

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT**

**(Reference: budget 2002-2003—service delivery)**

**Members:**

**MRS V DUNNE (The Chair)  
MS K GALLAGHER  
MS R DUNDAS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 15 MARCH 2002**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms M Weeks (Ph: 62050199)**

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

**The committee met at 10.43 am.**

**JAMES MACGREGOR DICKINS** and

**ROBIN BROWN**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for coming and thank you for taking an interest in the budget consultations as they relate to planning and environment. You haven't given us a written submission. I presume you want to make a general submission.

**Dr Dickins :** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Then we can talk to that. Is that the way you want to go?

**Dr Dickins :** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** First of all, identify yourself for Hansard.

**Dr Dickins:** I'm Mac Dickins. I'm here as convenor of PACTT. I'll make a few introductory remarks and then hand over to Robin Brown. PACTT was formed in early 1988 from residents groups and some like-minded similar organisations because of concerns in the community about planning. The first thing we did was work on a strategic plan. One of our main concerns is to try to promote a strategic plan for Canberra. We did prepare an interim document, of which I have copies for the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** If you want to give us something, we will consider afterwards whether it relates to this particular exercise of the committee. If it does, we'll accept it as part of the record.

**Dr Dickins:** I hope you will record it that we've found the timeframe difficult. We've got five or six standing committees we would be possibly concerned with. When I say "we", I mean community organisations. It has not been easy to prepare things in the timeframe. I hope that will be recorded, because previously organisations have expressed their concern about the budget. There's not enough opportunity for the community to participate in the budget preparation. We would think of something starting in November for a budget mid-year. Community organisations in general believe that the budget should start from the community and not from the bureaucracy as it does. That's a rather sweeping statement, I know, but we would like to emphasise that point.

The only other thing I want to emphasise is that PACTT is Planning the ACT Together. That's a very deliberate name we've chosen to take. Our adhering organisations regard it as very important that the residents as citizens—elections are carried out on a residential basis—should be involved in planning issues right from the start instead of what has happened. What has generally happened is that PALM prepares documents in which we have no part. We have no choice whether we have a part or not. These documents are then made public and we have to be reactive and not proactive.

I would mention particularly DV 125, which is the residential code. No community organisation of our kind was consulted about that document before it was released. The document which PALM presented to the last Assembly said that two professional organisations were consulted. Those were the Master Builders Association and the Housing Industry Association. You might ask what “professional” is? But it did illustrate the point that that document was prepared without reference to any general community organisation. We would like to see an end to that kind of process and one in which the community was more involved with. That’s part of what we’re on about now.

**THE CHAIR:** With particular reference to the forthcoming budget, do you have any particular representations to make?

**Dr Dickins :** I’ll now hand over to Robin, having made those introductory remarks.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you state your name for the record?

**Mr Brown:** I am Robin Brown. I’m the Yarralumla Residents Association representative on PACTT. I’m a member of the PACTT general committee, if you like. What we’re talking about is effective community participation in the planning process. Effectiveness has two main elements, in my view: efficiency and representativeness. I think we all want efficiency in the planning process so that decisions can be made as quickly as is reasonable, given all the things that need to be taken into account so that development that’s desirable in the community interest isn’t held up and so on.

Representativeness means that we obviously want to be as confident as we can that the community’s voice is being brought into the process across the whole of Canberra City when it comes to general questions like the strategic plan for the city, transport planning for the city and so on. Particular developments can affect particular groups of residents.

To do all that means resources. The previous government had what I guess we would see as the basically good idea that an amount of money should be set aside to provide for assistance to the community in the planning process in the shape of a community planning liaison officer. I’m not quite sure of the title. As I understand it, \$250,000 was set aside to set up such an office.

The basis of the idea was good but the actual proposal, in our view, was a bureaucratic solution to the problem rather than one that could actually make participative democracy in this process work. So we look to other examples of organising effective, efficient community input into policy-making processes. There are examples in the environment area. Environment bodies have been given grants-in-aid to organise themselves to make effective submissions in environment policy-making processes. That happens at both the federal and state/territory levels. There are many examples of environment organisations, consumer organisations and social welfare organisations being given grants-in-aid to get themselves organised to do this sort of job.

**THE CHAIR:** You are proposing an organisation to be a community advocate?

**Mr Brown:** We're proposing that an amount of money be set aside—the amount of money that was set aside by the previous government, \$250,000, is a good figure to start thinking about—to be made available to the community so that it can organise itself to engage in the planning process rather than have a bureaucratic office that it can call upon for advice and so on and so forth.

It would be much more effective and much more efficient, as far as the community is concerned, if that money were made available to the community itself. As a grant is made to the conservation council for that arena of public policy, we're suggesting that a grant be made through an appropriate vehicle in the community in this area of public policy.

PACTT is in the process of incorporating, and it may provide an appropriate vehicle. There are other possible vehicles, but what we are saying is that it should not be a bureaucratic solution, not a new bit of the bureaucracy doing this job. Rather a grant or possibly a number of grants should be made to an appropriately constituted bona fide community organisation.

Such an organisation would have to be open and democratic and completely apolitical in its constitution, thus able to put itself forward as an effective mechanism through which the communities can voice their views. Our thinking is that this facility would be available to all bona fide community organisations, so that if a group in Tuggeranong wanted some assistance in trying to work out a town planning solution to a problem, wanted town planning expertise or wanted legal assistance, then it could call upon this facility.

We'd be thinking in terms of a core staff, if you like, with appropriate expertise—one or 1½ people—plus an amount of money that could be used to pull in legal expertise or planning expertise if it were required. An efficient way of getting legal expertise might be to add to the budget of the Environment Defender's Office. There are things we haven't thought through in great detail yet. But we're quite convinced that that is the way to go, rather than simply expanding the bureaucracy.

**MS GALLAGHER:** You're putting forward a proposal, not necessarily on behalf of PACTT, that grants be disbursed amongst a number of community or representative organisations.

**Mr Brown:** We haven't got a fixed view on that as yet. As I said, PACTT is in the process of incorporating itself. It may come to the view that it is the appropriate vehicle, but it may come to the view collectively that there's a more appropriate way of doing it. My personal view is that it wouldn't be efficient to spread such resources around. It would be more efficient to have it in one basket so that you didn't get little inadequate bits of work done on this and that and the other.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I understand. Does PACTT currently receive any funding?

**Mr Brown:** No. To my knowledge, no residents groups do. Of course, the community councils do get a small amount, and the community councils are in the PACTT group.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there anything else that PACTT wants to contribute to the budget process?

**Mr Brown:** I think that's what we wanted to say at this juncture.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for taking your time to come and talk to us and to bring your ideas to the table.

**DANIEL STUBBS** was called.

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome. When you begin, state your name and your position in the organisation, as we're recording for Hansard. Because these are formal proceedings of an Assembly committee, I need to point out that these are legal proceedings that are covered by parliamentary privilege. That affords you certain protections and certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from legal action for any thing you may say today, but it means that you have the responsibility to tell the truth. I invite you to make an opening statement, or do you just want to speak to your submission?

**Mr Stubbs:** I am Daniel Stubbs, Director of the ACT Council of Social Service. You've already received our submission. I'm just going to highlight a few issues and then I'd be more than pleased to discuss any particular aspects.

The first issue I raise concerns the buildings community organisations are located in. This has attracted a little bit of media coverage recently. I guess because of the vagaries of the media, not all the issues get to be discussed, so this is a good opportunity.

We're concerned about the quality and accessibility of community sector buildings, the buildings that community organisations are housed in. Accessibility goes to a couple of issues. First, we think it's important that the buildings that community organisations are located in be close to public transport hubs. They should be located in the same way as we locate retail services.

We're very quick to locate retail services close to public transport hubs, and they pay a lot of money for it. Many community services serve the needs of some of the most disadvantaged people in our community, and they need to be considered side by side with retail services.

At the moment we push them way behind retail services. As you all know, we sometimes put them in former schools, shut-down schools. When those schools are shut down, gradually they become further and further away from public transport routes, and that makes them less and less accessible, in many instances, to the people who most need them.

A good example of this is HACC services, home and community care services, and disability services, in the ACT. There's not one that's right next to a public transport hub. There's one that's walking distance from Civic but a good walk from Civic—10 or 15 minutes walk from Civic. The rest are usually located in old schools, whether it be Holder, Hackett or further out.

These are the services that some of our most disadvantaged citizens need. They don't need to get access to them every day. Often these services go into people's homes. But people with disabilities and older people often need to get to them and at the moment really can't. That's just one example of the sort of situation we currently find ourselves in, and we need a plan for that.

The neighbourhood planning process we're now entering has a lot of possibilities, a lot of merit, but we need to consider it not just as a purely neighbourhood process but an ACT-wide process, which I think it has that capacity to be. In that process we need to remind ourselves where we need to locate community services in the ACT.

We also need to consider the quality of the buildings that we put the community services into. I know you've all been to many of these services and have seen some of the buildings they reside in. Many of them have huge OH&S risks about them. Many of them are not accessible for people with disabilities. Many of them have public health risks that we need to consider. I would venture to say that it would be an affront to many of your staff to have to go into those sorts of buildings, and I wouldn't ask them to.

Transport is important to planning. We need to make sure that transport is not just a commuter service but a public access service. It's not just a service that is about getting people to and from work in the peak hours. It's also about assisting community access for people who aren't in work, for whatever reason, or who are trying to get into work and trying to move around this spread-out town.

We have a considerable interest in the use of community land, those yellow splotches on the territory plan. In recent years community land use has changed to things other than what we would have expected it to be originally intended for. We need to consider it as a territory-wide planning issue. If we consider it purely as a local neighbourhood issue and take into account only the local neighbourhood, it's all very well when it's considered a patch of community land and people say that we need to consider older people's accommodation in those places. But that's not the only type of community use we're talking about. When we start talking about youth refuges, homeless men's refuges and drug rehabilitation centres, which are also community uses, it starts to get a bit more difficult. So we need to take a territory-wide approach when we think about the use of this land and think carefully whenever we change the use of that land. If we do change the use of it, and the territory gains a revenue bonus out of selling it to a private developer—that might be appropriate—that revenue needs to go to purchasing other more appropriate community land that might be right near the bus exchange; that it not be just Civic. It could be Woden, Belconnen or Tuggeranong.

The other issue about using space around the facilities of Canberra's town centres is affordable housing. We currently have an affordable housing task force which is working hard on this issue. Of great concern is not just the affordability of the house but how far it is from facilities. I hope this committee and planning generally in the ACT can take into account that extremely important issue of how far we locate housing from facilities. People who need access to affordable housing need it to be located near those facilities.

**THE CHAIR:** There a few things coming up, Daniel, that you may or may not be aware of and there might be a better place to inform the discussions on the appropriate use of community facilities. We have been made aware that we will have a reference on a draft variation looking at community facilities across the ACT. It is probably long overdue and an appropriate place for your organisation and many other organisations to make contributions. I expect that we will spend a fair amount of time on it when we get to it. We don't know when we're going to get it yet. I think that would be a really good thing to do in the context of the neighbourhood planning process, more specifically in the context of the government's proposal for a strategic plan.

Some of the issues you raise about housing affordability probably fall outside the purview of this committee, but it doesn't mean that we are not aware of them. The impact of affordable housing with appropriate access to community facilities and public transport is something we're very aware of.

**Mr Stubbs:** I guess the main issue with affordable housing—and I expect this will come out of the affordable housing task force report—is location.

**THE CHAIR:** For us the issue is location. But the principal issue of affordable housing probably falls with the Community Services and Social Equity Committee under Mr Hargreaves. But it is something we have to be aware of.

Your submission does not make specific proposals. They are general proposals to inform budget deliberations. Do you wish to raise specific issues that relate to this committee?

**Mr Stubbs:** I would urge this committee to recommend that the process of considering community space, whether we have this reference come to this committee or not, needs to be in collaboration with community organisations and the consumers of the services of community organisations. The community sector, in consultation with the government over the last couple of years, has developed a compact of understanding, and the development of community sector accommodation needs to be done in the spirit of the compact of understanding. So I would urge this committee to recommend that as a way forward.

I'd like to briefly mention a few environmental issues. We support the submission which you will have already seen from the conservation council, particularly as it relates to the expansion of recycling certain plastics. Recycling and environmental activity isn't always accessible to people on low incomes. They may be transport disadvantaged and can't get to recycling centres, and there is a range of other reasons. Assisting disadvantaged people, who potentially can have the most detrimental effects on the environment, will help our environmental cause considerably.

Within the last year the government has subsidised the insulation of houses with a 25 per cent subsidy for wall cavity insulation and that kind of thing, but that's completely inaccessible to people on low incomes. We need to consider ways of promoting, which have already begun, insulation and other environmental activity for public housing and community housing around the ACT, because that also affects the affordability of different types of housing.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you talking about schemes for government and community housing or, in addition, something for people who are outside the government community umbrella in the private market and don't have the wherewithal to insulate their house by themselves?

**Mr Stubbs:** I think the hardest group to approach with that are people on low incomes renting in the private market. Unfortunately, we don't have an answer on that. I think it's a very difficult one. A lot of people on low incomes are renting through the private market. How do you promote some method of providing those people with lower cost accommodation and lower utility bills? But at least we need to reduce the costs of people



in community housing and public housing through insulation and that kind of thing. The current subsidies for insulation don't do that. They're for owner-occupied houses. That's a great way to provide greater returns for people who own their own home.

**THE CHAIR:** There aren't many incentives for landlords to improve the thermal mass of their rental properties.

**Mr Stubbs :** Exactly, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** It's a good point.

**MS GALLAGHER:** I guess you're saying to the committee—and just tell me if I've got this right—that when decisions are being made through the budget process on planning or the environment people from disadvantaged backgrounds should be considered as a particular group? Is that what you're saying?

**Mr Stubbs :** Yes, that is what I'm saying. We have a high average income in this town, but that's balanced by one of the highest costs of living in the country. That affects enormously people on lower incomes and people living in different forms of disadvantage. It's easy to consider the issues of the majority, the 90 per cent or so. In many instances the middle class of this town will look after themselves. We believe that government needs to be there more for those not of that group.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Daniel, for your participation in the process.

**Mr Stubbs :** Thanks for your time today.

**IAN ROBERT FALCONER** was called.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for coming, Ian. I welcome you to the budget hearings of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment. I remind you that these are proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and are subject to parliamentary privilege, which affords you some protections but also brings with it the responsibility to treat your evidence in a truthful and serious matter—which I have no doubt you will.

I now ask you to state your name and position for Hansard. Would you like to make a statement to elaborate on your submission to the committee?

**Prof Falconer:** Yes, thank you very much, Madam Chair. My name is Ian Robert Falconer. I am the convenor of the park care group Friends of the Aranda Bushland Inc, and I will be speaking in that capacity. I have other hats, of course, as we all do, but I will be speaking as the convenor of Friends of the Aranda Bushland.

Our interest, as you might imagine, is the conservation and improvement of the natural environment in the ACT. It is our particular interest because of our continuous collaboration with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, which is integral to the successful maintenance and restoration of the natural environment with respect to Canberra nature parks.

There are a number of issues which have been of concern to us. One is that, as far as we can observe—we have not got accurate detail—the resources that have been available to the ACT Parks and Conservation Service over the last five year have apparently diminished. Many of the rangers had been on short-term contracts, and when their contracts lapsed they were not replaced. As far as we can detect, the staffing has appreciably diminished over the last five years, which has limited their capacity to assist in the work of the volunteer organisations and carry out the main work that they have to do themselves.

It is recognised by all people who work in the area of environmental conservation that a great deal of the labour input for the foreseeable future has got to be volunteer labour input. There is no way we can expect the public purse to fund the amount of time and work input that is required to maintain a good quality of natural environment within Canberra. Organisations like Friends of the Aranda Bushland, which is about 70 people who actively participate in the maintenance, conservation and restoration of the bushland, need adequate support form the ACT Parks and Conservation Service in terms of ranger capacity and facilitation.

Some issues are more crucial than others, and I will briefly run through them so that you can see the spectrum we are thinking of. Feral animal control is always an issue. In our particular area rabbits are a pest, but we also have feral cats. In terms of the environment, feral cats are of greater significance than anything else. We all have foxes, of course, but feral cats probably do more damage to wildlife—both birds and reptiles—than anything else.

Controlling feral cats is a specialist issue and is not something that can be done by volunteer groups. We need the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to have adequate capacity to deal with the problem. As northern suburbs like Gungahlin develop further into areas of quite high quality natural environment, the need to control feral animals will inevitably increase.

The next issue is weeds. Weeds will always be with us. We can spend 100 hours in an area weeding one year and then be back the next doing another 100 hours. But we get some facilitation from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, which is hugely valuable. They provide glyphosate, they provide tools and they provide training.

It is absolutely essential for volunteer groups to be adequately backed up. Whereas a ranger might only provide four hours input once a month to our group, our group might do 400 hours of volunteer work in that month. Because we are interested and, with the back-up of the parks service—particularly tools and herbicides—we can do a great deal of work, which we cannot expect them to do. It is not within the capacity of the public service to do it.

Another area is land erosion, which is quite significant. What causes us the biggest headaches are mountain bike teams who just ride through the bush. We have effective form trails, which it is totally legitimate for the mountain cyclists to use—and they do use them. But we get whole teams of mountain cyclists, either making their own trails through the bush by simply biking through it or going on preserved walking tracks where we have been doing erosion control.

Unfortunately, because they zoom downhill with their brakes on, they just score out the ground—they are going down the hills—and rain water collects, which cuts into gully erosion. We do a lot of erosion control, and we need help from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to do it.

**THE CHAIR:** Would that be particular measures related to erosion or particular measures to keep the mountain bikers off?

**Prof Falconer:** The two are intimately related. The mountain bikers generate the erosion, which we then have to control.

The last issue I want to deal with is the enforcement of regulations. It is quite illegal for mountain cyclists to go off into the bush where there is either no track or just a walking track. This is not just one person; it is teams. The rangers do not currently have the authority to enforce the regulations. In one instance we were doing erosion control in the Aranda bushland with a very good senior ranger, and a team of mountain cyclists came up the walking track on which we were doing the erosion control. Totally illegal use. All we could do was say, “You know, it’s not allowed. We’re sorry, but you can’t do it.” We had a very hostile response, too, from some of the members of the cycling group.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you saying that the regulations are not stringent enough or that the rangers do not have the power to enforce them?

**Prof Falconer:** The regulations are fine. There is nothing wrong with the regulations. There are two elements. One is that there are very few enforcement officers. They are not rangers; I think they work for Environment ACT. You could find the numbers better than me, but I think there are only two or three.

**THE CHAIR:** So the rangers do not actually have the capacity to fine?

**Prof Falconer:** What I would like to see is the rangers given the capacity to give on-the-spot infringement tickets. It is only a legislative issue; it does not cost anything. But it would strengthen up the rangers tremendously in their enforcement work if they could do that. If you are on a bike and the ranger is on foot you can just hurl insults at the ranger and bike off. If the rangers had the enforcement capacity they could legitimately ask for people's names and addresses and deal with the matter. So they are the issues that are of particular concern to us.

**THE CHAIR:** Has your organisation had discussions with some of the mountain bike groups? I suspect you would find that the formal mountain bike groups are probably aware of the problems.

**Prof Falconer:** Yes, they are. We have had some discussions with both informal and formal mountain groups. I will be pursuing them because they have just generated a totally new track through the Aranda bushland, just by biking through themselves. I think Canberra mountain cyclists are in for a little bit of correspondence in the immediate future, although I do not know if it is anything to do with them.

**THE CHAIR:** But the trouble is that, they may be law abiding themselves but, because they are a member of a group, they are not real law abiding. We are talking about people who are not members of organisations who just go out for a bush bash.

**Prof Falconer:** Sure.

**THE CHAIR:** Your proposal was for a specific number of rangers. Eight?

**Prof Falconer:** Eight—and a budget increase for the ACT Parks and Conservation Service of half a million dollars per annum on an ongoing basis. Both of these are approximations. The half a million dollars is probably more accurate than the eight rangers. One of the problems for the rangers is that they get tied up with lots of paperwork, so perhaps if you put a couple of secretaries in and got the rangers out in the bush it might be just as good as the extra rangers. What I am saying is that it is a flexible feast.

**THE CHAIR:** That is what you will find across a whole lot of areas, Ian. The people trained to do the job are in the office typing away rather than out in the field. What you say might be one way of addressing it.

**Prof Falconer:** We were very pleased to see appropriation bills 2 and 3 going through recently. The quarter of a million dollars for the conservation plan is something that we would strongly support, and the money that went into bushfire fuel reduction and recovery is very welcome and is already doing a lot of good.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you see that there are applications in Aranda for bushfire fuel management money?

**Prof Falconer:** It has been done; it has already been implemented. It is finished, essentially.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you got any questions, Katie?

**MS GALLAGHER:** No, I think that covers it. It is very succinct. I can clearly see what priorities your organisation has. It is good.

**Prof Falconer:** Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**THE CHAIR:** It is our pleasure. Thank you very much, Ian.

**KATHERINE ANNE CHAFFORD SAXBY**

and

**JAMES MACGREGOR DICKINS**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** I thank representatives of the North Canberra Community Council for making available the time to come and talk to our committee. I would ask you to state your name, your position, and the organisation that you represent. I remind you that this is a legal proceeding of the Legislative Assembly and is subject to parliamentary privilege, which affords you some privileges and a responsibility to take the matter seriously and speak truthfully.

**Ms Saxby:** Katie Saxby, secretary, North Canberra Community Council. First up I would like to ask forgiveness for the formatting errors in the printing of this submission. It looked fine on the screen this morning, and when I printed it there were formatting errors, so apologies.

**THE CHAIR:** That is all right.

**Ms Saxby:** One of the things that the North Canberra Community Council is very aware of is the interrelationship between the different terms of reference of your committee. Planning and land management, environment, ecological sustainability, transport services and planning, conservation and heritage, all tie in with terms of references of other committees. So we think that a comprehensive strategic plan is essential, and we support the government's hopefully quick implementation of the beginning of that process. We look forward to being involved in the process of the strategic plan for Canberra.

Our submission does not respond specifically to the budget papers. The short time frame makes it difficult for community organisations, which only meet monthly and which operate without paid staff, to respond. Unfortunately, I have not looked at the budget items. I am sure there are things that we would like to comment on, and maybe in future we will do that.

**THE CHAIR:** You would be lucky to find the budget papers. We have not seen them either.

**Ms Saxby:** I have had great difficulty locating the budget papers. Really?

**THE CHAIR:** No, they don't seem to exist yet. There was supposed to be a discussion paper, but it has not appeared.

**Ms Saxby:** We have requested and have not got it, so it is all a bit difficult. But we are hoping that we will have something in time for 9 April.

In any of the items that we have discussed we have emphasised that we need dollars for community consultation. The government, in doing whatever process, must have dollars for community consultation. For example, neighbourhood planning groups need a broad-based community education campaign to engage residents. I happen to live in Turner and I am also the secretary of the Turner Residents Association. Turner is one of the first cabs off the rank in the NPG process. Meetings are to be held on 9 and 10 April, but people do not really understand what it is about. So you have got to somehow get people involved at that very basic level. You need information that says, “This is your chance to do X and if you don’t do this now then you can’t complain about it later on and say that you weren’t given that opportunity.”

This is also important in terms of pre-applications, when developers or the real estate agents say to you, “Here is what is going up next to you. Are you happy with it?” Someone signs it and goes away. They are not given context. By giving your approval to this, this means Y. So people are not given context and I think this is something that PALM need to put forward in their documentation. I ask that proper consultation be undertaken because it is not happening in many of the planning processes that are going on, where it is left up to developers and real estate agents to engage the community.

The residents groups in North Canberra have had a lot of complaints about what is going on. People had the opportunity to be involved, they didn’t quite understand that that was their opportunity and they tried to pick up the pieces later on. So we are saying that it is very important that there be community consultation—not just lip service to community consultation.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I go back a bit, Katie. If someone is building and there is the sort of statutory consultation that goes on with neighbours—

**Ms Saxby:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You are saying that there is not enough context there?

**Ms Saxby:** There is not enough context. For example, for dual occupancies people are shown a plan. It is a matter of, “See that? No worries. It’ll be fine, Vicki. Just sign that. You are not affected by overshadowing.” I don’t call that consultation. It is not consultation to be given a copy of the plans to reflect on because most people can’t read plans; they have difficulty conceptualising what a basic plan means. They don’t understand that the developer is doing it not out of the goodness of their heart but because they are supposed to tick a box in the PALM checklist, and that they are able to tick a box just on the basis of that, supposedly, consultation.

But it is not saying, “We have pushed the boundaries of the guidelines for development and actually we are being a little bit over the limit here. And you have just agreed to us pushing those guidelines to the limit.” They are not given the context. Just to emphasise, say, overshadowing, when in fact there are a whole lot of other things that are going to impact on the neighbours, is not fair.

**MS GALLAGHER:** So, Katie, are you saying that there is a role for the community councils or the residents groups to undertake, to engage the community?

**Ms Saxby:** No, I am not saying that at all. I think the responsibility needs to be with the proponent, the developer, and that they should give the person they are having those consultations with context for what they are doing. It is all very well to drop a real estate card in the letter box and say “contact us”. Someone could say, “Well, I won’t talk to a real estate agent.” But then a real estate agent can say, “Well we gave them the opportunity to talk with us.”

**THE CHAIR:** That is interesting, Katie. Because I don’t live in central Canberra, I don’t have that experience. But I have had the experience of neighbours making substantial changes to their plans. You are written to by PALM and you are asked whether you wish to go in and view the plans. I didn’t bother to exercise the right to take away a copy of the plans, but I understand you can actually have these copied. So why doesn’t that happen in, say, your area?

**Ms Saxby:** It does. What PALM implemented from 1 May last year was high quality as a sustainability design process. The emphasis, instead of being at the stage you are talking about, Vicki, which is when the little yellow signs go up—and a lot of design work has already been done by then—should be before then, before the plans are really bedded down in concrete. The neighbours should be engaged then. That is the idea of that pre-application consultation. It is that stage I am talking about, where neighbours are not properly given context for what is going on. By the time a yellow sign goes up, someone has spent \$4,000, \$6,000, on a design, and they don’t really want to change it.

**THE CHAIR:** How, in the budget context—because this is what we are here about today—would you like to see that addressed?

**Ms Saxby:** That PALM, as one of their subprograms, has a package that developers have to send out. There needs to be consistency in approach across Canberra for these things.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, yes.

**Ms Saxby:** Also there needs to be funding in respect of the new appeals process, the planning appeals commission, so that the community can be engaged in that as well. This is so that the North Canberra Community Council has an opportunity for input into that process. This would give residents groups in Canberra, which have had practical experience of being in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, the opportunity to input into the shaping of that commission.

**THE CHAIR:** This is into the task force for the formation of the new planning—

**Ms Saxby:** That would be lovely. The PACTT paper that was presented to you before actually asks that that happen. The North Canberra Community Council does support PACTT’s submission this morning and also PACTT’s response to Labor’s planning policy, which was given to you this morning.

The NCCC submission covers all the terms of reference of your committee. I listened to ACTCOSS’s submission this morning and one thing I would like to add under environment—maybe it is under planning—is that there be a review of the EER scheme; I think ACTEERS is its acronym. There is a need to lift the standard. At the moment, as long as you meet EER4 you can build. But in fact we should be lifting the standard so



that EER4 might be where EER5 is now. We need to push up the standard to EER5. It is too easy to meet EER4, through putting in insulation. Insulation is only one aspect of sustainability. People could be still using energy for the purpose of heating because their houses are inappropriately sited. So that is something else that we would like to add in.

Also, one of the things that have been of concern to the North Canberra Community Council—this was raised by ACTCOSS—is the sale of community land. We would like a review of that process whereby community land changes from its original purpose, is sold and ultimately becomes an infill site. I am not saying that that is not necessarily an appropriate purpose for a site, but that, certainly to the community, it is not seen to be a fair process—feeding back into the community what was given to the community in the first place.

**THE CHAIR:** As I said to Daniel, we anticipate that there will be a wider discussion through this committee on the use of community facilities.

**Ms Saxby:** And we look forward to being part of that discussion.

**THE CHAIR:** I think that would be a really good place to have that discussion with community organisations. For instance, you could have a school or an ex-school on community land that doesn't meet the criteria of being accessible because buses only go past the shops. Discussion could take place about whether the community as a whole would welcome effectively a land swap so that the land could be used for some other purpose with land closer to hubs being freed up to meet the needs of communities.

**Ms Saxby:** We would expect that these are the sorts of questions that will come up in each of the neighbourhood planning processes as they are carried out through Canberra. But there does need to be that strategic plan. Each suburb or neighbourhood group, or whatever, whether it be two or three suburbs, needs to mesh with that strategic plan, and we don't have that at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Although that does not particularly inform the budget process, there are lots of things coming up where the community needs to be informed. I am talking about our deliberations and the general community deliberations.

**Ms Saxby:** Yes, the community has an expectation of transparency of process.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Saxby:** We look forward to being involved in whatever future deliberations you have on planning, the environment and transport in Canberra in future years.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, excellent.

**Dr Dickins:** Could I comment. My name is Mac Dickins, and I am appearing before the committee as a member of the committee of the North Canberra Community Council. I think we have probably raised this in another context but we want to be sure that the planning system, however it turns out, does have sufficient resources. We have asked for the plans of certain places. In particular, we asked for a plan of all the O'Connor shops

area and it was just refused. It was refused on the basis that they didn't have the resources.

I guess we will probably raise that. There is a budget committee and maybe there will be some money. But we are concerned that the \$3 million won't go far enough. This is also not only just a matter of money but how you organise things. As I said before, part of our PACTT activities is that the community be brought more into the planning processes than it is at the present time.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Saxby:** Is there an opportunity once the papers are available to submit a further submission?

**THE CHAIR:** Well, we have a deadline and we have to report by the 9th. We have to write a report. That is something we will have to discuss. I think this is probably something we will have to look favourably at. If the Treasurer suddenly drops the paper that we have been waiting on for some time, I think there needs to be some leeway for community groups to participate in that. But I am not sure how we will do that.

**MS GALLAGHER:** But this is only one avenue of participation. The government is carrying out their own budget consultations, which you would be involved in anyway.

**Ms Saxby:** Yes, that is right. And we are also making submissions to other committees as well.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Yes, I am sure you are.

**THE CHAIR:** All the committees are in the same boat—they have not seen the promised paper. So we are all punching with one arm behind our back.

**Ms Saxby:** Thank you of the opportunity to appear before the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Katie, and thank you, Mac.

**NICOLA DAVIES** was called.

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome representatives from the conservation council and remind witnesses that, for the record, you will need to state your name, and position held with the organisation, when you first give evidence to the committee.

I would also remind witnesses that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. It gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say today. It also means you have the responsibility to tell us the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence may be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

As is the practice, I invite you to make any particular statement you would like to, at the beginning of the hearing, before we move on to questions.

**Ms Davies:** I am Nicola Davies, Director of the Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra. I begin by giving the apologies of our president, Kathryn Maxwell. She was going to appear with me. However, she is unable to attend because she has been called away to something at work. Jenny Gilles, who is the vice-president of the conservation council, is here in her stead. Jenny will help me answer any questions. I will make a few brief comments.

We had some technological problems, but I see you have a copy of our submission. Thank you very much for allowing us to appear, despite the fact that we did not get things in on time.

**THE CHAIR:** We give everyone leeway once!

**Ms Davies:** Thank you. As you can see, we had to do a fair amount of work on the budget, and that will continue. We are considering this to be, as well as a submission to the planning and environment committee, our preliminary submission. We are conscious of the fact that we still have no information from the government about the budget. We believe that makes it very difficult for organisations to provide comment to the planning and environment committee.

In the last couple of years we have had a draft budget process, but the current government has decided not to pursue that. Even before we had a draft budget process, there was information provided to the community and business sectors about the territory's financial position, and also about the themes the government was proposing to make major issues for the budget. That obviously makes our job, in commenting on the budget, and the government's job, in trying to include our comments in the budget, a lot easier—if we are all working within the same frame of reference.

We have received a letter from the Treasurer saying that the information on the territory's financial position should be out in March. We will be using that to inform our submission to government, which is due on 9 April. As I said in the submission, I will try to forward to the committee any information that we put together in the meantime, if that is useful.

A number of our member groups have put in submissions of their own and have also participated in the development of this. Once the territory's financial position is a bit better known, we are hoping to run a workshop for our member groups. We hope to get some bureaucrats from Environment ACT and parliament to talk to the groups about what the budget might mean. We are hoping that will feed into the process as well.

In the absence of any kind of information on budget themes, we thought it was appropriate to emphasise that sustainability has been said to be a major theme of this government's term, and that it is very important that that underlie this budget.

There is a commitment in the environment sustainability platform to triple bottom line accounting. Whilst we understand that the timing of the election has probably made it difficult to implement any type of full triple bottom line accounting approach in this budget, we think there are some steps that can be taken to do a simple sustainability assessment of the budget. We would like to be confident that that will happen.

I have said in our submission that it could be as simple as making sure we ask what the social and environmental implications of measures are, as well as the economic ones. We emphasise that we think it is important—and we obviously welcome the commitment to sustainability as part of this—to recognise that economic growth is not necessarily the be-all and end-all, and that the social and environmental indicators are as important, if not more important than, as economic indicators in identifying the health of the society we live in. We think it is very important that the budget be considered—obviously, as a major policy instrument of government—in light of those sorts of arguments.

In relation to the environment budget specifically, I am happy to answer any questions you may have on the detail. However, we have been making the point for quite a number of years now that the natural environment, particularly, but increasingly the built environment, is suffering from the degree of funding being allocated to it.

If you have a look at last year's budget—for example, the environment and heritage functions—that constitutes only about 1.1 per cent of the total budget. We are not talking about large amounts of money. In many ways, that makes it almost easier to make substantial gains in the budget. When we are talking of only about \$23 million, a couple of million dollars extra can make a significant difference.

We believe that amount of money is entirely insufficient for the task of managing 53 per cent of the land in the ACT, let alone the requirement of looking after air and water and that sort of thing. We also make the point that the environment budget has had less funding than other areas of government. For example, last year there was an average increase of about 6 per cent in funding across the board, whilst the environment budget had an increase of only 2 per cent. When inflation was taken into account, this meant that, in real terms, there was actually a decrease in the environment budget.

You will see that there are only a couple of new programs. What we are trying to do is make sure that the programs we have—a lot of which are very good—can be properly implemented, so that we have sufficient money for implementation.

Increasingly, research is being done overseas which shows that, in the longer term, making sure that you actually invest in environment and environment-related things makes a big difference to the budget bottom line in terms of health spending, roads, accidents and all sorts of things. So it is particularly important, in the sustainability context, to think a little longer-term about the difference a small amount of funding now could make to very large amounts of funding in the future.

At this point, you may have some specific questions. If there is something else that I feel needs to come out, perhaps I could talk about it at the end.

**THE CHAIR:** When you talk about the eco-business, do you have a plan in mind for what this sum of money might do, exactly? Could you elaborate on that?

**Ms Davies:** I think the current eco-business program that has just been launched can be styled as a partnership between Environment ACT, ACT No Waste and the chamber of commerce. That is working with chamber of commerce members to help them reduce water, energy and waste associated with their businesses. We think the program could be very easily and successfully extended to work with groups in the community sector.

The suggestions came as a result of a conversation I had with Daniel Stubbs, from ACTCOSS, when he said, “If they are saying to business that they could reduce their running costs substantially by getting involved in a program such as this, we need to make sure the community sector gets access to it as well.” We believe there can be substantial economic savings with a program such as this, as well as the obvious environmental benefits.

**THE CHAIR:** One of the things I have noticed with eco-business is that there seems to be emphasis mainly on waste and not much emphasis on energy or water. Is that your feeling?

**Ms Davies:** It is certainly not the feeling I have had, from talking to the people in Environment ACT who are involved with it. I have to admit, though, that I have not spoken to any of the businesses they have been working with, so I could not say whether or not they were specifically talking about waste.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. At the launch and looking at the material, I had a feeling that there was, particularly, not much emphasis on water.

**Ms Davies:** No. I am conscious of the fact that, whilst Environment ACT have now officially got the water function, there has not been any extra money allocated to that. That may well be part of the problem. That is something we have said—that there needs to be a specific commitment to allocating part of the budget to that. Obviously, we do not want money to be taken from other programs to fund the water program, but that might well be part of the problem.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**MS DUNDAS:** I have a question about the wood heater program. You have suggested that there be \$400,000 per annum, as part of a repurchasing program. Do you have any more information on the number of non-certified heaters still in the system? Can you say

whether or not those costs could be significantly decreased, say in year number two of the program? We would have bought a lot of the heaters back.

**Ms Davies:** Yes. Not off the top of my head. We do have that information. Kathryn is not here and I usually rely on her for figures. It probably would not be substantially reduced in year two, but potentially in year three. There are actually quite a lot of non-certified wood heaters.

**THE CHAIR:** For the slightly less initiated, what is a non-certified heater? Or what is a certified heater? That might be easier.

**Ms Davies:** A certified heater is basically certified that it meets an Australian standard for the provision of pollution control, and has pollution control equipment attached to it. That means there is some attempt to reduce the particular pollution that comes out as a result. It basically involves designing the heaters in such a way that you cannot shut the air out completely. It is when it is smouldering, and that kind of thing, overnight that you get most of the problems. You cannot turn the new heaters down like that.

**MS GALLAGHER:** You cannot turn them all the way down.

**Ms Davies:** All the way. All new heaters have to be certified. The reason for saying non-certified heaters would need to be removed from circulation if this rebate was applied is that there is a market in second-hand heaters. They are advertised in the *Canberra Times* on weekends. Some people are upgrading because of the age of a lot of the heaters in Canberra—they are at replacement stage. What we need to do is actually make sure that those heaters come out of the system.

The information coming out of Launceston and Armidale is that this has proven quite successful. Rather than just an open-ended program that provides a rebate to every person who wants it, at any time, we felt it would probably be capped at about 1,000. I think those figures are based on 1,000 heaters a year.

**THE CHAIR:** If you could get some more information, that would be helpful.

**Ms Davies:** I will get some more information on that. I have just realised that that is something I took out.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Under environmental education, Daniel Stubbs mentioned in his submission that he thought there were groups within our community that could be targeted specifically in the area of, for example, recycling, but that those groups may face some sort of disadvantage in being able to access recycling depots—or something like that. Would you see the need for specific targeting of education programs? I know you have advertising, and programs in schools, but broader than that—maybe looking at how you can engage members of the community who might not access mainstream education to learn about recycling?

**Ms Davies:** I think that is vitally important, and I believe it would be part of any proper awareness-raising programs or environmental education programs. Fundamentally, we need to get many people in our community to do the right thing. The information we have comes out of focus group research, and all sorts of things that happen elsewhere in

Australia. Once work is done with different communities and reasons for doing things are explained, people are, in the main, extremely supportive of environment-related programs.

The tragedy in the ACT is that there is an incredibly tiny amount of money provided for what we have broadly termed environmental education, as a result of our environment programs. That is so small that no-one knows anything about them. The water tune-up program is deemed to have failed because people have not taken it up. Unless you happen to be thinking about water tune-up and decide, whilst in the ACT government shopfront, that it looks like an interesting brochure—or you happen to be walking past the Master Builders Association, or Macarthur House, which are next to each other on Northbourne Avenue—you go through life without knowing that they exist.

I think it is really important to understand that the community needs access. The community needs to be made aware of these things, and the money needs to be available for all sorts of innovative programs, to work with different parts of the community. Maybe it could be part of a program. With eco-business, working with the community sector was sort of building on that program. All sorts of really good work could happen.

I have just come back from a local Agenda 21 conference in Adelaide, which was attended mostly by people working in local government. There are all sorts of fantastic things happening around Australia that the ACT could have a look at and pick up on. Lots of things have been happening. The evidence is there about things that either work or do not work. It would be good to see a commitment to building a really great program here in Canberra, because people are willing to respond when that happens.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, there are a lot of spin-off effects elsewhere, if you can get people tuned into it.

**Ms Davies:** That's right.

**THE CHAIR:** Before we conclude, is there anything else you want to raise?

**Ms Davies:** In this submission, and also in our submission to government, we have tried to be comprehensive. We have talked about what is required in the range of environment-related programs in the areas the conservation council has responsibility for, in terms of its objectives. The one thing we continue to come back to is the need to properly fund the land management and environment protection functions, as the core of a clean and healthy environment, for the territory we live in. We need to ensure there is sufficient money provided for that, as well as some really good programs to deal with the greenhouse implications of the way we move around this city.

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

**REBECCA LAMB** was called.

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome the Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead. I remind you that, as a witness, you should state your name, your position and the name of the organisation that you are representing for the record when you first give evidence to the committee.

I also remind you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and are protected by parliamentary privilege. This gives you certain privileges, such as protection from defamation as a result of anything you may say to us today. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell us the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Rebecca, do you want to make an opening statement?

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes, my name is Rebecca Lamb. I am deputy chairperson and secretary of the Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead. I have been chairperson for the last 10 years or so. Just this year I was happy to relinquish my position to Jennifer Horsfield and, as her 2IC, assist the group. I apologise for Jennifer Horsfield. She has been delayed, unfortunately, and is not able to come.

As you are probably aware, MOTH was originally created as a lobby group protesting about inappropriate development on the heritage site. After many years, the process culminated at the Land and Planning Appeals Board in 1994. Our group was successful in convincing the government of the time, which was a Labor government, to overturn the housing project which was to take place on the homestead site, and which effectively would have excised up to two-thirds of block 1, section 450, Richardson.

These days we take a more conciliatory approach. We like to undertake certain cultural activities on the site, and we have been working closely with the authority and the current managers. We have had a number of successful events right up until today, and a number of them are planned, particularly for the Heritage Festival that is coming up in April. We have a full program for April, with three big events. We hope that there will be fine weather and that events will be well attended again.

My current concern is that all dealings concerning the future of the Tuggeranong Homestead are now in the hands of a government authority, which is a community group-based authority, plus government employees, run from Environment ACT. My primary concern is that there is little to no general information coming out from that authority to the wider community. Strategic decisions are being made at the moment, but consultation with the community is non-existent at this stage.

In particular, the recent variation to the Territory Plan resulted in a call for submissions. Our group submitted our thoughts on it. We did receive a brief response, but we do not know what the summary of all of those responses is. We still do not know whether the variation to the Territory Plan is going to proceed on the homestead—it is still in limbo.

A consultant has recently been commissioned to write the interpretative plan. We feel that the interpretative plan should be done first, rather than the variation to the Territory Plan, because one could cancel out the other, if you know what I mean.



**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, Rebecca, this is probably not quite on the budget consultation but, for the uninitiated and in two sentences if you can, what does the draft variation propose?

**Mrs Lamb:** We do not know.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a green paper out?

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes, there is a green paper out.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, well what did that propose?

**Mrs Lamb:** Mainly some excision of space from Pikes Paddock, which is to the north-west of the site, which could have something like a motel or some aged care accommodation built on it. As far as we are aware, none of that is going ahead yet. We are still waiting for the results of the community consultation.

**THE CHAIR:** So the draft variation process is still with PALM, and they are still collating it.

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes, that is right. Primarily, our concerns are then about the lack of information coming out to the community from the authority, and the ACT government in particular. We do not know what is happening to some very old things which are on the site, such as the arsenic-contaminated sheep dip. The Land and Planning Appeals Board's recommendation was that the arsenic-contaminated sheep dip should be remediated. All work on that has stopped at the moment. We are not sure where we are regarding the remediation of that problem. The work on the toilet block appears to have stopped as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Has it started?

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes, it has.

**THE CHAIR:** You actually have a partially built toilet block?

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes. We do not know when the long overdue archaeological survey, which was promised to us in 1994, again as the result of the Appeals Tribunal, will commence. We do not know if it will ever take place, but we feel it is an integral part of the interpretation plan anyway. So you see there are all these cabs trying to take off from the rank here, but we are not sure which process should be undertaken first—who should be first cab off the rank. As part of the community, we know very little about what is going to happen next to the site. All we can do is sit back and say, "We are watching closely."

Service delivery, in this context, has been quite poor. The conservation and heritage management plan has not been written for the site yet either, so we are really not sure what is going to happen to the whole site anyway. Basically, we are quite disturbed about the process, and about the fact that the government and the authority are not letting any information out to the wider community. It seems to be an in-house decision-making process.

**THE CHAIR:** Rebecca, who is on the authority?

**Mrs Lamb:** The chairperson is David Marshall, and the authority members are made up of employees from Environment ACT. There are also members from community groups, such as Mrs Ruth Bell from the Ngunawal community, and Rosemary Lissimore from the Tuggeranong Community Council, and a number of other individuals.

Mind you, their participation in that authority is subject to their adherence to a very stern instruction that they not disseminate any information outside of that authority to other members of the community. They are bound by a confidentiality agreement, which makes it even more difficult for us, on the outside, to know what is happening.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Rebecca, a lot of what you had to say probably relates to the draft variation, and what is going to happen throughout that process.

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes.

**MS GALLAGHER:** What do you see as the budget priorities for your organisation, because they are a bit different from the draft variation? I know they are linked but, in terms of this round of budget consultations, what would you want to see for your group?

**Mrs Lamb:** Right, I suppose more money for conservation and heritage programs generally. As you are probably aware, Tugg Homestead is quite an integral part of the valley's history and so on. A lot has been said and a lot has been written over the years, but we really would hope that the undertakings of the previous government will be taken up and valued as well.

I suppose my last point is that we need to be reassured that there is an ongoing commitment to the cultural and heritage values of the homestead, in particular. We need some sort of guarantee, especially in view of the fact that the ACT Heritage Unit is really struggling for funds at the moment. I cannot even nominate a member of the community for a heritage award at the moment, because there is just no money to permit such an award. I think it is pretty awful that we cannot afford something as small as that.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mrs Lamb:** I think the processes related to the draft variation really are a greater concern.

**THE CHAIR:** But that is not an issue for today.

**Mrs Lamb:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** At some stage it will eventually come through us and, in the meantime, things cannot happen. I think that is probably an issue for another time.

**Mrs Lamb:** I think this forum is a very useful one, and I appreciate the opportunity very much, but I also think that the main thrust of my observation should be addressed to the authority. We have done that, but it does also overlap into your area.

**MS GALLAGHER:** We will be seeing you again when the draft variation comes here.

**THE CHAIR:** Roslyn, do you have any questions?

**MS DUNDAS:** No, that is okay. My question was just answered.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Rebecca, for your time.

**MS GALLAGHER:** Thank you.

**NELSON QUINN** and

**ALEXANDRA MARY STICPEWICH**

were called.

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome representatives from the Ginninderra Catchment Group and remind you that for the record you will need to state your name and position within the organisation when you first give evidence to the committee. I also remind you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you may say to us today, but also means that you have a responsibility to tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

Would you like to make an opening statement in relation to your submission?

**Mr Quinn:** We sent you a relatively brief submission. It touches on both direct budget things and policy-related things that inform budgets. That's because in Australia budget processes and policy processes have got all muddled up over the years.

The group is an umbrella group of Landcare and related interests in the Ginninderra catchment, which is a large slice of the north of the ACT plus a reasonable amount of New South Wales immediately outside that.

The primary aim of the group is to put the various individual interests and groups in a position where they can do better the kinds of environmental and related good works they wish to, to provide a stronger and better educative and information base for all of those people and to carry out various functions which individual groups are not necessarily inclined to do. Putting a case for various things to a committee of this kind is an example, as are other interactions with ministers and the Assembly.

Here is a copy of the strategy. We've also prepared this two-page document showing you the position we're in today.

One of our tasks in our catchment-wide approach to things is the willow program. The clearance of willows along Ginninderra Creek has had a fair bit of publicity this week. That originally arose from people in the landcare groups being concerned that they could do a certain amount of work on certain kinds of problems but willows were beyond individuals volunteers.

That led to us successfully seeking a grant to begin a revegetation and weed control program. We put the focus on willows. We had some survey work done to identify better exactly what the problem was and how best to deal with it. That suited very much the interests of the various ACT government agencies, which quickly got involved. Because of the large resources they then put into it, we were able to get the result we did.

The significance of that, which touches on the budget as well, is that in things like weed control programs if you do a little bit all the time you might feel really good, but you've still got more to do forever. If you invest a sufficient amount of research, time and money in a program over a relatively short time span, as happened with the willows, you effectively eliminate the problem. It doesn't mean there is no maintenance, but it can be reduced by an enormous amount.

Another point we make in our submission is that our starting point for the way we look at all the things we do is the concept of sustainability. There are two things I'd say about that, seeing everybody says that these days. What on earth do they mean? One is that you're talking about sustaining the ACT more or less as it is—in other words, as a garden city in a bush environment. It is in one of the biggest and most important river catchments in Australia, and this is one of the two biggest single influences on that catchment. The other is the Murrumbidgee irrigation area.

Anything that's done by the ACT government, in our view, needs to be done very much in concert with what goes on in surrounding New South Wales. The work going on in the Murrumbidgee now to correct some of its problems, therefore, in our view, ought to influence policy and program and budget outcomes in the ACT.

On the point of sustainability, I'd make a couple of observations to clarify what we're talking about. People often relate this to environment activities, economic activities and social activities. The way we put it is that if you don't fix the natural resource base you can't do very much about the economic and social ones.

Therefore, you need the environmental protection approach for sustaining human and all other life. It's the beginning of it all. You need the economic activity and progress to provide the means to make sure you can attend properly to the environment protection, because it doesn't come free, quite often. And you need the social progress to bolster or provide economic stability, and then it goes around and around that circle forever.

There has been a historic underinvestment in environment protection activities, partly because for governments they are new. In the past people didn't overtly pay attention to the environment. Underinvestment has negative long-term effects on a whole range of economic and social issues and leads to an inadequate decision-making base, missed opportunities and waste. It is like the weeds again. If you do a little bit here and there you're really just wasting your money. Ad hoc decisions lead to poor planning.

In the *Canberra Times* on Tuesday there was an article by Professor Ken Taylor about Sullivans Creek. That is a similar catchment to ours. What he says near the end of that article sums up what we're on about—that you need a holistic approach to planning. We would agree with him that a measure of that needs to be restored in Canberra. The implications of that for the budget are not necessarily that you need more money or whatever but certainly some changes in direction.

**THE CHAIR:** You don't need silos?

**Mr Quinn:** No. Perhaps more money. I'm not in a position to argue that one way or the other. You sure don't need silos. If there aren't some changes of direction there, it will be very hard to get value from some of the other investments that might be made.

Another example we mention in the submission is the Lawson area. The old Belconnen naval station there is to be redeveloped, although a large part of it is not, for all sorts of sound reasons. That brings with it a management problem. We would argue that that can go two ways. The ad hoc default approach often leads to bigger problems later, even if it seems cheap and simple at the start of it.

We've developed a proposal that involves working with community groups like ours to set up a major environmental centre to value add to the work that has to be done there. In other words, it can be developed in a passive kind of way that simply requires continuing maintenance for ever and a day. People are going to watch a place like that. It can't just be taken over by hawthorns or something. If you apply the value added approach, you will probably make a similar kind of investment. You build in incentives for others like us to continue interest in it and work in it and incentives for people to go there and do useful things there that also bring in money. It's a tricky kind of area, given the sensitivity of the kangaroos that live there. That all has to be accommodated.

I've mentioned weeds already. We would say that a bigger investment needs to go into the weeds program. That, in my view, is a really good example. Nobody argues against that. Nobody says these things aren't weeds. It is common ground that something needs to be done. We would say that a larger and wiser investment now would pay big dividends.

**THE CHAIR:** To home in on this, how would you spend the money? We had weed strike teams, strategic weed commando or something like that. They would concentrate on a particular thing. Would you see that as a model, or something else?

**Mr Quinn:** More or less what you've just said. We mentioned serrated tussock in the submission, because that's a big problem in various areas of Gungahlin, and there would be some down in the Dunlop area as well.

**THE CHAIR:** There's a lot in Kaleen.

**Mr Quinn:** That's right. There's also quite a bit of serrated tussock in suburban gardens. Again, you'd follow what happened with the willows. You would do a proper survey of exactly what the nature of the problem was. That would include the rural areas, up on the hills, the suburbs and so on. Then you would develop a strategy likely more of less to get rid of the problem. You can never get totally rid of it, but you can have it really well managed. With that, you would develop a timeframe to have the right impact, whether it's one year or two years. I don't know what it would be. You would then channel your weed management resources in that direction. I guess we'd always envisage that there would never be the resources at any one time to tackle all the ones people are concerned with. So you'd always be selecting one or two.

**THE CHAIR:** You have to pick winners or losers?

**Mr Quinn:** Yes, all the time. But you still have to be doing a bit of maintenance work on whatever else there is. You don't escape that.

**THE CHAIR:** Now that the willows have been tackled, what would you see for the Ginninderra catchment as the priority in weeds?

**Mr Quinn:** Serrated tussock is one. What else is there?

**Ms Sticpewich:** St Johns's wort.

**THE CHAIR:** Isn't there a biological agent they use on St John's wort?

**Ms Sticpewich:** I understand there are a couple, but I'm not sure that they're all that widespread yet and making that much of an impact.

**THE CHAIR:** And it's getting the right vectors for them and things like that?

**Ms Sticpewich:** That's right, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Going back to the willows example, are you finding that much maintenance needs to be done, or have we successfully wiped out the willows on Ginninderra Creek?

**Mr Quinn:** Not successfully wiped them out.

**THE CHAIR:** I know all the babalonicas are still there.

**Mr Quinn:** Yes, the problem willows. There are still some further down creek and there's still a few out on Gooromon Ponds and so on, but in the area where the concentration has been and also at Hall creekbed the willows have been taken out. In the first few years you have to be vigilant about whether any new ones are coming up.

**THE CHAIR:** So you'd go back and paint?

**Mr Quinn:** Yes, you have to go back. Because they're on a water stream, you can't just go in there spraying either. It's a sensitive kind of thing. You have to be able to continue to mobilise your volunteers to literally pull the willows out. You have to do that for quite a while. The experience isn't there yet to know how long.

**THE CHAIR:** I'm not an expert in this, but once you've cleared the willows do other weeds come up? There's something that grows along the creek there that looks to me like a weed but it may not be. It has a sorghum-like head on it.

**Ms Sticpewich:** I think there are annual weeds appearing, but they're slowly being overtaken by the native reeds and rushes. That is what we are after.

**THE CHAIR:** You don't see that as an ongoing problem; you see that as a problem you can manage?

**Mr Quinn:** It's a continuing problem to the extent that that weed isn't dealt with on a wider basis. Say it is St John's wort. If it's becoming rampant over the rest of the territory, of course it's going to continue to appear there. The other thing that affects it is

the amount of revegetation going on. If you do that successfully, that again will start to eliminate or control some of the annual weeds and so on.

**THE CHAIR:** Is Chilean needle grass a problem for you?

**Ms Sticpewich:** It's an emerging problem. I understand the problem is the inability to identify it in the first place, general confusion amongst people doing the weed control as to the ID of even native grasses and not being able to tell the difference.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there things that are happening or shouldn't be happening that could address the problem? You've got widespread problems like St John's wort, but surely needle grass is an emerging problem.

**Ms Sticpewich:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you better off putting a lot more resources in now, because once it's in it's such an intractable problem? What are the things that are causing it to spread? Do you know?

**Ms Sticpewich:** From what I understand from Geoff Butler, who is the weeds officer with the conservation council, they're spread in large amount by mowers moving around from garden to garden and also public spaces. If they are not washed down between sites they transport the seed source around. I guess the other two emerging problems for the area are Paterson's curse and African love grass. African love grass is a similar problem to needle grass.

**Mr Quinn:** The thing we hope will be helpful in all of that is a booklet that identifies the major weeds of interest in our area.

**THE CHAIR:** In the catchment area?

**Mr Quinn:** It has photos of all stages of growth, to help overcome this problem. It's a far better investment to be vigilant when these things first appear and to get rid of them. This is why we would argue for investing more in it. Once you got rid of the willows, you don't keep going back to the willows, so you've got great opportunity there. You can see this in some of the best managed areas, in some parks and on some farms. Where people have done that they have a low annual maintenance which keeps control of prior weeds and stops the new ones getting a foothold.

**THE CHAIR:** Could I have a copy of *The Spotter's Guide to What Weed is That?* I'd love one.

**Mr Quinn:** Once it's published. If you paid to get the work done, it would be an awful lot of work. We don't have any trouble getting enough people to put enough effort into that. But when we get to the publishing part, it's no use unless it's published. But it doesn't cost that much. Another theme in our paper is that it would be sensible in government budgets to have not very great amounts to help community groups whose work supports wider government activities. This would be a case in point.



**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We have a slight procedural problem with some of these papers. If they don't relate to our reference, we can't keep them. Normally, if we can't keep them, we let you know. But I'm sure that Roslyn and I can put them to good use as private members if the committee can't.

**Mr Quinn:** We'd be happy if they stayed in this building. We would be happy to know that you had all read them every day

**THE CHAIR:** We'll let you know what we do with them.

**The committee adjourned at 12.45 pm.**