



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2004-2005)

Members:

MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2005

Secretary to the committee:
Dr H Jaireth (Ph: 6205 0137)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

The committee met at 9.34 am.

Appearances:

Mr Jon Stanhope, Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Arts, Heritage and Indigenous Affairs

Chief Minister's Department

Mr Mike Harris, Chief Executive
Dr Maxine Cooper, Executive Director, Arts, Heritage and Environment
Mr Darro Stinson, Acting Director, Environment Protection
Mr John Heinemann, Finance Manager, Environment ACT
Mr Geoff Wells, Manager, Parks and Conservation
Mr Daniel Iglesias, Manager, Canberra Nature Park, East District
Dr David Shorthouse, Manager, Natural Environment Policy and Research
Mr Rod Hillman, Manager, Public Affairs and Information
Ms Kate Naser, Acting Director, Corporate Management
Mr Hilton Taylor, Acting Executive Director, ACT Forests

Commissioner for the Environment

Dr Rosemary Purdie, Commissioner for the Environment
Dr Helen Sims, Manager
Mr John Heinemann, Finance Manager, Environment ACT

THE CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. I declare open this hearing about the 2004-05 annual and financial reports. I welcome the minister, officials, committee members and other MLAs.

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.

Today, we will be hearing from the Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope, as Minister for the Environment, and his officers. I ask officers who come forward to make a response to state their name for Hansard. If any questions are taken on notice, the committee would appreciate having responses within five working days of the hearing. It is the responsibility of witnesses to ensure that they meet the commitments they have made to answer questions on notice. The secretary will email a transcript to all witnesses as soon as it is available. Questions from the committee for today's annual report hearing should be relevant to the report for 2004-05.

A program has been provided in regard to the minister's generous availability of time. I ask all members of the committee and other members to adhere to this program. I would like to ensure that all committee members have an opportunity to put their questions to the relevant minister before we move on to other members' questions. Members are also reminded of standing order 235, which states:

When a committee is examining witnesses, Members of the Assembly not being

members of the committee may, by leave of the committee, question witnesses.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Stanhope: Thank you, chair. There is nothing specific that I wish to address at this time, other than to say that I and officers of the department are pleased to be here to respond to questions of the committee and all officers stand ready to render whatever assistance they can.

MS PORTER: Minister, page 2 of the report talks about the fact that arts, heritage and environment transferred from the Department of Urban Services to the Chief Minister's Department during the previous financial year. Why was this area moved, has the move been considered a success, and have any funds been saved by the move?

Mr Stanhope: To some extent, the move was simply a reflection of the change in the administrative arrangements which occurred subsequent to the last election, an election which saw the retirement of Mr Bill Wood, and a realignment of some responsibilities within the Department of Urban Services at that time, most particularly arts and heritage, which had been a functional responsibility of the then Minister for Urban Services, Mr Wood. It was reunited with environment, which was a responsibility that I had had previously. To some extent, there was the beginning of some thinking within my mind and perhaps the mind of others about the future of ACT Forests.

It is essentially a simple result of a change in functional responsibility. It is always an issue for ACT governments and has been since self-government, I have to say, that with a small jurisdiction, with a small number of ministers and with a relatively small number of administrative units or departments within the ACT government there is always some churning in relation to departmental structures to fit those realignments in ministerial responsibility. It was nothing more than that.

I believe that it is working well. I believe that the combination within Environment ACT of responsibility for arts and heritage, though arts might be seen to be perhaps distinct from some of the other responsibilities within that unit in an administrative sense, is working extremely well. To the extent that much of heritage is our natural heritage, there is a real connection or a synergy particularly between heritage and the environment, just as there is between arts and heritage. There are perhaps a million other computations that you might pursue, but I think that this one is working quite well. Mr Harris or Dr Cooper may have a view on that. Dr Cooper is more involved on a day-to-day basis than Mr Harris. If you wish to have further explanation, I am sure that Dr Cooper would be happy to give it.

Dr Cooper: It is working exceptionally well. We have found lots of commonalities in some of the processes. For instance, all the groups have major grant programs; so we have been looking at efficiencies in how to align those. Forestry has come together with the previous parks and conservation group. They have now formed the one group. It is very much thanks to some leadership by my colleague Hilton Taylor that those groups have been brought together. They are very strong in terms of fire management initiatives. We now have a very strong operational fire area. I would say that it is much stronger than it was prior to the amalgamation. There is a whole suite of things in the non-urban land area that we know we are going to deliver better because of the closer working

arrangement.

MS PORTER: So there are efficiencies in terms of working together. Are there efficiencies in terms of costs as well?

Dr Cooper: Absolutely. We have found savings of \$1.7 million through looking at our work, bringing the mergers together, and we think that it is working well.

MRS DUNNE: I thank Mrs Porter for raising this issue because I think that it is an important one. The org chart in the report essentially represents what things were supposed to look like during the last financial year. In that time, arts and heritage came in. I know that it does not really cover this year's reporting but, as of 1 July, there has been the reorganisation that involves forests. Could you give an exposition on how the line areas of environment and heritage interact with the Office of Sustainability and how those two things fit together, especially since—I know that it was not strictly in this reporting period—the new structure for the land managers has come into place?

Dr Cooper: The Office of Sustainability take the overarching role on issues across ACT government on sustainability. For instance, on water, they deal with cross-border issues and they deal with our regional agreements. We in Environment ACT then do things like the regulatory role for water. So we fit very well with them. We work together on projects. On initiatives such as looking at water issues across the ACT there is a senior officers working group and that working group not only has officers of sustainability and environment but also officers from other agencies, including ACTPLA, to ensure that we get a whole-of-government approach.

The approach is very much one of a team-based philosophy that drives how we work together. As you know, Mrs Dunne, the Office of Sustainability now has all of the greenhouse policy issues. We do not have any of that. However, like every other government agency, we look at our own practices and try to implement that. For instance, in the rebuilding after the fires of some of the accommodation/security housing that is needed, we are trying to achieve excellence well above what is normally required on energy and water issues.

MRS DUNNE: Is it fair to say that what we call Environment ACT is essentially operational and that policy, even down to the implementation of the water resources plan, actually rests with the Office of Sustainability, or do you still have involvement in implementation of, say, the water resources policies?

Dr Cooper: We still have involvement in the water resources policies. For instance, you would be well aware, I am sure, of the issues around bores. We still have that policy level and we are looking at reviewing legislation in that area.

Mr Harris: One of the interactions we constantly deal with, and you would all be familiar with it, is about where to draw the boundary line between a pure policy office and a purely line agency implementation office. The two work together and have to work together. You need line agency input or line divisional input to get practical policy and vice versa. You could argue, and I would not disagree, that the line can be moved at the margin from time to time. I think that it is important to understand, though, that the Office of Sustainability has some broader whole-of-government policy activities that it

looks after, including the broader water issues, the cross-border water issues which Dr Cooper mentioned, the application of policy positions that might come out of the broader climate change debate across the broader spectrum, and issues of that nature.

MR SESELJA: I refer you to page 149, dealing with some of the external sources of labour and services. I am interested in the one about Focus Coaching and the \$22,000 for strategic planning for the restructure/realignment of a new division. Could you talk us through what was gained from that contract?

Mr Heinemann: The expenditure there was in relation to the engagement of a consultant from Focus Coaching who provided assistance in strategic planning for the restructure/realignment of a new division. I guess that is a shorthand way of saying the realignment of functions of the business unit structure and the allocation of functions to those business units, with some indication of the areas where the savings might be achieved that Dr Cooper referred to previously.

MR SESELJA: I imagine that things such as strategic planning are a fairly standard part of what senior executives do. Is there a reason that that expertise in particular did not exist in the department and why external sources were needed?

Mr Harris: If I might intervene: we did use internal resources for a very large amount of the restructure, bearing in mind that we had two levels of restructure, if you like. We had divisional restructure occurring between arts, heritage and environment at the time and then we had a broader restructure across the whole department with BusinessACT and other functions leaving and a stack of other stuff coming in. We approach those restructures on the basis of using our internal expertise all the time, but for clarity and certainty we take external, third party verification and a bit of external expertise to make sure that we are heading down the right track. That is evident by the very small amount of money that we spent for that external verification and assistance.

MRS DUNNE: That was paid in July 2004. Since then this part of the department has gone through two other restructures.

Mr Harris: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: You will probably need to take this question on notice: as a result of the two other restructures, how much external consultancy work was done?

Mr Harris: We do not have that detail with us; you are quite right. I am perfectly happy to take the question on notice, assuming the minister is as well, and provide that to you.

Mr Stanhope: Yes.

Mr Harris: You are right: we continue to use external consultants for small bits of work.

MR SESELJA: My question probably needs to be taken on notice. Is it possible to get a breakdown of the \$22,000? Was it a lump sum payment or an hourly rate? Are you able to provide further details on that?

Dr Cooper: We can certainly provide further details.

MR SESELJA: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: In the graph on page 119 about output class 3.2 there is mention of the rebuilding of 109,000 hectares of ACT-managed land affected by the 2003 bushfires. Could you inform the committee as to what is happening in regard to the repair and reinstatement of infrastructure, including staff residences, fencing, roads, work depots, and recreational and educational facilities?

Mr Stanhope: I invite Mr Hillman to respond to that. He is the officer with direct oversight of that responsibility.

Mr Hillman: I can answer most of the question. With the reconstruction and rebuilding, many areas have been worked on in the financial year. One of the main areas is the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. During 2004-05, we had the shaping our territory report and a business case was put forward. From that business case, there was further refinement and we had the Sanmor report put together by a consulting group headed by Graeme Morris. From that group, we further refined the vision and from that we were able to go out to tender for the contract for the designing of Tidbinbilla.

Within Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve there was a range of construction projects undertaken. We had significant work done in the barbecue area on the electric barbecues installed there. We also had work done in the Jedbinbilla area, which was previously known as block 40, the old forestry block. We had work done on the Murrumbidgee River corridor. We had some walk trails completed linking the Cotter area and Point Hut, the full length of the Murrumbidgee corridor between those areas.

MRS DUNNE: Are all the fences between nature reserves, the park and rural leases completed?

Mr Wells: The issue of fencing between the reserve land and rural land has been a moderately difficult one, related particularly to the nature of the leasehold system in the ACT and the fact that leases have been issued at various times with quite different clauses in them relating to, firstly, the ownership and, secondly, responsibility for maintenance of the fences. Eventually, the minister and the government came to a solution which was agreed to by the rural lessees on how to proceed, and it has been proceeding and proceeding apace. I would say that significant progress has been made.

Under the leasehold situation, it turns out that many of the farmers are responsible for those fences. However, the government very generously agreed that the government would contribute half the cost, which basically meant that we would pay for the materials for the fence. The farmers still had to erect the fence. As you know, combined with a very long drought and the fires, many of the farmers do not have a significant income from their farms at this time, probably until the spring and they can sell something coming off the farm this year. Either they have been busy working off-farm to support their families and have not had time to erect the fences themselves or their farms have not produced enough income for them to pay someone else to erect a fence on their behalf. We have been working with them very patiently and been in constant contact with those farmers and we believe that every single one of them will be completed by the end of this financial year.

MRS DUNNE: When was the solution between the government and the rural lessees arrived at?

Mr Wells: I think it was in August 2004.

MRS DUNNE: How many lessees are directly affected and how many still do not have perimeter fences?

Mr Wells: If you took the number that were affected altogether by fires on their fences, probably in the order of 70 or 80, but the number remaining is 20, I believe. Some of those are partially done rather than not fully done. I would say that nine-tenths of the fencing has been done and one-tenth remains to be done.

MS PORTER: On pages 62 and 63 of the report there is mention of the focus on rebuilding the visitors facility at Tidbinbilla after the 2003 bushfires. Could the committee be given a bit more information about the work being undertaken there? Page 63 talks about what the government is doing as far as visitor services generally are concerned. The next part of my question is: how do you find out about the satisfaction of visitors with the services? Is there satisfaction from visitors to the various facilities?

Mr Stanhope: I will give a brief rundown of some of the specific tasks that have been undertaken and completed. As you are aware, the government—Environment Act most particularly—has been determined to ensure that we do enhance Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in terms of visitor experience and as an attraction for Canberrans and tourists to the ACT. I might ask Dr Cooper to speak in more detail about the plan for the future and where we are up to with that in terms of some of the major work that is being undertaken to restructure much of the facility there and the budget that has been provided for that.

Some of the on-the-ground work has been completed. For instance, almost all of the walking tracks have been reopened and upgraded. The koala wet forest enclosure and the walking tracks within that have been rebuilt. The ribbon gum amphitheatre has been rebuilt. The perimeter and enclosure fencing has been repaired and, where necessary, replaced. Roads that were significantly damaged by the fire, which was particularly fierce within the Tidbinbilla valley, have been resealed. Picnic tables, toilets and visitor facilities at that level have been repaired and replaced, and in some places enhanced, with additional gas barbecues and picnic areas provided.

The wetlands boardwalk and the viewing platform within the wetlands have been rebuilt. The fire trails have been repaired and some additional fire trails have been built. The Rock Valley and Nil Desperandum homesteads have been stabilised and we are doing further work. I will ask Dr Cooper to talk about that. Actually, the barbecues were not gas; electric barbecues have been constructed within the valley. There is continuing soil conservation and land management work.

We have established a significant corroboree frog breeding facility which we are in the process of enhancing or have just enhanced. In relation to the corroboree frog project, perhaps greater explanation could be given, but it has been particularly successful to date. The next phase, the breeding phase of captive corroboree frogs, might represent some interest to members and we might have corroboree frog people here to talk about

that. It is quite interesting at a scientific or environmental level.

The brush-tailed rock wallaby breeding facility has been re-established and some additional rock wallabies, including just recently a rock wallaby donated by New Zealand via Victoria, have arrived. I think a male brush-tailed rock wallaby has arrived, from which we will breed. We are, of course, removing unsafe trees, which is very significant work. One of the issues for us, an ongoing issue, in the Tidbinbilla valley is dead and dangerous trees.

I will ask Dr Cooper and perhaps Mr Hillman to talk more about the nature reserve works in progress. There is a significant project, funded to the tune of \$7 million, in relation to the nature reserve, including a nature discovery playground and a complete upgrade particularly of the dams. I think members would be aware of some of the issues that we have faced over the years in relation to the quality of the water and the dams essentially that have been constructed in the wetlands. We are doing significant work to upgrade those, combined with the discovery playground and the work that we are doing in the reserve, particularly on the wetlands. I think that it will significantly enhance Tidbinbilla, but there is much more we would like to do. Dr Cooper, perhaps you could speak briefly about the work in progress and where we are up to in relation to the design and reconstruction of those major works.

Dr Cooper: I am actually going to hand it to the person who daily thinks of Tidbinbilla as it is his project. Before doing so, I would like to share with the committee the visitor numbers. The visitors are really coming back to Tidbinbilla. We are getting very high visitor numbers. They are nearly reaching the numbers that were there prior to the fire. There is a great deal of interest in being out there and seeing the recovery, but also in using the facilities which we have put in place. I think the visitors are coming out to watch the development of the whole site as it emerges.

We had an extraordinarily successful Easter extravaganza. Seven thousand people came for a one day event. We have had theatre there. We have had a whole host of things. We have had the ranger-guided walks. It has surprised us, delightedly so, that people are really wanting to come back. There are a few projects that I will ask Mr Hillman to give more detail on. One is security housing. I would also like him to talk about our heritage sites, Rock Valley and Nil Desperandum.

Mr Hillman: We are scheduled to have three security houses rebuilt within the conservation estate, one at Glendale, one at Riverview and one at Bendora. These are out for tender as I speak. While we are having this meeting, some of our officers are giving a compulsory briefing to prospective contractors for tender and construction as soon as possible. Assuming that we get the right tenders put in, construction will be completed before winter of next year.

Rock Valley and Nil Desperandum are pise buildings in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Rock Valley, the larger of the two, was in the valley floor of Tidbinbilla. The fire all but totally destroyed that building. The walls were left. After consultation with heritage surveyors and architects, the recommendation was that we put a roof over it, but it will not be able to be restored to its condition. Very soon, we will have a roof over it, the walls will be stabilised and the area will be available for interpretation and viewing.

Nil Desperandum is much higher on the hill. It is still within the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, but it is up in a national park area. The intention is to return that building to a habitable condition, using the people who will be working at Rock Valley. We need to put the roof on Nil Desperandum, re-floor it, put the windows in, put a veranda around it and do some work on landscaping. The consultants and the builders for those buildings are highly specialised and it has been a very long process to work with them. There has been a lot of debate within the community on the right way to move forward with those. We are positive that the outcome will be great on those two buildings.

MRS DUNNE: What is the problem at Rock Valley? Are the walls in a highly fragile state as a result of the fire? Have they dried out too much? What is the actual problem that it cannot be restored?

Mr Hillman: The construction itself. Pise is a rammed earth construction and the particular one at Rock Valley, like most pise constructions, did not have foundations laid. They were laid straight onto the ground. With the combination of the fire and the age—you are looking at a building built in 1904—large cracks have developed and the reports we have are that it is at the end of its day.

MRS DUNNE: It is basically a function of the lack of footings.

Dr Cooper: There has been a high level of involvement by the heritage council and the heritage unit, which have offered this direction for us. It was not a matter of us leading in this regard; it was a matter of combining the skills across some areas, and certainly heritage was at the forefront in terms of what to do.

MRS DUNNE: Does that mean that, apart from Nil Desperandum, we have probably lost all the rural pise houses?

Mr Hillman: No. There is still Congwarra at the front, which Michael Flint lives in. It is a very good example of a pise. We have other pises out near Kowen as well.

MS PORTER: Dr Cooper, you mentioned the visitor numbers and you were saying how satisfactory and pleasing they were. Part of my question was about how you find out how satisfied people are with the experience of visiting the area. What processes do you use and what are the levels of satisfaction?

Dr Cooper: Mr Hillman is the manager of visitor services.

Mr Hillman: Are you talking specifically about Tidbinbilla or generally?

MS PORTER: I am focusing on Tidbinbilla, yes, but there is mention on page 63 of the report of a number of visitor services. I am just wondering how you measure the satisfaction with those services and what kind of feedback you are getting.

Mr Hillman: We physically count the number of people coming through and we have kept quite a detailed record of that over the years so that we can see visitation trends. We compare the visitation on a monthly basis, a weekly basis, which days are more important than others, and the aggregate as well. Also, we have the visitors book at the visitors centre and people make comments. We delve into that as well. It is a very

important tool for us. Also, for the ranger-guided activities we take formal feedback. The rangers and other staff at Tidbinbilla conduct a minimum of three ranger-guided activities a week. During the school holidays there are much more. On the weekends we do the majority of that. We record the numbers there. We record feedback from the participants so that we can get a fair indication of the visitor satisfaction.

MS PORTER: What is it? Are you getting good feedback?

Mr Hillman: It is excellent. I think the real proof is that we have a steadily increasing attendance at these. Also, as Dr Cooper mentioned, at the Easter extravaganza last year we had our largest attendance ever, which was a tremendous achievement. We started a new thing out there. We did a great bushwalk combined with that event. From that we got an evaluation from about 85 per cent of the participants and every one of them was very happy with the organisation and the outcome of that walk.

MR SESELJA: Page 135 talks about capital works management, including restoring and enhancing the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. The original project value was \$2 million and the budget for this year was \$900,000, with a total expenditure to date of \$205,000. What is the reasoning behind that fairly significant shortfall between the budget and the actual spending?

Mr Hillman: We are carrying a lot of that money over. It is a long-term project, going on for three years, and there are certain processes we need to do. We have done the initial feasibility work, we have come up with the design and we have now engaged the designers. Once the design work is completed, a project manager will come on board and we will divvy up the task to go through to construction, so we need to carry funds over from year to year.

MR SESELJA: I understand that. I am just wondering whether, because it was budgeted that the expenditure would be \$900,000 this year, there has been any delay, whether you planned to spend it but something happened to slow things down. Has anything like that been experienced or had you always anticipated, even though it was budgeted at \$900,000, that you would only spend a small proportion of that?

Mr Hillman: We are on track. There have not been delays with this project.

MRS DUNNE: There seems to be some inconsistency. Either Dr Cooper or the Chief Minister said that the Tidbinbilla project was for \$7 million.

Mr Stanhope: There was also insurance money.

MRS DUNNE: The \$2 million appropriated here is on top of the insurance money.

Mr Stanhope: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Dr Foskey has a question on forests.

DR FOSKEY: I do not have a question on forests. However, I have just ascertained that this is the right place to ask some questions about many other areas and my office is now looking at the urban services report to devise them. Can I go ahead?

THE CHAIR: Certainly.

DR FOSKEY: Can I talk firstly about the Office of Sustainability?

Mr Stanhope: That comes under the Chief Minister's Department.

Mr Harris: When we do the central part of the Chief Minister's Department.

THE CHAIR: When it comes up before PAC next week or the week after.

DR FOSKEY: That is news for some of us.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about the catchment area and the minor new works listed on page 136. There has been some restriction on the public use of roads within the catchment area. I have noticed some infrastructure improvements on those roads. When will the roads be reopened for recreation and sporting use?

Mr Stanhope: Are you talking about the lower Cotter?

THE CHAIR: In the Pierces Creek area.

Mr Stanhope: Mr Taylor, who has responsibility for management of the lower Cotter, will be happy to answer the question.

Mr Taylor: The question was in two parts, if I understood it. The part referred to in here is actually work done in the upper Cotter catchment in conjunction with Actew, if I am correct, and there were road restrictions in that area and on access to that area.

Mr Stanhope: That is in Namadgi National Park. Talk about the lower Cotter catchment.

Mr Taylor: With regard to the lower Cotter catchment, there has been ongoing work there since almost immediately after the bushfire. I guess the earliest part of that was the non-urban land use study, which gave some broad directions in terms of what may or may not go ahead, and subsequently there has been a number of committees and studies looking at various aspects within the catchment. A lot of them overlap—weeds, fire, roads, access, recreation, revegetation. There is a whole host of issues there.

With regard to the roads, the land management agencies have been working very closely with Actew and Actew's consultants in looking at mechanisms for stabilising those roads and stabilising the runoff that occurs in association with the roads. With those, we have had some restrictions put on access for recreational and other operational activities in the catchment. The timing of the reinstating or opening of those roads will be different in different areas. As the areas become more stable and structures that have been put in place jointly with Actew begin to work and capture the silt and sediment, I expect that various activities will be opened up over time. I do not think it will be the case that, as of a particular date, the catchment will be open for business. It will be a gradual thing as the area regenerates.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that replanting will happen first?

Mr Taylor: The replanting program has been ongoing since June 2003, immediately after the fire, and there has been a combination of species going back in. There have been public open days when there have been community plantings. There have been contract-scale plantings to hasten the revegetation of the area. There has been a whole range of activities going on to restabilise it. Grass seeding went on as early as May 2003 to help stabilise the area. There has been a huge effort put into planting already.

MRS DUNNE: In the last two or three months there was another report commissioned from CSIRO. Can you tell me where that is at and what you hope to find from it?

Mr Taylor: It is currently with CSIRO. The findings of that have not been made public to me. I am not sure that anyone else has been made aware of that. They are looking at revegetation options for the catchment and I think they have a fairly wide mandate in terms of what the options may be.

MRS DUNNE: What were the terms of reference?

Dr Cooper: We will take that on notice. As you would appreciate, we are the operational arm and the Office of Sustainability is managing that study. We are aware of them, but I do not have the terms. I broadly know.

MRS DUNNE: That is fine. The government commissioned the study in the last two or three months, 2½ years down the track. Chief Minister, are you concerned that perhaps we are doing work later than we should and that that sort of work should have been done more up front than it seems to be being done?

Mr Stanhope: I think we all have an anxiety about the time and the seasons and would wish perhaps that some of the restoration or rehabilitation might have been able to have been done earlier or faster. At one level, of course, we are very much in the hands of nature and the grip of the drought has impacted. I will ask Mr Taylor to confirm it, but I think that there is no doubt that the harshness of the last three seasons in terms of rainfall particularly has impacted quite significantly.

On a couple of occasions, we have cancelled mass orders, I think. I have a recollection that 18 months ago we cancelled an order for over one million pine trees because we did not believe that they would survive. So, to that extent, I would accept that some of the planting has not been at a pace that we had originally planned or hoped. We have cancelled bulk orders of trees at different stages. I would have to seek confirmation of that, but I have some memory of that. Going to the heart of your question—

MRS DUNNE: Which was really about the planning rather than the planting.

Mr Stanhope: Yes. At the heart of your question is the extent to which the original recommendations of the shaping our territory report are now being implemented. The latest report commissioned is, to some extent, an audit on an earlier report and earlier recommendations which flows quite genuinely from a shift, certainly within Actew and accepted by the government, in relation to the extent to which the lower Cotter catchment would be used as an ongoing water source, and it has required us to rethink.

There has also been, I am prepared to acknowledge, a reinvigorated debate around some of the original planned planting structures and the network of replanting. There has also been, to some extent, an additional focus, a focus that was very much brought to the fore by concerns expressed by the EPA, in relation to the role that roads play—this goes to the question previously asked by the chairman; I would defer to Mr Taylor and others on it—in siltation, runoff and turbidity. I think we have a view, as we look at the devastated lower Cotter catchment, at perhaps some of the lack of regrowth and the lack of trees.

I think we tend to underestimate in regard to the thousands of hectares of devastated landscape where there has been, say, a lack of regrowth that the area that one needs to focus on in terms of the source of much of the turbidity is the roads and the runoff from the roads. Stabilising those by not have roads at all has been part of the debate. I think that some of the concern about forestry is not so much about the forestry activity, the cutting down of trees, as about the impact of the roads. I defer again, but these are a part of the mix and much of the focus by Mr Taylor and nature resource management, and prior to that by ACT Forests in combination with Actew, has been around silt traps, regrading and realigning roads, the redesigning of roads and the provision of appropriate runoff to reduce runoff and turbidity.

I cannot recall the terms of reference—I am more than happy to provide those—in terms of the work that we have asked of the CSIRO. It is very much a desktop study around world's best practice in relation to afforestation of catchments. There is live debate around pine trees in a catchment and there is a level of lack of understanding around that. There is assumption in some quarters that pine forest catchment is inherently bad—do not have it—yet there is a broad view which has been expressed to the government over the last three years that it really has almost nothing to do with the species of tree; it is about the quality of management.

One point of view is that whether it is a pine tree or a eucalypt in terms of the quality of the catchment is essentially irrelevant. To assist the debate and perhaps to resolve some of the conflict, I am quite happy for CSIRO now to put on the table an advice to the government on the view of the world on the revegetation and management of catchments. Mr Taylor, if I have gone off at a tangent or said something that simply was not true, I would be grateful if you would correct the record.

Mr Taylor: The only point I would like, going back to Mrs Dunne with regard with regard to why have this piece of work now, is that it has been an evolution. We have been faced with the landscape there and a restoration program for which we cannot pick up a textbook and read how to do it. It has been a learning process for the specialists and scientists involved from every aspect of it. There have been academics involved, there have been practitioners involved, there has been industry involved and there has been innovation, changes in systems and working with different groups which have never been involved in this sort of thing before. As a consequence of that learning process, we have identified gaps in the knowledge and that is why CSIRO has been called in at this late time.

DR FOSKEY: I note for the committee's interest that the transfer of ACT Forests did not actually occur until 1 July and, technically speaking, I am not sure that this is the right place for it, but we have hastily prepared ourselves. Earlier this year we asked for copies of some of the studies that informed the decision to reduce the area of land

planted back to pines. We were not successful in getting copies of some of those studies. I think that they fed into the shaping our territory process. Anyway, the question I want to go on with—

Mr Stanhope: I might just take further advice on that. I must say that I thought we had provided those reports.

DR FOSKEY: I am not sure that we got all of them, but I probably need to go back and check as well.

Mr Stanhope: I do, too. I was not aware that there was any issue with that. I honestly thought that they had been provided to you. I will pursue that issue. I am sorry about interrupting you, but it surprised me to hear that.

DR FOSKEY: That is all right; I am always pleased to be interrupted by facts. I am interested in the disbursement of the insurance money. I am wondering whether, at the time the money came through, a quantity of pine seedlings was bought and, in a sense, that quantity of seedlings is shaping the decision making about how many will be planted. I am also interested in whether the seedlings that were bought—as you know, the Greens do not support the replanting of pines—were the best quality seedlings that we could have got. Those are issues that you might like to comment on. I am interested in the disbursement of the insurance money, if it arrived in a great big lump sum.

Mr Stanhope: I will ask Mr Taylor to respond in relation to the seedlings and Mr Harris in relation to the insurance. If we could just do the plantings, I think that it has to be said that, after the fire, there was an ordering initially, I think, of pine seedlings and subsequently eucalypts.

Mr Taylor: And natives.

Mr Stanhope: Natives were in the first order, too. We will talk initially about the pine seedlings that were purchased and planted. I am not sure what subsequent plantings have been undertaken of pine. At the same stage, we also did order natives for the riverine areas and the areas closer to the dam, and Mr Taylor might refer to those. Mr Harris can talk about the funding, insurance and some of the issues around the financing of forests and the way in which the moneys have been recorded. Mr Taylor, if you could speak about the nature, the numbers, the genesis and the ancestry of the seedlings.

Mr Taylor: With regard to the ordering of the pines following the fires and the insurance payouts, there is no link between the number of pine trees ordered and a lump sum insurance payout. The pines are ordered each year as required in terms of land that is being prepared and the planting program envisaged for the year coming up. The planting program and the size are set through a budget process each year, the same as other programs.

With regard to the plantings that have been undertaken, there has been a mix of both pine seedlings and native seedlings. For the native seedlings, we spoke with a range of advisers to take information about which genetic stock should be used. We have used species that are appropriate and natural to the area. The actual genetics of those is not endemic because the seed from that exact area was not available immediately after the

fire. We have used high-quality seedlings from nurseries within the capital region, primarily from the Bombala and Holbrook areas.

With regard to the pine seedlings, they are being delivered to us by nurseries specialising in radiata pine growing at Tumut and two other nurseries in Victoria. These seedlings are what they call GF19. They are the standard best practice seedlings required for sites of this nature. They are not cuttings or clones; they are actually seedlings. That is a trade-off between the quality of the seed stock that you get versus the price that you pay. For the particular landscape we have here, we cannot justify the cost of using cuttings, which are more expensive and only deliver marginally better outcomes in this particular landscape.

Dr Cooper: May I add one thing about pines? The team is not ordering any pines at the moment for the lower Cotter catchment for the next season. We are actually waiting on the findings of the CSIRO study.

MRS DUNNE: So when is the planting season?

Mr Taylor: Depending on the rainfall, our preference would be to start around the first week in June and to finish our pine planting by the third week in August, approximately. Our eucalypt plantings, depending on the season, can extend well into the spring. We are still planting our native plants as we speak. We are just about at the end of that planting season.

MRS DUNNE: I just want to follow up briefly on that. Does that mean, Dr Cooper—you said that there were no pines being ordered—that you are not planning to plant any in the next growing season beginning next June?

Mr Taylor: No, that is not correct. We have 600,000 pine seedlings ordered for next year but we have land prepared, both inside and outside the catchment, where those seedlings can go.

MRS DUNNE: I meant specifically in relation to the lower Cotter catchment. You're not planning to plant pines in the next growing season?

Dr Cooper: Not at this moment in time. We are going to wait for the CSIRO study, which will then help shape what we do.

Mr Stanhope: Just on the insurance, that is one other part of the question we are happy to respond to.

Mr Harris: I think Mr Taylor has actually answered the question with his comment that there is no direct correlation between the insurance payout you get and what you have to buy with that insurance payout, which I think was the essence of your question.

Mr Stanhope: No, it was more general than that.

DR FOSKEY: Did you receive the money as a lump sum from the insurance? How does that work?

Mr Harris: Essentially, yes. It might have come in two bits, but essentially yes. Once the insurance assessors have made a judgment about what the entitlement is under the terms of the policy, they essentially give you a cheque, and we put it in the bank.

DR FOSKEY: And that's still in the bank?

Mr Harris: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: Given that we didn't really look at this before this meeting, if we go to the annual report will we see how much has been spent, where it has been spent, what's left and where that is going to be spent?

Mr Harris: Yes is the short answer to that. There are two essential points. Once the insurance assessor has determined a value and we as the claimant have agreed with that value, they hand a cheque over, and what we do with it is essentially up to us. The second point to make is that, from the insurance assessor's point of view, they would like to make that assessment and have it agreed within 24 hours if they can possibly achieve it, because the sooner they achieve it the lower the claim.

DR FOSKEY: I have observed, and I have heard from various people who are watching the catchment, that there is such a prodigious amount of natural regrowth that in many cases there doesn't seem to be a need for planting, and also that the pine wildings that are growing aren't perhaps the right stock. How are you treating wildings? Are you treating them as pines if they're growing in the right place?

Mr Taylor: I'm happy to answer that question. The issue there is that the regeneration following the fire is incredibly variable across the sites. There are probably three or four categories of regeneration. There are areas where there is excellent natural regeneration of native species that are endemic to the site, that are coming back without much competition from pine wildings and/or other introduced weeds such as blackberry and some of the grasses. On those sites we are using them, particularly in our riparian areas, on some of our steeper slopes, to reinstate those areas back to the endemic species on those sites. It is fantastic. It is a fairly low-cost option for the government and it is getting exactly the species we want back on those sites.

We are finding in other areas that there is very robust regeneration of weeds competing with natural species regeneration, and we have a real dilemma on those sites, because, if we don't go in and intervene in some ways, we are going to wind up with an absolute weed thicket. It is very difficult to know what to do, because the intervention also takes out the natural regeneration. It is hard on the scale that we have out there to be selective, to take out the weeds and not the natural regeneration. In some areas we have patchy pine wilding regeneration occurring, and we have done surveys to identify potential areas where we could let that grow through and, perhaps outside the catchment, grow it to a short-term rotation, liquidate that pine wilding growth for a low-value crop of, say, pulpwood or fuel wood or something like that, and then help stagger the age classes of the regeneration and get a mosaic going. So we have a site by site treatment; it is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

DR FOSKEY: Have you thought about planting particular kinds of pines that would service a boutique market, rather than growing what I believe is the less good stock, to

create a boutique industry here? Are you doing any of that?

Mr Taylor: Yes. One of the submissions to the non-urban land use study was commissioned by CSIRO and the University of Notre Dame, I understand, and Jaakko Poyry Consulting. They did an in-depth study of alternative species that could be planted on the sites out there from a boutique industry to commercial scale—a whole range of considerations—and that study can be made available. It was one of the main submissions into the *Shaping our territory* report.

Dr Cooper: What Hilton and the team are involved in is adaptive management but also, which has not come out in the discussion this morning, they have an across-agency team. Water quantity and quality is the paramount objective, and driving that we have on the team people from ActewAGL and we have the EPA participate. We have Dr David Shorthouse, who is here today, from a flora and fauna perspective. It is very much a multidisciplinary team working together, but the primary objective is the water quality and quantity. The other one that I didn't mention, which is particularly important, is fire management. Mr Mike Costello, Commissioner Dunn and I meet and we are certainly focused on making the outcome of this something that we can all be proud of into the future. But I do have to emphasise what my colleague Mr Taylor has already done: this is about adaptive management, learning very much and then modifying. The solution is not clearly there.

DR FOSKEY: I know that, and I have seen the evidence, but I still know that there are things happening that aren't good management. For instance, pushing remnants from the fire or tree trunks together, pushing them vertically down the hill, burning them in a hot burn, sterilises the soil and sets up drainage lines. There still appear to be some issues that could be looked at, and that is an important one because soil quality and water issues are involved.

Mr Taylor: There are a couple of things I'd like to talk about there. One is that we have an obligation to remove a lot of the burnt debris off the sites. Those burnt pine trees are a huge fuel issue from a fire management point of view. They are also a huge issue from an access point of view for any subsequent treatment, whether it be going back to natives or some introduced species, because of the weeds and things. We cannot get in there and access the area to maintain it if we don't remove the pine debris from the site.

The pine debris that is pushed is all pushed and stacked on the contour, using bulldozers. All of the debris that is stacked up and down the hill has been snipped off using a machine that does not remove the root ball from the soil; it places the trees in rows up and down the hill because it is too steep on those areas to work across the hill on the slope to make those areas. We are then working with Actew to put in place systems to capture any sediment or run-off on those areas and we have experimented with hydromulching and other operations to try to stabilise some of those areas, in conjunction with the EPA, to try to develop systems to stabilise the areas where the windrows were. The ash beds created by those windrows in the short term create a scar on the landscape, but they are quite nutrient rich from the ash and they wind up being some of the most prolific growth a way down the path. The problem we have is that there is a short-term snapshot of a bad outcome as we move towards a long-term vision for a stable catchment.

MRS DUNNE: Could you give the committee a rough estimation of how much of the windrowing is on the contour and how much is across the contour?

Mr Taylor: Probably about 20 per cent of the area is over about 20 degrees, and once an area gets over about 18 or 20 degrees it becomes too steep to work comfortably up and down, to be able to push on to the contour with the windrows, and then we get on to those steep areas. We are modifying that. In some areas we are putting in turkey-nests, rather than long lines up and down the hill—whatever we can do to minimise that runoff, we are doing. Every one of those areas where it is so steep that we have to work up and down the hill is being returned to natives; we are not planting pines back onto those steep areas at all.

THE CHAIR: Minister, Mr Taylor mentioned earlier on planning and riparian zones. I have been personally involved with Greening Australia working in those zones. Can you advise how successful these operations with Greening Australia have been in regard to community involvement?

Mr Stanhope: I will take the opportunity to say that the partnerships that the government has developed and will continue to develop in relation to replanting, of course most noticeably with Greening Australia, have been fundamental in involving the community and giving the community some ownership of bushfire recovery. I will ask Dr Cooper and Mr Taylor to respond to the specifics of your question, but I just want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the fantastic partnership and role of Greening Australia and some other organisations.

Mr Taylor: The relationship set up with Greening Australia was largely attributable to an outcome of the non-urban land use study, where there was a recommendation that each subcatchment should be looked at by a group of experts, for want of a better word, to see how they would be re-established. Putting together that group of experts, ACT Forests and Greening Australia saw that they had a lot of synergies. We had land to be re-established, we had a budget to do site preparation and other activities. Greening Australia had an incredible network into the community and the technology to get the right mix of native species into some of these areas that was outside our core expertise initially in terms of changing it from a commercial-focused forest operation back to a landscape regenerative process. So there was this great synergy between Greening Australia and ACT Forests initially, and through that process we have well over 20,000 trees in the ground and we have had individual events where over 400 participants from the community have come out on a Sunday morning to plant trees, thousands at a time. It has been a fantastic outcome from the point of view of linking the community, getting people out there, seeing the extent and the complexity of the issues in the catchment and re-establishing it. It has been good.

THE CHAIR: I took part in the Holdens Creek one directly after the last federal election; it was a good cleansing exercise.

Mr Taylor: One other comment on that: about a year or so into the project Greening Australia did a survey of survival and it was in excess of 80 per cent.

Dr Cooper: The other thing the team are doing in various areas is combining tree planting with an event like a marathon or a triathlon. Recently, we had the family walks

along the Murrumbidgee and, to thank the environment, at the end of the walk we asked them all to plant a tree. Greening Australia ran that. So it is very much about not just planting necessarily as we traditionally have, but with the triathlon, marathon, family walks to plant a tree to say thankyou.

MS PORTER: I, too, participated in the Mount Macdonald area Sunday week back, I think—I lose track of the time. We went on one of those walks to have a look at the regeneration from the plantings that we had done, so that was a fantastic opportunity to see that. My question is around volunteering more generally. The report notes on page 64 that there are community volunteer programs and the government has taken initiatives to increase the volunteer numbers. I cannot find this in the report but I was wondering if we are aware of the number of volunteers that are involved in the area generally. If that's not available now, maybe I could get that on notice at some stage. I would appreciate it if we could have that in some way where I can find it in future reports—say under “v” for volunteering at the back. Are there any management issues associated with volunteer training, insurance and risk management, and what support staff that are working with volunteers, such as rangers and others, get in working with volunteers with the special issues that do arise from time to time?

Mr Stanhope: I'm sure Dr Cooper would be happy to respond to that. Environment ACT works with a range of volunteer organisations, not just through Greening Australia but through all of our Parkcare groups of a range of descriptions. Our partnerships with community organisations are a vital part of the work that Environment ACT does in ensuring community ownership of the environment and the importance of the environment.

Dr Cooper: To answer your first question last: we do make sure our volunteers are covered by the relevant insurance. In the past we have had insurance problems, and at those times we suspended activities with our community members until we secured the right insurance. So we certainly do do that. To answer the question before that, on risk: the staff involved certainly do undertake an analysis of the risks involved, and then there is a program to minimise those risks. So insurance and risk analysis are certainly part of working with them. But I can give you a bit of an overview of our community groups. The Environment ACT area manages volunteers in nature reserves—Namadgi National Park through a network of 14 Parkcare groups—and we encourage sustainable rural enterprises through the rural Landcare program, so it is also on private lands. Each of these groups is also a member of one of the three catchment groups—the Molonglo, the Ginninderra or the southern ACT—which operate in the ACT to coordinate the on-ground works. As I am sure you would appreciate, it is better to work in those catchment contexts, even though you have the Parkcare people to achieve the outcome you are after.

There are 14 Parkcare groups, 10 of which operate in the Canberra nature park reserves, such as Aranda bushland, Cooleman Ridge, Farrer Ridge, Red Hill, Mount Majura and Mount Taylor. The other groups include the Friends of Tidbinbilla, Friends of Googong, Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group and Park Carers of the Southern Murrumbidgee. The Parkcare program has matured in recent years, with many groups now working relatively independently of ranger assistance for their day-to-day operations. We think that is a huge mark of success. Coordination support is now mainly focused on assisting the groups to develop an annual works plan to complement the activities of our paid

staff, recruit and retain new members and provide training and development opportunities. Those groups also develop their own risk plans and operating procedures. So, although it is volunteer, it is all very professionally done.

In recent years the Farrer, Aranda bushland and Cooleman Ridge groups have, through their own initiative, developed local partnerships with the schools, to enable students to learn more about their natural environment by undertaking long-term monitoring of environmental conditions and bush recovery and undertaking on-ground activities. We absolutely encourage those monitoring activities. They are less appealing than, say, the planting ones, but they are terribly important. Parkcare volunteers also routinely contribute to our own events program and guided walks in their own areas. So we will announce our ranger-guided activities, but some of those rangers are the volunteer people.

Prolonged drought and bushfire recovery has restricted our rural land care activity, but now with the rains we are envisaging that that will pick up. We have a program called the living environment program, which is under NHT funding, and it has increased the opportunities for us to make available to the rural sector. The priority sites in the rural area for us, under another program called Landkeepers, are Pialligo, Fyshwick, West Belconnen, Castle Hill, Paddys River, Stoney Creek and Condor Creek. Certainly, now that we have the rains, we will be focused on those areas, working with people out there.

Other opportunities for community involvement in natural resource management provided through Environment ACT last year included a tertiary student volunteer program conducted in Namadgi National Park. I know from the stories that have come back from the students and the thank-you letters that I get from the students who have participated in that that they had—I know this sounds a bit dramatic—some life-changing moments, and that has been great to see from a lot of those kids. A lot of those kids are ones that do not fit academically in the mainstream; they look for an alternative. We also have corporate events, such as the Centrelink planting day at Pine Island and the highly successful greening days that we have just mentioned through Greening Australia. So there is a suite of activities out there, right across all our different landscapes.

MS PORTER: So it must involve thousands and thousands of volunteers?

Dr Cooper: And thousands and thousands of their hours—absolutely.

MS PORTER: I give them my congratulations.

Dr Cooper: I will pass that on to the team.

MS PORTER: On management issues, you were saying that more and more the rangers are not having to manage on the ground; that that is one removed from them so that they are not necessarily facing too many management issues on the ground with having so many volunteers out there.

Dr Cooper: I would say that the management issues in the ACT are always extremely challenging, given the high interface between urban areas and our natural areas. But what we do with our Parkcare people is that they are sharing the responsibility for that, so it is

a shared outcome that we are achieving.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

DR FOSKEY: I must also mention that I, too, have participated in Greening Australia's activities. I want to investigate that fine balance between volunteerism, which I really respect and enjoy my own role in it—where that ends and where government responsibility starts. For instance, I note that the ACT Environment grants program has been reviewed—I'm not sure whether the results of that review are public—but mostly the grants are for on-the-ground projects and less for advocacy work. That is certainly observable. I am concerned that the government is funding works that might otherwise have been undertaken by the government. Again, I guess this comes back to that insurance money in a way—how that is being disbursed—and where savings from using volunteers are then felt. I would like some comment on that. For instance, perhaps the minister could outline how working in partnerships—these are the words used under natural resource management on page 123—doesn't just mean saving government funds.

Mr Stanhope: I will make some initial comments but I will ask Dr Cooper to go to the detail of the issues. As to the underlying philosophy, you make the point, and make it well: is the government relying on community organisations to do work—I can't remember your exact words—that might otherwise be funded or undertaken by the government? You could say that about everything at one level. Governments can do everything and simply exclude funding to community organisations across the full spectrum of work that is funded. That is how we operate: government funds and undertakes some work and government funds the community to undertake other work. Certainly, the environment grants program in terms of overall dollars is not a program that is particularly significant, but it is certainly significant in terms of outcomes and it is an expression of the partnership that does exist between governments and communities, in this instance in doing on-the-ground work that enhances the environment, broadly described.

In this last funding round—I'll ask Dr Cooper to go to the detail of that—the grants were assessed against a number of criteria. A number of questions were asked, and some of that was around what the outcomes would be: would there be long-term improvement? Would it assist in the management of a sustainable environment? Is it good value of taxpayers' money? Does the project have some clear outcomes, and is it specifically directed at achieving some long-term improvement to a sustainable environment or natural resource management? Dr Cooper is much more closely involved than I am in the operation and management of the scheme and I am sure she can add to those opening comments and deal more specifically with the questions you raise.

Dr Cooper: To answer the grants issue, yes, they are for more on-the-ground projects. But you will notice, if you look at those projects, that they are often on the local schools area, on some community site, so they are very much focused upon being in the location where the grant applicants feel they can make a difference, particularly for them. So it doesn't take from some of the on-the-ground activities that our natural resource management area needs to achieve. It complements across the region.

In terms of volunteering, one of the things that is different to some degree from what we do as the full-time officers involved in land management is that the volunteering always

has to be cushioned around what is not only in their head but in their heart in terms of what we can get the community best involved in. One of the spin-offs by getting the community involved is not necessarily the achievement on the ground. While that is a plus, it is also about their caring for it as a community; that that is what they value too. It is making it relevant to them, so the knock-on effect is far greater than just the achievement on the ground. It is the whole understanding of what the rangers are trying to achieve in their other works, that greater understanding. If you have specific examples, Dr Foskey, where you think we may be encroaching upon what I would term core business as against the volunteering, I would be happy to take that on board and look at that, because to my knowledge it is much more a complementary arrangement than an exploiting arrangement.

DR FOSKEY: No. I believe there is good evidence that Canberra people really want to be involved. Frankly, I would like to see more money being spent on environmental outcomes, so I am interested in savings. The Greening Australia program is core government business; a lot of the grants aren't, and they are great things because inspiration comes from the community and you are facilitating that. I am also aware, though, that a lot of people work in the environment by doing advocacy and they are less likely to get funding—in fact, less likely this year than last year—so there is a bit of a trend here. So I am commenting on that as well.

Dr Cooper: I will note your comment and reflect that back, but I would like to say, for the committee's benefit, that through Environment ACT's budget we fund the conservation council and the environment centre, which perform much more an advocacy role than a hands-on role.

MR SESELJA: I want to ask about the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. I was looking on page 172 at the membership of that and it seems to suggest that more than half the positions on the committee are currently vacant. Are you able to tell us what is happening with that and what is the quorum for the committee. I assume that, if it is more than four, that means that they have not been able to have a properly constituted meeting since January of this year. Are you able to tell us the reason for such a high number of vacancies and what is the result of that?

Mr Stanhope: Yes, there has been, I acknowledge and regret, a fairly extended period of a lack of membership, which has now been resolved; the appointments were made in the last week or two—either at last week's cabinet meeting or the one before. So at this stage the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee at least has been approved by cabinet. I do not know whether it has been to the committee yet. No, it hasn't yet. Cabinet has agreed to the appointment of a number of people to ensure a full complement of members of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. The issue in relation to the vacancies arose on the retirement or resignation of the then chair. I will have to defer to Dr Cooper on the specifics. I cannot quite recall some of the issues, but I do acknowledge the significant time lag. I regret it, but it was resolved a week ago.

Dr Cooper: The time lag is primarily the difficulty we have had securing a chair. We did go out seeking expressions of interest. It is not an easy chairing role, as you would appreciate, and part of the requirement is that the chair be quite independent of all the different groups that sit on the animal welfare committee in other roles. We then had to go into a process of seeking out who might be interested, because it is something that

may not readily come to someone's mind, to sit as chair of animal welfare, unless you were deeply involved in animal issues. Then the legislation, if you are a member of that committee, precludes you. We now believe we have an exceptional chair and look forward to working with that committee. However, in the meantime we have informally consulted with members of that group. We particularly consulted with them over the national Australian animal welfare strategy. Given our commitment to animal issues, I and a group of five or so people are asked at the national level to oversee its implementation. So there has always been a commitment to animal welfare issues. It was really an issue around finding the right chair.

MR SESELJA: But the committee, can I take it then, has not met since January this year?

Dr Cooper: That's correct; we acknowledge that and, as we said, we now have a chair and we will be proceeding to work with that new committee. But I must say that the previous committee did leave us with a lot of codes of practice and a whole suite of things that are quite robust and have been slowly worked on.

MR SESELJA: In relation to the previous chair, I do not know the details of the legislation and how it works, but for how long did the government know that the previous chair wouldn't be continuing after January?

Dr Cooper: He had flagged it with us and we were taking action to try to get that situation resolved but, if you don't, through the public process, get anybody interested, it then does take some time. I would like to say that Dr Hayward was an exceptional chair, and the only reason he is no longer chair is that his own private practice in veterinary became so demanding. But he is certainly a strong advocate of animal issues.

MR SESELJA: You say he flagged it; I am trying to get an idea of how long before January the government knew that he wouldn't be continuing.

Dr Cooper: I don't know that we were ever officially told. We were told that he was looking to move on and we certainly then started to put things in place.

MRS DUNNE: I just want to raise my concern, which is an ongoing concern, about the length of service of some of the members. I gather most of those have gone off the committee, but there is still one member who has been there for coming up to 10 years, and I remember that the previous planning and environment committee wrote to the government about the extensive time that members were on the AWAC. Is it possible that we need to review the legislation—that the terms and conditions of the legislation make it too onerous to appoint an effective committee?

Dr Cooper: That is certainly something that we are investigating at the moment within arts, heritage and environment. We are looking across all our committees to see where we might streamline some things, so we will definitely take your comment on board.

MRS DUNNE: I think that has been a stand-out problem for a long time.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, members. We will break for morning tea and return at 11.20.

Meeting adjourned from 11.03 to 11.22 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back everybody. We will return to the inquiry on the report for the Chief Minister's Department.

MRS DUNNE: Chief Minister, in July this year you issued a press release headlined "Stop the slaughter". That was about whaling and the then anticipated International Whaling Commission meeting in Korea. In that press release you said, "The federal government's inaction on whaling is rank hypocrisy." In the run-up to the International Whaling Commission meeting in Korea, which I think was in August, were you asked by the federal government to assist in lobbying the Japanese over this?

Mr Stanhope: I recall receiving a letter—I would have to go back to the department—from the federal minister for the environment, Senator Campbell, in which he suggested that those states which had sister city relationships should draw to the attention of the heads of our sister cities our national position on whaling. To the extent of asking for assistance—I cannot remember the content of the letter but I do remember it in the broad—there was a suggestion that Canberra invite Nara to involve itself in the debate.

MRS DUNNE: Did you comply with Senator Campbell's request?

Mr Stanhope: No, I did not.

MRS DUNNE: Why was that?

Mr Stanhope: I saw it as entirely inappropriate, given the nature of our relationship with Nara—a friendship relationship, a sister city relationship—for me to involve that city in a matter of international politics.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter, you had a question.

MRS DUNNE: Could I follow up on that? You are saying you thought it was inappropriate, but why?

THE CHAIR: Mrs Dunne, I remind you that, so far, you have asked three times the number of questions as anybody else. Committee members still want a chance to ask questions.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. There was a large number of other cities which conveyed views to their sister cities in Japan—Byron shire, Redcliffe City, Noosa, Mildura, Maroochy Shire, Campbelltown, Pittwater and a whole range of others. Why was Canberra a standout no show on this?

Mr Stanhope: There are two issues. I think at that stage I had just agreed to visit Nara as Chief Minister of the ACT for the first time in the four years I had been Chief Minister. I am very supportive of our sister city relationships. In the context of that trip, the Leader of the Opposition within the ACT, Mr Brendan Smyth, described my trip to Nara as the greatest junket in history. I took that matter up with the Japanese Ambassador on a visit by the Japanese Ambassador to my office—the fact that the Liberal Party in the ACT had obviously walked away from the sister city relationship to the extent that the Leader of

the Opposition had described my decision to undertake my first trip to Nara in four years as Chief Minister as the greatest junket in history. That was not a particularly sensitive endorsement of the sister city relationship between Canberra and Nara—a relationship which I think is very important to both Canberra and the people of Canberra.

In the context of the background of an apparent abandonment by the ACT Liberal Party of the sister city relationship, I was intent on not further damaging our relationship with Nara. Some of the background to the decision I took included Mr Smyth describing my visit to Nara not just as a junket but I think the precise words were “the greatest junket in history”. I regret enormously the fact that there is no longer a bipartisan position of support within the ACT Assembly for the sister city relationship and that we have now been reduced to a partisan position—namely that the Labor Party and the ACT Labor Government support the sister city relationship but the Liberal Party does not. I was conscious of ensuring that no more harm or damage was done to the sister city relationship and, in that context, chose not to politicise it.

I believe it is important to be frank and honest in our relationships with our sister cities. In the context of the Canberra-Beijing sister city relationship, I have spoken very bluntly and objectively at length with both the Chinese Ambassador to Australia and the successive mayors of Beijing around my government’s position in relation to respect for human rights. Those discussions have almost always been generated through issues raised by me with Beijing and with successive Chinese Ambassadors to Australia around the role and activities of Falun Gong within Australia. That is the background. I simply chose on this occasion not to politicise our sister city relationship with Nara in an environment where the Leader of the Opposition of the Liberal Party of the ACT Assembly had chosen to describe my first ever visit to Nara as Chief Minister—my first visit in four years—as the greatest junket in history.

THE CHAIR: Thank you minister. Ms Porter.

MRS DUNNE: Would you consider your inaction on whaling rank hypocrisy, then?

THE CHAIR: Mrs Dunne! Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: You mentioned before morning tea that you had someone who would be happy to answer questions about the corroboree frog program. I have a number of questions about that. If that person could come forward, perhaps I could ask questions that are not answered in the presentation.

Mr Stanhope: Do you have specific questions?

MS PORTER: I want to know how the captive breeding program is going, what the numbers are now and whether there have been significant improvements in the population.

Mr Stanhope: I am sure Dr Shorthouse will be happy to do that. It might be relevant in a discussion around the corroboree frog breeding program to also talk about the status of the areas of the Namadgi park which still contain, harbour or support corroboree frog populations. Environment ACT has been pursuing some significant research and rehabilitation in some of the sphagnum bog areas in order to ensure that we support wild

frog populations. Perhaps Dr Shorthouse could give a rundown on both areas—our support for the areas within Namadgi and the breeding program, and what we hope to achieve through that program.

Dr Shorthouse: There are two sides to this story. The corroboree frog is probably one of our most endangered species. It has been thought that there are maybe only 100 or 150 adults left up in the mountains. The long-term captive husbandry program is going very well. We have about 1,000 animals in the two facilities at Tidbinbilla. The time from egg to adult is about four years, so there is some time to go before we will be in a position to release adult frogs.

There are a couple of questions we need to do further work on. One is whether to release large numbers of frogs in a few areas in order to create a mass population of significant size, or to you release fewer numbers in a larger number of areas in order to spread them across the range. That is the sort of work we will be doing in the next couple of years. The aim at the moment is just for captive husbandry as opposed to breeding in captivity—that is another stage altogether. There is some speculation as to whether it is a question of a male and a female frog in one breeding facility or whether you need a mass of frogs in order to stimulate the breeding process. This is all unknown, so there are quite a few research questions still to be answered.

The other element of the frog program is the rehabilitation of the wetlands, particularly in the Ramsar wetland at Ginini. There the critical issue is regeneration of sphagnum moss, bogs and wetlands which were severely damaged in the fire. Some work is being done with the ANU and a researcher from the University of Tasmania, who is a wetlands expert. That is helping us to put in place some of the measures to assist the wetlands to recover. That is going to take some time. Of the two key things being done up there, one is to spread water, not allowing it to channel and cause erosion. The other thing is to try and promote regeneration of sphagnum. We are using shadecloth in some areas there to see whether reduced light will help the sphagnum to regenerate. In the natural situation a lot of regeneration occurs underneath bushes, which were burnt. These two things will probably come together in a couple of years time, when we might be ready to start thinking about releasing frogs.

MS PORTER: Is the research that has just been referred to the research mentioned on page 60, where it talks about a number of cooperative research centres being involved with Environment ACT? It is the third dot point from the end of the listed key achievements. It talks about partnering a number of cooperative research centres. Is this the same research or different research?

Dr Shorthouse: No; they are separate programs. Of the two CRCs we are involved in, I have more responsibility for our partnership with the invasive animals CRC. That CRC has developed from the previous pest animal CRC—it has evolved with new commonwealth funding. All state and territory agencies such as ours are partners in that CRC. That has focused on methods to combat key invasive animal pests like foxes, cats and pigs. The other CRC—which I do not have any responsibility for—is the e-Water CRC, which is the next generation of the fresh water ecology CRC.

THE CHAIR: On another topic, during 2003 there were a lot of horse deaths in the ACT due to Paterson's curse. Could you inform the committee what is referred to on

page 79 of the report with regard to a Paterson's curse management workshop?

Mr Stanhope: I will ask Dr Cooper to talk about Paterson's curse and the significant management challenge it represents. There certainly were a high number of horse deaths in the spring of 2003. To some extent in the debate that has occurred around the management of Paterson's curse and the deaths of horses, one issue that was never as clearly articulated, particularly by the media, as it might have been is that, of those horse deaths—and they were very significant and heartbreaking—less than 10 per cent occurred on ACT-managed land. The vast majority—more than 90 per cent—of horses which died were privately agisted or on private land and did not die as a result of management within ACT land.

I have always regretted the dreadful slur ACT land managers suffered through that period because of the simple lack of objective reporting of information around those horse deaths. I think that, of the 95 horses that died, six were on ACT-managed land. Ninety-three or 94 per cent of the horses were privately agisted or on private land. Dr Cooper can talk to issues in relation to the management of Paterson's curse.

Dr Cooper: The workshop specifically referred to in the report was held on 23 June. These kinds of workshops are normal business for us in working with the horse paddocks people and the broader community. We have recently run quite an extensive program for this season doing exactly the same thing. That workshop was about giving ACT horse agistment land managers the latest information on Paterson's curse management techniques. The information assisted those land managers to formulate management programs to help prevent a reoccurrence of the spring 2003 horse deaths, when approximately 60 horses died in the region, with six suspected deaths from Paterson's curse toxin, as the minister has just said.

It is important to note that Paterson's curse is not a serious environmental weed; nor is it a problem in agriculture. The main concern is that it contains substances toxic to horses if they eat large amounts of the foliage. This is particularly important in the ACT region, where a large number of horses are used for recreation purposes. Paterson's curse has heavy seeds and is spread mainly through fodder—particularly hay brought back into the paddocks for horses—and in the stomachs of animals that have eaten Paterson's curse.

Because horse paddocks generally do not have enough natural grass to feed the animals in the paddocks all through the year, the fodder is regularly brought in and reinfests the paddock with Paterson's curse. This means we can never eliminate Paterson's curse from the intense areas where we have a lot of horses. However, we have proper management programs in place. We have an integrated control program that uses our vet, the managers of the horse paddocks, our field people in natural resource management and the general vets in the area. We know we will never eliminate it but we certainly know how to be prepared. We know what to look for, as far as the horses and the land being managed are concerned.

THE CHAIR: On another topic, column three on page 122 relates to output class 3.2 and there is mention of the Tree Protection Bill. Could you inform the committee of what the bill will include and what effects it could have on property owners?

Mr Stanhope: As you are aware, the legislation, which establishes a permanent scheme,

was passed in the Assembly in September. We have operated under an interim scheme which was passed before the Labor Party took government in 2001. It has taken some time—through a consultative and collaborative approach—to develop permanent tree legislation. Our experience through the interim scheme was very much that there was a range of circumstances in relation to which the conservator—or the government—had no discretion in relation to the impact of a tree on individual land-holders and individual leases.

We sought to achieve—this was one of the major drivers of change—greater certainty and a less onerous impact on private leaseholders in relation to their capacity to enjoy the amenity of their own land, their homes and the environment around their houses, whilst acknowledging that there is a range of individual trees of enormously high historic heritage and environmental worth and value, as well as a whole range of urban forests. We needed to protect the urban forest values.

The approach we have now adopted from the experience and the lessons learnt from the interim scheme is to establish an ACT tree register. We acknowledge that that is resource intensive. We looked at a stack of permutations in how we might protect trees and, at the end of the day, agreed on the resource intensive process of the establishment of an ACT tree register to provide high-level protection for specifically identified trees. We need to identify the trees that fall within the purview of the register and declare tree management precincts to allow us to protect trees in greenfields estates or areas, as well as in other areas of Canberra where there is very significant and identifiable urban forest value. That has been the overall approach.

At the heart of the tree protection legislation was a determination to streamline and simplify the process to provide greater certainty for residents of the ACT while doing what we believe is expected of us by almost every Canberran—to protect the garden city nature of Canberra and to protect the trees which are very much part of the heart of Canberra and very much in the minds of Canberrans as to what they love about this city. We needed to meet the twin policy aims of not only protecting trees and protecting the overall amenity of the ACT and Canberra but also giving greater latitude to the government, to the conservator and to our tree advisers in ensuring that people can enjoy their homes. I believe the balance we have struck is appropriate.

The statistics around trees are interesting. There is a view of a hard-and-fast attitude within the government, by the conservator and among our experts in relation to trees. In the last year there were 1,159 applications for tree-damaging activities, which is the description we use. Of those 1,159 applications 998—just two under 1,000—were approved with conditions, and 161 were declined. That gives some indication of the extent to which there has always been a capacity to meet the needs of the people of Canberra, whilst recognising that there are some significant trees that should be protected. I believe the new scheme provides the balance we need.

THE CHAIR: I have one last question on a slightly different tangent. You are aware of my interest in industrial relations, minister. I note that page 102 refers to the number of employees within the department who are on AWAs. I note that no new AWAs are being offered for the 2004-05 period. Could you please inform the committee why there are still some AWAs in operation?

Mr Stanhope: I have specific advice on this. There were two AWAs in operation in arts, heritage and environment during the 2004-05 financial year. Historically the AWAs related to two positions within Forests ACT. One of those AWAs was formally terminated in June this year and the other is still active. Both the government and the department support the position the government has taken in relation to AWAs but we, of course, recognise and respect those which were already established and which persist. At this stage there is one AWA within this administrative area.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Thank you members from the Chief Minister's Department. We will now move on to the Commissioner for the Environment. I welcome Dr Rosemary Purdie, Dr Helen Sims and Mr John Heinemann. For new witnesses, 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.

MR SESELJA: Dr Purdie, I was concerned that the first line of the first paragraph on page 12 of the report says that, although all "clusters" of recommendations in the 2003 state of the environment report were prefaced "In consultation with the Commissioner for the Environment ...", most agencies have proceeded without any contact with your office. You seem to be suggesting there that what is in those state of the environment reports is somewhat misleading. Are you able to expand on that?

Dr Purdie: I made that comment because I think in all of the state of environment reports—and this one was produced prior to my taking up this job, so I'm speaking in retrospect, as it were—the intent was that it would be desirable for departments to talk with people in my office, particularly about the intent of the recommendations, because I think often where the commissioner was coming from may have been slightly different from where the departmental people were coming from, and the intent was to make sure that there was clarity of understanding of what the recommendation was about.

I should say that I can certainly take some of the blame for not going proactively to departments, which would be one way to approach it. That's merely a limitation of my resources. But I think there has also been a hope that departments would be proactive in their turn in coming to my office to say, "We want to make sure that we understand what this recommendation is about" and that certainly didn't happen. So I think it's a two-way street.

MR SESELJA: Just to clarify: are you saying that the consultation did occur but there just wasn't follow-up, or it didn't occur?

Dr Purdie: No. I'm saying that, after the 2003 state of environment report was released, there was very little consultation with my office about how to proceed in actually implementing the recommendations. I think there was an assumption within the various departments that they understood what the recommendations were about and proceeded with their programs on that basis. I made the comment because it became obvious to me in preparing the annual report that there were occasions where there appeared to be a misunderstanding of what the intent of the recommendation was.

MRS DUNNE: Could you give an example of that, Dr Purdie?

Dr Purdie: I think mostly, if you read through the responses to the recommendations, there's a very strong sense of: this is what we've been doing. The intent is often what is being achieved by what is being done, so the focus is more on the outcomes of activity than on the activities themselves. That, I think, would be a fair summary of the main problem.

MRS DUNNE: But can you point to specific areas?

Dr Purdie: One specific one that I've already talked with Dr Cooper about was in relation to weeds in the ACT. It was recommendation 2003.7 and if you go to pages 18, 19, 20 and 21 the recommendation is really about how effective pest plant control activities have been in achieving biodiversity outcomes. A lot of activity has been carried out but it appears very little activity has happened to date in saying: what have been the positive benefits on biodiversity? So that was one particular example where there seemed to be a mismatch between what the recommendation was aimed at and what had actually been happening.

Dr Cooper: If I could just add, please: one of the things we are very good at being able to do is to say exactly where we have sprayed and what we have targeted and the success of that. But what I understand Dr Purdie is asking us, and we've had long conversations about this and have talked it through with David Shorthouse, is: okay, knowing that, go to the next level and actually try and quantify the impact on the biodiversity. So it's going that next step. It's not that we haven't been effective in what we've been trying to do in terms of an area analysis that we undertake, but actually going and looking at the biodiversity impact.

MRS DUNNE: So it's revisiting the sites after you've done away with the weeds, essentially?

Dr Purdie: And it's where there are. We know that there are bad environmental weeds in the ACT; there is no doubt that the department has a good handle on what those weeds are. But this is saying: to what extent are you sure that all of your weed control is having a positive benefit on biodiversity, because that's part of the intent on why you tackle weeds? There are other reasons in agricultural areas, but, for example, if you find that all of the work that you're doing on weeds is having absolutely no beneficial impact on the biodiversity values, maybe that's a trigger for why the department would need to review what it's doing. If it's showing that there's a positive benefit and you can measure that, then that's obviously a good sign that the right thing is being done.

MRS DUNNE: But at the moment we don't know?

Dr Purdie: Yes.

MR SESELJA: So, in relation to weeds, you're saying that there has been consultation with your office, but in a number of these other recommendations at least part of the recommendations haven't been complied with in the sense that they may well have gone ahead and promoted incentives for use of low-emission vehicles but they haven't done it

in consultation with you?

Dr Purdie: Yes. I think it would be true to say that, where there has been that mismatch, it's where, for example, in the government's comments they would say: we believe that this recommendation is now completed. You'll find that there are several where I have said, "I think this is a recommendation from my point of view that hasn't been totally completed yet, because it hasn't gone the extra stage to what the recommendation was asking for."

MR SESELJA: Which included consulting with you, which hasn't happened?

Dr Purdie: Yes, and I'm not suggesting that they would have necessarily done dramatically different things, but I think it would have helped clarify what the purpose of the recommendation was in the first place—and that has not happened.

MR SESELJA: They just haven't done exactly what they said they would do in terms of the recommendations.

Dr Purdie: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Mr Seselja just mentioned low-emission vehicles and on page 13 of the report, recommendation 2003.3, there were recommendations that the government should promote and provide initiatives for the use of low-emission vehicles for use by government agencies. Could you inform the committee as to the outcome of this recommendation?

Mr Stanhope: Yes, the government has directed and we're in the process of leasing, I think, 25 or 26 hybrid low-emission vehicles. We think it is important to have an opportunity to assess how they function. We do need to do something of a cost-benefit analysis, too, in terms of the leasing cost as against the environmental benefits, and we're still in that process. I might say, too, that there are a couple of other aspects of this which I think are very interesting in terms of policy and policy making. There are issues in the context of the leasing costs; they are slightly higher than the cost of some other vehicles that would fulfil the same essential purpose that the hybrid vehicles do for us as part of our particular fleet.

There have been significant delays in obtaining even the vehicles that we've ordered. We initially ordered 25. There have been significant delays from suppliers in providing hybrid or low-emission vehicles, which does surprise me in the context of the debate we're having in Australia and around the world about greenhouse and climate change. It seems to me that there is quite obviously not, within the car manufacturing industry, an evident commitment to developing alternative technology or technologies.

I think there is a role for government to play. At the last election, we did undertake to move to a figure of 10 per cent of ACT government fleet vehicles being hybrid, low-emission or other technology motor vehicles by 2008. That would require us to purchase somewhere in the order of 100 additional vehicles over the next three years. In terms of the time lags that we've suffered in getting these first 25, I'm not entirely sure that it's possible for us to do that, but I am interested in seeing some of the outcomes of some of the analyses that I believe we now need to do in terms of the environmental

benefit and the cost of the vehicles that we're currently utilising.

It is interesting to note that this is an issue that hasn't been grasped by other governments to the extent that I believe they should. At 25 vehicles, the ACT, on a per capita or per vehicle basis, has by far the highest number of alternative fuel vehicles of any government in Australia, and some governments of course have enormous vehicle fleets. I understand, for instance, that New South Wales has somewhere in the order of 30,000-plus vehicles in its government. We have about 1,200, New South Wales has over 30,000—and the Commonwealth would have even more than that.

It is an issue in which governments could play a significant role in forcing some change in attitude by major vehicle manufacturers around Australia and indeed throughout the world. If the governments of Australia could get together and commit to a certain percentage of alternative-fuel vehicles in a short period of time, involving thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of vehicles, I've got a feeling there'd be a very sudden change in attitude in terms of the development of these technologies. I'm hoping to show the way over the next three years by moving the ACT fleet to in excess of 100 hybrid low-emission vehicles if we can possibly achieve that.

Another aspect of our commitment to a change over time of our fleet is also our membership now of Greenfleet to offset vehicle carbon dioxide emissions. I think we have probably just had our first planting of trees within the ACT. We've now joined that particular initiative. The trees will be planted annually on the basis of a subscription by the ACT government to Greenfleet to offset the emissions of our entire fleet of vehicles. That's a great initiative. It's one of these issues around public policy. It goes to a question Dr Foskey previously asked about the provenance of the trees or the seeds and the natural landscape. Much of the ACT, of course, wasn't naturally treed and at this stage the identification of sites for Greenfleet plantings has not as been as easy, as simple or as straightforward as one might have imagined that it would be. This is an issue that we're working through with Greenfleet in relation to the planting of trees within the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Just on the particular vehicles, have you looked at the length of construction for these in comparison to normal vehicles and what effect that might have on greenhouse gases—the time it takes to build them?

Mr Stanhope: I must say that's not something I'm across. I don't know whether we have anybody here that is, but I think there is a range of issues in relation to hybrid low-emission vehicles that we do need to better understand—just some of the equations in terms of measuring. I make the point that I know these vehicles are more expensive to lease than some of the other vehicles within our fleet, so on a straight cost analysis they're not as cost beneficial as some other cars. But then, of course, they use 60 per cent less petrol and there's a whole range of costs that flow from that in terms of cost of fuel. What we're working through and what I'm particularly interested in, though, is the full analysis in terms of costs and resale value. Then, of course, there is the more difficult, more intangible cost of benefit to the environment through a reduction in emissions.

MR SESELJA: I just didn't quite get to finish my question previously. Thank you, Dr Purdie, for that answer, but I just wanted to ask the minister: is it a concern to you that at least part of most of the recommendations seems to have been ignored in relation

to the *State of the environment report*, according to Dr Purdie, in the sense that most agencies didn't consult with the Commissioner for the Environment. Is that a concern to you?

Mr Stanhope: It concerns me that there has been an apparent misunderstanding or a cross purpose in terms of the nature of an expectation in relation to consultation on recommendations. I must say, to counter that, that I'm heartened that my agencies have grasped the report and are determined to seek to meet each of the recommendations in what is a fundamentally important report, the *State of the environment report*. To that extent agencies and officers have charged off determined to support and implement the recommendations—and to that extent haven't done it perhaps as consultatively as they might have. But, yes, I would like close consultation consistent with the recommendations, but I applaud and support those officers of my department who have been determined to get on with the work of implementing these recommendations.

MR SESELJA: But is there a reason why that consultation hasn't occurred in many cases?

Mr Stanhope: I wouldn't know. I can't look into the minds of those charged with responsibility. But I would say that it was perhaps a rush of enthusiasm for the task at hand and a determination to implement the recommendations. It seems to me like overexuberance and a heightened anxiety to get on and get the job done. That's what it looks like to me, and I applaud them.

MRS DUNNE: I would like to go to recommendation 2003.8, which is in relation to a catchment by catchment hydrological study of ground waters. I'd like to seek some clarification, because your comments, commissioner, say that this is implemented, but I had a briefing in relation to the Water Resources Bill in June or July and at that stage I was advised by officials that the work had started but it was by no means completed and there was a lot of work to be done in relation to the studies and the surveys necessary to complete that work.

Dr Purdie: I will say something first and then Dr Cooper may wish to add. This recommendation was really raised first in the 2000 SOE report because it was clear, I think, at that stage within that SOE report that ground water was a really important part of the total water cycle.

MRS DUNNE: And we don't know what's there.

Dr Purdie: In the previous one, whatever recommendation was made there wasn't one that was supported by government. In the 2003 state of environment report, a similar recommendation was made. This time the government certainly agreed to it, and I guess my assessment was that a lot of the studies have commenced, there is certainly a better understanding of it. I guess my concern was that desktop studies do need to be supplemented by the on-ground thing. But I think I indicated that it was implemented because my understanding from the department was that they had prioritised their catchments, there were the commitments to do the work, and it is something that I would pick up in the next State of the Environment Report in terms of the outcomes. I'm not sure if you wanted to add anything.

Dr Cooper: I can't add anything further but we've certainly responded, we certainly have implemented the original recommendation and we are certainly moving on, as my staff would have. The emphasis, I think, did say desktop studies initially. They've all been done and, as my staff probably briefed you, they are now doing some ground truthing, to use their language.

MRS DUNNE: So the full range of studies is not completed but all of the measures have commenced, essentially?

Dr Cooper: That's my understanding.

MRS DUNNE: Okay.

Dr Cooper: It's certainly one of our programs that is at the forefront of our activities.

DR FOSKEY: One of the strong senses I get from reading the annual report is, firstly, a sort of sense of isolation in the sense of the commissioner, certainly if one compared it to the new Human Rights Commission. The Commissioner for the Environment seems to be rather off to the side, which is also emphasised by the new location. The second is a lack of resourcing, and the third is that perhaps there's not a real awareness in the ACT of the commissioner's existence and role.

The commissioner herself notes the low number of complaints and poses the question as to whether it's that people don't know that the office exists, as compared to, for instance, the Human Rights Office. So the question is; how is the commissioner and her office promoted to the ACT community?

Mr Stanhope: Thank you, Dr Foskey. I'll ask Dr Purdie and perhaps Dr Cooper to respond to that. But the Commissioner for the Environment is a long-established office within the ACT with a very significant reputation. Always, of course, there are issues around public education and public awareness. I'd be interested in the perspectives of Dr Purdie and Dr Cooper on that. But I certainly would be supportive of a public education and awareness-raising campaign for the office of the Commissioner for the Environment. I have no issue with that. There are, of course, always resource constraints but I'm sure that we could develop a cost-effective enhancement of the profile of the office of the Commissioner for the Environment. I would have no difficulty or issue with that at all. At different times though, particularly around annual report time, particularly in relation to the development of the State of the Environment Report, which is a report that I think most people within Canberra with an interest in the environment would be aware of, there are high levels of awareness. But I'd be interested in responses. I think it's fair to say, in relation to all statutory offices or government agencies or units, there's always more that can be done in relation to public awareness and public education. I would certainly support that in relation to the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment. It is perhaps a role or part of the function of the office that could be enhanced so that more people would be able to utilise the office and the resources and expertise within the office. I would support that.

In terms of a question of isolation, it's a fine balance, isn't it? The Commissioner for the Environment is an independent office, rigorously independent, and it's important that the commissioner be seen to be independent. So, you know, there's a divide always between

independence and perceptions of independence or isolation. I don't know what comment or response I can make to that. The office of the Commissioner for the Environment is rigorously independent, and it's important that it be seen as such. It's like commenting: do you think the ombudsman is seen to be distant? I would hope that it is seen to be distant from the government. I would hope that nobody believes, or is ever under a misapprehension, that there's an overly-close relationship between an ombudsman and a government, and I would put the Commissioner for the Environment in exactly the same boat. I would be worried if people began to think that there was an overly-close relationship, because of the importance of the appearance of independence. But I'd like Dr Purdie and Dr Cooper to respond to that issue.

DR FOSKEY: Just to clarify: I was really referring to isolation from the other commissioners and just—

Mr Stanhope: Oh, right.

Dr Purdie: Just on that latter one: I've met on quite a number of occasions with some of the other commissioners, and I think that sense of isolation isn't necessarily unique to my particular situation. If I could just comment generally, the issue of awareness I find really interesting because I think there's no doubt that those with an interest in the environment have a reasonably high awareness. But I think quite often the phone calls that my office gets are from people who had a problem; they didn't immediately home into my office because they knew that we could address it; it was more a sense of desperation and searching on the web, and they weren't actually aware that we existed until they found our phone number on the web, and then they weren't even aware of what our functions were. So I think it would be true, Chief Minister, to say that there are sectors of the community that have a high awareness of the Commissioner for the Environment, but my gut feel is that there's probably not a huge awareness by the general population, and that's certainly backed up just informally when I go out and talk to people and am asked to give talks. People come up and say, "I wasn't even aware that there was a commissioner for the environment," so I think it's a mixed bag.

In the corporate plan that we're just about to finalise and put on the web, that's one of the aspects that I've said is a priority over the next few years and I think it can be addressed fairly simply through making sure that there are brochures available more readily in a wider number of outlets et cetera. I have to be honest: over the last 12 months I have not deliberately pushed publicity for the office, because I thought, if I do that and suddenly we get swamped with queries, I don't have the resources to cope with that. So again it's a sort of double-edged sword there.

In terms of the degree to which I might or might not be at arm's length from government, I think that sense of independence is absolutely critical for people to have confidence in both my ability to carry out investigations, whether they are very simple things or whatever, and certainly in relation to the state of environment report, but it would be equally true to say that, where I have sought assistance from departments, generally that has been forthcoming and people have given me the information that I've asked for. So it's a perception of separation. It's a fine line in me being able to access information and remain that independent, so, if you like, I can't be seen—and don't want to be seen—to have my finger in every pie and be interfering, so for me it's more a matter of having the contacts with people so that, if I'm after information, they know who I am and they'll

respond to my information request—and it may be a formal request for information or just: “I don’t know where this program is up to; can you give me a briefing?”

DR FOSKEY: Just in relation to the web site, my office noticed that it isn’t immediately apparent if you go to the web site what the commissioner does, what the role of the office is or even who you are. Is the web site still in construction stage? Is there going to be a revamping of it? As you say, it sounds like a lot of people go looking for it. It’s important they get their information pretty immediately.

Dr Purdie: Yes. One of the things that we’ve done over the last 12 months is put on the web site about the complaints mechanism, so, if someone types the word “complaint” into Google, I would hope that it would throw up our web site. We’re not proposing to do major revamps of the web site. That’s expensive, we don’t have the resources for it and I think that’s a fairly low priority. But I think something that will help people get a sense of what our responsibilities are is when our corporate plan is up there, because that will be very clear then in terms of both what our statutory responsibilities are as well as some of the functions like regional state of environment reporting that we’ve taken on at the request of the regional leaders forum.

MS PORTER: My question goes back to weed control. It mentions on page 19 that Environment ACT—and I think this is a correct interpretation of what it says—prefers a non-chemical approach to weed control. Are there significant cost benefits or other benefits associated with this approach?

Dr Cooper: Our weed control program is a mixture of chemical and non-chemical. Of course if you can use non-chemical approaches for many reasons they are promoted but, depending on which one you use, they are also human labour intensive or else in managing things like grazing of cattle. One of the non-chemical approaches we use is the continuation of sustainable grazing in riparian zones in rural areas. This is part of the implementation of the African love grass strategy.

There is the monitoring of the crown weevil—a biological control agent for Paterson’s curse—which was released in the Murrumbidgee River corridor and at Isaacs Ridge. The crown weevil has established but has not reproduced sufficiently to produce a noticeable reduction in weed density. We try those non-chemical means but, as in this case, we then have to monitor.

Our NRM group released another biological agent—the flea beetle—on a total of six sites in early Spring 2004, and we are monitoring. We are monitoring another weevil and a boring weevil at Googong—both biological control agents for Scotch thistle—and we continue cooperative research with the CSIRO entomology program. So we have a suite of things as well as the mechanical means, which is the slashing, and in some cases we resort to burning. We certainly use and monitor the suite of them. On sites of conservation significance we will target certain weeds and use an intense approach to that, rather than a broad brush approach.

THE CHAIR: I refer to page 14 of the report. In recommendation 2003.4 it is recommended that the government should develop and resource long-term research and monitoring programs into post-fire recovery of terrestrial and aquatic components of natural and modified ecosystems as part of a joint program with other states that were

affected by fire. Could you inform the committee what steps the government has taken to implement measures to monitor bushfire recovery?

Mr Stanhope: This is something we are taking seriously. We think there is a great opportunity here for us to enhance our understanding of the recovery of natural ecosystems and we are doing significant monitoring across a large number of sites. We are also working, particularly in relation to our alpine areas, with both the Victorian and New South Wales governments in a range of joint programs in relation to management of the alps. In that context your question is a particularly important one for us. I will ask Dr Cooper to give you the detail of the work we are doing.

Dr Cooper: In 2004, 47 long-term vegetation monitoring plots were established in Namadgi national park and the surrounding area. A subset of these sites was resurveyed in 2005. These plots are being used to monitor the post-fire recovery and long-term changes in vegetation composition and structure. The data are being collated to form the ACT fire response database detailing the recovery mechanisms and timing for plant species. In 2005 some sites were surveyed for small mammals, to address changes in both flora and fauna. A fuel hazard assessment program was established in Namadgi national park and all vegetation plots assessed for fuel hazard. These and the aquatic monitoring program will continue and will be used to provide input into future management and planning.

We continue links with other states through our role in the Australian alps agreement. All Australian alps vegetation plots were resurveyed in 2005. Staff attended and presented results at the alps fire recovery biodiversity workshop held in June. In May we also participated in the pig management workshop. A copy of the report from this workshop will be forwarded to the commissioner's office when it becomes available. With those cross-linkages, if there is an issue raised we focus on it and will then share that information with Dr Purdie and her staff.

Dr Purdie: This recommendation is focused on long-term research. I imagine that is because it is often very easy to do research programs, particularly in response to a dramatic event like the 2003 wildfires, but the benefit of the research does not come only within the first five years after the fire, it is over the next 10, 20 or 30 years. I have commended Environment ACT and the government on the post-fire research activities they have carried out to date but I would hope there will be ongoing commitment to those programs over that longer term. If a lot of the data you get in the short-term does not continue over the longer term is not as useful for management purposes.

THE CHAIR: On page 16 of the report, in 2003.5 it says that the ACT government should request funding from the federal government for the implementation of that recommendation. Could you inform the committee of the success of the funding request?

Dr Cooper: I recall that in 2003 the minister wrote to the commonwealth minister about an online information base to assist in overall research effort. The commonwealth minister responded agreeing with the proposal but wishing to wait until the delivery of the report from the COAG inquiry on bushfire mitigation and management. That report was released in January this year. Subsequently, the bushfire CRC has been collating some of the relevant fire information. Through our own emergency services we are part of that CRC and its relevance. We are working collectively on that project with the

emergency services. I must commend our own ESA. Through David Shorthouse, with Mr Dunn, we are certainly in that forum. So it is progressing in a positive way, although not quite the way we originally thought.

MR SESELJA: Returning to resourcing, Chief Minister, I have one question one for Dr Purdie and one for you, if that is okay. Of course you can answer it how you like. Dr Purdie, I refer to page 5 where it says, "Under-resourcing, exacerbated by increased running costs, remains a key issue." You say it limits your ability to carry out all the functions of your office. Could you tell us of some of the functions you are limited in carrying out due to underresourcing and where some of those increased running costs are coming from.

Dr Purdie: That is the main thing I have not been able to do, and have not been able to even contemplate doing. Part of my allowance gives me the capacity to carry out investigative inquiries. It can be a very useful tool for an independent commissioner to step back and have inquiries on particularly relevant subjects. There are certainly some that it would be desirable to do, going into the next state of environment report, but at the moment that is simply not an option.

Ours is a small organisation and we have a very small budget. Remember I am paid to work two days a week and I have two full-time staff. The budget is small. We get supplementation for doing the ACT state of environment report and we get separate funding from the local governments to do the regional state of environment report. The reality is that, over the last financial year, the only reason we were not in the red was because I decided not to have a government car. That saved us \$12,000.

There were increased costs because we had to relocate our office. We had been housed in the ACTPLA office for the previous three or four years and they needed that space. To their credit, they paid for us to shift. In our new location the rent is much higher than it was previously. We decided not to shift into Civic and co-locate with the auditor because we could not afford the rental.

There are other administrative costs that have gone up right across government. As another example, some of the IT requirements are getting very high. The new location has meant that we have not been able to share facilities in the way we were able to with ACTPLA. These are seemingly quite trivial things but they have a huge impact on our capacity as a small organisation.

MR SESELJA: Minister, in the report it talks about multiple inefficiencies as a result of underresourcing. Do you agree with that assessment? If so, what is going to be done to address that?

Mr Stanhope: As I indicated before, the government is of course fully supportive of the Office of the Commissioner for the Environment. I am sympathetic to representations the commissioner makes in relation to her budget and I do not disagree, just as I am sympathetic to the representations almost every single statutory officer, departmental or agency head in the ACT makes to me in relation to their multiple inefficiencies and their capacity not to do all the things they would like to do. In the current and continuing budgetary environment the government and I will, of course, maintain a commitment to supporting the Commissioner for the Environment and her office, but the budget position

is tight.

MS PORTER: On pages 25 through to 35 there are a number of recommendations that look at areas that do not traditionally or typically come under environmental issues—such as homelessness, indigenous health, ageing population, employment for young people, people with mental illness, et cetera.

MRS DUNNE: If you had read the act you would understand it. It is part of the act.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter is asking the question, thank you, Mrs Dunne.

MS PORTER: It is probably because I am newish, Mrs Dunne. It is fine. I am asking about these areas because I would like to know more about how they impact on the environment.

Dr Purdie: It is quite common in most jurisdictions of Australia to include what are called human settlements as part of normal state of environment reporting. I think all the jurisdictions use as the basis of their state of environment reporting what is called a pressure-state-response. You have at the centre, if you like, the question: what is the condition or health of our environment? Then you have to look at the question: what are the pressures on that environment? Most of those things are due to people. If we know that the environment is in poor condition, there is also the question: what are the responses to that? Again, that involves people.

You cannot divorce people from the environment. That is reflected in the definition of the environment under my legislation. It includes a whole lot of things but in one part it talks about the fact that it includes ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities. That is a sense of our own environment. How we are travelling is just as important as the quality of the air and water—how biodiversity is going.

There are seven parts to the definition of the environment. The final part refers to the social, aesthetic, cultural and economic conditions that affect or are affected by the things mentioned in the earlier paragraphs. Those are the earth, air, water, organic matter, biodiversity, human made or modified structures, et cetera. From discussions I have had with people in other jurisdictions they are very envious of this because it is such a comprehensive, holistic definition of the environment. For me it would be unthinkable to not include those aspects of human settlements, otherwise it would be trying to divide the environment in a way that does not make sense. I would be happy to let you have this definition if that would be useful.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

DR FOSKEY: This is supplementary to my earlier question regarding complaints. In the report on page 8 you note that a number of complaints were made just as the previous commissioner retired and that, consequently, because there was no commissioner, they could not be followed up for the three months that I believe you were without a commissioner. This raises a question which is also relevant to the other commissioner positions. Is there a plan to have an acting commissioner, should such an event reoccur?

Mr Stanhope: I have to confess that I have not previously considered that issue. It

would perhaps have been sensible because it would have overcome that issue at the time. It is something we might have pursued. I will take that question on notice and give it some consideration.

DR FOSKEY: Good—thank you.

THE CHAIR: In recommendation 2003.17 on page 36, the ACT government was called on to work towards implementation of the sustainable transport plan. Can you inform the committee how this has been managed and what the government ideas are in relation to the draft Canberra spatial plan?

Mr Stanhope: The government has taken seriously the issue of the development of a sustainable transport plan. I acknowledge the work of my colleague Mr Corbell, the Minister for Planning, in relation to the development and implementation of a sustainable transport plan.

It is fair to say that one of the biggest issues potentially facing the city of Canberra in respect of sustainability and the road to sustainability is our roads and the way in which we use and depend on them. In that context there is a need not only to change behaviours but also to change the way in which we have traditionally looked at transport within the ACT.

I do not think there is one of us who, with the benefit of hindsight, does not deny that, in an attempt to understand some of the history of the planning, development and construction of Canberra through the Y-plan—or indeed the Burley Griffin plan or vision for the building of this city which morphed into the Y plan—and the development of a road transport system that caters very well for the car but not for enhanced public transport opportunities, one of the big issues we face is in relation to greenhouse gas emissions and other emissions, and all the other issues that go to a car-dependent transport infrastructure.

I say that in the context of the breakdown of our greenhouse gas emissions. They are essentially 60 per cent electricity and 40 per cent the rest—and much of the rest is petrol emissions. We must move towards a serious attack on greenhouse gas emissions within the territory—it is not if or when, it is a must—through a concerted attack on how we use both electricity and petrol.

We need to change behaviours. As individuals we need to change the way we look at movement from point A to point B. Over the four years since we came into government we have worked assiduously on an enhanced cycle network throughout the ACT. This issue has raised significant ire but, at its heart, it is about a number of initiatives in relation to transport. There are issues about sustainability, changing our behaviours and changing our views around exercise. That program is there for the future. We have a significant network of on-road cycleways that we did not previously have which, over time, I hope the people of Canberra will come to embrace as a great facility.

You are aware of the enormous work we have put into our bus fleet with the conversion of buses to gas and other fuels in relation to decisions we have taken to develop a functioning and sustainable transport plan around buses and bus lanes, and a heightened public transport system based on ACTION and busways. It is resource-intensive. There

is continuing debate around buses versus light rail, the issues around light rail and whether we might have taken a decision to embrace light rail instead of pursuing a sustainable transport plan based around an enhanced role for ACTION buses, bus lanes and dedicated busways. The government has accepted the wisdom of the overwhelming advice on the costs and cost benefits of light rail that, with the current structure and make-up of the city, we cannot at this stage in our development justify that.

The work we are doing in the context of dedicated busways is predicated on the future possibility of light rail, so we will develop a structure that will allow us to convert at some time in the distance—depending on population and population densities—and perhaps allow us to embrace other technologies as they become more advanced and certainly less dependent on non-renewable resources. That is fundamentally important to this government. We have done tremendous work in developing a sustainable transport plan. The hard bit is always finding the dollars to implement things, but we are working assiduously on developing a genuine major shift in community attitude to travel.

THE CHAIR: The time for the hearings has expired. I would like to thank the minister, the Commissioner for the Environment—Rosemary Purdie—and officers from the Chief Minister’s Department for their assistance today. I remind committee members that they have until close of business this afternoon to put questions on notice in.

Mr Stanhope: Thank you very much, chair, for your courtesy and that of the committee today.

The committee adjourned at 12.35 pm.