



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND
ENVIRONMENT**

**(Reference: Draft variation to the territory plan No 281:
Molonglo and North Weston)**

Members:

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)
MS M PORTER (The Deputy Chair)
MRS V DUNNE**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 15 JULY 2008

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms N Derigo (Ph: 6205 0435)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

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The committee met at 1.33 pm.

RAKE, MR GARY MICHAEL, Managing Director, Finance and Estate, National Capital Authority

ROHL, MR TODD JASON, Managing Director, Planning and Urban Design, National Capital Authority

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this hearing of the ACT Legislative Assembly's planning and environment committee in its inquiry into the draft variation to the territory plan No 281: Molonglo and north Weston.

Before we begin, I will read our privilege statement to you. The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. Any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing. Mr Rake and Mr Rohl, do you understand the content of that card?

Mr Rohl: Yes.

Mr Rake: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Gentlemen, we do not have a submission from NCA, so would you like to make some opening comments to the committee?

Mr Rohl: Yes, we would, Chair. I thank the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment for inviting us to this inquiry into the draft variation to the territory plan No. 281: Molonglo and north Weston. The secretary suggested that I may be able to provide you with some insight into the National Capital Authority's position on development in the Molonglo-north Weston region and possible inconsistencies between the National Capital Authority's draft amendment 63 and the territory plan's draft variation 281.

In doing so, I would like to briefly describe our role in this matter, outline the summary of the process to date and identify two matters which are still being negotiated between the National Capital Authority and the ACT Planning and Land

Authority. At the end of this short statement, we will be happy to take any questions.

In terms of our role, the statutory relationship between the commonwealth and the territory on planning matters is defined by the planning and land management act 1988—the PALM act. The PALM act sets out the formal arrangements and responsibilities for planning in the Australian Capital Territory. The Australian parliament is responsible for the planning of Canberra as the national capital and the national interest is expressed in the national capital plan.

The statutory object of the national capital plan is to ensure that Canberra and the territory are developed in accordance with their national significance. Matters of national significance in the planning and development of Canberra and the territory are described in the national capital plan and are summarised as follows: (1) the pre-eminence of the role of Canberra and the territory as the national capital; (2) the preservation and enhancement of the landscape features which give the national capital its character and setting; (3) respect for key elements of Walter Burley Griffin's plan; (4) the creation, preservation and enhancement of fitting sites, approaches and backdrops for national institutions and ceremonies; and (5) the development of a city which both respects environmental values and reflects national concerns with the sustainability of Australia's urban areas.

The national capital plan establishes the role of Canberra as the national capital at a strategic level through the general policy plan—metropolitan Canberra. This is achieved in the national capital plan by identifying urban development areas and those areas not to be developed, setting out general policies and land use planning. The national capital plan extends the distinctive bushland setting of the city beyond metropolitan areas. This is identified as the national capital open space system which consists of, amongst other things, the inner hills, ridges and buffers, and river corridors—the landscape setting of the national capital which contains major recreational and environmental resources for Canberra and the ACT. Graphically, this is represented by the general policy plan—metropolitan Canberra and the ACT.

The Molonglo Valley and north Weston are currently not identified as an urban area in the national capital plan and the general policy plan—metropolitan Canberra. The current land use policies are broadacre, rural, hills, ridges and buffers, river corridors and urban areas. To accommodate the ACT government proposals, an amendment to the plan is required.

It is the role of the ACT Planning and Land Authority to undertake the detailed planning in the area subject to draft amendment 63. In regard to the process that has taken place in the development of draft amendment 63 and draft variation 281, I would describe it as cooperative and collaborative between the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the National Capital Authority. It commenced with the ACT government release of the Canberra spatial plan in 2004, which identified the Molonglo Valley as being capable of greenfield residential development. In 2005, a joint suitability study was undertaken by the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the National Capital Authority in response to the proposed growth scenarios in the Canberra spatial plan and identified those areas suitable for urban development.

Between 2004 and 2007, a number of more detailed urban form and environmental

studies were undertaken by the ACT Planning and Land Authority to refine the urban boundary. These studies related to landscape and visual analysis, heritage, environment, the Scrivener Dam, water management and the like. On 1 September 2007, draft amendment 63 was released for public consultation and the draft amendment was released in conjunction with the ACT Planning and Land Authority's draft variation to the territory plan No. 281: Molonglo and north Weston. The consultation concluded on 23 November 2007—a period of three months.

The National Capital Authority received 67 written submissions in response to draft amendment 63. Nine were supportive, 22 submissions indicated partial support and 36 submissions were opposed to draft amendment 63. Of the 67 submissions received, 43 highlighted environmental concerns, with a large number focused on the potential impacts of urban development on areas of high conservation value located in the central Molonglo area.

In light of the submissions received during the public consultation period, the NCA identified the need for an independent review of earlier environmental work undertaken to determine if the proposed urban boundary was justified in terms of biological and environmental conservation. This review was jointly funded by the National Capital Authority and the ACT Planning and Land Authority and was completed in May 2008.

On 29 May 2008, the National Capital Authority board considered draft amendment 63 and recommended a number of changes as a result of the submissions received and the outcomes of the independent environmental review. On 10 June 2008, the National Capital Authority wrote to ACTPLA advising of the outcomes of the authority meeting. This letter also sought support for the proposed changes to draft amendment 63 in order for the matter to proceed to the Minister for Home Affairs for his consideration.

On 17 June 2008, the ACT Planning and Land Authority responded to the NCA, noting it would reluctantly support the proposed changes to draft amendment 63. However, the letter objected to two of the proposed changes to draft amendment 63. These related to, firstly, the removal of central Molonglo from urban areas on the basis of the environmental report and, secondly, changing the land use policy on the eastern side of north Weston adjacent to the Tuggeranong Parkway, between the Molonglo River and Weston Creek arboretum, from urban areas to hills, ridges and buffers.

After an on-site meeting on 8 July and further discussions with the likes of the Weston Creek Community Council, on 8 July 2008 the authority met, by phone hook-up, to discuss and reconsider the two outstanding matters. The two representatives of the ACT Planning and Land Authority participated in this meeting. At the meeting, the authority agreed to: reaffirm its decision to remove central Molonglo from the urban areas on the basis of the environmental report; change the land use policy on the eastern side of north Weston adjacent to the Tuggeranong Parkway, between the Molonglo River and Unwin Place, from urban areas to hills, ridges and buffers based on the current ACT Planning and Land Authority indicative layout plans for north Weston; the need to maintain the landscape setting of the national capital; and extend the urban boundary in the area south of Unwin Place and north of Cotter Road based

on the review of the ACT Planning and Land Authority's indicative layout plans for north Weston.

Today, we have sought the ACT Planning and Land Authority's support for these proposed changes so that the DA 63 process can be finalised as quickly as possible, which includes the draft amendment being forwarded to the Minister for Home Affairs for his consideration.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Rake, do you wish to add any comments?

Mr Rake: Not at this stage, no.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Rohl, do you have a map that might show those bits, or could you point them out to us on a map that we might have that show those bits that are now subject to change?

THE CHAIR: I think we can identify the eastern side of north Weston, but we are just looking at those specifics you gave us regarding Unwin Place.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, Unwin Place and—

Mr Rohl: If I can come forward, I think we all know where central Molonglo is.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. The proposal from the National Capital Authority in DA 63 removes all of this—

Mr Rohl: That is right, from urban.

MRS DUNNE: as a future urban area. Okay.

Mr Rohl: So this is what we proposed initially in the decision in May, and this was the layout we got from the ACT Planning and Land Authority in July. We overlaid that on our proposed strategic plan. With respect to the changes, this is Unwin Place, which runs up there next to the Orana school. Here we had it down to the arboretum, and we have made that back to urban. Down here, from Cotter Road to the north, we showed all that area as open space. After looking at the indicative layout, we have included that urban area—so just the open space.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify for the *Hansard* record, it is an increase in the availability of the change to urban in that north Weston area.

Mr Rohl: Yes, from the decision in May 2008 to the decision in July 2008, based on the additional information provided by the ACT Planning and Land Authority and discussions with the Weston Creek Community Council and others.

MRS DUNNE: Mr Rohl, when did you write to the authority to take out central Molonglo and other areas?

Mr Rohl: The authority made the decision on 29 May and on 10 June 2008 the National Capital Authority wrote to ACTPLA advising of that outcome.

MRS DUNNE: The long and short of it is that the Planning and Land Authority has now accepted the National Capital Authority's decision in relation to—

Mr Rohl: No, they have not. What they came back with is that they did not support the change of urban areas in central Molonglo. They wanted it shown as areas under investigation for urban use. After further consideration of the environmental report, it was the National Capital Authority's decision in July that it still should be removed at this time from urban areas.

MRS DUNNE: The position of the National Capital Authority is that central Molonglo should be removed completely?

Mr Rohl: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Does that include the north-western bit near Strathnairn or just the bit around William Hovell Drive?

Mr Rohl: Just the bit shown as urban. So it is to the north-west.

MRS DUNNE: The position of ACTPLA is that they would like to have it as an area for investigation for future urban area?

Mr Rohl: That is correct.

MRS DUNNE: You want to rule it out completely; they want to have another investigation, essentially?

Mr Rohl: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Could you go through some of the important bits that came back from that environment study that caused you to perhaps have a change of heart?

Mr Rohl: If you like, I could provide you with the conclusions of the study and a couple of other important pieces of information in relation to it. As part of the study, we asked the consultants to prepare a map of what were the most ecologically constrained areas, the moderately constrained areas and low constrained areas and see how that related to the proposed draft amendment areas, particularly those identified as urban. The conclusion in their report, which identified central Molonglo as highly ecologically significant, was that if that was adopted it was their view that the urban boundaries would address most of the recommendations of the environmental studies previously commissioned by both the National Capital Authority and the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the environmental concerns raised in the submissions.

Further, it would facilitate the conservation of the yellowbox-redgum grassy woodland and the national temperate grassland, habitat for the little eagle and brown treecreeper, and potentially other threatened bird species. It said:

If the conclusion of this report is adopted, it is assessed that no further ecological

study would need to occur in relation to Draft Amendment 63 and Draft Variation 281 at this time and additional studies could occur at later detailed planning stages.

It continued:

If the conclusions of this report were not adopted, further attention would need to be given to the implementation of the recommendations prior to Draft Amendment 63 and Draft Variation being finalised.

It was very clear that if we did not proceed with the expert advice there would be clouds over whether professionally we could move forward on draft amendment 63.

MRS DUNNE: Is that consultants' report publicly available or is that not available until it goes to the Minister for Home Affairs?

Mr Rohl: I would be happy to provide it but I would need to seek the agreement of the ACT Planning and Land Authority because it was jointly funded. Certainly, it will be published as part of the consultation report once the minister has considered it, which is our process. After the minister considers it, this will form part of our consultation report, which will be publicly available.

THE CHAIR: It may be one of the documents we have requested.

Mr Rohl: But I can certainly—

MRS DUNNE: Perhaps you could liaise with Nicola and we will work out whether we can get it now or later.

Mr Rohl: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: What is the process now with you and your minister and what is the time line, roughly?

Mr Rohl: As I said, today we advised the ACT Planning and Land Authority of the authority's decision on 8 July. We need that to be supported by the ACT Planning and Land Authority before we actually make a recommendation to our minister. If they support it, we are ready to go really quickly in terms of making that recommendation. The minister has the option then to refer it to the joint standing committee and they can make a decision about whether they want to inquire into the matter. Subject to that, the minister can then essentially approve it and table it in parliament. So we are looking at an estimate: how long is a piece of string? It could be a month to three months.

MRS DUNNE: And the joint standing committee may or may not inquire?

Mr Rohl: Yes, it is up to the minister to refer it. If he decides to refer it, it is their decision as to whether they wish to inquire into it. Obviously, if they inquire into it, the period of time becomes far greater.

MRS DUNNE: Could I just seek clarification again, because I do not know whether I

fully understood this: the piece of land which is considered to be west Molonglo, which is west of the golf course and—

Mr Rohl: The river?

MRS DUNNE: east of the river, around Strathnairn, is that part of the area that the National Capital Authority said should be taken out of a future urban area?

Mr Rohl: It is just this area here.

MRS DUNNE: So it is not this—

Mr Rohl: No.

MRS DUNNE: Just central; not this bit here?

Mr Rohl: No, just that bit. That is the only part.

THE CHAIR: If that position is agreed upon by ACTPLA and 63 goes ahead to the minister, is it your feeling that the rest of the position of NCA in regard to the territory and the things that you outlined in your opening statement are covered by that 63? So the rest of the concerns that residents may have, for example, in regard to hills, ridges, buffers and the look of the territory, distinctive bushland areas that you mentioned et cetera, will all be intact should this DV, in your case, go ahead?

Mr Rohl: In our view, from a strategic perspective, if these proposed changes are agreed, the National Capital Authority are comfortable that the strategic intent of the national capital plan can be adhered to. The territory can then do the detailed planning for the urban areas, with its open spaces and other proposals that it may have for those urban areas.

MRS DUNNE: On a slightly different subject, does the National Capital Authority have a view about the proposed lake in the Molonglo—

Mr Rohl: No, we have no view about that proposed lake.

MRS DUNNE: Draft amendment 63 is a winding back of the ridges, hills and buffers to essentially Mount Stromlo and areas slightly north and west of Mount Stromlo. Is that correct—the ridges, hills and buffers disappear to some extent?

Mr Rohl: There is some loss of the ridges, hills and buffers. However, that is being looked at very carefully in terms of the location of the urban areas and, further, identified through the submissions, which is one of the key reasons why we have identified that area of north Weston. East of Orana school and the Baha'i centre, if you go up on that ridge you can see the central national area—the Governor-General's, the lake et cetera. So we have made a very clear decision in terms of ensuring that those things are protected.

MRS DUNNE: From the lake and from Yarralumla, the Governor-General's residence, will you be able to see residential development in north Weston?

Mr Rohl: That was our concern, as part of the urban development, because it is different from broadacre. It has a different clear intent, obviously, and the nature and type of development is different. The whole intent of creating the hills, ridges and buffers was to ensure that that setting was protected and those views were protected.

MRS DUNNE: And that will be a continuing outcome after draft amendment 63?

Mr Rohl: Our view is that, with the amendments we have made as a result of the submissions, that will occur.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned in your overview that you had 67 submissions?

Mr Rohl: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And 36 were opposed. Can you tell us about those opposing submissions? Did they take a general form or were they all completely different?

Mr Rohl: There was a general form. A lot of them were environmentally based and were concerned with central Molonglo. Some were concerned—I am having a look at this as we speak—with the landscape, views and vistas—once again, the views from the central national area. There was a whole range of issues that we picked up which were detailed issues which we would not address from a strategic level but which would be considered by the ACT Planning and Land Authority.

There were issues in relation to the Scrivener Dam flooding inundation and making sure that we picked up those concerns. There were issues in relation to an open space connection between the arboretum and Mount Stromlo and ensuring that that was maintained and identified. So there were a range of submissions, but the majority of the submissions which opposed it really related to the environmental issues associated with the area.

THE CHAIR: Are they aside from the 43 submissions with environmental concerns or is it part of those 43 submissions as well?

Mr Rohl: The 43 that I mentioned in my opening statement were primarily environmental issues and primarily related to central Molonglo.

MRS DUNNE: Are there any leasing issues or is that not within your area of competence?

Mr Rohl: No.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Dunne asked you earlier about whether you had a view on the proposed lake. Do you have a view on anything like the riparian zone on the river corridor, endangered species or ecological communities apart from what you have been presented with in the environmental report?

Mr Rohl: In terms of the river corridor, as part of the process a river corridor study was specifically undertaken to look at the ecological, recreational et cetera values of

the corridor. That has been specifically implemented in draft amendment 63. It has been articulated also in the environmental report as there is a series of ecological issues associated with that.

The overall approach has been thorough and it has been accepted by the environmental report. This process does not trigger anything under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. It is my understanding that the ACT Planning and Land Authority are currently in discussions with the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on that matter and a strategic assessment is being undertaken. Until that strategic assessment is completed, no development could occur in the urban areas. My understanding is that the earliest that can be completed is April 2009. So that is a separate process which is going on in parallel.

THE CHAIR: The other thing I wanted to ask for your view on was anything in relation to planning for public transport, cycling and low-emission carbon issues in the new development.

Mr Rohl: Certainly, from a strategic perspective, we have clearly articulated where the intertown public transport route would go. A number of core submissions related to that were made in relation to draft amendment 63. Clearly, that is a matter for the detailed planning of the urban areas which will be, in my view, addressed by ACTPLA at that stage.

MRS DUNNE: So you do not have a view about the siting of public transport routes?

Mr Rohl: Not at the strategic level. We have certainly indicated where the main intertown public transport system should go.

MRS DUNNE: So you have a view about where it should go but you do not have a view about where it should go strategically? I am not quite sure that I understand the difference.

Mr Rohl: The national capital plan does identify an intertown public transport route for the ACT. We have identified the indicative location of that in the plan, to ensure that that is facilitated at the detailed level.

MRS DUNNE: Is that the route that essentially runs from Weston through roughly where Coppins Crossing Road is, but slightly to the east and then up Coulter Drive?

Mr Rohl: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: Is that it?

Mr Rohl: Yes, towards Cook-Macquarie.

MRS DUNNE: You do not envisage anything that might join up this development with the Tuggeranong Parkway, for instance?

Mr Rohl: That would be the main link through the proposed urban areas. There is nothing which would stop any further or additional public transport routes at the detailed planning level being undertaken. Certainly, in today's environment, that would be proactive and a fundamental thing to consider.

MRS DUNNE: I just wanted to make sure there would not be anything that would preclude such a step.

Mr Rohl: No, there would be nothing.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned a concern in one of the submissions in regard to a wildlife corridor perhaps between the arboretum and Mount Stromlo.

Mr Rohl: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you think those concerns are addressed in the planning to this stage?

Mr Rohl: Yes. In terms of the developing of that, we prepared, for the people who made this submission, a number of options at a strategic level for them to consider. The outcome is that we have indicated in the draft amendment a hatched line and some words in the urban area policy—that there must be a connection between Mount Stromlo and the arboretum as part of the detailed planning and development of this area. I think it is fundamentally important and it would be something which would be integral to the development of the area.

MRS DUNNE: Is it possible for the committee to receive those maps or are we waiting for that to go through your processes with your minister?

Mr Rohl: I think it is possible, now that the authority has made the decision, and we can provide those to you.

MRS DUNNE: That would be most helpful, thank you.

Mr Rohl: As has been pointed out to me, it must be kept in mind that ultimately the decision is the minister's, at the end of the day.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, of course.

Mr Rohl: But the board's position, absolutely.

MRS DUNNE: By essentially announcing that you have ruled out central Molonglo it has taken away many of the questions that I would have asked. It has made them redundant.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much for your time this afternoon. The committee secretary will contact you regarding some of those items. The *Hansard* transcript will be available in the not-too-distant future. If there is anything that we need to follow up, we will get back to you and request that.

Mr Rohl: Thank you.

Short adjournment.

LAWRENCE, MS CHRISTINE, President, ACT Equestrian Association

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the planning and environment committee's hearing into Molonglo and north Weston draft variation 281. Ms Lawrence, were you here earlier when I read out the yellow privilege card?

Ms Lawrence: I was indeed, Mr Chairman, but I am happy if you want to read it again.

THE CHAIR: Do you understand the implications of the statement?

Ms Lawrence: I do understand the statement and agree to abide by it.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much for coming in this afternoon. We have received your submission and I am sure all members have read it. Would you like to make some opening comments?

Ms Lawrence: Yes, I have a statement which I would like to read out, prior to answering questions. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to appear before this committee because it is very important to us to ensure that our sport is understood in the context of urban development.

The ACT Equestrian Association is a peak body representing all equestrians in the ACT in their sporting endeavours at all levels of achievement. ACTEA represents about 16 affiliated groups such as pony clubs, showjumping, trail riding, dressage, horse trials, eventing, endurance riding and bolting. This includes three Olympic sports. ACTEA has participated at every stage of the consultation process in regard to the Molonglo development because its members have been active users of the area since the 1970s.

Preliminary assessment 281 in 2007 recognised the significance of equestrian facilities in the Weston Creek-Molonglo area. It acknowledged that horse riders from the nearby equestrian facilities in Curtin and Yarralumla made use of the land on both sides of the Lower Molonglo River and that Stromlo Forest Park included designated equestrian trails.

Key public concerns identified by the preliminary assessment included inadequate buffer zones and recreational corridors and the loss of the Molonglo area's significance and lifestyle to the local community. In response, the preliminary assessment proposed a connection between the Stromlo Forest Park and the Canberra International Arboretum and Gardens, as well as a recreational corridor down the river corridor and a variety of new recreational experiences that connect the Canberra International Arboretum and Gardens and Stromlo Forest Park through the development site. Included in the plan are walking, cycling and horse riding trails that link to existing areas, the new group centre, proposed park, lake and beyond.

During the public consultation process on DV 281, equestrian representatives sought to ensure that the current movement of horses to and from existing equestrian facilities was not limited by the development, particularly safe links between Cotter Road, Mount Stromlo Forest Park, the equestrian park at Curtin, which is our major

competition venue, and the government horse paddocks in the area. The impact on the national bicentennial trail that links Stromlo Forest Park and Equestrian Park, Curtin was particularly questioned.

The structure plan contains an admirable equestrian policy. Horse trails are to be incorporated into the development. The trails shall link to existing equestrian facilities, including the national horse trail, the Pegasus disabled riding school, Forest Park Riding School, the public equestrian park in Yarralumla, pony clubs and agistment facilities. The trails shall also connect to recreation trails in the international arboretum and Stromlo Forest Park.

We were, therefore, extremely disappointed to learn that the present plans for Molonglo contain nothing like that. And you can imagine our amazement when we were also told that the bicentennial national trail was not even within the proposed development.

There are some key words in the structure plan policy in relation to horse riders. They are “incorporated”, “link” and “connect”. These are significant words for us and underpin all our representations to government. As a result of some strenuous lobbying, the ACT Equestrian Association is now in conversation with officers from ACTPLA about the complete absence of equestrian access in the Molonglo development. What we are being offered at the moment is a retrofitted reinstatement of the national bicentennial trail along the Cotter Road between the suburban street fronts and an increasingly busy road—a route that will have to cross numerous suburban access streets and travel through a public sportsground before we reach the Molonglo River. Somehow this does not seem to us to be consistent with the stated policy.

It is quite clear that in all the planning stages equestrian access is an afterthought, to be fitted in where possible around infrastructure, when any serious intent to implement policy No 65 would result in a clear plan for linking such widely separated facilities as Pegasus riding school, equestrian park and the Cotter Road.

ACTEA does not want equestrian-specific facilities and has never asked for them. We want community open space that allows for multiple use by an active community in a safe and responsible way. There is nothing in the present plans for Molonglo that allow for this. In other parts of this city, cyclists on bike paths and dog walkers use the connective open space with equestrians. This is not a difficult thing to achieve, but it requires that planners are driven by community wellbeing rather than real estate prices. Other recreational users of open space have the same requirements as equestrians—a free area, a safe area, one without the noise and danger created by motorised trail bikes and motor vehicles. We have made nine recommendations in our submission, and I am happy to address these in more detail as required.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for those comments. My first question would be in regard to the statement you made about requiring access to some of the urban open spaces like Mount Stromlo, Deeks Forest Park or Stromlo Forest Park. Your current major area is the equestrian centre—the Curtin horse paddocks?

Ms Lawrence: There are several major areas. If you look at Curtin equestrian park,

very close to that there are the Curtin government horse paddocks, Illoura horse paddocks and the Yarralumla horse paddock, next door to Curtin equestrian park. So that is a node there, and Forest Park Riding School. There is another node on the Cotter Road—the privately run agistment centres—plus the government paddocks along the spine going back through Chapman and out to Kambah. So there are those two areas. Stromlo Forest Park, in a strange dogleg way, is in the middle.

At the moment, access from Curtin through to Stromlo is through what we would call Deeks forest. You can cross the road and ride on the northern side of the Molonglo River, cross the river and travel along that way. You can come through the existing forest all the way through to Uriarra Road. There is an equestrian gate, a Cavalletti, on that corner of Uriarra Road and the Cotter Road, leading straight in to Stromlo. And that is the way that the national bicentennial trail travels at the moment.

THE CHAIR: It comes from the north side and then down through the old oak plantation near Glenloch?

Ms Lawrence: Yes, in that sort of area. It comes down near the lake and it goes to equestrian park, because that is where the only camping area is available so that you can camp overnight with—

MRS DUNNE: And equestrian park is roughly the Yarralumla Woolshed?

Ms Lawrence: Yes. Then, when you are moving on, you turn west and you go out to Stromlo Forest Park and travel through the south-east corner of that, pick up the trail again and go along through the back of Kambah. There is a map at the back of our submission that shows that.

MRS DUNNE: Looking at this map, it currently goes—

Ms Lawrence: It is the yellowish one on the left-hand side of your map.

THE CHAIR: We have only got it in black and white.

Ms Lawrence: That doesn't help. I do have a coloured version here, if you would like it.

MRS DUNNE: From Yarralumla, it runs close to the south of the river up through Deeks forest and roughly to where the bushfire memorial is.

Ms Lawrence: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: And then it turns south?

Ms Lawrence: Yes.

THE CHAIR: It then runs around the back of Weston, Duffy—

Ms Lawrence: It runs along the back of Weston. It goes through—

MRS DUNNE: Narrabundah Hill.

Ms Lawrence: Narrabundah Hill, along Eucumbene Drive, then through the back of Chapman, along the nature reserves through there, and it then goes all the way down to Lake Tuggeranong. So apart from that dogleg that makes it into Curtin, it is principally travelling on the western fringe of Canberra.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that you are liaising with ACTPLA at the moment and they have offered you a retrofit—

Ms Lawrence: Of that trail only. They do not really want to talk about those other trails, which are the many trails that people use for recreational purposes. At the moment they are really only interested in talking about retrofitting the bicentennial trail.

MRS DUNNE: The trails that you talk about, Ms Lawrence, are they informal trails?

Ms Lawrence: Most of them are. They are basically the public open space. People travel, for instance, from the Curtin horse paddocks down under the parkway and across the top of what is now called north Weston, along the top of the ridge there, down Unwin Place and across into the forest—the old forest across the road. They travel from as far away as our Kambah Pony Club, up through the public open space along what is part of the national trail and then into Mount Stromlo. They ride all through there. They ride all through what we call Deeks forest, which is the eastern side of Uriarra Road. People do ride from Cook horse paddocks all the way down, assuming there is good weather and it is a nice day.

THE CHAIR: So when you say they come from Cook, are they using public roads or do they try and stick to the trails?

Ms Lawrence: They try and stay away from public roads as best they can as it is not safe. They use public open space and bicycle underpasses.

MRS DUNNE: There is a stock route down Coulter Drive, isn't there?

Ms Lawrence: You can use part of that, yes. So they will use whatever is safe and available. It is more about the continuity and the connection and that there are not impediments placed in people's way constantly. In most of Canberra, there are lots of places where it is quite easy to get around on horseback. The problem we are having with this new development is that nobody is actually thinking like that at the moment. With respect to the public open space that you see on the map, there are a couple of nice green patches that have been drawn on part of the map. When you ask the planners about those, they will say that they are crossed many times by urban streets or they have a large public playing field right in the middle of them. So on the weekend, when you would be riding your horse—

MRS DUNNE: People would be playing soccer.

Ms Lawrence: People are playing soccer. So the constraints are much greater in this development. All of the public open space in Molonglo at the moment is based on

drainage lines. If you have a look at it, you will notice there is a creek that runs through each of them. So they have basically identified those places where they cannot build as the public open space. But if you put a creek line in the middle of your public open space, it divides it in half and makes it less useful.

MRS DUNNE: It would also make it more subject to erosion from horse traffic as well, would it not?

Ms Lawrence: You are not going to get such heavy horse traffic that that is likely to be a problem, but you are certainly going to be subject to flooding, flash flooding and those sorts of things.

MRS DUNNE: Looking at the concept plans for Coombes and Wright, there are fingers of green space that go all the way through, roughly on the northern boundaries of Coombes and Wright, and there is one that goes through the middle that does not go all the way. At this stage it does not go all the way through.

Ms Lawrence: Yes, that one on Coombes that does not go all the way through is on a creek line. The latest plans that we have seen also incorporate the playing field about two-thirds of the way down towards the Molonglo. So it swells out and becomes a public playing field. With respect to those other two green spaces, the ones further up towards the north-west, they are both creek lines.

THE CHAIR: There is a green space in the proposed lake area alongside north Weston?

Ms Lawrence: Yes. Access to that will be limited to a certain extent because the only place that they feel they can put an equestrian purpose-built underpass is at the intersection of the Cotter Road and that new north-south arterial. It is the only way they can get enough height. There will be an underpass near the ACT Forestry site, going into where that lake is, but it will be a cycle path. We may be able to use that.

MRS DUNNE: If the Cotter Road intersection is the only place where they could reasonably put a horse underpass then there is no green space, no corridor.

Ms Lawrence: There will be some connection there. I have got another map; I do not know how widely distributed this map has been. It takes a little dogleg to the left and picks up that green space.

MRS DUNNE: I see. So that incorporates a corridor.

Ms Lawrence: Yes. At the moment the retrofitted BNT that they are giving us goes along the Cotter Road itself, between the urban development and the Cotter Road. It comes around and—

MRS DUNNE: Presumably on the northern side of the Cotter Road?

Ms Lawrence: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: But somewhere you have got to get under that arterial road?

Ms Lawrence: Yes. There is a plan for a large underpass but it is getting to that underpass which is a problem for us.

MRS DUNNE: They would not be envisaging another one further up anywhere?

Ms Lawrence: No, not that we are aware of. The issue with the Cotter Road is that, while the planners would appear to be of the view that it is not going to get any busier, we find it hard to envisage that that will not be the case. It is a suburban edge and there will be streets coming out onto the Cotter Road from there. While they are proposing a purpose-built trail for us, the BNT, the bicentennial national trail, is not just a horse trail; it is a cycle trail and a walking trail as well. So the facility will be there for everyone but it will cross numerous streets.

MRS DUNNE: So your understanding is that there will be road access off Cotter Road into Wright?

Ms Lawrence: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: It is unusual that they would do it that way.

Ms Lawrence: We have been told that on several occasions. Our first assumption, on looking at the maps, was that because there was not any road access shown there, that was not going to be the case.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawrence, you have indicated in your submission that the equestrian groups provide a lot of interest in the ACT. In fact, on page 2 you have an estimated contribution to the gross state product of \$13.85 million. You said that was provided by Wayne Gregson and Graeme Taylor in January 2002.

Ms Lawrence: Yes.

THE CHAIR: So that is earlier. Do you think that figure has grown?

Ms Lawrence: Definitely; simply because the cost of keeping horses, with the drought and those sorts of things, means that people are putting more money into the system. That survey was done as part of a larger study done for the ACT Equestrian Association with a government grant. It was a fairly extensive survey, and that looked at on-costs as well. It looked at people that we support in the community, like all the food suppliers and the vets. The ACT equestrian community basically supports a single equestrian hospital. There are farriers, dentists, masseurs—

THE CHAIR: Yes, I remember them well.

Ms Lawrence: Yes. So there is an entire industry supported by the equestrian community.

THE CHAIR: You have said here too that there is a bit of a separation between the pleasure horse industry and those in competition.

Ms Lawrence: It depends on the level you are talking about. People at the very high competition level are probably working in arenas and confined spaces with very expensive horses. But one of the great features of Canberra is that it is not very expensive to keep a horse here, so that the ownership and enjoyment of a horse is available to a much broader cross-section of society in Canberra, which means that lots of people who do showjumping, dressage and those sorts of things also take the horses out on trail rides for fitness rather than being confined to equestrian centres.

The Stromlo Forest Park area, for instance, over the years has been used for keeping showjumpers, eventers, endurance ride horses and even several racehorses fit. One of the things that works in our disfavour is that people do not see equestrians in large numbers, except at competitions. We tend to be people who operate in small groups or individually and we tend to keep away from main thoroughfares as much as we can, so it is not clear just how many—

MRS DUNNE: It is in your best interests to do so.

Ms Lawrence: Yes, indeed. So we tend to be a bit invisible. It is very difficult for us sometimes to convince people that we actually contribute quite a deal to the ACT economy and also to the concept of the ACT. I notice that in the government's Live in Canberra campaign one of the things that comes up very readily is a bunch of young girls on horseback travelling through some nice bushland. We feel that if the government thinks that is an asset, we should also be able to benefit from an understanding of how that asset needs to be developed and protected.

MRS DUNNE: This is slightly off the area of this inquiry: there are no actual horse paddocks which are impacted by this development, but is ACTEA starting to encounter some constraints on growth in the area because of impacts on horse paddocks around the area?

Ms Lawrence: Yes. The infamous power station, for instance, will remove several horse paddocks.

MRS DUNNE: You will note that I did not mention it; I was not even thinking of the power station.

Ms Lawrence: But that is one case in point. We are constantly having to talk to people and speak to government about possibilities of loss of land. Some of the land is under huge power lines and is in part of the designated public space, so it is not as much under threat. But with respect to those blocks of land which are near the Gungahlin expressway and places like that, Holt paddock seems to be under a bit of threat at the moment from developers. So it is an ongoing issue, as is looking at ways in which we can find alternatives. It is a full-time job.

THE CHAIR: Would the majority of agistment availability that the clubs you support use be government facilities or private facilities?

Ms Lawrence: I honestly cannot answer that number-wise, because the numbers in the government paddocks are controlled to ensure that they do not have a detrimental effect on the environment. In fact, some government paddock groups are Landcare

groups as well. So there is a limit to the number of horses you can stick in any paddock and they are rotated within paddocks in those areas.

There are numerous private equestrian paddocks. There are five in the local Weston Creek area—this area of particular concern. There are others on the northern end of Canberra and there are others over near Pialligo. They are much higher density because quite often they are exercised internally or they are on privately owned land. I would not be able to give you a straightforward, honest answer to that without doing a count.

For us, the biggest concern is that if ACTPLA can, in the draft variation, produce a map, as they did in 5.10 under “Transport”, of all the places where they think on-road cyclists can go, and if they can look at connections between Stromlo and the arboretum, it is not beyond their capacity to think in a forward-looking, long-term, strategic way about how you could make connections through the Molonglo development between Cook and Weston Creek and through the Molonglo.

THE CHAIR: Indeed, our previous witness from the NCA indicated they want to see wildlife corridors.

Ms Lawrence: Exactly. And they can all fulfil a multiple purpose. If you make these corridors wide enough, they can be for everybody.

MRS DUNNE: So what would be an optimum width?

Ms Lawrence: To give you an example, on the Cotter Road, between the back of Curtin, the northern edge of Curtin and the Cotter Road, near where Forest Park Riding School is, there is about an 80-metre open space which has a cycle path in it. Equestrians use that to get through, and there are some nice trees and vegetation. It is a perfectly safe, usable—

MRS DUNNE: And horse people would not use the cycle path?

Ms Lawrence: No, absolutely not; it is not good for horses’ legs. If you put the cycle path close to the houses, so that there is something between the barking dogs and us, and have the cycle path on one side of that open space, the rest of the open space is for dog walkers, joggers and anybody else who would like to use it. So it is not necessary to have a particular road that is just for equestrians.

MRS DUNNE: You do not want a dedicated corridor, nor do you want a dedicated main road; you want a space that you can share that may have a made path on it for cyclists but that has a reasonable amount of space to accommodate horses.

Ms Lawrence: Yes. We just want it to be safe, and so that you can mark it for the BNT and it is usable by all those people.

MRS DUNNE: What are the criteria for “safe”?

Ms Lawrence: Away from vehicular traffic, a surface that is not going to damage horses’ legs—and that is not very difficult. We have been talking about what kind of

surface we would like on this, and the conclusion was grass. It is fine for mountain bikes and it is fine for horses. I am not talking about turf; I am talking about what grows when you just let it happen. The other thing that we feel is necessary is that, if you are going to have an underpass, you do not have blind corners and blind entrances; you have a line of sight so that if there is a cyclist coming in the opposite direction they can see that there is a horse at the other end rather than finding out when they are both in the tunnel. Small design things like that really make it possible for everybody to share these places safely. We are talking basically about “slow ways”.

THE CHAIR: What is the interaction like between cyclists and horse riders?

Ms Lawrence: It depends very much on the cyclist and the horse. We have been practising this in Stromlo Forest Park because, as you know, it is very heavily used by cyclists and they are cyclists who like to travel fast cross-country. There is a rule there, which is an international standard, that everybody gives way to horses. Generally speaking, once people get used to it, except when they are full of adrenaline and it is a competition, it works.

THE CHAIR: Do you mean the horse or the cyclist?

Ms Lawrence: The cyclist. But it is an educational thing. In Stromlo, because it is a confined space, we can really work hard at that education process on both sides. It is probably a bit more difficult in public open space because lots of people might meet a horse once in a blue moon. Our experience is that most people are wary of horses, anyway, and if they do not know about horses they will stay out of their way, and that is the safest thing. So the relationship between cyclists and horse riders depends on the cyclist, but it is not bad. It is quite good and it is getting better the more exposure they have.

THE CHAIR: If ACTPLA were to come back and support a corridor that was suitable for your use, would you then be supportive of the overall concept of development in the area, as a bigger picture?

Ms Lawrence: We should make it quite plain that we are not against the development of the area. While we would love to have our pine forest back, that is not going to happen. It is not an issue about being against the development. We think the planning for the development should be more sophisticated than it is and that it should take into account the fact that we have got a riverine environment which could be a really engaging community space, which it does not seem to be, which we could use. We could have a number of linking connections around the suburbs and through the suburbs that everybody could use. Equestrians could use them; it would make us happy. But it is not about not developing Molonglo; it is about incorporating us into the plan.

MRS DUNNE: To what extent do horse riders currently use the Molonglo River corridor downstream from, say, Coppins Crossing, and to what extent do you feel that would be constrained by the development?

Ms Lawrence: Downstream, so that is going west?

MRS DUNNE: Yes. Between Coppins Crossing and the treatment works, I suppose.

Ms Lawrence: And the Murrumbidgee?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Ms Lawrence: It is not as heavily used as the inner area. One of the groups of people who use that part of the forest heavily are the endurance riders because they need to get the mileage up. They run endurance rides from equestrian park all through that forest area and along the river. They have to get something like 80 kilometres, and they go right through to Belconnen in competition. Those people use it, where they can get access. Some access is prohibited because a lot of the old forest land is now under licence for grazing; those gates are locked and we cannot get in there. So it is not as heavily used as the areas closer in, but it is used.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in this afternoon.

Ms Lawrence: Thank you for having me.

THE CHAIR: If there are any further questions that we think of, we will get those to you as soon as possible. We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as possible as well.

Meeting adjourned from 2.41 to 3.21 pm.

BUTCHER, PROFESSOR HARVEY, Director, Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics, Australian National University

NEIL, MR CHRIS, Project Coordinator, Facilities and Services, Australian National University

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to this hearing of the ACT Legislative Assembly planning and environment committee's inquiry into Molonglo and north Weston. Before we begin, I will read the privilege statement to you.

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on the record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to parliament, its members and others necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

We do not have a submission directly to the committee from you as yet, but we have a copy of the one that you have provided to ACTPLA. Would you like to make any opening comments?

Mr Neil: Yes, if we may. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present our views on this development in Molonglo and north Weston. The ANU has an interest in the development for two reasons. We have property that we control in the area, both Spring Valley Farm and Mount Stromlo—the observatory at Mount Stromlo run by the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics. The Spring Valley Farm issue has been addressed separately with the ACT Planning and Land Authority and is not the subject of the hearing this afternoon, so we can dismiss that by simply saying we are satisfied with the arrangements that have been put in place for Spring Valley Farm. We have a Crown lease over that property; that has just been negotiated, so we are happy with that.

The real issue, and the reason we are pleased to present to you this afternoon, is in relation to Mount Stromlo Observatory. We have been in discussion with the ACT Planning and Land Authority and its various consultants since about May 2003 in the development of the Molonglo-north Weston district, and we have presented our views on the effect that that development might have on the Mount Stromlo Observatory.

We made a submission to the National Capital Authority back in November 2007 in

relation to amendment 63 to the national capital plan. We passed a copy of that submission to Mr Bruce Frazer, of the ACT Planning and Land Authority. In fact, both Harvey and I met with Bruce Frazer yesterday afternoon at the Land Development Agency to continue these discussions. I must say that we are pleased with the approach that people are taking to consult with us and make sure that our concerns are considered.

The issue regarding Mount Stromlo is unusual in most people's minds and it tends to be forgotten. That is why we appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about this because an observatory has some unusual requirements, particularly in regard to light pollution. In the submission we made in November last year, there were three issues that we raised. There was the important one of light pollution and the other two were to do with fire mitigation and traffic management.

It is our understanding of the way the division is being developed that the fire mitigation issues are of great importance to everyone, so we are just going to proceed along with everyone's views on fire mitigation and also with traffic management. There was a suggestion very early in the piece that another access road may have been run up Mount Stromlo. We believe that is no longer on the plan, so we have no issue with that proposal at all.

We come down to the issue of light pollution. Mount Stromlo, and the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics, is still an operating observatory—a gazetted observatory—and the general policy is that there should be no development within five kilometres of an observatory. We recognise and realise that Canberra is expanding and it is very difficult to make a definite statement about no development within five kilometres of the observatory, particularly since, in January 2003, all of the research optical telescopes on the observatory were destroyed and have not been replaced.

There are a number of small, domestic-scale demonstration telescopes on the observatory, and they will continue to be there. There is also—and my colleague will correct me if I am wrong—the possibility of research telescopes going back onto the mountain for research purposes. There may be a proposal put forward to rehabilitate the original telescope on the mountain, the Oddie telescope, in time for the ACT centenary in 2013. So it is an operating observatory. They have a requirement to have dark night sky. Therefore, we have concerns that the unusual requirements of light pollution are reminded to people when developments occur.

In our submission that we made to the National Capital Authority back in November 2007 and passed on to the ACT Planning and Land Authority, we pointed out that, while we have no desire to stop development, we would not like to see the development encroaching any further north of Cotter Road or any further west and south of Uriarra Road. In fact, we know that the Stromlo Forest Park development is using that area of land, anyway, so it is most unlikely that urban development will encroach any further. But I put on the record that we would like the development of urban areas to stop where it is currently planned to stop.

We would like, if possible, to ensure that any urban development that occurs in the Molonglo area has a number of conditions that are considered whenever the

development occurs. Those conditions are basically related to light pollution. In the proposal we put forward back in November last year, we mentioned the three standards that relate to light pollution activities: Australian standard 1158, which is road lighting; Australian standard 4282, which is the obtrusive effects of outdoor lighting; and Australian standard 2560, which relates to sports lighting. We would like those standards considered and mentioned in any development application process so that people are aware of the effects of this lighting.

The general effect of these standards is to try and reduce the upward spill of light from developed areas. Putting light upwards is inefficient, anyway. We do not want to shine light upwards; we want to keep the light down where it is efficiently used. So these standards are sensible standards; we just like people to be reminded of them.

We would like to have, if possible, caveats included which restrict the installation of obtrusive lighting by house owners. Most of the documents relate to commercial and public use space when talking about lighting, flood lighting, sports lighting and arena lighting. House owners themselves can also affect light pollution by having floodlights around their house, or somebody might put a tennis court in their backyard and then put huge floodlights on the tennis court, which can have an effect.

We would like the streets in and around the Molonglo division not to radiate away from Mount Stromlo. If you have a street that radiates away from Mount Stromlo and it has street lighting, that street lighting becomes quite a large intensity of light. We would like the plans for Molonglo not to have radiating streets away from Mount Stromlo. The plans I have seen do not do that but we just wish to mention it.

If housing is put at high level on hills and ridges around the Mount Stromlo area, the height elevation relative to Mount Stromlo has a more deleterious effect as the relative elevations become the same. So we would like to see less development on the high ridges around Mount Stromlo, if we could.

In areas where there would be direct line-of-sight suburban lighting visible at Mount Stromlo, we would like there to be strategic planning of stands of trees to screen against light pollution. We would like external flood lighting of buildings, both public and private, to be minimised or have bans on it where they are close to the observatory. We would like to reduce the number of lit sports arenas within five kilometres of the observatory.

In the examination of both amendment 63 to the national capital plan and variation 281 to the territory plan, we note that a number of these conditions are already picked up. One thing I would like to point out, though, is that in the transcription from our submission and amendment 63 into draft variation 281, a number of the issues have dropped off. There are policies relating to the use of strategic screening of trees, which we appreciate; there are policies relating to the minimisation of light, which we also appreciate. However, in that draft variation, which I understand is still a draft and is not finalised yet, there are specific policies relating to two suburbs—suburbs 1 and 2—which are in direct line of sight of the observatory and very close to the observatory, and the policies relating to minimisation of light pollution have dropped out of those two areas of the document, of draft variation 281. We would very much like to ensure that there is consistency, where light pollution minimisation is being

applied, across the whole of the development, particularly where it becomes close to Mount Stromlo.

This does not appear to have been reflected in variation 281: residential, commercial and public developments are of no difference to us as far as light pollution goes; they should all be addressed. Just addressing public use or commercial use space is fine, except people with their own private residences could damage the whole issue with light pollution.

If possible, we would like to see the actual standards specified by number rather than just using a vague reference to relevant standards. In that way, people are therefore directed at actual words that can assist them in their development application. If those issues that we raised are considered and accepted then we will have no objection at all to any developments occurring.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your comments. Professor Butcher, would you like to add any comments?

Prof Butcher: I think Mr Neil has summarised our position perfectly, thank you.

MRS DUNNE: The new suburb of Wright, the first of the suburbs, which is in part of what used to be old Deeks forest: how far away is that?

Mr Neil: I think it would be less than two kilometres as the crow flies.

MRS DUNNE: But some of the other areas that are on the northern side of Uriarra Road—

Mr Neil: Are further away.

MRS DUNNE: They are further away?

Mr Neil: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Just having a look at the north Weston area, that currently has a couple of sites that are not commercial sites, but there is the old police centre there and some sites above that. On the northern side of Cotter Road, there is the joint services staff college, the Defence Force College. I have not seen them of a night-time so I have not thought about it. Do they affect Stromlo at the moment—any of the operations around there?

Mr Neil: Not really, no.

Prof Butcher: Not badly, no.

THE CHAIR: If the committee makes a recommendation and the government picks it up in relation to particular standards, would it affect those places that are already established?

Mr Neil: Not as long as we do not get any worse than we are at the moment with

places like the joint services staff college. We have also got ActewAGL on the hill itself, with their water treatment plant. We have Stromlo Forest Park, with the pavilion at the bottom of the hill.

In the development of all of those facilities, we have had consultation with the controllers. When the pavilion for Stromlo Forest Park was being constructed and designed, we requested that any lighting spill down and away from the hill. If those sorts of conditions are taken into account then we are not going to have a problem and we will not have a worse situation than we have now.

It is an issue that we have to keep reminding people of because it is an unusual requirement. Unless we keep reminding people of it then someone at some time is going to build a sports field with floodlights which will affect the observatory, and that is when we are going to have to get into some more critical negotiations. Right now, we want to be good corporate neighbours to everybody in our vicinity. We enjoy the development out there because it brings people out towards Mount Stromlo. The real issue is the need to remind people all the time that this is an observatory and they have unusual requirements about light.

THE CHAIR: Would you be able to describe what the effects of light pollution in that area would be on the observatory and future uses?

Prof Butcher: It is a question of being able to see faint celestial objects; it is as simple as that. People, either for research purposes or in schools that come up to use small telescopes and so forth, like to be able to see planets, galaxies and things like that, especially young people who have never seen such things because they live in the city. It is a wonderful opportunity to be able to, close to the city, come and see something that many have not seen before. As the sky gets brighter it just becomes impossible. It is as simple as that.

THE CHAIR: Could you describe how that effect occurs.

Prof Butcher: It is a question of the lights.

THE CHAIR: The light escaping upwards?

Prof Butcher: The light escapes upwards, it reflects off water vapour, dust, particulate matter of one sort or another, in the atmosphere. So if it is a particularly dusty day then the moon will make it very difficult to see faint objects. But on a good night, Mount Stromlo is still a very good site for these purposes.

THE CHAIR: If we stick to these particular standards that you have indicated, it should not detract from your ability—

Prof Butcher: I think that is correct. I think the experience of the past several years has been that, as long as people consult, they are willing to make some small adjustments that mitigate the problem. After all, most people want the light to shine down where they can see it. If it shines up, it is wasted energy. So it is not usually a problem to convince people that it would be good to put some kind of shield on their lights or something like that.

MRS DUNNE: And all of those things are set out in the relevant standard?

Prof Butcher: Yes, that is correct.

MRS DUNNE: So there is no guesswork about what is required for people. It is not even rocket science, really.

Mr Neil: Not really.

THE CHAIR: In regard to standards again, what about motor vehicles? You have talked about the roads, but do the vehicles on the roads need to be to a particular standard so that there is no light pollution from there as well?

Mr Neil: Not really. If the issue of the roads radiating away from Mount Stromlo is followed then you are not going to have headlights pointing at Mount Stromlo.

Prof Butcher: It is the high beams. If the road is pointed right at you, the high beams are extremely bright, but if the road is over here then the high beams are much less.

MRS DUNNE: So that is something that people need to keep in mind when they are actually doing the road layout?

Mr Neil: Correct.

Prof Butcher: And the layouts we have seen are acceptable.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much for coming along this afternoon.

Prof Butcher: Thank you for hearing us.

THE CHAIR: We will get a copy of the transcript to you as soon as we can. If there are any further questions that we might have, we will get those to you.

Mr Neil: Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 3.40 pm.