



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

[\(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2014-2015\)](#)

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 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.

Appearances:

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

Environment and Planning Directorate

Ekelund, Ms Dorte, Director General

Rake, Mr Gary, Deputy Director General

Rooney, Mr Sean, Executive Director, Sustainability and Climate Change

Lane, Ms Annie, Executive Director, Environment

Sibley, Mr Jon, Director, Energy and Waste Policy

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Director, Finance and Operational Support

Smith, Ms Becky, Senior Manager, Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Environment and Territory and Municipal Services into the annual and financial reports 2014-15. On behalf of the committee thank you, minister and officials, for coming along this afternoon. Today the committee will be examining the annual report of the Environment and Planning Directorate, excluding the planning aspects which we will cover at a later date. We will conclude this afternoon by looking at the annual report of the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. Minister and officials, I draw your attention to the pink privileges statement and could you confirm for me that you understand the implications?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I also remind witnesses that proceedings will be recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we go to questions, minister, do you have an opening statement?

Mr Corbell: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to appear before you and your committee colleagues this afternoon. In the area of climate change Canberra continues to lead Australia in implementing measures to sustainably source our energy needs and to meet our legislative target of securing 90 per cent of our electricity supply from renewable energy by the year 2020.

The two wind auctions the government has initiated will take us a long way towards that goal, cutting over half the emissions associated with electricity use from Canberra households. This unique auction process is building innovation and cementing the ACT as a hub for research and investment in renewable energy technology. The first wind auction provided for the development of a million-dollar research fund to further drive this important sector forward. The government is committed to diversifying our economy to ensure our long-term future through funds such as these. The success of these programs is evident across the territory.

The Royalla solar farm commenced generation in September 2014 and a further two new large scale farms are expected to come online in 2016. Further, a review of the territory's rooftop solar feed-in tariff has determined that the scheme successfully achieved its objectives resulting in the emergence of a successful rooftop solar industry in the ACT. Starting with only 1,000 connections before the scheme commenced in 2009 there are now over 10,000 fit, supported connections in operation today including Canberra's largest roof mounted solar panel system installed at Amaroo School. This is not only the largest roof mounted solar installation in the ACT it is the largest system of any Australian school, again demonstrating Canberra's leadership in this area.

These measures are being supported by the government's Actsmart sustainability programs and the energy efficiency improvement scheme which are assisting households, schools, government and businesses to be aware of their environmental impact and put in place measures to reduce their carbon footprint. The Actsmart home energy advice program reached over 2½ thousand people in the 2014-15 financial year while the government's outreach program assisted over 1,800 low income households to reduce their energy consumption by 540 megawatt hours. And of course this reduced the cost of living for these low income households.

The energy efficiency improvement scheme also contributed to our reduction in energy use with over 244,000 activities conducted under the scheme abating 159,698 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. The success of this program has seen legislation passed by the Assembly to extend the scheme until the year 2020.

The government's Actsmart programs have also had a significant impact. Since the programs began we have been able to reduce the amount of waste to landfill by over 48,000 cubic metres. This means a significant reduction in carbon emissions as well as lessening the overall demand on our landfills. This achievement was acknowledged at the Actsmart awards ceremony held in June with organisations across the territory being recognised for their efforts.

The government is also focused on increasing the accessibility of tools available to Canberrans to understand how they can reduce their resource consumption. The launch of the one-stop shop on the Actsmart website provides innovative ways to help reduce costs around the home and also makes this process fun, with the option to challenge friends and family to see who can make the biggest reductions.

The government is also very focused on its own operations and reducing the carbon intensity of them. The carbon neutral fund has had a successful year with over \$3.5 million provided to ACT government directorates to reduce their own carbon emissions and reduce the costs of electricity paid by taxpayers.

The fund also provides the added benefit of reducing the costs of running some of our most important services such as the Canberra Hospital. The savings generated have multiple flow-on effects, with the money saved being able to be used in operational areas such as health services for the betterment of the community.

This year saw the introduction and commencement of the Nature Conservation Act which puts in place measures for contemporary best practice conservation standards

for the territory. The new act, which is the culmination of many years of hard work, demonstrates our government's commitment to managing our natural resources, protecting threatened species and empowering and working with local communities.

The management of threatened species remains a priority. Importantly the monitoring of local threatened species including the endangered grassland earless dragons which are still recovering from the long drought between 2002 and 2008 and the captive-bred northern corroboree frogs are showing excellent signs that they are surviving in the wild.

The government will continue to improve and implement measures to improve the water quality of the lakes and rivers of the territory. In the year ahead we expect to see work commence on implementing the basin priority project which will see funding from the commonwealth of \$85 million used to improve the water quality in our six priority catchment areas. This process has also been strengthened by the establishment of the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group which is bringing together relevant stakeholders across New South Wales and the ACT to ensure there is a coordinated effort to make sure our waterways are a place which we can all enjoy.

Madam Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to make that opening statement. I and my officials are happy to try to answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: We will start with output 1, environment, and then move to output 2, sustainability employment change. You mentioned the ACT basin priority project. Could you tell us how that improves water quality in the ACT's lakes and waterways?

Mr Corbell: Yes. The basin priority project provides funding from the commonwealth for the development of a range of infrastructure interventions to improve water quality and reduce sedimentation, and reduce pollution flow in the six priority catchments that have been identified under that project. The priority catchments are Lake Tuggeranong and Yarralumla Creek, the upper Molonglo, the lower Molonglo and west Belconnen as well as the Fyshwick catchment. These have been identified as priorities for improvement.

The funding is being used in two stages. We are at the end now of a very comprehensive analysis and data gathering stage which has seen a very intensive round of monitoring, data gathering and analysis of the water quality issues in each of those sub-catchments, identifying where the pollutant loads are coming from and therefore being able to identify where we need to put in place interventions.

The government has undertaken consultation with the community on a broad range of infrastructure options to improve water quality. Those are measures like offline and online ponds, swales, bio-retention basins and a range of other infrastructure options, and we have got that feedback from the community. We have completed a multi-criteria analysis of those options, and the government has now submitted its preferred projects to the commonwealth.

The commonwealth have a period of around, I think it is, three to four months to complete their analysis and to indicate to us what their position is. Once we reach

agreement between the two levels of government we will then be in a position to see works commence. The advice I have is that a decision by the commonwealth on the preferred works is expected by the end of March next year.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to tell us more about the community consultation that you mentioned?

Mr Corbell: Yes. There has been quite a bit of community consultation. We have held a series of open house consultations. There were two held in each of the six priority catchment areas between July and August this year. They were well attended. We had people from water watch groups, Landcare groups and local residents concerned about water quality issues. In addition the government also operated an electronic open house which allowed the community to provide feedback online through the EPD website.

We also have established a community advisory group with representatives from key stakeholder organisations that are helping to identify the priority uses and environmental values considered important for each of the key lakes, rivers, creeks and wetlands in the six priority catchments. There has been quite a high level of community engagement.

MR WALL: I have a supplementary. Could you give us an update on the water quality in Lake Tuggeranong?

Mr Corbell: In what respect?

MR WALL: Obviously there are seasonal ebbs and flows but has there been an improvement in the general water quality? Has there been a reduction in the days of closure due to blue-green algae?

Mr Corbell: It changes depending on rainfall, temperature and a range of things like that but what I can tell you is that, based on the analysis that has been undertaken as part of the basin priority project, it is regrettably one of our most polluted catchments. There is a range of reasons for that. What has been very valuable as a result of the basin priority project work is that we have been able to identify where those pollutant loads are, what they are and where they come from, and that has allowed us to identify a range of infrastructure options to tackle those issues and to allow water to be cleaned, pollutants to be removed—

MR WALL: For the benefit of the committee, could you elaborate on what some of those sources and pollutants are for Lake Tuggeranong specifically?

Mr Corbell: Yes. In Lake Tuggeranong it is largely runoff from the urban area. It is pollutants running out of suburbs into local creeks and drains and then ending up in Lake Tuggeranong. There are some particular issues with the volumes of water that can come into Lake Tuggeranong. Because of the very significant level of concrete stormwater channel infrastructure in the Tuggeranong valley area, what it means is that any runoff is deposited very rapidly into Lake Tuggeranong, and what that sees is a very large injection of pollutants in a very short period into Lake Tuggeranong. There are issues like that at play. If you want some further advice on the particular

pollutants I can take that on notice and give you some of that data.

Ms Ekelund: When Tuggeranong was designed I think it is fair to say that our knowledge of water quality management was not as sophisticated as it is now and there are parts of the Lake Tuggeranong catchment where there was no significant water quality management put into that part of the system. If you think, for example, about the Kambah area and look at the watercourses that actually drain into the lake from that part of the catchment—they are no longer watercourses, they are concrete drains—they do not actually go into a wetland and filters. Yes they do have trash racks and sedimentation traps but they are not substantial wetland filters or water quality management systems that would have cleansed the water and also removed a large amount of sediment before it is actually received into the lake.

Part of what the analysis has shown is that we need to retrofit some of the catchments, particularly the areas that were urbanised quite early in the development of Tuggeranong but also even in some of the later developments of Tuggeranong. For the size of the urban catchment, we really have not put in as many water quality treatment opportunities as that very urbanised catchment that the minister referred to warrants.

MR WALL: My understanding is Lake Tuggeranong has been closed for the last little while but not due to blue-green algae. What is the cause of the closure at the moment?

Ms Ekelund: It is another algae. The Environment Protection Agency is generally the agency that looks after this in detail but our ecologist could probably describe the particular pollutant in more detail if you need that.

MR WALL: If they want to take it on notice if it is outside their area.

Mr Rake: I am happy to take it on notice. I believe it is a different strain of blue-green algae. There are three prominent strains here in Canberra.

Mr Corbell: The government has published a number of reports on catchment health. There is a water report available online that looks at catchment health across the territory. In addition there is the annual catchment health indicator program report, which is put together by water watch groups which involves quite a large number of volunteers regularly sampling and recording indicators of catchment health. That report is also publicly available. Both of those you can find on the environment.act.gov.au website.

MR WALL: You mentioned that there is the need for various retrofitting of newer technologies for water filtration. What has been considered, and in what locations for Lake Tuggeranong at the moment?

Mr Corbell: I am not sure whether you were privy to or involved in the public consultation but what the government set out was all of the infrastructure options that were potentially on the table. We had more than we would implement but we had a very broad choice of possible infrastructure options. There were multiple sites across the Tuggeranong Valley in your electorate, and we got community feedback on those

options. That included both upstream of the lake options and also in-lake options. That included filtration technologies in the lake. That was an option that was canvassed in terms of improving oxygenation of the lake, getting more oxygen into the water body, but also a very large number of upstream water infrastructure options.

These include your very hard, physical trash rack-type options as well as ponds, wetlands and ponds, swales and biofiltration infrastructure, a broad range of options. There would have been I think around 30-plus options consulted on in the Tuggeranong Valley catchment alone.

THE CHAIR: Are those options now being taken back in-house and submitted to the commonwealth?

Mr Corbell: Yes. Out of that we have refined down to a short list of preferred interventions across all of the six priority catchments. I am pleased to say that, if the government's recommendations are accepted, a lot of the effort will be occurring in Lake Tuggeranong, because that is where we get some of the best outcomes in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment in terms of value for money. Obviously we will have to wait to see what the commonwealth's view of that is but we have completed our analysis and assessment and we have lodged our proposed works with the commonwealth.

Ms Ekelund: We have not quite lodged it—3 December.

Mr Corbell: I beg your pardon, 3 December. We are just about to.

THE CHAIR: Over what period will that \$85 million plus \$8.5 million from the ACT government be spent?

Mr Corbell: That is largely over approximately a three-year period up to 2019.

THE CHAIR: It is a huge investment in three years?

Mr Corbell: Yes. This will be one of the largest investments in urban quality improvement in an urbanised area in the Murray-Darling Basin.

MR COE: Minister, with regard to reserves, grasslands and the like around the territory, do you envisage that there would ever be a case for either eating into those or offsetting them, if sustainable development were to be proposed?

Mr Corbell: That is a very important question, Mr Coe. I would be reluctant to venture a view on that without understanding perhaps what you were thinking about in some more detail.

MR COE: One example would be that there is a fair bit of land relatively close to the proposed light rail route that is locked up in—

Mr Corbell: Where is that?

MR COE: Next to Franklin, opposite Harrison et cetera; and then other areas in the

Mulangarri grasslands in Gungahlin would be another area. Would there ever be any scope whereby such land could be built upon and perhaps offset elsewhere?

Mr Corbell: I think you would find, Mr Coe, that those reserve areas have been factored into decision-making in relation to existing environmental approvals for the completion of the Gungahlin district. Given their importance from a biodiversity perspective, and given that the Gungahlin strategic assessment undertaken by the commonwealth under the EPBC legislation has been completed, which has seen significant additionality actually added to the existing reserve network, I cannot envisage how that could possibly be the case.

MR COE: Are all those reserves tied in with the commonwealth EPBC Act, or are some of them at the discretion of the ACT government?

Mr Corbell: The point I am making is that the commonwealth, when looking at an approval, would be looking at the impact of a proposed development, the significance of the sites potentially captured by that development and making sure there was sufficient offset and additionality, on top of the existing reserve framework. The government's light rail business case and broader light rail master planning work does not in any way envisage the use of land that is already in reserve for other purposes.

MR COE: I understand the business case states that, but I am just curious as to whether, if there was a parcel of land that does have particular sustainability features with regard to urban infill, is there scope to offset that at any point?

Mr Corbell: You have asked me about those specific grassland sites around the Gungahlin area, and I think I have been fairly clear in relation to that.

DR BOURKE: Minister, can you update us on the kangaroo fertility control trial?

Mr Corbell: Yes, thank you, Dr Bourke. The kangaroo fertility control trial is ongoing. We have had some good progress to date. There was funding provided in the 2014-15 and 2015-16 financial years of approximately \$433,000 to progress research on the use of the contraceptive vaccine GonaCon, including a dart delivery method for the vaccine. The CSIRO is providing scientific support for the project. TAMS is contributing an additional \$172,000 in cash and in-kind support for these field trials. Testing is underway to determine the best dart for humanely delivering the vaccine. We have completed pre-treatment population estimates and fertility estimates at the research sites.

There are four sites involved. Across these four sites 75 female kangaroos have been captured, fitted with identification collars and ear tags and injected with GonaCon, or a placebo. An additional 50 female kangaroos have been fitted with similar collars and ear tags and will be treated with dart delivered GonaCon or placebo next year. If these trials are successful that will form the basis for a possible broader application of the use of this vaccine.

DR BOURKE: What is the nature of the involvement with CSIRO in that project?

Mr Corbell: I will ask Ms Lane to answer that for you.

Ms Lane: This is a partnership between EPD and scientists at CSIRO. CSIRO are very much involved in providing advice on the trial itself. They are not actually involved in administering the trial or in any of the fieldwork. TAMS has responsibility and is assisting in that regard as well. So they are providing the scientific integrity, along with our own ecologists in that regard.

A couple of areas need testing. There is the drug itself; having a look at that and at how effective that is. We know that it can be effective because it has been tested before on some adult females, and has been shown to be effective from four to six years. But that has been hand-administered. The second important part of this trial is to understand whether the drug can be delivered through a dart. That is unclear at this stage, but we are refining the dart itself and how that will be delivered. That is a very important part of the trial as well.

In summary, it is very much a collaborative effort and it will take a number of years before we can understand how effective it has been, and how much it can contribute to managing our populations.

MR WALL: What is the purpose of the placebo? I understand it in human clinical trials, but certainly the placebo effect would not be evident on a kangaroo. They would be unaware of what they were being treated for?

Ms Lane: The dart itself could have an impact. When you are delivering the dart, whether it be with the drug or a placebo, it is important to understand the impact of that. There is the actual injection into the rump of the kangaroo and what impact that might have, of the placebo or the drug. The placebo is the same sort of viscosity as the drug itself. So in that sense we get an idea of the impact of injecting that fluid into the animal itself. With all scientific trials you really need to have a control.

MR WALL: Certainly, the control with the kangaroos would be those that are treated and the birth rate, against those not treated?

Ms Lane: The dart is actually a factor in this, so it is a variable that we need to consider as well.

DR BOURKE: Is it a blind trial? Do the investigators who are administering the drug know whether they are using the placebo or the contraceptive?

Ms Lane: Yes, I believe they do.

MR WALL: I am curious about the weed management strategy. This first question would relate to the role of this directorate against, say, EPA and parks and gardens in TAMS. Is the environment department's role more of an oversight in a tracking and policy management area?

Mr Corbell: Generally speaking, yes.

MR WALL: The question related to page 28 of the annual report, which makes reference to a weed spotter website that was introduced. Could you give a bit of a

rundown of what the basis of that is and how it is being used?

Ms Lane: I am not right across it but—

MR WALL: The curly things you get asked at annual reports!

Ms Lane: Yes, very interesting. It is a similar concept to the Canberra nature map, which is about sighting a particular species. You actually upload it onto a site where it can contribute to the overall information and the database on location and also extent of weeds.

Mr Corbell: Our Landcare and ParkCare volunteers are increasingly using mobile smart phone apps to upload, with relevant GPS information, locations of either endangered plants and other species that they identify, or alternatively weeds, so that that can be used for overall data collection, focusing particular activities on the ground and sharing that information across ParkCare and Landcare groups and rangers at the parks and conservation service and so on.

MR WALL: Is the weed spotter website a public portal or is it an internal one for parks and—

Mr Corbell: It is public.

MR WALL: Are there any checks done of the integrity of the submissions that the public upload onto that website?

Mr Corbell: I would have to take some advice on that.

Ms Lane: Similar to the Canberra nature map, we have experts who can actually identify species from photographic evidence or else by going out onto the ground.

MR WALL: If I took a photo of fireweed in Tharwa and said, “This is in west Belconnen”—

Mr Corbell: I think you would have to upload the GPS data from your phone. So if you are taking a photo, it will have the GPS coordinates.

MR WALL: It would largely depend on the phone and its capability.

Mr Corbell: Sure, but I think generally the way these applications are operating is that you get the GPS information sent, along with the visual image.

MR WALL: What was the cost of developing this portal? Take it on notice; that is fine.

Mr Corbell: I will have to take it on notice, Mr Wall.

MS LAWDER: Are we able to move on to resource recovery, waste management, in output class 1?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS LAWDER: My question is about the current ACT waste levels. The annual report talks, on page 33, about new material recovery facilities. It talks about the waste management strategy, and achieving full resource recovery and a carbon neutral waste sector. The ACT government had previously talked about ensuring that the growth of ACT waste generation is less than the rate of population growth. Do you know whether that is currently being achieved?

Mr Corbell: The government has commissioned a very comprehensive assessment of waste streams because they have not been done for some time, including decision-making around which waste streams are counted consistent with interstate methodology, as well as broader waste streams that are not counted by other jurisdictions, to get a more complete picture as a whole in terms of our waste stream. That work is close to finalisation. The government will be receiving some further advice on that and then will be in a position to communicate to the community what that analysis has shown.

MS LAWDER: The annual report talks about diverting organic waste from landfill that would otherwise break down and release greenhouse gases.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

MS LAWDER: What does that involve? How are you diverting organic waste from landfill?

Mr Corbell: For example, through our Actsmart programs we are running waste food collection activity and encouraging the private sector in particular to pursue that as an alternative to relying on waste to landfill collection. This has proven to be very popular. As an example, at the AIS, which is a participant in the government's Actsmart program, they have ceased, to a large degree, sending their waste food to landfill, to rubbish collection for landfill. Instead they are diverting it to a private worm farm business. So it is cheaper for them to dispose of the waste and it is also providing for that resource recovery and reuse. Those are the types of activities we are supporting through Actsmart.

MS LAWDER: In some cases some organisations might have the Actsmart system in their own office space but there are no separate bins that are collected by the landlord, for example.

Mr Corbell: They do not necessarily need it. For example, you can engage directly with the worm farm operator and they will collect the waste for you and provide the receptacles for that. The worm farm operators have become quite entrepreneurial in identifying possible waste food sources that allow them to collect that and to recycle it. In the 2014-15 financial year organic material redirected from landfill by participants in the Actsmart program comprised 1,676 cubic metres of waste food. As unpleasant as it sounds, it is the same with hair from hairdressers and so on; they are recycling as well.

MS LAWDER: Does the ACT government collect figures about waste that leaves the

ACT?

Mr Corbell: This has been one of the weaknesses in our current legislative framework. At the moment it is very difficult. The way to capture this data is to require reporting of the private waste sector's collections and disposals. It has been very difficult to do that for cross-border transfers of waste outside the ACT. The existing legislative framework does not give the government any power to compel or require that data to be provided by the private commercial waste sector.

The government is currently looking at options to reform its waste legislation to allow us to have a stronger reporting framework so that we can identify comprehensively where commercial waste collections are going, insofar as if they are not going to ACT landfill. We know where they are if they are ending up at ACT government landfills or recycling sites, but if they are going across the border at the moment we do not have full visibility on that, and there is a need for legislative reform. Minister Rattenbury and I, given our respective responsibilities in TAMS and Environment, have agreed on that approach and that work is well underway.

MS LAWDER: In the budget there was a proposal for a waste to energy facility. I know previously you have spoken about gasification and pyrolysis or plasma gasification. What is the government considering in this financial year to use that money in the budget to look at waste to energy?

Mr Corbell: That was included in the TAMS budget; that is my advice. The government's general view was that there remains significant potential to reduce organic material, in particular, going to landfill through the potential development of a waste to energy plant. But that was always contingent on the development of a business case that was robust.

What has changed—and we know anecdotally and from our own observations of where landfill waste is ending up—is that there has been a significant increase in transfer of waste from the ACT to interstate facilities. That has led to the government undertaking the work I referred to in answer to your previous question, which was about the need for a stronger legislative framework to allow us to identify and get reportable data on where waste is going.

It also relates to my earlier answer in relation to our assessment of waste streams. The government is recalculating where waste is going and what the overall level of waste is in all of our waste streams, because there have been changes in recent years as a result of these interstate transfers, and once we have settled what is the new baseline, in terms of waste disposals and movements in the ACT, and the overall volumes in the respective waste streams, we will then be in a position to make further decisions about energy to waste facilities.

MS LAWDER: If we have a per capita waste level and we are looking to ensure that that does not increase, or that it decreases, when you are doing the work you are undertaking to examine how much waste we are generating, will you include the waste that is leaving the ACT as well? Is that what you have said?

Mr Corbell: There are two issues here. First of all there is an agreed formula for

comparing levels of resource recovery across jurisdictions. So you include this waste stream, this waste stream and this waste stream, and that is a consistent approach across jurisdictions to allow a cross-jurisdictional comparison. The advice the government has is that that is a legitimate cross-jurisdictional comparison and we will continue to report on that, but there are also a whole range of other waste streams that are not actually captured by that formula. We are probably the leading jurisdiction now in getting a comprehensive picture that does not deal just with the reportable waste streams but with all of them.

That will mean there is potentially some variance between the reported figures that simply focus on the agreed waste streams for reporting, and the broader, complete number of waste streams that actually exist. So the good news is that we will have a very comprehensive picture of waste streams in the territory, and that will allow us to move forward with some of these other options, such as waste to energy, with a high level of confidence about what is going on, in terms of waste.

THE CHAIR: Minister, the annual report mentions progress at the Mulligans Flat woodlands sanctuary and that the population of the eastern bettong has grown from 32 to more than 200. I gather that is a very good result. Could you tell us what is in the pipeline for Mulligans Flat over the next 12 months? There was funding in this year's budget.

Mr Corbell: I may defer to my colleague Minister Rattenbury as Mulligans Flat is indirectly administered by Territory and Municipal Services. There is obviously the trust that fundraises there. EPD is involved from a research perspective, clearly.

THE CHAIR: So that is EPD's involvement, the research partnership?

Mr Corbell: Yes. The day-to-day management is the responsibility of the trust and Territory and Municipal Services staff.

Ms Ekelund: Minister, if I may, as the minister said, a lot of the day-to-day management is not undertaken by our agency. But certainly what you have mentioned about the success of the bettong breeding program is true. We are continuing a scientific research relationship with Tasmania to have a look at the possibility of introducing quolls into the area as part of the hierarchy of species that originally existed in these areas. In fact, some people would suggest that the breeding program has been so successful we might need a higher order predator to maintain the population of the bettong.

THE CHAIR: And that would be a quoll?

Ms Ekelund: Yes.

MR COE: This is in a way a follow-up to that. With regard to the interaction between TAMS and EPD, I guess the majority of the on-the-ground people are TAMS workers. With that in mind, how do TAMS staff feed into environment policy?

Mr Corbell: The key link is through the conservation, planning and research capability of the Environment and Planning Directorate. We actually have quite a

large scientist-based capability in conservation planning and research—ecologists, biologists, others—and they are the people who work day-to-day with the ranger staff and other land managers in TAMS.

If you want to think about it this way: TAMS provides the on-the-ground land management capability and EPD provides the scientific capability. That comes together in the development of policy for the management of reserves, threatened species and so on. We actually have quite a large number of scientists based in conservation planning research.

MR COE: Are there formal structures as to how that communication occurs?

Mr Corbell: Formal and informal, yes.

MR COE: Is this since the days of self-government that there has been that differentiation between planning policy and rangers, or has TAMS or urban services ever been both the policymaker and the manager of the ranger service?

Mr Corbell: It has varied over time. If you think about the very early days of self-government that was the old Department of the Environment, Land and Planning or DELP, as it was known. That was an environment department with environment policy functions, but the parks and conservation service and certain land management functions still sat in the urban services department, to the best of my knowledge. So it varies.

I think people can get very hung up on these structures. The important thing is how it works on the ground and how effectively are the land managers able to share their expertise with the scientists and the policymakers in developing and finalising plans of management and developing and finalising strategies for a range of things, whether it is weeds or feral animals or kangaroos or whatever it might be. I think the runs are well and truly on the board in terms of demonstrating that that work gets done and gets monitored and implemented, and there is a very close working relationship between Parks and Conservation Service staff and conservation, planning and research staff.

MR COE: Is there any duplication in PCL with regard to policy? I assume that PCL also have ecologists and science capabilities?

Mr Corbell: Not to my knowledge, no. You would have to ask TAMS that question; I cannot answer for Territory and Municipal Services. But the science capability sits within CPR and EPD. That is not to say there may not be people with particular qualifications who are working as rangers, but they are being employed as rangers; they are not being employed as scientists or researchers per se.

DR BOURKE: Minister, in regard to the ACT and region catchment management coordination group, are you able to give us an update on the progress this year as you have you been setting that up and what you are looking forward to achieving?

Mr Corbell: Thank you very much, Dr Bourke. This coordination group has been established under the Water Resources Act, and the Assembly agreed to that

amendment earlier this year. The objective is to have a formal forum for coordination between different levels of government and different parts of government, community and research institutions and industry on catchment management not just in our city but in the broader region.

To that extent we have representatives of the commonwealth through the National Capital Authority given their responsibilities for the management of the waters of Lake Burley Griffin. We have Queanbeyan City Council, Cooma, Monaro, Palerang also engaged given their responsibilities for land management in those areas of the catchments that come into the ACT or that abut the ACT directly. There is also Yass Valley. There are representatives of the New South Wales state government given their responsibilities, and then there are representatives of the ACT government and ACT entities, such as Icon Water, given their responsibility for catchment management in certain parts as well. It is great to have all of those entities together. We also have a community representative.

The amendments made by the Assembly to the act provide for an independent chair. I have announced the appointment of Professor Ian Falconer, AO as the new independent chair, a statutory position, of the coordination group. He has a very lengthy academic career in environment toxicology on water quality. He was one of the experts engaged by the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council on the basin consultative committee for the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin plan. He has very extensive experience in this area. He is widely respected for that, and his job will be to be accountable to me on the operations of the coordination group and ensuring that it continues to be a high-level forum for information sharing and coordination on catchment management issues across all of those stakeholders.

DR BOURKE: I realise it is very early days with this group, minister, but has anything come to fruition as yet?

Ms Ekelund: If I can add some detail, the first meeting with the independent chair will happen next week. I have been the interim chair until the announcement of Professor Falconer. We have had a number of meetings already and we have started work on an integrated catchment management strategy with all those stakeholders.

We have also been able to facilitate a dialogue that is now happening between Icon Water and Queanbeyan City Council and us to a broader extent about the longer term solutions for sewerage treatment for Queanbeyan and looking at a regional approach to managing effluent from Queanbeyan, which, of course, from time to time impacts the lake and, therefore, is of interest to the National Capital Authority and the Australian government too. Already good work is being undertaken by the catchment coordination group, and the catchment coordination group has also been having an overseeing role, in terms of the basin project and providing good feedback into that work.

In addition, the minister referred earlier to community consultation that we have been undertaking in relation to the basin priority project. We have also been undertaking broader community consultation and research into what the community feels about water quality and the use of water assets in and around the city through the interim catchment coordination group.

The other local government areas around the ACT and also entities like Icon Water were very keen to be involved in that research and understand what the community feels about water. There are a number of areas that the catchment coordination group have been working on and providing feedback about.

DR BOURKE: How do you plan to get some Indigenous input into this catchment group?

Ms Ekelund: Part of the work that we are doing in relation to the water resources plan does involve Indigenous input. You would be aware that we have an Indigenous NRM facilitator who works in our environment area. He has been involved in work with the Indigenous community about water values, which is informing the water resources plan under the Murray Darling Basin plan. That in turn has an iterative relationship with our planning for the integrated catchment management. We definitely are working to inject Indigenous values and thinking and people's views through the integration catchment strategy.

MR WALL: Minister, page 34 of the annual report talks about action plan 2. Action No 5 talks about the climate change community engagement strategy that was released in 2014 and how the directorate continues to implement the key aspects of the strategy. Could you provide some examples of how this strategy is being implemented and how the impact the initiatives are having is being measured?

Mr Corbell: They are two separate things, Mr Wall. In terms of communication, as you can see in the report, mechanisms are being used, like the Actsmart sustainability website, which is designed as a one stop shop for Canberrans to get advice on reducing energy use, improving energy efficiency and reducing other resource use, recycling and so on. It allows Canberrans to get access to those services provided by EPD or other agencies, but it also allows them to get information on what the latest analysis is telling us about climate change impacts from the known science on the impact of a warming climate, in particular.

In addition to that residents in the ACT are able to access what is known as the NARClIM project which is also outlined in the report. NARClIM is the NSW/ACT regional climate projection. This was a two to three-year research project funded largely by the New South Wales government but had a contribution from the ACT government to include the ACT in it. For the first time we got down to a very fine grain of detail about what climate change projections look like at a 10-kilometre grid scale. That is very, very powerful because you can see local variances in terms of what the projections tell us based on a range of possible scenarios. You are able to go to that website, put in your address and find out what it means for your local area.

It has been very useful in the New South Wales context in terms of regional variations, farmers, land managers and so on, as well as in cities. Again it is very useful here in the ACT because, when you look at it, you can see the differences between what a hotter, drier climate means for the urban area versus what it means for our mountain forest areas to the west or what it means for our grassland areas. That is a really important capability that is also publicly available. Those are two examples of how people are able to access information and get directed towards information on climate

change matters.

In terms of implementation of action plan 2, I am required to report under the act yearly on progress on implementation of our action plan and progress towards our legislative climate change targets. I will be releasing the latest report on that shortly.

MS LAWDER: I have a general question. You spoke in your opening, minister, about renewable energy and that we are trying to reduce the impact on our environment. Given that we are trying to minimise the adverse environmental effects of energy provision, I am interested in the siting of the solar farm at Williamsdale and the impact regarding 116 medium, high and exceptional quality trees that may have to be cut down at the current site. Do you or your department put in a submission to the DA in defence of those medium, high and exceptional quality trees and suggest a different site? How do you, as the environment minister, balance those competing priorities?

Mr Corbell: Site selection and securing necessary approvals for the development of solar projects—it is the same for wind projects—is the responsibility of the proponent under the government’s solar and wind auction architecture.

In relation to the particular site that you refer to, the site was previously identified for a solar farm by ActewAGL in the first solar auction round. They were obviously unsuccessful. As part of that process ActewAGL secured approval for the use of the site under the commonwealth’s environment protection and biodiversity conservation legislation, the EPBC legislation. They submitted an application for use of that site as a solar farm to the commonwealth.

The commonwealth assessed that, because it was potentially an action on a threatened community or ecosystem under the commonwealth legislation. The commonwealth determined that application and granted their approval, consistent with the EPBC legislation for the site. That approval is still extant and applies for the new project. Indeed, the new project is smaller in total area than the original proposal that received the approval from the commonwealth under the EPBC legislation. There is a rigorous independent assessment of impact and that occurs through, first and foremost, the EPBC legislation.

There is also, potentially, a requirement for environmental impact assessment under the ACT legislation or the ACT planning law. In this case the Minister for Planning determined that no further environmental impact assessment was required because of the EPBC approval and the issues assessed by the commonwealth through that approval. That being the case, the environmental impacts have been looked at twice—once very deeply and once as a sort of check. The project is able to proceed to development assessment stage.

MS LAWDER: The land proposed for the development is not high, or threatened by a diversity value, but some of it might technically qualify as low quality yellow box-red gum grassy woodland. If it was moved 200 metres more to the north and the west it would further reduce the number of high and exceptional quality trees that would need to be cut down.

Mr Corbell: These are matters that would be considered as part of the assessment for a decision on the development application and could potentially be matters subject to condition of any possible approval.

MS LAWDER: I understand that. I guess what I was asking was: as the environment directorate, do you put forward a view on those things?

Mr Corbell: The environment and planning directorate assess the impacts as part of the assessment and determine whether or not they are reasonable and satisfactory, consistent with the EPBC approval. The EPD in this respect is the regulator, not the proponent. Dorte, did you want to add at all to that?

Ms Ekelund: I guess Minister Gentleman could be asked the question next week because it is his responsibility.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

Mr Corbell: Renewable energy projects are private sector projects. Yes they have a contract with the ACT government for the supply of renewable energy, but they are not owned by the ACT government, they are not financed by the ACT government and they are not developed or operated by the ACT government. They are private projects and they bear the risks and the responsibility for approvals under that project.

MS LAWDER: I understand that. It just seems an interesting tension between the loss of some exceptional trees which cannot be offset when we are all trying to achieve a particular environmental outcome. It seems to be at the expense of another area.

Mr Corbell: Well, I look forward to your questions in relation to tree removal in new suburban areas, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, would you be able to give us an update on progress towards our renewable energy targets? I should say: congratulations on your appointment as patron of the Solar Council.

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Ms Fitzharris. We are making significant progress in reducing the ACT's reliance on the fossil fuel powered electricity supply for the city. This is, of course, the single largest source of the city's greenhouse gas emissions, albeit not emitted in the territory but driven by consumption in the territory.

Our current assessment is that we are well on track to meet the targets. We have got the Royalla solar farm up and operating. We have got two others in the pipeline, including the project I was answering questions from Ms Lawder about earlier. We have got three large wind farms now under development—two in Victoria and one in South Australia—and we are currently conducting an auction for a further 200 megawatts of wind energy generation. I expect to see advice on the proposed successful bidders for that auction very shortly.

We expect by 2017 that these projects will secure 65 per cent of the territory's total electricity needs from renewable sources. So by 2017, when these projects are operational, 65 per cent of our electricity—65 per cent towards the current statutory 90 per cent target.

THE CHAIR: What are the economic benefits to the territory?

Mr Corbell: I am sorry, I should just be clear. That does not include the second wind auction projects.

THE CHAIR: The 65 per cent?

Mr Corbell: The 65 per cent refers to the three existing wind farm projects under development and the three existing solar projects in development or operational. If you were to add the second wind auction and the potential capacity associated with the next generation solar proposals, that would deliver enough renewable energy generation to achieve 80 per cent of the total 90 per cent target by the year 2018. So we are well and truly on track to achieve those targets.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a sense yet of what will make up that remaining percentage?

Mr Corbell: That will be driven by assessments around, first of all, electricity consumption in 2020, which does change over time, so we need to keep our analysis contemporary. There are a range of options for us to pursue. There may be further wind or solar projects to be supported or there may be other forms of technology, such as energy to waste, that will come into play. Obviously sitting on top of that is the government's political commitment to a 100 per cent renewable energy target by the year 2025.

I have asked my directorate to complete the detailed architecture needed to move to that as a statutory target. At the moment our statutory target is still 90 per cent. I will need to make a new determination to move to the 100 per cent commitment the government has determined it will make. We will be outlining further what that means in terms of renewable energy project support at that time.

THE CHAIR: Do you expect to do that next year?

Mr Corbell: I expect to do that at the completion of the review of action plan 2, which is scheduled to be completed late this year, early next year.

THE CHAIR: The annual report mentions the renewable energy investment development strategy.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell us more about the benefits of that for the territory as a whole?

Mr Corbell: What this strategy highlights is that switching to renewable energy is not

just an environmental policy and an environmental benefit, as important as that is. It is also an economic opportunity. There are significant levels of investment globally in the renewable energy space. Many billions of dollars are being spent annually globally on the shift to low carbon energy generation. The ACT is a knowledge-based economy, an innovation-based economy. We should be getting our fair share of that global growth in expenditure.

The renewable energy industry development strategy includes 25 local and international partners across government, research, finance and the renewable energy sectors. Let me run through a few of those names. There is the ANU, through its Energy Change Institute, Windlab, Reposit Power and large global operators like Siemens, GE Energy and Vestas. There is the CBR Innovation Network, the Griffin accelerator, Australian Capital Ventures and ANU Connect Ventures. We have a mixture of venture capital, international renewable energy developers, local renewable energy developers, and research and academic capability.

We have secured \$1.2 million worth of funding entirely from the private sector as a result of the government's first wind auction. We expect to see an ongoing contribution in our second wind auction because we have again made economic development, local investment, a criterion in our assessment for the second wind auction. There are a range of actions that we will be pursuing. First of all, we will be looking to utilise the funding in the renewable energy innovation fund, that \$1.2 million. I expect to make announcements about funding rounds later this year.

We are looking at supporting the deployment of household-scale battery storage in the ACT. This is going to be a fundamental change to the way the energy system, the electricity network, operates. There are some significant opportunities to build investment and grow local Canberra business through this. For example, Reposit Power is a company that was actually founded in Sydney and moved to Canberra. It is now based here and is growing its business here in Canberra. It is very focused on the rollout of batteries in the household sector. There are a range of opportunities like that that we are pursuing through the renewable energy industry development strategy.

THE CHAIR: Are you able to tell us yet what that would look like in the household sector?

Mr Corbell: We are looking at what the availability of batteries means for household electricity use and the operation of the electricity network overall. The directorate held a workshop with key stakeholders, including many of the ones I mentioned earlier, earlier this year. They looked at issues including the rise of the so-called "prosumer" household, so both a producer and a consumer of electricity. They were looking at micro-grids. This is the capacity for precincts, particularly educational and health precincts, to have their own grid with their own generation and storage capability, significantly reducing their reliance on the broader network.

We have looked at what the opportunities are there. They are significant. The ACT is well placed to capitalise on these very early changes that are starting to occur in the electricity market. We will be looking at how we can utilise our existing legislative structure to support this shift and see more households able to take up batteries and sell electricity at a time that is beneficial for them, and also reduce their overall

reliance not only on non-renewable sources but also on the network, and the need for the network to spend millions of dollars on augmentation to meet increases in demand.

THE CHAIR: How do the ACT's renewable energy targets compare to other states and territories?

Mr Corbell: The ACT has the strongest renewable energy target of any state or territory. South Australia has a very strong target. Their target is based on the amount of generation they host, not on the amount of renewable energy they use. So obviously, being a very hot, windy place, South Australia do pretty well in terms of hosting generation, but they do not have anywhere near the same commitment to actually purchase renewables for their own supply and their own operations, although I note yesterday the South Australian government committed to the purchase of quite a large amount of renewable energy for its own government operations. That is a significant announcement from that state government. The ACT is well and truly in front when it comes to actually sourcing renewable energy to reduce our emissions associated with the electricity supply.

THE CHAIR: The targets and the progress against the targets have been advantageous in terms of developing the industry here as well?

Mr Corbell: Yes. It is a direct and explicit requirement of our auction processes—requiring companies that bid in the wind auction, for example, to demonstrate not just how they deliver cheap large-scale renewable energy that is affordable for consumers but how are they going to invest in the city, how are they going to create jobs in the city, how are they going to support research and innovation in our education and tertiary sector institutions and how are they going to grow local-based start-ups.

There are some really great examples of that. Windlab I have spoken about frequently. It is a Canberra-based start-up, growing its workforce here, growing its headquarters function here in Canberra, investing in the ANU and investing in research. As to some of our other wind auction winners, the French company Neoen is spending \$7 million on the CIT to build Australia's first skills development, skills training capability in wind turbine operations. At the moment the companies that build wind turbines in Australia send their engineers and their technicians to Europe to be trained in how to maintain the turbines. That is crazy. They should be trained and skilled here, and that is exactly what the CIT capability will deliver.

THE CHAIR: It is the first one?

Mr Corbell: The first in Australia, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR COE: Minister, I was wondering if you could please give an update as to how the directorate is dealing with bullying in the directorate.

Mr Corbell: I will refer to the Director-General on that.

Ms Ekelund: We take very seriously what we call the people matter survey and

responses to concerns from staff about making sure that there is good strategic leadership and making sure that staff have good support in terms of performance, development, et cetera. We do not have any formal reports of bullying in the past 12 months in the annual report, but we certainly take a proactive role in ensuring that our staff are aware that if any such event happens they should contact a senior officer or HR to make sure that any issues are dealt with straightaway.

MR COE: When you say there was no bullying reported, what constitutes reporting?

Ms Ekelund: There has been no formal or informal recorded report of bullying or harassment that has gone to our HR people or to the RED contact officer in the reporting period. Bullying and harassment are always a subject of what they actually constitute, but under the government's RED framework we communicate to staff about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not acceptable behaviour.

MR COE: In the 2014 survey, when 27 per cent considered bullying and harassment an issue, how has that been addressed?

Ms Ekelund: We have been doing a lot of communication and training throughout the directorate. We have had a program of staff development and education programs about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not acceptable behaviour. Subsequent to that, we have been getting good feedback from our staff that they believe the organisation is supporting them in the entirety, in all the aspects, of what the people matters survey addressed.

MR COE: Twenty-seven per cent in that survey seemed extremely high: one in four people in the directorate are saying that bullying and harassment are an issue.

Ms Ekelund: I think they said they may have observed it. I am afraid I do not have that report in front of me, so I can only take your word for that statistic.

MR COE: Is that the correct statistic, though?

Ms Ekelund: As I said, I do not have it in front of me. The statistic from people who suggested that they had experienced it was much lower. All I can say is that we take this issue very seriously, we have a very active staff communications and training program, and we have had no reports of bullying and harassment occurring over the last period.

MR COE: I see the 27 per cent, but I understand that, with the staff snapshot, 20 per cent of people said that they had experienced bullying and harassment themselves. So when you say it is much lower—

Ms Ekelund: I am sorry, Mr Coe, but if you are making that comment, I think I would have to take a question on notice in terms of exactly the report that you refer to.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, what is that report?

MR COE: The staff snapshot. The staff snapshot, I believe, said that 20 per cent of people had experienced bullying and harassment. These are significant figures. Surely

someone here is across these figures: that one in five people in the directorate are saying they have experienced bullying or harassment?

Ms Ekelund: Mr Coe, the directorate is actually quite a different directorate from what it was at the time of the snapshot, and we are undertaking further work. The communication, and I sit on the staff consultative committee, is very positive in terms of the organisation dealing with concerns that staff have had in the past.

MR COE: Perhaps you can help us out. When was the staff snapshot completed?

Ms Ekelund: I am sorry; we have reported in the annual report. I think again we will have to take it on notice if you are looking at exactly the detail that you are referring to.

MR COE: Right. I am just amazed that these figures can be so high yet they are not top of mind in the management approach to this. Surely when you received survey results such as that, it is clear to see there is a concern—

Ms Ekelund: That is why we have a program—

Mr Corbell: I think the Director-General has been quite clear, Mr Coe, in explaining that the directorate does take the matter seriously, that a comprehensive program has been put in place. I think Ms Ekelund is also pointing out that the staff snapshot you are referring to, to the best of my knowledge, did not actually occur in the last financial year. I think it occurred in the financial year before that. So it is not directly reported in this annual report. It is nevertheless an important issue. I think Ms Ekelund has outlined a broad range of steps that have been taken over a sustained period to fundamentally work to turn these issues around.

MR COE: What was the course of that? Obviously in the past year you have been turning that around. In order to turn it around, you have to identify what the problems are. What problems were identified?

Ms Ekelund: There was concern in the organisation that people were perhaps not listened to enough; that there was, I guess, a blokey attitude in parts of the organisation; that there was a need to work more closely between managers and staff and have open lines of communication; and that there was concern that there were not enough opportunities for direct performance feedback and communications between supervisors and staff so that there could be good open lines of communications through all levels of the organisation. There was a multitude of areas; and to train staff about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not acceptable behaviour, and make sure that all levels of the organisation demonstrated respect for each other.

MR COE: How have you measured the success of that training or retraining?

Ms Ekelund: We have been monitoring, making sure that most of the staff actually— it is expected that everybody attend training, and we do staff surveys from time to time. There has not been a recent one that has brought it on in here, but we do test the feelings of the staff through the staff consultative committee and we have made a people matter item for discussion each time we meet with the staff consultative

committee where we ask people whether there is any feedback, any concerns that we need to address. People would know that there is an open line for communications to HR if there are any concerns. There are multiple avenues through which we get feedback about the sentiment of our staff.

MR COE: What was Optum engaged to do?

Ms Ekelund: I might defer to Bruce Fitzgerald.

Mr Fitzgerald: Optum was engaged to do a number of workshops with staff cutting across multiple areas so that they could identify where there were issues and what those issues were. Most of the issues identified were, as Ms Ekelund said, in relation to the means of communication. That is what that consultancy did. At the end of that work, it also included a staff survey, which showed a general improvement in the bullying statistics.

MR COE: In terms of what happened in the last financial year, were more surveys undertaken? I understand there were focus groups undertaken. What—

Mr Fitzgerald: There was a survey taken early on by Optum. That did show signs of improvement. We still had work to do, which we have done. We had work to do in training our staff in having a difficult conversation; we have done that work. We have also engaged CIT to do some work in managing underperformance, which was one of the other items identified that we lacked the training ability to achieve.

MR COE: What proportion of the workforce undertook that survey that Optum did?

Mr Fitzgerald: We have been averaging around the 30 to 40 per cent mark when it comes to the surveys, which was consistent with the original people matter survey.

MR COE: Is there any concern that those who have been bullied or feel as though they have been bullied, or those who, for one reason or another, are not confident with the arrangements that are in that 60 or 70 per cent, are not being surveyed or are choosing not to be surveyed?

Mr Fitzgerald: We have opened up other channels to ensure that that happens. As Ms Ekelund said, we have also put in place the directorate consultative committee, which meets monthly and provides an outlet for staff to provide that feedback as required.

MR COE: What is that consultative committee? Is that something in other directorates, and how is it comprised?

Mr Fitzgerald: The consultative committee is made up of the Director-General, Deputy Director-General and staff who are able to nominate for that committee from a cross-section. It also has a union representative.

MR COE: With regard to the union representation, has the CPSU formally approached you with regard to bullying in the directorate?

Mr Fitzgerald: No. We are in contact a lot with the CPSU; we keep them engaged in all of our work with staff. They are very happy with our response to date as to what has been happening.

MR COE: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Thank you; we might take a break.

Sitting suspended from 3.31 to 3.49 pm.

THE CHAIR: We will resume the hearing. Dr Bourke, your question.

DR BOURKE: Minister, can you tell us some more about how the government is supporting households to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions in a safe way through the energy efficiency improvement scheme?

Mr Corbell: The energy efficiency improvement scheme continues to reach more and more households each and every year. During the reporting period we are dealing with today, there were 20,807 Canberra households that reported receiving activities under the energy efficiency improvement scheme. Of these, approximately a quarter, or 4,788 households, were priority, low income households, which is well above the mandated level of low priority households needing to be supported under the scheme.

The types of activities we have seen across these nearly 21,000 Canberra homes in this period include: sealing around window and door gaps, draught sealing; incandescent lamps being replaced with compact fluorescent lamps; halogen lamps being replaced with LED lamps; standby power controllers being fitted in audiovisual or information technology environments, people's home computers or stereos or TVs; and the decommissioning and disposal of energy inefficient refrigerators and freezers.

The abatement achieved through these measures is, for the 2014-15 year, just under 160,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, with just under 35,000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent claimed for low priority households alone. That is a really significant achievement. It highlights that we can save households significant amounts of money. The average saving to households as a result of these measures is estimated at \$3.19 per week in 2020, noting that participating households will see greater savings, and at least 20 per cent of the savings will continue to accrue to low income households.

It is for all these reasons that the government has extended, with the support of the majority of the Assembly, the energy efficiency improvement scheme out to the year 2020 and that we have also expanded it to include small and medium enterprises so that they too can reduce their electricity costs, reduce their operational costs, and at the same time contribute to the task of saving energy and reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions.

DR BOURKE: Are you able to tell us more about what is being done for low income households?

Mr Corbell: A requirement of the legislation is that at least a quarter of all households assisted must be low income households. They are so-called priority

households. As you can tell from those figures I just quoted, we are reaching more low income households than is required under the legislation. That is a fantastic outcome.

Obviously this program is delivered as a mandated obligation by the electricity retailers, and here in Canberra that means it is ActewAGL. There are other retail electricity providers in the ACT. They are choosing to discharge their obligations because of their low customer numbers, household numbers, by making their payments directly to the scheme administrator. That allows us to spend that money on similar measures.

But the bulk of the work, over 90 per cent of it, is being done by ActewAGL through their contractors. I have to say that they are well and truly meeting their obligations and we are, in particular, seeing a very significant number of low income households being identified and provided with this assistance to reduce electricity costs for those households.

DR BOURKE: Of course, that is on top of the outreach low income energy and water efficiency program?

Mr Corbell: Yes, that is on top of the outreach energy and water efficiency program. That is quite right. That is an additional program that is not administered through the energy efficiency cost-of-living improvement scheme but is instead administered through government grants to third-party providers to assist low income households.

Outreach energy and water goes beyond the measures available under the EEIS and is an even more intensive, targeted approach to assist low income households to reduce both their energy and water costs and therefore improve their household budgets and reduce pressures on budgets which are largely fixed income. It will be a pensioner, someone on unemployment benefit or, indeed, someone on a low, fixed income.

DR BOURKE: And this is about providing them interest-free loans, I understand, to supply refrigerators and washing machines, freezers or even reverse-cycle air conditioners?

Mr Corbell: We are providing no-interest subsidies to be provided by Care Financial Services and the Salvation Army, and that is being used to allow households to upgrade some of their appliances at no interest. Forty-two households have received the no-interest subsidy to date. That is a really good initiative, because it allows them to get the capital they need to purchase the new fridge or the new dryer or washing machine or whatever it may be, to upgrade to an energy efficient model. Obviously they do not have interest associated with that, just pay back the principal, which is important for low income households.

DR BOURKE: And substantial savings will arise for low income households from that program?

Mr Corbell: Yes, there are significant savings. The assessment is that in terms of greenhouse and energy savings, based on their appliances and retrofits achieved in 2014-15, there was the equivalent of 540 megawatt hours of energy and 240 tonnes of

CO₂ equivalent. That is significant in terms of the abatement being achieved. Unfortunately I do not have a savings figure in front of me but I will see if we can get that for you.

MR COE: I have a supplementary. Is there a need for the new appliance to actually be more energy efficient or is just an assumption that a new appliance will be energy efficient?

Mr Corbell: Based on the national energy efficiency schemes that apply to all white goods now, the bottom line is that they are more energy efficient than older models.

MR COE: If, for instance, somebody did have one that was only a year old and they replaced it, is that allowable?

Mr Corbell: No, we are talking about old appliances, not relatively recent models.

MR COE: Are they allowed to get ones that may consume more energy because they are larger but still be more efficient?

Mr Corbell: The objective is to have a higher rating energy efficiency standard for the appliance. Obviously the nature of the appliance that a household gets will depend on their circumstances. They may have kids, they may have—

MR COE: But could someone replace, for instance, an old bar fridge with a new double-door, massive fridge?

Mr Corbell: No. The focus is on the primary appliances. These are low income households.

MR COE: I am just curious about the—

Mr Corbell: What we are talking about is an old fridge, an old kitchen fridge needing to be upgraded, an old washing machine, energy intensive, not very water efficient, being upgraded, those types of measures.

MR COE: But would it be permissible to replace an old, small machine with a new, much larger machine?

Mr Corbell: It would depend on the household's circumstances.

DR BOURKE: I think if a family were relying on a bar fridge that would be a terrible circumstance.

Mr Corbell: It is difficult for me to comment on individual circumstances but the point I make is that these are subsidies provided through Care Financial Services. These are no-interest loan subsidies delivered by Care Financial Services and the Salvation Army. They are provided to low income households. These are households still with limited capacity. It is not like they are going out and buying a top-of-the-line, massive fridge. They are getting the no-interest loan so that they can fix a problem with an old fridge or an old washing machine that costs them money simply because it

is old and is chewing up far too much electricity. That is what it is about.

There are checks and balances there where we are dealing with low income households; it is administered through those third-party providers who are familiar with the financial circumstances of those households and their needs.

DR BOURKE: After all, it is a loan. They still have to pay the money back.

Mr Corbell: Exactly. There are limitations, obviously. There is still significant constraint on those household budgets, because they are low income households.

MR COE: They are not all loans though, are they?

Mr Corbell: As I understand it, we have moved to the no-interest loan subsidy scheme.

MR COE: As of when? There was a time in the—

Mr Corbell: January this year.

MR COE: Prior to that they were not necessarily loans?

Mr Corbell: No. We were providing up-front costs for capital purchase.

MR COE: Given that you have spoken about the needs of the families that are low income, why would you in effect shift it from being a free item to a loan?

Mr Corbell: It is simply a more efficient use of our resources, in terms of being able to support more households through that loan mechanism.

MR COE: You said 40 households have taken advantage of that?

Mr Corbell: Forty-two.

MR COE: How many took advantage of it under the previous scheme when it was not a loan?

Mr Corbell: I would have to take that on notice.

MR COE: Thank you, please do.

Mr Corbell: In terms of the dollar savings for households at an aggregate level in 2014-15, 1,840 low income households were assisted through the outreach low income energy and water efficiency program. That aggregates to savings across all those households worth over \$106,000. That is the total across all those households.

MR COE: But that also includes converting halogens to LEDs, does it?

Mr Corbell: No. This is only in relation to the savings achieved on the outreach activities, not the activities delivered under EEIS.

THE CHAIR: Dr Bourke, any further questions on that?

DR BOURKE: No, thank you.

MR WALL: Minister, I want to ask you a couple of questions in relation to your announcement today to expand the wood heater replacement program and apply it to not just gas heaters but also to electric heaters. What is going to constitute an energy-efficient electric heater?

Mr Corbell: The reason the government has decided to provide a rebate for replacement of wood heaters in homes with electric heating systems, which will be reverse-cycle air conditioning systems most likely, is that the emissions intensity of an electric heating system is anticipated to be less, significantly less, than that of gas. The reason for that is that with the government's 90 per cent renewable energy target mechanism now well underway, and the fact that the territory's electricity supply is effectively going to be significantly decarbonised by the year 2020, the greenhouse gas profile of an electric space heater is better, much better, because it is powered by renewables, compared to a gas heating system.

What we are simply doing is giving people the choice. People can still use the rebate for gas if they wish, but there are risks with gas in terms of both the price and obviously the carbon intensity of it compared to electric space heating.

DR BOURKE: Maybe you can talk a little about the gas price and the electricity price and what people are saying might be happening in the future with them.

Mr Corbell: Yes, gas prices have been fluctuating very significantly over the past three to five years. The reason for that is that the domestic gas market price has aligned with the international export price for gas as a result of the decision on the part of a number of gas developers—the people who run the gas fields—to open up their domestic production for possible export. Therefore, the international price, export price and the domestic price have pretty much come into balance. If there is demand for Australian gas internationally, that means gas consumers domestically pay more. They pay similar to what is being paid for the gas internationally.

There are risks, therefore, in the long term in terms of stability in the gas price. In addition, here in the ACT, gas prices are not regulated. There is no regulated tariff for gas in the ACT. It is a deregulated market. Therefore, consumers are potentially vulnerable to significant fluctuations in the gas price. Given the level of gas space heating that is already in Canberra homes, the government feels that if we are encouraging people to make the shift away from wood heating, they should have support either to go with gas, if they feel that is the option they want, or alternatively use electric space heating because it is not subject to some of the same risks that gas fuel prices may present for household budgets in the medium term.

MR WALL: Has any consideration been given to expanding the scheme to older less efficient electric heaters?

Mr Corbell: Older less efficient?

MR WALL: Or old inefficient electric heaters?

Mr Corbell: You mean for replacement?

MR WALL: There are a number of old space heaters across the territory that—

Mr Corbell: For replacement?

MR WALL: Yes.

Mr Corbell: No. The primary objective of the wood heater replacement program is to improve air quality and, in particular, to deal with particulate matter pollution that comes from wood heater use. You would be familiar with the fact that that is an issue in places like the Tuggeranong Valley and elsewhere.

MR WALL: Look, it certainly is. I am more—

Mr Corbell: That is the primary purpose of the rebate: to stop people using wood heaters as their primary source of heating because of the air pollution problem. But in addition to that, we are saying, “If you are going to make that shift, you will have a choice as to whether or not you can have electric space heating or gas space heating as the replacement.”

MR WALL: Yes. You made the observation, minister, that part of the reason that it is being expanded to electric heaters is because of the cost fluctuations and price uncertainty around gas. Wood heating still remains one of the cheapest and most economically efficient forms of heating. Also, wood-fired heaters have come a long way, particularly in recent months, with new emissions standards that are amongst the best in the world. Has that changed the government’s thinking at all on, I guess, the use or the suitability of new wood-fired technology heaters being adopted by Canberra families?

Mr Corbell: This is not about people installing new, efficient wood heaters. It is about people who have got old, inefficient, polluting wood heaters.

MR WALL: But certainly, the government—

Mr Corbell: And that is what the program is about.

MR WALL: has taken a position to prohibit people from installing wood heaters in new homes, which—

Mr Corbell: No, that is not correct. What the government has said is that in a limited number of circumstances in the city, because of the nature of the airsheds where some new development is occurring, such as the Molonglo Valley, there should be a requirement for you to seek approval should you wish to install a wood heater. That is actually what the mechanism is. You need to get approval to install one. There may be limited reasonable grounds where a household believes that they should be permitted to have one and you can seek approval for one. But the government has not prohibited

the installation of wood heaters across the city per se. That is not what the government has done. It is limited in relation to particular airsheds where the environmental assessments are particularly vulnerable to the inversion layer effect in winter and the impact that particulate matter from smoke has on people's health.

In terms of the costs of wood heating, what I would say is that it may be possible to make that claim about the relative costs of wood heating, but only if you exclude the costs of the health impacts on others and on the health system associated with particulate matter on the very young, on the elderly and on people with chronic lung and heart conditions.

MR WALL: I point to some of the new heaters for which the particulate matter being released is almost zero.

Mr Corbell: Yes, I have no argument with that. But that is not what this program is about.

MR WALL: Yes, I understand that, but—

Mr Corbell: This program is about the old polluting wood heaters that create significant pollution problems in immediate residential neighbourhoods and that contribute towards our still seeing some days in winter in particular where we exceed the national standards for particulate matter.

MR WALL: The question, therefore, is: why not then include the new technology wood-fired heaters and biofuel heaters as part of this scheme?

Mr Corbell: Because even new heaters produce some form of particulate matter.

MR WALL: Despite them still being an effective form of heating?

Mr Corbell: The objective is to reduce the amount of particulate matter—airborne particulate matter—that contributes towards our having exceedences against the national pollutant standard.

MR WALL: When someone takes part in this scheme, either in its current form or in its revised form as of Monday, what are the requirements for the disposal of the old wood-fired heater?

Mr Corbell: It has to be surrendered to the government; to the government's contractor or service provider.

MR WALL: The entire unit or just a component of the—

Mr Corbell: I would have to take that—I assume it is the entire wood heating box.

MR WALL: Could you take it on notice.

Mr Corbell: I will take it on notice but you have to surrender it.

DR BOURKE: Minister, just to clarify, you are not prohibiting people from replacing old inefficient wood heaters with new efficient wood heaters. You are merely not providing a subsidy to do it.

Mr Corbell: No, that is right. If people want to upgrade to a new wood heater they can do that but they will not be getting a rebate for it. That is right.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can you give us some further detail on progress with the Actsmart program over the reporting period?

Mr Corbell: Yes. There are eight major programs being delivered under the Actsmart banner. They include services delivered to low income households, businesses, schools and the community sector. Under the Actsmart banner we have the outreach program that we were talking about earlier; we have the wood heater program, which we have just talked about; we have a new home energy advice service that provides free advice to households on how to improve the energy efficiency of their home; we have the Actsmart business recycling program which has seen 695 businesses and other institutions across the city sign up to that recycling program; we have got the Actsmart public event recycling program that supports public event recycling.

That is used at, for example, events like the Multicultural Festival and others as well—Floriade, for example. We have got the Actsmart energy and water program that assists government agencies to reduce their energy and water use. That has, for example, been deployed here in the Assembly I know. And we have got the Actsmart business, energy and water program that helps businesses reduce their energy and water consumption. It is quite a broad suite of programs being delivered under the Actsmart banner. We have also got the schools program and we have got some community partnerships as well.

THE CHAIR: Do you have any information on the savings that it is delivering to households and businesses?

Mr Corbell: Yes, it would depend on the individual subprograms but I will give you an example: in the business recycling program, there are 695 individual sites signed up. There has been a reduction in waste to landfill of just under 50,000 cubic metres of waste. There has been just under 12,000 cubic metres of mixed recyclables collected from those sites. There has been just over 1,500 cubic metres of organic material diverted from landfill. That is quite significant.

In terms of government operations, we have seen the Actsmart government energy and water program deliver savings from ACT government energy bills worth just under \$700,000—energy savings of 4,711 megawatt hours. That is reducing government operational costs and saving the taxpayer money.

THE CHAIR: Minister, do we do anything with the commonwealth government offices? Do we go in there?

Mr Corbell: Yes, that is rolled out across public sector agencies. So that includes ACT government agencies but it would also include some commonwealth agencies, and also there are some interesting other participants. There are a number of

diplomatic missions that also use it. Finally, to give you an example, there is the Actsmart business energy and water program; 115 businesses have received an assessment and 81 of those have received a rebate to implement the measures identified in the assessment. The total business energy bill savings estimates for those 81 sites is \$198,000, which is quite significant in terms of electricity bill savings for those businesses.

THE CHAIR: In the annual report, on page 218, the original target for increases in the number of businesses or offices assisted to improve energy and water efficiency was 10 per cent but the actual result was 27 per cent. There is a variance of 170 per cent. It notes that that was due to the large number of tenants at the Tuggeranong Hyperdome being successful and receiving the accreditation.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Can you tell us more about that particular one? That is significant.

Mr Corbell: Yes, what has been very pleasing is that the owners of the Tuggeranong Hyperdome have chosen to accredit their entire site, including all of the retail tenants, I think with the exception of a couple of the big ones like Woolworths and so on that have their own programs. That is very significant. But all of the smaller retail tenants signed up; so that is a significant number of businesses that are participating.

THE CHAIR: Have other large shopping centres in Canberra been signed up previously?

Mr Corbell: No, we have not been successful in getting the Westfield chain on board. They run their own program, which is different from ours. They run one at a whole-of-centre level and the Canberra Centre has not yet taken up the program.

THE CHAIR: Do you know what IKEA do?

Mr Corbell: No, I do not but perhaps that is an avenue for further investigation. I imagine they have got quite a strong corporate sustainability program themselves because they have got a lot of solar on their roof, for example.

THE CHAIR: They do?

Mr Corbell: They do. They are putting solar on all of their rooftops at all their stores across Australia.

THE CHAIR: They have got some big roofs—flat roofs.

Mr Corbell: Yes, they do and they are utilising them very strongly.

THE CHAIR: And the same for the one that is opening on Monday.

Mr Corbell: Yes. The one here has quite a large solar array. I am not quite sure how large it is but it is significant.

THE CHAIR: Under the Actsmart home energy advice program launched last year—the user pays in-home energy efficiency assessment—15 people took up that offer. Would you hope to see that increase over the course of the next year?

Mr Corbell: I think this is a program where it would be good to see it grow. Energy efficiency advice, to get it done well does take time. We believe it is important that households make a slight contribution to that so that we are able to provide something that is valued by the household and something they are more likely to act on. Certainly that is an area for further promotion.

MR COE: What is the threshold between free advice versus the one we have to pay for?

Mr Corbell: The one you have to pay for provides some more home-specific assessments whereas the free advice is obviously more general in terms of its application.

MR COE: In terms of the free advice, how is that contract managed? It is done externally through ActewAGL, isn't it?

Mr Corbell: No, it is a separate provider.

MR COE: Did ActewAGL win that contract or not?

Mr Corbell: No, they did not.

MR COE: Is that on a per home basis or is it a fixed contract and they just try and, in effect, fill their slots?

Mr Corbell: I am sorry; I do not quite understand your question.

MR COE: Is the contractor getting paid per house or is it for a fixed number of houses that they have to go to and then you will revisit it after that?

Mr Corbell: I beg your pardon; I have inadvertently given you the incorrect information. I am reminded that this service was previously contracted but it is now being delivered in house by the government's own assessors. So it is not a tendered service anymore; it is an in-house service.

MR COE: Who did the contract before? Was it ActewAGL before?

Mr Corbell: No. It was previously provided through a company called—

MR COE: That is okay. I just thought it was ActewAGL.

Mr Corbell: It used to be called HEAT.

MR COE: The Home Energy Advisory Team?

Mr Corbell: Yes, and that was a private business.

MR COE: Going back to the survey or staff satisfaction and the like, I understand that there was a reference in research which suggested that political decisions were affecting staff satisfaction or creating additional stress.

Ms Ekelund: Could you repeat that, please?

MR COE: I understand that one of the surveys identified that political decisions were contributing to issues with staff satisfaction and/or staff stress. Could you expand on what political decisions might be affecting?

THE CHAIR: This is about a document that our officials do not have in front of them. If you have a number of questions you might want to consider putting them on notice, in fairness to officials who may not have a document in front of them that you are referring to.

MR COE: How about giving them the opportunity to answer that question?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MR COE: And then you can chime in after that.

Ms Ekelund: I would say the individuals who responded to the questionnaire would have had their own perceptions of what that meant. Certainly, there is no definition of that in the questionnaire, from my recollection.

MR COE: However, it was highlighted as being an issue from the staff survey, so I was wondering how that is being addressed. What action items or recommendations have been constructed on the back of those surveys or the Optum research, which hopefully is guiding how you deal with it?

Ms Ekelund: Public servants work for elected representatives. We are paid to deliver on the policy objectives of governments. Governments make decisions within the framework of the democratic system. How a person would interpret that question would be up to the individual.

MR COE: It has been highlighted as something that is affecting staff satisfaction and contributing to stress.

Ms Ekelund: I do not believe that that report was in this current annual report, so I do not believe it is appropriate to try and answer that. We will do future surveys of staff to test the feelings of staff at the moment about their working environment. As I said earlier, we are very committed to making sure that we have a very healthy and productive work environment and we take staff satisfaction levels very seriously.

MR COE: Can you point me to where in the report bullying would be included? Would that be a human resource issue?

Ms Ekelund: There is a statement, as I mentioned earlier, that confirms that there have not been any reports, informal or formal, of bullying provided through our RED

framework or to our HR people.

MR COE: But that is in contrast to the fact that what I believe is in here is a contract to Optum EAP which is, in part, dealing with this issue. I am curious as to what recommendations have come down as a result of that Optum consultancy.

Ms Ekelund: I think we mentioned it earlier, and I will give you a couple of comments from the notice that went out to staff today on our operations in relation to the people matter strategy that we have. It is a multipronged strategy. I alluded earlier to the fact that we are upping work in performance management and leadership and ensuring that our senior and middle management are involved in decision-making and get briefed about what is happening. We have been gathering information from focus groups. We have invited anonymous feedback. We have had one-on-one interviews and a staff snapshot, which was mentioned earlier, which retested the 2014 results.

We have been seeking reports back to the executive and we referred it earlier to the directorate consultative committee as well, which we mentioned was a mixture of staff at all levels and representatives of all parts of the organisation. We take it so seriously that we make sure that the director-general and/or the deputy director-general attend all of these meetings.

The four areas that were identified in the people matter survey that were a priority to our staff were about leadership, making sure that we provided good strategic leadership and support for our staff; that we formalised and ensured performance management was committed to and followed through throughout the organisation; that we provided opportunities for staff to ensure they had good learning and development opportunities; and, as you alluded to, Mr Coe, that we address very clearly the unacceptability of bullying and harassment in our organisation.

We have done many activities in all of those four areas since the Optum report came out and the Optum work with our staff. We have also embodied these principles and activities in our corporate plan.

MR COE: Was that emailed to staff today?

Ms Ekelund: It did go out to staff today.

MR COE: What was the cost of the Optum consultancy?

Mr Fitzgerald: I do not have the exact number here. I know the contract details are listed in the annual report. We have not to date expended all of that money. That was the total contract.

Mr Corbell: Madam Chair, just before we continue could I provide you with further clarification in relation to the work of the home energy advice service. Unfortunately, my earlier advice was also incorrect. I apologise to the committee for that. The home energy advice service, I am now definitively advised, is outsourced for advice provided over the phone or by email. The provider is paid per inquiry and the provider is a business known as Cool Planet. The in-home assessment is also undertaken by Cool Planet.

MR COE: If you are able to clarify the contractual basis, and whether it is per home—you can take it on notice—that would be handy.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

DR BOURKE: Minister, can you tell us a little more about what the ACT government is doing to reduce its own emissions, and particularly the carbon neutral government fund?

Mr Corbell: The carbon neutral government fund is a really effective way of saving taxpayers' money, incentivising government agencies to reduce their energy consumption and allow them to free up money that would otherwise be spent on electricity bills to focus on the key areas of service delivery and other activities. The government decided to reallocate money associated with the purchase of green power and government electricity contracts to instead reduce electricity and energy consumption overall through the establishment of the carbon neutral government fund. The fund had funding available when it was first established to the quantum, if I recall correctly, of around \$3 million. Since that time a range of loans has been made to government agencies to reduce funding. In the 2014-15 financial year, applications for six projects worth \$3.5 million were received, and a range of programs has been supported.

Let me give you an example. The largest is the one that was announced recently. It was a \$3.31 million loan to the Health Directorate for a major LED lighting upgrade, and the establishment of a 500 kilowatt solar and PV system at the Canberra Hospital. That will achieve payback of the loan principal in eight years. After that the Health Directorate will continue to accrue those savings annually and will be able to redirect those to other areas of health service provision.

Another good example is the Education and Training Directorate. They received a loan amount of just over \$1.5 million for various sites, 10 schools, to replace old lighting with LED lighting, with a payback period of six years. Another good example is an LED lighting retrofit at ACT libraries in the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate. It had a payback period of four years, a loan amount of \$137,000 and a reduction in electricity use at these sites of 30 per cent. The total value of loans supported has been \$9.8 million since 2009 for 18 separate projects.

DR BOURKE: Where is the PV installation at the Canberra Hospital going to be? Sorry, maybe it is the wrong directorate.

Mr Corbell: I am happy to take it on notice. I am sure we can get that detail from Health. If I recall correctly, it will be on the multistorey car park site and a number of other buildings, but I will clarify that.

DR BOURKE: Was that something that the Canberra Hospital initiated and sourced? How does the process actually work about locating and decision-making around these allocations?

Mr Corbell: As part of the funding for this the government has enabled a capacity in

house to support directorates in their assessment of energy and water saving opportunities across government. That capability has assisted those directorates to identify the best ways of reducing their electricity consumption, in particular. They put forward proposals to EPD and are then assessed as to whether or not they are suitable for the loan fund.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wall.

MR WALL: I have one question. At page 216 of the annual report under the output for the environment, total costs for the financial year, there is a 41 per cent variance. It is noted as being due to an increase in the transfer of water entitlements to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Is there a cost implication for the transfer of those water entitlements to the authority?

Mr Corbell: Water entitlements have a financial value and they are being given to an entity outside the ACT government but Mr Fitzgerald can expand on that.

Mr Fitzgerald: That is correct. As part of the living Murray initiative, water entitlements were surrendered to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Those assets did have a value to the directorate and on surrender that forms a cost then to the directorate. That was not initially factored into our budget allocation, which is why they appear.

MR WALL: Is that just a one-off transfer?

Mr Fitzgerald: Yes.

MR WALL: It is a transfer of the entitlement for year on year, rather than just a one-year entitlement?

Mr Corbell: The entitlements are for an extended period. They are a result of an agreement made between the territory and the commonwealth and, indeed, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to make a contribution towards water entitlements for the Murray-Darling Basin river health.

The way the ACT is acquitting its obligations in relation to that agreement is to purchase an amount of high security water entitlements. I think it is high security, or is it general security? Yes, it is general security water entitlements and then surrender that to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, therefore, has additional environmental water available for environmental management in the Murray-Darling Basin as a result.

MR WALL: The expense at issue was the ACT government going out, purchasing the entitlement and then surrendering it to the commonwealth?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

MR WALL: Does the ACT government currently hold any other water entitlements under the scheme?

Mr Corbell: Not to my knowledge. ActewAGL hold a number of water trading entitlements associated with their capacity to utilise the Murrumbidgee to Googong transfer capability. But they have their own commercial arrangements in relation to those entitlements.

MR COE: ActewAGL or Icon?

MR WALL: I beg your pardon, Icon Water.

MR WALL: And has the territory government now fulfilled its commitment or obligation under the agreement with the commonwealth and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority?

Mr Corbell: Yes. With the transfer of these entitlements we have fulfilled our obligations under the living Murray agreement.

THE CHAIR: Minister, we now move to questions for the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. I understand the commissioner, Ms Wright, is not with us. I was reminded by the secretary of a recommendation from last year's annual report hearings which was:

The Committee recommends that the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment update the Committee during—

these hearings—

on progress on defining ecologically sustainable development for annual reporting requirements.

Mr Corbell: I think it may be best if I take that question on notice and provide a written answer to the committee on that. The commissioner can provide it.

THE CHAIR: I think that during estimates and in the last annual report hearings the commissioner spoke to us about the state of the environment report which is due shortly. Do you expect that to be released early next year?

Mr Corbell: The most recent advice I have from the commissioner is that the commission is on track to meet their reporting obligations in relation to the SOE report.

THE CHAIR: And when the report comes out what is its purpose?

Mr Corbell: This is a mandated obligation on the part of the commissioner set out in the commissioner's legislation. It is a regular reporting requirement of the commissioner to produce a state of the environment report. If I recall correctly, it is every four years. It is meant to provide a comprehensive assessment of the state of the territory's environment and the challenges and issues associated with those matters.

MR COE: Staying in the corporate space with regard to internal audit at page 87 of the report, would you please advise what the motivation or the need for the IT unauthorised access and control was?

Mr Fitzgerald: We have a number of business critical systems across the directorate and given that we had not looked at this area for a number of years we decided that it would be useful to check, just as an assurance, that those systems are still operating as we expected.

MR COE: I know, of course, it is a diverse directorate in terms of all the planning capabilities and everything else and running all those systems it is inevitable there will be issues. But what are some of the recommendations and what are some of the take-outs as a result of the audit?

Mr Fitzgerald: Generally the audit found that controls were strong. Most of the issues identified were around reporting and making sure that changes to access were logged and reported correctly.

MR COE: On that third dot point, the environmental authorisations, what is the genesis of that audit?

Mr Fitzgerald: The recommendations have transferred across to Access Canberra as part of the EPA. The reason for that is very similar to the IT space. We have a three-year program of audits trying to cover all aspects of our work. It had been quite a while since we had looked at environmental authorisations and, given the changes to the EPA Act, we thought it would be worth while to look at that one.

MR COE: Finally on that fifth dot point about implementation of prior audit recommendations, have all the prior audit recommendations been implemented or are there still some outstanding?

Mr Fitzgerald: We have a very good success rate in completing audit recommendations. This audit found that there was one that was still outstanding. It was a very minor issue related to our internal corporate calendar and making sure people are aware of upcoming events. Generally speaking all of the recommendations that we said we had completed had been completed on review.

MR COE: Not just the ones that had been marked as completed but also the ones that had not been marked as completed?

Mr Fitzgerald: This audit focuses on ones that are marked as completed to double-check that, in fact, the recommendations have been included.

MR COE: There could still be ones that are not marked as being completed and are still, in effect, to be completed?

Mr Fitzgerald: They are reviewed by the audit committee on a quarterly basis. All recommendations are reviewed and questioned by the audit committee.

DR BOURKE: Minister, can you tell us a little more about natural resource management programs, in particular those designed to engage with the local Indigenous community. The audit talked a little in regard to water but maybe you could elaborate on other areas where this is happening?

Mr Corbell: We have some very strong levels of engagement with Indigenous-based activities when it comes to natural resource management. I ask Ms Lane if she can come up and talk about what is happening in this space in a bit more detail.

Ms Lane: One of the wonderful things about natural resource management is that it cuts across not only environmental issues but also we can use it for social and educational outcomes as well. And this is really highlighted in the Aboriginal NRM space. We have an Aboriginal liaison officer in NRM, as we have one in heritage as well, and he has embarked on a program with JACS to go into the Alexander Maconochie Centre and work with the detainees there to give them some skills in natural resource management, for example around germination, propagation, weed management and so on, so that they have the opportunity to perhaps take up that kind of work on release. But also it is a very important cultural element as well so that they have an opportunity to reconnect with natural resource management and country.

We also work in schools with Greening Australia and work there with Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids, again around those natural resource management skills and connecting to culture and country. We also run in the Alexander Maconochie Centre things like basket weaving, which has proved to be really very popular. We also run those with staff and broader groups as well. It is a suite of different activities connected to NRM and culture, and we do that in partnerships with other directorates and non-government organisations.

MR WALL: My question relates to the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment and is in two sections. I start on page 219 of the EPD annual report and the accountability indicators there. Point b said that there were no minister-initiated investigations for the year. When was the last time that there was a minister-initiated investigation referred to the commissioner?

Mr Corbell: That would probably be the report into water quality in Lake Burley Griffin which would have been—

MR WALL: And when was that?

Mr Corbell: About two years ago.

MR WALL: In the report it states about two years ago.

Mr Corbell: To the best of my knowledge. I am happy to give you a more precise figure if you like.

MR WALL: Point c states that the commissioner did not initiate any investigations during this period. When was the last time the commissioner initiated an investigation of their own accord?

Mr Corbell: I would have to take that on notice and ask the commissioner's office.

MR WALL: The others questions I have relate to the commissioner's annual report. At pages 8 and 9 it has the status of complaints lodged from 2012-13 through to the

reporting year. I was after an explanation as to why the complaint from 2012-13 is still pending.

Mr Corbell: I am very sorry but the commissioner is not with us today.

MR WALL: That is okay. If they are taken on notice, that is—

Mr Corbell: I ask you to put the questions on notice and the commissioner can provide you with a response. I am reluctant to put myself into the shoes of an independent office-holder on this matter.

THE CHAIR: Minister, on a couple of occasions today you and officials have mentioned volunteers in this space, both advocating for and conducting research on environmental climate change sustainability issues. How many volunteers are engaged in programs across the territory that might—

Mr Corbell: “Quite a large number” would be the simple answer. Last night, for example, I had the opportunity to go to the ACT Landcare awards. There would have been 150 people there last night, most of them volunteers or coordinators in the Landcare area. Our Landcare groups engage hundreds and hundreds of Canberrans, at the very least, and if you look at the number of other people who tune in and out of those groups and participate in events, such as those conducted by Greening Australia and others, there would be thousands. These are quite remarkable activities that our land carers, our park carers and also our water watch volunteers undertake.

In the water watch program volunteers cover around 90 sites across the ACT and surrounding region catchment. There are over 160 volunteers in five catchment areas. They have undertaken over 1,500 water quality surveys, they do water bug surveys, riparian condition surveys. That is quite a significant body of work and that is just by the water watch volunteers.

When you look at what the Landcare volunteers do, in weed removal, erosion control, revegetation as well as monitoring and vegetation counts and other species counts, it is quite a remarkable effort.

THE CHAIR: And you mentioned earlier the weed spotter app that some of them use. Are there other examples of mobile technology that is being used to allow the community to better engage?

Mr Corbell: Yes. The most recent and contemporary example is the Canberra nature map, which is an app-based capability. It is mostly targeted at the Landcare volunteer community but the nature loving community more broadly. And it allows people to identify rare or endangered plants and map their location using the app and a GPS location from their smartphone. Then that information can be shared across that broader conservation community.

Canberra nature map won an award last night, the people’s choice award, at the Landcare awards. A significant number of volunteers—hundreds of volunteers—have been engaged in the use of that app just in the last 12 months or so.

THE CHAIR: Is there a connection—it may not be in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate annual report—with CBR in delivering a nature play app? It did say that directorate was TAMS. There is no connection between the two?

Mr Corbell: No.

THE CHAIR: Any further questions, members? No. That wraps up the proceedings for today. I thank you, minister, and all the officials for coming in today. Members, there are three days for any supplementary questions to be taken on notice. Minister, if any questions are taken on notice today the answers should be provided to the committee by Friday, 26 November. That would be greatly appreciated. Today's hearings are adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 4.50 pm.