



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT  
AND TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the draft plan of management for Albert Hall](#))

**Members:**

**MS M FITZHARRIS (Chair  
MR A COE (Deputy Chair)  
DR C BOURKE  
MR A WALL**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 1 APRIL 2015**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr H Finlay (Ph: 620 50129)**

**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.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 2.02 pm.**

**BARR, MR ANDREW**, Minister for Economic Development

**DAWES, MR DAVID**, Director-General, Economic Development, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

**BAILEY, MR DANIEL**, Director, ACT Property Group, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

**SHAW, MS TANIA**, Senior Manager, Tenancies, ACT Property Group, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

**THE CHAIR:** We have a quorum for a public hearing, so I welcome everybody to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services inquiry into the draft plan of management for the Albert Hall. Thank you very much, Mr Barr, Chief Minister, and officials for coming today. I will take you through the privilege statement, which I know the Chief Minister and Mr Dawes are very familiar with. I just wanted to check with the other officials that you have read and understand the statement before you? Could you confirm that for me?

**Ms Shaw:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Can I remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Barr:** No, thank you. I am happy to go straight into questions. The officials will help.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Would the officials like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Shaw:** I would just like to recognise that this has been an ongoing process since 2008. The former Department of Land and Property Services was certainly involved in it. I know that there are members of the Friends of the Albert Hall and the ACT government who were working on this process well before that. We would just like to recognise the input that we have had from community members in developing this plan of management. It would not have happened without their input.

**THE CHAIR:** Great; thank you. Are you able to respond to the submission put forward by the Friends of Albert Hall in terms of some of the commentary made and perhaps where your current draft plan of management sits?

**Ms Shaw:** It is quite a detailed submission, so I think going through it point by point would be quite arduous. We are having a look at that.

**THE CHAIR:** Just a general comment would be fine.

**Ms Shaw:** Generally, there are points in there that we are happy to discuss and happy to work on, such as making things a little clearer around the objectives and how they

relate to the act, and making sure that there is that clarity in the plan of management when it goes out for final publication. There are some matters that have been considered in government and we have come to a different position to the Friends of the Albert Hall on those matters.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you in a position to outline some of those?

**Ms Shaw:** We can go through a couple of the key ones.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Shaw:** In relation to the management reference group, that is something that is still to be established and still to be created. Once the plan of management is finalised there will be a process of seeking nominations for that and making sure that there is appropriate representation on that to give a cross-section between the various interests that want to contribute to the Albert Hall and its management over time.

**THE CHAIR:** The reference to the management reference group—is that a requirement under the act, or is that something—

**Ms Shaw:** No, not at all. It is something that we feel is a very important part of the ongoing management of the Albert Hall, and it is certainly something that came through in the community consultation process; people wanted to have an ongoing input.

**Mr Dawes:** I might just add to that. I think it is important to ensure that we do have that dialogue with a number of the stakeholders. Obviously Albert Hall is quite an important asset for the territory, so we think it is appropriate to form a reference group and receive the appropriate nominations as well. We hope that the friends will nominate a representative on that committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Did you want to cover some other ones?

**Ms Shaw:** Yes, absolutely. In relation to the reporting requirements for the plans of management, there has been a change in very recent times. There has been an exposure draft put out for the annual report directions for the next financial year, which includes a requirement, where there is a plan of management in place, that agencies include that in their annual report process. Prior to that, we were going to offer it up as something that we were happy to do in the annual report process anyway.

**THE CHAIR:** Great.

**Ms Shaw:** That is subject to the government accepting those annual report directions, but certainly it has gone out through the consultation process and is back in government.

In relation to the coffee cart cafe concern, the view of the ACT government is that it is a suggestion, and it is something that was identified in the community consultation process as an opportunity. There are no current plans for a permanent cafe to be established in the hall. We recognise that it is a very useful part of the hiring for

people to be able to self-cater for their events, and it is very highly valued by a lot of our hirers, but it needed to be included as an opportunity and a possibility. If there was going to be that sort of activity considered there would be an evaluation process, and that would include consideration of planning constraints that might apply to that site.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and it is reasonable to have opportunities and constraints in a document like this.

**Ms Shaw:** Absolutely, yes. The other one is the public liability insurance for the hirers. That came up in Mr Sexton's submission to the committee. We have the public liability insurance, and we established that a few years ago. We recently extended that to the Fitters' Workshop and the former transport depot in Kingston as well. It is very popular. We find that there is a lot of subscription to that for the individual activities that people want to hold—birthdays, weddings, funerals and those sorts of things—that are not normally organised by an organisation. It is available to non-incorporated organisations and private members of the community. That is a provision that is set by the insurer. It is not something that we can control. We did ask, but it is something that they set as a very firm boundary around the insurance that is provided.

However, the only organisation that is incorporated that has said it does not carry public liability insurance is Friends of the Albert Hall. So we talked to the insurer and we managed to get coverage for that organisation when it uses the Albert Hall.

**THE CHAIR:** So most of the hirers have their own public liability insurance anyway?

**Ms Shaw:** Yes. Anyone who is incorporated usually carries public liability insurance to protect their members and their directors.

**THE CHAIR:** So it is not a barrier to hiring the hall?

**Ms Shaw:** No, we do not believe it is any longer.

**THE CHAIR:** Great. Are you able to comment on the issues around cost recovery?

**Mr Bailey:** Regarding the hall itself, we have got some pretty good statistics here. It is evening out now but, on average, from the hire fees it is returning around \$200,000 per annum. The expenses are up there a little bit, averaging around \$170,000 to \$180,000. There are some other costs there. At the moment it presents a bit of a cost to ACT Property Group, around a \$15,000 cost overall. That is taking out employee expenses. We have an employee that is dedicated to not only this site but also other venues and hiring, and just the general repairs and maintenance.

We also have discounted hire fees for community services. Without that it would probably be returning a bit of a positive for us. It costs a little bit to run, but it is a very popular venue. I can just give you some of the statistics that we have in terms of the bookings. On average, it has around 100 to 110 bookings. It is booked around 200 days of the year, and there are about 78 individual hires. Of those, there are about 45 community hires and about 18 private hires. As I said, there is a little bit of a cost to

us, but nothing material.

**THE CHAIR:** It looks like one of the aims of the draft plan of management is to increase the use of the facility.

**Ms Shaw:** Absolutely. The biggest issue that we have is hiring Monday to Thursday. We are very happy with the level of hires on Friday to Sunday. We have got about an 80 per cent fill rate on those times, but it drops down to about a 40 to 50 per cent fill rate on the Monday to Thursday period. That is where a lot of the promotion and activity will focus on over the next few years. It is getting a lot more of those business uses.

**THE CHAIR:** I believe it is listed online under the events website, but obviously it sits within Property Group. There is marketing underway already?

**Ms Shaw:** Yes. We have engaged a firm to assist us with marketing and promotion. We are looking at a much more active promotion. Historically there has been a lot of word of mouth advertising that has generated the interest that we have and people find it through either the web or their own networks. We are aiming to get it out there and get a lot more active promotion happening, and modern processes like social media and so on, on the web.

**Mr Barr:** It has got a Facebook page?

**Ms Shaw:** Not yet. Maybe this year. We are aiming for it.

**Mr Barr:** Not yet?

**MR COE:** Maybe this year.

**Ms Shaw:** We are aiming towards it.

**Mr Barr:** Something to aspire to.

**Ms Shaw:** Nothing moves quickly, but we are in the middle of creating that branding and promotion, yes.

**Mr Barr:** That will assist with audiences under 40 in particular.

**Ms Shaw:** That would be great.

**THE CHAIR:** Even some over 40, I might add.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I might hand over to my colleagues to see if they have any questions.

**MR WALL:** I have a quick supplementary while we are on the bookings and use of the hall. Is there much collaboration done with Canberra Convention Bureau or other

organisations to try and attract business from out of town into the Albert Hall?

**Mr Dawes:** Actually, the Albert Hall is very much on their radar, depending on the size of conference or meeting that is required. If it is a smaller boutique-type conference or meeting, certainly the Convention Bureau is aware of it.

**Ms Shaw:** We have had the directors of the mints come and meet there and use that as a major venue for their conference. So there is a level of interest.

**DR BOURKE:** I have a supplementary, if I might?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, certainly.

**DR BOURKE:** Based on the discussion that we had before, Mr Bailey, my understanding is that it is government policy that this is a cost-recovery situation for this facility?

**Mr Bailey:** That we have committed to making it cost recovery? Yes, that is the ultimate goal, and I think we are fairly close. The one thing that is probably holding it back a little is the repairs and maintenance that we have had to do of late. That has probably just stopped us from getting there. We have invested quite a lot following the refurbishment that we did there. We actually have done some other works on the front entrance. We spent about \$80,000 upgrading the entrance to allow vehicle access, where you can drive through. We are having some challenges with the paint adhering to the portico; so that has increased our R&M expenses.

So if you look at that, we have spent \$24,000 this year just on paint. If we had not done that we would have been ahead or right on that sort of cost recovery. Hopefully we can get hold of those R&M expenses, and then it just becomes the general sorts of expenses that you have of cleaning, gardening, rubbish, security—all those sorts of things. So we are very close. If we could just get this paint sorted out, and we might—

**Mr Dawes:** It is still under warranty.

**Mr Bailey:** The paint is still under warranty; so we have got the consultant—the company down from Sydney to work on what we can do to get it to adhere to the portico.

**DR BOURKE:** Most building managers look at a sinking fund as well to make provision for future large-scale refurbishment. Is that part of your ongoing cost as well?

**Mr Bailey:** No, we have not planned on having a sinking fund there. I suppose the model that ACT Property Group has allows us to sort of have the benefit of that without having a dedicated sinking fund directly for Albert Hall. Having properties like this together in this portfolio allows us to do something when things like that happen. I suppose it is a better return, with swings and roundabouts, with some area we can focus on but maybe not having to focus on another area in that particular year.

With the condition assessments and things like that that we undertake of buildings



every five years, we are able to plan our forward works off those. That hopefully means that we can sort of prevent a lot of these maintenance issues. Then we are just dealing with the reactive sort of things that hopefully—

**Mr Barr:** I guess across the portfolio of properties rather than—

**Mr Bailey:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** having sinking funds for each individual property.

**Mr Bailey:** Yes.

**DR BOURKE:** So in effect all you are recovering in your cost recovery is the day-to-day ongoing costs, not making provision for future refurbishment of that property and relying upon capital expenditure by government to undertake that work in the future?

**Mr Bailey:** Yes; that is correct. It is just recovering those things. Obviously, if we were to factor in the refurbishment works that occurred three or four years ago, it would take some time. We would have to charge some pretty high rates to recover.

**THE CHAIR:** Further to the cost recovery, is there a sort of capital upgrades program within Property Group?

**Mr Bailey:** Yes, We have an annual capital upgrades program. We do it on a portfolio basis, based on the condition assessments that we get. For larger things we might put up a bid for something there but, as I said, we invested quite heavily in Albert Hall over the last few years; so it is in a pretty good position.

**Mr Dawes:** There has been over \$3 million of spending.

**Mr Bailey:** Yes, \$3.2 million on the refurbishment works there. I think the majority of that was in 2011-12.

**THE CHAIR:** Further to the policy settings around that, around the asset portfolio that you hold, the Friends of the Albert Hall submission makes comment about cost recovery being something that is not applied to other areas across government. Is that correct?

**Mr Bailey:** I suppose that we have a diverse community portfolio. There is a whole different scheme of rents applied there. As a general rule, Property Group does recover and return a dividend to government. So portfolio-wide, we do. We do not probably focus on each individual one. For some it might not be appropriate or applicable there. Yes, I think that as a portfolio we certainly aim to do that and improve the condition and viability.

**MR COE:** The cost of the refurbishment for the Albert Hall a few years ago was \$3 million or thereabouts; is that right?

**Mr Bailey:** Yes.

**Ms Shaw:** \$3.2 million.

**MR COE:** Yes. What component of that was related to the painting and the rendering?

**Ms Shaw:** I would have to get you some specific advice, but it was in the order of a few hundred thousand dollars.

**MR COE:** I remember that there was some discussion at the time about the paint selection—

**Ms Shaw:** Absolutely.

**MR COE:** and the heritage qualities. We got quite a few calls or emails from people who said it looks like it has not been painted.

**Ms Shaw:** Looks shoddy, yes.

**MR COE:** Of course, that is the heritage value of that particular paint.

**Ms Shaw:** Absolutely.

**MR COE:** But, that said, is the paint actually wearing well, by and large, or is it just a portion of the paint which is deteriorating?

**Mr Bailey:** Yes, it is not working well, especially on the portico area. Originally I understand that the building was rendered. We think on the portico area they have used some other surface in the substrate. There is something that is leeching out of that particular area. The paint is not applying to it at all.

We wanted to use a standard acrylic-style paint, but obviously with the heritage consideration and things like that, we did not go that way. I think now we are at the stage—we are very frustrated. We are as frustrated as anybody else about the condition of the paint. We probably have to test some of those boundaries there, because it is a little unsightly. It is inconvenient to get this thing painted if any sort of scaffolding or things like that are required.

It is a sort of prestige hire venue. People hire this for weddings and things like that. So to have it inconvenienced with scaffolding or painting works is something that we are really trying to limit. We want to find a better solution that is a little longer-lasting than what we have currently got. It really has everyone puzzled. I have spoken with project managers who are quite experienced in this. The company that is doing it are a little bit stumped as to what they can do.

**Ms Shaw:** The portico is the issue, but on the balance of the building that paint treatment has actually worked well. The main body of the building is faring quite well. There are only a small number of patches where it has crumbled off, but the portico is the main issue.

**MR COE:** In terms of repainting whenever it is required, does it need to be stripped

and then repainted or can it simply be adhered over the top?

**Mr Bailey:** I think there were reasons why that did not happen last time, but I think that is where we are wanting to go now. We may have to look at some sort of stripping back to try and get that portico sorted.

**Ms Shaw:** It was originally stripped back. There was a chemical process to peel off the old, flat acrylic paint, see what the substrate was and then apply the new paint to the BondCrete on top of that. But it is a challenge and that is a bit of a puzzle as to why it has not worked the way that all our experts convinced us that it would.

**MR COE:** I have a question on something that was raised earlier that may well go beyond this particular issue, minister. It is the issue of public liability insurance for events. There was a committee in the last Assembly which recommended that the government consider an insurance facility for events in certain government facilities such as the Albert Hall. Has there been any progress with regard to that? Is it something that you envisage could be implemented for the Albert Hall?

**Ms Shaw:** It is certainly something that we are considering. We have got the public liability assurance applying to four of our events facilities: the Albert Hall, the Yarralumla Woolshed, the former transport depot and the Fitters' Workshop have been covered under that policy. As part of the community facilities transfer, ACT Property Group inherited the responsibility for that ACT government commitment.

So we are in the middle of getting an update on where community facilities in the Community Services Directorate were up to. ArtsACT certainly did a lot of research work on what was out there and what the risks for government were. We are working towards getting an outcome for government this year. We need to identify the risks and see what coverage arrangements there are with our community facilities managers out in—

**MR COE:** Just to clarify, this is taking away the need for hirers to take out insurance?

**Ms Shaw:** It is providing them with an opportunity to subscribe to a centrally managed public liability insurance coverage, yes.

**MR COE:** Sure, for a surcharge, in effect?

**Ms Shaw:** Yes. It is a cost recovery process.

**MR COE:** Yes.

**Ms Shaw:** That is something that we are working on with our community facilities managers. We have got a number of community halls across the ACT. Each of those managers has a different arrangement. Some of their insurers allow their hirers to subscribe to their own public liability insurance. Others sort of do not quite have as formal a process. So we are developing some strategies and some policies that we will then work with those agencies around.

**MR COE:** Have you had many claims at the Albert Hall against the insurance?

**Ms Shaw:** No, absolutely none to my—

**Mr Barr:** Not to my knowledge.

**Ms Shaw:** I have been involved in this for seven years and, no, there has not been any.

**DR BOURKE:** From a policy point of view, minister, how does that provide equity to other community organisations that have their own facilities that have to take out public liability insurance or use commercial facilities that also require public liability insurance? It seems to be that if you are a community organisation and you are using a community facility you are going to have, in effect, a different level of subsidy from government than if you use an alternative site.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR COE:** But you are paying for it, though, are you not? The community group would be paying for the insurance.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes, they pay \$250 per hire.

**DR BOURKE:** But not the same rate.

**Mr Barr:** I do not know if this answers your question, but there is, I guess, a spreading of the risk profile over a larger number of venues and a larger number of users. So insurers will take different views on that and the ACT Insurance Authority would also be involved in that work.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a question?

**MR COE:** I have got more but I am happy to hand over to Dr Bourke.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Bourke?

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you, chair. On page 12 of the plan, under 1.6, “Actions”, there is a range of items advocating for new plans, projects, consultancies and capital works. Is there an estimate of what that is going to cost? I did not quite catch it in the previous discussion.

**Ms Shaw:** Sorry, Dr Bourke, can you provide the reference again? Page 12?

**DR BOURKE:** It is under 1.6, “Actions”. There is a range of items advocated. I was just wondering what the overall estimate for those might be, in cost.

**Ms Shaw:** We have not done that final pricing research at this point in time.

**DR BOURKE:** Okay.

**Ms Shaw:** That would be developed as we put proposals either within our own organisation or up to government.

**DR BOURKE:** Presumably, as a result of the discussion we had previously, that would need to be funded out of the government's capital expenditure budget rather than through from the hall's?

**Ms Shaw:** The large value items, yes.

**DR BOURKE:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, depending on the scale. Yes, there is a capital upgrades allocation annually through that program that is apportioned to the different directorates based upon the assets that they are to manage. In the context of Property Group—given the transfer of the bulk of the other community facilities under it, so we have a single property manager approach—there is a capital upgrades allocation that has been attached to that that flows from the other departments, which were Community Services, Education and Health, into the Property Group. They will have an enhanced annual capital upgrades budget to reflect the fact that they have got more properties under their management.

**DR BOURKE:** Okay. If we might just go back to the cafe suggestion again, what other opportunities or constraints might arise from the operation of a permanent cafe or a coffee cart in the precinct?

**Ms Shaw:** It is about looking at activating the space and bringing people into that area, more than just the events-based functions. That is something that came up as an opportunity. It is a very isolated building at this point in time. There is not a lot of passing traffic. Your commonwealth government public service traffic tends to go into the centre. And there are buildings that offer cafe facilities, like Old Parliament House, the Portrait Gallery and those sorts of areas, as an adjunct to the main purpose of the building, which is providing a museum or a display activity as well. So it is something—

**DR BOURKE:** Probably as a result of putting a lake next to it—that was part of the isolation.

**Ms Shaw:** The lake is a very pleasant atmosphere for—

**DR BOURKE:** Since Albert Hall pre-dates it.

**Ms Shaw:** Absolutely, yes.

**DR BOURKE:** Of course, you have got Nara park there, which is a very heavily utilised community facility.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes, but there is no cafe.

**DR BOURKE:** Unless you want to trot into the Hyatt, which is possibly a barrier for many people.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes.

**DR BOURKE:** So there probably is not much.

**Ms Shaw:** If you are in your fishing gear, the Hyatt is not—

**MR COE:** I imagine that any cafe there is either going to require a subsidy or going to require an exclusive catering contract and therefore perhaps take away some of the benefit of the hall.

**Ms Shaw:** Potentially. We explained earlier that part of the process would be an evaluation, and that would be certainly part of the consideration about whether there is financial viability. During the consultation process, we certainly had a couple of private catering firms that were interested in pursuing that opportunity, so there is a level of interest in potentially doing that. But we also recognise the fact that a lot of our hirers enjoy the fact that they can self-cater at the venue.

**MR COE:** Yes.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Wall?

**MR WALL:** Management plan objective No 5 is:

To attract a new generation of Canberrans to use and engage with the building ...

I was just wondering what the department had in—

**THE CHAIR:** A Facebook page obviously.

**Mr Barr:** Facebook page.

**MR WALL:** Yes, and that is all part of it.

**Mr Barr:** We will get on Twitter as well.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes.

**MR WALL:** We might just start there—as to why it might take until the end of the year to get a Facebook presence.

**Mr Bailey:** It will not take that long.

**Ms Shaw:** It is a bigger branding process than that. Facebook is probably the easier part of it; there is a whole suite of branding products that we are developing and we just want to make sure that they are all consistent before we put them out in the public domain.

**MR WALL:** So ultimately what is being done to target that younger audience of Canberrans?

**Ms Shaw:** As I said, word of mouth has been the way that we have promoted it thus far, and we know that that is not effective for the younger generation. So the Facebook and the advertising campaign are going to be part of that process.

**MR WALL:** And is that promotion you are trying to develop, an attachment with the younger generation, going to be done through a different style of function and event held at Albert Hall?

**Mr Bailey:** I think we have had that. I think there was a music awards—

**MR WALL:** Or is it purely on a marketing and advertising basis?

**Mr Bailey:** I think there was a music awards ceremony or something held there.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there was.

**Mr Bailey:** We are trying to get a different sort of—

**MR COE:** The MAMAs event has been there twice, I think.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes. Jumptown Swing is very active in using the venues, and there are some younger people attending activities there.

**THE CHAIR:** Justine Clarke had a concert there a couple of years ago, I recall.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** There were a lot of toddlers around.

**Ms Shaw:** Yes. There are some schools that use it as their rehearsal venue or their performance venue for their end-of-year activities. So there are a lot of people starting to get exposed to the venue. The challenge is getting them to become actively involved with the venue rather than passively attending events at the venue.

**MR WALL:** I want to go back to the timing. It is something that has been raised in a number of the submissions as well. Even in the report it says:

Actions will be delivered over the following time frames ...

It gives an indicative time for the short term, medium term and long term, but a time frame has not necessarily been put against many of the activities or changes that have been cited in your report. Is there a detailed breakdown of what changes or objectives you are seeking to achieve in what time frames?

**Ms Shaw:** It has not been put in a published document, but it is something that we are happy to adopt.

**MR WALL:** Is it something that you are able to provide the committee with some detail on?

**Ms Shaw:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that what you referred to in your opening statement as taking on board some of the comments from the Friends of the Albert Hall submission around breaking those down into each of the—

**Ms Shaw:** Yes, correct.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a time frame for that?

**Ms Shaw:** We would like to take account of the committee's input and do this as a single process rather than doing it through multiple processes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Could I ask about the on-site venue manager—whether there are any plans for that right now or whether there is something under development that will come out once you have the results of this committee's inquiry?

**Ms Shaw:** It is not something we do currently. However, we do have a number of staff that are on site. It is just a different model to what is being proposed. We have our venue manager, who is out on the site a number of times each week. She works on the site with the hirers and checks various things as she goes around and does her weekly inspection. We have a cleaner who is engaged specifically for the Albert Hall, and he is very good. He plays caretaker as well as cleaner for us, and he does let us know when there are maintenance issues that arise. We have also got our own suite of professionals who go out on site and do the work when we ask them to do particular upgrades as we need to.

**THE CHAIR:** Would it be fair to say you could not combine all the functions of marketing, communications, booking, cleaning and caretaking? You would be unlikely to find all of those skills in one individual to be on site.

**Ms Shaw:** Absolutely.

**Mr Bailey:** I also think it would be a challenge to make it cost recovery under that model, given the expense of just having a dedicated person for that one venue. Tania just referred to the tenancy officer that goes out there. That tenancy officer looks after four other different properties as well, so they go to all of them there. I think it is more cost-effective.

And the way the Property Group is set up probably allows it to have this model in place that is better. Through the tenancy officer going out there—or the cleaner or the other person that goes there—and identifying a fault, if it is a plumbing issue or an electrician, ACT Property Group has plumbers on the staff and we have an electrician on staff. We can get the correct person out there with the appropriate qualifications to fix issues. I think it would make it really difficult to do cost recovery if we had a dedicated person there at this stage.

**THE CHAIR:** So rather than having one person there, you have multiple people monitoring and looking after the site. Could I ask one question—this might be more



for you, minister, and Mr Dawes—around the requirement for a plan of management under the Planning and Development Act. I know that that is not in your bailiwick—that public land. Looking at a map of the territory, most of the areas of public land are land without buildings—water catchments and that type of thing. Some are buildings, but there are also a lot of other buildings that are not public land. Do you have a comment on the requirement for a plan of management for every area of public land?

**Mr Barr:** My preference would be to not have to have that requirement—to have less red tape. That would be my default position on any element of regulation in this city: if we did not have to have it, we would not do it. But there are often reasons for regulation, and good reasons. As a general observation, do we have too much regulation? Yes, of course we do. Can we have a lot less? Yes, of course we can. Should the regulation we have be enforceable and useful and actually contribute to the public good? Yes. You run that filter over any regulation. But as a general rule, does Canberra have too much of it? Of course we do.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** It is insane at times.

**THE CHAIR:** Members, do you have other questions?

**MR COE:** On that question, you do accept the need for such a plan of management?

**Mr Barr:** When it adds to the public good, absolutely. My comments were in the general. But as an overarching responsibility for heritage assets, then, yes, you can certainly mount a case for a public good. Whether that necessarily needs to apply to every single area, the question then is about the detail and the requirements within. But there is no point in having documents and having an extensive regulatory environment if that is not enforceable or puts in place a series of requirements that are not necessary. That obviously will be the subject of considerable debate and potentially there will be a range of different views in relation to that. I guess my test is what value does it add? You can mount a case for value-add in this context, I would imagine, but not in every context.

**MR COE:** Sure. That all sounds reasonable but, with that said, it did take a number of years for this plan to actually come together. For years now we have been operating without this plan. Why was it not a higher priority for the government to actually get it to this point several years ago rather than 2015?

**Mr Barr:** I cannot comment on that as I have not held this portfolio until recently. It has obviously been the subject of considerable public debate. We are where we are now, and we will move on. There is not much point raking over the coals of history.

**MR COE:** Well—

**Mr Barr:** We have got this here in front of us. I look forward to the committee's views, as, of course, do the officials.

**THE CHAIR:** We will do our best to move it along.

**MR COE:** I think there is some benefit in raking over the coals of history. I think the history is very important. That is why we are valuing this heritage asset. I am curious as to whether this really has been a priority for the government and whether, I guess, due respect has been shown to all the contributing organisations which have either participated in various working groups or made contributions through this inquiry.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, they have, absolutely. Thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money is being spent holding this hearing and undertaking all of the work associated with this—tens of thousands of dollars, on top of the millions that have been spent. So compared to the 10,000 other issues that government faces in this city every day, I think this has been given an appropriate priority, and we are here in this hearing today engaging and looking forward to a response from the committee. The planning minister has been engaged. It is a very significant process, more so than most other issues. I do not sit before a committee as Chief Minister on every single ACT Property Group asset.

**THE CHAIR:** I would note your acknowledgement early on of the contributions of the stakeholders as well, so thank you. Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you, chair. What metrics are you proposing to put in place to measure the effectiveness of the plan of management in the future, such as satisfaction indices of users and numbers of complaints? What did you have in mind?

**Ms Shaw:** There is certainly provision in the plan of management for some form of satisfaction-type activity. It is something that you can consider. The current metrics that we use are around the level of hire and the balance between the different hire groups that use it. It is acknowledged that usage will go up if people are satisfied with the building. If feedback is positive, they will tell their friends, and their friends will come and hire the venue from us. It is part of what the management reference group will need to look at that gets established under the plan of management.

**DR BOURKE:** Why is that differentiation between different groups who hire the hall an important thing to measure?

**Ms Shaw:** It is acknowledged that it is a community asset and it is a very important asset for the community to use. It is the original town hall for the ACT. The feedback from the community has been very strong that we should be providing this venue as something that is used by the community rather than used for rug sales and various other things that happened when it was in private sector management for 10 years. It is something that we have worked very hard to turn around, from that very heavily commercial aspect and sales aspect to being used more for fetes and fairs, performances and private events.

I do not know that there was such a significant use of the hall for weddings as there has been in recent times. I think that is something that is really positive. People are seeing this as a venue to use for really milestone activities in their life, including death. We have had a few funerals and celebrations of people's lives. For a young lady the other week that was killed they held the memorial service there, which I believe was quite a positive use of the venue. It was quite flattering that they chose to use that

venue and saw it as a good venue to use for that activity.

**DR BOURKE:** On the other side there was the recent department of immigration citizenship ceremony, which I had the opportunity to attend.

**Ms Shaw:** They did. It was very busy. I dropped in that day and there were a lot of people there. It was quite positive. That is what it was used for originally. It was used for political activities and citizenship activities in its original time frame. To see that coming back to the venue is really positive.

**DR BOURKE:** So are you planning some town hall meetings there, Chief Minister?

**Mr Barr:** Summoned on Facebook.

**THE CHAIR:** Any other questions?

**MR WALL:** I do not know if it was something that was touched on very early in the hearing today, but obviously the future of Albert Hall is for it to remain in government hands. There is no consideration of putting it back into a private management contract?

**Mr Bailey:** Not at this point in time.

**MR WALL:** Just to go back to the marketing and the promotion that has been spoken about: is that something that is being looked at being done in house or have you engaged a specialist to undertake that?

**Mr Bailey:** We have engaged a private marketing company to draw up the concepts and assist us with the process, in conjunction with our communications team within the directorate.

**MR WALL:** Who has been engaged to do that work?

**Mr Bailey:** 2B marketing, I think it is.

**MR WALL:** What is the value of the contract you have entered into?

**Ms Shaw:** We will have to take that on notice. I am sorry; we do not have that to hand.

**Mr Bailey:** I think it was under \$10,000, from memory, but I can get that.

**MR WALL:** Okay. What are the terms of engagement? Are they just to do the original design and concept work?

**Mr Bailey:** That is across all of our hire facilities as well, so it is not just the Albert Hall. They are doing the woolshed. We have got the hangar out at 255 Canberra Avenue, which is another one, and fitters at the trade depot. Yes, they are doing all of the—

**Ms Shaw:** The transport depot.

**Mr Bailey:** The transport depot. They are doing all of the sites, and with flyers. They are also assisting us through the internet pages, Facebook and things like that.

**THE CHAIR:** I will look forward to that. Thank you very much, Chief Minister and officials. I was going to say that I did not think we had any questions on notice, but we do now. If they could be provided to the secretary by Friday, 24 April, that would be great.

**Mr Bailey:** Yes.

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

**Short suspension.**

**LUNDY, MR PETER RFD**, President, Friends of the Albert Hall Inc  
**PINKAS, MS GEORGINA**, Vice-President, Friends of the Albert Hall Inc

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Mr Lundy and Ms Pinkas. Can you confirm that you have read the privilege statement in front of you.

**Mr Lundy:** Yes.

**Ms Pinkas:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Lundy:** Yes, I would. Madam Chair and committee members, Friends of the Albert Hall Inc appreciate this opportunity to present our opinions on the Albert Hall draft plan of management. We will be pleased to answer any questions members may have in relation to the issues raised. The Friends of the Albert Hall has a broad-based membership. Members range from representatives of the hall hire groups, heritage groups, people who have a long affiliation with the hall, and people who want to ensure that a much loved place continues to be cared for and available to the people of Canberra.

Since we formed in 2007, we have actively participated in two Albert Hall reference groups at the invitation of the ACT government. One group advised on the restoration and capital works relating to the hall and the other on the development of the draft plan of management.

We have lobbied to get public liability insurance provisions changed to reduce the cost for the community in hiring the hall. We are pleased to say that there are now reduced costs for individual and unincorporated hirers, but not incorporated hirers who are not-for-profit organisations. That is a very important point we are making. Incorporated not-for-profit organisations are not included in the current scheme for public liability insurance. We do not know the exact reasons why, but we believe it has been through pressure by the insurers on the ACT government. It is totally inequitable, quite frankly.

We have worked extensively with our members and the broader community to promote events and the general use of the hall. One of our most successful achievements of recent times has been the commissioning of the book *Albert Hall: the heart of Canberra*, which then Chief Minister Katy Gallagher launched last year. We were very pleased to receive a grant from the ACT government of \$10,000 towards the cost of the book's publication. We will provide today a copy of the book to the committee secretariat for the information of members.

The Friends of the Albert Hall have generally enjoyed a very cooperative relationship with the government. We especially value the funding of \$2.73 million provided by the ACT government for the restoration, and \$500,000 from the commonwealth government, which together was used to restore the hall to its former glory, so to speak.

We are, however, most concerned, as you have already heard, about the poor

maintenance, cleaning and general care of the hall. We hoped that the plan of management would rectify this through specifying maintenance and cleaning plans, as are required in such heritage-listed facilities. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The development of the plan has been a source of frustration over a long period of time. We are extremely disappointed that the final product does not address some of the key issues we have raised in our original submission.

The ACT Planning and Development Act 2007 sets out in section 10 the statutory requirements for the use of all land identified as public land in the territory plan. A draft plan of management is required for each area of public land as soon as possible after the land has been identified as public land. In most cases, as with the Albert Hall land area, that was self-governed with the adoption of the territory plan.

Many local councils throughout Australia—and we have done research on this—have at some stage developed a regime of plans of management for land in which the public has an interest. Often this has been a requirement of local government legislation, as in New South Wales. Some councils, such as Kur-rin-gai, have developed excellent plans of management for their halls. They demonstrate the issues which should be addressed in ensuring that public interest in the facility is promoted.

Representatives of the Friends of the Albert Hall participated in a reference group established by the ACT government to develop a plan of management for the hall and the land, which stands. Six years is a long time to develop a plan of management, particularly when the ACT requires plans to be reviewed every 10 years.

It is therefore particularly disappointing that a large amount of our input into the final draft has often been ignored, without any advice as to why. An earlier draft of the plan was put out for public comment three years ago. The friends made extensive comments at that time. Unfortunately, we were unable to see how these issues were treated until the draft plan was tabled in the Assembly last year. Due to this apparent secrecy in finalising the draft, we have had no alternative but to again raise many concerns with this committee and also that the disappointing work of these reference groups was not reconciled in the consultation on the plan. I was a member of the planning reference group.

We note that other plans of management fully list the references and other consultation in their development. Our submission is very comprehensive. It deals with statutory issues, policy and objectives, hire cost and operational concerns. Pages 3 and 4 of our submission highlight our key points.

I will now hand over to Gina Pinkas, our vice-president. She is an expert on plans of management, and she will briefly highlight details of some of our issues that we wish to draw attention to at the hearing. Thank you very much.

**Ms Pinkas:** Madam Chair and committee members, I refer you to our submission for details of how we believe the public's interest in the Albert Hall can be served—and I emphasise that, because that is what, in our minds, this is all about. It is about public access to a facility that is run on their behalf by the ACT government.

We have worked willingly for many years to try and get a plan of management which

will achieve that aim. I will outline some of our key concerns. Some of them have been dealt with already. I will not repeat them, because I do not want to waste your time.

But from a statutory perspective, as specified in pages 4 and 5 of our submission, we have concerns that the plan does not meet all the requirements of the act. Since writing this submission, we have found, because I have been out lobbying to make sure that they are publicly accessible, that there are excellent plans of management for the nature reserves of the ACT.

I would stress that we do not need such a complex plan for the Albert Hall and its surrounds. However, we do need some key elements that are in those plans, and I recommend them to the committee to have a look at. There are a whole lot on the environment website. I am extremely pleased and proud that they are publicly accessible. I want to make that point. Since our submission we have finally got them up on the website, thanks to some officials. So I will skip over that bit.

One of the main points is that, as Tania has said, they will now link the main objective, which is in schedule 3 to the act, the special purpose reserves, to the objectives that have been invented within the plan. But the one that has legal status at the moment is the objective for a special purpose reserve. Everything should be shown as to how that objective is met.

From a policy perspective, we believe that the plan should set priorities for the use, management and maintenance of the hall. Who is the hall for? Is it for commercial people from out of town or is it for the ACT community? That ties into the cost question. I listen to people talking about cost recovery. I used to run all these facilities, as you know from another submission. I want to ask a question of the committee that you may like to consider. Is this an asset of the people of the ACT for their benefit? Is it an asset for tourism? What is it an asset for? Therefore, our costing will fall out of that.

I am not answering it. I am just asking the question, because if the priority use is for organisations such as the Embroiderers' Guild or whatever, then we need to have a cost and access structure policy that delivers that. If it is for conventions, citizenship ceremonies or whatever, then our costs, access and booking needs to reflect that.

There has been much negative comment on how the hall has been poorly maintained of late. A lot of people were thrilled when it was first refurbished. I might add that the refurbishment was required because of the 10 years of neglect beforehand. That is why, if we had an ongoing maintenance program, you would not need that huge expensive refurbishment and one-off cost.

Photos in our submission, which were taken last year, demonstrate some of our concerns. We are pleased to note that where the photo shows rubbish accumulating in boxes at the front, the boxes have since been planted and are much improved. So we are thrilled about that.

The plan does need to deal with the landscape, because it is a heritage landscape and it should, as per Calthorpes' House and other heritage places, reflect the hall. As I said

in our submission, we were horrified to find mossy rocks and petunias scattered happily around the hall at one stage.

The issue of cost recovery has been raised at the end of the plan. Cost recovery was not in the previous draft. It has been snuck in right at the end of the plan, on pages 31 or 32—something like that. It was a complete surprise to us after it was tabled.

I would question this, because the committee asked the previous witnesses whether it was government policy that there be full cost recovery on the hire of the hall. I am unaware that this is government policy. I suspect it is operational policy by a certain area of the ACT government.

However, have we got cost recovery on a whole range of other municipal facilities such as sportsgrounds and ovals, let alone subsidising high level football players and other people? This is a community asset. Should it be fully cost recoverable is a question for the government to decide, I think.

The higher hall costs restrict the community access to the hall. We have got a lot of issues and comments on that. If you go to page 29, I think it is, it will show you relative hire costs of other facilities and the Albert Hall. These are facilities throughout other states. The Albert Hall costs are the highest. I do not think that is where we want to be in terms of delivering a service to the ACT community.

I am not talking about commercial hire. I am talking about community access. Some of our constituents in the Friends of the Albert Hall have actually told us that they have moved from using the Albert Hall because the hire costs do not make it achievable. We need to really clarify who the hall is for, what the priorities are, and maybe subsidise the community costs by actually charging more for the commercial costs. That is an issue that I am throwing up here.

There was an issue in terms of link-in with the conservation and landscape management plan. In the draft plan it is stated that the conservation and landscape management plan will have priority. There is no legislative basis that I can find for that. They just must coexist. One should not have priority over the other. They need to be developed in coordination with each other.

Certainly in other areas, like Namadgi, with their plans of management, they have heritage areas and have to do conservation management plans. They do not state that that has priority over the plan of management. They are compatible. I am just trying to whizz through this. We certainly welcome support in some aspects of the plan, in particular the use of an on-site manager, which is actually in the plan.

Before the ACT government contracted out the management of the hall, it did have an on-site manager. That person was there to protect the fabric of the hall, to assist and to do other jobs as well, but they were there during events. As a past manager of the Albert Hall I would stress that if you want to preserve the fabric of the hall you cannot let hirers just run around there sticking things on walls and doing whatever they like to do.

We have put in our views on the proposed membership of the reference group. I do



not think we need to talk about those very much. If you have questions, that is fine. We are very happy, as I said, to find those plans of management for Namadgi and those other areas and we would stress that they are very good models.

We appreciate that the Albert Hall is far less complex but we would also suggest that you look at the key framework there. I think that we need a framework for the plans of management within the ACT government to cover such things as values, actions and targets.

We know that the targets will be subject to budget funding, but we need to set priorities. As has been pointed out before, the high, medium and low has not been set with any actions. I have to say that I was quite distressed to hear the department saying, “We have not done that; we are thinking about that.”

There is no compulsion on them to actually do anything in this plan of management. That is what we find extremely upsetting. If there is a minimum framework for plans of management under the Planning and Development Act then there would be far less work in developing these plans. Once the plans are developed, it is not very much work to actually tweak them every few years. It is the job of getting them done.

We are pleased that the government is taking action to incorporate in the Chief Minister’s annual reporting guidelines a requirement that custodial agencies report on the status of plans of management for all public land for which they are responsible. That will make them focus. A lot of them have managed to avoid it ever since self-government. They will have to focus now if they have to report. So I ask that you all ensure the Assembly passes these guidelines.

The Friends of the Albert Hall believes the requirements will help all agencies meet their statutory annual reporting. In the case of the draft plan, we ask that you consider the recommendations in our submission, noting the excellent plans for nature reserves produced by Territory and Municipal Services.

I do know that in respect of some of the other plans of management for sportsgrounds or whatever, people have purposely—this is in the past; not currently—not put in targets because they did not want to be tied down to any targets. So it is something that we need to be aware of.

We have recommended a time frame of 12 months for a completion of the review of this plan of management, which we consider is not satisfactory—the plan, I am talking about. However, given the time delays of five months since that submission, we now suggest a period of three months to ensure that the work is completed before the next ACT government elections. We certainly do not want this to be an issue in the elections.

Thank you for your attention to our presentation. We look forward to answering any questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, and thank you, in particular, for providing the book. That will be a great resource for the committee and for the Assembly. I wanted to go back to the public liability insurance. The previous witnesses from the

directorate said that most incorporated associations would have their own public liability insurance. Is that not your experience?

**Mr Lundy:** No, it is not, because most of the ones we are concerned about are non-profit organisations. In other words, they are charities. They simply have not got the funds to pay for insurance of the type demanded by the ACT government.

**THE CHAIR:** Will they have events in other venues around the territory that you are aware of?

**Mr Lundy:** They may well do. It seems to be there is a mindset about companies limited by guarantee and associations that are not for profit. I think it is coming from the insurer's side of the house. They put the proposition that companies limited by guarantee and other larger organisations that are incorporated can afford to pay the premiums that they are asking, but they cannot; a lot of them cannot.

We asked some time ago for TAMS to do a survey of the types of organisations that were non-profit in the ACT, but we never got the answer to that. As far as I know, it was never done. We also asked them in the same meeting to look at this question of incorporated associations, especially the non-profit ones. That is where we are with that. We are still pushing for that, because it is a very expensive business to take out public liability insurance, due to the way insurers frame the premium. You have heard there have been no claims in the ACT.

**Ms Pinkas:** In the Albert Hall.

**Mr Lundy:** In the Albert Hall, I mean.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. In relation to the cost of hiring the hall, it is obviously a significant cost, but it is a significant venue. Do you have a view about the status of the Albert Hall, which obviously you play a role in helping to maintain? It is a large venue as well, compared to a lot of local halls or a community centre, for example. Should there be some relationship between the cost of the hire of that venue as opposed to a local hall that is not in our parliamentary triangle? Do you have a view on that?

**Ms Pinkas:** I certainly do. If we look at, for instance, the Bruce stadium—and I used to run the Bruce stadium as well—the hire costs of the Bruce stadium go nowhere near to covering the costs. Revenue and that may do. I do not know what it is currently. But there are a whole range of facilities around the ACT that do not cover the cost. If you look at page 30 of the plan, we have the Albert Hall, Leichhardt Town Hall, Bendigo Town Hall and Parramatta Town Hall—I would suggest that is certainly no less grand than the Albert Hall—and you look at the hire charges there. All we are saying is that for community use, and we are not saying for commercial use, we must make it accessible for our exhibitors, such as the Embroiderers Guild and those sorts of organisations. They have a right to access a hall of that size in the ACT without having to raise huge costs, and several of these people have submitted that is one of their key things.

I think we need to decide what the hall is for and structure our cost and booking

systems to serve that. That is what we used to do—I know it is sounding like I am old. In the past we opened the bookings for community groups first. One of the submitters to the committee has said they would like to know when they can hire it, rather than just what is available each year they come in.

If we actually say to community groups, “You can hire it now, and these are the concessional rates,” and then build it up with money from the commercial and other rates, I think that is what we are asking for. As I said, the ACT government has subsidised so many community activities. The Albert Hall does not have to be any different to that.

One of the issues is that, from Property Group’s perspective, they are a commercial operator. They are managing property to lease and let. We argue very strongly that the Albert Hall should be included in the cultural facilities because—if you look at Lanyon or Calthorpes’ or whatever that has heritage provisions—they also have very good heritage maintenance. They understand the issues of those sorts of things, and they tap into the experts. It is not a property like a building for offices or something. That is one of the issues, I think, within Property Group, that they do not understand some of the philosophies of letting a community facility with very strong heritage values and very high values to the ACT community.

**THE CHAIR:** I note that in the plan of management it says that the community facility hire has actually increased over time.

**Ms Pinkas:** When I last looked at the figures, which are the only ones I am able to, they showed that there is still about 50 per cent commercial usage. Is that what we are subsidising in fixing the hall? I understand that we want to attract business to the ACT and all of those sorts of issues. I am not denigrating that; I am just saying we need to be clear on what we are running here and why we are running it and structure our costs accordingly.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Thank you. First I would like to commend the friends and Ms Colheart for the lovely publication. It was a great launch as well back in December. I think it might have just been a day or two before the Chief Minister announced her—

**Mr Lundy:** Exactly.

**MR COE:** resignation, so it was certainly significant. With regard to the landscape and the environment of the hall, would you go into a bit more detail about how you think the plan should incorporate the surrounds?

**Ms Pinkas:** I am happy to do that. As was discussed with the earlier witnesses, do you need to have plans of management for all public land and is it onerous or whatever? Yes, it is onerous to the developer, but the whole site is classified under the Heritage Act and, as such, should be managed in accordance with the conservation management plan—and the ACT Heritage Council is still considering the latest update of that—and the heritage landscape. We just cannot, as I said, put petunias and mossy rocks in, which they did before. We need to have a landscape plan which

actually complements the hall. That is a heritage issue.

This has happened at Calthorpes' and places like that. It is part of the whole context. If it was not considered that there was a public interest in the land that the Albert Hall is situated on then that would not have been made public land. If I may digress slightly, when questioned about whether there is much public land with buildings on it, yes, there is, and there is in other states. The Olympic pool, for instance, is on public land. There are a whole range of municipal facilities which are on public land. In my submission, as opposed to the friends' submission, I can certainly explain to you why that is.

**MR COE:** In terms of what work you think could or should be done to restore the environment or the landscape to something more befitting of the Albert Hall, what do you envisage?

**Ms Pinkas:** We would like to see a landscape plan tied into the planning venture. That will take time to deliver. That is a very good example of where we say, "Develop a landscape plan for the Albert Hall by whatever time." That is really what we are looking for, whether it is a high, medium or low priority. Tying that into the actions is really what we want to see. Obviously if there is no funding for a landscape plan then they cannot do it. I am not setting the priorities, but it may be a high priority. That is where this plan of management needs to be a tool for managers and the public—not just something in a cupboard; not something that ticks a statutory box. It needs to be a workable document. If you look at the Namadgi ones—and I am using that as a group—although they are very big and full of lots of things, they still have some actions when they are going to do stuff by whether it is a priority. That is all we are asking here. A landscape plan done by heritage architects and whatever and in keeping with the conservation and management plan should be part of it and enabled through the plan of management.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you. Did you have anything more that we have not already heard that you would like to elaborate on about the cafe proposal?

**Ms Pinkas:** Yes, I do. Thank you. I have, as I said, been around for a long time, managing ACT government facilities. I do not believe that a cafe will subsidise the operation of the Albert Hall for a start. If you need to enliven that area there is plenty of land around the Albert Hall to actually attract people and enliven it. I am not disputing that you may need something down on the lake. Hirers of the hall can bring in coffee carts and that if they want to. You can get a cappuccino there if you go to some of the displays. You can do this sort of thing. You are not allowed under the national capital plan, as you know, to have a permanent commercial facility on that site. That is all we are saying.

We want to know what the objective is, rather than people saying it would be nice to have a restaurant there. What is the objective? Is it to subsidise the operation of the hall? Well, I have not seen a commercial activity like that that would do that. We were hoping at Lanyon, for instance, that the cafe there would subsidise it. I suppose the rent may, but certainly the cafe owner is not going to use his profits, if he has any,

which I doubt he does at times, to subsidise the operation.

It is all very nice to say we would love to have some cafe or whatever there. It is just not going to be subsidising the operation of the Albert Hall. It will take away from that community ownership of the hall where they can do their own catering, and it is a very big fundraiser for some of our members. The other thing is that if you are having a wedding there you bring in your catering and a commercial cater sets up. We are talking about ongoing permanent catering, a coffee shop or catering.

**Mr Lundy:** I would like to add something to that. If you look at the number of facilities in the parliamentary triangle that provide it, you have got the National Gallery, the Portrait Gallery and the Library. On the other side of the hall you have got the Southern Cross Club, the Yacht Club. I have done a survey on this sort of thing in relation to another institution and we found it is just not viable. There are not enough people to support these sorts of operations in the ACT. You have got to look at the number of cafes and restaurants around the ACT that have gone. I support what Gina is saying: that it really is not a feasible idea to look at it in the future, in my view.

**Ms Pinkas:** If I could just add to that. The issue which I put in my submission, as opposed to the friends' submission, is around land tenure. It would have to be leased because the Albert Hall is owned and managed—I use both words because it can be owned but not managed—by the ACT government, and therefore there would have to be a sublease to a cafe owner anyway. We think that if you want to do the feasibility study and whatever, that is fine, but it should not be part of the plan of management because that is some future planning thing. You could think of all sorts of things. You might want to do accommodation there—anything. That should be set outside the plan of management and a feasibility study done if the government wants to fund it, but certainly not as part of the plan of management.

**DR BOURKE:** Perhaps you could also elaborate a little what you talked about before—Albert Hall's position of unique worth as a heritage site in the ACT.

**Ms Pinkas:** As the book will show, it has got a wonderful history. It certainly is a lovely title—*Albert Hall: the heart of Canberra*. When you saw 3,000 people rising up, when they thought that it was threatened through the planning through the NCA, that shows you how dear it is to the heart of residents of the ACT. We are hoping that it does become close to the hearts of younger people in the ACT too, as is one of the Chief Minister's aims.

It is listed on the heritage register of the ACT. Its heritage values are recognised, but we have also seen it through the participation of the people of the ACT in supporting the hall. I am not quite sure if there are any other angles you want to get in on that, but it certainly has a very high heritage value. People think of it as a heritage building, but the main thing is it is a community asset which has heritage qualifications. In other words, it has to serve the community but it also has a heritage overlay which we have to preserve and conserve as much as we can because it is on the heritage register.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Thank you, chair. Ultimately, fast forward 10 years from where we are now. In a perfect world, what is the hall being used for? What is a day in the life of Albert Hall?

**Ms Pinkas:** Would you like to start, president?

**Mr Lundy:** I cannot read the future.

**MR WALL:** If it was in your control, Mr Lundy, or if the friends—

**Mr Lundy:** We would hope that it would continue to be used as a community asset and that the use of it would continue and grow. That is all I could say at this stage.

**Ms Pinkas:** I can add to that, if I may. I think that it is a wonderful dance venue. I do not know if any of you have been to any dances there, but it is one of the few dance venues that we have in the ACT. So that is one source. It is not a performance venue per se because—well, it is, but it has huge constraints, and there are other better performance venues. In the plan, they compare the Albert Hall to Erindale, the Q and whatever. It is not that facility. They are tiered facilities. It is ridiculous to compare them with that. This is a flat-floor performance space which is capable of accommodating a whole range of community exhibitions. It can accommodate exams and those sorts of things, bringing younger people in. We used to have stomps in there. It would be old people now that did stomps. There was even kickboxing, which Wayne Berry tried to ban at one stage. It is a very versatile facility because of its flat floor. It is not a key performance facility as such, because it has behind-stage issues.

We need a whole range of those community facilities. It is also a lovely size. It fits into a size. You have got to look at the spectrum of opportunities in the ACT. Some of them are very big. Some, I noticed in one of the submissions, do not use church facilities, which are ideal to use for this sort of thing that we are talking about, because they are not available on Sundays so you cannot have them over a weekend. It is about looking at where it fits into that niche, and it does in terms of a recreational opportunity spectrum. So stomps I think—certainly not funerals.

**MR WALL:** It seems that the intent is to have it as a vibrant and well-utilised community centre, a destination rather than a forgotten landmark.

**Ms Pinkas:** We would be very happy with that.

**MR WALL:** Then I guess really the crux of it is: does the plan of management that we are looking into allow for that to happen?

**Ms Pinkas:** In my view, no—I do not think the friends believe that—because we do not have the priority actions to achieve that. That is really what it is about. It is talking about marketing. I was very interested to hear that they are dealing with some marketing now, but what are they marketing? What are their objectives? What is their brief? We have not seen it. We do not know what they are doing. Again, if the government wants to have a younger age group using it, fine. What has the marketing guru been told? I am just pointing because it is where Tania is sitting. What have they

been told about it? What are we marketing? Are we marketing for small international conferences? Are we marketing for younger people to have parties there? I do not know.

**MR WALL:** So what you are suggesting is that first we need to figure out what we want the hall to be and then we need to figure out how we go about marketing it?

**Ms Pinkas:** Market around it and charge around it. There is some argument or discussion about whether you have this new lights system. I am out of my depth here but you can have a fabulous performance light system, sound system or whatever. Again, that minor work cuts into what you are trying to deliver. If we know what we are trying to do and why, it all falls into place—with a bit of money.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there currently any issues with the commonwealth or the NCA that you see that are constraints or barriers?

**Mr Lundy:** No. DA53 was withdrawn as a result of the joint standing committee on operations for the NCA. They strongly recommended to the NCA that they abandon the plan, so it was subsequently withdrawn. I think it is the first plan that has ever been withdrawn by the NCA, and that is what sparked the Friends of the Albert Hall.

**THE CHAIR:** If I could just go to the performance space, can you just elaborate a bit more on the issues behind the performance space?

**Mr Lundy:** No.

**Ms Pinkas:** I am not a performance space person, but I do know—and our dear friends from TOSA will be bringing you evidence in a short time—that some people have said that the performance space is limited by the organ. I cannot comment on that either way, because I really do not know, but I presume it takes up some space. That is why perhaps we need to look at that in terms of whether that is appropriate. It may or may not be. We do not have a view on it in terms of the friends; we just think the question should be asked. But there is limited backstage area. With productions now, they need much more for scenes and all that stuff. It is limited. The question is: would you add extra space to the back of the Albert Hall? That is another feasibility question really. We do not have a view on that.

**THE CHAIR:** Any other questions, members? No? Is there anything else that we may not have covered that you would like to add?

**Mr Lundy:** I would just like to make sure the committee understands the position about the plan of management and the heritage plan.

**Ms Pinkas:** On conservation?

**Mr Lundy:** Yes. We were advised that the revised version of the conservation of landscape management plan under the ACT Heritage Act referred to in our submission remains in draft and has not yet been adopted. We understand it will be called a conservation management plan, but we are concerned to ensure that there will be consistency between the new CMP and the plan of management. We think that

they should coexist.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you happen to notice that, with the Minister for Planning and the Environment and Planning Directorate?

**Ms Pinkas:** We know, because we chased this up, that the Heritage Council approved the conservation and management plan. As you would be aware, there are new members of that council, so they are reviewing it again. So there is a bit of a difficulty in that, under the Heritage Act, the council approves the plan, not the government or the minister. And the Assembly actually allows the plan of management. So we have different levels of approval. I am not arguing against it; I am just pointing it out. It means that if you want consistency between the two, there is a bit of a mismatch in how you achieve that. I do not believe that we should have one statutory document recommending something which is illegal under the current legislation and another statutory document opposing it. They are ACT government documents and they need to be sorted.

**Mr Lundy:** We understand, for instance, that the draft CMP refers to on-site catering and cafe facilities on the Albert Hall public land. That is the inconsistency we do not want to see happen.

**Ms Pinkas:** That would be good.

**THE CHAIR:** Point taken. Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you, chair. The Theatre Organ Society's submission to the committee argues that organ pipe chambers are fixtures and cannot be easily relocated without upsetting the heritage fabric of the area and a significant cost. In light of that information, do you think that, if the organ is not frequently used by the general public, removing it would damage the heritage value of the Albert Hall?

**Ms Pinkas:** I do not think we are in a position to argue either way. We really do support looking at that issue again. It may be fabulous to keep it there. We do not have a view. We just suggest that it is something that needs to be looked at as part of looking at the future of the hall.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We appreciate your time today.

I believe we have a slight change in the agenda. Ms Pinkas, you also made a submission in your own right and you would like to have some time to comment on that. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr Lundy.

**Ms Pinkas:** I will try not to repeat myself.

**THE CHAIR:** I am advised we can just keep on going, but you are now going to give evidence in your own capacity.

**Ms Pinkas:** I will be very quick. Thank you.



**PINKAS, MS GEORGINA**, Community member

**SHAW, MS TANIA**, Senior Manager, Tenancies, ACT Property Group, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

**MS PINKAS:** There was some discussion about why plans of management are needed. This is something that I really would like to explain to you. As you would read in my submission, I was the reason that a lot of the urban land was coloured in as public land at self-government. The reason for that was that I saw some of the municipal facilities funded by the commonwealth actually sold without the public knowing.

I will use the Macquarie pool as a good example. In relation to Macquarie pool, I knew the people that bought it. They told me at the time—this was ages ago—that it was actually sold for minus \$50,000. It was valued at that because it had a hole in it. The people who bought it sold it the very next day—they told me; I have no proof of this—to someone that wanted a cash business. We lost our municipal pool. It is fine; it is still being run. That is not the person who has it now, and I do not wish to perjure myself here, but what I am saying is that it is run but it could have been developed into office blocks like the Deakin pool was.

What we were trying to do in having these urban facilities as public land was to enable the Assembly to actually make the final decision. If all public land has a plan of management, and the plan of management has to be agreed by the Assembly because it is a disallowable instrument, that land cannot be disposed of without the public or its representatives in the Assembly being aware of it. That is why, and only why, it is such an important issue. They are our public assets, and over the 30-odd years that I worked in the ACT government I saw those assets being whittled away.

We can see it now with various facilities that suddenly are leased. I will give you an example, Football Park, Phillip. That was leased to Aussie Rules, who let the facility deteriorate because they could not manage it. The ACT government at the time paid about \$800,000 to take the lease back. At the time, the government fought very strongly not to let that go. But it could have been—and I saw the proposals—developed as aged care and whatever.

So it is to protect the public interest in the land. A plan of management should pass two tests. Does it tell the manager how to manage it and what it is for? And does it protect the public interests in the land? They were going to lease the Albert Hall. The government put out tender documents for the management for 30 years. I knew the Hyatt was interested at the time, and I suddenly remembered that that was public land and we did not have a plan of management.

Once that was made known to the people that were tendering out—this may not be the reason—if you were tendering for the management of the Albert Hall for 30 years and you were not told in the tender documents that you had to conform to a plan of management which the Assembly would allow or disallow, you would be in a position to sue the ACT government for not disclosing that.

I am being very open here, but it is very important that you understand that it is not about red tape. It is about protecting public interest in our assets. That is really what it

is all about, whether it is Namadgi—there are conservation values there, too, and, of course, heritage values—or somewhere else. We should know. That is why we have been campaigning, and I am very pleased to see we have got them up on the web now, to make sure those plans of management are finalised—they were not there—and to make them publicly available so that people can see what the government is doing about their assets. The key thing is that the power rests with our elected representatives to either disallow the plans or allow them. That is great, and that is why I think they are so important.

I think there might be one other point. We have covered cost recovery quite well. I would like to say, though, something about page 31 of the plan of management. It was not in earlier plans of management drafts, but in April 2014 “Requirement for costs of Albert Hall to be recovered through hire fees” was put in. It was not in any other earlier draft. There was not public consultation on that; it was just put in at the last minute. We are pretty cross about that.

That is probably all I want to say. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That is very comprehensive, in both submissions. Do members have any other questions they would like to add?

**DR BOURKE:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Bourke.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you, chair. Ms Pinkas, in your submission you mention that the current sign is hidden when the hall doors are open. What do you think would be the most appropriate size and placement for a sign for the Albert Hall?

**Ms Pinkas:** We have provided that information to the property management group. Once you go there—if you go to, say, the antique show or whatever—you cannot see the sign on where to hire the hall. I do not think that has changed recently, has it, Tania?

**Ms Shaw:** We have got a temporary sign.

**Ms Pinkas:** That was the major concern. We are all about trying to get use of the hall, and we felt that if you went to the hall when it was closed—you could see this temporary sign now—and said, “This is lovely; I would love it for whatever,” you could not see how to access it. That is all we are saying.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you.

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

**Ms Pinkas:** Thank you.

**HERBERT, MR KINGSLEY**, President, Theatre Organ Society of Australia (ACT Division) Inc

**WARNER, MR STUART**, Secretary, Theatre Organ Society of Australia (ACT Division) Inc

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Mr Herbert and Mr Warner. Thank you for coming today. As with previous witnesses, I would like to draw your attention to the privilege statement in front of you, which I understand you have received from the secretary. Could you just confirm for us that you have read the statement and agree?

**Mr Herbert:** Yes, I agree.

**Mr Warner:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I will hand over to you as to whether you would like to make an opening statement.

**Mr Herbert:** Thank you for this opportunity to speak at this public inquiry into the draft report of the plan of management for the Albert Hall. I am President of the Theatre Organ Society of Australia (ACT Division) Inc, more commonly known as TOSA, the Theatre Organ Society of the ACT. First, I would like to mention that the committee of TOSA has delegated the society's secretary, Mr Stuart Warner, to my right, and me, as president, to represent the society at this hearing.

The Theatre Organ Society (ACT Division) Inc has had a longstanding historical and cultural attachment to the Albert Hall since the society's Compton theatre pipe organ was first installed and inaugurated in Albert Hall in August 1986. I wish to emphasise that the society greatly appreciates and respects the privilege and responsibilities that come with that, and I hope this positive relationship will continue throughout the period of the forthcoming plan of management.

I would like to add supplementary comments to TOSA's written submissions in relation to the summary of opportunities and constraints of the society's heritage 1932 Compton theatre pipe organ, to assist the inquiry to better understand the matters raised in the report, followed by comments on a further three matters of a general nature addressed in the body of the report or the draft.

Firstly, I go to item 2.3.4, "Opportunities and constraints", and the item "Current location of the Theatre Organ on the stage affecting the usable space". It goes without saying that any prized asset such as a heritage pipe organ installed in any public hall will take up space. The location of the Compton organ at the rear of the stage area in the hall was determined by the commonwealth departmental authority responsible for the management of Albert Hall at that time and the space was offered to TOSA for consideration. The organ itself was very tightly constrained within the limited footprint area allocated for its installation. I feel it is important to point out that necessary compromises were adopted by all parties involved when installing the organ. It being a fixed standing structure on the stage of the hall, at the rear of the stage, the chamber construction was carried out to TOSA's organ design requirements under the direction and oversight of officers of the department and constructed by the commonwealth department of works in order to satisfy necessary construction

standards and safety requirements of the day.

The society, as a voluntary society—I might point out, for clarification, that we are a not-for-profit incorporated association—raised funds and reimbursed government for the entire costs of the structural requirements, including the addition of a three-phase electric power supply for the organ blower, at a total cost of \$40,000 in 1978 terms of currency value.

Logistically speaking, and in the society's view, there is no other position within the hall that the organ can be relocated to without direct impact or despoliation of the heritage fabric of the hall. In fact, the society takes an alternative view from the report: that the installation of the organ, rather than being viewed as a constraint, should be regarded and accepted universally as an opportunity, as a community asset contributing as an added feature to the music life and character of Albert Hall for the benefit of the people of Canberra and the region—as, indeed, it has over the period of years. And perhaps as a more reflective observation—I apologise for getting a little technical here, but I think it contributes to understanding—it is my belief that, without the organ chambers in situ as at present, the stage area would revert to the unacceptable acoustic difficulties and sound entrapment issues that international guest artists to Canberra complained of in the hall from the 1950s onwards.

There have been no structural changes to the stage area to overcome this inherent acoustic problem of projecting the sound through the proscenium out into the auditorium. When the organ chambers were first installed, it was noticed and recognised that the piano on the stage could be clearly heard at the back of the hall, which was difficult prior to that, thanks to the organ chambers' construction acting as a solid acoustic reflector baffle bouncing the sound forward. One might therefore consider that the chambers in their present position provide this ancillary opportunity and asset for all Albert Hall users of the stage area.

Summarising, then, the location of the organ at the rear of the stage was determined by the responsible government authority managing the hall at that time. The society has worked within that constraint to provide what I believe has proven to be a successful outcome for all hall users.

I will move to my second point, in relation to 2.4.4, “Opportunities and constraints”, the item “Making greater use of the theatre organ for events and performances”. Without taking up too much of the committee's time, I refer members to TOSA's written submission to the inquiry, providing a more substantive summary of the use of the Compton organ for concerts, community and seniors events over many years in Albert Hall. It is regretted that there was a period after 2001, for seven to eight years, when the organ was decommissioned for major refurbishment and upgrade. Since then, however, the organ performed splendidly during Canberra international musical festivals in 2012 and 2013 and during the Canberra centenary celebrations in 2013, both in public events and in free concerts for the general community, and in association with other hall users or hirers.

The society has always viewed the organ as being very much a community asset for the enjoyment of the listening public, as part of community events, hall functions, civic and public concerts, annual seniors and veterans' charitable events, and open

days. If I may dare to say it, TOSA ACT is probably the longest standing community organisation that has retained an unbroken association with Albert Hall since 1986, during a period when many hall hirers and cultural associations actively requested the organ's involvement in providing background music for events and occasions.

Sadly, it is a reflection of the times and current situation that those associations are no longer active users of the hall, limiting the opportunities to hear the organ play during other community sponsored activities. TOSA wish and hope that we could promote more frequent organ concerts or combined organ events and seniors' events. That is the society's goal, and in fact it is the society's mission statement. The single impediment from the society's point of view, if I may say so, is the high level of community use hall hire rate structure one has to pay as a non-profit organisation.

That leads me to address the hall hire rates that are covered in the draft, in 2.5.2, "Community engagement outcomes". When I am speaking to this item, please understand that I am not singling out TOSA but speaking from TOSA's direct experience as a community association and on behalf of all cultural and community group users of the hall.

TOSA ACT recently staged a highly successful organ concert in Albert Hall, in December 2013, with an internationally acclaimed concert organist who attracted a near-capacity audience. The weekend day rate hall hire fees amounted to 35 per cent of the total revenue received; with other professional staging and organ tuning costs, the society suffered a net loss for that event of more than \$1,500. The largest single cost factor for the event was the hall hire cost, which I consider is a heavy burden on any activity and extremely difficult for community associations to sustain.

By way of comparison, through our position as part of a national theatre and pipe organ fraternity across all states and here in the ACT, we were able to share our financial information. There is disbelief amongst the theatre organ fraternity and groups in the other states at the costs that TOSA ACT pays for hall hire when compared with similar costs for pipe organ installations in other metropolitan and city halls.

I will move out of the organ scene just to give one other example, in Hobart, a capital city of comparable size to Canberra. A community organisation can hire the Hobart Town Hall for a weekend day with costs in the order of several hundred dollars, as against \$1,500 for Albert Hall in Canberra—a difference, you might consider, of twice the magnitude compared to comparable facilities interstate. This also equates with the scale of differences with interstate city halls and civic centres where heritage organs are installed, as I mentioned previously.

In this regard, we support the earlier comments from the Friends of the Albert Hall that it is most difficult for community organisations and societies, including TOSA, to regularly promote public activities, concerts and events in the Albert Hall at the current comparatively excessive hall hire rates for community and non-commercial hire—people who, after all, are trying to provide a valuable community service for the general public and the cultural life of the community in the ACT. We are not doing it for any other reason.

I urge the inquiry to make recommendation for an appropriate review of the scale of current hall hire fees for a more cost-affordable outcome for community and charitable organisations.

I move down to 2.7, to the constraint that Ms Pinkas referred us to that somehow crept into the paperwork: “costs of Albert Hall to be recovered through hire fees”. Following what I have been talking about, I would like to say that as much as there might be lip-service paid in espousing and promoting community use of the hall throughout the draft plan of management, my view, and it is TOSA’s view, is that it will not happen unless there is a serious review of making non-commercial use more affordable for community activities as just outlined. The notion that a civic hall or other public facility must be seen to pay for itself—that is, that the costs of Albert Hall should be recovered through hire fees—as a business case scenario is not only implausible but totally unreasonable and runs against one of the prime purposes of governments in providing community facilities for the enjoyment and use of their citizens.

My last point is in relation to 1.5.2, “Management reference group”. I would like to make a final comment, if I may, relating to the proposed management reference group and its structure. TOSA supports the establishment of the management reference group in providing ongoing input into the management of Albert Hall in an advisory role to ACT government, and TOSA would welcome the opportunity to be part of the management reference group if invited to participate.

I thank you for your time and patience. I would be pleased to answer questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. With reference to the event that you held at the end of 2013, how were you covered for public liability insurance?

**Mr Warner:** We have our own cover.

**THE CHAIR:** You have your own cover?

**Mr Warner:** We provide insurance to the organ.

**THE CHAIR:** Right.

**Mr Warner:** The organ is owned by TOSA but is in situ by licence and lease agreement in an ACT government facility. We are required, as a not-for-profit organisation, to have full public liability cover, and we insure the organ as well. We are required to provide evidence that the organ is insured, in case there is a malfunction with that. It will be household, property and whatever it is there. And there is public liability. It costs us about \$1,200 a year to do.

**THE CHAIR:** So the requirement for you to have that is because you have an asset?

**Mr Warner:** No; we are a not-for-profit organisation, incorporated, and we are required to have public liability because we invite people to come to the Albert Hall for a function that is planned, run and organised by a hirer.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. In your submission you mention that the previous five-year licence agreement terminated on 30 April 2014. What is in place now?

**Mr Warner:** Nothing.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you waiting for some information back from the ACT government?

**Mr Warner:** I understand it is with the solicitors or somewhere.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Warner:** It is the licence agreement that, ever since 1968, has been in place with various levels of government. It is renewed. It provides for the occupancy by the Theatre Organ Society in a government facility. It is a business-in-confidence licence that is agreed to, signed off and renewed as needed. As you quite rightly point out, it has not been renewed since 2014. It is in need of review and renewal.

**THE CHAIR:** You understand that it is actively being considered, but you are not exactly sure where it is at.

**Mr Warner:** No. We have not received any information lately in regard to that.

**THE CHAIR:** Does that concern you?

**Mr Warner:** We would have thought that the plan of management may have been some intervention in that process or may have led to something to not do or do or whatever.

**THE CHAIR:** Right.

**Mr Warner:** But our occupancy is terminated, if you like, from the previous lease agreement—we are waiting for renewal—as it had been in the past, and as clauses in the licence agreement allow it to be continued.

**THE CHAIR:** Forgive me for not knowing this, but in terms of the use of the organ, who is able to actually operate or play the organ? Are there many people who are able to do that?

**Mr Warner:** Out of our membership, probably about 30 per cent, perhaps even 40, are organists of some sort. I classify myself to be a theatre organist at concert level and provided the concert background, if you like, and entertainment for the events that were mentioned in the centenary celebrations.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Warner:** I did a little organ recital before the dance and before the band started on each of those nights when it was the 20s night and the 30s night. We would do that for the seniors as well. There would be half a dozen of us that could get a tune out, probably not to concert level, but there would be another 20 or so people who would

love to get on there and have a look, who would play.

**Mr Herbert:** The society has an open door for anyone who wishes to use it, but one of our constraints, again tied with public liability cover, is that we require them to be members of the association before they can use the organ.

**Mr Warner:** So it links in with the insurance cover.

**Mr Herbert:** Insurance cover, yes.

**Mr Warner:** We get in there as often as we possibly can, based on availability and hiring, to maintain the organ, to improve it. We have been recipients of heritage grants to improve and to maintain. We have another project in place now. Access has been a bit of a problem for us. I would like to think that was somehow rectified to allow us to do our work the way we believe we could. It possibly could be improved. The management plan does not refer to that; it is probably the licence agreement that would do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. As a general comment, I would say that often constraints are opportunities, and opportunities are constraints as well, so that is—

**Mr Warner:** We see the organ as an opportunity.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. I will hand over to my colleagues.

**MR COE:** You spoke at some length about the benefit of the positioning of the organ, and the ancillary benefits as well. What alternatives have been mooted for locations for the organ?

**Mr Warner:** None.

**MR COE:** None? I note that the plan does make mention of improving the backstage area, including resolving issues relating to the location and frequency of use of the organ. Has anyone actually been in touch with you suggesting alternatives as to where the organ could be placed?

**Mr Warner:** No. When the organ was installed 40 years ago, it was placed, I would say, strategically, between other storage areas at the back, to minimise impact but to provide two chests for the organ pipes and associated gear, and the console, which comes out from the middle. So it is behind closed shutters and is locked away. It does take up some of the stage, obviously, because it was put at the back of the original stage. There has been no suggestion from anyone ever since, at any time, to relocate it to any other location or any other location within Albert Hall. And it would be a very expensive exercise if you wanted to, I can tell you. That aside, organs are available to buy; people put them into their homes. They are a movable asset, if you like, but it is a very expensive and difficult thing to do.

The society believes that the theatre organ is part of a “town hall environment” similar to other town halls that have a theatre organ. Willoughby Town Hall in Sydney, for instance, took the Arcadia Theatre organ into their first town hall; then they pulled it



all down and put in that beautiful big theatre that they have got there now, the big thing that looks like the Q, and put it in there again. It becomes part of a municipal town hall civic centre environment in many towns. I think that was the feeling when it was put in there, and the government of the day said that was it.

**Mr Herbert:** I think the consideration was probably that up to that time Albert Hall was the premier performance facility in Canberra.

**Mr Warner:** Venue.

**Mr Herbert:** Venue. We had choral societies, philharmonic, repertory and others. But then, with the availability of the purpose-specific Canberra Theatre Centre and government school facilities at Erindale and whatever else, they moved out from the Albert Hall. I am sure that the authorities at that time saw an organ as an opportunity to add life to the venue.

**Mr Warner:** There were previous comments about the suitability of the Albert Hall as a performance venue. We would agree with that. If ever we are doing anything, we all want to get to the front of the stage. The acoustics are not particularly good. The theatre organ is on the back wall; if you do not open up the shutters, you will not hear it from about the fourth row. It is the acoustics. It is a poor place to perform. I have been on there with bands and things myself.

To answer your question, we believe that bringing that forward has improved the acoustics going forward, because it has provided a backdrop, if you like, or a wall, a buffer, that allows that to go out. If there is nothing back there, it would just be hollow; there would be nothing there.

**MR COE:** Thank you.

**DR BOURKE:** Thank you for your submission. Perhaps you could talk about the issue I raised previously with the Friends of the Albert Hall regarding the heritage value of Albert Hall and whether the pipe organ actually adds to that, notwithstanding the age of the instrument, which I understand to be from the 1930s though it has only been in there, as you say, for the last 30 years. Does it actually add to the heritage value?

**Mr Warner:** Probably yes and no.

**Mr Herbert:** We believe that, although the society's organ may not have been there in its earlier days, it is a perfect meld and blend with the heritage of the Albert Hall. It is only five years younger than the Albert Hall in its own life. Frankly, if you wanted to ask where else the organ could go in the ACT, the society would not see any other venue that would have the same characteristic and aesthetics for the organ as the Albert Hall.

**Mr Warner:** I have one further comment. It is within the hall. It has not affected the external appearance of the hall, so it has not affected a heritage look. Close the curtains and you would not even know it is there. Does that detract from a heritage look? Probably not. It is at the rear of the hall and was not there when the hall was

built. On true heritage provisions, then, it was not there, but we believe that it is a suitable adjunct and a suitable heritage instrument to be where it is. And obviously the government of the day thought the same thing.

**Mr Herbert:** Could I just add to that. There is a parquet floor on the stage of the Albert Hall. That extends two metres beyond the current limit where the chamber is, two metres into the actual chamber space itself. That would be the extent of any visual use of the stage, were the organ not there. As I think I mentioned before, when the installation of the organ was being considered there were compromises. TOSA compromised on the size, and I think what has been achieved is a fair outcome for the benefits that the organ provides.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We are close to being out of time, I am afraid. Mr Wall, I am sorry. Did you want to ask anything further?

**MR WALL:** This is just a very quick one. Going to the access that TOSA has to the pipe organ, we heard earlier that there are around 200 days per year when the hall is utilised. If the ambition of this management plan is seen through, it is going to see a much higher usage rate of the hall. What impact is that going to have on the activities that TOSA conducted and the maintenance and rehearsal time that you require with the organ?

**Mr Herbert:** Certainly we realise and accept that we have to work around availability issues; there is no question about that. It is not just about the hall becoming available; it is the voluntary resources of the society and whether they are available on that same day, because they have day-to-day jobs.

**Mr Warner:** It will impact on us.

**Mr Herbert:** But I would like to place on record the excellent support that TOSA receives from TAMS and the Property Group in making days available when we might make a request, and if it is not available on that day we look further forward.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time today. The committee's hearing for today is adjourned.

**Mr Herbert:** Thank you.

**The committee adjourned at 4.05 pm.**