



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2015-2016

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2015-2016 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2015-2016](#))

Members:

**MR B SMYTH (Chair)
MS M FITZHARRIS (Deputy Chair)
DR C BOURKE
MS N LAWDER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 23 JUNE 2015

**Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph 620 50435)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	779
Environment and Planning Directorate.....	779, 847
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.30 am.

Appearances:

Gentleman Mr Mick, Minister for Planning, Minister for Roads and Parking, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations, Minister for Children and Young People and Minister for Ageing

Territory and Municipal Services Directorate

Peters, Mr Paul, Executive Director, Infrastructure, Roads and Public Transport

Gill, Mr Tony, Director, Roads ACT

Elliott, Mr Gordon, Acting Executive Director, Corporate and Business Enterprises

Ponton, Mr Ben, Deputy Director-General, Environment and Planning Directorate

Environment and Planning Directorate

Ekelund, Ms Dorte, Director-General

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Director, Finance and Operational Support

Corrigan, Mr Jim, Executive Director, Planning Delivery

Carmichael, Mr Tony, Executive Director, Strategic Planning

Hubert, Ms Pamela, Acting Manager, Heritage, Planning and Heritage Branch

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Simmons, Mr Craig, Director, Road Transport Regulation

THE CHAIR: Good morning all, and welcome to the eighth day of public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2015-2016, which means we are two-thirds of the way through. In the proceedings today we will examine roads and parking under Territory and Municipal Services, the Environment and Planning portfolio, as well as the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Please be aware that the proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will also be published. The proceedings are being broadcast as well as webstreamed. Could witnesses please familiarise themselves with the privilege statement that is on the table? Could you please confirm that you have read the privilege card and that you understand the implications of privilege?

Mr Gentleman: Thank you, Mr Smyth, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. Before we proceed to questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, Mr Chairman. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today to examine the 2015-16 budget. As you are aware it is my first budget as Minister for Roads and Parking and I am very proud of the funding the ACT government has committed to the ongoing development of our city.

The budget delivers more than \$90 million in spending for new roads and road infrastructure in addition to the ongoing road maintenance programs. The budget includes \$24.6 million over three years for the duplication of Ashley Drive from Erindale Drive to Ellerston Avenue. This follows on from stage 1 works which were completed last year and progresses the commitment given by the ACT government to improve safety and access for users of this road in Tuggeranong.

There is \$31.2 million over two years for the first stage of the Gundaroo Drive upgrade, which will duplicate the road between the Gungahlin Drive and Mirrabai Drive-Anthony Rolfe Avenue section. The next stage of these works will be considered in future budgets. \$17.1 million has been provided for Horse Park Drive, which will upgrade the road in the vicinity of Throsby and assist in the development of the residential area there. \$14 million has been provided to improve roads in the Gungahlin town centre, including extensions of The Valley Avenue and Manning Clark Crescent. This work will support commercial developments in the town centre and will also be important to manage traffic arrangements with the construction of the capital metro light rail project and changes that will take place on Hibberston Street as well.

The ACT, in partnership with the Australian government, continues to fund improvement to bridges on key commercial routes to ensure access is available to the current fleet of larger and more productive commercial vehicles. This results in more productive commercial freight movements and lower operating costs as well. The ACT government has provided \$700,000 to undertake strengthening works on bridges along the Monaro Highway from Pialligo Avenue to Isabella Drive to ensure a safe and reliable freight route from the Majura Parkway.

This government recognises the importance of the timely planning and development of road infrastructure projects to meet future city needs. \$2.5 million has been provided over two years for this purpose, covering feasibility and/or design studies for six intersections and main access routes across Canberra. For example, \$900,000 has been provided to assess the need for road upgrades in the vicinity of the airport, including Pialligo Avenue. This road provides an important link to Queanbeyan and regional New South Wales. The ACT government will work closely with Queanbeyan City and surrounding councils to progress these, including a joint submission to the Australian government's stronger regions program.

As our city continues to develop, a planned and integrated approach to the provision of road infrastructure will only become more important. I am pleased that this government is leading the way in this regard. I and directorate officials stand ready for your questions, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. If we go to page 6 of budget paper H, output class 1.2, roads and sustainable transport covers both roads and the provision of ACTION bus services. What is the split in funding between the roads part of the budget and ACTION bus services?

Mr Gentleman: I will ask Mr Elliott to provide some details of the split.

Mr Elliott: The payment for ACTION is around \$96 million.

THE CHAIR: The total cost has dropped by \$7 million yet the GPO has gone up by about \$2 million. Who has suffered the cut?

Mr Elliott: As you mentioned, there is about a \$7 million variance. In the expenses line it does include some non-cash items. In 2014-15 that figure includes around \$12 million of expenses of capital works projects. So we do not budget for that expense but it is expenses for capital works which do not meet the testing of asset. So it is actual expense—examples like landscaping or earthworks. There is \$12 million in 2014-15 but not in 2015-16. That would bring it down by \$12 million, but offsetting that there is an increase of around \$4½ million in depreciation for 2015-16, plus there is some indexation, which will get you back to that \$7 million gap.

THE CHAIR: Roads last year had how much funding, and how have they gone this year? Have they gone up or have they gone down?

Mr Elliott: The estimated outcome in terms of GPO funding is \$196.9 million and in the new year it is \$198.9 million. So it has gone up by \$2 million in actual GPO funding.

THE CHAIR: But the \$96 million comes off that for ACTION?

Mr Elliott: Yes, the \$96 million gets transferred to ACTION.

THE CHAIR: What is the split in the estimated outcome then?

Mr Elliott: For ACTION?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Elliott: It is a similar figure, around \$96 million. I would have to get an exact figure but it is around that \$96 million figure.

THE CHAIR: Could we have a reconciliation of the ins and outs, please? Minister, on page 10 the accountability indicators show the annual percentage of territorial roads resurfaced; the target was five per cent. The target again in the coming year is five per cent but the outcome was only 3.2 per cent. What is the reason for the under-delivery?

Mr Gentleman: The reason is that we have moved to different levels of resurfacing. We have been talking to the community about the level of detail and surface style that they want in resurfacing of these roads. We have chosen to go down a slightly more expensive route, which means that it is more costly; therefore we are unable to meet those close targets that we allocated. But it does mean generally that we are providing a better outcome for the territory.

THE CHAIR: In the coming year therefore will you get to the five per cent target and have you increased the funding?

Mr Peters: Further to the minister's answer, we are certainly using different types of surfacing—asphalt instead of chip seal around the busier intersections—which is more expensive, which means we do less. There are also other pressures on the roads budget around street lighting, electricity and drainage. If we have a lot of wet weather then those sorts of maintenance costs come out of that budget and that effects how much we do every year. This year we aim for that target of five per cent but it depends on what pressures come up during the year as to whether we hit it at the end of the day.

THE CHAIR: What was the road resealing budget for 2014-15?

Mr Gill: The figure was in the order of \$11 million. That was at the start of the budget year.

THE CHAIR: And for 2015-16?

Mr Gill: It will be about \$12 million.

THE CHAIR: That makes it impossible to get to the target of five per cent. If you have done two-thirds of your target for \$11 million you are not going to get 100 per cent of the target for \$12 million. It is mathematically impossible.

Mr Gentleman: Mr Smyth, we are doing the best we can to reach those targets, but as I explained there has been extra pressure from both the community wanting a different outcome and of course the extra costs in regard to electricity et cetera.

Mr Gill: In terms of the approach we are also using some federal funding to assist us in our road maintenance work, the roads to recovery, which is funding of \$28 million over five years. We are using half of that for road maintenance work. That will supplement the territory's budget. That is an additional \$3 million on top of that figure that I have mentioned.

THE CHAIR: An additional \$3 million?

Mr Gill: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Which will get you closer but still will not quite get you there?

Mr Gill: It will get us closer. The issue of the long-term maintenance of roads is a matter on which advice will be put to government during 2015-16.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke has a supplementary.

DR BOURKE: Yes. Minister, can you tell us a little more about this road resealing decision, the particular surface types that you were discussing and what the relative benefits are for both longevity and serviceability?

Mr Gentleman: Yes. There certainly is more longevity in the bitumenised seal. There is also less road noise and less impact on traffic in regard to the chip seal being loose at the time. I will ask Mr Gill to give some more detail on that.

Mr Gill: I will give a bit of a summary of the background in terms of road maintenance. When you are responsible for roads and car parking areas, the idea is to keep the pavement dry and to have a good skid resistance. The most cost-effective way of doing that is to use a product such as chip seal.

In a car park—using Cooleman Court as an example of a car park that people might be familiar with—if you are pushing a trolley and the road has been resurfaced, the stones and the bitumen, if it is during a warmer day, the bitumen softens and poses a problem for people. We prepared a change in position in terms of the approach we would use to car parks. We decided that we would not use chip seal in car parks even though it was a technically suitable product to pursue. We also decided that in certain residential areas, or on main roads that were close to residential areas, we would also pull back from using chip seal, even though technically it was a suitable product. An example is Kingsford-Smith near Florey. We have used a different treatment from the point of view of trying to manage the noise and the amenity impact rather than using chip seal. So there is a range of product.

In terms of cost, the cost of chip seal might be \$10 to \$15 per square metre. The cost of the next level up, which seeks to address traffic noise issues, may be in the order of \$30 to \$40. And asphalt is somewhere between \$50 and \$100. So when you have responsibilities for 16 million square metres of residential street and in excess of six million square metres of main road, the cost per square metre is one of the issues that you need to consider. It is something that we have considered in discussion with not only the current minister but also Minister Rattenbury as the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services.

THE CHAIR: All right. Mr Coe has a supplementary, as does Ms Lawder.

MR COE: Those prices you mentioned, Mr Gill, are, of course, the application costs, but what about the whole-of-life costs for chip seal versus asphalt?

Mr Gill: Asphalt is a more durable product; in the same circumstances you might get an additional five years. With chip seal, basically a whole of life of 15 years would be considered a good whole of life for a chip seal resurfacing, whereas for asphalt resurfacing 20 to 25 years would be seen as a good life. But there is a significant difference in the level of investment.

MR COE: Yes, sure. I have received numerous complaints over the years about the application of chip seal, where you get grooves, in effect, down the driving line. There is a recent complaint for Temperley Street in Nicholls. There have been complaints about Kerrigan Street in Dunlop and many others. It seems to be a recurring problem that the chip seal does wear out on the driving line. How much of it is a problem with the specific application on those streets and how much is, in effect, a policy problem with using that material?

Mr Gentleman: Mr Coe, my understanding is that the application of chip seal and then road use afterwards form the particular surface that is required, in that the vehicles actually push the chip seal down into the surface, but I will ask Mr Gill to give you some more detail.

Mr Gill: Given the level of application of chip seal in the territory over the last, say, 10 to 15 years, it represents about 90 per cent of the total resurfacing that happens in the territory. In relation to the number of instances where there is stripping—the term for what you are describing, where basically vehicles strip along the wheel lines as they travel—the number of occurrences of that is very small in the overall scheme of things. The rectification of that also rests with the contractor rather than the territory. So while it is an inconvenience in terms of having to go through some remedial works, the cost of that stripping basically is a cost borne by the contractor, so it is not an additional cost to the territory.

MR COE: With regard to that asset acceptance or that approval, how is that conducted and what portion of chip seal work, roughly, would you need to go back to the contractor and say, “You have got to rectify it”?

Mr Gill: In terms of the overall resurfacing contracts, there is a superintendent that is engaged to monitor the quality of the product. In terms of rework, it would be less than one per cent on an annual basis.

MR COE: Are there ever any concerns expressed from ACTEW about loose chips going into the stormwater system?

Mr Gill: As part of the management process, if there is a stormwater network or a side inlet, that should be protected, as part of the process, with a snake or sand snake across the inlet. I am not aware of any specific complaints from ACTEW. In recent years we have tried to improve the level of sweeping and the level of surveillance of the resurfacing program. For the most recent year that has been completed, the level of community concern, I would suggest, is quite low.

MR COE: Finally, what are the criteria for when chip seal is appropriate and when another treatment is preferable with regard to noise? For instance, Kerrigan Street in Dunlop is quite a busy road, with houses, in effect, backing onto it. A lot of people have complained to me about the noise of the resurfaced road, in addition to the quality of the resurfacing. If Kingsford Smith warrants it, why wouldn't a road like Kerrigan also?

Mr Gill: In terms of the process that is adopted, if there is a road that is in close proximity to residential areas, and it carries high volumes and traffic noise is seen as a factor that needs to be considered, we will undertake some traffic noise surveys. If it is close to the territory guideline in terms of traffic noise—acceptable traffic noise levels—in, say, existing areas or new areas, there is a threshold for that. If it is close to that, that would influence our choice of treatment.

MR COE: Is it in effect like a matrix—for 60 kilometre an hour roads, it is this many vehicle movements; for 80 kilometres an hour, it is this many vehicles?

Mr Gill: The matrix is basically the volume of traffic, speed limit and proximity direct to residential dwellings.

MR COE: Right. So there is actually a hard and fast rule?

Mr Gill: There is a consideration of that, yes.

MR COE: Are you able to provide to the committee the—

Mr Gill: I will take that question on notice.

MR COE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I think Ms Lawder had a supplementary; then we will go to a new question from Ms Fitzharris.

MS LAWDER: Following on from Mr Smyth's point, does it appear that your indicator a is actually a number of dollars rather than a percentage of the roads—a and b?

Mr Gill: One translates to the other.

MS LAWDER: Not really, because the cost of everything goes up every year. As Mr Smyth pointed out, if you have done 3.2 per cent for \$11 million, you are not going to get five per cent with \$12 million when costs go up.

Mr Gill: The five and four per cent are technical standards that seek to achieve a resurfacing of main roads every 20 years and residential roads every 25 years.

MS LAWDER: So you are not achieving them at present. Okay. On the chip sealing, one example that I am aware of—I have had discussions with the previous minister rather than Mr Gentleman—is Bugden Avenue in Fadden. From recollection, I think the chip sealing was abandoned and you went to bituminised instead. Is that correct?

Mr Gill: Over time, we can change treatments. There are examples of roads—Bowen Drive is one, but also, on the north side, there are roads like Owen Dixon Drive—where a different treatment has been used. I mentioned Kingsford Smith near Florey, where an example has been used. There are examples where we do change, for a range of reasons, from chip seal. Having said that—

MS LAWDER: Halfway through or after complaints? I think that is what happened with Bugden Avenue.

Mr Gill: Sometimes we supplement. To give an example where we have supplemented, we initially did a chip seal in the case of, say, Bowen Drive in Barton. We have subsequently gone and basically measured the traffic noise levels and gone back to do an asphalt resurfacing.

MS LAWDER: I know with Bugden Avenue in Fadden, around the Wanniasa hills, I received a lot of complaints about the chips on the footpath creating a hazard for pedestrians, runners and whatever. Do you get many complaints like that?

Mr Gill: We get some complaints, but we also try to improve our processes in terms of sweeping up and making sure that driveways and gully inlets basically are dealt with.

THE CHAIR: We will push on. We have got roads and parking until 10.30. Ms Fitzharris, a new question.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. Good morning, minister. I have a few questions about roads in Gungahlin, but I would like to say at the outset that in relation to the announcement in the budget, particularly to start the duplication of Gundaroo Drive and Horse Park Drive, I have received a lot of very positive feedback from locals. So thank you. I also thank you for your generosity, and that of your officials, in briefing me and informing me about the roads network in Gungahlin. As you know, it has been the most often asked question of me in the last six months.

The Chief Minister was here as Minister for Economic Development on Friday and he spoke with us about the duplication of Horse Park Drive. Mr Dawes mentioned that they had had some success in savings across a number of projects due to new procurement and capital works processes and that that had enabled savings in some areas and, therefore, enabled the directorate to accelerate works in other areas. I asked if they could consider accelerating the design and duplication of the section of Horse Park Drive from Majura Parkway to Well Station Drive, which they said they would take into consideration. In case you had missed that, I wanted to share it with you.

Mr Gentleman: I did listen carefully.

MS FITZHARRIS: Great. As you know, with the opening of Majura Parkway, obviously there is a bit of a halt as it comes to the beginning of Horse Park Drive. The duplication between Well Station and Anthony Rolfe is welcomed, but if some consideration could be given to that stretch in particular.

There is another issue along Horse Park Drive—and I thank you for your letter yesterday—around the Katherine Avenue intersection in particular. That intersection has been raised with me many times, largely due to the increased volume of traffic from Bonner. People find they are diverting up into the top of Amaroo and coming out at the traffic lights at the top of Amaroo rather than using the Katherine Avenue intersection. Can you give a bit of an explanation around what is planned for that intersection?

Mr Gentleman: Certainly. I go to the first part of your discussion there with regard to Majura and Horse Park Drive. The timing, I think, for Majura is very good. The results are that there are quite a number of commuters using Majura now rather than the other key roads from Gungahlin, which means that there is some lessening of pressure on some of the other roads feeding into the city. Of course, that timing means that we can now do some of the other works that we have programmed on Gungahlin Drive and some of the other areas and relieve some of that pressure as well.

With regard to Katherine Avenue and Horse Park Drive, we will be looking at that within the survey that has been funded out of this budget for that particular avenue. I remember working there in the early 2000s, when you were lucky to see 10 cars a day, but it has grown incredibly through Gungahlin since then. I will just ask directorate officials to go through some of the details for us.

Mr Gill: In terms of the intersection of Katherine Avenue and Horse Park Drive, we have done some work on this in the past. It was funded as a forward design. The actual treatment was quite extensive—in excess of \$4 million, I believe—and it involved signalling the intersection. There was no interim arrangement. It was basically either do all that or live with some very minor improvements to the existing.

The other aspect was that, while people have raised the issue of Katherine Avenue and Horse Park Drive as an intersection of concern, when you look at intersections within Gungahlin itself it was not the most highly ranked intersection from a safety point of view. There were four or five other intersections within the town centre that had a higher safety consideration—Hibberson and Hinder, Hinder and Efkarpidis, as examples. There were two intersections on Anthony Rolfe that also, from a safety point of view, which is the focus of your question, were more highly ranked. That is where we have focused, rather than Horse Park Drive.

Horse Park Drive-Katherine Avenue will be picked up as part of the larger project that will complete the forward design to join into the Majura Parkway project. At this stage, we do not have an understanding of the cost of that overall project. We appreciate the importance of it connecting into the parkway project, because the parkway project will have the capacity to attract additional traffic once they can get to it.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you; I appreciate that. I think the concerns that have been raised with me are around safety. What people are saying now is that they are no longer using that intersection at all. They are using other ones and going through the suburb rather than accessing it and exiting from there, which I have done on a number of occasions, and it can take a considerable amount of time to get out. I appreciate that, and I know that that work is being done.

You also mentioned Hibberson, Hinder and Efkarpidis. I know that there has been some discussion since the opening of Winyu House about having a look at the pedestrian and traffic movements. Do you have an update on that?

Mr Gill: Yes. We have actually completed that work in recent weeks. There is a case to establish some pedestrian crossings, and as part of our minor works program we will be progressing those. That would be a crossing and some lighting to support it.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are you able to say where exactly that is?

Mr Gill: I can take that question on notice.

MS FITZHARRIS: That would be great, thank you.

Mr Gill: I know the work has been done and it does meet a warrant for additional pedestrian crossings. That will be progressed as part of our minor works program. We can provide some separate advice on that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you, and the same about the timing of that work?

Mr Gill: It will be part of our current year minor works program. We will try to get it

in place within the next three to four months. That is the sort of timing that would be typical with a minor works program.

MS FITZHARRIS: Just a last one on what I know is a fairly perennial issue—that is, the traffic movements around the Burgmann campus on The Valley Avenue and Gungahlin Drive. Has there been any recent thinking on how that is going? Some feedback has been that the pedestrian traffic lights for the school, to park across the road, have caused some delays across the intersection of Gungahlin Drive.

Mr Gill: We have ongoing discussions with Burgmann. It is quite a substantial school now at what always has been, from a pure traffic management point of view, a difficult location in terms of the intersection of The Valley way and Gungahlin Drive. We have installed over the years quite a number of measures, including additional car parking and an exit from the school onto another part of the town centre.

Concerns have been raised about whether motorists passing through the site actually perceive that there are two sets of traffic lights. They are focused on the Gungahlin Drive set and on occasions they may not be focusing on the fact that a signalised pedestrian crossing has been put in to support people getting from one side of the road to the other side of the road. We continue to work with the school. We are aware that there are some ongoing concerns and we will continue to do the best that we can in those circumstances.

Mr Gentleman: Safety is paramount for school children especially, and that location has shown that we needed to put in a signalised pedestrian crossing there. In some other areas across Canberra we are looking at particular changes to intersections to provide safer access for pedestrians. That may mean changes to traffic flows to ensure that safety is paramount.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. With the Burgmann campus, has there ever been consideration of two possible options? One would be extending the top exit from Palmerston of Kosciuszko across to The Valley Avenue or through the grasslands. The other one is possibly a road and an exit from Gungahlin Drive heading south just at the top of the Burgmann campus onto Delma View so that, even within the school grounds, that does not butt into the grasslands but goes along the top of the campus?

Mr Gill: There have been a lot of discussions over the years about a range of options, none of which, unfortunately, when looked at in detail or when looked at in terms of the environmental impact have been able to be progressed.

MS FITZHARRIS: Right.

Mr Gill: Other than the work that I have described where we have connected into Delma View and we have put in measures on The Valley way. As I said, it has always been a school located in a difficult site.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: I have got some questions about roads and parking in my electorate, Ginninderra. Can you tell me about the budget funding feasibility and design studies for traffic lights at three particular intersections in Belconnen which I think you have announced—firstly in Weetangera at the intersection of Belconnen Way and Springvale Drive, in Evatt at the intersection of Kuringa Drive and Owen Dixon Drive and in Dunlop at the intersection of Lance Hill Avenue and Ginninderra Drive? How will these improve traffic flow in Belconnen?

Mr Gentleman: The intention is to improve traffic flow. If you look at the last question first, in regard to Dunlop, the Lance Hill Avenue and Ginninderra Drive intersection, in recent years we have seen the expansion of west Belconnen add traffic volumes accessing the suburb of Dunlop at that particular intersection. As the west Belconnen development has expanded, movements are expected to increase as well and that adds pressure to the intersection. At present the intersection does not meet the appropriate standards for arterial road classification. Therefore Roads ACT will look at some options to increase that standard. I will ask directorate officials to give us the details of what we are doing there.

Mr Gill: Dr Bourke, you would be familiar with the Ginninderra-Lance Hill intersection. There is no actual right turn facility. When you are travelling on Ginninderra Drive and you want to turn right into Lance Hill there is no actual separate right turn facility; so people just prop on Ginninderra Drive and, given the nature of that road and the busier nature of that road, there have been a number of collisions. Basically the investigation would look at providing a more typical arterial road intersection which allows a right turn facility in that particular case.

The intersection of Springvale Drive and Belconnen Way has a crash history that qualified it as a black spot. Because the federal program requires very tight cost-effective treatment, the benefits have to basically outweigh the cost by a factor of two to one. The preferred scheme at that intersection would be a set of traffic lights but the cost of traffic lights would not enable it to get a benefit cost of up to two. So the territory decided that it would seek to progress that road safety improvement as part of its own road safety program in the future. This work is to establish the cost of installing traffic lights.

It is not unusual that some road safety improvements cannot be delivered. Even though they might be identified as a black spot program, they cannot be delivered through the federal government program because of the criteria. There are examples. Say, Melrose Drive and Eggleston on the south side, Chifley, was a similar project where basically the optimum intersection treatment was a set of traffic lights but it could not be funded through the black spot program because it did not meet the criteria, and the territory progressed it separately through its own road safety program which recognised the importance of having safe intersections but did not place such a high or hard threshold in terms of the requirements.

There are two aspects to that last intersection, Kuringa Drive and Owen Dixon Drive. Again, if you are familiar with that location there is no right turn facility on Kuringa Drive as you turn into or out of Owen Dixon Drive. There is a bend on Kuringa Drive. It has a crash history.

The other aspect that this project will look at will be an off-road cycle path connection from the Barton Highway down to Kingsford Smith Drive. There is a well-worn track on one side of Kuringa Drive where obviously people travel. We often get requests for a cycle path connection in that vicinity. We will take the opportunity to try to pick up both the safety improvement and the improvements potentially to walking and cycling at the same time.

DR BOURKE: Furthermore, what are the long-term plans for Kingsford Smith Drive, given that residents say it is already a major commuter route for traffic going south to William Hovell and it is going to become worse as we have more development happening in north Gungahlin and ultimately in west Belconnen?

Mr Gentleman: Mr Gill, what studies have we done?

Mr Gill: It carries a reasonable amount of traffic but there are no plans to dramatically alter Kingsford Smith at this point in time.

Mr Gentleman: We certainly keep an eye on those traffic flows and certainly as more development occurs in west Belconnen we will have a look at it and keep a study of the traffic flows onto Kingsford Smith and, indeed, onto William Hovell.

DR BOURKE: And can you explain who is responsible for the parking areas at the Charnwood shopping centre, that is, the shopping centre down the bottom, not the one up the top on Tillyard Drive?

Mr Gill: Tillyard Drive and Lhotsky Street?

DR BOURKE: No, the one down the bottom where the Woolies is.

Mr Gill: In terms of maintenance of the car park that would be a TAMS responsibility, a Roads ACT responsibility.

Mr Gentleman: Are there some issues you would like to highlight for us, Dr Bourke?

DR BOURKE: I am wanting to know who is actually responsible. Now I know that you are responsible I can direct my inquiries to you, minister.

Mr Gentleman: It is not a private car park. It is ours.

THE CHAIR: A new question, Ms Lawder, and then Mr Coe.

MS LAWDER: I have a couple of questions about some roads in Tuggeranong. Firstly, there is the Ashley Drive upgrade which I think is \$24.6-something million in this coming year's budget.

Mr Gentleman: It is \$24.7 million.

MS LAWDER: That is good to see. However, I have received a number of queries about why it has not been extended to Johnson Drive, that last 300 or so metres. Can you explain why that is the case?

Mr Gentleman: Can I say that it is a good expenditure for Tuggeranong. Ashley Drive is quite congested, especially in the morning peak up towards Erindale Drive. The first part of the Ashley Drive duplication was completed last year—and that is on the Erindale side—and now it is appropriate for us to fund the section across from there to Ellerston Avenue. It will be a complete dual construction.

In conversation with the community during that consultation process there were several other factors that the community wanted to see for Ashley Drive but most of those were in regard to pedestrian safety, some also in regard to noise abatement for residents mainly on the eastern side of Ashley Drive where the dual road will be constructed. We took into account the needs of the residents and those concerns so that in this program we have not only the dual carriageway being completed but extra pedestrian access underneath Ashley Drive at the appropriate underpasses. Indeed, on top of that there is a proposed pedestrian bridge over Monks Creek to allow residents—

MS LAWDER: I know that. I am just interested in the 300 metres.

Mr Gentleman: I am getting to the last part. What is also shown is that the area from Johnson Drive to Ellerston Avenue is not yet at capacity. We have made a decision to fund up to Ellerston Avenue with the extra investment as a result of the needs and wants of the community in regard to pedestrian access and then we will look at funding the last part of the 300 metres from Ellerston to Johnson Drive in further budgets.

MS LAWDER: What is the number of vehicles carried between Erindale Drive and Isabella Drive every day?

Mr Gentleman: Erindale and Isabella?

Mr Gill: At the top end basically it is about 22,000 vehicles a day and at the bottom end, south of Ellerston, it is fewer than 10,000 vehicles a day.

MS LAWDER: I did not quite catch what you said but my question was: how many are carried between Isabella and Ellerston per day?

Mr Gill: South of Ellerston Avenue you have got fewer than 10,000 vehicles a day.

MS LAWDER: Do you mean from Johnson to Ellerston?

Mr Gill: Yes.

MS LAWDER: What about from Isabella to Ellerston?

Mr Gill: North of Ellerston ranges between 10,000 and 15,000.

MS LAWDER: And what is considered to be capacity?

Mr Gill: Typically from a technical point of view you look at in the order of 18,000

vehicles when you start looking at whether a road needs to be upgraded from a capacity point of view.

MS LAWDER: On the TAMS website it says that—and I guess it is technically correct—Ashley Drive from Erindale Drive to Johnson Drive is currently a single carriageway and carries over 20,000 vehicles a day. You are saying it is actually more than that—22,000 for example.

Mr Gill: It varies depending on the section of road you are looking at.

MS LAWDER: How many cars come out from Isabella Plains from Ellerston Avenue and head north each day?

Mr Gill: If you want that level of detail we will have to take that question on notice.

MS LAWDER: That would be great.

Mr Gill: Rather than speculate.

Mr Gentleman: They travel north in the morning and then south in the afternoon, of course.

MS LAWDER: And then how many vehicles come from Johnson Drive each day and turn left into—

Mr Gill: The point to add is that it is not simply a question of traffic volume. There are basically safety considerations and safety improvements that you might achieve at a particular intersection. That also adds some benefit to a project.

MS LAWDER: As a pub test it does not seem particularly safe on your way home, when you are heading south, the dual carriageway to a single carriageway and then within a short distance that roundabout. It seems a bit bizarre to me and to many of the constituents who have contacted me.

Mr Gentleman: There are two things I would like to say about travelling south in the evening. Firstly the evening peaks are staggered, at different times, so that they are at different capacities travelling south. The morning peaks are normally at the same time so that we are looking at peak capacity travelling out in the mornings. That is the key indicator. Then, of course, if most of the traffic is peeling off before it reaches Johnson Drive, into Ellerston Avenue, then it is appropriate that we do that duplication to that point. But as I mentioned, we will certainly look at funding in future budgets for the rest of the duplication.

MS LAWDER: My next question is about Coyne Street in Fadden and Macarthur. There was some consultation done about that some years ago, but apart from those fierce speed humps and the signage, where are you at with the proposed modifications to straighten Coyne Street, which was one of the options put forward?

Mr Gentleman: That was during the survey results. Mr Gill.

Mr Gill: That was part of the local area traffic management of three locations in the Tuggeranong area. It was initiated a few years ago. As part of that consultation process an overall master plan was developed and some priority works were identified. Those have been implemented initially. The priority one works have been initiated at this point in time. The straightening of Coyne Street, as you have described basically, was identified as one of the lower priorities. It was also one of the more costly treatments. In terms of the available funding for that program it was not able to be delivered at this point in time.

MS LAWDER: But there have been continuing accidents along Coyne Street, I am sure you aware, including I think around the Christmas-new year period when some of the signs were actually knocked over. Obviously it is not having the desired effect.

Mr Gentleman: There continue to be accidents across the territory.

MS LAWDER: I know. I am asking specifically about Coyne Street. I know there are accidents across the territory.

Mr Gentleman: I was going to go further and say that we certainly address those numbers in the planning for roads and intersection upgrades across the territory. As you may have heard before—and Mr Gill will emphasise—we have a program which takes into account traffic accidents at intersections, their locality close to major schools or shopping centres, and that gives it a particular rating that is required.

DR BOURKE: Is that your traffic warrant system?

Mr Gentleman: Traffic warrant system, yes, that is correct.

MS LAWDER: And on the upgrade of Erindale Drive and Sternberg, the roundabout there, there are some good things and some not so good things. For example, when you are coming out of Wanniasa, trying to turn left into Erindale Drive it is almost impossible now to get out of Wanniasa. Have you received many complaints about that?

Mr Gill: Maybe if I just can go back to that last question that you asked before I answer this one in terms of Coyne Street and the LATM work, part of what we do once our initial measures are in place is a technical evaluation. We also go back to residents to get their view. We are currently doing that in that area. We have just completed similar work in Holt and in Wanniasa. There will be some information about the technical aspect and community aspect for Coyne Street and that will include whether there has been an increase in traffic crashes as you have described and what the volumes and the speeds are after the works have been implemented. Just to complete that response—

THE CHAIR: As a supplementary to that, what happens to the intersection of Castleton and Bugden there at Gowrie oval and Holy Family which is still quite hectic in the mornings? There was talk of a roundabout there.

Mr Gill: That will be subject to the next stage of works as it is funded.

THE CHAIR: This is all subject to a budget bid?

Mr Gill: Yes. There is an ongoing program of residential street improvements. We seek to identify the priority work and then we progress it as we can.

THE CHAIR: No, go on; you are right. Ms Fitzharris has a supplementary as well.

MS FITZHARRIS: Sternberg and Erindale?

Mr Gill: It has not been the subject of much complaint. You have written to us on a few occasions now. What we have basically given an undertaking to do is that we will actually do some CC videoing of the intersection during the morning peaks to see how it actually works in practice and whether we need to actually modify that arrangement.

Mr Gentleman: Ms Lawder, has it been the morning peak that you are referring to?

Mr Gill: Yes, I think so. Overall initially when it opened up, the response was quite positive about improvements. You have brought that aspect to our attention two or three times.

MS LAWDER: Finally, is there a left turn lane going in at the Tharwa Drive-Duggan Street intersection?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, I had a look at this this morning. I will ask Mr Gill to give us some detail but I understand it is almost completed. There is quite a longer approach to the left turn into Duggan from Tharwa Drive.

MS LAWDER: I was wondering how long that has been in process—making that lane? Some constituents have complained to me that it seems to have taken quite a long time.

Mr Gill: I would suggest that it has taken about seven months to complete it.

MS LAWDER: Is that a normal period of time to do a left hand turn lane?

Mr Gill: There have been some delays in terms of the actual construction activity, but now it is almost ready to go and to be implemented.

THE CHAIR: We will go to Mr Coe. If we get time, we will come back for another round.

MR COE: A quick question with regard to sewerage in the inner north. I understand that the network is under considerable strain at the moment?

Mr Gill: Are you talking about stormwater or are you talking about sewerage?

MR COE: No, I have been told sewerage but perhaps it is stormwater. I have been told that there is a fair bit of pressure on the inner north network. That would be increased significantly should there be much more development happening up and down Northbourne in particular, but also at EPIC.

Mr Gentleman: Mr Coe, we can certainly talk about stormwater. That falls into this portfolio. Indeed, you will notice that some of the work we are doing now on Constitution Avenue actually dramatically improves stormwater treatment from what has been occurring.

MR COE: Yes, particularly the trunk up and down Northbourne, or parallel. Am I right, Mr Gill, that there would have to be the creation of retainers or container tanks to disperse the flow?

Mr Gill: There are two aspects. In terms of the existing stormwater network, I suppose that we have undertaken basically a survey of the existing network along the Northbourne Avenue and Flemington Road corridors. That would be used to feed into basically what development is proposed in the area and whether there is a need to augment the existing network, noting that the inner north stormwater network has been in place for quite a while and the nature of the development in that area has changed quite significantly over time. So, as the area develops, there will be on occasions need to augment the existing network.

Mr Gentleman: Of course, it is worth while pointing out, Mr Coe, that it is the same amount of rainfall per square metre, for example, but the development that we do—that is why I was talking about Constitution Avenue. When we see an opportunity to augment existing older infrastructure, it is appropriate that we seek the funding and do that at the time.

If we look at Constitution Avenue, that has a stormwater drain that feeds all the way from the north of Canberra down into this area. We saw at the time that there was an opportunity there to enlarge the stormwater network, to draw that water across to treatments in the lake. That is what we are proceeding with with the Constitution Avenue stormwater network. It would be appropriate that where we see augmentation possibly in other areas we go forward and do similar work.

MR COE: Sure. I know stormwater falls squarely within Roads ACT, but with regard to the sewerage plan—

Mr Gill: ActewAGL.

MR COE: Although it is ActewAGL, what role does government have in the planning of that infrastructure? It is of course maintained by ActewAGL, but in terms of the actual policy settings surely it has got to fall within some category.

Mr Gill: Within the planning directorate there is an area that basically looks at infrastructure planning. As part of the master planning, that is an aspect that is looked at—all the trunk service requirements, whether it is stormwater, whether it is sewerage, whether it is roads. It does get an overview from that point of view. TAMS's role and then Roads ACT's role in particular is about the management of a network that is given to the territory to manage and maintain into the future.

MR COE: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wall?

MR WALL: Minister, there is a line item on page 19 of the budget paper, “Urban renewal program, Erindale group centre—Gartside Street (south)”. Does that include any upgrades to any parking facilities along that stretch of Erindale?

Mr Gentleman: Thank you, Mr Wall. It is an important area to look at in regard to the opportunities for improving the area of Erindale. As members may be aware, there is a restaurant strip in the Erindale group centre. There has been a lack of parking and pedestrian amenity along there. In fact, it is quite difficult in some circumstances to get a park there. So we will design and improve Gartside Street with additional car parking. We are also doing pedestrian paths and associated infrastructure. With the expansion of the local gymnastics centre as well, along with the increase in commercial activity in the area, we are looking at improvements to the provision of parking and footpaths along the street.

MR WALL: How many additional car parks are going to be constructed?

Mr Gentleman: I do not have a figure of car parks in front of me at this time, but I am happy to take that on notice and come back.

MR WALL: Okay.

Mr Gentleman: We have got to do the design first before we can actually allocate the numbers.

MR WALL: Is the money that is in the budget for urban renewal—close to \$880,000—just for design work?

Mr Gill: Yes.

Mr Gentleman: It is design work. Also, it is to look at safe crossing points and improvements to landscaping as well as verges. As we talked about earlier, it is amenity in that area as well as safety and car parking.

MR WALL: Okay.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder had a supplementary on this one.

MS LAWDER: Yes, it is about the Erindale area, but it is actually about footpaths. Can I ask you that now?

Mr Gentleman: Yes.

MS LAWDER: I note that there is not a continuous path along McBride Crescent. Are there plans to have continuous footpaths all the way along on both sides or either side of the street?

Mr Gentleman: I will have to ask Mr Gill for the detail there.

Mr Gill: If there are gaps in the footpath network anywhere, you can make that inquiry separately or to us and we can assess that, because there is an annual footpath program. In this particular case, it might be opportune basically to look at it in the context of Gartside Street and the overall Erindale master plan. This Gartside Street work links back to that overall Erindale master plan that was developed a few years ago.

MS LAWDER: For example, in front of the club?

Mr Gill: Are you talking about the bottom end?

MS LAWDER: On McBride Crescent.

Mr Gill: McBride, close to Ricardo—the bottom end? Where the club is, yes.

MS LAWDER: The Erindale—

Mr Gill: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Anyway, there is no path there and on the opposite side of the street and around the same spot in front of the swimming pool and leisure centre there, there is a sort of gravel path.

Mr Gill: That is actually outside the public area. That is actually within, I think, private lease, that area that you are talking about—adjacent to the gymnasium.

MS LAWDER: No, I mean right at the roadside.

Mr Gill: At the roadside?

MS LAWDER: There is a little gravel path.

Mr Gill: Yes. Looking at the scope of the project that we are talking about, it does basically cover pedestrian paths and associated infrastructure. So there should be an opportunity to look at that aspect.

MS LAWDER: When I walked along there recently, there was a little gravel path with the road right next to you. In the middle of the gravel path was a light pole, which actually made it quite difficult to navigate along the path. I wondered what the people who put that path in were thinking.

Mr Gentleman: We will certainly have a look at that for you.

THE CHAIR: And a final from Mr Wall?

MR WALL: Minister, on a number of occasions I have written to you regarding the line markings in the car park at Calwell shopping centre. Also, there is a call by a number of retailers down there for some increased pedestrian safety, to have a pedestrian crossing installed—to no avail. The line marking down there is still pretty appalling. When is that likely to be addressed?

Mr Gentleman: Line marking at Calwell, Mr Gill?

Mr Gill: We might take that on notice. I am not across the detail of that.

THE CHAIR: Our time with Roads is almost up. Minister, I have a question on output class 1.2, page 6. It also contains provision for ACTION bus services, but then on page 35 of the same budget paper there is output 1.1, public transport, which contains the provision for ACTION bus services. How can you have the same provision in the budget papers in two locations?

Mr Gentleman: A very good question, Mr Smyth. I will ask our budget analysis man to give you the detail.

Mr Elliott: I guess it is like a budget treatment where the funding goes first to the directorate and then it is passed along to ACTION. You are right. There is an output which includes the ACTION funding and then it is actually transferred across to ACTION itself for its recording.

THE CHAIR: There is an output class “Roads and sustainable transport” and there is an output class “Public transport”. Then there is a subclass 1.2 “Roads and sustainable transport” and there is a subclass “Output 1.1: public transport”.

Mr Elliott: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And they both contain the same money?

Mr Elliott: Yes. TAMS actually passes that money to ACTION through a grant. There is a grant expense in TAMS’s books of the \$96 million.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is that the same with public cemeteries as well?

Mr Elliott: No, cemeteries are a stand-alone expenditure.

THE CHAIR: I think this is the only one where the money seems to be in two places in the budget papers at the same time. I note that in the bill there is no separate appropriation for ACTION. It is all done through TAMS. So you are only appropriating the money once, but it seems to be delivered twice in the budget papers.

Mr Elliott: Yes, that is—

THE CHAIR: It might be something to be considered for next year.

Mr Gill: We are only delivering it once.

THE CHAIR: I hope it is not costing twice as much.

MS FITZHARRIS: The whole thing is very transparent.

THE CHAIR: I hope it is not costing twice. We will break for morning tea. We will

resume at 10.45 and we will move to planning.

Sitting suspended from 10.30 to 10.42 am.

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the eighth day of hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates. For the next almost two hours we have Environment and Planning, output class 1—1.2, planning delivery, and 1.3, strategic planning.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed. For your protection, there is a copy of the privilege statement on the table in front of you. Could you please confirm that you have read the privilege statement and understand its implications?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, thank you.

THE CHAIR: We have all confirmed that? Thank you very much. Minister, before we get to questions, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Gentleman: If I could, yes, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to answer questions about the important work undertaken by the Environment and Planning Directorate in the ACT. The 2015-16 budget reaffirms this government's commitment to maintaining the ACT as the most livable city in the country—in fact the world, according to the OECD.

There is a strong focus on urban renewal in this budget, and EPD will carry out an enormous part of that work. This agenda will ensure that our city continues to be well organised, connected and maintained to achieve the balance between work and play. This includes the revitalisation of centres for the benefit of all Canberrans.

We will continue our master planning program in the coming year. Master plans offer a great way to draw the community together and allow them to contribute their ideas for the centre they want to see. To date, the ACT government has delivered final master plans for Weston and Oaks Estate and draft master plans for Woden and Mawson, with rigorous consultation being undertaken in the Belconnen, Curtin and Calwell centres as well.

With the better connections to better places initiative, our government is further delivering on the opportunities identified as part of the master planning process. Funding provided to the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate will deliver important links to improve the way in which the community uses their centres, further rejuvenating and building a vibrant environment for locals.

The budget provides \$340,000 according to the important partnerships that we have with the Heart Foundation through our active living program. That funding continues. This program has already delivered innovative planning solutions which integrate physical activity into everyday life. This will further be enhanced by our commitment to active travel options. Good urban planning physically shapes our neighbourhoods and also how we move within and between neighbourhoods. It encourages people to walk and cycle for recreation and social interaction, and it provides options for people

to walk, cycle and catch public transport to destinations such as school, work and shops. As we renew our city and develop new suburbs, we will further embed active living principles into our suburbs and into the lives of residents.

Fulfilling an election commitment also, the ACT government has provided a further \$500,000 to the Canberra and urban regional futures program. This is a program that has developed a platform to share information across a range of issues, including sustainability and climate change, at the same time as forming partnerships across our region to share experiences and develop collaborative solutions.

The ACT government is committed to doing things in a smarter and more efficient way, and we remain committed to delivering more digital services to the community. Digital services mean greater efficiencies for all. To this end, work will begin in the coming financial year to upgrade the e-development system. This system has already achieved huge savings for the ACT government and has been widely embraced by the building industry as well. The upgrade of the system will address aspects of the functionality which industry has raised as concerns and will also ensure that this is a platform that can be used by multiple applications across government. This will particularly support the work of Access Canberra.

Furthermore, the ACT is one of the first jurisdictions to actively engage with the commonwealth in relation to streamlining the approval process for EPBC assessments. Not only will the \$1.449 million this government has committed to implementing a new system improve the efficiency of the approval process but also it will lead to better environmental outcomes. The funding provides for three new positions to undertake important work in the assessment, survey and ongoing management of offsets. This will ensure that the process is managed efficiently and will provide a greater level of certainty for people undertaking development in the ACT. It will also lead to greatly reduced time frames for the development assessment process.

Preserving our heritage is another important element of our job. Therefore, as part of the capital upgrades funding, the government has committed to preserving important Aboriginal artefacts. Funding for the preservation of one of the territory's important scar trees will ensure that this significant site is preserved for future generations and provides a valuable insight into the culture and history of the territory's first residents.

In recent months I have joined directorate officials in undertaking comprehensive consultation to develop my statement of planning intent, which will guide the key planning priorities for the next three to five years. I have been delighted that so many Canberrans from a variety of backgrounds have taken time to provide their views and share their thoughts on planning for our city. We have engaged with a wide range of people through a number of workshops combined with considerable input from a range of interested parties through surveys and submissions. Once completed, the statement of planning intent will identify high priority areas for delivering the territory's planning strategy, transport for Canberra and the climate change strategy. It will also be an opportunity to address some recent changes and create pathways for innovation to reinforce Canberra as a city widely acknowledged for its livability, sustainability and prosperity.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and look

forward to answering your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Just for clarity the old output class 1.1, construction services, is discontinued; that has been sent to Access Canberra. But I do note that Mr Simmons is with us. Anybody who can come up with a question to get him to the table gets bonus points. We are doing output classes 1.2 and 1.3, planning and delivery and strategic planning. I will throw my first question to Mr Coe.

MR COE: Minister, where are things up to with regard to winding back the onerous solar access provisions in the territory plan?

Mr Gentleman: Thank you, Mr Coe, for the question. It is an important consideration that started quite a while ago to ensure solar access across the territory. It was driven initially through the PETAMS committee in regard to the development of Molonglo and then developed in regard to draft variation 306. DV306 included policy changes relating to all forms of development in residential zones and subdivision of land. There was and still is community support for key issues that were introduced in 306, such as solar access policies. Notwithstanding those large amounts of support, there has been a diversity of views, even within the same industry and professional associations. The government has been listening to these different views about variation 306 and has been considering adjustments to the relevant parts of the territory plan.

MR COE: What impact have the onerous requirements had on the built form over the last couple of years? And if you are going to, in effect, wind it back, as was the wish of the MBA, HIA, Institute of Architects, Institute of Landscape Architects, Institute of Planning and Property Council, what have we forgone over the last two or three years as a result of this failed policy?

Mr Gentleman: Firstly I refute that it is a failed policy. We have certainly responded to community need, but there has been some commentary, as I have explained, around some of the aspects of 306. It is my view that we should retain, as much as possible, as much solar access as we can for the territory.

I had the privilege of opening Solstice, which is Rick Butt's new design solar orientated house in Macquarie over the weekend. It is a fantastic result for solar access in the territory. There were no heaters in the property at all. The northern side of the property has windows right across. When I arrived, the house had been open for a number of hours, with the main living area of the house quite open to the open area out the front, and it still remained very warm in the property. It showed that solar access can work extremely well at very low cost. It is my intention to ensure as much as possible that we can have solar orientation. But I do take on board the comments from the construction industry, and indeed others. As I said, we will look towards what changes we can make to the territory plan.

MR COE: But this was looked at in extreme detail by committees in the department as well as here in the Assembly. What has changed over the last two or three years that was not thought of at the time of those inquiries?

Mr Gentleman: I cannot speak for those inquiries; at the time I was not the minister.

I will go to directorate officials to give you some further background.

Mr Ponton: Like any policy, Mr Coe, it is important that, once the policy is implemented to be planning policy, we start to see what is happening on the ground. There was an ongoing review of that policy. In this particular circumstance, that is exactly what has happened. Whilst there are some very good policy objectives that we have identified and tried to achieve through variation 306 of the territory plan, it was important that after the initial adjustments that were made through a range of technical amendments in response to feedback, particularly from industry, we then monitored. That was the commitment that the government made at the time—that we monitor and review. Minister Gentleman has since asked the planning authority to look at the outcomes of that analysis and whether or not there are different ways to achieve those good, sound policy outcomes. That work is currently underway; we will be providing recommendations to the minister shortly for his consideration.

Mr Gentleman: That does go to the live experience that we have with the territory plan. It is a movable document. Whilst it informs the way we develop in the territory, the territory is a moving community as well. I will hark back to my early days. When I was born here, in an ACT of 20,000 people, the border of the territory was quite small. Dickson was about the northernmost property and Narrabundah-Yarralumla about the southernmost. Now we have grown to a territory of 384,000 people, with 550,000 expected in the coming years. It is important that we evolve as the territory evolves and make sure that the best possible policies are in place.

MR COE: We are talking about 2013 here. And not only that: the solar access laws were already in place with provisional effect in the suburb of Wright. So at the time of DV306 coming into effect, it had already been lived out in the suburb of Wright. We as a committee and as a community saw numerous examples of poor building outcomes as a result of that policy, yet the government went ahead with it anyway. Now the government finally seems to be of the view that it is a failed policy. When are we going to see a variation come into effect which winds it back? And is it simply going to be motivated by the government's own profiteering on the back of DV343?

Mr Gentleman: Mr Coe, I firstly go to your comments on the suburb of Wright, in particular, Molonglo. It was the PETAMS committee that made the recommendations to have solar orientated design for the whole area of Molonglo. The government took that on board. It is quite important to have the history of that as well. In regard to those other details, I will go to Mr Ponton.

Mr Ponton: Thank you, minister. In relation to Molonglo, Mr Coe, that was variation 301, and 303 had interim effect. What you saw with variation 306 is that there were changes that were made around cut and fill in response to what we have seen in Wright and Coombs.

MR COE: They were very minor changes.

Mr Ponton: Nevertheless there were changes made in response. The other important thing to note is that, while we do need to have a good period to test these policies on the ground, and whilst you may comment about industry not supporting variation 306, we were receiving support within the same industry associations that were also not

supporting. For example, there is one institute in particular that I recall where we had two representatives of the same organisation writing to us, one not supporting variation 306 and the other one supporting variation 306, for different reasons. It is important that we give the opportunity for us to actually see what is happening on the ground.

Also, as with many planning policy changes, it is important to give time for industry to adjust. We saw that with variation 200. The feedback at the time was that developers and builders would not be able to build homes in response to variation 200, but people started to adjust. With variation 306, it just means that you cannot necessarily build the stock standard that was being built; you need to provide a bit more thought as to how you respond to the particular site conditions. I can speak from experience, having done just that—building a house that fully complied with variation 306 in its original form with a 1.8 metre solar fence. It can be done with a bit of thought around how you respond to the site and the lay of the land.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke has a supplementary on that point. Then we will go back to Mr Coe and a new question from Ms Fitzharris.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, chair. Minister, are you able to tell us what sort of adjustments to DV306 you are considering?

Mr Gentleman: At this stage we will be going into a consultation phase to talk to industry and the community on what they would like to see. I do not want to pre-empt what will occur out of the consultation, but it is worthwhile saying that it is important. As I said, the territory plan is a live document, so it is important that we work with the community and industry, of course, over that period and get the best outcomes for the territory.

DR BOURKE: What sorts of issues are the community and the industry raising with you now after they have seen this variation in place for a couple of years where you think there might be some opportunity for change?

Mr Gentleman: Mr Ponton?

Mr Ponton: One of the key things that we were seeking—and in fact the minister has specifically asked that we consider—was simplification of the development codes. In trying to capture the needs of a vast range of stakeholder groups, the particular codes—the single residential code and the estate development code—have grown and the minister has asked that we look at ways to simplify them. Again, we are looking at those very sound policy principles but delivering them in a smaller document so that we do not have as many rules and criteria. That is probably one of the key things.

The other thing that the industry particularly has asked us to look at is whether or not the height of the solar fence—originally it was 1.8 and it has been increased to 2.4—and the depth within the block that the solar fence applies, is actually the right height. So we are doing some analysis around whether or not that ought to be adjusted.

DR BOURKE: One of the things raised with us last week by the Australian seniors association was the desire of many seniors to be able to downsize but live in a newish

home in their existing suburb as a result of further infill-type development. Would some adjustment to 306 around its application within existing established suburbs be contemplated?

THE CHAIR: I think we are straying slightly, but how about a quick answer and then we will go back to Mr Coe and then Ms Fitzharris?

Mr Gentleman: We certainly are addressing ageing in place as a key planning priority. We understand that many people who want to downsize want to stay within their suburb. We are facilitating that wherever possible, both in a planning sense and in an economic sense. You would be aware that the government has indicated the removal of stamp duty for those older people downsizing within the suburbs. I think there are some key partnerships across government to help people to age in place and keep Canberra—with my hat on as ageing minister—an age-friendly city.

THE CHAIR: Back to Mr Coe for a final and then Ms Fitzharris.

MR COE: Thank you, chair. In light of this, where is the review of the territory plan up to and what form has that review taken?

Mr Gentleman: For me, Mr Coe, it is early days for the review of the territory plan in that I want to ensure that we get the best outcomes. It would be, in my view, at this stage quite an extensive review of the territory plan, but there is still further work to do with the directorate to understand the implications and the time line that it will take to do that review.

MR COE: Where is it up to now then?

Mr Gentleman: I am working with the directorate on when we would go through that process. The directorate has already done some work. Mr Ponton, would you like to give us some detail on that?

MR COE: So it has started?

Mr Gentleman: On the work we have done internally.

Mr Ponton: Absolutely. Based on the initial feedback that the minister was giving us early on in his term as Minister for Planning, we have undertaken a review of the single residential code, looking at, as I said, ways that we can address those sound policy outcomes in an alternative and simpler way. We have been testing that, particularly with the Master Builders Association. We have a key group of people in the MBA and also a group of architects who go by the name of 5AAP, five ACT architectural practices. We meet with them on a regular basis. We have given them an in-confidence copy of that so they can test that for us and we can start to see, in terms of the design industry, how they will respond.

As I said, we have been going through that important testing phase before presenting a recommended version to the minister for him to then determine how he would like to proceed. The next phase obviously would be the estate development code, which was the other code that was very much impacted by variation 306, and we have been

receiving a lot of feedback in particular from industry.

Having said that, there was concern from industry and there were high levels of support from certain industry groups and also, importantly—I think it is important to consider the alternative side—the community, particularly those in established areas. There has been some very strong support for the provisions of variation 306. I stand to be corrected. I think, in particular, the Inner South Canberra Community Council had expressed support for certain provisions within variation 306. It is a balancing act in some respects in terms of making sure that we do not head down a path of responding to certain parts of industry without fully considering the other parts of industry and also those other important stakeholders, being community members.

MR COE: Yet if a neighbour plants pencil pines or has a gum tree blocking out light, that is allowed.

Mr Ponton: The planting of trees is not a matter covered by the planning codes, Mr Coe.

THE CHAIR: A new question from Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. Minister, we had the Chief Minister in here earlier in the week talking about Access Canberra. I wanted to ask—I might get my bonus point here, potentially—how EPD's functions and Access Canberra's functions are working together now with the establishment of Access Canberra.

Mr Gentleman: Certainly. I will ask Ms Ekelund to give you that detail.

Ms Ekelund: We have been working very closely with the Access Canberra team to transition to the creation of Access Canberra. It is a new organisation. It needs to continue to have very strong relationships with Environment and Planning. Indeed it involved the transfer of a substantial part of the former directorate to Access Canberra, particularly covering construction services, our customer services people, and also the Environment Protection Authority. That was approximately 150 FTEs. So it was quite substantial, a third of our organisation.

One of the things that we were keen to negotiate in the creation of Access Canberra was to continue to see Access Canberra people co-located with us in Dickson. That is continuing, which means we can continue to have a day-to-day relationship with the officers in Access Canberra that have a strong need to work closely with our organisation. I personally meet regularly with Dave Peffer, the head of Access Canberra. We are trying to achieve a symbiotic relationship to make sure that we have strong feedback loops between the operational work of Access Canberra and the policy work that we retain within our directorate. We also have been working closely, obviously, on the transfer of not just people but financials et cetera, and splitting costs for accommodation and IT.

It is quite a detailed piece of work, but it is being done with very good cooperation and support. We see that some of the excellent work that our officers have done that have now moved to Access Canberra will assist Access Canberra more generally. In particular, we are quite well advanced with a lot of our approaches to innovation and

IT in our workplace, which the broader parts of Access Canberra are now benefiting from as well.

MS FITZHARRIS: In general terms it could be described as your policy functions and the operational and customer service functions having moved to Access Canberra. Development applications well and truly stay within the Environment and Planning Directorate?

Ms Ekelund: That is right. One thing that it is quite important for us to keep a very close relationship with Access Canberra on is the customer service interface with development applications. Whilst Access Canberra have the staff that receive the applications—they virtually provide the front end, if you like, to the development application process—we retain matters such as eDevelopment, which is the principal software that we manage to process those applications.

Mr Gentleman: Those interfaces are very important through the directorate and the authority and those people wanting to do applications. I remember in the early 2000s going in to visit with the planning authority at the time on development applications with a builder. We had, as we do now, predevelopment application meetings so that the developer or the builder at the time had the best knowledge on how to present that application.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have never submitted a development application. In terms of someone who wants to submit for a residential, where do they need to go? Do they still need to go to Dickson or could they lodge their application at the Access Canberra shopfront?

Ms Ekelund: Applications are now able to be lodged online. You would choose to come to a shopfront in either Dickson or Mitchell if you wanted the assistance of one of the Access Canberra officers to help you submit it. Indeed if it is a more technical matter that requires the lodgement of a development application to be assessed by the authority then you may seek an appointment for a preliminary discussion or a pre-application discussion with our officers. Many development applications now, of course, are dealt with by private certification and are electronically lodged and assessed. It is quite efficient. We are at the forefront of a lot of the electronic management of development applications in Australia and continue to improve our systems to maintain that status.

MS FTIZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just for clarity: all of the old class construction services have gone across to Access Canberra. None of those have remained with EPD?

Ms Ekelund: Essentially, only the policy function remains with us. The officers that undertake regulatory activities are all with Access Canberra, but obviously they have a lot of knowledge that is important to our policy functions. We retain important conversations and meetings with them to make sure that that feedback loop from administration comes back to our policy work.

THE CHAIR: You said you thought 150 staff went?

Ms Ekelund: That is right.

THE CHAIR: But the table on page 3 of budget paper E shows a drop of 127.

Ms Ekelund: I will ask Mr Fitzgerald to go through the details of how the movement of staff occurred.

Mr Fitzgerald: We had an increase in FTE numbers because of the basin priority project, which is a commonwealth funded project, that we have actually put on more staff for. There are an additional eight staff as part of that process.

THE CHAIR: So that would take it up to 135.

Mr Fitzgerald: Yes. I will find the numbers. In the past we have also struggled with FTE numbers resulting from casual staff coming on and off. We have had a number of casual staff come on for projects like kangaroo counting. We have readjusted the FTE number to allow for a higher figure. At the moment our FTE numbers are around the 280 mark. That is where we will generally be as an organisation—around 280.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary from Dr Bourke, and then a new question from him.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, chair. You mentioned online lodgement of DAs. What proportion of DAs are now lodged online?

Mr Corrigan: One hundred per cent of DAs are lodged online.

DR BOURKE: All?

Mr Corrigan: They all are, yes. It is excellent too because some big projects can be lodged at all hours as well, so it helps applicants greatly. I emphasise what Ms Ekelund was saying before. Obviously, if anyone wants advice before a DA, particularly people building houses who may need some assistance, they can come to our shopfronts and we always have DA assessment planners available to talk to people.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Does that mean you can only lodge it online?

Mr Corrigan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Before Dr Bourke goes to his new question, on page 395 of budget paper 3 it says that Environment and Planning transferred 141 jobs to Access Canberra. Is it 150, 141, 127 or 135?

Mr Fitzgerald: The figures were preliminary figures. We were still going through the actual machinery of government changes required. The final figure was 149 FTE to transfer. At the time of finalising the numbers for the budget we were still negotiating the policy elements to be retained by Environment and Planning. So we retained an

additional six staff for policy elements.

THE CHAIR: Can we have a written reconciliation of all those movements?

Mr Fitzgerald: Absolutely, yes.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary from Ms Lawder, then a new question from Dr Bourke.

MS LAWDER: Were there any job losses as part of the transfer?

Ms Ekelund: Not in terms of the transfer from us, but as to what Access Canberra did with the positions, that is really a question for them.

DR BOURKE: If we go to table 13 on page 15, minister, you can see that the estimated outcome for mediation in relation to development proposals is significantly higher than the target for 2014-15. How did you achieve that outcome?

Mr Gentleman: Mr Corrigan will be able to give you that detail.

Mr Corrigan: The mediation process at ACAT is a good one. When appeals are lodged the tribunal tries to facilitate a mediated outcome. Obviously, it saves time to do that instead of having a full hearing. The directorate put a lot of effort and resources into achieving that, and it has been successful, and continues to be so. We have had a good number. There were 18 appeals taken to ACAT in the last financial year, and some of them are still in ACAT. They have got on with matters. On the whole it has been a good outcome.

DR BOURKE: What is the proportion of appeals to ACAT as opposed to overall DAs?

Mr Corrigan: I think there were over a thousand DAs last year, so it is 18 out of about 1,000. A very small proportion are appealed. With a lot of the DAs we get, not all of them attract appeal rights. It still is a very small proportion.

Mr Gentleman: All of the ACAT hearings have resulted in the decision of ACTPLA being upheld.

DR BOURKE: Which is a great batting average.

Mr Gentleman: It means that the authority is doing the right thing for the territory.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a new question?

MS LAWDER: I have a quick supplementary before I move on. The percentage of development application decisions made within statutory deadlines is slightly lower than the estimated outcome—slightly lower than the target. Does having them all lodged online make it easier in theory to assess and make those decisions?

Mr Gentleman: It does, Ms Lawder. The electronic applications make it easier not

only for the applicant but also for ACTPLA to make the decision. Interestingly, there are more applications occurring all the time, because it is a better process. In regard to those targets and arrivals close to target, it has occurred where the authority has gone back to the proponent and asked for more information. Sometimes the decision-making process has taken a little bit longer for the proponent but the outcomes have been quite good. Mr Corrigan can give further detail.

Mr Corrigan: Yes, Ms Lawder, it definitely assists, having it online. I think your question was as to why we are down a bit. As the minister alluded to, it depends on the complexity of the applications coming in, how we assess them, issues raised, and whether we need to go back to the applicants and ask for additional information. Things like that add time to the process. So it does fluctuate. Last year I think we got to 74 per cent. This year we are down, but we are doing all we can to improve that. For example, for the month of May I think we were at 76 per cent, slightly over. It does fluctuate.

MS LAWDER: Do you assess whether you need to adjust the application form to ensure that you get all the information that you need?

Mr Corrigan: We do. We keep a close eye on that. We actually have what we call a completeness check process. When a DA is lodged the officers check that everything is there, that it is complete as an application, before it passes. It is a way of saying to applicants, “Look, you may be missing something,” and rather than slow it all down or hold it back, pass the application, get it in and then process it along.

We do these things to try and assist. We keep a very close eye on that. In fact currently internally we are doing a bit of review work around all of the completeness check processes and the like. It is always good to keep an eye on those things. If applications are not going through initially, why is that the case? Are there common threads? Do we need to educate? Do we need to change things? We are constantly keeping an eye on that.

MS LAWDER: The statutory deadlines do not allow for a to and fro process at all?

Mr Corrigan: They do. As the minister alluded to, one of the reasons why it might drop to 70 per cent is that some applications—indeed in the last financial year we had about 11 or so—crept well over the six months time frame. When you look at that, and you look at the median, we are doing quite well. But there is always a handful of applications that take a long time. Out of 1,000, that can skew the statistics. That is why it goes down a bit.

It is one of those difficult things we grapple with. Some applications are quite complex. You can look at an application and say, “Okay, we can see what the applicant is trying to do. We think the application is deficient in these areas for these reasons.” Or we might have feedback from the community about the notification period, so we say to the applicant, “Do you want to do a bit more work around this and see what you can come up with?” That takes time. That adds to the time frame. We do that.

With other applications we might say, “This is not consistent with the policies; there

are issues.” So we may seek to refuse it. We are always balancing the large, complicated applications in that way, and that also affects the time frames for the average processing through the whole year.

MS LAWDER: I am happy to pass my question on to Mr Coe.

MR COE: Thank you. I have a question with regard to what role EPD has had with the approval of works at the Stomping Grounds. I realise that this area is in Access Canberra. However, I am curious about what role the directorate has played with regard to the plumbing code, fire code et cetera.

Mr Gentleman: Yes, there is certainly a consultation role, but I will ask—

MR COE: It is an approval role, is it not?

MS FITZHARRIS: You get the bonus points.

Mr Gentleman: Mr Simmons to provide Mr Coe with the bonus point.

Mr Corrigan: It is designated land. Works approval rests with the NCA, but in respect of the compliance issues that is an Access Canberra issue.

THE CHAIR: You can see, Mr Simmons, the high regard in which the committee holds you.

Mr Simmons: Morning all. I am Director, Road Transport Regulation, formerly Director of Construction Services with EPD, currently with Access Canberra.

MR COE: Good morning.

Mr Simmons: Good morning, Mr Coe. What would you like to know?

MR COE: What issues have there been with regard to the various codes at the container village on the old futsal slab?

Mr Simmons: The project came to the attention of Construction Services as it got close to seeking its certificate of occupancy. There were some issues with the quality of the plumbing work. The initial inspection identified that. That is a normal process. There were directions to the plumber that the work had not been done to the Australian standard, which is AS3500. It had not complied, so they needed to do some work. That then took a bit of time. In the normal course of events there are applications for a certificate of occupancy. A few issues identified themselves. Directions were given back by the private certifier to the builder to rectify those things before the application could be proceeded.

MR COE: What delay has been experienced as a result of this failing to meet the various codes?

Mr Simmons: The codes as you apply them on any building project will have issues with compliance around particular elements. That is not an unusual process. To the

extent there is a delay, it is the capacity of the developer and the builder working together to get to the state of compliance with the Building Code. There were probably slightly one or two more unusual characteristics to it, but nothing completely out of the ordinary for a building; well within the normal sort of range of things that we would expect to see.

MR COE: What about with regard to safety in the event of a fire? What issues have there been there?

Mr Simmons: The building, to my knowledge, has an alternative fire solution to it. That is very common. The Building Code of Australia allows, under its performance criteria of the code, for alternative solutions. There was an alternative solution provided to it. That alternative solution is also subject to oversight by the ACT fire brigade—their officers.

It is a very standard process in modern buildings to have an alternative solution, and this building has one. We are assured, and the registrar is satisfied, that the solution that has been put by the proponent and by its fire engineer will be sufficient in the circumstances, any circumstances, to meet the minimum requirements of the code.

MR COE: To your knowledge, did the territory bear any of the costs of delivering services to the site that were not otherwise there?

Mr Simmons: I do not know. That is something you would have to ask the LDA.

MR COE: Sure, but was EPD involved in the approval or the supervision of any services going to the site?

Mr Simmons: No. Our role is simply the standard process. We have the works approval that was identified by Mr Corrigan. The works approvals was a CNO works approval. Our job was simply to ensure that compliance with the Australian Building Code and a minimum compliance to all the other codes—AS300, AS3500.

MR COE: When is the site likely to get a full certificate of occupancy?

Mr Simmons: I have transferred to Road Transport Regulation whilst that project was still underway but that knowledge would sit with—

Mr Gentleman: Access.

Mr Simmons: Our records will show where we are up to with that.

MR COE: When was certificate of occupancy first applied for—ballpark?

Mr Simmons: There was a partial certificate of occupancy in around mid to late February, from my recollection.

MR COE: When you say partial—

Mr Gentleman: I think rather than go to further detail on this, which remains within

Access Canberra and that directorate, it would be appropriate that we send the questions to them.

MR COE: Mr Simmons is doing a pretty good job so far.

Mr Gentleman: Yes, but we are here to look at planning, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Sure. So with regard to that partial—

THE CHAIR: It is set as an output class in the papers for the budget. But could we come to a conclusion?

MR COE: Yes, in regard to the partial certificate issued in February, what was the nature of it being a partial certificate as opposed to a full certificate?

Mr Simmons: Within the building industry partial certificates are a very common thing that happen now because of the complexity of buildings. There may be certain elements. The partial in this was that it related to the elements of the building that the proponents wanted to use. In that instance, all they wanted to use was the ground floor where the food services were; so they did not want to access upper decks, which still had some work to do.

The partial certificate was to just ensure the occupancy on the ground floor, which had developed to a stage where they were fine to work but it then prevented access to the upper deck for a particular weekend when they wanted to put an event on and test some of this. With a project like this you want to test some elements out. They wanted to test out the shipping containers and how they were working. From memory, it was the one that sold coffee, steaks and things on the ground floor. So that is why it was there. It is quite a normal process.

THE CHAIR: I think Ms Lawder gave you her question, Mr Coe. Do you have a new question, Mr Coe?

MR COE: I do indeed. With regard to the Yarralumla redevelopment and also the Deakin redevelopment, which has been proposed and managed by the LDA, what role has ACTPLA or EPD had with regard to that site?

Mr Gentleman: There is certainly a liaison role, Mr Coe, but I will ask Mr Ponton to give you some more detail.

Mr Ponton: Thank you, minister. Mr Coe, in relation to the Yarralumla brickworks, which I presume is the item that you are referring to, that is a LDA proponent-led consultation at this stage, as you would expect the proponent to do in developing a concept. The Planning and Land Authority within EPD has not yet been approached for a territory plan variation; so our role at this point is limited.

MR COE: Sure, but what expertise has EPD lent to the works?

Mr Ponton: At this stage, as I said, it is proponent driven; so they are working through the design concepts. They are working with their own consultants and are yet

to make a formal approach to the Planning and Land Authority with respect to a territory plan variation.

MR COE: What role is EPD having with regard to Throsby?

Mr Ponton: I will ask Mr Corrigan to respond.

Mr Corrigan: An EPD estate development plan for the suburb of Throsby has been lodged with us by LDA.

MR COE: When does EPD get involved in these projects as opposed to the LDAs that are running the whole time? Surely there is much expertise when it comes to planning in EPD? Why are EPD not consulted earlier on in the piece with regard to these developments?

Mr Gentleman: There is a formal process, Mr Coe, for lodgement of proposals, as we have talked about here.

MR COE: Yes, I am talking about pre-lodgement.

Ms Gentleman: Ms Ekelund can respond.

Ms Ekelund: I guess in the first instance that the Environment and Planning Directorate sets the broad policy agenda for the territory, whether that is encapsulated in the ACT planning strategy or transport for Canberra. That then really cascades down into more detailed planning across the city. We do the broad strategic planning for Gungahlin as a greenfields area, likewise with Molonglo. Within established areas the planning strategy guides where urban intensification is likely to occur and we therefore follow up with more detailed planning in the town centres and along transport corridors in our master planning program.

We have in the planning strategy a clear policy direction to promote urban intensification in our town centres and along our transport corridors. So we anticipate that proponents, whether those proponents be the Land Development Agency or a private sector proponent, would have regard to the broad policy agenda in both the planning strategy but also, of course, within the territory plan.

But, as I guess your question alludes to, some proposals by their nature will be seeking variations to the territory plan. But we would expect that they would have regard to the broader planning strategy. Then in greenfields areas we have varying statutory roles in terms of translating the more detailed planning of the LDA into what the final territory plan will say for those greenfields areas. They are slightly different processes in established areas versus greenfields areas.

MR COE: I recognise those statutory processes but is there no working group for these sorts of estates whereby someone from EPD is involved with the LDA from the very beginning so that when you do see it as part of the statutory process you are not necessarily seeing it for the first time?

Mr Corrigan: It depends on the project, Mr Coe. Certainly in the greenfields,

absolutely; we are involved very early on. EPD has the structure planning roles in terms of Gungahlin, Molonglo and those things; so there is a well-integrated process working with the LDA up to the point where they lodge an EDP and those sorts of things.

In respect of infill projects, it does depend on the type of project. For the Yarralumla brickworks, the LDA officers came to see some of us some time ago now. It was very early on. They sort of talked about what they were thinking of doing there and those sorts of things. They have been speaking to us about possible territory plan variations and the like. So we had some early dialogue with them but we have not had an ongoing role as they developed that project in recent times. It is really a hard thing. It is very much that the LDA or the developer will—it depends on the project and how they want to develop and work through that.

Where they are up to now with the brickworks, for example, is that when they are getting close and they think that it may be time to look at the formal statutory side of things—territory plan variations and a national capital plan amendment will be needed for that project as well—they will certainly come back to us then and talk through a lot more detail with us.

With any territory plan variation, if a proponent, including a government agency like the LDA, actually seeks to amend the territory plan, they will ask for a scope. Typically when we give a scope of what things would need to be covered by the planning investigations that support the territory plan variation, we will always usually include a pre-consultation element in the scope. In many respects what the LDA is doing now with the brickworks is consistent with that approach as well.

As topical as it is and as interesting as it is, they are in very much a consultation phase with the community in general about their proposal. If it proceeds further to the next stage and they seek formal statutory changes, that would be an input to us for our consideration in any territory plan amendment.

MR COE: Can you think of any other agency as a government driven project that requires a territory plan variation that has been knocked on the head or been majorly revised from what the government agency proposed?

Mr Corrigan: Yes, it is not unusual, Mr Coe. Our Community Services Directorate colleagues with housing sites and things like that, they will often approach us and talk about those things. I include the LDA which does a number of other projects as well. Just off the top of my head, TAMS. TAMS will approach us from time to time for things to cover off there, particularly reserves and the like and the work the conservator does.

MR COE: I am talking about ones that have been rejected or substantially revised—in effect, where the agency has not necessarily been on the right track and the EPD has had to come in and steer the ship.

Mr Gentleman: We are trying to think of what may have been rejected, Mr Coe. We might have to take that on notice and do some research for you.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary. That is from the government. What about the private developers, big projects? For instance Doma had their project in Dickson knocked on the head. Did they not discuss that with you before they submitted the DA? Did the DA come as a complete surprise?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, there was quite a bit of work that the directorate did. I will ask Ms Ekelund to go through that for you.

Ms Ekelund: We were certainly briefed on the concept plan and the concept for the release of the site and were very supportive of a mixed use development on that site and an increase in food offering in Dickson. It is a very important centre and most people would be very aware that the retail turnover in Woolies in Dickson is quite extraordinary and the community does merit some further food retailing there. So we have been involved in that from the outset. We did have pre-application discussions with the proponent and communicated what our expectations from the proposal would be. Essentially there were a couple of processes prior to the application being lodged where we communicated where we saw the outcomes should be for this site. Most of the time, through those sorts of consultative processes, a proposal comes in where we can support or condition to make sure that the application does meet the requirements that we are after.

In the case of Dickson, we sought some amendments to the plans after they were lodged, but we concluded that those amendments still did not actually reach the standard that we believed this important group centre warranted, particularly in terms of its interface with Antill Street and its interface with the existing group centre. It was not well integrated in terms of pedestrian movements; we had concerns about this with the development too.

It is quite unusual. Conceptually, it is the sort of development we are very supportive of, but we want to make sure it is a high quality development for the community as well.

Mr Gentleman: Just to finish off with Dickson, the proponent now has an option to apply for reconsideration of that decision, to appeal the decision in ACAT or to lodge a new development application.

THE CHAIR: Any new indication of what caused their lodgement to—

Ms Ekelund: We prefer not to pre-empt that, but we are certainly hopeful that at present they are having a close look at the design and will come back to us with an improved design.

MR COE: Are you saying that EPD in effect telegraphed the concerns before the DA was lodged and therefore the proponent lodged it knowing that it would be rejected?

Ms Ekelund: I would not say that they knew it would be rejected, but they certainly had heard our concerns about those issues and that we expected those issues to have been addressed to our satisfaction in the application. But they were not adequately resolved. One of the areas, for example, was the treatment of the loading docks and interface with pedestrian movement. We really believe that a much better design

solution can be achieved than what was proposed.

MR COE: Who had carriage of that part of the DA? Obviously EPD has carriage of the whole DA, but in terms of providing expert advice does that come from EPD or does it come from TAMS?

Ms Ekelund: Both.

Mr Gentleman: The interface with roads, of course, and access for, in this case, heavy vehicles into the loading dock for the Dickson development certainly have a lot of information provided by TAMS, but the directorate makes the decision.

MR COE: Are you, in effect, acting on the advice from TAMS with regard to that issue?

Ms Ekelund: It was partly. Certainly we have quite a lot of skills in house ourselves. We have got a number of architects and urban designers as well as planners within the authority, and obviously we are skilled in looking at matters such pedestrian interface and aesthetics. So it was certainly comments received by TAMS as well as our own technical assessment of the proposal.

MR COE: In terms of the aesthetics or the cosmetic issues, how much of that is an issue and how—obviously it is very subjective—do you make a call on that? I am sure there would be many buildings around town that have been approved in recent years where a lot of people would say that they are aesthetically not to their standard but someone else might like them.

Mr Gentleman: Is there a particular theme that you like in development, Mr Coe, that we could—

MR COE: There is a lot of diversity in Canberra. I am just wondering how you make a call on the cosmetics or the aesthetics.

Ms Ekelund: I suggest that in this case it was not cosmetic. It was not. There were significant concerns about having blank faces, for example, against pedestrian areas as well as having heavy vehicles crossing with pedestrians—accessing a footpath having blank walls so you lose the opportunity for surveillance onto the street and feelings of security as a pedestrian. There were a number of aesthetic visual but also urban design issues in terms of how the building operated and interfaced with its context.

MR COE: The height of the building is fine?

Ms Ekelund: We did not have a problem with the height.

MR COE: Or the number of storeys or number of apartments? Was there anything along those lines?

Ms Ekelund: Not specifically. There were some adjustments to the number of apartments. There were some detailed design issues discussed regarding the design of the apartments, but they were issues that could have been dealt with by conditions. It

was the fundamental layout of the development which was flawed from our perspective.

MR COE: Are you saying that—

THE CHAIR: This will be the last.

MR COE: Final question. If it is to be approved, there will have to be a fundamental change in the layout?

Ms Ekelund: To parts of the layout.

Mr Gentleman: Indeed, the particular areas that EPD has indicated—traffic coming into the loading dock—would need a different approach. And the amenity from the Antill Street side, where basically there were, in this proposal, bare walls on the pedestrian access rather than an active street frontage, was a key component.

MR COE: Have you had any role in this, minister?

Mr Gentleman: No, other than to look at the information provided by EPD when they made those decisions.

THE CHAIR: On a new question, I have some issues about Woden and some other sites. The pitch 'n' putt course at Woden—as part of the Woden master plan, a transport corridor goes in that effectively cuts its existing access. In another inquiry the club has raised concerns about lack of access and its options for the block. Where are we at in terms of assistance to the club in coming to solutions?

Mr Gentleman: I will ask Mr Carmichael to give the detail on Woden.

Mr Carmichael: We are still developing the Woden master plan. We are certainly aware of the access issue. We are working with the community and interested stakeholders around a resolution. There is the potential rail alignment that we are looking at through there. We are just looking at access issues from other arterial roads and what the potential access arrangements can be. So it is still a work in progress.

THE CHAIR: I understand the club has timing issues in that they have got to vacate their current premises and they would like to redevelop. Is that being taken into consideration?

Mr Carmichael: The process of a master plan is long term. They would be able to apply under existing planning arrangements, but once the master plan draft is done it goes through consultation and then it goes through a variation of the territory plan, so we are talking about a year and a half or so. If they have got pressures that they need to address, they can work under the current planning arrangements.

THE CHAIR: A supplement, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Yes. Mr Carmichael, did you say rail alignment before?

Mr Carmichael: Light rail alignment. Obviously we are looking right across Canberra with the light rail master plan, so we are looking at what potential alignments might be right across Canberra.

Mr Gentleman: Dr Bourke, you might be aware that there is a transport corridor allocated in the very early designs of Canberra that goes all the way down through Adelaide Avenue towards Woden, and there was a particular corridor allocated in the area of the pitch 'n' putt as a transport corridor.

THE CHAIR: For light rail?

Mr Gentleman: Originally it was simply set aside as a transport corridor, but we are certainly looking to that in the future for light rail, yes.

THE CHAIR: But all blocks in Canberra have to have street access. If you put that corridor through, you have got to come up with adequate street access to the block.

Mr Carmichael: That is right.

THE CHAIR: The master plan for Woden talks about something like 20,000 square metres more of retail space. What is the basis of that decision?

Mr Carmichael: We have done a range of planning studies for Woden. We have consulted with retailers. We are looking at what the opportunities are in the Woden centre. Woden has good potential to develop further. There is support for high densities in the centre—not just for retail but also for residential. It is just looking at what the complementary retail component of that should be. These are draft propositions that will go out; we will consult more formally with the community once we have settled the arrangements. We have got an ongoing conversation with a range of key developers in that area to try and understand what they are aspiring to do and for us to inform them of what we are aspiring to do. So it is good alignment with what they are trying to achieve in terms of their own developments and what we are trying to achieve to make Woden a more active business hub and residential area in the future.

THE CHAIR: Is Canberra over-retailed? It has been put to me by various groups that we have got the highest metreage per head of population for retail in the country. Do we monitor that?

Mr Carmichael: We do monitor that.

THE CHAIR: Is there a downside to having too much retail?

Mr Carmichael: There would be a downside to having too much, but we do not believe we are in that space at this point. We actively monitor retail floor space and what the demand might be; we think we are in reasonable balance with that. But for every one of the master plans that we do, we look at that as an issue for that district, whether it is Belconnen, Woden or Tuggeranong.

THE CHAIR: Could you provide for the committee an indication of where we stand

in terms of square metres of retail space as opposed to other jurisdictions?

Mr Carmichael: We could get some comparative analysis on that, yes.

Mr Gentleman: And it is good to see that the ACT has the cheapest basket of groceries across Australia.

THE CHAIR: Many of us are still searching for that supermarket. In regard to some other blocks, section 63, where is that at? It was sold in, what, 2007 and not a sod has been turned.

Mr Gentleman: I understand there is some work with LDA occurring on section 63. Mr Ponton.

Mr Ponton: I have been working with my colleague, the deputy at EPD, Dan Smith, in relation to that site. We are looking at opportunities to progress development. We have been having initial conversations and, in fact, in the next week or so I will be having more in-depth conversations with the owners of the site. There have been some adjustments occurring in relation to the ownership arrangements. It is still latent but there are some partnership issues. We are just working through those.

We are working on opportunities to relook at the uses on the site, perhaps incorporating some residential development. As part of that we are also looking at opportunities in relation to parking in the city and the extension of Edinburgh Avenue. I guess it is a little early to give you a detailed update but certainly in a matter of weeks we will be in position to provide you with more information in relation to what is happening on this site.

THE CHAIR: It sold eight years ago. What commence and complete fees have been paid?

Mr Ponton: It was a deed of agreement. In relation to that site I will need to check on the detail, it being in a deed as opposed to an ordinary crown lease.

THE CHAIR: Do they own it or not?

Mr Ponton: They own it but they own a holding lease. A holding lease is traditionally a five-year lease with the opportunity, like in any other lease, for an extension.

THE CHAIR: So if you have got a holding lease do you not pay commence and complete fees?

Mr Ponton: Ordinarily, no. I would like to double-check that there are no such provisions in that particular lease but ordinarily there are no commence and complete provisions. The issue is that you have got five years to develop and then you would need to seek an extension of the holding lease like you would with any other lease. And there are provisions within the holding lease for that to occur.

THE CHAIR: Where is the equity for those that have bought blocks in that time frame but are paying commence and complete fees?

Mr Ponton: I do not think that it is appropriate for me to comment on commence and complete fees.

Mr Gentleman: No; they are a matter for EPD really.

THE CHAIR: For what remains the old section 56, I understand a DA has now been approved for the extension of the Canberra Centre.

Mr Ponton: Precinct D section 100, I think it is now.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, precinct?

Mr Ponton: Precinct D section 100, is that what you are referring to, Cooyong Street?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Ponton: I might confer with Mr Corrigan on the status of that site.

Mr Corrigan: I will have to check on that one too, whether the DA has been lodged for section 100. I am not sure. There have been some discussions with us.

THE CHAIR: That has now been going for 15 years. When will that whole area be completed? There was meant to be residential, a hotel, a public park and other things there in the original scheme. When is that likely to happen and why 15 years later is that site still undeveloped?

Mr Corrigan: I cannot answer that; I need to come back to you. That is a question I suppose I will have to take about the status of that site and where they are at with the DA. I know that QIC have had some recent discussions with us about the site.

Mr Gentleman: So we will take that on notice and come back to you with the detail.

THE CHAIR: A new question, Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: I would like to ask some questions around the urban design aspects of the capital metro corridor. It is in two parts, the Gungahlin end and the Northbourne corridor. I start with the Gungahlin town centre in particular and the southern part of Hibberson Street, from Gungahlin Place to Gozzard.

I know that the southern end of the street from Crace to Gungahlin Place is planned to be closed for capital metro. What is the thinking about Hibberson Street in terms of pedestrianisation? I know that soon the venture group development will be closing it temporarily to all traffic, I understand, but a number of people often say, particularly when I am standing there on the pedestrian crossing, that well-trod pedestrian crossing at the market place development, "When are you going to close this street?"

I want to ask questions around, I guess, the urban design thinking around pedestrianisation in an urban village type of atmosphere like there is in the Gungahlin town centre. What are the pros and cons and what sorts of things would you weigh up

about whether full pedestrianisation is a good idea or maintaining some shared pathway like Bunda Street is preferable?

Mr Gentleman: It is quite an interesting topic for the ACT. If we look at some of the early pedestrianisation of the streets, Mr Coe and I have had some discussions in regard to Petrie Plaza, Garema Place and those areas that were pedestrianised quite a while ago. There was at the time full access to the road—it was Petrie Street rather than Petrie Plaza—and you used to be able to drive in, park your car and slip into the local take away. But the community wanted something quite different as the city progressed and grew in density. That was addressed during those earlier days of planning in the city itself. Then of course we have seen recent changes to Bunda Street were you see a call from the community both in regard to safety and accessibility for pedestrian access.

It also does fit into our plan for more active transport across the territory. We do want to see people walking a little further from their car park to their destination or to their workplace. In regard to Gungahlin I will pass on to directorate officials.

Ms Ekelund: I was actually involved in the early planning of the town centre a very long time ago when what we tried to do with Gungahlin was move away from the enclosed mall approach that we had previously seen occurring in Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong. We worked very closely with the community, although the group was very small at that time, but really with stakeholders across the city, including questionnaires about what people liked or did not like about the existing malls.

We very clearly came to the conclusion that we needed a different model for Gungahlin so that we could actually break out of the mould of the enclosed mall and actually have much livelier streets and pedestrianisation. It was a very deliberate decision of the government at the time to actually have a different model. Part of the design that evolved was a narrower street, a narrow carriageway, supported by the footpaths along that street.

I guess what we have today is a situation where we will be putting light rail down that corridor. It is not a huge width. As you say, it is already well patronised, with pedestrians moving across that space. It will only have a fairly small extent of road that is actually closed to car traffic. Further east and south along Hibberson Street you will still have car traffic along there. It is really about pedestrianising the most heavily used part of the town centre that has got quite high movement of pedestrians.

It is probably not appropriate to directly compare it to places like George Street in Sydney but light rail is obviously going to see George Street become virtually a whole pedestrianised area together with light rail rather than the dominance of buses that exist there now. It is a much bigger city but it is not unusual for light rail corridors to be sitting in a pedestrian precinct rather than together with traffic.

Mr Gentleman: It is important too to look at lessons from other jurisdictions. If we look at some older jurisdictions internationally, in Freiberg in Germany the whole centre of the city is basically pedestrianised. You are not allowed to bring cars in there unless they are for a specific purpose. There are permits involved for that. There is walking and cycling right across the city and of course light rail. When you go to visit

the city and you stay there in your accommodation, for each day of accommodation that you stay you get a free public transport ticket which encourages you to take public transport across the city. It is a great result.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have had fairly overwhelming feedback about the western end of Hibberson Street being too busy with vehicles, both buses and cars, and people finding the pedestrian crossing dangerous. I do not believe there are any statistics to prove it is dangerous in the sense that people have been hit. Are there ways other than fully pedestrianising it to make it more pedestrian friendly? What are some of the arguments around having other forms of surveillance when it is not peak retail hours? If you are on the street and it is fully pedestrianised, if there are no vehicles, is it less safe?

Mr Gentleman: You can certainly look at opportunities like Bunda Street, where you have a shareway. Motorists are well aware that this is a shareway. The road architecture has changed quite dramatically. It is elevated to show a flow-on from the pedestrian areas that were previously on the edges, and traffic is slowed to quite a low speed to ensure there is more safety for pedestrian access. So you can look at those steps before you move to fully pedestrianise.

We have had some really good lessons from Bunda Street. Having worked with the community, and also stakeholders like the shopping centres around each side, they have called for the way we develop those shareways to be done in specific time lines that would assist them to keep their businesses running, and that sort of thing.

MS FITZHARRIS: You would not have a preference for full pedestrianisation of that section? I do not have a firm view on it at all, but the overwhelming feedback from people is that they would like to see that fully pedestrianised.

Ms Ekelund: It is interesting to look at how different parts of cities function, with the daytime economy and night-time economy requiring a different approach. If you go to Pitt Street in Sydney at night, it is pretty dead. There is no surveillance. But if you look at the tenancies there, they are very high turnover or very expensive. It is the core of the commercial area. The same thing happens in most cities—

THE CHAIR: Pitt Street or Pitt Street mall?

Ms Ekelund: Pitt Street mall area. That is where you are going to have the most pedestrians during the day and the intensity of pedestrians. So it is about giving priority to those people who will be using the space when you have really high pedestrian activity. By its nature, it means it does not work as well at night. So you generally have the night-time economy operating slightly outside that core, for two reasons. One is that you do not have that surveillance that you get from cars, and people like to feel there is surveillance in the evening. It is also because the rent gradient is so high. People who have restaurants or other activities cannot afford to pay what the big banks or Myer et cetera can pay. So there is a natural order of things in commercial centres.

Where you have really high pedestrian movement, a full mall can work very well. But there is something to be said for not having it too long, so there are still levels of

surveillance from some car activity in proximity; otherwise you can get quite long, dead spaces at night.

MS FITZHARRIS: So there really are options between the current situation and full pedestrianisation? There are a range of options in between?

Ms Ekelund: The other end of Bunda Street is a different example. There are pedestrian lights, so you can get some movement of vehicles down Bunda Street but pedestrians have a very safe environment to walk across as well.

MS FITZHARRIS: Can I move to the second part, around the Northbourne corridor and the urban design around the Northbourne corridor. In particular, how is it intersecting with the redevelopment that is taking place through the asset recycling initiative? What is your role in that project?

Mr Gentleman: It is a guiding role, ensuring that the aspects of town planning are met as best we can. I will go to directorate officials to give you some detail.

Ms Ekelund: I will make a couple of preliminary comments; Tony Carmichael can give more detail about a very substantial piece of work that we are undertaking at the moment to look at the whole planning and urban design framework of the Northbourne corridor and the city. It is action coming out of the city plan; it is also work which complements the light rail development. It is something we should be doing whether light rail happened or not.

Essentially it is about looking at Northbourne corridor as an important transit corridor, its role in providing improved pedestrianisation, as well as being an important public transport corridor. As I mentioned earlier, the planning strategy very much talks about urban intensification happening in centres and along corridors which are readily accessed by public transport.

Even though it is a very wide corridor, the footpaths themselves are not very wide. So we are carefully looking at how the verge treatment should be undertaken in terms of upgrading footpaths and improving lighting. At the moment Northbourne corridor does not, for example, have proper pedestrian lighting. There is lighting on the road for cars, which already have their own lights, but pedestrians at this point in time are lacking proper facilities to encourage active travel.

There is a very major piece of work looking at the verges, as well as at what the built form outcomes are along the corridor, including at the nodes where we see the rail stations being put, and also interchanges with buses. There are key nodes like Dickson and around Macarthur et cetera. We are doing a major piece of work, and Tony can give a bit more detail about where that is at.

Mr Carmichael: We have engaged a consultant, HASSELL, who have international experience in urban design and recently have done very similar work on the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, for the light rail that has been implemented on the Gold Coast and the proposed light rail for the Sunshine Coast.

There is about a kilometre on each side of Northbourne and we are looking at the

potential intensification of the corridor. One of the things that Jan Gehl talked about when he was here was the monumental scale of Canberra, and Northbourne is no exception. It is a long way across the road itself, and up the corridor. We have done a number of targeted consultations currently, and we will go out later this year for more formal consultations, looking at some east-west villages that would be built at the human scale—very walkable, and joining up the west and east sides of Northbourne.

MS LAWDER: What do you mean by “human scale”? What other scale would you do?

Mr Carmichael: So that you can actually walk it. Currently people do not walk—except for Dorte occasionally—up Northbourne because it is a very long way and there is not much to see. If you think about Melbourne, it has a lot of activity on the street. People tend to walk more in Melbourne because of that pedestrian level activity of buildings, pedestrianisation, permeability of being able to get through the long blocks.

One of the issues along Northbourne is that some of those blocks are a couple of kilometres long, so to actually get around it and onto the corridor can mean maybe a 15 or 20-minute walk. A recommendation, as the government looks to redevelop those sites, will be that you have dedicated walkways and pedestrian wings so that you can get from, say, Dickson onto the corridor.

That work will also include Civic—the city. Part of the implementation of the city plan is to look at the pedestrianisation, the pedestrian links, around the city. We have had a special study done of what it takes to encourage people to walk. Currently, if you are walking from Civic to the ANU, you are spending as much time waiting at traffic lights as it takes to walk. So it might be a 20-minute walk but you are standing still for maybe 10 to 12 minutes of that time. We are looking at ways to minimise the wait times, to have a more pedestrian feel, to encourage people to walk across what currently is a bit of a divide down the city, which is Northbourne.

Similarly, if you look further up the corridor, it might take you three sets of traffic lights to get to a diagonal; it can maybe take 10 or 15 minutes just to cross Northbourne from one diagonal to the other. They are the sorts of things we are looking at in terms of the urban design—trying to make it more people friendly.

That work will also talk about building bulk and what the opportunity is for development down the corridor, so that we can phase the development of the corridor in a sensible way to complement development we are doing in other parts of the city, and how it might connect to the west basin proposal.

THE CHAIR: A new question from Dr Bourke, but before we go to him, how much has EPD spent on work to support capital metro? Could we have a list of the projects and the cost of each project, please?

Ms Ekelund: I do not know if we have that with us at the moment. You would need to consider the work in a number of different ways. Of course, our organisation was involved in preliminary work that has led to the government making the decision to go with light rail, but we certainly have been looking at higher capacity public

transport systems for the corridor for some time, including light rail. That is a different issue from the work we are doing at the moment, which, as I said earlier, came out of the city plan. There has been a consciousness of the need to upgrade Northbourne corridor for some time. It was considered prudent to do this in a way that complements light rail at the moment. I would not say it is for light rail; I would say it is complementary to light rail. Tony has the figures.

Mr Carmichael: The HASSELL contract is for \$1.8 million. That covers a range of activity. We have engaged Arup as part of that contract to look at traffic issues and intersections. We have had a movement study. A specialist firm has done a study in Civic to look at how people move around the city and what we might need to do to encourage them to potentially walk across to west basin and to access all parts of the city. That will inform some of our urban design recommendations coming from the study.

There is also some work being done on the economic viability of Civic and what we might need to do in terms of encouraging further development or the redevelopment of current sites. That goes to some things like our recently announced parking strategy and looking at a parking offset fund so that you do not have to provide the parking onsite; you can purchase it elsewhere.

THE CHAIR: Can you take that on notice and give us a breakdown of all of those reports and their cost? Thank you. Ms Fitzharris, then Dr Bourke.

MS FITZHARRIS: As you say, you would be doing that work anyway—the urban design of the corridor?

Ms Ekelund: We have certainly had a lot of communications with TAMS over quite some time about the need to address the quality of the public realm in the premier address of the city in terms of the lead-in to the city. TAMS has been conscious about the need to seek support from the government to upgrade that public realm but was wanting to see, from my understanding, what the government's decision would be in terms of light rail so there would not be aborted work in terms of any improvements that were undertaken there. The corridor is already experiencing urban intensification. For us to achieve the outcomes we want in terms of having a much higher quality amenity area for pedestrians and cyclists, we would certainly want to see much of this work done anyway.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Thank you, chair. Could you tell us a little bit more about that increasing intensification along the light rail corridor and how you are measuring it?

Ms Ekelund: The work that was done some time ago along the Northbourne corridor understood that you could get quite high densities along the corridor and set in place a planning framework which has the density cascading backwards, if you like, from Northbourne corridor out into suburbia. There is already quite a high capacity within that corridor, within the existing zonings.

One of the things that we have concluded in the work that Tony has described is the

interrelationship between the density that is permitted and what we call the design and siting requirements. You can put higher density on the sites than you can physically fit inside the building envelope. That means to maximise the return on your investment you have to build to every corner of the building envelope, so you get a quite blocky effect in terms of the urban design outcome.

We have discussed this with the National Capital Authority, and it is essentially their rules that we are working to. We want to modify that relationship to get more interesting urban design outcomes in terms of the architecture et cetera, and also to see whether there is an opportunity to have some different rules around the key nodes as well. Whilst we would say there is already a lot of capacity for urban intensification in the existing corridor and, of course, we have already seen quite a substantial change in parts of the corridor, we think we can achieve better urban design outcomes by some modification to the current rules.

Mr Gentleman: We had a really interesting discussion with a renowned town planner called Larry Beasley, who discussed opportunities, while you are doing intensification or urban density, to look at the way that you are providing for a wide range of the community. A number of members of the community would like to live in tower-style structures, if you like, apartment-style structures, but at the same time there are members of the community who would like to live in the area but with a ground floor opportunity and a front door onto a suburban street. There is an opportunity to look at whether we can provide those things in the future as well. You may well have a developer that produces an apartment complex and alongside it street-sized, human scale, if you like, opportunities for residential as well.

I think in the past across the city we have seen that occur with some adaptive reuse. If you look at Canberra Avenue—this points a little bit to heritage as well—as you travel east towards Fyshwick, before the Diplomat Hotel, there is the Whitley construction. You had a couple of single-level art deco homes and the development that occurred around that was retaining that single level but producing a tower behind, which is not too high, which provided a similar architectural outcome but a more dense apartment-living complex. It is quite a good amenity to look at.

DR BOURKE: What you would be talking about there with the NCA is presumably the height rule for the CBD, or is there a height rule along Northbourne Avenue that they have imposed as well?

Mr Gentleman: Yes.

Mr Carmichael: Yes, 617 is the level, and it is to do with Parliament House. As Ms Ekelund was saying, on a few of the key sites we might want to punch through that. But in terms of the existing planning, both the ACT and the national capital plan, we have probably got 80 to 90 years of development in the corridor right through. That is under existing arrangements. If we were to build that corridor out to existing planning rules, the outcome may not be as attractive as people might think because of the issue of people building to the full block.

One of the bits of work that HASSELL are bringing forward are some housing typologies to look at making sure we have a good social mix in the corridor and that

families can purchase suitable housing, generally townhouse-type housing, which we do not see a lot of in the territory. What are the opportunities to establish that and where would you establish it? Maybe on the fringes of the urban villages we are proposing. These are all proposals that will come forward to cabinet at some point and go out for further consultation. We are trying to look at the opportunity for a mix of people—young people, university students, families—being able to live close to high amenity but live in that corridor. Obviously we will then look at the community facility requirements of that over time.

DR BOURKE: Much of this strategic planning seems to be either happening in house or using consultants, minister. Is there a particular mix there or do you use particular projects for particular places?

Mr Gentleman: There is a lot of incredible knowledge in house amongst our planners, but occasionally where there are particular knowledge areas that we can resource from outside, we will seek that assistance as well. I think it is important that we provide a resource base wherever we can. Where there is expertise then it is appropriate that we use that expertise. I must say I am very impressed with the knowledge base within the directorate. I am sad sometimes that we lose it to other directorates. We have lost Mr Simmons, but he does come back from time to time to give us some advice. So that is very good.

DR BOURKE: Talking once again about light rail access to Belconnen, do you have a preferred route up Belconnen Way or Ginninderra Drive identified yet?

Mr Gentleman: No, not at this stage. The light rail master plan is almost at fruition. We are going through that process now and hope to have that finalised for further consultation before the end of the year. We have certainly identified that Belconnen is a transport corridor that needs to be worked on. That will be part of that process.

DR BOURKE: So towards the end of the year we would have an idea of which would be the preferred route for the light rail to go?

Mr Gentleman: With regard to the light rail master plan, yes.

DR BOURKE: To Belconnen?

Mr Gentleman: For the whole of Canberra.

DR BOURKE: For the whole of Canberra?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, the light rail master plan will scope the whole of the ACT for light rail in the future.

DR BOURKE: Turning to Belconnen, which will be my substantive question, if you do not mind, chair—

THE CHAIR: If you can be quite quick.

DR BOURKE: I will be. The Belconnen town centre master plan—what is the

progress there, minister? Where are we up to?

Mr Gentleman: It is going well. Mr Carmichael?

Mr Carmichael: We have just finished public consultation on the first of the Belconnen master planning process. We had very good engagement with the Belconnen community. We got a lot of submissions—nearly 100 submissions. Mostly those were quite positive and constructive about what we are doing, particularly some proposed cycling and pedestrian links that we are proposing for the centre.

One of the things that have slowed the master plan up a little bit has been the announcements around the University of Canberra and what they propose to do. We wanted to make sure that any proposals and the master plan now occurring on the University of Canberra site marry up very well with the Belconnen master planning process.

There are now increased opportunities to draw the university into the town centre, a bit like ANU has done with the city. We want to encourage that between the Canberra university and Belconnen because it builds a lot more vibrancy. There are a lot more eyes on the street, so there is safety, but there is higher amenity and there are new opportunities then for residential accommodation to accommodate students on site and have access to the Belconnen town centre for a range of other services. It is travelling well, but we are running a little bit behind because of trying to delay the work to align with what was happening on the University of Canberra site.

DR BOURKE: When do you expect that work to be completed?

Mr Carmichael: We expect a draft to go out to consultation later this year. We have to finalise the current work and then we will take it to cabinet for agreement for a broader consultation process with some proposals that will be in the final master plan.

DR BOURKE: That is about the same time as the light rail master plan?

Mr Carmichael: Similar timing.

DR BOURKE: Which it should probably be, considering where the University of Canberra is in relation to its route—

Mr Gentleman: We will go through that work and we will try and give you an update on the timing for those processes as soon as we can.

DR BOURKE: Thank you.

MR COE: A supplementary to that: why was there not a great deal of reference to the UC developments in the discussion paper which was put out in January about the Belconnen town centre?

Mr Carmichael: There has always been interest, obviously, to build linkages between the University of Canberra and the Belconnen town centre, but there have been a range of additional opportunities now with the recent passage of the proposal around

University of Canberra being able to do further development on their site. We did not want to miss that opportunity with the Belconnen master plan. We have just delayed it a bit to align with that. We had to talk with the University of Canberra because we did not know, under the new arrangements, what their full aspirations were for their own site. They are still developing, but we are trying to align where they are aspiring to go with what we are aspiring to do with the Belconnen master plan.

MR COE: One of the sentences in the paper put out for discussion was “strengthening the links between the town centre and these facilities, particularly the university, will improve the viability and activity of businesses within the town centre”. Is there not a real risk that with the university’s development on the site it will undermine the town centre and will give greater cause for people to not leave the university and, therefore, not support businesses in the town centre?

Mr Carmichael: There was a recent market decision or response to that; it was the very high sale price—double the price they were expecting—in the Belconnen town centre. On a major site there the reserve was about \$11 million or \$12 million, and it went for \$22 million. I think industry and the commercial sector have confidence in the town centre.

MR COE: This is the site next to the Labor Club?

Mr Gentleman: I am sorry, Mr Coe?

MR COE: It is the site next to the Labor Club?

Mr Carmichael: I understand it is, yes. A lot of the opportunity on the Canberra university site will be around residential accommodation. They will actually build demand for commercial services that we are proposing for the Belconnen town centre. We think there will be higher demand for Belconnen town centre services, goods and services, over time as the University of Canberra start their development program.

MR COE: How will 3,000 units on the UC site impact the Belconnen town centre? That certainly was not flagged in the discussion paper that was put out earlier in the year.

Mr Gentleman: I think Mr Carmichael is answering that by saying that we develop the master plan in Belconnen in relation to what is going to happen at UC. That will inform it. There are going to be, of course, different types of accommodation at UC. We see it predominantly as accommodation for those wanting to attend a tertiary education spot and, of course, there is a lot of opportunity there with regard to UC hospital as well. We feel they are different sorts of accommodation that will be sought in regard to those, but they will certainly form a busier Belconnen town centre, we believe, and we will see what information comes forward to inform the master plan for Belconnen.

THE CHAIR: A new question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: I will pass to Mr Coe.

MR COE: Thank you. This is primarily to do with some of the indicators which are on page 15. We discussed the ACAT decisions earlier. I am interested in ACAT decisions unrelated to a DA. How many times has the directorate had decisions appealed that were not related to a DA?

Mr Carmichael: We have had a recent one around heritage, which went in our favour, in terms of the heritage listing of the Dickson flats. I think that would be the first one for more than a year. I think there is probably only one.

Ms Ekelund: Previously there may have been actions in ACAT related to construction services activities, but, again, that is no longer within this directorate.

MR COE: It has shifted across to Access Canberra?

Ms Ekelund: That is right.

MR COE: With regard to liaising with the NCA, especially with regard to the light rail proposal, who is going to take the lead from government with regard to seeking the works approval for capital metro?

Mr Gentleman: Capital metro? We are taking the lead on that.

Ms Ekelund: Capital metro will be the proponent. If appropriate, the NCA may seek to align their works approval processes concurrent with our development application and assessment processes. The NCA will be the principal decision maker, of course, along the Northbourne corridor, but the territory, through the planning authority, is the decision maker along Flemington Road. They may seek to align the timing, in which case we would work closely with them to make sure that there is a single consultation process, in a similar way to the work we did for the industrial rezonings that helped facilitate the IKEA site where we undertook concurrent consultation for the amendment and the variation.

MR COE: This may be a question for later in the day. Are there any EPBC considerations that you are across that will impact the planning process for capital metro?

Ms Ekelund: I do not believe so.

MR COE: The grasslands off Flemington Road will not pose any problems?

Mr Gentleman: No, they are to the north of Flemington Road, so we do not see those as an EPBC—

MR COE: There are grasslands to the south as well, I believe.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you mean the one at Well Station?

Mr Gentleman: I see what you mean. No, we do not consider they will be an issue at this point.

Ms Ekelund: The conservator has been consulted throughout the process and is formally consulted as part of the EIS process as well. To date I am not aware of any EPBC issues, but Mr Corrigan might have more detailed knowledge.

Mr Corrigan: The detail is probably best directed to capital metro, but the recently released EIS went out on Saturday for four weeks notification. That addresses these matters. We understand with capital metro that any possible impacts could be around where they put construction depots along Flemington Road—things like that—and also near where the depot could be at Mitchell. They have been very careful—avoidance is the best outcome—to avoid any impacts with EPBC matters. That is our understanding to date, but the EIS has more detail on that.

THE CHAIR: We will adjourn and resume at 2 o'clock with output class 1.4, heritage.

Sitting suspended from 12.30 to 2 pm.

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, members and officials. We are back to the select committee inquiry into estimates. This afternoon we have output class 1.4, heritage, followed by environment. Minister, could you give us an outline of what heritage is doing to assist both capital metro and the urban renewal in regard to, for instance, assessment of existing properties on Northbourne Avenue?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, indeed. Heritage has a very important role across the territory. I will just go to a bit of history. It has been a very important opportunity for us to tell the story of the history of the ACT and the key components, whether they are in relation to the original occupants of the ACT in regard to our Ngunnawal elders and the story that they have to tell across the territory or to the built form and the European influence of heritage across the territory. EPD and the heritage groups have been working on keeping the important message that heritage needs to tell across the territory whilst still allowing for urban renewal. I mentioned earlier today some of the opportunities for telling the story of heritage in adaptive reuse across the territory in the built form. I might go to directorate officials to tell us what they have been working on.

Ms Ekelund: There are a number of properties along Northbourne Avenue that have got heritage. Some have been listed for quite some time, others more recently. They include the Sydney and Melbourne buildings; Haig Park, which we are looking at very closely as part of that Northbourne urban design corridor, as we mentioned earlier; the Rex Hotel mosaic wall; and the AAA building, the Australian Automobile Association building, which is quite a fine piece. Nominated places now include Churchill House. There have been a number of places rejected as well. In the recent past, the area that has attracted most interest is the Northbourne housing precinct. The Heritage Council have given that area some consideration and have registered a proportion of the Northbourne housing precinct. They are the main things.

In terms of the question re light rail per se, this is not, if I understood the question correctly—the land that the Heritage Council have been looking at is not directly related to that; it is just in the precinct. They have been looking at this area, with the government indicating that it would like to see renewal of housing along that precinct.

There is an application that we have now received that has been referred to the Heritage Council; they are giving that some consideration as well. They are probably the main issues at the moment.

THE CHAIR: Under the act, if something is heritage listed, what has to happen? Does the entire property have to be saved and maintained as is? What are the provisions?

Ms Ekelund: We need to be very clear about the different roles that come into play at this point in time. The Heritage Council is a group of experts in heritage. They have the statutory role of determining what they believe is the heritage value of an area. Their criteria are quite specific and narrow to look at heritage. The planning authority, when it looks at the development application, will consider the advice of the Heritage Council, but our remit is to also consider the broader socioeconomic and environmental considerations that we look at under the territory plan and under our act. So we have different roles.

THE CHAIR: Under that, can you reject the advice of the Heritage Council?

Ms Ekelund: We have got the ability to have regard to the advice but to actually make a decision that is inconsistent with the advice.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder first; then Dr Bourke.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. You mentioned that you take advice from the Heritage Council but you may be able to proceed nevertheless. What about the National Trust? I know that earlier this month the National Trust was looking to challenge that only half of the Northbourne flats or half of the properties along Northbourne Avenue had been listed for preservation. I will read from an article:

The Heritage Council has listed only about half of the site for preservation, but the National Trust wants all of it listed.

There was a court case. How bound are you, or otherwise, by the National Trust decisions?

Mr Ponton: Not at all really. It is a private entity. The National Trust is a private interest group, like an industry association. It is an interest group that represents interests of heritage looking at the national perspective. It is not a government authority, no. In terms of the Planning and Land Authority considering or being required to consider advice, that is from the statutory Heritage Council.

Mr Gentleman: Can I add to that to just say that whilst they are not directly associated with government, they provide an interesting and great resource for heritage across the territory—and across Australia, being the National Trust. There is a resource there that could be tapped into when required to provide information on how we could make decisions about the propriety or not of a lot of particular areas of interest in heritage.

MS LAWDER: In that area down the corridor, I think there were some original

reports that three of the properties might be retained. Now I think I have heard it is up to 11 or something. Can you confirm the number that are actually being retained?

Ms Ekelund: I think Ben knows the details of the development application.

Mr Carmichael: I am happy to answer that. The ACT Heritage Council made a decision in February this year to list the Northbourne housing precinct and register it as a heritage precinct. There are a number of buildings that that covered. The National Trust were interested in the whole precinct being registered. The court case you talked about was where the National Trust tried to appeal that decision of the Heritage Council. It was deemed that they were too late. They were two days too late registering that interest. So they are not an interested party now on that matter. As to the number of buildings, I think there are three main buildings. There are two towers and then two sets of De Burgh units. I might get Pamela Hubert to give us the detail.

Ms Hubert: The registration of the Northbourne housing precinct that the Heritage Council made earlier this year included a sample of each of the five types of housing that are included in the Northbourne housing precinct; there is a group of paired housing, the bachelors flats that are the northern end of the precinct, the maisonette units, the three-storey flats, and another type of flats in that group. They are the five different groups of building in the Heritage Council's registration. It has also got enough area to show the overall planning of the precinct and the relationships between the different types of buildings and between the buildings within that precinct.

MS LAWDER: In relation to the treatment options for the future, would that have to be something like the Whitley buildings, which you talked about earlier, minister, or something which incorporated the existing—

Mr Gentleman: Yes indeed. We do term that as some proportional reuse where you keep the story of heritage in the area but you allow other development to occur around it. That is a treatment that has occurred on Canberra Avenue which seems to be successful. I am not indicating that that is the way the LDA would go down the Northbourne corridor. LDA have put forward some thoughts on a proposal to retain one of the Dickson flats towers, on the eastern side of Northbourne Avenue, its twin on the western side of Northbourne Avenue, being the Lyneham flats, and one of the De Burgh daisy chains around the registered burr oaks.

MS LAWDER: It does sound like three properties?

Mr Gentleman: That is the proposal I understand LDA is looking at, yes.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke had a supplementary, and Mr Coe has a supplementary.

DR BOURKE: I was just curious about the heritage registering of the Rex Hotel that was mentioned before. What was the rationale for that?

Mr Gentleman: It has some very fond memories for those of us who have grown up in the territory, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: I am sure there are memories, minister, but the heritage is in regard to its built form, I presume.

Mr Gentleman: Indeed; I will ask—

Ms Ekelund: It is just the expansion mosaic mural wall—the mosaic. It is just registered for that mural—not the whole site, not the whole hotel.

DR BOURKE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe.

MR COE: With regard to that heritage listing in relation to which the National Trust is not deemed to be an interested party, how did that stuff-up occur with regard to the notification?

Mr Carmichael: There is a 28-day period in which to make a submission. When we provide that information to our area, advertised as that, we set the 28 days from the day we gave it to them, expecting it was going to be advertised on that day. There was an administrative error and it was advertised two days later. The ACAT determined they had no jurisdiction to ever find the National Trust to be an interested person or to be able to overturn that decision.

MR COE: Is there any scope whatsoever for the agency or for the council to relist this or to readvertise? It is pretty unfortunate that somebody would trust the government, trust the advertising period, and then be told, “Actually, our error has meant that we are advantaged.”

Mr Carmichael: It is unfortunate that it happened. The National Trust had previously provided advice on the Northbourne housing precinct. That advice had been taken into account already by the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council met to reconsider whether they would remake the decision so that that would provide the opportunity again for the National Trust to then appeal. They decided not to remake the decision.

MR COE: But do you accept that it is a pretty perverse circumstance whereby you actually benefit as a result of your mistake and they are actually disadvantaged as a result of this?

Mr Gentleman: I am not sure there is a benefit for anyone, Mr Coe.

MR COE: There was a benefit. There were two competing parties at court. The government benefited as a result of the mistake.

Mr Gentleman: I will take on board your comment. I am not sure that I agree though. I do not see that there is a benefit for the government in this. The LDA has a particular view on how it wants to proceed down Northbourne Avenue. EPD has some views and, of course, the Heritage Council have views on what should be held there. At this stage there is still a lot of work to be done.

MR COE: How much did the government spend in the ACAT dealing with the National Trust?

Mr Gentleman: We would have to take that on notice. We can come back to you with the details of that expenditure.

MR COE: Did you just use AGS or were solicitors from outside hired as well?

Mr Gentleman: Just the Australian Government Solicitor—the ACT Government Solicitor.

MR COE: Has AGS passed on an invoice to you yet for internal purposes?

Mr Gentleman: I will take that on notice and we will come back to you with that account.

MR COE: Was any consideration given to either extending some flexibility to the National Trust or to a re-advertising period so they could be given an opportunity to be an interested party?

Mr Gentleman: Firstly, the decision was made by ACAT, not us or government. Mr Carmichael.

Mr Carmichael: The chair, Mr David Flannery, met with Eric Martin, who is from the National Trust. I was at that meeting. He had a number of meetings to discuss the issue, looked at what arrangements they might be able to come to to accommodate the national heritage trust advice. He took that back to the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council discussed at some length what they would do. They decided in their view that the national heritage trust appeal. Their advice on the corridor had already been taken into account. It would not change the ACT Heritage Council's mind on what they did register. So they decided not to remake the decision. That is the Heritage Council, an independent body from government.

MR COE: Albeit, government appointees. Do you accept that the government did benefit by way of the ACAT hearing from the mistake that was made?

Mr Gentleman: No, certainly not.

MR COE: So what was—

Mr Gentleman: I will just reiterate that. I do not see any benefit for government in this—

THE CHAIR: You would have another party joined to the case. That is the benefit.

Mr Gentleman: That is not my view.

Mr Ponton: A related matter is that the National Trust is a party but it has appealed the decision in relation to the development application. There was a development application that dealt with the demolition of a number of the buildings. Whilst there

was the issue of the registration that was running over here, the other matter is still live. In fact, that matter is before the courts tomorrow.

MR COE: The Supreme Court?

Mr Ponton: No, that is ACAT. That is a third party appeal on the DA. So the National Trust still has the opportunity to—

MR COE: For the standing.

Mr Ponton: No, this is—

MR COE: Interested party, rather.

Mr Ponton: This is the substantive issue of the decision of the Planning and Land Authority to agree to the removal of some of those buildings.

Mr Carmichael: Just to follow up on the heritage matter, the national heritage trust has 28 days from the ACAT decision to appeal that decision. They have suggested that they might go to the Supreme Court. That time has now passed and they did not take up that opportunity to appeal the decision of ACAT.

MR COE: Due to the considerable expense, I am sure. With regard to the directorate not releasing the public submissions into the heritage issues as reported in the *Canberra Times*, what is the rationale for that?

Mr Gentleman: Mr Coe, if you could just clear up for us which heritage submissions?

MR COE: Sure. A month ago the *Canberra Times* reported, “The ACT government’s Environment and Planning Directorate declined to release the public submissions on the heritage protection citing privacy restrictions.”

Mr Gentleman: In regard to this in the ACAT case or a particular development application?

MR COE: Yes, this is the article with regard to ACAT’s consideration of public housing demolition.

Mr Gentleman: Was it in relation to the registration?

MR COE: Yes, it is.

Ms Hubert: That is something I would have to look a little further into. The Heritage Council does not normally release a public consultation report on any of its registrations.

THE CHAIR: Or the submissions?

MR COE: So the submissions are not published?

Ms Hubert: Public submissions—submissions about a registration, they do not normally get released to the public.

MR COE: Just because it is common practice, does that mean that the directorate would refuse publication?

Mr Gentleman: It is not the directorate, Mr Coe. It is the council in this case.

DR BOURKE: Minister, Mr Coe seems to be confused about the status of an independent statutory authority. Perhaps you could enlighten us as to the status of the Heritage Council and its relationship with both the directorate and yourself.

MR COE: Actually, there is some confusion here, I think—Dr Bourke has alluded to it—as to exactly who is responsible for making the call or if the Heritage Council is, in fact, just an advisory body.

Mr Gentleman: It is an independent body, Mr Coe. I do not have any control over the council other than to approve appointees.

MS FITZHARRIS: I am not clear which call you are talking about.

MR COE: With regard to the Heritage Council's decision which can be disregarded under the new Heritage Act. Therefore it is, in effect, advisory.

Mr Ponton: It is actually under the planning act. That has been the case for many, many years in relation to acting consistent with the advice of council. That was not a feature of the new Heritage Act, if I could just clarify that point, Mr Coe.

MR COE: As amended?

Mr Ponton: The provision is in the Planning and Development Act. That has always existed for many, many years.

MR COE: But this is the Heritage Act, as amended.

Mr Ponton: Yes, but the provisions are in the Planning and Development Act and have been in that act.

Mr Carmichael: But this did not change in the new Heritage Act if that is what you are trying to understand, Mr Coe.

MR COE: That is right, yes.

Mr Carmichael: It did not change between the acts—that provision.

THE CHAIR: Just for clarity, if the Heritage Council has a submission before it for listing, they make the decision and they are the final body. But in regard to a development application, if there is a heritage consideration you go to the Heritage Council and you ask for advice, which you can accept or disregard.

Mr Gentleman: That is correct, yes.

THE CHAIR: So there are different streams with different projects.

Ms Ekelund: Could I say that we never disregard it but we may not—we would always take it into consideration—

THE CHAIR: Very diplomatic, Ms Ekelund; very diplomatic.

Ms Ekelund: and weigh it against the other considerations in the application.

THE CHAIR: Is that clear? All right, done. A new question from Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: A final supplementary.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary and then a new question.

MS FITZHARRIS: The current development application that exists for this precinct is only to demolish a number of the two remaining Dickson towers that the LDA has.

Mr Ponton: There are two development applications afoot. One has been approved. That was in relation to demolition of two Dickson towers. The intention of—

MS FITZHARRIS: The two southern ones?

Mr Ponton: The ones on the eastern side.

Ms Ekelund: The application was to demolish all three.

MS FITZHARRIS: All three, was it?

Mr Ponton: Originally it was, yes.

Ms Ekelund: And we decided that it would be appropriate to keep one.

MS FITZHARRIS: The northernmost one?

Mr Ponton: That is the northernmost one. That is right. In discussions with the proponent, being the LDA, they were comfortable to keep the northernmost and its twin on the western side. That current DA has been approved and that is the one that is currently before the courts. So I would not talk too much about that particular matter given that the tribunal is considering the matter tomorrow. There is a full hearing on that one.

There is a further DA that is looking to demolish other buildings within the corridor but retaining, again, those two towers, as the minister said, also the daisy chain around the heritage listed or the registered trees under the Tree Protection Act.

MS FITZHARRIS: I turn to my substantive question, minister. Today, I think during

the lunch break or just before, you had a media release around a scarred tree that will be restored and relocated to the Namadji Visitors Centre for its heritage value. Could you talk us through the significance of that?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, indeed. It is a very important piece of Aboriginal history for the ACT. Originally it was located at Outward Bound. Mr Smyth would be aware of the locality of that. Based on the size of the scar and the proximity of the tree to the Murrumbidgee River, the scar is believed to have been formed during the construction of a canoe. So it is quite interesting in that heritage sense for Indigenous people.

The tree itself has been felled for quite some time and is in quite poor condition. It is appropriate now that we do as much as we can to preserve the scarred tree. Heritage will be providing funding for some conservation works to be carried out on the tree and the tree will be relocated in the Namadji Visitors Centre to help tell the story of Aboriginal heritage across the territory.

MS FIZHARRIS: What is the significance of scarring on trees?

Mr Gentleman: It is quite significant in Aboriginal history. It is a place where Indigenous people would meet and perform a ceremony. I am certainly not an expert on it. I only have some of the basic information but my understanding is that it is quite significant around a scarred tree.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what part of the heritage budget is allocated to conservation, preservation, protection and maintenance of heritage assets?

Mr Gentleman: We might go to Mr Fitzgerald for the details on that aspect.

Mr Fitzgerald: The core budget, which is the \$1.5 million for this year and \$1.6 million for next year, is for the identification, preservation, maintenance and enhancement where appropriate. The capital works is a separate source of funding. That is listed in the capital upgrades funding and is generally around \$140,000 a year. It is split between heritage sign upgrades and work like the Aboriginal scar tree.

DR BOURKE: Apart from the scar tree what else is planned in the coming year?

Mr Fitzgerald: The remaining cup is to be used for interpretative signs, signage around heritage sites.

DR BOURKE: Any particular sites?

Mr Fitzgerald: There are two aspects of it. There is one aspect which is the restoration of existing signs. There are signs that have been in place for a number of years which actually do require preservation or upgrading and some of the information on signs is deteriorating. They are out in the weather, so they do actually deteriorate over time. There are new signs to be put in place but I do not have a list of

where those signs will go at this stage.

DR BOURKE: Perhaps you could take it on notice, understanding my particular interest in what is happening in my electorate.

Mr Gentleman: Certainly.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a new question.

MS LAWDER: Minister, are any of the Mr Fluffy homes heritage listed?

Mr Gentleman: Yes. I understand that there have been some of those properties heritage listed. I understand Ms Ekelund has some detail for you.

Ms Ekelund: There are a number of properties that are heritage listed. They still are required to be demolished as part of the government's program. It was determined that, like other properties, there was no safe level that people could be comfortable with. That is most unfortunate. I would like to stress however that if they sit in a precinct those heritage provisions still remain even if the building itself is required to be removed. I should mention that the proposal to permit some changes to provisions around dual occupancy does not affect the heritage-listed Mr Fluffy blocks.

MS LAWDER: Was that taken into account when the budget cost of the Mr Fluffy demolition was put together, that those blocks may not be subject to that same subdivision?

Ms Ekelund: The asbestos task force was fully aware of those provisions and would have taken that into account.

THE CHAIR: Mr Coe, a new question.

MR COE: What advice has the heritage unit or the Heritage Council provided to the LDA regarding Yarralumla and the brickworks?

Mr Carmichael: The original proposal had gone to the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council are comfortable with the proposal on display now on Yarralumla. They have been fully consulted.

MR COE: But in terms of the reworking of the brickworks then from one thing to another, does the unit, the minister or the council have a view as to what will be an appropriate reuse of the facility?

Mr Gentleman: I certainly have a view as the minister in regard to the heritage aspects of Yarralumla brickworks. There are some important listings there. The two kilns are quite important, as is the tower which gives us a view of Yarralumla. I have a personal history there. My grandfather was a carpenter on the original Parliament House and the bricks from Yarralumla were transported via light rail, if you like, to Parliament House from Yarralumla for the construction of the original Parliament House. There is a bit of personal interest there. But it is certainly important, I think, that we keep the heritage story of the brickworks including those kilns.

MR COE: Do you want the walls to be incorporated as part of the construction? Does it stay as an open-air type piece of art? Is it incorporated into a garden, a conference centre? What are your thoughts?

Mr Gentleman: Those are matters, I think, for Heritage Council and the proponent to have a look at. The council has said in its comments of March this year that it supports the primary heritage objective for the site to establish a future use that ensures the physical conservation and retention of key heritage values in the longer term. I think that is an important message for the proponents there. And I would be interested in listening to council and to heritage on how they would like to see that future development occur.

MR COE: I am sure that whatever is proposed is going to be controversial. It is just the nature of a site such as that. In light of that are there some options which have been measured and which are unacceptable? Are there others that are going to be more palatable?

Mr Gentleman: It is an interesting question. In regard to community comment, at the moment there is quite a bit of support, I think, for what council has brought forward. In my discussions with the Yarralumla Residents Association they are keen to see as much support for heritage in the area as can be provided. I think it is a balancing act to try and find the right results in regard to their new development and the best story that we can tell about the Yarralumla brickworks.

MR COE: We are going back to the question: is there anything that you would, in effect, rule out or things that you would not want to progress there? Would you tolerate commercial uses of the site? Does it have to be publicly accessible or can it be privately run? Have these sorts of things been considered by the unit, the minister or the council?

Mr Gentleman: I certainly have not made any firm commitment to which way it should go forward. There are components of heritage which need to be kept, in my view. But I am happy to look at opportunities there. There are some people operating out of the brickworks at the moment who do some work which is, I think, well renowned across the suburb. I would like to see them stay in place if that is possible. If not, we need to find other alternative opportunities for them.

Ms Hubert: If I may add to that, the Heritage Council, in its advice on the most recent master plan that the LDA provided for the brickworks, was very pleased to see substantially more funding being allocated towards the repair and stabilisation of the brickworks. It appears that there is an intention to retain the majority of the significant buildings there. There were no specific proposals for how they would at this stage be adaptively reused but certainly the intention there appeared to be to increase public access to the site, which the council is very pleased about.

The council are looking forward to looking at opportunities for how they might activate and adaptively reuse the brickworks. Given the scale and the size of the place, there seems to be potential to have a range of activities happening there, whether private, public or a combination of the two. There is certainly an intention from the

LDA to turn the brickworks and the brickwork park, which is the old quarry site associated with the brickworks, into a park, which would improve public accessibility and provide further opportunities for interpretation of that site and integrate the whole site into the new development.

MR COE: Has the government considered any hypothecation of funds or proceeds of land sales to the site?

Mr Gentleman: That is a matter for LDA. It is just not EPD or heritage.

THE CHAIR: To follow on, though, what work has been carried out on the brickworks site in the last 10 years to ensure the preservation and stability of the buildings?

Mr Gentleman: I understand there are some works around the asbestos site at the moment and there has been fencing but it is before my time. I would have to ask directorate officials.

Ms Hubert: I think that is actually more a question for the LDA of what they have been doing in the last 10 years. They have certainly allocated money in the most recent master plan for works that they would do for the stabilisation and they have had consultants preparing reports of what stabilisation works need to be done there.

THE CHAIR: What inspections have heritage carried out to ensure that the buildings have not been deteriorating?

Ms Hubert: ACT Heritage does not normally do regular inspections of buildings because we do not own buildings in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: So who would carry out inspections to ensure that the heritage batons are not being denuded?

Ms Hubert: The LDA has engaged Lovell Chen architects from Melbourne who are very experienced architects with heritage buildings. They have prepared scopings of work for what needs to be done there.

THE CHAIR: So heritage as such does not have control of any buildings?

Ms Hubert: Not direct control in works funding and things like that, no.

THE CHAIR: So who is responsible for any works carried out on, for instance, Tuggeranong Homestead?

Ms Hubert: ACT Property Group, I believe, are the managers of that property.

Mr Gentleman: I think with CMAG in that case.

THE CHAIR: There was some heritage work done on significant heritage properties in Tuggeranong, I think, two years ago. What was the outcome of that consultation?

Ms Hubert: I am not quite sure I understand which ones. At Tuggeranong Homestead?

THE CHAIR: I think it was the schoolhouse, Tug Homestead, Lanyon and Cuppacumbalong. A heritage trail was looked at.

Mr Gentleman: Yes, indeed.

THE CHAIR: Did that work progress?

Mr Gentleman: The heritage trail, I think, has progressed. I would have to take that on notice and come back to you with the details.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris, a new question?

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. I am just wanting to understand the difference between the heritage unit and the Heritage Council. Your advice on heritage issues on a day-to-day basis comes through a number of expert officials within the heritage part of EPD—is that right?

Ms Hubert: That is right, and it is the heritage unit that provides the secretariat functions to the Heritage Council per se.

MS FITZHARRIS: How do issues come before the Heritage Council?

Ms Hubert: If it is something about a registration et cetera the secretariat will coordinate all of that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Who can propose registrations and—

Ms Hubert: Anybody.

MS FITZHARRIS: So anybody can.

Ms Hubert: Anybody can nominate.

MS FITZHARRIS: Great.

THE CHAIR: The number of registrations outstanding at this time?

Ms Hubert: We have been working very hard to reduce the backlog.

THE CHAIR: There was a big backlog.

Ms Hubert: So hard that it is not even in the top of my mind as to what the backlog is.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is there a threshold for raising an issue?

Mr Carmichael: What we have been doing over a number of years is working hard to reduce the number. One of the things that had happened historically about the number

of registrations there was that there was a very low threshold about nominations, so somebody could say that every building a certain architect had ever designed in Canberra should be considered for registration. That is no longer the case. Some of the amendments we made around the changes to the act were to set a higher threshold to argue the case why particular buildings or artefacts should be registered. That makes sure that there is a higher quality number of registration applications coming forward.

We have got the number down to 111 outstanding ones. Because of the vague nature of the way that the registrations came forward previously, I think there are probably 40 or 50 duplicates in the number that we have got. Part of the work we are doing is to research and understand that and go back to the original people who proposed those registrations to understand exactly which building or artefact it was. But we are around the 111 mark, which is a great reduction in the backlog that we have had over recent years.

Mr Gentleman: The figures to date are that in 2008 the backlog peaked at 320, so it is quite a significant reduction. In the strategic approach to the backlog, the council determined that priority would be afforded to nominations identified on the indicative land release programs by the LDA to ensure that assessment of places is undertaken as early as possible, also that priority would be afforded to nominations that affect the development and capital works program of other ACT government directorates and to nominations identified to be subject to further development pressures. Those were the key priorities set by council.

THE CHAIR: If it was 320 in 2008 and it is now 111 in 2015, how many of the 209 actually ended up in a listing citation?

Mr Gentleman: I do not know if we have that. We do? We might take that on notice, Mr Smyth, while we do some calculations for you.

Ms Hubert: We could, yes.

THE CHAIR: And whilst it might have helped the LDA and the government's bottom line, surely the criteria should have been the protection of heritage rather than facilitating the land development program from the perspective of the act which you are responsible for. Why would you take a land development approach to heritage listing rather than heritage values?

Mr Gentleman: I do not think the criteria actually sit in the way you have described. Certainly the criteria are about the importance of heritage. However, in looking at which objects are looked at first, those were the ones with some government priority so that they could be progressed.

THE CHAIR: So land was the overriding issue? Land sale was the overriding issue?

Mr Gentleman: No. I mentioned also other government priorities. If you are going to make a release of an area of land and it has a heritage issue, it would be a priority to look at that heritage issue before you release the land rather than trying to do it later on.

THE CHAIR: Further questions—

MS FITZHARRIS: Sorry, just one supplementary.

MS LAWDER: Another supplementary?

THE CHAIR: A supplementary from the deputy chair and then one from Ms Lawder.

MS FITZHARRIS: If an individual or a group wanted to put forward a nomination, what would they go to to find out what they needed to do and what threshold they needed to reach in order to submit that nomination?

Ms Ekelund: The criteria are in the legislation, and we are more than happy to assist people with interpreting the legislation and how to go about putting in an application.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you.

Ms Ekelund: It is all online.

MS FITZHARRIS: I was trying to find it and I could not.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a supplementary. Then we will finish.

MS LAWDER: Further to Mr Smyth's question about the Tuggeranong discussion about two years ago, does the unit have any part to play in sites like Hill Station in Hume, which has fallen into disrepair? Can you tell me what part that is?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, indeed. We had some proponents from Hill Station come in to visit my office not long ago. We do look at all those particular heritage sites. I will go to Mr Carmichael for some more detail.

Mr Carmichael: We certainly encourage people to look after their properties. Earlier, Mr Smyth was asking what our role is. Our role is to support and provide funding. There is a funding pool where people can apply for funding to help some of the heritage restoration. Hill Station is a bit problematic because it is in multiple ownership and not all the owners agree. It is falling into some disrepair. There are certainly some challenges around in terms of the multiple owners and then trying to reach some agreement about what they would like to see done to the property. It is something we stand there to support, but they have to resolve some of their own issues first before we can actually do something positive and constructive with that group.

MS LAWDER: What about something like Rose Cottage? Is that heritage listed?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, certainly.

Mr Carmichael: Yes.

MS LAWDER: And that is privately owned too?

Mr Gentleman: Yes.

MS LAWDER: On an ongoing basis, does the unit have any involvement in Rose Cottage?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, indeed. We actually launched a heritage trail out from Rose Cottage last year. It was a very enjoyable day. We had some guest speakers from old Canberra, if you like, to tell their story.

MS LAWDER: Gosh, I must have missed my invitation.

Mr Gentleman: I do apologise. We did launch it at Rose Cottage and it was a great event. Yes, we do have interactions with those owners quite regularly.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Members, our time with the minister has expired. I have just been told that Minister Corbell will not be here until 3 o'clock, so we will have a brief break. I think the minister is leaving but the officials are staying for the next round. Minister, thank you for your attendance today. A transcript will be provided when it is available. If you have any corrections or alterations, if you could please forward them to the secretariat, that would be appreciated. Members, we will resume on environment output class 2.1.

Short suspension

Appearances:

Corbell, Mr Simon, Deputy Chief Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Health,
Minister for the Environment and Minister for Capital Metro

Environment and Planning Directorate

Ekelund, Ms Dorte, Director-General

Ponton, Mr Ben, Deputy Director-General

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Director, Finance and Operational Support

Lane, Dr Annie, Executive Director, Environment

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

Neil, Mr Robert, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

THE CHAIR: Members, we turn to environment, output class 2.1. Welcome, minister. I remind people that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed. Minister, in front of you is the privilege statement. Could you and your officials please confirm that you have seen and read the privilege card and understand the implications of privilege?

Mr Corbell: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Minister, would you like to make an opening statement before we go to questions?

Mr Corbell: Yes, I would, thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank the members of the committee for your forbearance with my very slight delay this afternoon.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a brief opening statement. I would like to start by acknowledging that I understand that later today the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Mr Neil, will be appearing before the committee. I would like to take this opportunity to advise the committee that I have, with much regret, received and accepted a letter of resignation from Mr Neil for personal and family reasons.

Bob Neil has had a long and distinguished career in the ACT public service spanning nearly three decades. Initial positions held by him included supervisory and executive roles in waste, energy, heritage, biosecurity and water resources, to mention just a few.

During his time as commissioner, Mr Neil produced and delivered the 2011 *State of the environment report*, the recommendations of which aim to improve environmental and sustainability outcomes at a practical level. He also led an investigation into the state of watercourses and the catchment of Lake Burley Griffin, allowing more informed current thinking and practical actions for government responses to water quality issues in the ACT. More recently, he was instrumental in facilitating the passage of one of the ACT's most important pieces of legislation, the Nature Conservation Act.

Bob Neil's respect for the environment has been translated throughout his career and

conveyed in on-the-ground achievements which have not always been publicly recognised. But those who have been aware of them have greatly appreciated his commitment and foresight. The protection of the environment we all love and enjoy is due to people like Mr Neil who have served their community and this government, and previous administrations, with much dedication and professionalism.

With that thought in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my personal thanks, and, I am sure, that of all Assembly members, for Mr Neil's distinguished service to our community and for the betterment of its environment. We live in a better place thanks to the efforts of people like Bob Neil.

Mr Chairman, this government has a proven track record of being at the forefront of developing new measures and policies to improve our environment. We are particularly being innovative in the area of the delivery of large-scale renewable energy and nature conservation programs.

As an example of this, I would like to advise the committee that today the Environment and Planning Directorate has been advised that in the lead-up to the UN Bonn climate change conference, the ACT has been recognised, through a joint report of the Carbon Disclosure Project, the Climate Group and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, as having the equal second highest emissions reduction target of any state or region in the world. The ACT was the only Australian state or region to be included in this list. States and regions with the same target include California, British Columbia and Scotland. The region of Baden-Wurttemberg in Germany is the only region with a stronger target. This is a strong endorsement of the leadership role the ACT is now playing in the climate change space.

In this budget we have also announced a range of important programs on the ground. We have recently announced grant funding for both the ACT environment grants and community gardens to the tune of \$210,000. The government will provide \$185,000 in environment grants, continuing the long history of supporting excellent on-the-ground activity in the nature conservation space. Successful environment grants in previous rounds have included community and landcare groups for the control of invasive weeds and planting of native species in integrated areas along the Murrumbidgee River, for the housing and rehabilitation of injured native wildlife, and for the annual Frogwatch volunteer survey data. Funding for the new community gardens round is open to individuals, community groups and not-for-profit organisations; this will help to promote locally grown, sustainable food choices within the Canberra region.

As I mentioned earlier, the government has long been recognised for its innovation in developing its response to a changing climate. We are continuing this commitment with an expression of interest process for the next generation solar project, which closes early next month. I am pleased to say that the government has had a very strong response from industry to this latest expression of interest round. It is envisaged that the next generation solar infrastructure will generate an additional 50 megawatts of renewable energy for the ACT; it forms an important part of our 90 per cent renewable energy target by the year 2020. The government has decided to target next generation solar, including energy storage and new renewable energy technologies, as part of its plan to reduce emissions and grow the renewable energy industry in the

ACT, helping to position our city as an internationally recognised centre for renewable energy innovation and investment.

Earlier this year, I launched a new strategy to bring together industry and research sectors to accelerate the development of the renewable energy industry in Canberra. Focusing on solar, wind and energy storage, the renewable energy industry development strategy brings together a range of existing government initiatives and will help facilitate the next generation of renewable energy technologies, including the creation of a renewable energy precinct and test berth facilities. There is no doubt that there are significant economic benefits to be had from being an early adopter economy, and I want the ACT to benefit from the jobs and investment that we will see from this.

In this budget the government will also be continuing funding for on-the-ground programs in the Waterwatch area. Regrettably, the Waterwatch program was cut by the federal Liberal government, but this government has chosen to continue to fund it. The program highlights the value that the community puts on environmental management. Waterwatch has been able to mobilise significant numbers of volunteers and has established an important network for the monitoring and reporting of the health of the ACT's waterways. This network is now being heavily utilised as the ACT works to implement the base and priority project funding we have secured from the commonwealth, which will provide for up to \$85 million of investment in infrastructure to improve the ongoing health and amenity of our waterways.

Earlier this month I tabled legislation in the Assembly to establish a catchment management coordination group. This group will help to place on a statutory basis an ongoing forum to ensure the health of the waterways of our city and our region. It has representatives from agencies, authorities and interest groups across the state, local government and commonwealth sectors, and it will make sure we closely engage the community in this critical issue.

The government is also excited by the possibilities recently commenced in the bilateral agreement with the commonwealth to bring environmental approvals and the management of the accompanying environmental offsets into an aligned framework. These environmental offsets help manage impacts on threatened species and threatened species habitat. They provide for environmental compensation for development impacts on sites that contain matters of national environmental significance such as the yellow box red gum woodlands so common here in the ACT.

The new one-stop shop for approvals will help to maintain high environmental standards while promoting greater efficiency in the economy by simplifying assessment and approval processes. This will also be supported through funding provided in this year's budget.

Finally, the important work of the ACTSmart team will continue throughout 2016. This program has been very successful in helping to achieve the government's targets of reducing energy consumption while reducing utility costs for households and small businesses in the ACT. The program has been rolled out over the last four years. It has helped many low income households to replace inefficient appliances, supported the installation of window fittings to improve comfort, and increased general awareness

of factors that affect electricity consumed. This program will continue to be supported through funding provided by electricity retailers in the energy efficiency improvement scheme obligations.

Mr Chairman, they are just some of the matters being dealt with by the Environment and Planning Directorate in my area of responsibility as Minister for the Environment. I and my officials would be very happy to try and answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. On page 11 of budget paper E, the total cost for the output dropped from \$39.2 million to \$31.6 million. Could we have the ins and outs of that, please?

Mr Fitzgerald: There are a number of factors that impact on that decrease. The largest factors—one is the transfer of the ACTSmart programs to utilise the energy efficiency improvement scheme, as the minister mentioned. We also have decreasing funding for the basin priority project. That project is nearing the end of phase 1. We only have funding in the budget for that phase of the project; as we finalise that aspect of the project, we will get additional funding. The other big element is the EPA, which transfers across to Access Canberra.

THE CHAIR: How much is that worth annually?

Mr Fitzgerald: In this budget it is 2.3.

THE CHAIR: All right. Could we get a written reconciliation of all those numbers?

Mr Fitzgerald: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris, a new question.

MS FITZHARRIS: We are doing environment but I have some renewable energy questions. Are we going to range across both now? Is that all right?

THE CHAIR: Yes, if you like.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, I want to ask about the renewable energy industry strategy and the work going on under that. It mentions a renewable energy precinct. Could you elaborate a little more on where that is and what might be going to happen there?

Mr Corbell: There are a number of initiatives that are coming together. The first is the renewable energy industry development strategy. It is designed to leverage the existing potential and research that is happening in this space here in the ACT. For example there is the Energy Change Institute at the ANU and it does world-leading research on a range of renewable energy technologies, both PV technologies and also solar-thermal and renewable energy technologies that blend together, for example PV with pump hydro. There is a range of very important types of research going on at the ANU.

In addition, there are start-up companies like Reposit Power who are developing new

software to enable the trading of energy that is stored in distributed storage frameworks, whether it is batteries in the home, electric vehicle batteries and so on, and the capacity to dispatch and sell electricity as needed from those storage points.

Then there are other Canberra-based companies like Windlab, which again is a start-up company spun out of the CSIRO, which is now developing wind farms around the world, growing its corporate headquarters here in the ACT as a result of the government's support for its first Australian-based wind farm development at Coonooer Bridge as part of the wind auction process.

That is an example of the type of renewable energy research and innovation and start-up business that is happening here in the ACT. The renewable energy industry development strategy is designed to first of all allow for further research in and amongst that sector. We have secured over \$1 million worth of funding from successful wind auction participants who have agreed to invest just over \$1 million into a renewable energy research fund which will be jointly administered between industry and government and allow for innovative research projects to be supported.

We are also working closely with ANU and CIT on the possibility of a test berth facility. This would be a facility that would test the operation and deployment into the grid of battery storage and how different battery storage technologies operate. For example there is another Canberra company called IT Power, which have recently received funding from the federal government's renewable energy agency, ARENA, to look at a range of different battery technologies and their suitability and differences in performance. They have received federal funding and there is an opportunity to leverage that into a test berth facility here in the ACT.

That is the direction that we are seeing the energy industry head. I want, and the government wants, to make sure that our research facilities are taking advantage of that, developing their knowledge in this area and developing the expertise that could potentially lead to further export and market opportunities for the city.

MS FITZHARRIS: I think I remember correctly that CIT yesterday said that they were aiming for their Bruce precinct to have a bit of a focus on climate change and renewable energy so that people and businesses could take advantage of some of the educational offerings that they have got.

Mr Corbell: That is right. The CIT have had, for a number of years now, a sustainability training building which is meant to be a hands-on training capability for renewable energy technologies, solar hot water, heat pump technologies and other building fabric treatments where people undertaking that training can get hands-on experience in that building. It is a great facility at Bruce CIT. CIT have been a successful recipient of funding through the wind auction process. They have received a commitment from one of the wind auction participant winners of \$7 million worth of funding which will support the development of the CIT as Australia's first dedicated trade training facility for wind turbine maintenance.

As part of that commitment the winning auction company will be training all of its staff here in Canberra for its wind farm operations in Australia and elsewhere, and that, we anticipate, is the start of a bigger training capability for the CIT. At the

moment there is no dedicated wind farm turbine maintenance training course in Australia at a TAFE level. This will be the first and, we believe, a real opportunity for Canberra, particularly as we continue to see over time growth in wind farm operations in the surrounding region and the need for further skilled staff.

MS FITZHARRIS: Do you have a view on the recently announced federal wind turbine commissioner?

Mr Corbell: My view is that he is a commissioner for anecdotes, and that is unfortunate. There have been seven national studies over the last decade that have all concluded that there is no link between health concerns and wind farm operations. What does need to be address by the wind industry is community ownership and community engagement, and that is why the government has said, through its wind auction process, that community engagement is one of the key rating criteria that we assess the success or otherwise of bids on. This fanciful crusade that we are seeing from some parts of the federal government trying to give legitimacy to something that has no scientific basis whatsoever is deeply concerning and only does great damage to the cause, the purpose and the growth of renewable energy in Australia.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are there still remaining other uncertainties on the commonwealth funding around, I think, the targets which have now been—

THE CHAIR: The minister is not responsible for the commonwealth.

MS FITZHARRIS: No, but in terms of certainties for our market and for renewable energy industry development, is there enough certainty at the national level for investors?

Mr Corbell: There is no doubt that there is a significant level of confusion and uncertainty being put into the industry as a result of comments like, “If we could have got a lower RET we would have,” or, “I do not like those things,” referring to wind farms, or the new commissioner. Even though there is now a settlement on the RET, in terms of the revised target on the RET and what that means for the ACT, certainly it will see some growth in wind farm development, although not as much as was available under the previous RET. That is of some benefit to the ACT and the surrounding region because it will potentially bring forward currently stalled wind farm projects in the Australian capital region.

There is much less benefit for large-scale solar as a result of the revised target because essentially wind development will squeeze out opportunities for large-scale solar. For the ACT, mechanisms like our large-scale feed-in tariff law will be very important to secure the best, lowest priced wind available and the most productive wind sites available and also support further large-scale solar projects that are not going to be supported because of the cut in the federal RET.

MS FITZHARRIS: And finally, minister, in terms of the approach that you were driving to research and innovation in renewable energy, where do we sit compared to the other jurisdictions across Australia?

Mr Corbell: I think it is a consensus now that the ACT is very much leading the

states and territories in this space. South Australia has had a strong development in its wind industry but it has relied largely, indeed almost exclusively, on the national RET to achieve that and it has what I would say are sensible planning assessment policies. So we are very well placed. Growth in jobs in the renewable energy sector has been up 400 per cent over the last four years, and that is at a time when the rest of the renewable energy sector has seen a decline in the number of jobs because of uncertainty at the federal level.

I am confident that there are significant economic opportunities for Canberra. To give you an example, the support of the ACT government for the Canberra-based company Windlab will see, over the next 20 years of their feed-in tariff entitlement for the Coonooer Bridge project, investment into our city of approximately \$250 million. That is investment that would not have otherwise occurred in terms of extra staff, growth of its corporate operations and expansion of its research activities here. That would not have occurred unless there was support through the large-scale feed-in law and I am very proud of the fact that a Canberra-based company is sharing in those benefits.

MS FITZHARRIS: I have one more. In terms of the jobs, have you got a number? Are you able to quantify the number of jobs currently?

Mr Corbell: I do not have that to hand but I can certainly take that on notice and provide that to you.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: Minister, I go back to output 2.1 and table 16 on page 16, accountability indicators. Two of the indicators are a twice yearly progress report to the commonwealth on the caring for our country initiative, which finishes, and a twice yearly progress report to the commonwealth on the national land care program, which starts. Does this represent a change of emphasis from the commonwealth? What do you think the commonwealth is trying to achieve with these two programs, and do they have any impact on the ACT's efforts to protect the environment?

Mr Corbell: That reflects a policy change on the part of the commonwealth, who have ceased the caring for our country initiative and have revamped the national land care program instead. There has been a change in the emphasis around the elements of the national land care program and there has been a ceasing of the caring for our country initiative.

Dr Lane: I can add to that. As the minister said, it really is pretty much a change in name, if you like, for the program. Some of the same objectives still remain, that is, to protect our environment, to work with the community, particularly in on-the-ground work, and also to work with rural landholders in improving their environmental management of their natural resource assets.

There has been a renegotiation of the agreement with the commonwealth as a result of the change in the program, and that has happened for every NRM region in Australia, of which there are 56. The ACT is one of those. There has been quite a bit of undertaking in renegotiation. It gave us an opportunity to refine our targets a little

further and to work with the community to actually arrive at those targets. It is still very much about protection of our assets, community engagement and increasing the capacity of the community to manage their resources.

DR BOURKE: What you are saying is that it is more of a rebranding exercise than a real change in emphasis?

Dr Lane: It is pretty much that. Certainly the new government had some different perspectives on the policy, very much about on-the-ground work. They have actually brought in a requirement for NRM regions to work as much as possible through their local groups, putting money out onto the ground. For the ACT, that is very easy because that is how we operate anyway. Probably about in excess of 80 per cent of the funding that comes from the commonwealth under the national land care program goes directly out into community groups. They are mainly the three catchment management groups and Greening Australia.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. Minister, in 2014-15 the number of people employed by EPD decreased from 419 to 292, which was a loss of 127 staff. Did all of those positions transfer to Access Canberra or were there some job losses?

Ms Ekelund: Those figures reflect the transfer to Access Canberra. Prior to that time, as per the previous year's budget, we had been reducing our FTEs somewhat, but not hugely. I think it is fairly safe to say that that does reflect Access Canberra. You may recall that Mr Fitzgerald, in the previous session with Minister Gentleman, did go through in a little more detail about the fact that we moved 149 FTEs over to Access Canberra but it is not a straight deduction because we have adjusted our budget for the remaining FTEs to rebalance how much is FTEs. We have also reduced the allocation to consultancies so that we actually have the people in house doing the work rather than relying on external consultancies.

Mr Fitzgerald also mentioned that what we have tried to do in the FTE numbers is to accommodate some of the ups and downs that actually happen in our FTEs because at some times of the year we will have more people on our books than at other times. The example he used was kangaroo counters. When we are actually out there doing the research on how many kangaroos are in the conservation areas, we bring on six to eight extra people, as an example.

Mr Fitzgerald also mentioned that the FTEs have gone up a little in EPD because of the basin priority project. With the assistance of the commonwealth, we have been able to resource up a small team to take that work forward.

MS LAWDER: I think we did have some of this discussion. On page 395 of BP3 it is stated that there are 141 full-time employees that were transferred, not 127, which is less, and not the 149 that you have mentioned.

Mr Fitzgerald: I did undertake to provide Mr Smyth with a reconciliation of those numbers. We did have some issues with the timing. We were unable to give final figures at the time of budget publication.

THE CHAIR: Minister, where is the kangaroo fertility management trial at?

Mr Corbell: We are undertaking further research and monitoring of eastern grey kangaroos, including a two-year trial of dart delivery of the fertility control vaccine, Gonacon. Last year's budget enabled two years of research and monitoring of the eastern grey kangaroo population, including monitoring of vegetation and reptiles over different grazing intensity. The project was extended from two years to four years to enable further use of monitoring to capture environmental variations between seasons. The aim of the research is to expand further our knowledge on kangaroo impacts and refine the annual calculation of the number of kangaroos that need to be culled in conservation reserves.

The funding for the controlled vaccine Gonacon is \$433,000 over 2014-15 and 2015-16 to explore this potentially non-lethal control method. Territory and Municipal Services have undertaken to make a commitment, and have made a commitment, plus in kind resources for field trials of the fertility control vaccine. As I understand it, we are still at the first stage of the trial in terms of the finalisation of delivery methodology and issues around the administration of the fertility control drug itself. The second stage will involve field trials of that delivery methodology, that dart methodology. Dr Lane may be able to elaborate a little on where we are at with that.

Dr Lane: Yes, certainly. We are in the very early stages of this trial. We know the drug works by administering by hand, but we do not know how well it is going to work with a dart and if indeed the dart will actually deliver the vaccine. There is quite a lot of work to be done around that. It involves collaring kangaroos so that we can track their movements, track the effect of the vaccine as well. That will need to happen over a couple of years.

We are not sure how long the vaccine will be effective for, for example, but we are quite optimistic that it is another tool, if you like, for managing kangaroo populations, particularly small populations that are well contained. It would be in addition to the culling. Yes, very early stages, and beyond the two years we will still need to continue monitoring those kangaroos who have been administered.

THE CHAIR: So when do you hope to be in the field?

Dr Lane: Some of the trial will be happening in the field. In terms of actually rolling out this new technology—I think this is what you are referring to—we are not sure when that might happen.

THE CHAIR: You spoke about monitoring beyond the two years. How long will you have to monitor it for to get a sense of the success of the program?

Dr Lane: I would not like to put a time frame on that but it would be at least five years, I imagine. I think it has been shown by hand administering the drug that it is effective for beyond six years. That may also be the case for the dart. We are just not sure. There are many unanswered questions.

THE CHAIR: What does success look like for the program? What are you seeking to

prove?

Dr Lane: Managing those smaller populations through a non-lethal means would be really beneficial rather than having to carry out culls in those populations. It is just an additional means, if you like, for managing those populations and reducing the impacts on their habitat.

THE CHAIR: Has it been determined what the cost per kangaroo is for the delivery.

Dr Lane: We have not been able to work that out yet. That is all part of the trial.

THE CHAIR: Are we still looking at darting or are we looking at sedation and application?

Dr Lane: We are now at the stage of looking at darting. But prior to that, of course—well, we would need to be able to track those kangaroos; so we have to also capture them and collar them as well.

THE CHAIR: Do kangaroos roam much or are they territorial?

Dr Lane: They are quite territorial. They tend to hang around in the same place. Even when they are under a bit of pressure, they tend to stay where they are. So they do not tend to roam very far. But that said, some of the reserves that we work in are very large. It would be difficult to use that dart technology in those particular circumstances.

THE CHAIR: You talked earlier about smaller populations. Where is an example of a small population?

Dr Lane: Some of the smaller reserves, for example. Perhaps even some of the Defence lands are quite small areas and well contained.

THE CHAIR: When will the first results from the program be known?

Dr Lane: It will be beyond the current trial. It would be at least a couple of years until we can get some definitive results.

THE CHAIR: Is that 2017?

Dr Lane: I would not like to say. But it would be at least then, yes.

THE CHAIR: Until then the cull will be the primary way of containing the population?

Dr Lane: The cull will always be used. It will always be an important method to manage the population. The culling, yes, will continue.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, in the budget there is \$1.9 million for the upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch program. Could you talk us through that initiative? There is roughly \$500,000 each year. Is that staff costs? Are there more staff to work on that

program? What is involved there?

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Ms Fitzharris. The government is continuing funding for the Waterwatch program in this year's budget because we recognise that it is a very important part of engaging the community in citizen science. Simply put, it is a very cost-effective way to get a great range of sampling and monitoring of water quality issues at a wide variety of sites on a regular basis.

The key outcome of the program is the annual report card, the catchment health indicator program. I released the recent report card earlier this year for the 2013-14 period. What that showed was that we had over 160 volunteers from four catchment areas across the region undertaking just under 1,200 water quality surveys and 78 water bug surveys at 184 separate sites.

This has allowed us to have a level of reporting at 63 separate areas of waterway across our region spanning a total catchment area of approximately 8,500 square kilometres. This really does highlight that this citizen science gathered data can play a very important role. We are using that data to inform our planning and preparation for the implementation of the basin priority projects, which will deliver water quality infrastructure into a range of catchments across the ACT.

This program is being supported by the government but also supported by Icon Water and South East Local Land Services, which is the relevant New South Wales government entity that supports this land care Waterwatch function in the surrounding New South Wales region. It is a small part of our contribution to the basin priority project and gives us the on-the-ground people infrastructure to monitor the water quality in the ACT and the surrounding region.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are there other examples of citizen science in action across the ACT?

Mr Corbell: Yes, there is. Certainly in the land care groups, there is a lot of engagement around weeds and weed monitoring where there are problems with invasive weed species. We certainly see, for example, that activity also undertaken by our land care groups.

MS FITZHARRIS: What are the benefits—not only the benefits of data collection to learn about these issues, but the broader benefits for the community—of being involved?

Mr Corbell: An important part of engaging people in active citizenship is being engaged in their local communities, understanding issues in their local environment and being able to feed back their observations of areas that they take close custodianship of when it comes to their overall environmental health. So there are real benefits for us.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is it the land care groups that do the dating version of citizen science? Is it land care? They have a singles night—

Mr Corbell: Yes, I think that is the planting program that is run by Greening

Australia. They have a singles dating—

MS FITZHARRIS: Any successes on that front?

Mr Corbell: I think they call it “speed planting” or something. But, yes, singles sign up to meet like-minded—

MS FITZHARRIS: Any marriages to report?

Mr Corbell: singles through planting days. I do not know. I hope so.

MS FITZHARRIS: Good, thanks.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: I will stay on the same theme, chair. This is interesting stuff here—what is happening out there in the community. Just talking a bit more about the contributions those volunteer and non-government organisations make, and in particular Frogwatch and the Friends of Aranda Bushland, if you could shed a bit more light on those for us, minister, that would be appreciated.

Mr Corbell: I think I have pretty much encapsulated that to date. Waterwatch and Frogwatch, which is a subprogram sitting under Waterwatch, are both great examples of volunteers engaged in monitoring and reporting data back to our scientists and the directorate on the health of our waterways. We have a broad range of catchment groups that are engaged in this space. They are a fantastic group of volunteers; there is no doubt about that.

DR BOURKE: Of course, Frogwatch is probably more about frog listening, though, isn't it? It is the mating calls that they are listening to, which segues back into the previous question.

Mr Corbell: There is no doubt that the presence of frogs in a waterway is an indicator of a waterway's health, and the capacity to monitor the diversity and the frequency of frog sightings assists in understanding the relative health of a catchment.

DR BOURKE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Just to go back to the water quality questions, this is a question probably for Mr Ponton. Are there any problems with flocculation in the waterways of the ACT, and have you any comments to pass on that?

Mr Corbell: I am sorry, what is the term you used—flocculation?

THE CHAIR: I understand Mr Ponton is somewhat of an expert on this issue.

Mr Ponton: No. Where did you get that from?

Mr Corbell: I am sorry, Mr Smyth; I will have to take the question on notice.

Ms Ekelund: I might just add that I understand we have used flocculation techniques in the past to manage some of our ponds to make sure that sediments settle down as part of our water quality management. I am not sure if the territory is using it at the moment, but if it is being administered it would be through Territory and Municipal Services management.

THE CHAIR: Is this a question for TAMS?

Ms Ekelund: I believe so.

THE CHAIR: A good flick pass. One of the objectives in budget paper E, page 11, is to establish an ACT catchment management governance framework. Given the report of the Auditor-General on this area, has that report come about because there has not been a management governance framework in this area?

Mr Corbell: I think that report and the previous analysis that has been undertaken by others, such as the commissioner for the environment, have all pointed to the importance of strengthening our governance when it comes to catchment management. That is the purpose of the bill that is now before the Assembly—to establish a statutory catchment management advisory framework that brings all of the key stakeholders together.

The bill that is before the Assembly at the moment establishes a statutory catchment management advisory group, to be chaired by an independent chair appointed by the minister and having representatives from the relevant ACT government directorates, from the water utility and from the National Capital Authority, given their responsibility for the Lake Burley Griffin water body, as well as representatives of the relevant local government and state government agencies in New South Wales.

That ACT and region catchment management coordination group has already met, without having a statutory basis. I asked the directorate to convene it earlier this year. The first meeting was held earlier this year, indeed in February, and it will now be established on a statutory basis if the Assembly agrees to that bill. Its task is to make sure that we have an integrated catchment management strategy and common agreed goals and actions. The importance of having senior representation on this group has been an issue that I have been at pains to point out to my directorate and indeed to the members and organisations that are represented on that group.

The government and I want to see senior representation, and I have been pleased to say the response from the relevant entities has been very positive. It is at D-G level within ACT government. It is at chief executive level, for example, with the water utility, Icon. It is at a similar level for the local government areas and state government agencies. I have been very pleased with the engagement of all of those entities. I should add that the ESA is also represented on that, given the interaction between flood planning work, bushfire mitigation and catchment issues, which are in part some of the issues you raise, Mr Smyth. That is very much the focus of that group.

THE CHAIR: When the legislation is passed, how long before the framework will appear?

Mr Corbell: The framework? I am not quite sure what you are referring to.

THE CHAIR: It says “establish an ACT catchment management governance framework”. So when will it actually—

Mr Corbell: I guess framework or arrangement is the same terminology. It is already established. It is already operating on the ground. This gives it a statutory basis and, I think, a permanence that is important to make sure it endures and is sustained.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. I wanted to ask around environmental offsets but in particular the Gungahlin strategic assessment. In terms of how the offsets are now managed and rolled out, is that a question for you, minister, or is it more for the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services?

Mr Corbell: It is largely the responsibility of Territory and Municipal Services, along with the Land Development Agency. The Land Development Agency are the development proponent, which are required to secure an approval, including offsets for any impacts arising from their development proposals. Given that the LDA are developing the new suburban areas, they are the proponent and they have responsibility for ensuring that development happens in accordance with the approvals granted through that strategic assessment, including the offsets that have to be delivered as part of that approval.

Territory and Municipal Services will be responsible for the ongoing management on the ground, for example, of the new reserves that are created as a result of that offset and the approval under that strategic assessment.

MS FITZHARRIS: So your directorate effectively plays no ongoing role in—

Mr Corbell: Not in day-to-day management. The conservation planning and research area within the Environment and Planning Directorate, which reports to me as Minister for the Environment, has responsibilities to work with TAMS in terms of identifying the environmental issues that have to be managed on the ground, particularly in relation to the impacts and the appropriate management regimes for threatened species and ecosystems, which is clearly the critical issue when it comes to the need for the strategic assessment in the first place. Dr Lane can probably elaborate a little on CPR’s role, given her role as conservator and having responsibility for that area.

Dr Lane: Our role is very much around the policy, the strategy and the scientific advice. We get involved in the monitoring of those threatened species for which those offsets have been set aside. We do that on an ongoing basis. We provide advice on what the information is telling us and appropriate management actions, whether that might be some regime around grazing or fire or pest management. That is primarily our role. We also, for the threatened species, develop action plans, and these offsets play an important part in implementing those plans.

MS FITZHARRIS: In terms of the link, specifically in the Gungahlin area, around

Mulligans Flat and Goorooyarloo, the woodlands and wetlands trust, is that a relationship mainly maintained by EPD or is it more through TAMS?

Mr Corbell: That is largely through TAMS, because it is a land management function. Again, when it comes to the scientific assessments and policy advice that sit around that scientific data base and evidence base, EPD has a role to play in that.

Dr Lane: In fact, in partnership with ANU we are actually leading the research in Mulligans Flat, particularly on the bettong and also a few other species that will be reintroduced in the near future.

MS FITZHARRIS: They were mentioning this morning on the radio—I think the trust—around having a “meet the scientist” evening next week with the ANU researchers on the project.

THE CHAIR: We had an impromptu recess earlier, but we will just stop now for a few minutes, when we will go to Dr Bourke.

Sitting suspended from 3.48 to 4.01 pm.

THE CHAIR: Members, minister and staff, we will resume. We are looking at environment, output class 2.1 to 2.3, as well as the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. Dr Bourke has the floor.

DR BOURKE: Minister, I refer you to page 17 of budget paper E, table 18, indicator d. Note No 3 attached to that says that this increase is mainly due to the large number of tenants at the Tuggeranong Hyperdome being successful in receiving accreditation. Can you tell us why this program was so successful at the Tuggeranong Hyperdome? Can those of us who are north of the lake learn from that experience?

THE CHAIR: One can always learn from Tuggeranong, Dr Bourke.

Mr Corbell: This question relates to the ACTSmart program. ACTSmart is a program designed to assist businesses and households with their energy, water and waste management to reduce energy consumption, to reduce water consumption and to improve recycling and diversion from landfill of their waste.

Tuggeranong Hyperdome is the only shopping mall in the ACT that as a whole has signed up to the ACTSmart program. They have signed up their entire business and all their tenancies are engaged in the program. That is different from the other shopping malls in Canberra who have not elected to sign up to ACTSmart as a whole. So we have had a great partnership with Tuggeranong Hyperdome. Whilst there are many other businesses in shopping centres across the city that are part of ACTSmart, the owners of Tuggeranong Hyperdome as a whole have elected to participate. We have seen a large number of their tenancies engaged through that.

DR BOURKE: So it is possible to sign up to ACTSmart as a landlord rather than actually being the business; is that the case?

Mr Corbell: Obviously if the landlord has signed up they are going to work very

closely with all of their tenants to participate. They have chosen the ACTSmart approach for their waste management when it comes to recycling and so has the Hyperdome.

Some of the other mall owners and the other big shopping centre owners like Westfield and QIC have their own programs already; so they do not use ACTSmart. But the company that owns the Hyperdome has chosen to use ACTSmart as their preferred approach for recycling at the Hyperdome.

DR BOURKE: You mentioned energy, water and waste. I presume most of the commercial benefits for businesses from these programs would be in the energy side?

Mr Corbell: It is energy, water and waste, Dr Bourke. In all three sectors there are significant potential savings for businesses. Certainly in energy it is reductions in electricity and gas use to improvements in the efficiency of their appliances. Obviously it is through measures such as reducing heat loss or wasteful use of electricity, in terms of lighting and switching to more efficient appliances.

But it is also in areas like water. The classic example that is often cited is a business in Ms Fitzharris's electorate in Gungahlin called "Wokitup!" It is an Asian food business that uses woks. When you use a wok you use a lot of water in the cooking. They have switched to a waterless wok technology, which means that they are saving thousands of litres of water every day. That is obviously reducing their water consumption and their water bill. It is an example of how businesses are being helped through this program and we are reducing resource use.

To give you a bit of an example of the benefits of the program overall, as of 31 May this year, for the current financial year, 103 businesses have received an assessment under the ACTSmart business, energy and water program. Sixty-eight of those sites have received a government rebate. The government offers a rebate of up to \$5,000 on a cost-sharing basis to assist the business with the costs of their efficiency upgrades in energy, water or waste.

Looking at the 146 sites who have completed retrofits this year, we are estimating energy savings of 1,500 megawatt hours; greenhouse gas savings of approximately 1½ tonnes across those 146 sites; and savings of energy bills across all of those sites of \$528,000. There will be over half a million dollars in savings on the energy bills of those 146 businesses. It is a great example of helping businesses to reduce their costs and achieving greater resource efficiency as well.

DR BOURKE: They would have to be pretty happy about that, minister. Have you had any feedback from the actual businesses themselves?

Mr Corbell: I have. We had great feedback from the businesses that are involved and it is overwhelmingly small business in the ACT. For example, I was at a breakfast for Law Week last week over in the NICTA building and the cafe. A participant in ACTSmart came up to me quite unexpectedly and said, "We want to get your photo because we have been saving a lot of money on our electricity bills and we are really grateful for the support."

That is some really positive feedback. Indeed the ACTSmart awards morning was held earlier this month. We handed out awards to a large number of businesses who have been successful. We see great competition amongst businesses to win these awards. They are the best ambassadors for the program because they go out and talk to their peers about the real financial savings they can achieve, as well as the information they are able to impart to their customers and their staff about being smarter with energy, water and waste.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, any questions?

MS LAWDER: Minister, given the move of EPA and some other functions to Access Canberra, does your directorate have any role now in asbestos contamination or investigation?

Mr Corbell: Only in relation to environment protection policy; so if there are matters arising in the areas that are the EPA's responsibility that are policy matters, they remain the responsibility of me as Minister for the Environment and the relevant staff in my directorate.

MS LAWDER: What about with the reported asbestos contamination of the new solar farm site near Williamsdale?

Mr Corbell: That is a matter for the EPA in its operational role potentially. It is not an environment protection policy matter.

MS LAWDER: On the solar front, are there any plans for new investments for private home owners in 2015-16 via the feed-in tariff?

Mr Corbell: Sorry, what do you mean by "investment"?

MS LAWDER: Are you planning anything via feed-in tariff for home owners in the coming year?

Mr Corbell: A micro feed-in tariff scheme for households?

MS LAWDER: Yes.

Mr Corbell: No, the government is not giving consideration to that at this time. There is very little justification for a premium feed-in tariff scheme for household solar, given the very significant price reductions in the cost of installing household solar over the past five years. There certainly was justification at the time we had a premium feed-in tariff scheme, but since that time the cost of installing household solar has effectively been halved, if not more.

I saw an ad today, for example, that showed you could install a five-kilowatt system for around \$4,000. Five years ago a five-kilowatt system would be costing you \$10,000 to \$15,000 at least. It certainly highlights that there have been very significant price reductions in the cost of household solar.

That said, the government will continue to look closely at opportunities to make sure

that people who are exporting electricity from their solar panels and who are not already in the premium fit schemes, which have closed, are paid a fair price. So we certainly want to make sure that there is no advantage taken of household generators who are exporting their electricity to make sure that they are paid a fair price. We keep that issue under close watch.

MS LAWDER: Who determines that price or how would that price be determined?

Mr Corbell: At the moment the price of electricity purchased by the retailer or network operator is determined by that business. There is a guarantee under the consumer framework for the national electricity market that guarantees consumers a fair price, but there is a lot of variability of what is a fair price. We have not had problems with this to date in the ACT, but it is certainly a matter that the government keeps under close watch.

MS LAWDER: Do you think that will take place during the 2015-16 year?

Mr Corbell: I really could not speculate on that.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke has a supplementary on the issue.

DR BOURKE: You mentioned a significant reduction in the price of the installation of household solar and you quoted a five-kilowatt series of panels. Minister, do you think there has been any change in the quality of those systems as well as a reduction in price? Are there any reports of such things happening?

Mr Corbell: The main reason for the reduction in the cost of PV panels has been the enormous expansion of production capacity in the Chinese manufacturing sector, which is where most solar panels are manufactured. The scale of production in China has led to significant reductions in the unit price. That, of course, is combined with a significant level of demand globally for the PV.

Overall, it would be fair to say that there has been a significant shake-down of the manufacturing sector in China. Many of the less viable and less permanent businesses have disappeared or been swallowed up by larger companies which have greater long-term financial and economic viability. That should lead to ongoing improvements in quality. In terms of quality, it is the case that high quality panels cost more and low quality panels cost less, but that is really a matter for consumers to do their research on and to understand what it is they are buying when it comes to PV panels.

DR BOURKE: Is there much independent advice around the quality of particular PV panels with efficiency, longevity and ongoing maintenance issues?

Mr Corbell: I think there is certainly a case that consumers need to be as well informed as possible, as they should be with any other purchase. There are cheap fridges and there are expensive fridges. You get what you pay for really. It is no different with PV panels. They all do the job; it is just that some will perform better over a longer period of time than others. It is no different with this product compared to any other product.

There is certainly a good range of consumer information available, particularly from consumer organisations like Choice. Certainly we would always encourage consumers to be aware of the issues and to make sure when they are dealing with suppliers and installers that they are getting good advice from those suppliers and installers.

Certainly industry-based bodies like the Clean Energy Council and others also provide information to consumers to help them with their choice and there are industry-based accreditation schemes that are meant to provide a level of assurance about the competencies and quality of services being provided by installers.

Here in the ACT when it comes to installation it is important to stress that we have a very strong safety regime. We are the only jurisdiction that inspects every single solar PV installation that goes into a roof. In other jurisdictions they are not uniformly inspected. They are inspected on a random or a spot basis. We inspect every solar PV installation and we do that twice; once by the electricity company ActewAGL and once by the inspector in EPD.

DR BOURKE: What have been the consequences in other states and territories of that lack of inspection you just talked about, minister?

Mr Corbell: In other jurisdictions I think there have been problems arising from time to time around safety. Fortunately here in the ACT we have a very high level of compliance with the wiring rules, for example, as a result of that mandatory double inspection.

THE CHAIR: Minister, on page 11 of budget paper E, the second-last dot point talks about the policy development of regulatory activities to protect and enhance the natural and built environment. With the EPA moving across to Access Canberra, how will you be aware of what issues require regulatory activities, and what arrangements have been put in place to get the feedback required?

Mr Corbell: There has been an agreed set of protocols put in place following the decision to establish Access Canberra, which ensures that the relevant portfolio ministers are made aware of emerging operational issues that have policy implications when it comes to the activities of Access Canberra. This is a new space for the government, but I think it is important that we work out the complexity of this, because the benefits of Access Canberra are considerable; a one-stop shop for all of these approvals will improve efficiency and competitiveness in the local economy, and make it easier for citizens and businesses to get the approvals they need. But equally, where there are operational issues arising that have policy implications, there is an agreement between the Chief Minister and ministers across the range of portfolios that are affected that there will be the capacity for feedback of these issues and work undertaken at the policy level in the relevant directorates as required.

THE CHAIR: Will the officers of the EPA remain within your department, in the physical location, or are they moving somewhere else?

Ms Ekelund: Mr Smyth, you will recall that earlier in the session with Minister Gentleman I mentioned that we worked very hard to try and secure the retention of the Access Canberra officers who had formerly been in the directorate to

be physically co-located with us. In talking with Access Canberra, Dave Peffer, he was agreeable to continue those arrangements. So even though officers might be working in two different entities, we work side by side. It means we have close coordination of matters, in much the same way as the directorate has to work with other parts of government, whether that is TAMS or Chief Minister's et cetera. So we have a close working relationship and the fact that we continue to be co-located we see as being of great benefit to our staff and both organisations, making sure we have seamless communications between our entities.

THE CHAIR: So the interaction between the enforcers and the policy guys will continue simply because you are co-located?

Ms Ekelund: Absolutely. And I should mention that in the policy work that we do we recognise the significant experience and expertise that exists within the officers in Access Canberra. As we work with other stakeholders as well, we will be tapping into their knowledge during the consultations on policy development and implementation.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Thank you. Minister, I want to ask some questions around energy efficiency measures for buildings, both for residential and for commercial. The department administers the energy efficiency improvement scheme and the ACTSmart program. Do you have a view on how well informed the ACT community is about their own energy efficiency in their own homes? We had a discussion earlier with Minister Gentleman about the importance of solar access. Are you aware of any new materials or new products on the market or coming into the market that might help the community improve their energy efficiency?

Mr Corbell: Yes. Thank you, Ms Fitzharris. The first point to make on this as a jurisdiction is that the latest greenhouse gas inventory confirmed that there has been an eight per cent reduction in our greenhouse gas emissions for the period 2011-12 to 2013-14. One of the key reasons behind that is a reduction in energy consumption. About three per cent, if I recall correctly, of that reduction is through reduction in energy consumption. The balance, the majority, is through a switch to renewable energy generation, an increase in renewable energy generation in the city. That would point to changes in consumer behaviour around how they are using energy, particularly electricity, and that certainly points to an improvement in energy efficiency.

During part of that period, the energy efficiency improvement scheme commenced its operations. The energy efficiency improvement scheme is designed to see up to 80,000 households participate in the installation of free energy saving measures and devices to reduce household electricity consumption. To date, 50,000 Canberra households have participated in the energy efficiency improvement scheme and over 500,000 energy-saving items have been installed. That is a very strong record of achievement to date.

There has been a very broad range of measures undertaken. That includes replacement of light globes with energy efficient globes, the installation of standby power controllers, door sealing to reduce draft and heat loss, and the decommissioning of

refrigerators and freezers where they are inefficient and costing households a lot of money.

We know the savings from this scheme are considerable. It is estimated that the savings to be achieved from the scheme will, over the course of the scheme, be in the order of \$4 per household per week, and that is a net saving after the costs of the scheme are reflected in the pass-through to electricity consumers. There is a net saving to consumers from this scheme.

In terms of more recent measures, ActewAGL, who are obliged to provide these services, as are other electricity retailers under the scheme, have recently launched a downlight upgrade program as part of their free energy saving house call. This will allow households to replace their halogen downlights with free LED downlights. Halogen downlights are very energy hungry beasts. Members may recall that they were very popular over the last decade or so; lots of halogens were installed when electricity prices were much lower. But there is no doubt that halogens use a lot of electricity. Replacing them with LED downlights is a great measure on the part of ActewAGL. They are doing this because they are required to achieve savings under the scheme, and it is great to see them responding in a very proactive way.

The program has been very popular. Within the first two weeks, 3,000 households booked for the replacement of their halogen downlights with LED downlights. That is a free service through EEIS. It is a really good example of how we are driving energy efficiency. And we are not just reaching a couple of hundred households, which we used to reach when the government ran grants programs; we are reaching tens of thousands of households through this program. That is exactly what we need to do to reduce energy consumption, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the residential sector, and also to save households money on their electricity bills.

MS FITZHARRIS: Are there any innovations in building materials for renovations and new builds that you are aware of?

Mr Corbell: Those are factors that are more difficult to influence and are driven largely by the building code. It is really a matter I would leave to my colleague the Minister for Planning, because it is really driven by building code and planning approval frameworks. But the other innovation worth mentioning is the new ACTSmart sustainability portal, which is an extension of the ACTSmart website. That is meant to be a one-stop shop online for households to get advice and information and understand what programs are available when it comes to what households can do in relation to climate change and what they can particularly do in terms of reducing their energy consumption and their broader resource consumption, and the savings they can achieve from that.

MS FITZHARRIS: Finally, I had the opportunity last week to meet the Reposit folk. What do you see the future looking like in terms of battery storage for residential households?

Mr Corbell: Battery storage has the potential to completely change the way the energy market operates. It changes consumers from being passive receivers of electricity to being active—not just generators if you have PV on your roof but people

who are much less reliant on the grid and can potentially sell into the grid at a time when they can make the most profit. It potentially makes householders energy traders, which is a complete change in the way we see the energy market. How quickly batteries will arrive in force and be dominant in the market is difficult to judge exactly, but when you consider the level of penetration of PV generation into the residential sector—how dramatic that has been and the fact that it has really only occurred over the space of less than a decade and Australia now has the highest level of households, in percentage terms, with PV on their roof of any nation in the world—it is quite possible that we will see a similar transformation with batteries.

MS FITZHARRIS: Last week Dr Bourke asked ICRC about battery power, and they expressed a view that they thought potentially—I do not think they used the word “detrimental”—it could have an impact on the grid in that the grid may then be supplying fewer people and it would therefore increase the costs. Do you have a comment on that?

Mr Corbell: That is a risk if we just continue with existing tariff settings and existing access charging regimes, because more and more people will choose to get out of the grid if they can and reduce their exposure to those charges. But if people are generating and storing their electricity, there may emerge a market where people want to sell electricity to the networks at a time when it is profitable to do so. That requires you to be connected. To what extent households will simply completely disconnect versus to what extent households will want to trade and take advantage of trading energy is something that is difficult to predict at this time, but both are possible.

From the ACT’s perspective, we believe there needs to be much stronger discussion about this nationally, particularly through the relevant COAG forum. There is a ministerial council of energy ministers. I will be recommending to that next meeting that the planning work in the national electricity market has much closer regard to the implications of battery storage and how we should be planning the future growth and development of the national electricity market to take account of those technologies. The ACT has put that issue firmly on the agenda at an officials level. I am pleased to say it has received a good level of support from quite a number of jurisdictions, and that will be something that ministers are discussing at the next meeting in the coming months.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: Going back to that halogen changeover program that you were talking about with Ms Fitzharris a moment ago, minister, I think I heard you say that that was being run through ACTEW.

Mr Corbell: ActewAGL.

DR BOURKE: Is that means tested or is it just to any of their customers who put their hands up for it?

Mr Corbell: No, it is not means-tested. It is a free service insofar as there is no up-front cost to households to receive it. But I make the point that under the EEIS there is a mandated level of households to be assisted that are considered to be priority

households, that is, low income households. I am trying to recall if it is 25 or 30 per cent. Twenty-five per cent of all households that are to be assisted under this program are required to be priority households, that is, low income households, households that receive a concession due to their income status. That is an important emphasis as part of this program. All the electricity retailers are required to demonstrate that at least 25 per cent of the households they reach are low income households.

DR BOURKE: You are monitoring that outcome?

Mr Corbell: They are required to report on that basis. That includes public housing tenants but also people in private rental who are on low incomes and people, indeed, in their own homes who are on low, fixed incomes as well. The government is giving great priority to make sure the energy savings that can be achieved through this program, which is, as I say, about \$4 per household per week, are particularly going to those low income households who are most vulnerable when it comes to movements in energy and other utility costs.

DR BOURKE: I will go to my substantive question. Table 18 on page 17 is about the number of households assisted by outreach. Note 2 states that this program was assisted in exceeding its performance targets due to community organisations increasing their referral rates. How was that achieved and which community organisations were involved?

Mr Corbell: The outreach program is a separate program from ACTSmart and the energy efficiency improvement scheme; it is the ACT government's own budget-funded program to provide further intensive support to low income households when it comes to energy and water costs.

DR BOURKE: This is the whitegoods program, is it not?

Mr Corbell: It includes a whitegoods component, that is correct. It is designed to specifically target low income households with further measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce their energy costs and, indeed, their water bills as well. As of 31 May this year 1,522 low income households have been assisted. That brings a total of 6,143 low income households assisted by the program since it began in 2012. My directorate estimates, for the last financial year, energy savings of approximately 520 megawatt hours in electricity and gas and greenhouse gas savings of 217 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

The measures include replacement of refrigerators and freezers, washing machines, draft sealing and window treatments and a range of other measures. Referral is done through community sector partners, organisations like Communities@Work, Belconnen Community Service, south side and north side community services, St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army and others. They are partners in the program. They identify their at-risk households. They will often come into contact with these households when the households are seeking other assistance—emergency loans, food and other assistance that households in real stress seek out from those organisations. They refer those households to the program.

We have a contracted assessor service that will go out and meet with the householders,

do an audit, identify the most practical measures and then arrange for those measures to be undertaken. There is no cost for the low income households to participate in this program but they can save a considerable amount of money on their electricity bill and their water bill, in particular. For example, if they get an old fridge replaced with an energy efficient fridge, that can be a considerable saving on a household electricity bill.

DR BOURKE: Minister, your directorate has quantified the energy saving. I think you mentioned a figure before. Has that been turned into a dollar equivalent so that we can get an idea of what these households are saving per year as a result of this scheme?

Mr Corbell: Yes, an audit has been undertaken of the program that has quantified, through a series of case studies, the energy savings. I do not have that to hand but I can certainly provide it.

DR BOURKE: What do the 6,000 households represent as a percentage of low income households within the ACT, say, in the lowest or second lowest quintiles?

Mr Corbell: I would not have that information to hand but I can try and give you some further advice.

THE CHAIR: A supplementary, then a new question, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: This program about replacing light bulbs and that kind of thing has been advertised recently. Does anyone actually ask if they are people on a low income or is it open to everyone?

Mr Corbell: The way it is undertaken is through our community partners. The community partners—St Vincent de Paul, the local community services—look at the people coming through their doors seeking assistance such as emergency loans, food and other emergency responses that those households are seeking. They have their own processes for determining the eligibility of people. Once they have passed through the processes that those community sector organisations have in place, they are deemed to be eligible for referral. The referral is made by those organisations.

MS LAWDER: More generally, can any member of the ACT community get their light bulbs replaced to lower level—

Mr Corbell: Yes, they can, and that is through a separate program. We were speaking earlier about the energy efficiency improvement scheme. That scheme is open to all households and is a mandated retailer obligation on the part of the electricity retailers. Here in the ACT that is the program that sees ActewAGL, for example, advertising free replacement of light globes and the halogen downlight replacement program that I was referring to earlier. That is delivered through EEIS. Again there is a priority household component in that which the retailer has to report on and demonstrate that they are reaching out to low income households. But equally, that scheme is open to any household to participate in.

MS LAWDER: What is the cost of energy in EEIS compared to the value of the

products provided free to home owners?

Mr Corbell: There has been a cost-benefit analysis undertaken on the operations of the scheme. That cost-benefit analysis indicates a net saving to households over the life of the scheme of approximately \$200 to \$300 per household. That cost-benefit analysis was provided by the government to the Assembly when the initial legislation was passed.

MS LAWDER: Is the cost of advertising the scheme included in that cost?

Mr Corbell: The way the scheme works is that the electricity retailers have an obligation to achieve a certain amount of emissions reduction through the measures set out in the legislation. They have costs associated with the deployment of that program and they make an application to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission or the AER, as relevant, to recover those costs in the price determinations made by the electricity regulators.

THE CHAIR: I have a question for the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. How many action plans have we currently got and how many are under preparation?

Dr Lane: Our threatened species action plans fall broadly under our three main strategies, that is, the grassland strategy, the aquatic strategy and the woodland strategy. In terms of specific action plans that are species specific, we have in total 10 species action plans at various stages of implementation.

THE CHAIR: Are there any under consideration now?

Dr Lane: The grassland strategy is under review at the moment. We expect we will have that out for consultation at the end of the financial year. Then we will start reviewing the aquatic strategy after that.

THE CHAIR: All the individual plans we used to have, like the spotted-tailed quoll action plan No 30, have been brought down into the three broad groupings?

Dr Lane: Yes, depending on their habitat.

THE CHAIR: In your role as conservator, issues are often referred to you for investigation. In the last 12 months how many issues have been referred to you and how many investigations have you undertaken?

Dr Lane: I do not have those numbers at hand. I would have to get back to you on that one and take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Could you give us an overview on what sorts of issues have been referred to you?

Dr Lane: The consideration of development applications and the occurrence of threatened species in those development sites are routinely referred to the conservator. Also there is consideration of significant tree registrations, either on the provisional register or on the permanent register. Also the conservator is required now to develop

a biodiversity research and monitoring program. That is something I have been working on with my staff and we expect that we will have that out for consultation this calendar year as well.

THE CHAIR: How do you balance your job as conservator with your position in the department?

Dr Lane: Both positions really rely on referring to the evidence at hand and advice that I receive from staff as well as from community. I think the two positions go hand in glove. I have access to all of the latest research and expertise, including scientific committees and the NRM advisory committees or those associated with NRM work. I think it is a very good position to be in to be able to access all that information very quickly.

THE CHAIR: We will go to Ms Lawder for her substantive question. Before we do, Dr Bourke has a supplementary to this.

DR BOURKE: Do you have a role in the assessment of or providing advice around environmental offsets as well?

Dr Lane: In relation to threatened species I do, yes. I have an overview there and as to whether a particular issue needs to be referred or whether an environmental advice can be provided, I have a role there, yes.

THE CHAIR: We will go to Ms Lawder and then back to Ms Fitzharris.

MS LAWDER: Minister, the ESAA had a release on 19 February this year in which they put a different view of the total cost of reaching the 90 per cent renewable energy use. Earlier this year I think you suggested it will be \$4.67 per household per week in 2020. Is that correct?

Mr Corbell: That is correct.

MS LAWDER: The ESA's modelling, I think, predicts the increase to peak at \$5.42 per week by 2020. Their estimate is based on the government's recent forecasts that it would seek to underwrite 490 megawatts of large-scale renewable energy to meet the 90 per cent target and user wholesale price of \$40 per megawatt hour in 2020. Do you have a view on the difference between the two figures?

Mr Corbell: Without knowing the assumptions of the ESAA it would be difficult to comment.

MS LAWDER: It has a lot more I could read out but your directorate did not look at that when it came out in February?

Mr Corbell: My directorate may very well have looked at it but I am not familiar with the detail of their assumptions. The only observation I would make about this matter is that the government's projections to date have been confirmed by the pass-through costs that have been conferred by the electricity price regulators. For example, in relation to the estimated cost of the first round of the large-scale solar auction, we

made estimates around that at the time based on the prices received by the winning bidders. Those costs have subsequently been passed through to consumers through a decision of the price regulator, and the government's assumptions and calculations were proven to be accurate.

I think we have a good track record of being able to identify what the potential price impacts are. Those have been confirmed by the regulator when it has come to previous pass-through decisions. That indicates to me that we have a robust methodology for estimating these cost price pass-throughs.

MS LAWDER: Back to the question, did the directorate compare it or do any analysis of where the assumptions may differ?

Mr Corbell: I am advised we have not done that work, no.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris, a new question.

MS FITZHARRIS: Minister, I want to ask about the one-stop shop for environmental approvals that was in the budget. Are you able to explain when that will be rolled out and what the benefits are?

Mr Corbell: The commonwealth and the ACT, along with all other Australian jurisdictions, have committed to a streamlined assessment process under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, the EPBC legislation, to provide for a more efficient way of identifying impacts on endangered and listed species and ecosystems and offsets regimes to manage impacts on those species and communities.

We have, through changes to the Planning and Development Act, implemented an environmental offsets policy, which is a requirement of our agreement with the commonwealth. We have put in place the necessary approvals framework to allow for a one-stop shop here in the ACT. The issue for us is that the commonwealth parliament has not yet agreed to the necessary legislative changes at a commonwealth level to allow for the full implementation of one-stop shop arrangements in the states and territories. In the interim we continue to make sure that we have as streamlined a process as possible for approvals under those intergovernmental agreements.

MS FITZHARRIS: Is there a time frame for the commonwealth that you are aware of?

Mr Corbell: I think it is a matter for the Senate.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: I have a question for the conservator. What do you see as the greatest threat to ACT flora and fauna at the moment?

Dr Lane: I would have to say climate change is probably one of the largest threats. We are not sure what the impacts will be on individual species, let alone ecosystems, and we often do not have a good understanding of the complex interactions that

happen in ecosystems. That would be something. It is probably more the variability of the climate as well within climate change. That would be one thing.

The other would be invasive species. This is true everywhere, of course. They have a great impact, whether they be pest plants or pest animals, in terms of displacement but also in terms of predation. Some of the feral animals such as cats and foxes have been responsible for the demise of some of our small mammals. That continues to be an ongoing challenge, and managing those species so that our natural systems can still flourish will be an ongoing issue that we need to address. They are the two main ones I would see.

DR BOURKE: You mentioned climate change and increasing variability in climate. Can you draw that out a little more for us? Which particular species in the ACT may be most under threat?

Dr Lane: Probably those that are at higher elevations would have some issues because they do not have very far to move up to a cooler climate. Certainly that would be one area. Those that are perhaps at the edge of their range would be quite vulnerable because that is where their impacts will be felt the greatest. Also there are those with very small populations whose viability is probably under question anyway and when additional pressures are added they are even more vulnerable.

DR BOURKE: So frogs?

Dr Lane: Yes, frogs that rely on wet areas. If they are drying out further, then, of course, that is an issue for them. They cannot move very far between wet patches.

The other thing is the shifting of seasons and the impact that might have. We are not really aware of the impacts there. Again there are those complex interactions around pollination, seasonal flowering and so on and what that means for species that rely on flowering plants, for example. It is very complex.

DR BOURKE: Is there much information coming from climate change modelling that is helping you to work on those predictions or come up with some alternative plans?

Dr Lane: It is certainly improving all the time. We have now more specific information. As I said, you can model for single species in a linear way but we cannot consider or account for the interactions that might happen. For example, if different species move into an area what impact does that have? While it is improving, there is still a long way to go. The best we can do is try to maintain the health of our current ecosystems to improve connectivity between native vegetation. That helps to improve the resilience of our natural systems. The more resilient a system is to adverse impacts, hopefully it can sustain itself into the future under different climate conditions.

Mr Corbell: To add to that, for example in relation to modelling, the government has a good partnership with the New South Wales government and the University of New South Wales who have undertaken very detailed modelling of future short and long-term climate change projections for the ACT and surrounding region. For the first time this modelling has been done at a much more granular scale, at a 10-kilometre

level scale rather than the tens of thousands of kilometres that generally climate change projections are done at. This allows us to get a better understanding of the direct impacts of a range of climate change scenarios on the ACT and the surrounding region, even between lowlands and highland areas. That gives us a much better understanding of changes in climate. It is a very powerful assessment.

One of the conclusions is obviously, as we are familiar with, many more hot days and a shift in rainfall from the cooler months to the hotter months, but what is perhaps less well known is the significant decrease in the number of cold nights. The projections indicate a reduction in the number of cold nights, if I recall correctly the long range forecasting, of somewhere in the order of 30 to 40 fewer cold nights; that is, nights less than about two or three degrees. Most of us say, "That's great, not so many cold nights," but the impacts on ecosystems are considerable, particularly in the mountainous areas and the subalpine areas of the territory where, as Dr Lane indicates, there are species that are reliant on cold winter climate for their survival, because that is what they have adapted to. Having to deal with much warmer temperatures will put those endangered and very beautiful species and ecosystems under significant threat. Those are the types of shifts we are seeing as a result of a warming climate that perhaps are less well understood or well known.

DR BOURKE: Has that work also been developing homoclimes so that we can actually see a comparable climate now with what it may be in the ACT in 10, 20 or 50 years?

Mr Corbell: The modelling work does not seek to have a homoclimate or a comparator climate but it gives you an assessment of what the temperature range is looking like in those immediate and long-term scenarios so that people can practically relate to it—more days over 35 degrees, how many more days every summer over 35 degrees, how many more nights above two or three degrees in winter, trying to give an indication in really practical terms. People can log online and look at this data and look at the modelling, and they can look it up by region.

We have a good partnership with the New South Wales government. They have co-badged the online resource that everyone can use for this. The ACT made a significant financial contribution to make sure we did get modelling for the ACT in it as part of the broader New South Wales modelling. That gives us a very practical and direct understanding of what the climate change scenarios look like for our region and for our city.

DR BOURKE: I should imagine that information is particularly important for our surrounding agricultural industries, in particular viticulture.

Mr Corbell: Certainly one of the key drivers for New South Wales was to understand the impacts on the agricultural sector of a changing climate. It is certainly not a pretty picture, I can assure you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, a final question on this subject.

MS LAWDER: Are you planning any expansion or extension of the current cat containment legislation?

Mr Corbell: The government continues to look closely at the impact of both feral cats and domestic cats on our reserve system and on native species more broadly in the territory. The government's current policy is that cat containment will be undertaken in new suburban development areas where new residents are moving in for the first time. We continue to look at impacts of cats and we will continue to look at other options as and when they are warranted. Other than that, the existing policy stands.

MS LAWDER: I know the conservation council are very much supportive of that policy. Do you get much other feedback? Does the directorate get much other feedback, positive or negative, about cat containment?

Mr Corbell: I think it is a difficult issue. It is certainly the case that people value their cats as pets, and that is entirely understandable. Often the impact of domestic household cats on the native environment is not well understood by many cat owners. I think there is an important role for education and explaining to home owners the potential impact that their pet may be having on native wildlife. I personally favour a very strong educative approach on this because I think that is what is needed first and foremost.

MS LAWDER: Can you explain to me how it is communicated to people who may be buying blocks in those particular suburbs—the planning question?

Ms Ekelund: Could I just say that it is mainly TAMS that administers it and also regulates it but in terms of our involvement, as the minister said, we certainly have involvement from the policy perspective when we endorse planning for new urban areas. But in terms of the detail of communications and flyers and whether it is connected to sales conditions—

MS LAWDER: We have TAMS tomorrow. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions on environment, thank you for your attendance here today. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you all for the answers you have provided. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice, if you could get those to us as soon as possible, certainly within five working days, that would be appreciated. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearings when it is available, for corrections or additions if you feel they are necessary. Thanks very much and we will now hear from the commissioner for the environment.

Welcome to the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, and a particular welcome to the soon-to- retire Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and they will be transcribed by Hansard and then published. The proceedings are also being broadcast as well as webstreamed. Could you confirm for the record that you have seen the privilege statement that is on the table before you and that you understand the implications of privilege?

Mr Neil: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much. Commissioner, would you like to make an opening statement before we proceed to questions?

Mr Neil: I would. Unfortunately, the minister has gone. I would like to thank him for his generous words. In saying that, any achievements that I have made have been built on the knowledge and professionalism of those I work with, including members of the Assembly, which I think is a very progressive place on contemporary issues. Again I thank the minister and I thank Assembly members for their support during my time not just in the commissioner's role but in all of my roles in government.

As to the business of the office, I think it would be beneficial to have a quick look at last year and what we are up to this year. Last year, of course, we had the delivery of the implementation status report for AP2. That was quite extensive. With respect to the state of the environment report, we have done a fair bit of work on that, and we are still doing it. I will get to that shortly.

With respect to complaints, we had a few complaints to settle, and one new complaint. Advocacy still poses a little challenge for me and for the office in terms of engaging with those who are not so heavily involved in environmental issues. That will be a challenge for not just commissioners but everyone in the future. It is quite difficult to actually engage with them, although we did some work with the Children and Young People Commissioner at Ngunnawal school, and that was quite interesting. They have given me quite a long list of things they would like me to do, and it was in many ways quite insightful and instructive.

With respect to ecologically sustainable development, we are still working on trying to build some form of reporting mechanism that is meaningful in the ACT context. We do use the triple-bottom-line approach. At the moment it fails to optimise all three outcomes and we have a little more work to do on that.

Looking ahead, I can honestly say that both I and anyone who follows will be very heavily involved in the state of the environment report. It comes around once in every term of government. Over the years it has become the flagship report of the office. I am desperately trying to get at least a first draft for the incoming commissioner. Apart from that we will, of course, try to make ESD a little more practical in what we do.

There are some other things coming up that the next commissioner will need to be aware of. With things like the Gungahlin strategic assessment, there is a role for the commissioner to audit the implementation of the strategic assessment. The nature conservation strategy has also provided a role for the commissioner in reporting on progress of the ACT nature conservation strategy. More recently, the Auditor-General has recommended that the commissioner help to identify the direction of priorities in the lower Cotter catchment.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, commissioner. We might reverse the order. Ms Lawder, you have the first question.

MS LAWDER: Mr Neil, you said in your opening statement that you had one new

complaint last year.

Mr Neil: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Are you able to give us an idea of what it was about?

Mr Neil: Certainly, and it is one that I am surprised has taken this long. Someone reported to us that they were very upset and very concerned about the use of unleased public land. It involved an area beside a roadside reserve and it backed on to a nature park. My experience over the years has been that it is not isolated. In fact some of my staff drove through a few suburbs after we received the complaint and, sure enough, it is happening in other parts of the territory.

I think there needs to be a sensible balance between access to building sites for developers and builders and the need to protect our unleased public land. If it is not done, and not done properly—and there is provision for bonds to be taken—then territory taxpayers pick up the cost of cleaning up the site, which really is unfair. With a little more care, builders and the development industry would be willing to try a little harder. We just need to give them a hand.

MS LAWDER: So that particular complaint came from a member of the public?

Mr Neil: Yes.

MS LAWDER: It looks like the total cost for the output here has been reduced by \$414,000, from \$1.830 million to \$1.416 million. Could you talk me through that?

Mr Neil: I can. The practice in funding the office has been to provide the annual budget allocation and we have then been able to roll over unspent moneys from the previous years. So what you see is that last year's budget has our base budget for 2014-15 plus the rollover that was moved from the previous financial year. The actual base budget has gone up by about five per cent between last year and this year. Hopefully, we will be able to roll over what we have not spent. The whole idea is that you can get investigations which are quite time consuming and quite expensive—and, of course, the state of the environment report is due every fourth year, so we spend quite a bit of time and money in the final year. So that is the difference, but the base budget has actually gone up by about five per cent.

MS LAWDER: So you have—

Mr Neil: 2.5, sorry.

MS LAWDER: had one complaint from a member of the public.

Mr Neil: Yes.

MS LAWDER: To your knowledge has the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment ever self-referred a complaint?

Mr Neil: I do not think so. However, in talking to the inaugural commissioner, I think

he said he did one himself. I think it was the motorsports one that he took on, but it is very hard to find the paperwork on that. Apart from that one—if in fact that is where it came from—no.

MS LAWDER: Would the commissioner self-refer for investigation the removal of trees from the Northbourne Avenue corridor for the construction of light rail?

Mr Neil: I do not think so because it is not really a systemic issue that will go on forever. It is specifically around the Northbourne corridor. Many of those trees, to my knowledge, are in poor shape or likely to be in poor shape. I do not think anyone likes to see trees removed. In fact, as I was saying earlier, the schoolchildren told me they would like to see more trees planted. But if the light rail is to go ahead then the recent report would suggest that many trees have to go—although if there was no light rail many of those trees would have to go, anyway. It is quite a complex problem. Street trees have been a little problematic. I know my predecessor had to deal with her tree report. That was around removing trees for very good reasons, but the community are quite attached to them. So I do not think I would take it on.

MS LAWDER: Continuing on from that, you said you would not necessarily look at the tree removal because it was not an ongoing thing. What about sustainable landscaping along that corridor?

Mr Neil: Sustainable landscaping would be a fantastic outcome—absolutely fantastic. As to what a sustainable landscape is, it is probably different for different people.

MS LAWDER: The commissioner would not perhaps self-refer that and look at that to ensure that that was the outcome that was achieved?

Mr Neil: There are two ways you can do it. If you get a complaint from a member of the public, you can look at it and determine whether or not it is actually worth doing a full investigation. The important part of all of this is to have a really well-functioning, sustainable built form which includes our ability as residents to enjoy the public domain, as you go up and down the street. Perhaps my tastes are different to others, but I would really love to see it being far more inviting.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, a new question.

DR BOURKE: Commissioner, in the outputs in table 19 on page 17, point a states:

Report on the uptake of recommendations on the ACT State of the Environment and special reports as part of the Annual report.

All the reporting dates are September 2014.

Mr Neil: Sorry; September 2015. You have done very well, Dr Bourke. I have missed it.

DR BOURKE: I presume that applies to point e as well?

Mr Neil: Yes.

DR BOURKE: I am satisfied, chair.

THE CHAIR: Ms Fitzharris.

MS FITZHARRIS: Both of my questions have effectively been asked, so thank you for the answer, particularly about the corridor and the targets there.

THE CHAIR: When is the next state of the environment report due?

Mr Neil: December this year and the minister then has six sitting days to table it. That was the recent change to the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act.

THE CHAIR: And your intention is to resign when?

Mr Neil: My last working day will be 31 July.

THE CHAIR: I shall burden you no further. On behalf of the committee could I say thanks for your good service to the territory. If you have a closing statement or a closing wish for your successors to follow, what would it be?

Mr Neil: My dearest wish would be to see a genuine optimisation of environmental, social and economic outcomes in decisions that the Assembly makes on behalf of the community.

THE CHAIR: We will finish there. Thank you for your service and we wish you well in your retirement.

Mr Neil: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I do not think anything was taken on notice. When it is produced there will be a transcript of this very brief final session before the committee. If you could check that and if there are any corrections or additions you would like to make, the committee would be pleased to look at that. We will finish there for the day.

The chair's award today goes to Jim Corrigan for putting forward the challenge to use the word "flocculation" in a question or an answer. I got the question and Mr Ponton got the answer; I think Jim may get the dividend, whatever that may be. We will return in the morning with TAMS, and a full day with the minister.

The committee adjourned at 5.20 pm.