



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2006-2007**

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2006-2007)**

**Members:**

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)**  
**DR D FOSKEY (The Deputy Chair)**  
**MR M GENTLEMAN**  
**MS K MacDONALD**  
**MR S PRATT**  
**MR B SMYTH**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 16 JUNE 2006**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Ms S Lilburn (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 that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

## APPEARANCES

BOWE, MS SANDRA, Committee Member, Belconnen Community Council.....	16
CRESSWELL, MS ARA, Director, ACT Council of Social Service .....	27
DONALDSON, MR DAVID, Mount Neighbour Parents and Citizens Association.....	9
EVANS, MR GRAEME WHELLER, Vice-President, Belconnen Community Council.....	16
FOXALL, MRS PATRICIA L, President, Tharwa Preschool P&C .....	1
GOONREY, MS CHRISTINE, President, National Parks Association of the ACT .....	32
HADDAD, MR KARIM, Chair, Tharwa Primary School Board .....	1
HAESLER, MRS EMILY JANE, President, Tharwa Primary School P&C Committee ..	1
HAGGAR, MR CLIVE JOHN, Branch Secretary, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch.....	39
HARRUP, MS TRISH, Director, Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra.....	32
LE GUEN, MR MAURICE, Spokesperson, ANU Medical Students Society.....	20
MALONE, MR PETER, Secretary, Unions ACT .....	39
NICHOLSON, MS KAREN, Senior Policy Officer, ACT Council of Social Service ....	27
REYNDERS, MR LLEWELLYN, Senior Officer, Media and Policy, ACT Council of Social Service.....	27
STEVENS, MS LESLEY-ANNE, President Flynn Primary School Parents and Citizens Association .....	13
TULLOH, MS FIONA, President, Rivett Primary School Parents and Citizens Association .....	5
TULLY, WILLIAM JAMES, President, Friends of the ACT Library and Information Service .....	24

## **The committee met at 2.01 pm.**

**HADDAD, MR KARIM**, Chair, Tharwa Primary School Board

**HAESLER, MRS EMILY JANE**, President, Tharwa Primary School P&C Committee

**FOXALL, MRS PATRICIA L**, President, Tharwa Preschool P&C

**THE CHAIR:** I need to read to you a card that is read at all public hearings. It says that you should understand 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 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 serious matter. Do you all understand that? Thank you. You have 10 minutes to make a statement or whatever and then some members may want to ask you some questions.

**Mr Haddad:** Fabulous. I am speaking on behalf of the primary school, the preschool and the community of Tharwa. We see this as a broader issue that affects us because both the primary school and the preschool are the only community asset our community has, and the removal of them, as suggested in the budget, will have severe implications for our community as a whole, as well as the students that attend the school.

We have been petitioning the minister's department and others for details on the closure and haven't been able to get the information we required to give you a full and accurate breakdown at this meeting. We have got the finance estimates from our own budget that we manage and I have got some numbers that I would like to share with you in a moment. I had a meeting with Carol Harris, the director of schools for the southern district, and she assured us that no jobs would be lost out of the Tharwa teaching staff. So there will be no savings of any of the wages of those people.

We looked at our budget for the year. Tharwa primary school and preschool run on a combined budget of \$76,000 for the year. This is made up of money from the government, as well as fundraising done by the parent bodies and donations from the community. Out of that money, we went through and carefully examined each of the line items that we would be spending in the year and looked at which amounts would be a saving to the government if they closed the school down, which amounts would be transferred as they are linked to students and student participation in the education process, and which ones may still need to be covered in the maintenance of our building.

You may be aware that the Tharwa school building is on the proposed heritage listing. It has been on site since 1899 and there are certain covenants and restrictions on what can be done with that particular building in the district. When we broke down the \$76,000 we found that the building and the maintenance of the building which we believe would need to be continued in whatever capacity the building is used later would amount to approximately \$30,000. That is the amount that has been allocated in this year's budget for the upkeep of the building and the grounds.

We looked at the transferred amount, which was \$25,000, which would be taken with the students to whatever schools they go to. That includes consumables, access to computers, library resources, training for staff, and personal development for the different teachers

that are there. That left us with a saving of about \$21,000 that we would envisage the government would collect if they closed down our school. This would also have to be divided in half for the next financial year, given that it will be closed for only half of that. So for approximately \$11,000 the school has been put on the list to be closed.

When I asked Carol the details of why and all the reasons, she gave me a very vague answer, saying that it was a combination of social and educational opportunities and financial reasons. I have just gone through the financial reasons there, as we see it. I fully admit that there are things that we don't know the government spends money on and I am sure that they will come up with a different figure. But, at the moment, for all requests that we have had for the money from them, nothing has happened.

From a social and educational point of view, we have been told that our students go to a small school, and there are 43 students at the school at the moment. We were told that they experience severe social and educational disadvantage because of being in a small school. We disagree with that. In fact, research from the department's own web site which was removed two days after the announcement of the closures, which was removed on the 8th, talked about the value of the schools, the benefit to the students and the increased educational opportunities that they get.

In fact, it was only two weeks before the announcement that we were still being told in the cluster about the outstanding work that the Tharwa primary school is doing in forging new educational opportunities, and that the Lanyon cluster which it is part of is part of a world best practice group. We also piloted with the preschool a number of initiatives that have been taken up by *Towards 2020* about running preschools on two days a week instead of four half-days, and also combining the preschool and the primary school in an early learning centre. We piloted that for the department and we were being commended on that up until two weeks before the announcement was made. So it came to us as a complete shock that we were told that we were not providing the educational opportunities for our students and they were being disadvantaged because of that.

In terms of future enrolments, our projected enrolments for the next three years are on the increase, due to the growth in young people in the area, and we are the only one in the *Towards 2020* report that shows a steady enrolment level in 2010. All the other schools that are mentioned in that report, that lovely glossy brochure that came out, were showing a decline in numbers. We were the only one that was the same.

We have always been at that level. We have never been a large school. I think the most we have ever had was 35 students in the primary school and about 10 students in the preschool at that time. So we have never been above about 45 combined, and we believe we have been consistently serving the Tharwa community and surrounds for the last 107 years.

One last point to make is that the commonwealth earlier this year agreed to give us a grant of \$75,000 to extend the school to deal with the increased projected enrolments. At the moment, we have been told by the department that our capacity is 50 in the primary school and we only have 29 students enrolled. They make that assessment based on two classrooms with 25 students in each. They have declined to come out and remeasure it and to look at the space, because our library, computer labs and art centre are all located in the same classrooms. There is physically no space to put any more students in there. But they

are using the number that we are at half capacity to show that we are an excessive waste of money to the Canberra community.

The Chief Minister, on ABC radio last Friday morning, stated that Tharwa costs three times as much as sending a child to one of the other schools in town. We have asked for a copy of the evidence of that and yet have nothing from them. We believe we have been, as a small rural community, prejudiced by this budget, based on our size and our location, not based on our financial burden to the ACT or our educational opportunities or social opportunities for our students. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Haesler, would you like to say something?

**Mrs Haesler:** No, I think Karim has covered it all for us, thank you.

**Mrs Foxall:** I am quite happy with what Karim has said.

**MR SMYTH:** Apart from closing the school, I understand that you were promised—I think I attended the meeting—a new bridge across the Murrumbidgee.

**Mr Haddad:** We were, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** That there was to be an upgrade to Tharwa Drive.

**Mr Haddad:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** And that a large amount of the small number of businesses that you have out there depend on passing tourism and environmental trade. Is there anything at all in the budget for Tharwa?

**Mr Haddad:** No, there is no money for the bridge in the budget or projected for the next two years after that.

**MR SMYTH:** What does that do to you? The Allan bridge is the oldest Allan truss bridge in the country. I think I heritage listed it when I was the minister.

**Mr Haddad:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** In terms of trucks and access to Tharwa, what is it doing to you?

**Mr Haddad:** One of the things it is doing is stopping some of our deliveries coming through. They have to go the long way. People are charging us extra for any kind of freight that comes in there. We are quite vulnerable when the river floods, which it does. When it does close, if we cannot use the Tharwa bridge, what was a five-kilometre trip into the edge of town would take 80 kilometres because you have to go via the Cotter area. That is the only other crossing that we can make across that river.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** So you cannot at this time drive around the Point Hut crossing road?

**Mr Haddad:** We can at the moment, but when the river comes up we cannot. At the moment it adds an extra 15 kilometres. It is interesting that when the bridge was closed for

emergency repairs last year, when they put that thing on, we had two fatalities in a very short space of time on that Point Hut section of road. In the previous 10 years there were no deaths on that road. That road wasn't designed for the increase in traffic or the heavy traffic that goes on it and, with the way the road is cambered, people that drive at the wrong speed can actually come a cropper. It was quite tragic those people being killed.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** You mentioned that it is about 15 kilometres longer on the Point Hut route.

**Mr Haddad:** Yes, to go to the same place.

**MR SMYTH:** If the river floods, Point Hut closes first and then the bridge closes, which means you have then got to go via the Cotter.

**Mr Haddad:** The Cotter. It is 80 kilometres.

**Mrs Haesler:** I will also point out that, with the way the bridge is set up at the moment, it is not possible for public transport buses to fit across it, so how would the children from Tharwa access schools?

**MR SMYTH:** So that if they want to close the school they will have to build a new bridge at a cost of \$4 million, \$5 million or \$6 million.

**Mr Haddad:** No, they are talking about \$15 million or \$20 million. We were promised a response in April this year about what the options were for the bridge—replacing it, fixing it or putting another one next to it. We haven't got any of that yet.

**MR PRATT:** What sorts of travel times do your families have coming from a little bit further out?

**Mr Haddad:** From the southern side of Tharwa?

**MR PRATT:** Yes.

**Mr Haddad:** We have people travelling up to half an hour to get to our school. The nearest school is another 15 minutes past that, and that is if the bridges work. If the bridges don't work, we are not going to school.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, we will stop now. Thank you very much for appearing before us today. You will get a copy of the transcript so that you can check it for accuracy and get it back to the secretary as soon as possible after that. I would appreciate it if you would be able to table those figures that you mentioned.

**Mr Haddad:** Yes. I will just write them up now.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Give them to the secretary.

**TULLOH, MS FIONA**, President, Rivett Primary School Parents and Citizens Association

**THE CHAIR:** Fiona, were you in the room when we read the card?

**Ms Tulloh:** Yes, I was.

**THE CHAIR:** Did you understand it?

**Ms Tulloh:** Yes, I did.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you introduce yourself?

**Ms Tulloh:** I am President of Rivett Primary School Parents and Citizens Association and I also represent the preschool and the broader Rivett community.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to make a presentation?

**Ms Tulloh:** I would. Rivett Parents and Citizens Association is opposed to the closure of 39 public schools in Canberra. It is particularly concerned about the proposed closure of Rivett's primary school and preschool. The government, in its 2020 documentation, included the words "choice, diversity and opportunity" but those words are not reflected in any substance in the proposed changes. Students at Rivett's primary school and preschool are currently receiving the best possible educational programs in contemporary facilities.

The high-quality provision of education at Rivett celebrates and values diversity, strives to achieve excellence, and is accessible to all. The school has a successful double integration program and it has the only autism-specialised unit in the ACT. Children attending that learning support unit, or LSU, were moved there approximately 18 months ago. If you know anything about autism as a disability it means that those children have had substantial difficulty in making that transition.

The impacts of autism mean that children have difficulty communicating and participating socially, but they have made a very successful transition into Rivett primary school and they are now currently enjoying a caring and nurturing environment. Children in the school who do not have special needs are learning to be socially responsible and caring human beings. They are learning to be the types of leaders that our community wants and needs in the future. Sadly, these are qualities that are lacking in our current leaders today.

Over a number of years the school has worked hard to recover from previous threats of closure. It is now a thriving school with its own unique identity. The school is well positioned to meet the challenging needs of our community and it is well equipped for the challenges of the future. Like Tharwa, the current capacity of Rivett primary school has been misrepresented. Figures show that if all the children who currently live in the area attended Rivett primary school, the enrolments would be above 200 students.

The rationale of the current government is that parents make choices and that they have clearly chosen not to send their children to Rivett primary school. We challenge the

government's statement. We surveyed parents and asked them the reasons why they did not send their children to schools in Rivett. They said they were fearful that the school would close as it has previously been on the threat list. It is difficult to attract new enrolments in that environment, as people are concerned that the school will close before their children complete their primary education.

The government talked also about a seamless transition from home to school being supported by a strong sense of community and belonging, and it said interventions that were necessary and constructive would be provided. That ideal is a current reality for the students of Rivett's primary school and preschool. The preschool provides a smooth transition from the early intervention, language intervention and autism units provided by the preschool through to the primary school. Both schools provide the most constructive interventions that meet the needs of significantly disadvantaged children and children who have special needs.

The parents and citizens in Rivett and in the broader community have grave concerns for children, specifically children with autism who do have special needs. What will happen to them if the school closure goes ahead? We are very concerned that, despite the significant efforts and positive role modelling that our principal, teachers and parents have provided for children, the government is sending a message that these children do not count. The role modelling of our political leaders shows a lack of concern and care for our most disadvantaged children.

Currently there are 46 children with special needs in Rivett's primary school and preschool. The primary school has a double autism unit and the preschool has three special needs programs, including the communication and social awareness group for two-year-olds to three-year-olds, an autism intervention unit for three-year-olds to five-year-olds, and a language intervention unit that specifically is an early intervention unit for children with communication delays.

In addition to the special needs programs we also house the Warehouse Circus. The government has not promoted the ideal that we need to combat childhood obesity. The Warehouse Circus provides free, physical educational activity outside school hours two days a week for all disadvantaged children that attend Rivett primary school. The government also talked about using the space of schools efficiently. Currently, Rivett primary school is home to the ACT Playgroup Association and it also houses the Noah's Ark childcare facility. These are all important programs that we are concerned about losing.

I have prepared a list of questions that I will leave with the committee today—questions that parents and members of the community in Rivett would like to see answered by the government. How much is the drag race track costing? How does that compare with the cost savings being created by school closures? We are also interested in knowing how much Stanhope's salary is since his recent pay rise, what are his vehicle costs, and why those costs are more important than the education of children with special needs.

How much value does the government place on the integration and education of children with special needs, and on the social and educational outcomes of children in the broader school community who are benefiting from this program? Significant modifications at Rivett primary school include: automatic sliding glass doors for children using walking



frames or wheelchairs; disabled toilet facilities; disability access to a children's shower; an assisted change area; and enclosed outdoor areas for two learning support units, with fenced entrances to ensure the safety and security of children who have a history of absconding.

These facilities provide access to essential toileting, hygiene and play requirements and ensure that children's needs are met with dignity. These are features for which parents look when deciding whether or not their children should attend Rivett LSU units. We would like to know how much money was spent on these facilities and how long ago it was spent. We know that it is quite recent. Will these facilities be duplicated in new preschools and primary schools if Rivett's primary school and preschool are closed? How much will that cost? Have those costs been included in the budget because we cannot see them?

What guarantee will the government give that LSUs and all staff and students will be moved onto a new small school site, given that all small schools are being targeted for closure? Research shows quite clearly that the integration program for children with special needs works best in a small school environment. We would like to know whether the government intends to sell the land that the schools are currently occupying. If so, for what purpose and how much revenue is it expecting to make? If the government is not planning to sell the land how does it intend to use the school building and the land on which it is situated?

Has the government completed a social impact study for each of the communities affected by the closures and, if not, why not? From where did the government get its figures relating to capacity at Rivett, as it is definitely not accurate? What is the detailed breakdown of costs that were used to calculate the individual cost per student at each school? Again, like Tharwa, we take issue with that. We believe that the government calculated those figures incorrectly. Lastly, we would like to know what is the time frame for the minister's office and the Chief Minister's office to reply to letters from the community, in particular, letters from parents and children from affected schools? Will all those letters be answered?

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Fiona. Would you table those questions?

**Ms Tulloh:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** As we have a tight time frame we need to go on to the next group. Thank you very much. We will send you the *Hansard* transcript as soon as we can so that you can check its accuracy.

**Ms Tulloh:** Thank you.

**MR SMYTH:** How many empty classrooms are there in Rivett primary school?

**Ms Tulloh:** None.

**MR SMYTH:** There are no empty classrooms at all? So the whole building is used?

**Ms Tulloh:** There are no rooms that are not currently being used for some purpose.

Rooms that used to be classrooms are being used as a library resource centre and as a computer laboratory to house the Warehouse Circus and for various other activities, but there are no empty rooms in the school.

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

**DONALDSON, MR DAVID**, Mount Neighbour Parents and Citizens Association

**THE CHAIR:** Were you in the room when I read the card?

**Mr Donaldson:** Yes, I was.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you understand its content?

**Mr Donaldson:** I understand it, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to introduce yourself and then make an opening statement?

**Mr Donaldson:** I represent Mount Neighbour Parents and Citizens Association, the preschool and the community.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you give us your presentation?

**Mr Donaldson:** Yes. A few days ago we held a meeting. Generally, the people of the area are upset about the school at Mount Neighbour closing. The main concern is that people want to know the reasons behind the decision to close this school. Why was it picked? After looking at documents on the web site it is not clear why. The government said it was for financial and social reasons, but there is nothing concrete for us to go on.

We believe that we have a joint responsibility to educate our children. People at the meeting said that the web site was uninformed and that it did not enable them to make an informed decision about whether or not it was correct. We are also concerned about the fact that information is going on the web site but a lot of parents do not have access to the web. They also need that information. In a few instances parents tried to post feedback on the web site, the web site crashed and they were unable to post that feedback. Parents have tried calling and they have not really received any responses.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you clarify your last statement so that I and other members know exactly what happened when they tried to call?

**Mr Donaldson:** I suppose they were after information and basically they were read the same brochure.

**THE CHAIR:** So they felt that they were not given additional information?

**Mr Donaldson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And their queries were not answered?

**Mr Donaldson:** Basically, they were given the same information, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Donaldson:** Within the capacity of our school we believe that data is probably outdated. That was before computers were around. Every school now has a computer

laboratory so they have reduced capacities. We also have a special unit with seven children. We are worried about the effect that these changes will have on them.

**THE CHAIR:** What is that special unit?

**Mr Donaldson:** I think it is level 5 but I am not sure.

**THE CHAIR:** We can obtain that information later. Could you provide to the committee information about what that special unit is?

**Mr Donaldson:** Sure.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think it is an autism unit.

**Mr Donaldson:** Yes.

**MR PRATT:** Is it an autism unit or a unit for other needs?

**Mr Donaldson:** I think it is an autism unit. Like Rivett, it is set up with its own toilets and change facilities and all that kind of stuff.

**MR PRATT:** Right.

**Mr Donaldson:** Parents are worried because kids do not like change. They are worried about what effect those changes will have on the kids. I reiterate all the things that other schools have said. I will give you a couple of practical examples. One parent discovered that one of the kids in the class was unable to read. Two parents have been working with that other parent in helping the kids to read. In a larger school will there be the contact with parents that there is in a smaller school? One thing that gets to me is the fact that my daughter has cried over this. What do I tell her? She has been with these kids through preschool, they are her friends, and they are going to be broken up.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it all right for members to ask you questions, Mr Donaldson?

**Mr Donaldson:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Firstly, I apologise to all those who are appearing because at 2.30 p.m. I have to attend a function being held in the chamber for several schoolchildren. I will catch up with what you have said and be in touch with you personally. Just about everyone who appeared has said that he or she rang the department and that it had been unhelpful. Did you sense that the department did not have any information other than what was available in the 2020 public document, to which we all have access?

**Mr Donaldson:** One person who had a background in legal matters went through it. When she pushed the department she was told that it was cabinet in confidence and that it would not release the information.

**MR SMYTH:** How many empty classrooms do you have?

**Mr Donaldson:** There are none.

**MR SMYTH:** There are no empty classrooms?

**Mr Donaldson:** No.

**MR SMYTH:** So the school is full?

**Mr Donaldson:** It could be said that it is spacious. Originally, where there were three classrooms they have been combined into two. They have made those changes, so there are no empty classrooms.

**MR SMYTH:** For the non-Brindabella members, where is Mount Neighbour?

**Mr Donaldson:** Mount Neighbour is in Kambah.

**MR SMYTH:** On what street?

**Mr Donaldson:** On Boddington Street.

**MR SMYTH:** If the school closes where will the students go? What will be left in Kambah if your school goes?

**Mr Donaldson:** It is very uncertain what the priority thing means. Will children have to go across Drakeford Dive, or will they be sent to Urambi? Kambah is the biggest suburb in the ACT so it involves quite a deal of distance. One person who attended the meeting the other night has a two-year-old child. The parents of that child picked Kambah and bought a house there because it was close to a school.

They made a decision to get rid of their second car because they were moving close to a school and they could walk to that school. We are all aware of the increased costs of petrol. People with young kids that are going to school will have to accompany them on buses. They will not send kindergarten and year 1 students on buses. That means an extra cost for them. Some of them also have young children, so it means dragging their children with them when taking these students to and from school.

**MR PRATT:** How far is it to the next school where children with autism could be taken care of?

**Mr Donaldson:** That is remaining open.

**MR PRATT:** What is your understanding about that?

**Mr Donaldson:** My understanding is that they are contacting individual parents. I am not sure where the schools are. I think there is one in Woden. There is one in Rivett but that is going. I am not sure what schools will remain open and whether or not they will be able to cater for those kids.

**MRS DUNNE:** Madam Chair, I think I misinformed the committee. Mount Neighbour has a disability unit at Village Creek. It has autism units that are going to close.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mrs Dunne.

**Mr Donaldson:** They are closing too.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Mr Donaldson, how many students are there at Mount Neighbour at the moment?

**Mr Donaldson:** There are 131 students at the moment.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** From your calculation, what is the capacity of the school?

**Mr Donaldson:** I would say it would probably take around 200 or 250 students, or something like that.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you are disputing the government's figure of a capacity of 400?

**Mr Donaldson:** I think all of them were done pre computers and before a lot of these changes were made.

**THE CHAIR:** So you have a specific room set aside as a computer laboratory? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr Donaldson:** Yes. Every school would have. There are computers in every classroom as well. That is extra space.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Donaldson. We will send you a copy of the transcript as soon as possible. Get back to us if you have any problems with its accuracy.

**Mr Donaldson:** Thank you.

**STEVENS, MS LESLEY-ANNE**, President Flynn Primary School Parents and Citizens Association

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Were you here when I read the card?

**Ms Stevens:** I was.

**THE CHAIR:** Did you understand?

**Ms Stevens:** I did. As well as being President of the P&C, I will choose to talk for the preschool as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. If you would like to make your presentation?

**Ms Stevens:** The Flynn P&C recognises the need for a new policy or vision for public education in the ACT, which may include the rationalisation of school clusters in its present form. However, it rejects the budget paper *Towards 2020* as a blueprint for quality, affordable and sustainable education, as it apparently disregards the enormous economic, educational, social and environmental costs of closing some of our best community schools.

Key points for rejecting this proposal are that the notice to close the schools was announced before the consultation process commenced. Most parents are concerned that the decision was announced with the budget and before any significant consultation. We would have preferred input before major announcements, so that we could work with the government to achieve the solid educational outcomes we all want for the public education system. Canberra's communities have not been provided with the outline for the proposed consultation process or, indeed, the government's evaluation criteria for deciding which schools will remain open and which will close. There has been no revelation of the underlying analysis that produced the government's list of proposed schools to be closed. Canberra's communities must now commit limited resources and enormous amounts of unpaid time to prepare the analyses to justify keeping our schools, but the true costings for this paper have not been fully identified.

Our preliminary analysis has revealed that some of these costs include the following: the cost of compensation for schools with uniform shops generally run by P&Cs. As you can imagine, no-one is going to want to buy a uniform over the next six months and most will have recently purchased winter stock. Flynn's stocktake at the end of December 2005, as included in its audited report, was approximately \$7,500—the cost of providing pedestrian underpasses or bridges: Major arterial roads surround Flynn. A student was knocked down and seriously hurt a few years ago when attending the preschool. He required significant time in hospital. A schoolchild from St Francis was killed in December 2004 whilst attempting to cross the Ginninderra and Kingsford Smith drives intersection. If Charnwood Primary School is being offered to Flynn primary school, providing safe access across Tillyard Drive has to be a part of the proposal.

There will be environmental costs. The schools Evatt, Florey, Fraser, Latham, Macgregor and Miles Franklin have been identified as best serving the area. To attend these schools the Flynn children would need to be driven. This puts the onus back on parents to drive them to school before work. With soaring petrol prices it puts an

additional financial burden on families. In respect to buses being offered, we find it hard to believe that a service could be adapted to service all children going to all six schools. This budget proposal places the cost burden of accessing schools on private transport. This is contrary to the ACT government's priority for achieving sustainable cities where the physical planning and infrastructure reduces private car use and therefore also reduces the production of greenhouse gases and dependence on fossil fuels. There are enormous social costs from dismantling a community hub and breaking vital community links, as measured through reduction in volunteer participation, increased drug use and criminal and antisocial behaviour and sustained poorer educational and financial outcomes.

The consultation time frame put forward in the budget paper is critically flawed. The consultation period ending on 6 December does not factor in that preschool enrolment placements are finalised in October. Even if parents enrolling are asked to identify the second preference it does not address the obvious gaff in that proposal. With regard to teacher placements, Flynn has a significant number of teachers who have finished their rotation and are leaving at the end of the year. Replacement rounds are conducted in September. Because the government has named schools that are likely to close it is unlikely that teachers will nominate a preference for placement at Flynn or any other school identified for closure. Instead of schools getting a fair chance to hear rounds we will be disadvantaged by this proposal. We deserve to be able to choose staff of the highest calibre to work with the teachers we already have.

With the consultation period ending on 6 December, three weeks before the end of the year, how do you plan to assist children through a transition period? Are you planning to put on extra staff and work with schools through the holiday period? Are you providing counselling? Three weeks is not long to help thousands of children who are likely to be affected by the government's proposal. The cost of dismantling the social cohesion and capital built up throughout standing community schools like Flynn primary school and preschool, as proposed in *Towards 2020*, will far outweigh any short-term or ongoing cost savings through closure of such schools. Lastly, any policy that promotes quality, sustainable, affordable education and communities has to have a place for community schools like Flynn primary and preschool which set a standard the ACT should aim to reproduce. Thank you.

**MRS DUNNE:** Ms Stevens, I have been told by someone associated with Flynn primary school that you were anticipating a rollout of IT, which has been put on hold. Do you know about that?

**Ms Stevens:** At this time, as you can imagine, rumours start. That was going around. I had heard it. I have heard that that is not true anymore. All schools are getting new computers. Our front office had intimated that it was not going to get its computers. I believe that is going through now.

**MR PRATT:** What is the total number of children enrolled?

**Ms Stevens:** At the moment we have 180, but I am happy to announce that we had a new enrolment today, which is a good news story.

**MR PRATT:** What is the government's declared capacity number?



**Ms Stevens:** It is 375, but I would like, if I may, to quickly talk on that.

**MR PRATT:** Can you talk about the school's space?

**Ms Stevens:** Yes. My son is in a unit that has three classes, which move very well between literacy and numeracy. We do not understand where the capacity comes from. If it comes from its maximum number when it opened, it had five classes in that room. They used to rotate a class in the back room where they had the table and the papers. So, even at its maximum it was not feasible. Now, as you might imagine, the computers are placed in the corner, and the smart boards. We acknowledge that we would like healthier numbers. We think that we are getting healthier numbers. We think there are rationalisations that we can discuss.

**MR SMYTH:** With 180 students out of a 375 capacity, half the classrooms are empty, I take it?

**Ms Stevens:** No, not at all. We have two classes in this unit, three classes in this unit, two classes in this unit. The kindergarten unit has 25 in it. It could do with another class but it is not an empty school. All places are being utilised. If we rationalised with Matt Rogers, we would have one room that we could then put desks in. At the moment it is used for music, LOTE and literacy. It has a wet area and we use it for music tuition and for the P&C. So it has four school curricular activities in there.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, could I just ask one last question?

**THE CHAIR:** Can you put it on notice? Is that all right?

**MRS DUNNE:** Well, I do not know that I can put a question on notice to the community group, and it is a one-line answer. Do you know what the maximum enrolment at Flynn was in its heyday?

**Ms Stevens:** No.

**EVANS, MR GRAEME WHELLER**, Vice-President, Belconnen Community Council  
**BOWE, MS SANDRA**, Committee Member, Belconnen Community Council

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Evans and Ms Bowe, You should understand 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 that you are protected from certain legal actions such as being sued for defamation for what you say in this public hearing. It also means that you have responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Do you both understand that?

**Mr Evans:** I do.

**Ms Bowe:** Yes, I do.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Would either of you like to make a presentation?

**Mr Evans:** Yes, thank you. There are a number of matters we would like to address. We have described the budget as having some good things for Belconnen and through Belconnen to the wider community, and we have identified the budget as having some other things that are far more disastrous, both for Belconnen and for the wider community. The good thing, of course, is that funding for the continued work on the Belconnen Arts Centre has been re-voted to be continuing funding, and that is much appreciated by the Belconnen community and I hope will be strongly supported by this committee. I am confident that it will be. Sandra may wish to speak more about the arts centre and its role in the wider community. In the media release that our president put out, which I trust is in your hands, a number of things were said that are quite important. It said:

The sting in this budget is potentially fatal ... The proposed closure of preschools and primary schools in Belconnen is very serious, with 36% of the closures over the three years being in Belconnen.

The release goes on subsequently to say:

... in truth it is really a very complex and far reaching decision about the future of the ACT education system and—

and this is important—

the nature of our suburbs as we know them.

You need to understand that we are dealing with the fundamental psychological perception of the character of our city in dealing with this school closures issue. The media release goes on:

... dismantling our local education infrastructure increases the real cost of education to individual families and even further damages opportunities for those students of families most at risk.

We need to understand that in every key respect this is a socially regressive move. It will

bear very hard on low-income families much more so than on higher-income families. It needs to be understood that it is a socially regressive move. The press release then goes on to look at the linkage between what is happening in the shopping centres, and particularly the shopping centre of Giralang, and what is proposed to happen with Giralang schooling opportunities. The news release put out by our president after consultation with the whole of the executive committee of Belconnen Community Council reads:

This budget completes an appalling assault on the community of Giralang ... It is almost as if the government has joined up with the private owner of the local centre—an aspiring developer of that site—in dismantling the services in this suburb. First the local centre is allowed to run down in a most disgraceful fashion, with the owners fulfilling only the most rudimentary of their obligations as lessees, and now the Government proposes to take away the local schools—it is a disgraceful decision.

That is our view on the matter. We are very happy to discuss it with the committee, but I think that media release sums it up as we see it. We welcome the decision relating to the arts centre. We think that the flowering of the arts is fundamental to a civilised and aspiring community, but the decisions relating to schooling, both those that are freestanding and those that come on top of decisions, and relating to the shopping centres, really are appalling. I see it, I must say, as a territorial equivalent of the appointment of Windschuttle to the board of the ABC. Both are pretty astonishing decisions.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Bowe, do you want to say any more about the centre?

**Ms Bowe:** The centre?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Bowe:** Well, just that it is going to be a very important piece of infrastructure for Belconnen. It is very much needed. I hope and trust that because funding has been re-committed that this building will eventually materialise on the promised site. The schools are also equally important infrastructure for Belconnen and also a focus for the community. So, what goes on in our schools is vitally important for the wellbeing of the community. Losing so many schools will have a devastating flow-on effect throughout the community. Obviously it is not just the children who are impacted, but parents who are involved with the schools in the day-to-day running of the schools and also employed by the local schools. They will all be deeply impacted upon. I think that this will create flow-on effects that could be very detrimental to the health of the Canberra community.

I also wanted to comment on tourism and the arts, areas of passion for me. I am a tourism management student at the University of Canberra and very interested in cultural tourism, and hence my involvement with the Arts. I am very surprised that tourism has taken such a blow, because economically it is an investment for Canberra. Research has shown—and it has been reported in the paper—for every dollar of tourism invested we get quite a substantial return, and that seems to be the case everywhere.

I would like the government to maintain the programs that tourism administers, especially the research and marketing. I think research is a very important aspect and its

connections with the University of Canberra, and the sustainable tourism, CRC, are very important linkages—the tourism awards especially. It all adds to the social capital for Canberra. Tourism infrastructure is good for the locals as well as bringing in tourists. So, it has enormous benefits, as does Arts ACT. I would hate to see that its programs are going to be cut, impacting on the Canberra community. I would hate to see arts organisations having to close down because they can no longer have their funding assured. Thank you.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, could I go back to the question of school closures. Mr Evans, you dwelt particularly upon the school closures in Giralang because the shops are also in a rundown state. Would you like to reflect upon the impact that school closures would have on a suburb like Flynn, which has never had a shopping centre, and what the loss of that infrastructure might mean to a suburb like Flynn?

**Mr Evans:** Yes. I dealt with the question of Giralang particularly because Giralang has had body blow after body blow. It needs to be said that what the owner of the shopping centre was allowed to get away with, with the lease arrangements not being enforced, was quite outrageous. If anything, the sense of identity, the sense of community, which the schooling system is so important to, is even greater in a suburb where there is not an established shopping centre. The sense of cohesion, of knowing each other, of feeling at home, is absolutely critical to the community. In the best situation it comes from both the shopping centre and the schooling. Where there is no shopping centre then the school carries an even greater load and is correspondingly more important to the community.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Mr Evans, you mentioned the Giralang shops earlier. How many shops are operating at Giralang?

**Mr Evans:** They went down over the years and finally there were very few operating. Now, your question, if I may say so, is not the key question. The important question is how did that come about? To what extent were the lessees in breach of their lease obligations, and to what extent were they allowed to get away with that over the years? That is the key question.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** So were there four or five?

**Mr Evans:** I cannot answer that. I am not a resident of Giralang. I have observed the problems they have had over the years. I am not on top of the arithmetic of it, but I can say that there were obligations on government to enforce governmental instruments called leases that were not honoured and acknowledged and applied in this instance.

**MR PRATT:** Do you have any feeling at all, Mr Evans, when the last substantive funding was spent by government on upgrade, maintenance or repairs of the shopping centre precinct?

**Mr Evans:** There have been some decided cases of shopping centre improvement in activity following upgrading, yes. It is not my special area but I am aware of the range of centres that have found a new life following an improvement in their physical attractiveness.

**MR MULCAHY:** Ms Bowe, the Chief Minister, following the presentation of the

budget, both at the budget breakfast at the press club and also in the Assembly, has likened some of the money granted to tourism as some form of business welfare and could not see a relationship between that and the needs of social services. Could you give us a quick comment on your view about how tourism may relate to the economy, as you would see it?

**Ms Bowe:** How tourism relates to the economy? Apart from bringing in the visitors it stimulates infrastructure, planning and development, jobs for the ACT and flow-on effects not only from the visitors' initial spending but the traders and the businesses that benefit from those dollars and who then spend throughout the Canberra economy.

**MR MULCAHY:** So you see a direct link?

**Ms Bowe:** There are quite considerable flow-on effects.

**MRS DUNNE:** Madam Chair, just for Mr Gentleman's information, my recollection is that there are five shops at Giralang and there was a tavern. They are all closed except the Vietnamese restaurant at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the minister made an announcement today that there will be, I think, four shops in the new development.

**LE GUEN, MR MAURICE**, Spokesperson, ANU Medical Students Society

**THE CHAIR:** Were you in the room when I read from the card?

**Mr Le Guen:** Yes, I was.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you know you have five minutes to speak?

**Mr Le Guen:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Please make your presentation.

**Mr Le Guen:** The issue I would like to discuss today relates to the introduction of pay parking at the Canberra and Calvary hospitals from 1 July. Exemptions have been granted for quite a few categories of people, including long-term visitors and patients with health care cards, volunteers, medical and allied health staff and visiting medical officers.

As you can imagine, quite a few of these groups can readily afford to pay for parking on a daily basis. However, students who attend the hospital on a daily basis or a regular basis for their studies have not been granted any exemption from paying for parking. This is despite ACT Health and the ACT government stating on numerous occasions that they believe that medical students, in particular, form an invaluable part of the medical teams at the hospital and also that they are quite proud to have a medical school present in the national capital, where it should be.

The introduction of pay parking, however, will impose an additional financial cost of \$800 per year for students in their third and final years of studies. This represents approximately 10 per cent of the federal payments a student could be expected to pay from, such as youth allowance or Austudy. This substantial increase in financial costs faced by individual students will, however, only raise a relatively small amount of additional revenue for the ACT government, in the order of \$150,000 per year.

The introduction of pay parking will also place students attending the hospital at increased risk to their safety. On occasions students can be expected to stay at the hospital as late as midnight or 1.00 am, for example, if they are attending surgery and, as students will be forced to park off the hospital precinct with the introduction of pay parking, the students will no longer have access to a security escort to their vehicles.

Another point that the students feel should be heard is that students can be expected to travel from their GP practices throughout Canberra and Queanbeyan to the hospital on any given day. Given the fact that it takes about an hour to travel between the two hospitals in the ACT, students are not in a situation where the current public transport system in Canberra provides a viable transport alternative.

Furthermore, the policy will not aid the current doctor shortage in the ACT. It is going to detract interstate students from attending the ANU medical school as their first choice and it is well known that many doctors choose to practise where they have undertaken their studies. The student body at the ANU has attempted on numerous occasions to discuss this matter with both the Chief Minister and the health minister, Katy Gallagher,

but we have had no formal response from the government. The students have found this aspect of the government's attitude to the issue particularly disappointing.

Furthermore, the students have been willing to compromise on this matter and would be willing to pay the same rate as students attending the ANU campus, in the order of \$150 a year. Once again, we have not received any replies from the government on this matter either. That is all I have to say today.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a couple of questions of clarification. You said that it takes an hour to travel between them.

**Mr Le Guen:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that by public transport?

**Mr Le Guen:** Yes, by direct bus. There is one direct bus between the two hospitals.

**THE CHAIR:** How many times, on average, did you say the students need to attend the hospital?

**Mr Le Guen:** The students in their third and fourth years attend the hospital five days a week for 40 weeks of the year.

**MR SMYTH:** Just on the ANU parking, can you get a permit for the ANU?

**Mr Le Guen:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** How much is that a year?

**Mr Le Guen:** I think it is exactly \$151.80.

**MR SMYTH:** Effectively, the ACT government wants to charge you five times that amount to park at the public hospitals.

**Mr Le Guen:** Yes, and there will be students that are, effectively, getting a double whammy because they will spend half their time at the ANU campus and then some days a week at the hospitals, so they are paying for parking twice basically.

**MR SMYTH:** As a student in, say, third or fourth year, which is where you would be doing most of your travel, how many contact hours a week do you have? Surely, as students, you have plenty of time and you can duck out and get another job! Maccas are looking for staff.

**Mr Le Guen:** At the moment, for instance, where I am studying, and every single student is facing the same thing, we need to be there for a full-time job. The doctors expect you to be there from 7.00 in the morning, if you are doing surgery, for ward rounds and 8.00 in the morning if you are doing ward rounds during medicine, and you will be there till 5.00 or 6.00 pm on a regular day. You can be there much later if they are doing surgery, if you have to scrub in.

**MR MULCAHY:** Supplementary to Mr Smyth's question, how many hours a week are you providing by way of, notwithstanding it is supervised, patient care for the people of the ACT in our hospitals?

**Mr Le Guen:** In your third and fourth years you are at the hospital five days a week. Out of those five days, four days are for patient contact. So full time for four days a week.

**MR MULCAHY:** Over how many hours each day, typically.

**Mr Le Guen:** I would say eight, a full-time workload.

**MR MULCAHY:** So 32 hours a week of patient care.

**Mr Le Guen:** Easily, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** But you get paid for that, though, don't you?

**Mr Le Guen:** No.

**MR SMYTH:** You are providing patient care. You must get paid for that, surely!

**Mr Le Guen:** We do not get paid anything. We are studying as students there. It is part of our medical studies. We don't get paid.

**DR FOSKEY:** I thank you for the representations that you have made to us as members and, I am sure, to the Liberal members as well. Have you talked to the ANU about this as well, because the ANU, no doubt, could make representations on your behalf or could perhaps pay these costs?

**Mr Le Guen:** Sure. The vice-chancellor has written to Jon Stanhope and, from what I understand, hasn't received a reply from him either formally. The way it stands is that, because the hospitals are actually owned by the government at the moment, the ANU campus are effectively tenants on the hospital grounds and can't actually provide parking for their students. So it would need to be the hospitals or ACT Health saying to students, "Yes, we now have an agreement with the ANU that you can pay what you would pay at the ANU campus," for instance.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Le Guen, you talked about the costs incurred. Is there enough parking on the campuses at Canberra Hospital and Calvary Hospital currently to provide for you as students if money is no object?

**Mr Le Guen:** If money was no object, at the moment we park there more or less every single day. It is not the easiest place to find a park but you do find a park. Because we are attending the hospital on a regular basis, we attend there every single day, we turn up early. There are no increased parking places coming from this initiative, from what we gather. We understand that this is just a pay parking situation that is being introduced, not an increase in parking spots on the campuses.

**MRS DUNNE:** Do you also have a view about the way in which parking charges are going to be levied—come in the morning, work out how long you are going to stay and,



if you overstay, you get a fine? Is that a problem for you as well?

**Mr Le Guen:** At the current stage, it will be \$5 per day and anything over four hours you will have to pay for the full day.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We will be getting a transcript to you and you will be able to correct it and give it back to us.

**Mr Le Guen:** Thank you.

**TULLY, WILLIAM JAMES**, President, Friends of the ACT Library and Information Service

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Tully, were you in the room when I read from the card?

**Mr Tully:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. You should understand 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 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 responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Do you understand that, Mr Tully?

**Mr Tully:** Indeed I do, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Do you understand that you have five minutes to make your presentation?

**Mr Tully:** Indeed. I have a prepared statement here which should carry it along a little bit and I do not have lots of issues. I do have lots of issues, but five minutes is not very long.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Tully, if there are issues over and above the ones you can mention now, you can leave those with the secretary and we will be happy to accept them.

**Mr Tully:** I will stick with what I've got at the moment. Thanks very much for letting me come along for about the third time, I think. It is not so much to do with the budget, because there is very little in the budget to do with public libraries in the ACT that I could find. There are several matters that I might just mention, but it is the larger issue, I think, of the consultative process that goes on about public libraries and about people like the friends, an advocacy group, and their say in how it operates.

We are a small group, a very small group—about 14 people at the moment. We meet regularly. We have been going for about 10 years. I am the president and there has been no attempt to get rid of me. I think I am quite safe there for the foreseeable future. Looking at the budget, it did not appear to me to give much joy to libraries at all. Libraries did seem to be a bit of a Cinderella issue for the budget as far as I could see.

There was a little bit about capital costs of the new Civic library which, of course, is in Civic Square. There was a little bit also about other capital costs, \$600,000 or something like that, and there was a peculiar little piece about providing access for disabled people and ageing people like myself to the theatre complex rather than to the library, which I thought a little ambiguous because it does not mention the library, and access to the new library is pretty much an issue that I am very concerned about, and have been for the last three or four years.

The capital cost of the new library, \$15 million roughly, seems to me in retrospect to

have been a mistaken, given what happened in the budget. I think the older library could have been refurbished at much less cost and I don't think there was really a need to do it, but it has happened, it is a fait accompli, and the friends accept that more or less, albeit somewhat grudgingly.

The other issue I would like to raise is the amount of money that presumably will be coming to the library, because it is not very clear what the current operating costs will be or what the budget operating costs will be. But the whole business of McDonaldisation of public libraries is very much an issue, not only in Canberra but in many other states. I am referring to the commercialisation of the process. The free library process is, I think, under siege.

I would like to conclude by saying that the Cultural Facilities Corporation have been the people who have been pushing very strongly and very effectively for the library as part of a theatre complex. I think this is the issue that they have had done, and I think they are assuming and many people assume that theatres and libraries can go together. They are not the same. People don't go into libraries with a white wine after they have been to the theatre. I don't think there is any connection. I find this still very much an assumption.

Also, the allocation to the corporation has been fairly large, I think it is about \$11 million. The library's operational costs are about the same. I find this rather extraordinary. Libraries, as I say, are becoming increasingly the Cinderella organisation or the Cinderella operation in the ACT. I am a little bit worried about that and I came along today to express that concern. Thank you for hearing me out.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Tully.

**DR FOSKEY:** Is there any time for questions?

**THE CHAIR:** Very quickly. We are already 10 minutes over time.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, I know. Mr Tully, I just want to say that the last thing you said was probably of most concern, that library operational costs appear to remain the same. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr Tully:** That is what I think is going to happen.

**DR FOSKEY:** Is that because you could not find it, that it is so hard to find in the budget?

**Mr Tully:** I couldn't find it, no. I just couldn't find it.

**DR FOSKEY:** I just wanted to make note of that concern, given the demands on libraries at the moment for electronic as well as paper material.

**MR SMYTH:** John Marsden, the Australian author whom you would know of, said five or six years ago that the ACT public library service was the jewel in the crown of Australian public libraries. Is that still the case or are we falling behind the other systems?

**Mr Tully:** I think the jewels need a little bit of refurbishing. It is the same as the sense of community in Canberra, which is very much part of it. Yes, they are in many ways very good. The Kippax library is excellent, but it is just a little bit of a worry about where we are going with the new one as an exemplar of, I suppose, the future. A jewel? Compared to other places, they are pretty good, but I think we've got to look at where they are going and where they are heading, and I am a little worried.

**MR PRATT:** Are you concerned that the—

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, we are already 10 minutes overdue, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** A rapid one, please, chair.

**THE CHAIR:** It will need to be very rapid.

**MR PRATT:** Right, in 17 words or less. Given the new project here, are you concerned that there will be a devaluation of the services in the outlying libraries?

**Mr Tully:** I do. There is an allocation for increased costs, staff costs. Despite all these things, I think it will lose a lot of its former clients, possibly its future clients, and I don't think it has been really worked out just what sort of a library it is going to be. I think that is one of the things. Is it going to be a central library for the ACT or is it going to be just another version, although bigger, of the other one? There has been very little talk about the future. That worries me.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Tully. You will get a copy of the transcript. Get back to us if there are any errors.

**Meeting adjourned from 3.15 to 3.26 pm.**

**CRESSWELL, MS ARA**, Director, ACT Council of Social Service

**REYNDERS, MR LLEWELLYN**, Senior Officer, Media and Policy, ACT Council of Social Service

**NICHOLSON, MS KAREN**, Senior Policy Officer, ACT Council of Social Service

**THE CHAIR:** I will read the card. You should understand 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 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 responsibilities to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Do you all understand that?

**Ms Cresswell:** Yes.

**Ms Nicholson:** Yes.

**Mr Reynders:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Would you like to make your presentation to the committee?

**Ms Cresswell:** We have a number of issues. We'll race through those as quickly as we can. Certainly housing is one of our major concerns. We are concerned about the efficiencies. The election commitment was for \$30 million to go into housing. It now looks like a number of efficiencies need to be made, to the tune of \$6 million a year. We are gravely concerned that, if those efficiencies don't materialise, services will need to be cut in order to find that money.

We are concerned about what that means for staffing levels and what that means for people on the ground. We would have to emphasise that crisis intervention is always much more costly than the provision of services at the other end rather than at the crisis end.

We are gravely concerned about the cut to eligibility criteria. The cut for a couple from \$975 to \$613 is a cut of 37 per cent. That means that a couple with a child making \$700 a week will no longer be eligible for public housing. That means we will see homelessness increase. There's no question that homelessness will increase. And certainly, like the security of tenure, it is the issue of a job or a house. Do we choose a job or do we choose a house?

Our concern with the security of tenure is the same thing. People are forced to choose between a job and a house. The message is very clear that, if you want to get into public housing, don't get a job. We're really concerned that that acts as a disincentive to people. We'd also like to know a bit more about the make-up of market renters in public housing, and particularly how many of those require accessible housing—people with disabilities, those who are sole parents or those who have special needs. I'll come back to talk about SAAP and sector viability.

With the streamlining of grants, we are really interested in knowing how that will fall out

and what will happen. There is a lot of confusion about what that means at this point in time, and we need a lot more information. We really would like to find that government works with the community. Particularly, there used to be a community sector funding working group that took on the tasks of looking at all the funding issues.

That group has had only one meeting in well over 12 months. It is a significantly important group in terms of issues to do with contracts and funding for the community sector. That group actually could have taken carriage of some of that work. So we'd like to see some work done on that issue.

In terms of rationalising boards and committees, there is no detail; there is no consultation with the sector. There certainly could have been some advice from the sector about what works and what doesn't work. We'd like to be consulted about it.

In relation to the community sector, we welcome the indexation model that ACTCOSS put up a couple of years ago. We were pleased to see it, but we are certainly really concerned about the sector at the moment. The government was given a report from the community sector task force some months back. That looked at the wages and conditions of the community sector and how to keep the sector viable.

That report is still not a published report. I know it sits with the minister, but we are concerned to see that something happens with that. We would like to have seen the government put aside some money for the implementation of some of the recommendations from the task force.

Of very grave concern to us is the ACT homelessness strategy. The ACT homelessness strategy, the community sector funding policy, the social compact, engaging with communities, and the social plan are a number of rather significant documents put out by the government. The work that was done about how we engage with the community, how we talk to the community and how we build capacity in the community has been collapsed—put away on a shelf.

We are really concerned that the cut to SAAP of \$1.7 million that is being found in this particular year will immediately mean job cuts. Certainly for ACTCOSS it means job cuts. For other services it means job cuts—and whilst there is a commitment to retaining beds, inevitably that has to mean beds. If we take the capacity out of the sector, if we stop giving the sector the training and the development and working with the sector to ensure that they deliver good quality services, we won't have the services at the end of the day.

**MR SMYTH:** You mentioned job cuts. On page 187 of the budget it says that the staffing will go from 972 to 931. Are you aware of where those jobs cuts will come from?

**Ms Cresswell:** Is that housing you're talking about?

**MR SMYTH:** That's the entire department. The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services loses at least 40 jobs.

**Mr Reynders:** We're not sure. I understand that Housing ACT has a separate part of the

budget, and I understand that the cuts in there are more severe than they are for the department as a whole.

**MR SMYTH:** Housing goes from 210 to 200. So in that sector there are at least 50 job cuts. But you're not aware of where they're coming from?

**Ms Cresswell:** I don't think we have any idea where they're coming from. The job cuts I was referring to are those within the community sector.

**MR SMYTH:** The sector itself, yes.

**Ms Cresswell:** The sector who are dealing with homeless people, dealing with people with disabilities and dealing with our most vulnerable Canberrans is the sector that is now facing significant jobs cuts, particularly because of the cut in SAAP funding.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you elaborate on the cut in SAAP funding?

**Ms Cresswell:** With the SAAP program the ACT is taking \$1 million of the money they put in out, that they're calling "overmatched funding". The commonwealth has taken back \$300,000, and they need to save \$400,000 for a service that has been committed to. What that means is—we've been told—that that funding will be saved from anything that is not a bed—so any administrative costs.

The service that ACTCOSS runs, for instance, does a lot of indigenous development. It does work with mainstream organisations to ensure they're accessible to indigenous people; it does a lot of governance work and training work—really work to help bring the sector to a point where it can do the work with mental health consumers and drug and alcohol-affected clients—the people who are doing it tough. So it develops the community. All of that kind of work is what we're looking at losing.

**MRS DUNNE:** What you're saying is that, with the extra training and the skilling of the sector, what we will see is a deskilling of the sector.

**Ms Cresswell:** There's no question. We will see a deskilling of the sector and we will certainly see an impact upon the indigenous people, not just in the supported accommodation arena but across the community sector.

**Ms Nicholson:** Can I add something to that before we go on? You have to understand that, in the context of the high turnover in our sector of staff, in two community service surveys—they were conducted by ACOSS but ACTCOSS did the work in the ACT for that larger ACOSS survey—we had turnovers in our sector of 31 and, I think, 21 or 24 per cent.

I'm not quite sure of the figures, but we come in at something like double to three times the all-industry average for Australia for turnover of staff, which means that there is an extremely high need for training in the community services sector. Particularly in high stress jobs like SAAP, where you're dealing with people in crisis all the time, that training need is ongoing. It cannot be fulfilled in two or three years. It needs to be committed, ongoing funding.

**Ms Cresswell:** The ACT community sector has staff turnover double that of any community sector in the rest of the country.

**DR FOSKEY:** I just want to point out that we haven't actually had, as yet, representatives from indigenous mental health and disability organisations giving evidence, so I don't know if you feel that you could just add to our understanding of what's happened there. I'm also interested in what you now know about grants. Apart from the cuts to SAAP, are you also aware of other funding cuts that are reverberating through the sector; or when will you know about those kinds of grants?

**Ms Cresswell:** Well, we are trying to keep our ear to the ground. We are gradually hearing about what's happening in SAAP. We heard today about one service that just lost \$200,000 and another service that's being closed. So we're gradually hearing that. We have heard of significant cuts in the community housing sector. We've certainly heard of cuts to some of those bodies who do the policy and representative work for the housing sector. But at this point we don't know anything else about—

**Ms Nicholson:** No, the whole area of grants at the moment is a bit of a black box. We've been told that there are going to be major changes in the way that they're administered—the one-stop shop. At the moment there's no detail, so there's no way of assessing whether that also means cuts in the amounts of money.

**MR SMYTH:** I note that you have got community sector indexation. You'd have to be happy with that, wouldn't you?

**Ms Cresswell:** I said that. I mentioned that we were happy with the indexation. It was a model that ACTCOSS put up two years ago, and we were really glad to see that there. It was in last year's budget.

**MR SMYTH:** So the \$36,000 is adequate?

**Ms Cresswell:** That's actually on top of. I believe there was a more significant sum.

**MR SMYTH:** So \$36,000, whilst it's appreciated, is not what you were looking for?

**Ms Cresswell:** Any small amount—

**MR SMYTH:** You talk about the viability of the community sector. How far does an extra \$36,000 go to keeping it afloat?

**Mr Reynders:** Our understanding is that 3.5 per cent was put in last year's budget to begin this year. That's an extra 0.2 per cent, because the wage cost index was slightly higher than previously forecast.

**THE CHAIR:** Last question.

**MR PRATT:** Just going back to your comment about the disability sector working strength, do you have any feel at all as to whether there are cuts behind the front-line working subsector, or are you concerned that most of the cuts will occur at the front end? Are you picking up any vibes at all?



**Ms Cresswell:** We don't know at this point in time. The only cut I know of in the disability sector is in community housing. And one of the services that deals with people with disabilities, which has community housing, is taking a cut of some \$53,000. As yet we're still waiting to hear, or waiting to gather what's happening out there in the sector.

We're just getting the phone calls now. Our phone is running hot at the moment as services are beginning to find out what's happening for them and to them. We would be asking for some consultation, you know. We're told we're going into consultation but it isn't consultation, we are walking into meetings to be told. That's why I held up all these documents—because I think we actually work to determine a way forward, and it looks like—and particularly the homelessness strategy—they've all been disregarded.

**Mr Reynders:** The other issue the budget papers seem to point to is that this financial year a number of money was actually moved out of funding ISPs into providing community access support. That money will not continue in community access support and will be put back into ISPs. Unfortunately, those community access support programs are running at full capacity or, indeed, beyond capacity. There are large waiting lists for those. So we're going to see the waiting lists for disability support services blow out even more.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Would you like to table those documents? Hansard can't read them from that distance.

**MRS DUNNE:** Would it be easier perhaps if the secretary took a list of the names of them?

**THE CHAIR:** We just need a list of the names of the documents.

**MR SMYTH:** Perhaps you could just read them out now.

**Ms Cresswell:** They are: *Breaking the cycle: The ACT homelessness strategy*; *Building our community: the Canberra social plan*; *Your guide to engaging with the community: ACT government community engagement manual*; *The social compact: A partnership between the community sector and the ACT government*; and the *Community sector funding policy*.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that. Thanks for appearing before us today. You'll get a copy of the transcript. Please get back to us with any corrections that you would like to make.

**HARRUP, MS TRISH**, Director, Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra

**GOONREY, MS CHRISTINE**, President, National Parks Association of the ACT

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** I am taking over as Deputy Chair of this committee. I apologise for the short amount of time that we are able to make available to community organisations. I would like to let you know that we are prepared to read anything that you have to say and you will be able to talk to any member later. I believe you were present when this yellow card was read out so I do not need to read it out again. You understand what is in it. Would you now make a statement and be available for questions?

**Ms Harrup:** Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. As you know, the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra is the peak body for environment and conservation in the ACT. I have with me today Christine, who is a representative of the National Parks Association of the ACT, one of our long-term member groups. I will provide an overview of our reaction to the budget that was handed down last week and Christine will address more specific issues arising from that budget.

In our view, the 2006-07 budget and associated functional review will have significant and adverse impacts on the protection and management of the natural environment in the ACT. We believe it will adversely affect environmental policy development and environmental regulation, and we see no evidence that these impacts have been given due consideration.

When we look at the 2005 budget papers we find that we had a Minister for the Environment; an identifiable environmental agency, Environment ACT, with its own public presence and identifiable agency head; specific funding against a specific set of outcomes under the forward outputs of \$20 million for nature conservation and land management and \$6.9 million for environmental management and regulation; and specific accountability indicators which link directly to that funding.

As a result of the 2006 budget and associated functional review we find that we have no identifiable minister for the environment; no identifiable agency for the environment, merely a branch within a large division of recreation and land management; no identifiable agency head; a single costing against a single outcome, output 1.5, environment sustainability, heritage and forestry services, \$41.7million; and no identifiable link with accountability indicators and costings.

Under the new ministerial arrangements the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services will have multiple and, we believe, conflicting roles. This will impact on the budget process, policy development and environmental regulation. In the future there will be no advocate for the environment during cabinet deliberations of the budget because there is no minister for the environment. Under the proposed departmental structure there will be no advocate for the environment during the budget process because there is no agency head with that responsibility and all bids will be channelled through one senior official with multiple responsibilities.

We are very concerned that, under the proposed departmental structure, conflicts of interest will be created—conflicts that will have a detrimental impact on environmental protection. The environmental agency has responsibility for developing and

administering environmental protection legislation concerning air, water, noise, ozone and chemicals. The environmental agency also has responsibility for administering the Nature Conservation Act, which has a specific regulatory role.

My colleague Christine will speak in more detail about some of the impacts and conflicts that we believe will arise from that regulatory role of the environmental agency being compromised within the proposed structure of the department, resulting from the functional review. We believe that in order for the regulatory role of the environmental agency to be properly fulfilled there needs to be an identifiable agency, an identifiable agency head with appropriate expertise and qualifications, and a sufficient level of independence.

Whilst we acknowledge the need to create savings and we support the centralisation of administrative and support functions to achieve that aim, we put it to you that centralisation of policy and regulatory roles will neither save money nor deliver good governance. On the issue of the rationalisation of advisory boards and committees, I concur with the previous presenter from ACTCOSS that at this stage there is no detail and no consultation, but we are also concerned that it will impact on the independence of advice. We also have concerns about the impact of policy decisions under the budget that affect other portfolios and will have an impact on the government's plans and its commitment to the environment.

As an example, we believe that the decision to close a number of schools will impact on achieving the aims under the sustainable transport plan, which aims to reduce the number of car trips to work. We believe that will be adversely affected by the need now for more parents to drive their children to school. Also programs such as the walking school bus will be adversely affected by that decision. We again see no evidence that those broader impacts have been taken into account. Finally, on the issue that is widely acknowledged as posing the greatest threat to our future, human-induced climate change, this budget does not deliver a cent towards any new policy measures or programs to curb emissions.

**Ms Goonrey:** It is worth mentioning at the outset that the National Parks Association is 45 years old. It was first formed to work on a national park for a national capital and we have been working on conservation issues around our natural estate ever since. What Trish has outlined is a rather worrying process. To begin with, there is no detail at all in the budget about what is being spent on the environment. As she said, there is just a simple single statement, a simple single outcome and no measures, so I cannot give you the sort of detail that other speakers have been able to give.

However, we have looked at and we have heard some information about the impact of the functional review on the operation of Environment ACT and other environment agencies, and we are deeply worried. We believe that the Legislative Assembly should also be worried because they will have profound implications on the way in which you will have to handle environmental issues. For example, we have no environmental champion in the bureaucracy.

One of the examples of that is resolving the debate that too frequent burns in the water catchment area will reduce water quality and promote water runoff. We have seen quite a bit about that in the press recently. How will that be resolved when Environment ACT is virtually a section within a branch, within a division, within a department? There will be

no senior bureaucrat to respond to public concern or to media attention. I draw your attention to Dr Cooper's article in the paper today in which she defended the actions of her agency and other agencies in carrying out the recent burn.

Who is going to do that for you? If it is not done at the bureaucratic level it will have to be done at the Assembly level. It will land on the floor of the Assembly. I would also like to remind you—and this is a going back a little into the past—about the kangaroo culling exercise when Dr Cooper again took full responsibility for public outrage. If there is no senior bureaucrat, if there is no agency here, that again will land on the floor of the Assembly.

Members of staff have lost the means to raise issues at a senior level within the system and to have them resolved before they become serious issues. I give as an example wild horse incursion from Kosciuszko into Namadgi National Park. That has the potential of being dealt with swiftly and effectively under the current system but I cannot see how it could be handled effectively under the proposed new regime.

We understand that we have already achieved 20 per cent savings in the environment portfolio over the past two years. That has resulted in a significant staffing loss. One of the ways of doing that was the merger of ACT Forests and existing park staffing. That has been carried out without any undue fuss. You are putting tree harvesters together with tree conservers. It has not come into the Assembly because of the leadership and because it has been resolved through good management. I do not see how that sort of issue could be resolved under the current circumstances.

As Trish said, there is no advocate for environmental funding in the budget process. I would just like to give you a brief example. There is funding in this budget for 44 kilometres of new fire trails. That will need maintenance over the next 30 years at least. Who will be the champion in the budget process for ordinary, average, everyday maintenance of the existing 55 kilometres of fire trails in national parks and reserves and an additional 44 kilometres?

There is no separate environmental representation in cabinet. We submit that this is a significant body of public opinion not represented in cabinet. That presents a potential to overlook problems of walking into political hotspots with little prior warning or capacity to respond speedily and effectively. There is even the potential for the Assembly to become involved in minor issues—for example, tree preservation issues and minor licence breaches. The conservator who decides on tree preservation at the moment is an agency head. Where is that person going to live? I am quite sure that the Assembly would not like to get involved in that.

Around this functional review impact—I cannot tell you how angry we are about the diminishing of the authority of our environmental guardians—we would like to give you a particular example from the budget documents that has aroused our strong suspicion as to the motives behind this reorganisation. Estimated savings from rationalising accommodation, human resources, finance and information services—that is a huge block of your operating budget—would yield \$1.29million. Integrating policy functions will save \$2.5 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you just repeat those figures, Ms Goonrey?

**Ms Goonrey:** Yes. Rationalising accommodation, human resources, finance and information technology services will yield \$1.29 million. Rationalising policy functions will save \$2.5 million, which is almost double. That is a hell of a lot of policy officers who are no longer doing the job. Our conclusion is that the policy function is being defunded.

If I have time I would like to look at the regulatory functions in Environment ACT. Our concern is that we are going back to the good old days when a junior officer in the old urban services department was charged with imposing environmental regulations on a more senior officer in the same department. An example would be internal regulatory functions, including dealing with air, water or noise pollution during the construction of roads. Of course, what remains of Environment ACT in this regulatory function is within the department and within the division responsible for road building. I have visions of a very junior officer knocking on the door of a very senior officer and saying, “Stop it. We are not impressed.”

External regulatory functions include ActewAGL’s operation of water and sewerage services under the Land (Planning and Environment) Act and the licensing of such services under the Environment Protection Act. To date, any disputes have been handled at an agency-to-agency level. There is clear potential for a conflict of interest at senior management level and an undermining of the regulatory regime that protects our environment should the structures remain in their proposed form. I could go on. For example, in the process of merging all of these, no senior environmental officer is involved in the transition planning level. We have all been through structural reviews and reorganisations and we know what that means.

What is missing in the budget? There is no response to climate change. My job here is to give you a very specific example: additional funding for research into appropriate response to invasion by species seeking refuge from climate change in their existing areas. If birds migrate into Canberra looking for refuge from climate change and they alter what is going on with our own bird population we will not have a clue. We have no money and we have no way of handling it. That is just one specific example. There is no money for implementation costs for the Namadgi management plan or the proposed lower Cotter management plan.

I would like to finish with a quote. We were talking about poetry outside. One of my heroes is historian Manning Clark. He used to divide people into straighteners and enlargers. The whole purpose of straighteners was to simplify things: to impose a broad view that made life easier. According to Manning Clark, enlargers were people who saw the complexity of human nature and understood that it needed more than just simple systems. I submit to members of the Assembly that if this restructure of Environment ACT goes ahead, environment in the ACT will have been well and truly straightened.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** We will proceed until 4 o’clock with this particular topic, which is five minutes over time. I hope that the next witnesses are prepared to stay until 4.30 pm. So that means brief questions. I will let other members ask questions on this and ask witnesses to give brief answers if they can.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a couple of structural questions. Ms Goonrey, I think you said you

did not know where the conservator would sit, is that right?

**Ms Goonrey:** That is exactly right. We tried to find out. We believe that there is no information or no decisions as to what the conservator's role would be.

**MRS DUNNE:** You are telling the committee that Environment ACT effectively has been dismantled?

**Ms Goonrey:** Absolutely.

**MRS DUNNE:** So will there be an entity called Environment ACT any longer?

**Ms Goonrey:** We are unsure of that. We understand that what is currently Environment ACT has been placed into organisational structures. But I cannot imagine that you could hold an agency structure at that reduced level.

**MRS DUNNE:** Ms Harrup, I think you said earlier that in previous years roughly \$40 million was set aside for a number of output classes and a number of agencies. That has all been put together now in one output class, which is a subset of another output class. I confess to you that I cannot track the money. Is there an increase or decrease? Is the money staying essentially the same, or are we seeing yet another cut in environment spending?

**Ms Harrup:** I do not believe there is sufficient detail in the budget papers to determine that. It is disappointing if you look at the *Budget at a glance*. Unlike other sections, under Environment there is no figure.

**MRS DUNNE:** I thought it was just me. I feel so much better now.

**Ms Harrup:** We have looked.

**MR PRATT:** Ms Goonrey, you said earlier that no senior environmental officer was involved in the rationalisation project. Did you mean that to date nobody had been involved in the rationalisation exercise or that nobody would be appointed in the transition process?

**Ms Goonrey:** We understand that jobs and roles have been allocated for the transition process. We are unable to identify any senior environmental officer responsible for any of the transition projects, other than Kowen Forest.

**MR PRATT:** Right. So you might therefore deduce that that means a total gutting of the agency as we once knew it?

**Ms Goonrey:** We have severe concerns that the people who are responsible do not understand environmental issues.

**MR PRATT:** Those who would be involved in the rationalisation?

**Ms Harrup:** I add that, at this stage, our understanding is that there will be three major clusters within the department. Recreation and land management will be one of a number

of functions sitting under a large cluster of land and that is to be headed up by a staff member coming through from Roads ACT.

**MRS DUNNE:** Are you saying that that will be part of Roads ACT, that Roads ACT will be part of that, or that the person is coming from Roads ACT?

**Ms Harrup:** A person is coming from that section.

**MRS DUNNE:** But you are not saying that roads and environment are all in the same structure?

**Ms Harrup:** No.

**MR PRATT:** Not yet.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** We do not know.

**MRS DUNNE:** We do not know. That is your best guess.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you for putting up with that whistle-stop tour of the apparent decimation of Environment ACT. We look forward to following that up with the relevant department. Ms Goonrey or Ms Harrup, if you have some written material that you would like to leave with us, that would be very welcome.

**Ms Goonrey:** Could I email it to the secretary?

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** You certainly can.

**MR SMYTH:** What was the funding in the 2005-06 budget for the environment?

**MRS DUNNE:** We do not know.

**Ms Harrup:** For 2006-07?

**MR SMYTH:** No, for 2005-06—the current year as opposed to the coming year.

**Ms Harrup:** Earlier I was referring to page 24 of BP2. In 2005-06 we had a total of \$40 million for environment, heritage and arts. In 2006-07 we have \$41.8 million for environment, sustainability, heritage and forestry.

**MRS DUNNE:** So that is arts out and forestry in.

**Ms Harrup:** And sustainability in.

**MRS DUNNE:** And sustainability in. Last year there was \$4 million or so in the output classes in the Chief Minister's Department for the Office of Sustainability.

**Ms Goonrey:** Page 325 gives some figures around environment and heritage, sport and recreation, Office of Sustainability and ACT Forests, as changes.

**MRS DUNNE:** But matching it is like moving a motion.

**Ms Goonrey:** We cannot match it.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** We will have to conclude it there.

**Ms Goonrey:** There are too many unknowns to solve the equation.



**MALONE, MR PETER**, Secretary, Unions ACT

**HAGGAR, MR CLIVE JOHN**, Branch Secretary, Australian Education Union, ACT Branch

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** You should understand 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 that you are protected from certain legal actions such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

**Mr Malone:** Unions ACT comprises 22 union affiliates with approximately 30,000 members affiliated to the council. At our recent council meeting, which is delegates from each of those 22 affiliates, we discussed the ACT budget. Our meeting occurred the day after the presentation of the budget. For the record, I would like to state the decision of our council in regard to the ACT budget. Delegates to council determined that through the delivery of a budget that fails the Canberran community the government is now indicating that its Canberra plan is all but dead. The 2006-07 ACT budget is a failure because, one, it cuts the superannuation for new workers, meaning proper investment for our ageing population will not occur; two, inadequate provision for salary increases means that all the good work of the Stanhope government in making ACT public sector wages and conditions competitive will be undone, and recruitment and retention will again be very difficult.

Three, cuts to staffing levels mean that quality service delivery will be undermined in both our public schools and the public service at large; four, the proposals for school amalgamation and closure are ad hoc and underfunded, which will lead to considerable community distress without strengthening the public education system; five, cuts to vocational education mean that the urgent issue of skills shortages will not be addressed; six, the restructure of the public sector will lead to considerable staff dislocation and the assignment of responsibilities to inappropriate agencies. In particular, the allocation of ACT WorkCover to JACS will seriously undermine the independence of the Occupational Health and Safety Commissioner and his staff.

A further determination of council was that in a desperate attempt to prove its economic management credentials the Stanhope government has sadly lost sight of the need to balance financial prudence with the needs of real people. Council determined that it will support the actions of all affected affiliates and their members in opposing the impact of all negative and ill-considered changes proposed by the ACT government through its budget.

That was the formal position taken by the delegates of Unions ACT. Those delegates, and indeed the affiliated unions, do not oppose change and do not suggest that the ACT financial situation does not require significant changes to be made in order to improve the overall circumstances for our community. What concerns us gravely is that these changes have not been properly considered, that these changes are based solely on an economic rationalist approach without really considering the social impact on our community as a result.

There have been no real details forthcoming to explain why these particular changes are the ones chosen by this government. It is not my intention to call for any particular report or other to be made public. That is not really the issue. The issue is now that there are decisions that are publicly made through this budget and those decisions need to be justified. To this point, we do not believe they have been adequately justified to our community. Thank you, Dr Foskey.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you. We will ask you some questions when we have heard Mr Haggar's presentation.

**Mr Haggar:** Thanks, Dr Foskey. I would like to hand up to the committee a small selection of material that we have put into the public domain. It highlights the seriousness in various ways of the issues we are facing. You will find in the package a short article for a community newspaper written by me; one of the 100,000 pamphlets that we have had printed and distributed in the ACT community highlighting the job cuts in the ACT budget to teachers in schools; a communication from a school principal to her community, one of many that have gone home from secondary schools, highlighting the damage of the loss of positions in her school and reflecting on the educational impact. Finally, to cover the issue of superannuation, you will note that we have provided the superannuation arrangements for private schools in the ACT, all of which are now superior to those available for new entrants into the public sector, as they have, of course, lost some 6.4 per cent employer contribution for the future.

The situation in education has been caught up very much with the school closure issues in the 2020 program but I want to address in the first instance the job cuts that are being imposed on the system by the budget, and to flag that over the next four years \$100 million worth of staffing will be removed from the Department of Education and Training, the vast majority of those dollars being from teachers' positions in schools. Ten per cent of the secondary work force is to disappear and the work picked up by the teachers in those schools for a paltry one per cent extra per annum on the budgeted salary figure for the three-year period. A salary figure that is being paid at this moment in the private sector is being fully funded by those systems.

We are also seeing a cut over this next three years of some five per cent of the funding available to the Canberra Institute of Technology. This is an organisation that to date has already experienced on an annual basis in real dollars a \$17 million reduction over the past decade. So, we are going to be moving to about some 20 million real dollars reduction in the funding that used to be provided to that organisation a decade ago.

With the job cuts, profit taking is going on by ACT Treasury. To provide the 1 per cent per annum salary increase that they are insisting on would have required the loss of 40 positions over the schools on an annual basis of three years. They are removing 145 positions from the schools and then another 86 positions from the central office. We are supposed to be engaged in a major curriculum review. We have the 2020 program in front of us, yet the capacity of the system to support such major changes is being absolutely gutted.

I just want to reflect on the 2020 program for the moment and highlight the fact that there is no community demand for the removal of a stand-alone secondary college in North Canberra. We certainly have to build a college by 2011 in Gungahlin and there are

sensible alternatives that would not deprive North Canberra of a stand-alone secondary college. In Weston Creek, if we were following the same approach that was conducted in West Belconnen—and I am on the record of this Assembly as saying that our organisation supported the closure of Ginninderra high school and Holt primary school and the amalgamation of Higgins into a larger school—that model should have been used in Weston Creek for a new primary school, and in the Tuggeranong area to replace Kambah high school, the two preschools and the two primary schools that are being removed.

The document itself is being treated with absolute derision by the teaching profession—the lack of data, the simplistic assumptions that are contained within and the impossibility of some of the proposals containing the students that are supposed to go to particular schools when their own closes. There is no consideration of timetable. A 6 December decision by government to close schools will mean that we have no capacity to staff schools adequately, whether they shut or they remain open for the beginning of the next school year. With the job cut overlaid on top of that we have no capacity to recruit, and if we can find vacancies to recruit, by the beginning of next year if we have no salary agreement we will be some 10 per cent in salary and superannuation terms behind the private sector.

We are facing the gravest crisis in the history of public education in this territory and it is being inflicted by appallingly thought-through plans masquerading—and it is almost Orwellian in the language—as a program for the improvement of public schools. Not even the ordinary students in our schools believe that you can have better programs by removing 145 classroom teachers, or removing the central support, or creating a level of disruption that is being introduced at the moment, in the way in which this program has been handled.

The price we are going to pay—and I believe this is a conservative assessment—will see our high schools become the residualised sector, the minority sector, within the next 12 months to two years, and I believe the whole system will head in that direction very rapidly as a result of the treatment that public education in schools and the CIT have had from this government in this budget. Every single gain that we have achieved over the past five years has been wiped out by this budget, and its impact will last for many, many years to come.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Are there any questions? I am not sure you have the luxury of 10 or 15 minutes.

**MR SMYTH:** The Chief Minister in his speech says about 500 jobs are going. The *Canberra Times* public service reporter reported it was an additional 500 jobs if you go through the numbers in budget paper 4. What is the real story? Does anybody know?

**Mr Malone:** Again, budget papers are extremely complex at the best of times and at the worst of times even more so.

**MR PRATT:** These are like the Da Vinci Code.

**MR SMYTH:** So, you are not sure what is really happening?

**Mr Malone:** No, I cannot give you a precise figure. I accept there is a swing and roundabout there. Jobs will go and yet jobs are going to be created. What the overall net figure is I cannot discern from the budget papers.

**Mr Haggar:** We have been given a net figure for education, including CIT, that is well in excess of 320 positions, just out of education.

**MR PRATT:** That is teachers and staff from central office?

**Mr Haggar:** That is right.

**MR SMYTH:** What is the long-term effect on employment opportunities for members if there is no support? We are setting up a skills commission but we are cutting CIT. Do you have concerns, particularly in the trades, for standard of education, a standard of output, occupational health and safety education?

**Mr Malone:** We are certainly very concerned about the cuts to CIT. CIT remains the primary deliverer of vocational education and training in the territory. It endured a number of cuts for a number of years under previous governments and was beginning to get back on its feet. Yet again, these cuts will impact very much in that sector.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** In relation to that, I heard announced earlier this week that the federal government is not giving the contract for English as a second language to CIT. I wonder if someone could go into more detail about that and indicate how that compounds the issues that you have raised?

**Mr Haggar:** We remain concerned about that particular program. For many years it has had enormous pressures through the contracting process. But what we know at this point in time is that the CIT has not won it, so we are going to lose those jobs to an external provider of services. But it is simply a small part of the \$3 million a year that CIT will be losing overall as a result of this budget. We are happy to provide further information as it comes out in relation to it. I cannot for the moment tell you who was the winning provider, but CIT was certainly the body which has had an award winning reputation for the provision of that English as a second language service to migrants.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** I had heard Mission Australia but I just wondered how it impacts on the qualifications—whether teachers will be recruited. I suppose that is all up in the air now and you do not know?

**Mr Haggar:** Yes. Well, it means there will be termination of contracts for those contract staff, and certainly the part-timers who work there will not have work. Hopefully, we will be able to place the permanent staff there in appropriate areas. They are highly skilled people, and in fact many of the people who hold significant promotions positions in the CIT have come out of that area over the years.

**MR PRATT:** On teacher cuts, I presume you do not have much of an idea where these cuts are going to come from. Do you have any feeling about the impact on the structure that has slowly been put together involving a few more mentors, and a few more lead teachers being introduced to schools? Do you have a feeling about what the impact on that leadership role in teaching will be?

**Mr Haggar:** One thing that the committee might consider doing is to ask for the newsletters of all of the secondary schools which have described in detail what the impact in each of those schools has been. I have given you one example there, but certainly the enrichment programs, excursions, additional support internally for numeracy, for literacy, all those sorts of programs with a pastoral care influence, are going to be extremely difficult to provide. Once the 10 per cent of the staff have gone in secondary schools—and that process will begin almost immediately as they introduce a new formula for schools to be staffed for next year—our members have no enterprise bargaining agreement. They will not undertake the required additional face-to-face teaching. There is a minimum 10 per cent additional workload being demanded of them. When you have fewer bodies in a school, I believe the workload implications will be even greater. So for the staff of next year, having had the incredible disruption with that 6 December close-off for whether or not your school remains open, we are going to be starting next year with major industrial issues and it has already been flagged—not directly, but flagged to us—that teachers refusing to take on the additional workload could be facing the WorkChoices legislation or disciplinary action.

**MR PRATT:** Right. Do you have a feeling for what the impact on the balance of experience will be? Is there going to be a prejudice exercise perhaps to force more senior, experienced teachers out and go for, shall I put it crudely, cheaper, newer, younger teachers? Is that a budgetary management issue? Do you have a feeling for that?

**Mr Haggar:** We now have, because of this budget, an enormous recruitment problem. So, if you can get a job that is paying up to 10 per cent more across the road in the local private school, certainly by next January eight per cent more in New South Wales, why on earth would you be walking into a system in the state of disruption that we are going to be in? I have had younger teachers already communicate to my officers that they are not staying around. They are looking to go overseas or interstate. I do not believe, given the way our system operates, that there will be discrimination against older, more experienced teachers, but we are simply not going to be able to attract them. A lot of members now who have worked beyond the CSS or PSS retirement age will be going in the face of this additional workload.

**MR SMYTH:** How is morale among the teacher work force?

**Mr Haggar:** Absolutely rock bottom. It has never been worse.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Were you consulted at all in relation to the 39 school closures?

**Mr Haggar:** No. As an organisation that is on record as supporting some when educational programs cannot be delivered, I believe that there was clearly a need for much more community consultation, much more consultation with the profession and certainly the schools that are being targeted. I believe that some of them are certainly targeted unnecessarily. I want to look at the data that led to the decisions about the rest.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You have not been shown any data?

**Mr Haggar:** No, none at all, despite requests.

**MR SMYTH:** Is there a feeling that some of the school closures are just sort of dummy closures—you know, we will put 40 on the table and settle for 20—or do you think the government is serious about closing all 39?

**Mr Haggar:** Well, I have to say I certainly hope it is an ambit claim.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** How useful is that?

**Mr Haggar:** Well, I will just go back to the massive disruption that this is causing.

**MR SMYTH:** Well, can I give you the next question. If it is just an ambit claim and they only want to close 27 of 40, what is the effect of this foolishness?

**Mr Haggar:** Certainly we will be starting 2007 with a much smaller system. Parents are already seeking to enrol their children, not necessarily in other government schools but in the non-government sector as well. For those coming out of primary school into their local high school, with the thought of losing 10 per cent of the staff out of that local high school, they know what is going to happen in quality of provision.

**DEPUTY CHAIR:** Can I just ask just two questions. One is, anecdotally have you heard how involved or prepared the education department staff itself were for the announcement? There has been some indication here from school groups that they were not able to get any information when they sought it from the department.

**Mr Haggar:** I do not believe that the department was fully aware of the breadth and depth of this proposal. Certainly, if this document was produced in the department they had their riding instructions from elsewhere in a very short time scale to produce it. As I say, the holes in this are enormous. Where is the new school that should have been built in North Tuggeranong to replace the five institutions that are closing? Where is the new primary school that should be in Weston Creek?

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** But you had made the department or the minister aware of that as your view? I am taking it that they had heard that view.

**Mr Haggar:** Through the West Belconnen process we made it very clear to the department and government in particular that if they were going to go down the path of a program of school closure, it needed to be built around worthwhile infrastructure improvement. What we have—and I have described it before as a fairly cheapjack exercise—is \$90 million over four years. It is not sufficient. Other than those schools that must be built, which is Harrison and the West Belconnen preschool to year 10 school—and down the track a little bit further the new college for Gungahlin—there is no new infrastructure. So communities have been seriously short-changed in Tuggeranong and in Weston Creek.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You mentioned already you are seeing a drift to the non-government sector, which is I think one of the concerns articulated by quite a few people after this bombshell hit us. Would you be able through your good offices to give this committee, which will be sitting for a couple of weeks, some figures as at, say, the next couple of weeks, as to numbers? One would be parents who will be sending kids to non-government schools, and secondly, perhaps parents who are taking kids out of schools

that are earmarked for closer?

**Mr Haggar:** There is no public process for that. From what I understand, the Catholic education system and independent schools are not providing the media with information about the number of inquiries or what have you. So we cannot do that, but you can track the historical trend. The ABS gives you those figures.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I just thought, through the fact that it is a heavily unionised work force, you might be able to provide some assistance about what people on the ground would know of their students.

**Mr Haggar:** At the moment I am faced with a circumstance where a couple of the closing schools are saying, “Can we run as a private school?”—that is the extreme—“We do not want to do it, but if that is the only way we will keep the site open that is what we are prepared to do”.

**MR SMYTH:** You said that the ACT government high school system runs the risk of becoming the minority sector.

**Mr Haggar:** That is correct.

**MR SMYTH:** What is causing this drift from government education to non-government education and what should the government have done to stop that drift, if it is truly dedicated to improving the quality of public education in the ACT?

**Mr Haggar:** We have had 20 years of politicians bashing public education. We have had enormous funding pressures and our secondary schools have had to deal with the increasingly problematic nature of our adolescent population. We live in an unbelievably speeded up world where young people have access to a whole range of activities, interests and distractions that have never existed to the same degree. A great many politicians in this country—and they are on both sides of the table, from the Prime Minister down—have taken a delight in targeting public education to no good purpose other than the political. Over the past decade both parties have spent money to provide a focus on our high schools but it has not been enough. There has not been enough public support out there. It has been there from time to time, but it has been too easy to demonise the public sector. Now, this purports to be a document that will rebuild public education on the basis of a 10 per cent cut in secondary staff. I do not think so.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** I think we might leave it there. It is 4.30.

**MR SMYTH:** Can I just ask one question?

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** Well, you may ask one question, but let us see how many questions need to be asked so we do not have the effect that we had last time.

**MR SMYTH:** It is something Mr Malone mentioned about the lack of independence, particularly of WorkCover. How important is it to have WorkCover as an independent authority, and what does the move of WorkCover into JACS do to its ability to do its job?

**Mr Malone:** The whole structure of WorkCover, and particularly the role of the Occupational Health and Safety Commissioner, was established to ensure there was a degree of autonomy between the functions of that agency and the rest of government. It has not functioned perfectly by any means. Nevertheless the principle of that autonomy is critical in order to ensure a consistent and fair approach to all in our community on occupational health and safety issues. The move to JACS we consider will place the commissioner, in particular, at the discretion or direct supervisory capacity of a mainstream agency. If that is the case, and that is certainly our reading of it, that independence and autonomy of action is simply removed and will undermine the appropriate processes for WorkCover.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** Are there any more questions? And are you prepared to stay for another question or two?

**MR PRATT:** Yes, I have one, if I may.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** Yes.

**MR PRATT:** Have you been advised what the rationale is behind the new model which sees CIT reporting to Treasury? Do you have any idea of what that is all about?

**Mr Haggar:** If it is a simplified method of report that allows a greater level of appreciation of the needs of the institute and its capacity to get budget figures up, I think it would be looked upon favourably by CIT. We certainly had major issues—and Mr Stefaniak would remember this when he was minister—where the department sat between the CIT and direct appreciation at the ministerial government level of its needs.

**MR SMYTH:** I will be quite quick. The education cuts on page 374 of budget paper 4 were from 5,456 to 5,063 staff, a cut of about 400 in education. What did you say the cut was to CIT, in teachers? They do not seem to have a head count.

**Mr Haggar:** When you are looking at the education figures, remember CIT has been moved out of the education portfolio. So it is about 57 million there. In terms of CIT it grows to an annual \$3.7 million by 2007-08. Then that occurs onwards into the forward estimates. So, by then it is some five per cent of its operating funds. As I said earlier, this comes on top of a reduction of \$17 million in real terms that took place in the previous 10 years.

**MR SMYTH:** And job losses? You mentioned job losses at CIT.

**Mr Haggar:** Because CIT has such a large part-time work force, and it has to because of the industry connections, it is difficult to say. But I could provide you with those figures if you like. I will not make a guess.

**MR SMYTH:** That will be terrific.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIR:** We look forward to any further documents, which can be given to the committee through the secretary. Thank you very much for your time today, and for those people who stuck around and observed as well. That concludes this hearing. We will meet again on Monday at 9.30.

**The committee adjourned at 4.33 pm.**