was all that was needed to try to meet that target? How many houses do you think you’re going to reach in the general community with this money?

**Mr Stanhope:** I understand it has been anticipated that this particular initiative will provide funding for 1,500 audits and rebates over four years. We do have an issue in relation to the greenhouse strategy and the analysis that we’ve relied on in relation to that. A revised draft strategy is about to be released for further consultation, as a result of some of what we believe was the flawed analysis at the time the strategy we are reviewing was prepared and issued.

The advice I have is that the analysis that was undertaken, that underpins the strategy that was released in 2000, is simply wrong; it is false. So it is not just a question of us not making appropriate progress on the self-imposed targets. The issue, as I understand it—Dr Cooper can provide a more technical explanation to this and I’ll ask her to do that—is that the analysis, the science underpinning the targets, is simply flawed. So we have a significant problem with our strategy that is based on assumptions.

**MS TUCKER:** It is just that the levels were higher.

**Mr Stanhope:** No, it is not—it is not that simple. That is part of it, yes.

**MS TUCKER:** Isn’t that a reason to get more serious about it?

**Mr Stanhope:** I think it is, but let’s work out exactly what is going on. We’ve commissioned significant support and expertise in the development. Through that process we’ve come to an understanding that we’ve been proceeding on the basis of some fairly significant false assumptions. We need to get it right. We are now in a situation where we are faced with a circumstance of not being able to achieve, as you say, a self-imposed target because, essentially on advice, it was never achievable. That is just a fool’s errand.

It really undermines the commitment we make as a community to the achieving of targets when all of the assumptions we made around the targets we set—well, not all of them—are wrong. We need to overcome that. We are now going through a refined process to understand our situation. Through that process, hopefully we can set ourselves a task that we can achieve. As a community we cannot set out on a path that I am now advised is essentially not achievable with the size of our budget and the resources available. Some advice I received was that we would have to commit tens of millions of dollars now to go anywhere near meeting the expectations that were set. That is simply not doable.



24 May 2004

I acknowledge that there are issues around greenhouse and energy. I think I accept that we've established a strategy in relation to water. We've done some serious work in relation to what we need to do in the context of water and set ourselves a range of targets. We will meet the targets that we've set under the water strategy. I accept that the next big task in environment is greenhouse and I intend to devote myself to that over this next term. We will establish a strategy that we can achieve; it will be realistic and the targets will be rigorous. We will commit incrementally additional resources to it.

**MS TUCKER:** Can I ask why, if it is such a priority, you're prepared to spend millions of dollars—\$10 million from memory—on the arboretum and \$300,000 on greenhouse strategy? I am basically asking about your priorities.

**Mr Stanhope:** I think it is a fundamentally important priority to restore our non-urban area. I must say I don't think you should underestimate or trivialise the need for this community to restore our environment as a result of the impact of the fire. I think it is a vitally important priority. I don't think it should be trivialised or underestimated.

I can say that about any initiative. It is always the way, in relation to any budget, when you're sitting in the cabinet room making decisions around your expenditure. Why this and why not that? Why not another \$2 million or \$3 million on the water strategy? Why put any into the water strategy? Why not put the money we put into the water strategy into the greenhouse strategy? The bottom line is that, when one dismisses the one-off bushfire recovery funding that was provided to environment last year, it is clear that the budget for Environment ACT this year has increased quite significantly.

**MRS DUNNE:** It went down by \$2 million!

**Mr Stanhope:** That is as a result of one-off bushfire initiatives. In fact, the Environment ACT core budget has increased by over \$2 million. That is a very significant upward trend in a relatively small budget. The Environment ACT budget, ex-bushfire related one-off initiatives, which were a direct response to the disaster of January 2003, has increased significantly. There is only so much increase each year that any government can apply to any particular issue.

The Environment ACT budget has increased by over \$2 million. On a budget of less than \$30 million that is not a bad outcome for the environment. I've seen the reports. I've seen the *Canberra Times* rushing to press, saying that the environment budget has declined. If you take out the one-off bushfire initiatives, it has not. On core Environment ACT priorities, the environment budget has increased; it has trended up significantly. You can drop any initiative that you favour on the table and say, "Why didn't you apply more money to this?" I can say, "Well, where would you like us to take the money from?"

**MRS DUNNE:** The Minister for Environment has just said that the Environment ACT budget, on core environment non-bushfire issues, has increased. Could we have a piece of paper that demonstrates that, please?

**Mr Stanhope:** Most certainly.

**Meeting adjourned from 10.38 to 10.59 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** Let us get started.

**MS DUNDAS:** You were talking about the “energise your home” program and the \$300,000 for that. On page 223 of Budget Paper 4, we see that the solar hot water rebate scheme is due to conclude in 2004-05. Will the “energise your home” program pick up the solar hot water rebate program or are we just going to see the end of solar hot water rebates?

**Mr Stanhope:** That is a decision we will make in the context of next year’s budget. At this stage, on the basis of reports I have in relation to that program, I would anticipate that it would continue, but that is a decision that will be made in the next budget round.

**MS DUNDAS:** But we are actually seeing a drop in funding for this year’s budget. I think the scheme finishes halfway through the year, so are we going to be six months without a scheme?

**Dr Cooper:** It depends upon the take-up rate. As you might recall, with this particular scheme, in the first year we had a very low take-up rate. Last year we adjusted it. When it finishes depends upon the take-up rate and we would envisage that it would probably nearly make it right through the year, just on current trends.

**MRS DUNNE:** On the issue of take-up rates—this is probably a question on notice—when this started there was \$1.1 million over three years. Was there a target at that stage for the number of hot water systems?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes. I do not have that figure with me.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is fair enough.

**Dr Cooper:** Sorry, I do. The target was for 1,500. On current trends this is likely to be just over 1,300. It is due to us trying to get a better uptake. What we did was increase the rebate for the gas heater boosting rather than just leaving it for people to choose what their booster was. So in terms of greenhouse emissions, by a greater uptake we are actually addressing the emissions objective more efficiently.

**MRS DUNNE:** Under the scheme, if you have mains gas to your property is it mandatory for you to have a gas boosted system?

**Dr Cooper:** No, it is not mandatory, but one of the things that has happened with the adjustment for the market incentive with that little bit extra money is that we have gone from a figure of seven per cent worth of gas boosted systems over a year ago to a figure now of 22 per cent. So the actual financial incentive seems to be the mechanism to get them to use the gas boosting.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have done the costings. It is very expensive to put in gas, even if you have gas to your house.

**Dr Cooper:** Yes.

24 May 2004

**MRS DUNNE:** Apart from the booster, is it just a flat rate rebate, because some hot water systems are dearer than others, or is there an incentive rebate for, say, the quantum system which does not need any booster at all?

**Dr Cooper:** I understand that there is a sliding scale according to a few variables.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you give us an exposition on those, perhaps on notice?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes, we could.

**MS DUNDAS:** To go back, I understand also that the cavity wall insulation program was due to finish in spring 2004. Is that correct?

**Dr Cooper:** Correct.

**MS DUNDAS:** What is the future of the cavity wall insulation program?

**Dr Cooper:** The cavity wall insulation program is a seasonal program. It goes forward in autumn and spring. We will be assessing that and advising the minister accordingly.

**MS DUNDAS:** The spring 2004 program is budgeted but is the autumn 2005 program budgeted?

**Dr Cooper:** John understands that it is, so it will take us through to the end of that financial year.

**MS DUNDAS:** So, again, this will be something for next year's budget considerations.

**Dr Cooper:** That is correct. Both of them were designed to try and feed into where the government might then wish to go in the following financial year.

**THE CHAIR:** When you say 'John', do you mean John Heinemann?

**Dr Cooper:** The minister, not John Heinemann.

**MS DUNDAS:** Just to finish up: do you have any idea if these rebate programs are being taken up in the ACT public housing sector?

**Dr Cooper:** If the private tenants wish to do this—some of them, I understand, have very long-term commitments to a property—they can do that. We do not discriminate. If they wish to do that, the door is quite open.

**MS DUNDAS:** Do you have a breakdown of figures of housing type—who is taking up these rebates?

**Dr Cooper:** We may do. I can get that if you want it—if we have it.

**MS DUNDAS:** If that information is available that would be great.

**MS MacDONALD:** How expensive is the cavity wall insulation program per building

and how effective is it? I have just heard varying reports about its effectiveness, but that is anecdotal. I do not know how much evidence there is on that.

**Mr Heinemann:** I believe it is about \$1,500 to \$1,800 per house. I am also speaking from personal experience because I was one of the people who did it before the program existed. I think it probably is variable in effectiveness, depending upon orientation of the house and that sort of thing.

**Dr Cooper:** The funding for it is shared. Just-Rite, the insulator, subsidises the program, as do the ACT government and the Greenhouse Office. So in terms of effectiveness, for most people most of the time it is one of the most effective mechanisms you can apply to your house, but it is also much better to apply it with ceiling insulation and, depending upon your floor, with floor insulation.

**MS MacDONALD:** I take it that there is a way of evaluating it. I am sorry, I am not on the Planning and Environment Committee so I do not actually look at these issues.

**Dr Cooper:** We are doing a study, evaluating all the people who have used it and what is their response. That is yet to come in. But, from just talking to people, the greatest response is a more comfortable home—a home that is warmer in winter and cooler in summer. The next response, although it is environmental, is that they do notice their energy bills decrease. So it is comfort, cost factor and then that they feel good about it because it contributes less to greenhouse gases.

**MRS DUNNE:** But they feel really good about it because the costs of running the house go down. I just wanted to go back to the “energise your home” program. The minister said before we broke for morning tea that there have been 1,500 rebates and audits over four years. How do you envisage the program will work? Have you worked it out?

**Dr Cooper:** In offering home owners—

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, how does it work, what is involved in the audit and what do you get a rebate for?

**Dr Cooper:** As with the water program, they are designing that to target different components or different households around the ACT at the moment.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you have not worked out how it is going to be implemented?

**Dr Cooper:** No. They are working that out right now.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you. Of the 400 audits this year, you do not know what will be involved? There is a rebate component, according to the minister. What will be involved in the rebate component?

**Dr Cooper:** It will depend on what the audit says. What they are trying to do in this program, instead of specifying the rebate, is to try and gain the most in energy efficiency. So they will take that on board as they are assessed. We will come back to you on this, Mrs Dunne, but I am sure the staff implementing this have clear criteria on how to achieve that.

**MRS DUNNE:** Does Environment ACT have any idea—has it done any research, commissioned any research or picked up on anybody else’s research—of what initiatives will give you most bang for your buck? Sometimes you can spend a lot of money and not get much benefit from it.

**Dr Cooper:** Correct. I do not have the information with me, but they absolutely have done that.

**Mr Thompson:** Mrs Dunne, if you go to one of these places, they will give you some principles about what will be most effective. They will run through a checklist such as ceiling insulation, which is extremely effective, draught minimisation and so on. They will also go on to say, “In the case of your house, we really have to come and look at it.” Draughts are a classic. If they walk in the front door and realise that there is a gap of 50 mils under the door, that will be the top priority. It will be very cheap to fix up. That is the point of tailoring the assistance.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I understand about the tailoring, but, before you tailor it to a particular house that you might walk into, is there research information available to the people who are going to do the audits that say, in general principles, this is the thing that gives you the most bang for your buck?

**Dr Cooper:** Absolutely, Mrs Dunne. As I said, I cannot list what they are, but we have absolutely got that information.

**Mr Thompson:** I did these things five or six years ago. The very first question is: how old is your house? That immediately tells you whether it is a 40s or 50s house. You then go on to: does it have an open chimney straight through up into the atmosphere?

**MRS DUNNE:** Does it have louvers in the loo?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes. From those basic questions they can calibrate the age of the house. Then they move on and say, “For a house like yours, the most likely things are probably the following.” In the case of that place, they started quizzing me about the light fittings. It suddenly sunk into all of us that we had these light fittings that penetrated the ceiling. So you effectively have a series of chimneys venting all the warm air up into the ceiling. Instant advice will fix that up and you will help yourself enormously.

**Dr Cooper:** Also, we have some model housing available. Once our five properties that were burnt in the fires are reinstated we will have them six-star rated. So we will have in the ACT more than the five-star energy rating that people aim for. We will have six-star energy rating buildings.

**MRS DUNNE:** Which properties are these?

**Dr Cooper:** We have two at Tidbinbilla, one at Cotter, one at Bendora, one at Glendale and one at Namadgi. The properties that were burnt during the fire were for staff accommodation. We are rebuilding them for security purposes as well as for the staff. They will be six star. We are going to have actual examples out there in energy efficiency as to how you can really achieve the top.

**THE CHAIR:** I have some questions on this output class. In relation to the performance indicators, on page 223, I note there are some quite good clear ones: for example, “management of water resources” and “develop water resource strategy”. But the one below that—“management of trees”—seems to me to be somewhat less than useful. It says “Manage tree protection scheme”. That is an ongoing part of the job of Environment ACT, isn’t it? Is that a performance indicator?

**Mr Thompson:** It is not unlike some discussion we had last Friday. We would like to have things that are, if you like, more quantitative but, to be blunt, if you take trees it is incredibly difficult to pick a quantitative measure. A lot of the business of the people who manage the tree protection schemes is essentially reactive. It is the business that comes in the door, which is driven by the level of greenfield development and by the level of inner urban redevelopment and the like. Try as we have, we have not come up with better indicators. Essentially what we have put down there indicates that there is a body of work, which is very important for the ACT. We would aim to be successful at undertaking that, but we have not come up with a smarter measure such as number of trees protected or whatever. It is very hard to—

**THE CHAIR:** I understand that, Mr Thompson. As I may have suggested on Friday, perhaps you have that somewhere else—an ongoing highlight—in the report where it is probably more relevant than it is here. As you say, should it be a performance indicator? It is important but it is not a performance indicator.

**MS TUCKER:** We have just had legislation tabled looking at changing the scheme. There is going to be a significant tree register and, as I understand what I have read of the legislation so far, you are going to have particular areas that are recognised as being under pressure. So they will have the interim protection of the existing scheme. Is that right? Have I understood that correctly?

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes.

**MS TUCKER:** One of the issues with the tree register has always been the resource implications. You can have a real lag in that, which means that trees are not covered. I would have thought that a performance indicator, at this point anyway, certainly could be how you are progressing. If this legislation is passed, and I realise that has not happened yet, I would have thought there would be real resource implications, if you get the current revised scheme up, with the significant tree register. I think that is an issue in measuring performance. I have two questions. Firstly, if this gets up what time will it take to get the significant tree register to cover significant trees? Secondly, what are the resource implications?

**Mr Stanhope:** You are quite right, Ms Tucker. We do acknowledge that there would be, first up, significant resourcing implications. It was one of the issues we debated in relation to going to a permanent tree register. I was concerned about up-front costs—the resource implications in developing it, in the first instance, and then the basis on which it is maintained and updated and the ongoing implications. The advice was, as you say, that, first up, perhaps in the first year as the register was developed, there would be a significant cost. I am also advised that it would then be anticipated that the cost to maintain the register would not be so great.

I take the point you make. There would also be an opportunity then to provide a measure. If the legislation passes and we do agree to establish a permanent tree register, a measure could be incorporated in relation to the establishment of that register to the extent that it is completed within a reasonable timeframe. I am not aware at this stage whether we have set a target, but it would need to be done. As you say, the idea is to move for a permanent scheme. The current scheme is essentially a holding or a temporary scheme. We have consulted on the development of a new arrangement. We believe that the model that we have proposed does best meet the needs of tree protection in the community. You raised two points that were very much part of the decision making that we undertook in relation to the tree register.

**MS TUCKER:** Where are the resources going to come from if they are not in the budget? You could argue that we cannot put it in the budget because the legislation is not passed, but if it is passed I would have thought it is really critical that we know that that is going to be properly resourced and, therefore—this is Ms Dundas’s question—where does the money come from?

**Mr Stanhope:** I do not have an answer to that at this stage. I acknowledge that there are significant up-front resource implications to the establishment of a tree register.

**MS TUCKER:** While that significant tree register is being developed, is it the idea that the current protection will exist?

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes. There will be an interim arrangement to ensure that trees are protected in the interim.

**THE CHAIR:** In output class 3.1, what is the reason for the increase in funding of approximately \$2.8 million to 10.5 million? I note that the big money increases seem to be around the cost of management of water resources and the third appropriation funding being reflected for the implementation of the water resource strategy. Mention is made of that in footnote 9 on page 224. I take it that is basically an increase as a result of those things. If so, what will the ACT community get from those increased funds?

**Mr Stanhope:** I think your assessment is essentially correct, Mr Chair. The significant additional expenditure is in relation to the implementation of a water strategy. That is the essential shift in resourcing. A significant increase in resourcing is devoted to the water resource strategy. The suite of programs that Dr Cooper mentioned before will be delivered to the community.

**MS DUNDAS:** I was just going to ask about the water resource strategy. I have a problem with “implement water resource strategy by 2005” as a performance measure. There are other measures like this. That does not mean that the water strategy is going to be fully implemented by June 2005, does it?

**Dr Cooper:** No. It is a framework for ongoing action. A whole suite of things will go forward. A significant component of it within that three-year period will be achieved. Sorry, I may not be understanding the question, Ms Dundas.

**MS DUNDAS:** The implementation of the water resource strategy and the greenhouse

strategy are ongoing projects which have a performance measure and which requires them to be completed by a particular date. In other bits of the budget papers we say “new legislation to be completed by June 2005” where there is an end date when the legislation is tabled and debated, but these are ongoing.

**Dr Cooper:** Our targets for water are things like a 12 per cent reduction in the mains water usage by 2013 and then a 25 per cent—

**MRS DUNNE:** What is the significance of a June 2005 date?

**MS DUNDAS:** In terms of the performance measures in the budget papers it looks like all the projects are going to finish in June 2005.

**Dr Cooper:** No, the program that we have set with the initiatives that we have mentioned today should conclude. For the different numbers of rebates that we have programmed in, that is our target date for achieving those.

**MS MacDONALD:** Can I just clarify this? Will your action plan be up and running by that stage?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Up and running or completed? A second ago, Dr Cooper, you said that you would envisage that all the rebates would be completed by then.

**MS DUNDAS:** There would be 7,000 showerheads out there.

**Dr Cooper:** No. The ones that we have targeted for that year we would anticipate achieving by the June date.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can you tell us what they are?

**MS DUNDAS:** Our problem is that that is not very clear in this budget paper.

**Dr Cooper:** We acknowledge that; we understand that.

**MS DUNDAS:** Especially if you are breaking down the water strategy into one-year, two-year and three-year programs. We just see, “By June 2005 the water strategy will be implemented.”

**Dr Cooper:** No.

**MS DUNDAS:** That is what the budget paper says.

**MRS DUNNE:** There is a table somewhere towards the end of the first volume of *Think Water, act water* that says you will do things by a particular date. In this financial year you start thinking about commercial water and things like that. Are these the things?

**Dr Cooper:** Those are the types of things in that program that we would want to achieve by then.



**MRS DUNNE:** But why aren't they, in some way, enumerated here? As it is written it gives the clear impression to someone who is not familiar with the water resources strategy that it is all over red rover by June next year.

**Dr Cooper:** I would assume that it is about Treasury being succinct. There is not much room to put a whole mass of targets in. I think that is the essence of it.

**MS TUCKER:** I think there is certainly room to have some indication in the budget, whatever Treasury may think. I can reflect over the years how these outputs have reduced significantly, not just in this area. The argument at the time from Mrs Carnell and Mr Humphries was, "We don't want to complicate things with too much information", which is a bit insulting, to be honest. I think people in estimates committees like to have some real measures that they can easily access, as well as people in the community. So if you have a water strategy or a greenhouse strategy, why not have output measures? For example, with greenhouse: how are we going with transport and energy of commercial and residential buildings? You could have some general targets for water conservation. If you have a target of whatever you just said it was, why not have that in here as a measure? Treasury might not think it is necessary but I think members of this committee would like it, as would the community. I would—definitely.

**MS MacDONALD:** Ms Tucker has just made a statement; she has not asked a question. Would it be possible instead to consider it?

**MS TUCKER:** It was implied.

**MS MacDONALD:** Would it be possible to include? Obviously you cannot include every measure; otherwise the budget papers would be double the size at least, if not triple the size, which would mean that we would have to cut down a whole lot more trees.

**MS TUCKER:** Don't try that one.

**MS MacDONALD:** It is true, Ms Tucker.

**MS TUCKER:** The cost of democracy.

**THE CHAIR:** Steady! I would like to hear Ms MacDonald's question.

**MS MacDONALD:** The point is well taken that sometimes the things that are put in budget papers are a little unclear. Surely there would be the possibility of having within the notes attached reference to where the targets are placed so that there is further information and it can then, therefore, be pursued.

**THE CHAIR:** I think you have two questions there, Dr Cooper: one from Ms Tucker and one from Ms MacDonald.

**MS TUCKER:** Thank you, Chair.

**Dr Cooper:** We will take that on board. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Ros, did you have something?

**MS DUNDAS:** I have some questions about the statement of financial performance for environment and heritage, which is on page 222. There has been a sharp increase in the resources received free of charge from the 2003-04 budget to the 2003-04 estimated outcome. Why is that?

**MRS DUNNE:** On page 222?

**MS DUNDAS:** Page 222. The last line under, "Revenue."

**Dr Cooper:** May we just clarify? Is it the \$316,000 to the \$315,000?

**MS DUNDAS:** No. It is the \$42,000, which was last year's budget, to the \$315,000. It is just in the 2003-04 year.

**Mr Eggins:** I am the Executive Director of Corporate. I can assist with that. During the 2003-04 financial year we took advice from our auditors about the treatment of legal services provided by the ACT Government Solicitor. We had recognised them in our annual reports but were not also recognising them in budget papers. The increase in the environment resources received free of charge you will see repeated across all department services outputs.

**MS DUNDAS:** There has been a huge increase in the grants and purchased services but this time between 2003-04 and 2004-05. It is down in expenses.

**Mr Eggins:** Yes, and then ongoing for several years. That is a reflection of the additional funding out of the water resource strategy. The nature of much of that expenditure will be in the form of grants.

**MRS DUNNE:** The revenue is up significantly in this financial year. It seems to be a one off. What is that?

**Mr Heinemann:** That represents the bringing to account of a revised estimate of the insurance claim. It is a \$1.2 million increase over what had been brought to account in 2002-03.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Mr Chairman, does that also apply to the second last line, the \$1,944,000?

**MS DUNDAS:** The extraordinary revenue.

**THE CHAIR:** Extraordinary revenue, John.

**Mr Heinemann:** That is a small mistake in the budget papers.

**MR HARGREAVES:** It is a very large mistake.

**Mr Heinemann:** It should not be there. It reflects the cash we received at the end of the last financial year in relation to the insurance claim. In some way it is a double counting

of something that happened in the previous year.

**THE CHAIR:** It should not be there. It is a mistake that should have been taken out. Other questions on output class 3.1?

**MRS DUNNE:** I wanted to go to the issue of pests-plants and animals-and go back to hardy perennials, things like Patterson's Curse, St John's Wort and weeds of that nature, which are an increasing problem post bushfires. What specific activities are in place in the autumn and spring seasons for addressing these issues?

**Mr Wells:** Geoff Wells, Manager of Parks and Conservation and Environment. We recognise the difficulty we're facing with weeds such as Paterson's curse, which is would be the most obvious one to us. In autumn very little was done because there was little germination of seed. Therefore our normal autumn patrol program, and those of other land managers, was not able to be undertaken. We expect, therefore, to have very prolific growth of, for example, Paterson's curse if we get winter rain. That will be in late winter/early spring, at which time we will expect all land managers to have plans in place and be ready to implement them. We will have a very small window of opportunity and it will be quite difficult. We would be dreaming to imagine that we will get Paterson's curse totally under control this year. It's going to be an ongoing problem.

**MRS DUNNE:** I understand that. **Mr Wells:** We've already given advice to horse owners and we're giving advice to all rural land managers on the options they have. But it's important to remember that a weed like Paterson's curse is really a weed not of reserves and conservation land but a weed of production land, and particularly a weed related to paddocks on which horses are grazed.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, that is generally the case. What particular strategies are in place for the horse paddocks, for instance, which ACT directly or indirectly has control of?

**Mr Wells:** The strategy we have in place is that we will endeavour to focus our early work on one or two paddocks which we will endeavour to maintain and keep Paterson's curse-free. That is going to be a really concentrated effort. We will put the horses in those paddocks while dealing with the Paterson's curse as it grows on the other paddocks. It's going to be almost impossible, in the window of opportunity, to get all thousand hectares of the government's horse paddocks Paterson's curse-free. We don't want to be in the same situation as last year where there were no, or very few, paddocks without Paterson's curse to put the horses on. We have a strategy and we're advising other horse agisters of the same issue.

**MRS DUNNE:** You're quite right that probably land under reserve is not all that susceptible. But there are lands under the management of ACT Forests which were particularly badly affected last year. What strategies are present there? Every time you don't deal with it, you're storing up problems for another seven years.

**Mr Wells:** Since I'm not responsible for that land, I think it would be unreasonable of me to answer on behalf of ACT Forests or their minister.

**MRS DUNNE:** You said before that Environment ACT are requiring people to put plans in place. Are you checking to see that the plans are in place and that they're ready to

move, if and when it comes up—if we get rain?

**Mr Wells:** There's no way we can force people to do that. However, there is a very active weeds working group operating in the ACT that has all land managers and external stakeholders involved. They've been very active recently working on these issues. We certainly will be as prepared as we could be. That goes for all land managers across ACT government.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why can't you force people to do that? You said that you can't force people to take action.

**Mr Wells:** In the same way as we can't force people to take weeds out of their lawn.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is there any mechanism under the pest plants legislation that would put some imperatives into your action and force people to do things?

**MS TUCKER:** The noxious weed—

**MRS DUNNE:** We don't have a noxious weed.

**Mr Wells:** We recognise pest plants. "Noxious weeds" is not a very useful label. Experience has shown that, if you take Paterson's curse for example, declaring it, as they have done in a lot of Australia, a noxious weed has zero influence on its control. The weed is so prolific, so widespread, and so difficult to bring under control that to make it a requirement means that the farmers will say, "I can't do it." It is the same as serrated tussock. Making it a noxious weed does not influence its control.

**MRS DUNNE:** Farmers in the ACT have expressed the view to me and to others that they would like to see it declared a pest plant. They say they are doing as much as they can, but they're being constantly inundated from the corridors and forest land, which is not being maintained to the same extent that they are maintaining their land. Is there any mechanism under the pest plants legislation that would put some compulsion into dealing with weeds?

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes, there is, but we've taken a decision for what we believe to be good policy reasons not to declare Paterson's curse a pest plant or a noxious weed, for the reasons Mr Wells has explained.

**MRS DUNNE:** I'm sorry. I don't know that I've heard a good policy decision—except that it's too hard.

**Mr Stanhope:** No, that is not what he said at all. Mr Wells said that experience in other jurisdictions is that it's counterproductive. It does impose, potentially, an enormous burden on landholders. I have to say I've had no representations from a single landholder in the ACT—

**MRS DUNNE:** I must get them to ring you!

**Mr Stanhope:** —wishing to have Paterson's curse declared a pest plant or a noxious weed. I can assure you, Mrs Dunne, that any comparison of ACT managed land and rural

24 May 2004

lessee held land in relation to the proliferation of Paterson's curse will not show ACT government managed land in a poor light. I would be extremely surprised if the Rural Lessees Association, or a significant number of ACT rural lessees, would like us to have the capacity to force them to remove all the Paterson's curse on their properties. I doubt that a single rural lessee would thank you for the suggestion that we should declare Paterson's curse a pest weed.

**MRS DUNNE:** I'll get the rural lessees who've asked me to do something about it to contact you, Chief Minister.

**Mr Stanhope:** I'll look forward to that with interest.

**MS TUCKER:** What percentages of horse agistment are managed by government and by the private sector?

**Mr Wells:** As a rough figure, if you could imagine the ACT government having 500 horses on agistment, there are probably in the order of 3,000 in the territory in total. I guess we have about a sixth of them on government managed land.

**MS TUCKER:** I'm interested to know what contractual requirements you have of the people managing horse agistment in respect of weeds.

**Mr Wells:** Do you mean the government managed land?

**MS TUCKER:** No. You've got your own land that you're managing. I'm trying to understand what the contractual requirements are for non-government providers of horse agistment—or have you outsourced it all? How does it work?

**MRS DUNNE:** Horse agistments are outsourced.

**MS TUCKER:** Can Mr Wells answer? I can't listen to both of you.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am sorry.

**Mr Wells:** On land which is under private lease, not the government managed horse paddocks, the arrangements are—

**MS TUCKER:** So they're just doing it on privately leased land?

**Mr Wells:** That's correct, yes.

**MS TUCKER:** Then the government managed horse agistment is managed by urban services, or are you subcontracting it out?

**Mr Wells:** It is contracted out.

**MS TUCKER:** That is my question. What are the requirements in those contracts regarding weeds?

**Mr Wells:** I think it would be sensible to have a copy of the contract in front of me,

rather than trying to remember it.

**MS TUCKER:** Yes, take it on notice. Thank you.

**Mr Thompson:** There are two significant lumps of ACT public land that are worth talking about, apart from the horse agistment paddocks and the like. They are the rural road edges and the ACT Forests land. We will certainly be doing as much as we can for both of those this year but, as Geoff Wells said, the window of opportunity will be very small.

The really big issue, in many ways, for the whole ACT community is that the resources available to do spraying or whatever in that narrow window are going to be very limited because those very same people will be in huge demand right across southern New South Wales as well. It will be quite hard to get enough work done in all of the different areas when we've got the chance. As Geoff said, I think the prospects for both leased land and unleased land this year are not great, and we've got to be a bit realistic about it. It would have been much better had the rain happened and we'd had some germination of Paterson's curse now, but we haven't.

**MRS DUNNE:** Who is responsible for the management of Narrabundah Hill at the moment?

**Mr Thompson:** ACT Forests.

**THE CHAIR:** We will now go to 3.2.

**MS TUCKER:** In relation to the quality effectiveness around a number of issues—smoke problems, greenhouse, et cetera—we have the ratings from the annual client survey. It says “90 per cent”. I think we've already had some discussion about getting more specific quality indicators about achievements there—not just an annual client survey. I would like to focus briefly on the smoke problems. I'm already getting calls from Tuggeranong, which is obviously an area that particularly suffers once fires start to be lit. Can you give us a bit of a summary of what has happened with the rebates, what targets you've got and what you see happening this winter in terms of measuring? I know that you've done some work. Is there an indicator that you can put into this output class that will give the committee, or future committees, an immediate clear picture of what you're achieving in reducing smoke pollution in winter in Canberra?

**Dr Cooper:** The health protection services have purchased and installed a PM 2.5 instrument at Monash. It's called a Thermo Anderson Reference Ambient Air Sampler, referred to as RAAS.

**MS TUCKER:** Yes, I'm aware of that.

**Dr Cooper:** We will be able to get more quantifiable measurements for that.

**MS TUCKER:** Is that something that you can summarise for future estimates committees to see what you're achieving? It's great to keep measuring, but we need to see whether you're improving the performance and reducing smoke.

**MS MacDONALD:** Is that information put in the annual reports as well?

**Dr Cooper:** When we start collecting it, it will be something that we would imagine would definitely go in public reports, yes. We will take that on board.

**MRS DUNNE:** When will you start collecting it? Where will the baseline data come from?

**Dr Cooper:** I understand it has already started to be collected.

**MRS DUNNE:** That will form the baseline data, will it?

**Dr Cooper:** That is something it could do, yes.

**MS TUCKER:** What about the rebates on the wood heaters? Where are they up to?

**Dr Cooper:** The rebates are going extremely well—there's been a very healthy uptake. So far this year we've filled our quota and we're moving into next year in a robust way. Total applications so far number 230. It's a program that has certainly been taken up.

**MS TUCKER:** What is the limit?

**Dr Cooper:** I'm not sure exactly what the limit is. We've got \$300,000 over the years and we're now at \$125,000, so we've got around \$160,000 or \$180,000 to go.

**THE CHAIR:** We are on 3.2. Going to performance indicators about playground equipment on page 225, why are there only four reports—and, indeed, why are there reports on this in any event?

**MRS DUNNE:** Why are they there and not in CUPP?

**Mr Heinemann:** It's a quarterly inspection program of all the facilities that have playground equipment at Cotter, Tidbinbilla, et cetera.

**THE CHAIR:** Wouldn't a performance indicator that deals with the playground sites inspected be more appropriate? In other words, they've got to be in a certain state or something like that and the inspection has to reveal some sort of satisfaction level.

**Mr Heinemann:** The reports reveal that sort of thing, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** What do the reports reveal about the state of the playground equipment?

**Mr Heinemann:** From a public safety perspective they identify any remedial work, repair work et cetera that might be required.

**MS DUNDAS:** I think Mrs Dunne was asking what is the current state of the playgrounds?

**MR HARGREAVES:** Do the standards of those playgrounds achieve the Australian standard like the rest of them?

**MRS DUNNE:** That wasn't the question I was asking.

**MR HARGREAVES:** The ones that we have around the schools and that sort of thing have a minimum standard that needs to apply. Do these meet those standards?

**Mr Heinemann:** They all meet the appropriate Australian standards, yes. That is what they're measured against when the inspection and reporting is done.

**MRS DUNNE:** Going back to my question, what is the state of the current playground equipment at places like Tidbinbilla and the Cotter?

**Mr Heinemann:** At the Cotter we have a very nice new set of playground equipment that replaced the set destroyed in the January 2003 bushfires.

**Dr Cooper:** That was opened in late January and it meets all the standards.

**MRS DUNNE:** It's been inspected since then? What does this "four" mean? Does it mean that four playgrounds are inspected every year or that all the playgrounds are inspected four times a year?

**Mr Heinemann:** It means that all the playgrounds are inspected four times a year and a report is produced at the end of the inspection process.

**MRS DUNNE:** For instance, has the Cotter been inspected since it was opened, and is it still up to standard? This is what I'm trying to find out.

**Mr Heinemann:** We will have to take that on notice.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**Mr Heinemann:** I imagine it would have been inspected once but I couldn't say exactly, definitely.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could we have a rundown on notice of the program for inspection and the indication of the state of play that has been revealed by the inspections for the past year, just as an indication of how we're going with our playgrounds?

**MR HARGREAVES:** When you built this you-beaut playground down at Cotter—and in fact all of it is there—was there a warranty period that came with it which would negate the need to go back and inspect it?

**Mr Heinemann:** I'm sure there was a warranty period. It probably doesn't negate the need to inspect it. We would obviously be inspecting it before the end of the warranty period, to make sure that anything that needed fixing was fixed.

**Mr Thompson:** Perhaps I could expand on that. Warranties are important in these sorts of playgrounds, but the far bigger worry for us is vandalism.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Indeed.



**THE CHAIR:** Note 1 on page 226 reads:

Variation to the 2004-05 target due to the decline in the number of activities resulting from the continuing dry conditions and the aftermath of the January 2003 bushfire.

That is in relation to page 225, “Number of Park Care Groups activities supported”. What has been and what is the impact of the long dry on flora and fauna?

**MR HARGREAVES:** They die.

**MRS DUNNE:** And weeds come in.

**Dr Cooper:** That varies. I would have to get that, depending what on perspective we wanted to look at, but it varies according to the species.

**THE CHAIR:** We’ve already talked about weeds. Have you had some species which are far more susceptible than others, that would mean that certain actions have to be taken as a result of a lot of them dying?

**Dr Cooper:** No, not to my knowledge. Do you mean that some trees are more susceptible to dying?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, exactly.

**Dr Cooper:** We are not getting those trends in at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you expect to?

**Dr Cooper:** I can’t answer that but, at the moment, we’re certainly not. A lot of our vegetation is such that it can withstand droughts.

**Mr Thompson:** The other complicated overlay here is that we have groups of trees that were recovering from the fire which have now got this extra burden of drought. It’s almost impossible to differentiate between those two events.

**MS TUCKER:** In your initiative on threatened species recovery, you’ve got \$140,000 going up over the years a bit. You say in that initiative that the aim is to bring together research priorities identified in the action plans. I am interested to know exactly what you think this \$140,000 is going to achieve in terms of those priorities, and what you think those priorities are. Is there accommodation for your new legislation regarding cats in this? What is your estimation of the resource implications of that?

**Mr Stanhope:** I’ll ask Dr Cooper to respond to that.

**Dr Cooper:** On the first part of your question, we’re looking to support several post-graduate students, either at ANU or Canberra University. As you’ve got there, the four key areas are the habitat requirements—for instance, with the woodland birds. We would be hoping for one of them to do their research focus on something to do with the

woodland birds, the hooded robin, brown tree creepers et cetera. We've looking to use it in that capacity, although it could also be used to deal with habitat fragmentation.

The species that would come to mind there are our grassland reptiles, the earless dragons, striped legless lizards or the impacts of urbanisation on water quality in the aquatic biota or post-fire restoration of things like the corroboree frog habitat. we work on this through the Flora and Fauna Committee, seeking advice from them as to what some target areas should be but also, importantly, what students are available to work on those projects. It's a combination of things. We haven't got, "This is absolutely it; this must be the research focus" written down. It's according to meeting the Flora and Fauna Committee's directions and the availability of the students.

**MS TUCKER:** So this is basically money for research?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes, but it must be integrated with field outcomes.

**MS TUCKER:** How does that relate to the research that you're still doing, particularly around fires and the fact that you've got, in most of your plans and documents at the moment, this basic overlap of fire abatement zones and nature corridors? You're still doing the research to look at the impact of urbanisation and fires. Those are two of the things you mentioned. What does that mean in respect of decisions that are being made now regarding this overlap of fire abatement zones and nature corridors? Are we going into this without fully understanding how you are going to merge those two functions?

**Mr Stanhope:** Are we going into what? The research program?

**MS TUCKER:** The fire abatement zones are overlapping the nature corridors. If you look at your spatial plan you will see that.

**Mr Stanhope:** The nature conservation areas. I'll ask Mr Thompson and Dr Cooper to respond but I'm happy to acknowledge that this is a very significant issue. It's something I've taken quite an interest in. I've been very demanding of Environment ACT and of officials in relation to the impact of the proposed fire abatement zone on nature reserves.

I take the point absolutely that it is, at one level, a nonsense to create a nature reserve—in a sense at a very significant opportunity cost to the community—for the preservation of nature and then to draw an urban edge in such proximity that we have no option but to develop an abatement zone within the nature reserve. I think it's an absolute nonsense and it's something I'm particularly concerned about in relation to the most obvious of our nature reserves, namely Mulligans Flat and Gooroo. To have the prospect of building Forde and Bonner within reasonably close proximity of Mulligans Flat and then saying, "What a pity! We now have to do ground clearing for 150 metres into Mulligans Flat to create an abatement zone" Is quite unacceptable.

I've asked—and I must say, I don't know at this stage exactly how that decision has been concluded—Environment ACT, the Emergency Services Bureau and ACTPLA to ensure that, in the development of fire abatement zones, there is no unacceptable or undue impact on nature reserves. It's something I take seriously. I'll ask Mr Thompson and Dr Cooper if they can give you more up-to-date information on where the consideration of those issues is up to, but that is my position.

**Mr Thompson:** Perhaps I can give you a perspective on this. On the one hand there are the new suburbs. As the minister has indicated our objective there is to allow the reserve to exist, and manage the impacts within the urban area, rather than vice versa. And we're certainly hoping we can do that in the Forde/Bonner area.

**MS TUCKER:** You've certainly got an opportunity at such an early stage. You can do your ovals and things like that.

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes. You can manage part of that by increasing the specification for the housing in those areas, perhaps imposing some conditions on the nature of private gardens. We know that private gardens had a very significant impact on what happened around Weston Creek. That is well documented, courtesy of CSIRO. So much for the new urban areas.

For the rest of Canberra, the existing suburban areas, we've been conducting this urban edge review. We haven't got everything finalised but the general objective is to create a maximum safety zone immediately adjacent to housing and then to have progressively lower or lesser intense management as you move back into the reserve, whatever it is. In general we'd be talking about the immediate high intensity area being perhaps 30 to 50 metres, the less intensive management for a couple of hundred metres, and much less intensive management beyond that.

So, even though the fire abatement zone is typically measured as a kilometre, the most intensive management will be very close in to the housing. All of that we're trying to develop with the best advice we can get from zoologists, botanists, and the like, but we are faced with the reality that Canberra urban areas exist. I think that, out of January 2003, we've all taken a message that we've got to make sure we've got appropriate bushfire safety. I suppose the really good news is that the dimensions of those safety zones, in respect of intensive management, are not a whole kilometre, it's much closer in to the urban fringe.

**Mr Stanhope:** For the sake of completeness, I should say that I was referring very much just to those areas where we have that opportunity. My answer didn't go to the issue Mr Thompson raised of the very difficult situation we have where we have built up to the back of nature reserves. I think we face a much more demanding task there.

I believe that, in relation to those new areas, we must take the opportunity of ensuring that our development doesn't impinge on, or impact through, fire abatement zones on nature reserve areas or on those corridors. As Mr Thompson has been saying, there are some areas around town where we are faced with some very difficult decisions or choices in relation to development of appropriate fire abatement areas between existing development, and some areas of nature reserve. There are some areas around Canberra where we have some significant issues to face.

**MS TUCKER:** That is right. that is why I'm interested in how much money you're putting into this issue at the moment. The concern is that, quite often, there are solutions to be found which will provide good outcomes for nature as well as for fire abatement, if

you have the people with the expertise in there informing those decisions. I'm curious to know exactly how those decisions will be made in bringing environmental science into it. Given that this research is being funded as well, is that part of it?

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes. The research proposal for \$140,000 wasn't meant to encompass that sort of research. Let me say that, in relation to all the decisions that we've taken—essentially post-bushfire and related to issues we're now seeking to deal with as a result of the fire—we've never hesitated to seek and utilise all of the available expertise. I understand the point you're making around the expertise that has been engaged in relation to issues around fire management. I think we should give you a written response to that issue.

**MS TUCKER:** Okay. Dr Cooper did say fires. What about on-the-ground resources? I mentioned cats in my question. That is newer legislation. Generally there's no extra money for on-the-ground management of threatened species. Is that because you don't perceive there to be any need for extra resourcing in that area?

**Mr Stanhope:** In an ideal world, in optimal situations, I would like to increase funding for almost every single initiative. I'll ask Dr Cooper to respond to that question in relation to the resources that are applied to conservation. I think your question goes particularly to endangered species.

**MS TUCKER:** And implementation of action plans.

**Mr Stanhope:** We made a very significant commitment to lowland woodland conservation and protection in last year's budget through a very significant additional contribution through the budget and, of course, through the dedication of significant areas of nature reserve. The fact that we are committing, into the future, significant additional areas of nature reserve is of itself an enormous commitment to nature conservation. Dr Cooper may be able to assist further in relation to the resources that are applied.

**Dr Cooper:** We do have some committed resources that link in very explicitly on some of these projects with WRM and parks and conservation. For instance, with the lowland woodlands ones, we have two dedicated rangers whose job is to focus upon the ecological issues, if you like, in the field application. What we try to do with our staff at parks and cons is not create an elitist group but rather have the knowledge shared through the different rangers. There are programs in place and the rangers move from one area to another.

So at the end of the day, in their ordinary business, they take on board some of the research findings. That is the best outcome we can aim for. That is certainly the case at the moment, in that we've had the two specialists there and they're very much needed. They then go and share their field knowledge with other rangers, such that the outcome we're after is achieved. that link between research and the outcome is critical.

**MS TUCKER:** I'm just interested to get a progress report, if you like—I won't ask for it now because I think I've taken up enough time—to see what we're achieving in the implementation of action plans. It's all very well to say, "Yes, we're doing it"—but it's like the other questions that have been raised here this morning, you know. We need to

24 May 2004

get a really clear picture of what we are able to do with the current resources, what we aren't able to do at the moment, where the work is not getting done and where it is getting done if we want to take this work seriously.

**Dr Cooper:** The Flora and Fauna Committee look at how well we are, or are not, implementing the action plans. They then give us advice, which prompts us to make some adjustments.

**MS TUCKER:** Is that advice available to the Assembly?

**Dr Cooper:** I could get that, yes.

**MS TUCKER:** It would be helpful if the committee could have that.

**MS DUNDAS:** What is happening to the ACT Environment grants program?

**Dr Cooper:** It's continuing. Last Friday the committee that reviews all the applications met. No doubt in the month or weeks ahead there will be some recommendations to our minister, and then things will be announced.

**MS DUNDAS:** How much money is there in that program?

**Dr Cooper:** Without looking it up, it's around \$145,000.

**MS DUNDAS:** Why is that measure disappearing from the output class?

**THE CHAIR:** Footnote 3 on page 226 reads, "Measure discontinued."

**Mr Heinemann:** This is a bit like your earlier comments on the implementation of the water resources strategy. This is one where the measure—I guess on the advice of Treasury—would seem to be a good indicator of performance. On Treasury's advice it was discontinued.

**MR HARGREAVES:** Is it just part of your core business to deliver those grants?

**MRS DUNNE:** It isn't a particularly effective measure of delivering the ACT Environment grants program. Perhaps you could have come up with a more effective one rather than deleting it—like delivering it on time!

**MS DUNDAS:** Especially when it looks like the whole grants program has been deleted from the budget papers.

**Mr Heinemann:** No. The grants program hasn't been deleted, just the measure.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is \$140,000.

**Dr Cooper:** It is \$145,000.

**Mr Heinemann:** Or thereabouts.

**MRS DUNNE:** On notice, could we have a rundown on the amount of money in the grants program for the past five years? I just want to see how it's growing—or not.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want a list of what the grants were?

**MRS DUNNE:** No. I don't want a list of who got the grants. Can you tell us off the top of your head, Mr Heinemann?

**Mr Heinemann:** It has basically been maintained at that level, with CPI adjustments each year. The amount given out each year will have tended to vary because we have instances where offers of grants have been made and the recipient organisations haven't taken them up.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I understand. The quantum of about \$140,000 is constant?

**Mr Heinemann:** Yes. The Conservation Council, the RSPCA and the Environment Centre were funded from the grants program until three years ago. They have been funded separately, outside the grants program, for the last three years. That is why there appears to have been a significant decrease.

**MRS DUNNE:** It seemed to be less than I recall.

**Mr Heinemann:** Yes. The funding has been maintained for community groups for small projects.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could we just have an exposition of where that is—and also can you roll into that the major institutions?

**Mr Heinemann:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I just wanted to go back to a few issues, one of which is bushfire fuel management. The McLeod report has come down and has been critical of the management of fire trails, maps, et cetera. What steps have been put in place within Environment ACT, and especially within the reserves, to address the issues raised by Mr McLeod, like the active sabotaging of fire trails in the past? Are we going to see a repeat of that?

**Dr Cooper:** Sorry. I don't quite understand the question.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr McLeod made recommendations about fixing up the fire trails and coming up with better fire trails and better maps. He was also critical of land managers who appeared to either neglect or actively sabotage fire trails. Are we going to see an end to this practice? Are we going to see fire trails maintained in the reserves?

**Mr Stanhope:** I'm always nervous of questions that use language such as "actively sabotage". I have no recollection of Mr McLeod stating, or suggesting, at any stage that land managers were actively sabotaging fire trails. It may be that Mr McLeod did have comment to make about the non-maintenance of fire trails. I'm concerned to have on the record a question saying that Mr McLeod says that land managers such as Environment ACT actively sabotaged fire trails. I'm not inclined to have my officers answering

questions such as that.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr McLeod said that trees were actively planted on fire trails and that, as a result of that, the fire trails were impenetrable. If you want to have a quibble about the language, Chief Minister—

**Mr Stanhope:** I do!

**MRS DUNNE:**—you can quibble all you like. But are we going to have a continuation of the situation?

**Mr Stanhope:** I'm not quibbling. I'm saying categorically that I'm not prepared to have officers respond to a question like, "Are you going to stop actively sabotaging fire trails?"

**MRS DUNNE:** That wasn't the question.

**Mr Stanhope:** Yes, it was, in effect.

**THE CHAIR:** Ask your question again, so the Chief Minister can be clear.

**MRS DUNNE:** What steps are in place? What actions have been put in place by the land managers under Environment ACT to ensure fire trails are maintained, that they are accessible, that people know where they are and that the maps reflect where they are?

**Mr Stanhope:** Environment ACT and all ACT land managers are actively implementing all of the recommendations of the McLeod report, including the appropriate maintenance of all fire trails. In addition, detailed maps have been provided of all areas within the ACT as a result of the experience gained from the fire and as a result of the McLeod report recommendations.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could the committee receive on notice, Mr Chairman, a list of the activities undertaken and progress against each of those activities since the implementation of the McLeod report?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Could you provide that, Dr Cooper?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes. I would add that in 2003-04 we were given \$2.1 million over three years—so obviously it carries into the next financial year—for tracks and trails work. That will continue. The other thing that will continue is that we are undertaking some very focused planning on Namadgi as part of the Namadgi plan of management. That work is involving a range of people to make sure that the fire issues, the ecology issues and the community issues are integrated.

**THE CHAIR:** I'm concerned to hear that anyone would plant trees on a fire trail. Could you tell me if that happened and assure me that it is not happening anymore?

**Mr Stanhope:** I think it would be useful, Mr Chair, if you could provide us with the reference in the McLeod report to that effect and we will respond to it.

**THE CHAIR:** We will find the reference but, if you could take that on notice, I would be interested as to when that occurred—and if you could assure me that that is not going to occur in the future.

**Dr Cooper:** Just for the record—and I will go back and double-check—I would personally be horrified to hear of staff planting trees in areas that were needed for fire access purposes. We will check but, to my knowledge, that is not happening.

**Mr Thompson:** I feel the need to say something here because that is a very serious concern. We have a track and trail network in Namadgi Park. Essentially it's the set of tracks that was there in 1986 when the last management plan was developed. That management plan was developed essentially immediately after the major Gudgenby fire. We had a lot of experience from many of the then staff about what was needed. They essentially concluded that the set of trails that were there then were adequate—they didn't recommend that further trails be developed. My memory is that they commented that some of the trails could be, if you like, not maintained in the sense of simply left there and then reopened when a fire event happened. That was accepted wisdom at the time, and that was done in January 2003. We've all learned a few things, particularly about signposting and the usability of some of those trails to float bulldozers down.

That is a concern to us now. We've realised that some of those trails were not as accessible to heavy floats. We've developed a new technique—and we did it last summer—of using small dozers, which are taken in on the back of a tip truck. We're using that technique now. The signposting has improved and the maps have been redeveloped in conjunction with ESB. We're more than happy to move on from where we were but, again, I must say I'm not aware of any instances of trees being planted on tracks.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a couple of questions on government election initiatives. Minister, I don't want this to appear to be in any way critical of the current arrangement or the current personnel but there was a commitment to ensure that the Conservator of Flora and Fauna is independent from the day-to-day administration of Environment ACT, and that hasn't happened. You made a commitment and you haven't done it. Dr Cooper is both the conservator and the administrator of Environment ACT. I don't want this to appear to be in any way critical of Dr Cooper, but are you going to do anything about it or are you happy to let the status quo stand?

**Mr Stanhope:** No, it's a continuing issue. We will be reviewing the nature conservation act in the near future. That will be one of the issues considered in relation to that. I think there is an issue in relation to the head of Environment ACT carrying the statutory function of Conservator of Flora and Fauna. There are instances where there is some confusion around the appropriateness of that dual responsibility and I believe it's an issue that should be addressed. I'm happy for the nature conservation act to be reviewed in the broad and to wait until then.

I don't regard it as so pressing an issue that it requires us to deal with it separately from a full review, but I do believe that there are some issues in relation to the dual function or responsibility being vested in the senior Environment ACT officer and statutory office of conservator. I think our experience in relation to Nettlefold Street is a good example of where there was a perception of a conflict of role. I don't necessarily accept that the



24 May 2004

conflict was real but perceptions of a conflict often need to be addressed in just as serious a way as issues around a conflict of role.

**MRS DUNNE:** Another thing in your election commitments was to establish the integrated nature conservation plan for the ACT. How far has that progressed?

**Dr Cooper:** We will be offering that to the minister in six to eight weeks to launch the final component. It's been extremely successful. One of the key components of it was to bring together electronically all the various management plans that Environment ACT is involved with, and that has certainly happened. What we're looking to do over the next year is to "normalise" it so it becomes part of the business unit's everyday activities. The initial funding has been used in that direction.

**MRS DUNNE:** Will the plan be based on a GIS system and show major habitat status, distribution of endangered and threatened species in communities and areas of priority work and sites where major work should be planned or undertaken?

**Dr Cooper:** That is my understanding. As I said, in about six weeks time all of that will be available to be seen.

**THE CHAIR:** Unfortunately, Ms Dundas had to step out a couple of minutes ago, but she told me she will be putting questions on notice. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, officials.

**The committee adjourned at 12.14 pm.**