



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Members:

MS Y BERRY (Chair)
MR A WALL (Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER WALL
MR B SMYTH

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 23 MAY 2013

Secretary to the committee:
Dr B Lloyd (Ph: 620 50137)

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 11.09 am.

Appearances:

Bega Valley Shire Council

Taylor, Mr Bill, Mayor

Tegart, Mr Peter, General Manager

Bombala Council

Stewart, Mr Robert John, Mayor

McCrinkle, Ms Ngaire Anne, General Manager

Boorowa Council

Corcoran, Mr Christopher, Deputy Mayor

McMahon, Mr Anthony James, Assistant General Manager

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council

Lynch, Mr Dean, Mayor

Vucic, Mr John, General Manager

Eurobodalla Shire Council

Brown, Mr Lindsay, Mayor

Dale, Dr Catherine, General Manager

Goulburn Mulwaree Council

Kettle, Mr Geoff, Mayor

Berry, Mr Christopher, General Manager

Palerang Council

Harrison, Mr Pete, Mayor

Bascomb, Mr Peter, General Manager

Queanbeyan City Council

Overall, Mr Tim, Mayor

Snowy River Shire Council

Thomson, Mr Fergus, Councillor

Vescio, Mr Joseph George, General Manager,

Upper Lachlan Shire Council

McCormack, Mr Brian, Representative

Bell, Mr John Keith, General Manger

Yass Valley Council

Abbey, Ms Rowena, Mayor

THE CHAIR: Good morning everyone and welcome to this first public hearing of the Select Committee on Regional Development. Today the committee will speak to and hear from member councils of the South East Regional Organisation of Councils. I also welcome representatives of the Bega Valley Shire Council. Today's hearing

will take the form of a roundtable discussion between the members of the committee and council representatives. This way we can make the best use of our time. We have three hours, and the committee wants to make the most of this opportunity.

With this in mind, I would like to ask participants to keep a few things in mind. One is that when you speak, each time you speak, could you please say your name. This will help Hansard create an accurate record of what is said today. The second thing is that the committee wants to hear from everyone. If people are mindful of the need to share the floor, we can do that. Otherwise, I may need to give directions from time to time so that everyone can be heard. Third, you should be aware of the privilege statement sent to you by the secretary and available in hard copy on the table in front of you. The statement sets out the obligations and protections that apply to witnesses in committee proceedings.

The fourth and final thing I have to say to you at this stage is that today's hearing is divided into four sections. In each of these the committee hopes to focus on one of the points from section 5 of the terms of reference for the inquiry—term 5(a), coordination for economic development; term 5(b), service planning and delivery; term 5(c), collaborative procurement; and term 5(d), cooperation on environmental and conservation matters and building community resilience in the face of adverse events. Forty minutes has been allotted to the discussion of each of these terms. Members of the committee will ask some questions. The main emphasis is to have a productive conversation and discussion about the important issues to be considered by the committee during its inquiry. Without further delay, we will begin the discussion on coordination for economic development.

I will kick things off. The literature on regions in Australia talks about the flow of populations to major cities and challenges in growing economic activity. It also comments on the very different situations that can apply to different regions in Australia. Could you, as mayors and chief executives, paint a picture of the economic scenarios and challenges facing your local government areas to provide a context for our discussion? Yes, Rowena.

Ms Abbey: Yass Valley is one of the fastest growing rural areas of New South Wales in terms of additional people. That is from the recent statistics that have been issued by the New South Wales state government. One of our issues in terms of trying to manage that growth is that we are waiting for a new LEP to be gazetted by the state government, which has been coming for some time—we are still awaiting that—which will allow us additional growth to try and meet some of the needs and the pressures that we are under in terms of new businesses, areas for growth in housing, as well as commercial, retail and business growth. We are under quite a bit of pressure on all sorts of facets to provide more availability for growth in our area, which is quite strong.

THE CHAIR: Mr Overall.

Mr Overall: I will comment similarly but a bit differently. Queanbeyan City Council is a local government area that was, until some six years ago, often reported to be the fastest growing inland regional city in Australia, including Canberra. Our growth has slowed over the last seven years, but it is expected to regain that very high growth

status over the next 20 years. The population is now 42,000, our local government area, and over the next 30 years we are projecting, along with the department of planning of New South Wales, a population in the order of 70,000 to 75,000. That carries with it enormous pressures with regard to infrastructure and transport—roads and transport—and a number of other aspects. Madam Chair, is now the time to put forward some thoughts in regard to that?

THE CHAIR: Yes, please do.

Mr Overall: With regard to transport, there is clearly an opportunity for a much better coordinated approach to the development of transport-related matters right across the region. We have ongoing issues with the Kings Highway and the Barton Highway. They seem to be managed in a somewhat ad hoc manner. The transport demand is already significant in terms of Queanbeyan, as over 70 per cent of Queanbeyan residents travel across the border every day, and that includes 2,000 school students commuting into the ACT. That is according to the 2006 census. The regional transport demand is projected to double as the C plus one region population grows to over 600,000 in the next 20 years.

Public transport in the regions, whilst well catered for in the ACT, is really poorly serviced in adjoining New South Wales. A lot of cross-border legislative processes and regulations frustrate the regional approach to public transport, as has been highlighted during our discussions over the last couple of years in terms of publicly owned bus services, privately owned bus services and different regulatory regimes. This has contributed to an increasing am-pm peak travel problem. Traffic congestion at the border of ACT and New South Wales is a high priority for the local regional community, but I submit it still has a low-priority status for both the ACT and New South Wales governments.

We have the Majura parkway, of course, scheduled for completion in 2016. Detailed traffic studies conducted by council and its consultants have determined that the Ellerton Drive ring road extension to the east of Queanbeyan—at an estimated cost of some \$44 million to \$50 million—is required by 2018-19, based on the detailed traffic modelling studies by the RMS and council. A long-term funding agreement needs to be put in place with regard to that major piece of infrastructure involving the commonwealth and, no doubt, the New South Wales governments.

Extra lanes and upgrades of both Pialligo Avenue and Canberra Avenue need to be time framed and funded under an appropriate formula. I am recommending a joint regional and integrated transport study be commissioned to address priorities and time frames involving the ACT, New South Wales and commonwealth governments, and regional councils.

I would also like to highlight a major issue that we have regionally as it concerns Queanbeyan—that is, water supply and purchase. Queanbeyan's only water supply option is to purchase water from ACTEW. We are recommending that a cross-border water supply and purchase memorandum of understanding be developed between the ACT government and the Queanbeyan City Council embodying principles including a no-disadvantage provision regarding water access and pricing.

Negotiations between Queanbeyan City Council and ACTEW on a new bulk water agreement are continuing at the moment. It is five years since we last negotiated and the agreement requires a five-year negotiation. They are continuing, but we are waiting on the ICRC's final determination applying to Canberra water consumers before we are able to conclude those negotiations.

I would put forward that pricing principles should apply equally to end consumers irrespective of dotted lines on a map. That includes any revenue shortfall pricing that may apply. Of course, the ICRC in its interim report is suggesting a reduction in water prices and no revenue shortfall pricing adjustments, but we are waiting for that final report in July. At the same time negotiations are going on with Queanbeyan City Council where ACTEW are putting forward that Queanbeyan council needs to pay an additional \$7 million on behalf of its residents for a shortfall in revenue over the last five years during which we had water restrictions and did not use as much water. Therefore we did not pay ACTEW as much and, therefore, there is a revenue shortfall which needs to be caught up. What we are proposing is an MOU between the two jurisdictions for no disadvantage in water pricing for consumers.

The other aspect I would mention is tourism. The capital region is defined as a tourist destination in itself, but it is really not managed well from a regional perspective. There is clearly an opportunity—

THE CHAIR: Mr Overall, we might go to tourism after the break.

Mr Overall: Certainly, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: Does anybody else have any comments to make about some of the challenges economically within their region?

Mr Harrison: I just want to make a brief statement at this point. Like our immediate neighbours in Yass and Queanbeyan, we are also experiencing fairly rapid growth, in recent times in particular. For us in Palerang, where we do not have a major commercial centre, that growth is all tied to growth in the ACT and Canberra. In that sense, our growth, or the economic benefit of our growth, is flowing and facing the ACT.

In our particular case, the impact on our infrastructure is primarily associated with our population moving into the ACT and effectively providing economic benefit to the ACT. While it is recognised that there is not necessarily going to be a direct financial transfer out of the ACT, the significant benefit that we see in being involved with a broader development program is that, as a relatively small population centre with a fairly large area to service, there is a particular advantage for us in simply being involved in committees, organisations, within the ACT that are performing a similar function.

The advantage to us, as we see it, is significantly just being able to interact with people who are solving similar problems, not necessarily even with financial assistance or anything like that but simply having access to groups of people, organisations, committees, that are dealing with the same problems that we are dealing with. That enables us, as a smaller population, without having to make a great

investment in these sorts of structures, to actually derive some benefit from what is happening closer here to Canberra.

Mr Brown: The issue we face is that we have a very low area of development capability, yet we have continuing and increasing pressures on people relocating into the area. Currently we have, if not the highest, the second highest of non-resident ratepayers in the state; 37 per cent of our ratepayers do not live inside the shire. Hence we have a great number of vacant properties down there. Obviously we need to provide services to accommodate those properties, yet we do not have the money or the investment in the local area—so our businesses are struggling in that way. I think 11 per cent of our ratepayers are from the ACT, and obviously quite a large number are from the regional area, the Waggas, the Gundagais and the surrounding areas.

The other issue that we face is the transport matter which Mayor Overall mentioned earlier on. For example, the Kings Highway is closed for the next five weeks for three days at a time. Whilst it is very concerning to our community, there is also an impact on those on the other side of the hill, especially Canberra and Queanbeyan. We see transport as a major issue for us to deal with, but we are also mindful that the better we make the roads and the more transportable our employees are then we can actually have economic opportunities for people to work in the bigger centres and allow them to live locally down in our area. The biggest thing that Eurobodalla is concerned about is development opportunity. The economic growth is such that we are growing, yet we are having very difficult times trying to manage that growth.

We are also very concerned about transport regarding both the Princes Highway and the Kings Highway. The Kings Highway, in particular, is the only viable access we have. When it is out, it is about a five-hour drive to get from Canberra to the coast via Nowra. We need to really address these issues collectively. The mayor of Palerang and the mayor of Queanbeyan and I are working on that, but we would also like to have a lot more input from the ACT government because they are a major player in this and a lot of their residents invest locally in our community.

Mr Lynch: I am probably going to make some similar comments to some of the other mayors. Firstly, I applaud this great process. I was talking to Brendan earlier. Apparently this used to happen some years ago. So it is great. I think that for local government to prosper, we need to have more of these sorts of meetings, where we can all have that collaborative approach. So it is a great process.

Some of the issues we have involve our being a direct neighbour to the ACT, but we are all in this together. We have an issue that is probably similar to what was happening in Palerang. We have more and more people living in our community and commuting to Canberra. So that has its own issues. Transport has been highlighted by other people. We had a commuter bus operating on a trial basis for three months. There was an inquiry which looked at getting it going again for a further two years. That is an issue—public transport into the ACT. It is definitely something that is going to happen.

We have to try and collaborate. We just approved the biggest ever development in our shire, a development at Bredbo, which is obviously targeting the Canberra market, because those people will be living in our shire and coming in to the ACT. So that has

its own problems.

I have already raised with the Chief Minister that we had some issues with roads, coming in through the Goggin Road. For example, the gravel sources are coming out of the Cooma shire across our roads, to repair roads in the ACT. So there are some issues that we really have to address as we are probably bearing the brunt of the cost to benefit the ACT.

I come back to the collaborative approach. There is an area of our shire where our staff, our graders, have to drive through the ACT to get to a part of our shire, which is ridiculous. There should be some cost savings. For example, where our grader goes up that road, surely we could pay the ACT or someone to do that for us. That is a collaborative approach where we would save money in the process.

Talking about challenges, our challenge is probably in seeing our town grow. We all know there is going to be some decentralisation, and we want to be able to be collaborative, cost save and get some benefits for all, to benefit the ACT and ourselves.

Mr Taylor: Thank you for the invitation to the members of SEROC to attend this inquiry. We appreciate this opportunity. I will give a bit of background. Bega Valley Shire is a relatively large shire, like many of those here. We have a long stretch of coastline. We are about 7,000 square kilometres. We have, again, a relatively small population for that area—33,000 people. For a coastal shire, that is relatively small. Our growth rate has not been enormous but the opportunity is there.

Transport is one of our main issues. We do not have a railway line. I will come to something else in a moment. Because we are so spread out along a relatively narrow coastline, we have a number of towns and villages with relatively small populations. That means that we operate 10 sewage treatment plans. We operate three water schemes. We have six swimming pools. We have four libraries. And 75 per cent of our land area is state national park or state forest. When you split those up amongst 30-odd thousand people, you find that we have a sewage treatment plant for every 3,000 people in the shire. That is one of our issues.

That leads to our opportunity, because we are part of the wilderness coast, and that comes from having a small population. That is just one of the issues. The opportunities that our shire has, in cooperation with our neighbouring shires and with the ACT, include the fact that we have one of the deepest sea ports in the world, in Twofold Bay. It is ironic that in the centenary of the ACT we should be talking about Eden and the ACT, because Eden was proposed as the national capital at one point, and even part of the Monaro, various towns such as Dalgety and Bombala, were proposed. That was based on the fact that Eden was to be the seaport and not Jervis Bay. We would be quite happy to have the ACT take up a role around Eden and transfer from Jervis Bay, because that would enhance the opportunities for cooperation and collaboration into the future.

There are great opportunities in our shire. I have told you what the problems are. We are working on the opportunities. Our planning documents and strategic plans are in place, or almost in place. We would welcome more synchronisation and collaboration

with the ACT and surrounding councils to make sure that we are all working in the same direction, because we are all in this together.

Mr Stewart: I will give you an overview from our perspective. We would be one of the smallest shires in New South Wales, along with places like Boorowa. Our main issues down there are that the economy is rural and timber. We have 398,000 square kilometres of area with only about 2½ thousand people in it. We have 60,000 hectares of pine plantation that are just coming to maturity. We have been supplying a lot of wood to Tumut and Tumbarumba for their mill supply. Recently we have been successful in getting a state-of-the-art \$76 million investment by a Korean company, Donghwa, to process 250,000 cubic metres of wood a year out of our town, which has been a good boost for our economy.

Coming with that always are the challenges for us with heavy haulage transport. We have a lot of trucks going through. We do not have a good model of funding for that, to keep our rural roads up to a reasonable standard for our residents. We are in negotiation with the state government to try to get a better model to service these types of areas. We take significantly more heavy haulage over pretty ordinary roads and to maintain them is a big challenge for a small community.

We are moving along quite nicely down there. I think we have opportunities to help Eden out in the future with export. The Korean company are keen to develop their product to export out of Eden as that wharf develops. We are a great supporter of trying to get that happening, to advantage regional development.

We have a wind farm going up between Cooma and Bombala, or a proposed one that is nearly there. They are hoping to bring all the wind turbines and the stems through Eden, coming up through that area, to generate activity out of that, and to develop that wharf. A key area for the whole region is to try to take away from Port Kembla and try to develop that Eden wharf situation. I think there are a lot of advantages that we can all gain out of that in the future.

I think the upgrade of Canberra Airport is a great advantage for regional development and tourism for the whole region, not only for Canberra. I hope people down here support that development because I can see good advantages for everybody out of that, too. That is a bit of an overview from a small community that is just going along and trying to meet the challenges.

MS PORTER: A number of you have started to talk about coordinated approaches. Particularly just now you were talking about a coordinated approach between yourselves and Eden. You mentioned the airport as being another opportunity for some cross-coordination between ourselves and the region. Could people comment about other practical scenarios for the ways that we could have a coordinated approach in regard to economic development and creating jobs in your regions that will benefit all of us?

Mr Brown: I understand Boorowa are doing some work with the smart learning centre.

Mr Kettle: SEROC.

Mr Brown: SEROC is doing it. You might want to elaborate on that.

Mr Kettle: As well as being Mayor of Goulburn Mulwaree, I am wearing a second hat today as an executive board member of SEROC. I would like the opportunity for my general manager to speak on Goulburn's behalf, and then I would like to address some of the things that have been brought up and what SEROC is doing and trying to do in the region.

Mr Berry: The smart work centre idea is the concept of providing a work centre in a regional area to reduce the need to commute from the region into Canberra on a daily basis. By providing a smart work centre, the idea is that it is a contemporary office and meeting space so that people, rather than commuting, can actually go there and work, instead of contesting the commuter traffic on a daily basis. The idea was to come up with a trial. We have put an application forward for a trial of the centre, using one of council's buildings, to see if we can actually prove the concept. The idea is that it works where you have got a large commuter population. Certainly, Yass and Queanbeyan have already got large commuter populations. Palerang was mentioned before. But we have got a growing one. We have about 600 to 700 people commuting to Canberra on a daily basis. One of the options is that we are looking at reducing that number of people every day of the working week by two-thirds at least.

That was the concept of a smart work centre. It was linked in with the idea that the regional areas provide a potential solution to some of the urban problems of Canberra. For instance, in Goulburn we have a range of housing types, and it is certainly significantly more affordable—about 50 per cent cheaper than the median house price in Canberra. So it is an affordable housing solution, but recognising that some of the jobs would still be provided in Canberra, the smart work centre works in well with that idea of reducing the commuter need and providing benefit to the ACT as well as to the local community.

The other practical idea that Goulburn is working on in terms of providing a solution for the ACT is that we like to think of ourselves as the shed down in the backyard. We are quite happy to provide all the storage facilities at a fraction of the price that it costs in Canberra. At the moment we are working very collaboratively with a number of federal institutions as well as some state institutions in Sydney to provide storage facilities for collections—museum collections, library archives, that type of activity. It provides an opportunity at a lower price in a regional area and a small number of jobs, but there is still a strong connection back to where the main institutions are, such as the National Museum, state archives and the like.

That is another practical project that we are looking at and we are trying to advance that. We are pretty far down the track of finalising our business case, and we are using that at the moment to sit down with the institutions themselves to present them with a business case that we think is pretty compelling and will make it a fairly easy choice for them at the end of the day.

Mr Kettle: I am an executive board member of SEROC. As other mayors have indicated this morning, thank you for the opportunity to come along. SEROC was formed some two years ago to represent the interests of all its members. SEROC

represents all the local government areas surrounding the ACT, and we are very happy to now have the ACT as a member of SEROC.

The primary objective of SEROC is obviously to advance the interests of the region covered by its members and promote a sense of regional community, promote regional planning and sustainability, encourage and nurture suitable investment by getting all members of SEROC involved in and focused on developing regional cooperation and regional sharing. SEROC has also commenced some of those projects which are detailed in the submission herein.

So I think this inquiry is quite timely. Everybody here in this room is or will be members of SEROC, and I think that we are now a very strong lobbying body to federal government, particularly representing some—I cannot think of the exact number of the population, but with the ACT it is a substantial amount.

THE CHAIR: It is a good recruitment opportunity for SEROC as well.

Mr Kettle: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We will hear from someone from the other side of the table now.

Mr Lynch: This is probably in answer to you, Ms Porter. You referred to some practical approaches in collaboration. I just want to offer a couple of practical things that probably could happen pretty much straight away. Firstly, some of the issues we have raised here are with tourism and growth of tourism for the ACT.

I would just make the statement that down our way we have Tourism Snowy Mountains, and you would have seen the ads on television. That covers, of course, four local government areas, and I assume you are aware of that. That new board has just been set up. I know there is no representation from the ACT on that but I know the destination management plan has just been completed. As well, we have done our own plan in Cooma Monaro to fit into that. As you know, that is Cooma, Tumbarumba, Tumut, Snowy River and, of course, national parks. They are all members of that. The major ski resorts are as well. That destination management plan does speak about Canberra airport and that being a major part of building international tourism.

As a start, with tourism—and I can set that up, if you want to do it through me—I could have you come and speak to the board, make a representation and maybe want to be part of that. The new board had its first meeting last week actually. And it has got major backing from local governments in that area. So it is there. It has a great structure in place. It is funded. It is probably short of practical solutions. Some areas could probably benefit straight up.

Another practical solution, straight up again—this is again for our local government area but potentially could go further—is that we have just set up an economic development task force. We have not had a meeting yet but we are using a professional facilitator. We are funding that from our local government perspective. We have got our major corporate players in our region—Snowy Hydro is an example—and we are looking at economically long-term developments for our region

in the south-east.

Again, if someone from the Legislative Assembly wanted to come down and make a representation to that, our first meeting is going to be probably at the start of June, and that is going to have some real focus. That committee has got a sunset clause and is only going to go for six months, coming up with a paper to give some focus on development in our region.

They are a couple of practical examples where it could happen virtually immediately, if you so desire.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We have got a couple more minutes to go on this item. We will hear from Mr Bell and then Ms Abbey. If we have got time, we can come to someone else

Mr Bell: I just raise the issue that we are essentially the energy capital of all the shires around here. We have got 12 wind farms either under approval, approved or under construction. And we have got four gas-fired power stations as well, either approved or under the approval process.

There are a number of opportunities with respect to that which we see the councils in the area and the ACT government can utilise. There is a project already that SEROC are running, the South East Region of Renewable Energy Excellence's project, SERREE. That is a collaborative network of New South Wales and ACT government agencies, RDA Southern Inland, the South Coast, industry, education and community stakeholders.

That particular project has, as its objective, to boost growth and diversity in the regional economy, assist the region to grow towards greater environmental sustainability, enhance the provision of jobs and liveability in all of our local regional towns. So that is an opportunity that we see that is there. You have heard some issues, but obviously that is an opportunity that we see that is out there that should be grabbed with both hands.

Ms Abbey: I want to add, in terms of the general discussion, that obviously one of the big issues for most of us who adjoin the ACT border is actually growth that has, from the ACT perspective, reached its boundaries and is wanting to expand. For example, there is Mulligans Flat, which is just outside the Yass boundary. It is in the ACT area. I know Palerang, Queanbeyan, Goulburn and Upper Lachlan all have many of the same issues. I think it is something that we have to keep a little focus on in terms of a collaborative approach between planning and development, because there are big issues around water, sewerage and the provision of services, which I know we are going to talk about shortly.

There is that cross-border planning in terms of the provision of services in not just health and education but in water and the actual management of roads, infrastructure and the provision of power. They are pretty sizeable issues, I think, for pretty much everyone in this room and need to be put up near the top of the list of things that we have to resolve to actually help all of the areas grow. I think everybody is sort of

bursting at the seams and wanting to get on with things. And that is one of the things that if we do not get it right, it will be a problem for us all down the track.

Dr Dale: Just in terms of practical examples, recently we launched Australia's Oyster Coast, a collaborative between three councils. It is an example, I think, of bringing economic development together into a group that can then make sure that it has a common brand, and the hope is that the oyster growers from the South Coast will be able to have their oysters on plates in Canberra and Sydney that afternoon.

That brings me to the importance of regional airports. We have the Moruya airport, which we are hoping to further develop. That is a really critical part in trying to bring economic development together, but you need to have the infrastructure that can then move the freight or the oysters or whatever that might be into the major centres.

I think that is a really good example of collaborative working together in terms of having all the oyster growers across 300 kilometres of coast come together and launch a brand that will, I think, become exceptionally important into the future. So that is a practical example, but the importance of regional airports is really critical for us.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that.

Mr Overall: Following on from Ms Porter's suggestion for different approaches, we are a strong supporter of SEROC, of course, and the broader regional area, but I think there is an opportunity to be explored for a more consultative, collaborative structure between the ACT government and those councils that actually neighbour the border, particularly Yass, Queanbeyan, Cooma Monaro and the others—but perhaps not so much Tumut—to address the regional development issues and roads and transport planning into the future.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all for that. We will go to the next term of reference, which is the coordination of service planning and service delivery, particularly in the areas of health and education.

MR SMYTH: Before we go to that, there are a lot of issues that been canvassed. Two things that really interest me are: what is missing and how do we deliver it? So I would be interested in what would be the best structure to continue this conversation and how you would see that work, and then whether or not we can come up with almost a priority list.

There are a number of issues that this will then affect, but each of the shires or councils could say something. Do people have a view on how we might coordinate what Tim was saying about total regional development? You cannot have this as a stop-start process. If we can work out what the tool is, then how do we deliver it or what do we deliver? I would be intrigued to know.

Some of the issues that have clearly come up are cooperation, the lack of regular and genuine collaboration, transport, how we coordinate the planning study that was suggested, cross-border services, delivering coordination. We have all got problems with maintenance of infrastructure. We are all looking at different ways of economic development. Tourism cropped up a lot. In regard to infrastructure, we have got a port

at one end of the area and a good airport at the other end. How do we benefit from that? Ideas like the smart work centre have gone worldwide, and there are a number of cities doing that already.

Then there are personal issues, affordable housing, health, education. A good chat is a good chat. Otherwise this is just a one-off event and who cares? But are people interested in a long-term discussion and how do you see that happening? What are the priorities that we might address to make it worthwhile?

THE CHAIR: I think there has already been a suggestion that we need more opportunities like this for people to talk about it. Mr Thomson.

Mr Thomson: I think we do not need to go back to history. We used to have the regional leaders forum, and that used to meet—I do not know—two or three times a year. It really did not deliver anything. We have now got a very good organisation in SEROC. It has the ability; it has all of the members in this room. I do not think we need to go and reinvent something to do it. Let us use the system we have now got in place. And that can grow with the need and can fulfil, I think, all of those components you are talking about.

MR SMYTH: Thanks for that. Are people happy with that as a suggestion, that we just use SEROC as this vehicle?

Mr Kettle: I totally agree with the comments from Councillor Thomson. The other thing that needs to be brought into the picture now is the reform of local government in New South Wales and what we will look like going into the future. So that also needs to be brought on the table.

THE CHAIR: Sure. Ms Abbey.

Ms Abbey: I was just going to say that, out of SEROC, we often have working groups that actually focus on particular projects. On the question about how we take some of these things forward, I think we are all recognising they are terribly important and that we have to maybe form some working groups that actually do not meet only every month. It is a full-time project for them to actually make it happen. We all know that there are many things going on, and to get something done you actually have to have people saying, “This is your task. It must be completed.”

I think the only way, particularly for things like your cross-border water issue, is for you to sit down with ACTEW and come up with a plan that works for all of the people involved, and that cannot happen with monthly meetings. That would just be my thought on it. We need specific projects for identified items.

Mr Tegart: I want to pick up on the point made by Goulburn a moment ago that the future of local government may be very different in terms of ROCs no longer existing in the foreseeable future. Therefore the mix of county councils that are proposed might become the means of engagement between the ACT and the local government.

My suggestion would be to move away from that and think more about the Regional Development Australia committee structure, which completely surrounds the ACT,

the south coast and so forth. I understand in the main that general managers or councillors are at least represented on all of those RDA committees. There is already evidence of the strength of the combined integrated activity between the southern inland, the ACT and the south coast RDAs. It pulls together the best of local government in terms of the projects and initiatives from an infrastructure point of view, as well as the initiative and ideas of the private sector.

In terms of economic development, that may well be a structure that would work better because it already engages federal and state government, and obviously the ACT government. That might be a better forum to try and pool the economic development initiatives. Frankly, most economic development initiatives coming forward so far are infrastructure led. Therefore that bodes well for local government involvement.

Mr Bascomb: I have been general manager for shires surrounding the ACT for 13 years. During that time I have been chair of Capital Country Tourism, which covered the regional tourism organisation for the southern tablelands primarily. Also for three years I was chair of Project SCAN, which was a joint project between Capital Country Tourism, Tourism Snowy Mountains and Tourism ACT.

I have always believed that the reason the regional leaders forum failed was that it was simply too big. It went far broader even than SEROC. With respect to some of the issues that we are facing, you are hearing different ones depending on how far away we get from the ACT border. For example, one of the issues that I see is that we have a commuter bus that runs from Bungendore. We have something like 2,000 commuters coming in to Canberra every day. The reason that bus fails is because it has to stop in Queanbeyan and all have to change. That lack of coordination is relevant for those councils immediately adjacent to the ACT, but not so much for Robert down at Bombala.

I would very much support Councillor Overall's suggestion that there be a working group, whether it be a subset of SEROC or a separate agency, between the ACT and those councils immediately adjoining the ACT. That is somewhat contrary. I support Mr Tegart in the fact that we have four reviews going on into local government and its operations at the moment. The world of local government is going to change fairly dramatically over the next 18 months. The structure of local government surrounding the ACT could change as well. So that is an interesting scenario.

I certainly believe, in direct response to your question, that there should be a smaller working group. C plus one, which is meeting this afternoon, is potentially a model for that.

Mr Brown: Obviously we agree that there needs to be further work on this. I also think we need to look at who plays a role. I am fairly concerned about the way the New South Wales state government have played a role in the region here. If we look at the New South Wales long-term transport master plan, it includes everybody except the ACT. They have not even had a conversation with the ACT. So when we are looking at transport being one of our biggest issues, it would be really good to have some input from the New South Wales state government on this matter because I think they play a role. They fund the Kings Highway. They fund the Princes Highway.

The federals do not.

I think we should have them involved in this. I am not sure what mechanism or what officers or department we would use, but I do think it needs to be fed back to the state government that we are fairly serious about regional development down here in the south-east region. If you look at the funding, for example, that the New South Wales long-term transport master plan decided for the southern region, it was a \$7 million bridge in your area. That is it—seven million bucks and some fluff and bubble about doing some work on the Princes Highway.

We need to bring them into the tent and have a conversation with them to show them our genuineness and our capacity to work together as a group. Having the ACT on board adds recognition and gravitas to that process. That is what I would be looking at. I would be very careful about who we bring into this, because I think we need as many players as possible across a number of areas.

Mr Bascomb: That is my argument for the C plus one, because it is a joint New South Wales, ACT and local council venture, discussing those very issues. I think the C plus one initiative is the basis for that ongoing cooperation. Certainly it is in its early days. This afternoon's meeting is the first opportunity that our mayors have had to really see how it is progressing. If it is progressing as we all hope it will, I think it is a firm basis for ongoing cooperation and potentially deserves the support of both the ACT and New South Wales governments.

Mr Stewart: If we are going to take the region seriously, having regard to these sorts of meetings, the capacity of governments cannot work without bringing your major private industry players into the spectrum. Without them, you are not going to get too much development. I can only talk from the point of view of a small community. We have been trying to work on getting this development in Bombala for the mill to process the softwood down there. We got a major Asian company that put their money forward to do the job and to bring that infrastructure improvement. We went to many meetings over many years and came up with nothing.

I do think that, as a region, our main thing is that we work with industry to supply good infrastructure, whether it is in roads, water or health. But industry players, like any major players in our community, should be involved to try to bring us along, to help. They have different ways of looking at developing things. Having been in local government for a fair few years now, it can be quite cumbersome—a lot of talk and not much result. But if you get the right people doing the job and coming along with us, we must promote ourselves as a region. We are only a small part of Australia but we are a productive part. But we need private industry to work with us to help us to develop infrastructure and for that investment pipeline to come into our area. If we get that investment pipeline, I think a lot of our issues will be solved with better infrastructure.

I am a big supporter of making sure that we have a good relationship with our major investors, like Snowy Hydro for Cooma, and now us with the Asian company at Bombala—Donghwa. There is the Bega Cheese company down there. They are the major players. You guys in Canberra would have major industry that have visions for the area. We should be working along with them.

Mr Tegart: I want to reinforce the views of my learned colleague Mr Bascomb regarding C plus one. Partly in response to the question about what sort of structure we should look to, could I urge the ACT to look past the nose and on to the horizon and think of Canberra plus 2.5. What I mean by that is that the basis around Canberra plus One was about the commuter traffic—where their employees and residents are moving to and from. If you extend that horizon to Canberra plus 2.5, basically most of the LGAs around Canberra, including the coast, are then accessed within that circle, if you like.

If you look beyond how economic development and regional influence are based, then, yes, we are all hearing about transport being the key driver. But if we look at that horizon and at how we can aggregate activity, aggregate freight, aggregate movement of people in and out of Canberra on a hub system, then regional activity and economic cooperation will take place.

In our submission from Bega Valley Shire Council, a number of initiatives were put forward around waste, around energy, around freight and around movement of people during holiday periods. A very basic premise we heard very often was that if the major corridors in and out of Canberra to the north, south, east and west were able to take B-doubles and therefore able to aggregate weight for freight out of airports, in and out of Canberra Airport or out of Eden port, for example, suddenly those freight corridors will lead to economic activity taking place and will lead to opportunities for residents to move out of Canberra, if need be, to take the infrastructure population pressure out of Canberra, and then populate the areas in the region which have the infrastructure that already exists. Therefore optimal use of infrastructure takes place and it grows those centres. That will be the strength in the region—by, ironically, decentralising.

MR SMYTH: Just to follow up, there is SEROC, there are the RDAs and there is C plus one. Which is the better one to use or do they do different things? Is there lots of overlap or a little overlap, from your perspective?

Mr Brown: Can I put the question back on you? What do you see? What does the ACT see as important? How far is your region? We all think we are part of the region, but if you do not think you are—

MR SMYTH: Unfortunately, the committee is not here to answer on behalf of the government.

Mr Brown: No, it is a question that you can take back. That is essentially the issue, I think. I take on board Peter's point. If all roads lead to Canberra in this region, it is SEROC. The ACT has made a great statement by bringing us together and having this. I think it is fantastic. That, in essence, should be what it is. I think we really need some direction from the ACT, because you guys have got the resources.

MR SMYTH: If we read the debate that set up this committee, I think the government was actually throwing it to you guys to find out what you wanted.

Mr Brown: I hear what you are saying. I just thought—

MR SMYTH: No, it is a good point. If you actually read the full debate, that is the point we made, as the opposition.

Mr Bascomb: The old saying is that form follows function. It is about the committee making a recommendation about the level of regional involvement that the ACT makes and how much the New South Wales is willing to be part of that. Peter Tegart was quite correct. I was talking about C plus one, and that is looking to solve some immediate problems. Yass talks about the water and sewage issues. Queanbeyan has the same issue across there. We have the commuter problem as much as anything else. If they are the sorts of problems you are looking to solve, which is the basis of our submission, C plus one becomes the issue. But if you lift your nose above the horizon, as Peter suggested, you are looking at a different model. So it really is a case of what ultimately the ACT government decides that its level of involvement in the region is going to be. That is how it is going to best be formed. My hobbyhorse is on the RDAs: there should only be one, not two. But that is a different story, having regard to the history there.

MR SMYTH: Just for the *Hansard*, can you explain C plus one?

Mr Bascomb: C plus one is an initiative primarily started, as I understand it, from New South Wales to look at the planning and infrastructure needs for the region, and the “plus one” is the hour’s drive, which is, as Peter pointed out, probably the commute distance for us and for the region; hence the involvement. There has been a group of people, including people from my organisation, working with people from the New South Wales Department of Planning and Infrastructure and with their compatriots from the ACT. As I said, they are effectively providing their first report to the mayors and GMs this afternoon. That is going to be an interesting experience across at Nara House. I am sure they would welcome your attendance, if you are at all interested. I do not know whether I am allowed to say that.

MR SMYTH: I do not think we are invited.

Mr Bascomb: My mayor is unable to attend because he is attending another meeting. So you may come along as pseudo mayor for the time being!

MR SMYTH: Is that an indication of the sort of dysfunction? You have C plus one meeting across the road a couple of hours from now, but here we are in a different venue having a different discussion about what appears to be exactly the same issues. I think everybody has used the words “coordination” and “collaboration”, but there is almost a breakdown there right from the start.

Ms Abbey: C plus one, as I understand it—and I could be wrong and I will find out more this afternoon—is more about looking specifically at issues that relate to cross-border development—water, sewerage, services et cetera—whereas my sense of this morning’s conversation was that it was about bigger issues that are to do with all of us who are further than the C plus one, talking about actual development and issues that relate to all of us in a bigger picture. So there are actually two different things. Although they will cross over in interests, they are two different issues that they are covering. One is more on the ground looking at how to deal with and how to get

power across from the ACT into New South Wales, how that gets costed, serviced and managed. That is a more detailed issue, whereas I think most of this conversation is about bigger issues of longer term, big picture stuff. That is how I am seeing the two. So I think they are actually both relevant. That is how I see it; that is all.

Mr Kettle: Addressing Brendan's point of what particular style of forum there should be, again, I have to reinforce the review of local government in New South Wales. Everything could change, having regard to the way we are at the moment. Again, at the risk of marking time, I think that the appropriate forum is here—SEROC. ACT is a member; all the councils are members. We are currently working on projects that John from Upper Lachlan has mentioned, and that Dean and everybody around this room has mentioned. There is the opportunity within that committee to form subcommittees.

I pick up on Lindsay's point. I believe there should be more involvement from our state colleagues in getting involved not just with local government and the ACT government, but we as local government also require major input from the state government. I think the forum is there at the moment. Again, that could all change—we do not know—within the next 18 months.

THE CHAIR: I think that has been a really important discussion that we have had. I just wonder whether committee members want to look at the areas of health and education in the next 10 or so minutes before we break.

MR WALL: I guess one of the critical things in the region is obviously health and education, which we are going on to talk about. Often young people need to leave the region that they grow up in to acquire a qualification or further training and they do not necessarily always return home. Obviously Canberra tends to be one of the hubs for that as far as tertiary education certainly goes. Can you inform us of the significance of post-secondary education being provided in the region and what contribution that makes to your economic stability?

Mr Lynch: Just to give you an overview of what we have done to address that problem you just mentioned, we have highlighted the issue of people leaving the region. Once that knowledge is gone, it generally does not return. We have taken an approach like the mayor from Bombala spoke about. We use a collaborative approach with no government input. In conjunction with Snowy Hydro, our university centre opened four months ago. We have collaborated with Snowy Hydro. We have brought an optic fibre into that centre. Students can study there full time via broadband, via optic fibre. We were hoping to get 10 students in the six months and we have got 40 already. It has not hit the schools yet. It is actually expanding massively. It is a great project and it is a great way of using the businesses there to see that progress.

We probably need to expand that. I have had some preliminary discussions with the University of Canberra. There are some issues there, cross-border issues. We are talking about education across borders. There were some issues with money coming out of the ACT and New South Wales and going backwards and forwards. We are doing that initially face to face with the university. We hope to progress that further. That is an example of doing what Bob said and that is what we are doing. There have been no government handouts whatsoever.

I would like to see every regional town have something similar to what we have set up. I am quite happy to help anybody in the room by showing them how we did it and how it is helping our region. I am not asking for any collaboration here; I am just throwing that open for discussion to let you know what we have been up to. As we do progress it further, I hope to get a fully-fledged campus there, whatever it may be. That is where I will need some help, particularly using the University of Canberra. They have already highlighted that they need to expand. They are one of the smallest universities in the country. It is to help them as well.

Mr Corcoran: Thank you for the invitation to be here. I just want to touch quickly on the point that Andrew made, that young people are leaving country towns and not returning. Well, it is true and it isn't true. When I was the mayor of Boorowa I had young people come to me, when we were making developments and changes in a small town like Boorowa, saying, "Don't change it too much." I said, "We've got to progress. Do people want these things?" They said, "No, we don't want that. We left that in Canberra. We want to come back to the town we grew up in." They want to bring their kids home, especially for their primary education, because they feel it is a safe environment where they have family and friends.

They are happy to return home if the opportunities are there. I take on board what Goulburn said about the smart work centre and things. We do not want all the jobs in Boorowa, we do not want all the jobs in Goulburn and we do not want all the jobs in Canberra. We want our young people to come home. They will come home if the opportunities are there. What we need is the internet. We can talk about transport, but we do not really think that is the big issue. We just want to give them opportunities. Those opportunities are there. They do want to come home and live in a safe, quiet environment. They want to take advantage of health and education and secondary education in places like Canberra. So there is a balance. I think we can come up with that balance. Our general manager is pushing this smart hub thing very strongly. It is a clever idea. It is thinking outside of the square and we should be going down that path.

Mr Harrison: I just wanted to follow up quickly the comment about the smart work hubs. That provides an opportunity to deliver those high-level education services in remote regions. I just wanted to follow that up on a more general education front. Perhaps in Palerang we have a very different sort of problem. The large majority of our population live along the ACT border. It is not so much people leaving Palerang or their home to go to the city but being able to live in Palerang and still participate in the city. We tried to put in our submission that the biggest problem we see is the artificial white line. Perhaps we are a little bit unique because we have such a high population there along the border. The biggest thing that impacts us is that white line.

A lot of people actually move to the east, in our shire, for primary education because it is a nice, safe environment. It is a country environment, and that is great. We do not have a lot of opportunity for secondary education and for higher education, obviously. We tried to highlight in our report the problem that we have had in more recent years in our population in making use of the ACT education facilities. There have been constraints put on which schools can take New South Wales students into their numbers. That, we see, is a problem with the white line. If the white line was not there and we could see the region as a broader region that was not just New South Wales

and ACT, we could look at processes, whatever they need to be.

If there needs to be funding come across the white line, fine, but if we do not talk about it and we do not address the actual issue of the problems that our young people face in getting an education in the ACT, it is difficult. I think that is the first problem. From our perspective, the first problem we have to solve is having our population feel like they are part of the region rather than somebody on the other side of a white line and effectively, without wanting to use emotive words, being discriminated against because they are not actually in the ACT.

Mr Thomson: Education is great, but we have done some work on a skills audit and the skills that we are lacking across the region. I think we very much need to be able to match that education with the skills shortages that we have, certainly having heard in recent times that university education is not necessarily going to get you a job. Cooma may well have some jobs that they cannot fill, but we are not training people for those jobs. We need to match those two together, otherwise we are still going to have that lack of opportunity. The opportunities are there; we do not have the skilled people to fill those opportunities. I think we need to match those two to make it work.

Mr Taylor: We have had the presence of the University of Wollongong for 10 to 15 years now. They have a campus in Bega similar to the one they have at Batemans Bay. In the last 15 years we have had an increasing use by the Australian National University of our hospital for rural training of doctors. We have the University of Canberra and the ANU both interested in the marine discovery centre at Eden, which is in its infancy. It will in time—maybe not in my lifetime—become a major, I believe, marine research centre worldwide because of the various physical aspects of the marine environment down there and the fact that Twofold Bay provides the basis of that marine research. So we have already got that going.

The other thing that is happening down our way is that the state government has committed, largely with federal funding, to a major regional hospital—\$170 million. The sod has been turned. Within three years the daily drift of people from the South Coast to Canberra and Queanbeyan is going to change. I do not know, at a local government—and I pretty sure our general manager does not know—what impact that is going to have on ACT health services. Does the ACT know what impact that will have? That is going to be a significant change within three years. It is going to be operating in three years time. That will affect Eurobodalla certainly. It will affect Cooma-Monaro.

That leads to the point that we need to collaborate on studying what movements are going to happen in the future as these things change. We are doing it in isolation. Maybe the state government are doing it in isolation; I do not know. Maybe they have liaised with you; I do not know. We do not know. There are some areas where we need to sit together and say, “Where are we going?” These things are happening right now.

I go back to Eden port. I do not want to overemphasise it, but it is going to become a major impact on our whole region in due course. A ship comes to Port Kembla, waits out for a day, two days, three days—who knows?—and at Port Botany it is the same. At Eden they can come in and out in a day. It is all there. We just need to recognise its

location in relation to the south-east of this state and also its relationship to Melbourne and Sydney; it is exactly halfway between.

MR SMYTH: If something is offloaded at Twofold Bay, how does it get anywhere else? There is no rail link.

Mr Taylor: No, there is not. I will hand over to my general manager because you have asked a question that he wants to answer.

MR SMYTH: It leads back to something that we started with about a regional transport study. There is no rail link. The Princes Highway is still pretty—

Mr Taylor: Pete will answer that. The rail corridor is still there to Bombala, as far as I am aware. Take over, Peter.

Mr Tegart: Very briefly, Madam Chair, the work that we have been doing with the state government has been significant in terms of raising the profile of Eden port and its ability to be a single-handled modal facility rather than a multi-handled modal facility that exists in all the other ports along the east coast. We have been working closely, of course, with Bombala and the Tasco company there to get to the point of the next stage of development at Bombala to be able to containerise either in Bombala or at Eden.

It is all about building scale and scope. We have got to the point now where Imlay Road can be nominated as a freight corridor out of Eden directly through Monaro Highway and Majura parkway out onto the Hume. We think we are starting to get the state government to see that they should not necessarily be trying to improve the freight systems they currently have; they need to think differently and create a new freight system, or influence a freight system by creating opportunities through those east-west corridors and then utilise the Hume Highway as the B-triple HPV corridor north and south.

In that way, a very short trip from the Hume Highway to Eden, three hours, with containerised high mass vehicle loads—and we already have capacity, but we can improve capacity through Snowy Mountains, Imlay or Kings Highway if we make them B-doubleable. There is only one means of shipping in and out of the country via Eden port—that is, putting freight back on the truck. The truck has more access, of course, to other regions or cities along that corridor. The freight does not need to get on and off a train. It does not need to get on and off a truck before it gets on and off a boat. That single means of modal transport will reduce the freight per tonne per kilometre significantly.

That is the type of language that we need to describe amongst the transport community to understand that. The point has been made earlier that the south-east was left out of the state transport master plan. That is with their expectation it would become part of the regional transport master plan. It ignored the existence of the ACT. I want to pick up the point we heard earlier about the white line. If we think differently about that white line in terms of white line fever, that has been the thing that has been stopping a lot of this regional activity, health exchange, education exchange and resident exchange. This notional line in the sand stops our

bureaucracies and politicians looking beyond that line.

The Eden port, as the mayor has pointed out, has now become very significant. We are hopeful of significant federal and state government funding to elevate that status both in terms of a freight centre and a leisure transport freight centre from the point of view of 50 cruise ships a year coming in via Eden port, 2,000 or 3,000 passengers per visit. They will be heading west, they will be heading north, they will be heading south out of Eden. That will significantly change regional economic activity here and, therefore, the transport demands in the region.

Mr Kettle: I think that what we are all trying to do today is work out the best way to progress regional collaboration, taking into account and getting rid of that white line. Going back to Mr Wall's question about regional education, Goulburn, significantly placed location-wise, can also be at a disadvantage when you are looking at tertiary education. However, we have embraced it along the lines that the mayor of Cooma has done but not in as big a fashion. We had discussions with Canberra uni about the possibility of a campus. I am resigned to the fact that that is probably not going to happen, but we are well serviced in Goulburn with training programs provided by Canberra universities—ANU with their rural doctors and Canberra with their nurses.

We have a campus at the Charles Sturt University for the police academy on policing studies. I was made aware recently of the Australian Catholic University coming to Goulburn. This is along the lines of the model that they have done in Young at one of their Catholic colleges, bringing in further training. We have a significant sized TAFE which is now increasing courses in hospitality.

Picking up on what the deputy mayor of Boorowa has said, with our young people there is a drift, but a heck of a lot of them come back as well. I am a product of that. Many of the people that I know in Goulburn have gone away for education and come back. I do not think we can stop that. People do come back. That is basically where we are at.

Mr Stewart: I am a great supporter of the Eden wharf, but I do not know what that has to do with education. I was just going to bring Peter back on track there. I thought we might have run off the rails, as we often can do in these sorts of things. As I said, I am a great supporter and we will help him out.

I agree with the deputy mayor from Boorowa that we do get a drift out. We have had a trade training centre just built down in Bombala under the government's investment in schools. It is just starting off. I think it is going to be quite successful in helping develop the skills of the young people that want to stay around our area. Shearing is quite a big industry in our area. We have quite a sizable sheep population down there. It is a big resource for us. They brought in professional trainers to come down to take these high school kids that do not want to move on to tertiary education but want to get skills so they can go out into the workforce. I think it is a good model.

Similarly, the Donghwa company are investing to get the younger people trained up through this trade training centre. It is going around the region. I think it is good to have these sorts of facilities. It is very well set out and it gives many of those kids an opportunity to stay locally and develop their skills. I think these are great things.

There are always going to be fluctuations. We have seen ups and downs and that is not going to change when we are finished.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that everybody. I do not think the committee minds that it goes off the rail a bit and we talk about other things that are important.

Meeting suspended from 12.29 to 1.00 pm.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We will start with the third term of reference. I know that people really do need to leave by 2 o'clock for other events or for car parking reasons. So we will have to cut some time off some of this afternoon's session. We will start with term (c), opportunities for collaborative procurement by the ACT government with surrounding local governments, and I know that this is an issue that will be dear to all of your hearts. I do not think I will even need to ask a question for you all to start on this. Who is going to go first?

Ms Abbey: I started the last one. With collaborative procurement, obviously issues for all of us are in trying to make cost savings and stretch our dollars further. Obviously we all still have rate pegging. We can go for one-off various rate rises for particular issues but, obviously, if there are some synergies to be had between all our groups, then obviously that would be a big help, I would imagine, to all of the councils.

We have not really looked into that. I think there are large-scale issues that can be looked at as part of this overall group. Again, I think probably the SEROC group, as a group discussing it with the ACT, is the obvious way to take that forward.

Dr Dale: I have a comment. I had been a CEO in local government in Victoria for 12 years prior to coming to the wonderful coast of the Eurobodalla, but I think Victoria in this context is a long way ahead of New South Wales, because they have been operating under Procurement Australia for many years. And local governments more broadly link in, and most procurement is done on a state or national basis. So there are huge potential savings, I think, that we can look at. Whether it is through SEROC or with the ACT or whether it is on a state basis with the ACT, I do not really mind. But the productivity gains are really significant. And I think we need to fast-track this as quickly as we possibly can.

Mr Bell: The SEROC councils through GMAC, the general managers group, have been working with ACT local government and ACT Procurement. We had a presentation recently to the GMAC meeting. And what we were looking to do there was establish the process to allow the ACT government to join with SEROC councils in joint procurement. Those benefits would be substantial across the board for both ACT government and all the SEROC councils. We are looking for a joint working party to be established, which would be the senior officers responsible for procurement functions within the ACT government and SEROC councils. That is part of the process that we have undertaken so far. And that is about as far as we have got. But just be aware that we are progressing that.

Mr Kettle: Mr Bell picked straight up on what I was going to in our submission. It is fine.

Mr Bascomb: Like my colleague to the right, I am also ex-Victorian and understand and support what she is saying in that sphere. I agree that there are a lot of services, particularly with your equivalent of local government, that we can share and procure on a regional basis and get the economies of scale. But we can go a step further, and this was briefly discussed the other day. John is the chair of the GMAC group, the General Managers Advisory Committee, which is, if you like, the working group of SEROC where operations are actually implemented. The mayors are the board, if you like. The mayors obviously have a key role in the governance of any local government area. If the independent local government review panel recommendations are accepted, then they are going to have an even greater role.

Getting back to shared procurement, there is one model where we all need, for example, a resale contractor to maintain our sealed roads. That can be done at a regional level. But the other thing we all have is a library service. I am just using this as an example. I am not saying it is necessarily the best candidate. But particularly those councils that are immediately adjacent to the ACT all provide a library service through some mechanism. You have all heard that a large percentage of our community travels into the ACT. It strikes me as logical that there be some level of integration in that. Again, economies of scale around the administration and the back office requirements of a library service exist.

At the moment, we have a very good working relationship with Queanbeyan, and we offer the Palerang-Queanbeyan library service as a joint operation between the two of us. I think that model demonstrates that there are benefits. And without wanting to even suggest to QCC that they may be willing to consider this but, to me, that could be extended. The same applies for other areas. And there are a whole raft of those sorts of services that we provide to our community, whether it be the phone centres, after-hour emergency callouts and so forth, if we can coordinate them. We all have our own services in place. We do it by rotation amongst some of our staff. But clearly, if we can coordinate with you those sorts of shared services—it is just another form of joint procurement—I think it has merit and is worth examining. Again, that was a part of our submission.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else want to make a comment?

Mr Taylor: I suppose it is a question, in many ways: is there a directory of the services that are available across the south-eastern region? If there is not, should they not be mapped so that we know what is available in the ACT, Eurobodalla, Cooma Monaro or wherever so that we can start to think and act more locally rather than being committed to the state contract system or whatever? Does it exist?

MS PORTER: I was really interested in what you just said about the directory. Were you talking about an electronic form of directory?

Mr Taylor: I do not mind how it turns up, so long as it is efficient and effective so that we know. Road surfacing was mentioned. We use a particular contractor on a regular basis. There may be others. There may be someone in the ACT looking to expand. If we know these things, you get that cross-border cooperation for the benefit of everyone. But how it turns up as a directory is another issue. But has it been

mapped?

MR WALL: A lot of what we are talking about seems to be coming back to SEROC. I am going to go slightly off topic. It seems to be the most productive mechanism currently in existence for collaboration, for working together to get common outcomes to better the region. I would like a bit of feedback on how the ACT has been engaging in SEROC and on these improvements that we, as a territory, can make in how we engage with you as councils through that SEROC mechanism or other mechanisms that we are currently utilising so that, I guess, we collaborate with individual councils.

Mr Kettle: I am happy to comment on that, and I will make mention of a former chair of SEROC, Councillor Thomson, who was integral in getting the ACT on board, into SEROC. I would encourage other mayors of SEROC to contribute along with me, but I believe that the membership of the ACT in SEROC and their participation in our debates and our ongoing projects is invaluable. Their contribution has been strong. Regardless of whether the Chief Minister attends the meetings, there is always representation there from her department. And that is strong, collaborative, suggestive and very helpful to what we are trying to achieve for the whole region with SEROC.

Mr Thomson: I think that was the recognition, that the purchasing power or the lobbying power of the total population now that we have Canberra involved is immense. I know Bill was asking: is there a list? I think the list is probably as long as you want to make it. And opportunities come up. As Bombala knows, we were able to achieve a substantial amount of money just through some efficiencies in fuel rebates. There was about \$88,000 or something in that. So there is no list. That is the short answer. But our negotiating power is enormous. And I think that can work for the ACT as well as it can for your region around you.

Mr Lynch: It is fantastic having the ACT government as part of SEROC. I think that has been great. Obviously you have got the population base behind you. I think that the procurement side of it has been good, but I think some of the engagement from ACT into SEROC has been poor. I might see some raised eyebrows there, but my comment for them is that we are here today at this meeting discussing things like tourism, education and what have you. This should be done, as Fergus said earlier, at that SEROC board level. I believe that if that is an issue for the Chief Minister—and Katy has been to one of the SEROC meetings—that should be raised, minuted and then there has to be submissions from all the local government agencies into something that you require some information on. I think that structure is already there if you need it. I think it would be more specific really coming back from the Chief Minister. That is only my personal opinion.

Mr Harrison: I think that, simply by being involved with SEROC, the ACT government have provided a commitment. The very fact that they are in there, in one sense, even if they do not turn up to meetings, makes it easier to talk to other sectors of the ACT government, to get assistance, by virtue of the fact that they are there. Even in the short time I have been involved with SEROC as a mayor, I have had the opportunity to speak to ACT representatives that come to SEROC meetings. Just through those conversations, and nothing else, we have been able to get our staff members in touch with staff members within appropriate areas of the ACT

government and make progress with things that we are working on. So just in six months I have seen value in the ACT government being there, notwithstanding that there are opportunities for improvement.

Mr Bascomb: I would make the comment that the ACT government's involvement in SEROC has directly led to the establishment of your committee. The government has recognised that there is a need for better integration with the region and it is looking at ways of improving that, and that has led to your committee.

I agree with my mayor; it has been fantastic having access to the staff and also to the Chief Minister on the occasions that she has attended. Clearly, she is unable to attend every one. I have felt for the ACT people, because, as I mentioned earlier, there are four reviews going on in local government at the moment in New South Wales. Our focus has been a little bit directed towards those and they are not of direct interest to the ACT. So I have wondered whether the ACT is getting the full benefit of their membership yet.

I agree that those sorts of issues that we are talking about today should clearly be on board. If we and the ACT are going to get the full benefit of that cooperation, it should be on the board meeting agendas and discussed seriously. But, unfortunately, our time has been taken up in preparing submissions for the independent local government review panel and various other committees and inquiries that are going on at the moment. I think it can only get better from now on.

Mr Tegart: I want to reinforce the point that our mayor made. There have been opportunities already taken up through Geoscience and ABARE, and through the ACT sustainability and environment commissioner some years ago, to map the resource base across the region. The idea behind that is that it is not just the natural resources but also the physical resources available through the business activity generated through the regions. That mapping or directory, using the mayor's terms, could be a critical tool to understand what is available and therefore the extent to which we can interact economically in the region.

Let us take that to the next step. Why not use the advantage the ACT has in engaging with the disadvantage of the region? The region has some of the highest SEIFA scores—that is the socioeconomic indicator framework. Bega Valley, for example, is in the low 900s, whereas you should be up around 1,000. Queanbeyan, for example, is up around that number, by comparison. But in reality, therefore, by having quite a low SEIFA score they were able to attract a number of subsidies and grant initiatives through the federal government in particular.

Could I suggest exploring the opportunity of an enterprise tax zone for the region. It may gain some benefits for government and business to interact regionally, provided the regional activity remains within the region. So they can have transacting within the region, in resource, economic and business activity, education activity and health activity, for example, through the private sector, and gain the benefit of those tax incentives brought about by the federal government. It is worth having a look at.

THE CHAIR: Did you put that in your submission?

Mr Tegart: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone else want to make a comment on the question that Mr Wall asked about the ACT government's engagement with SEROC or around procurement lists? Mr Smyth, do you have any questions on procurement?

Mr Thomson: Can I ask a question on that? Is it possible—and I think it has been discussed probably by GMAC—to use the resources of some of your departments to assist local government in the region, thereby bringing about a saving through the efficiency of your departments? Is that something that could be available?

THE CHAIR: We will add it to the list—the list of procurement.

Mr Thomson: It is a form of it, if you like, in that it is reducing a cost to local government across the region for things that they would have to pay for, but using a combined resource to achieve an end.

THE CHAIR: Council and local government legal services could be something that could be procured together to make savings. I was thinking of things to put on the list. Government department support is another one.

MR SMYTH: I suspect that with any further use of a service that is provided by the ACT or expertise in the ACT public service, if it is used more, then you have to get an economy of scale over time. I do not see why it could not, and that might be a recommendation of the committee.

I was interested in the larger picture again. A couple of us were discussing at lunch the high-speed train. The original high-speed train route was Sydney to Canberra to Cooma to the snow and then down to the south coast through Bairnsdale into Victoria from the east. That seems to have been dropped. Is that an issue of interest in terms of the large-scale infrastructure? Is that still of interest to councils and do they see some benefit? I am sure Goulburn would love to see the train through, but would Cooma and would the far south coast? And is it worth having that as a discussion or feeding it into some of the inquiries?

Ms McCrindle: My thinking on that one, given that I was involved in high-speed trains when I was at Goondiwindi, not to mention border issues, is that Eden port is sitting there. There are Melbourne and Sydney with these huge populations. It is in the middle. You just need to get your transport synergies right, and that would have a major impact on the economic development of this region. Whether we can push it is the question.

MR SMYTH: If there is a recommendation in a report, it is a start.

Ms McCrindle: Yes.

MR SMYTH: Is the far south coast interested in that discussion?

Mr Tegart: We would take a high-speed train.

Mr Taylor: Yes.

Mr Tegart: The rail link is very important.

MR SMYTH: And Cooma?

Mr Stewart: Yes. Just on the fast train, I really think you do not want to go outside the scope of reality with it. It is going to be a very hard infrastructure thing to gain. I think that, for the region, we should be giving full support for the first high-speed development from Canberra to Sydney. Take that on board, get that developed and then look at your plan from there. Once again, the airport development out here is great. You have a very good private company running that development. You could bring in other companies to get on the back of high speed.

It is all well and good to say, “Oh, yeah, we’ll head down the coast.” There are going to be a lot of issues with taking that train down over the mountain, I can assure you of that, and lots of billions of dollars to get it there. We could easily talk about it. Who is going to pay for it, and is it viable? But there probably is a case that it could be viable to have a fast one from here to Sydney, especially with the airport problems they have up there. From the point of view of SEROC and from a regional point of view, we should be concentrating on that. Once you get over that, you can go on to the next stage. But leave the rest out.

THE CHAIR: Does anybody else have a comment to make on the train?

Mr Kettle: I totally agree with Councillor Stewart. Goulburn has been working very closely with the Australasian Railway Association and working in conjunction with the inquiry in the phase 2 study. I have written to several councillors on the alignment. Now, at the suggestion of the ARA, I will be writing to councillors along the whole route to keep lobbying state and federal government, including the ACT. They will be included in that. But Canberra-Sydney is the first important stage that needs to be got up.

THE CHAIR: Does anyone have any more comments to make on procurement? Otherwise we can go to the next session so that you can all get out of here on time. Now we are going to discuss cooperation on environment and conservation matters and building community resilience.

Ms Abbey: Generally councils are quite under-resourced in this sustainability area, in terms of general access to resources. The ACT generally probably has a lot more resources in relation to that. We should be looking, I would hope, to work towards some more cooperation to put together plans for sustainability in terms of weeds, threatened species and all sorts of other things, and actually using some of the resources of the ACT. I know it sounds like we are asking for everything from the ACT, but generally you are better resourced in this area than most of us councils. I know we certainly do not have the numbers of staff to actually be able to work on those sorts of projects, to put something together properly. So as a group, as a collaborative process, that could be very useful for us going forward in terms of those plans. I know you have mentioned here disasters and other things, but generally, on sustainability and ecological processes, there are quite a few synergies that could help

us as a group going forward to put together some broader plans.

In terms of emergency services and other things, obviously, the more coordination the better, having just been through the joys of a very large fire in January. Ten years ago it left us and came in to Canberra. So the coordination between all of those emergency services is very important. I have seen certainly at first hand in the last couple of months a very strong coordination of that. I would encourage the continuation and expansion of that.

Mr Bascomb: Clearly, this area is where the white line on the map means nothing. We, as Palerang, have worked with the ACT on a number of projects along this area. While the former regional leaders forum was often derided, there was one constructive thing that came out of that, and that is the regional state of the environment report, which both the ACT and the individual councils are required to do. And we leaned very heavily on the office of the commissioner for the environment.

More recently I was on the committee that worked with the commissioner on the Lake Burley Griffin study, and my staff are working on the task force for that area. Clearly, Palerang forms a large part of the catchment area for your lake.

We also worked with the ACT government on the management of on-site sewage management systems as a way of helping control water quality through the area. But clearly, yes, you are far greater resourced than we are and, in future, we would be looking to work with particularly the commissioner for the environment on the state of the environment reports and those other operations.

As with Rowena on the natural disasters, clearly, the white line means nothing to a fire running across our shared environment. Yes, we need to be totally integrated.

Coming to extreme weather events and climate change, many of you may recall that some 30 houses in Captains Flat were flooded on 9 December 2010. That was after the Bureau of Meteorology removed the storm warning for the area. However, we subsequently learned that the ACT government was actually mapping that storm and could have been able to advise us that it was going to dump on the catchment immediately above Captains Flat. And the fact that we did not have access to that and we were responding to the broader Bureau of Meteorology information led us to be behind the eight ball, if you like, when it did actually drop. As everybody knows, the topography of Captains Flat is like a huge bathtub with a very big tap at one end and a very small plug hole at the other end. And 30 houses had up to a metre of water come through in a bit over an hour following that rainfall. A greater level of cooperation in sharing that level of information would have been great.

Mr Bell: Peter covered my issue with the state of the environment report.

MS PORTER: I do not know whether or not it is useful to talk around the room about all your experiences. We were talking over lunch about the wind farm issue, about some stresses and strains and whether economic benefits can be better shared amongst regions from the power that is generated. You talked before about the issues around water and power. Tim, you were talking also about those kinds of issues around electricity pricing and water pricing, if I remember correctly. I was just wondering

whether or not there is some discussion around how we manage the various issues around new technologies that come up and how we best benefit from those and manage our community resilience in dealing with those new technologies as they come forward.

Mr Bascomb: Clearly, we have the Capital Wind Farm. We have an approved 100-hectare solar farm plus an approved 40-hectare solar farm yet to proceed. We also have the issue of the solar farm down opposite the Royalla area and the impact of the planning decisions that are taken without consideration of our residents. I think Tim is probably on side, because Royalla is one of those split communities. Clearly, there is scope for working better in that area, not just around sharing that but also in the planning for that.

But one of the models that council is considering is a community solar farm where people, perhaps apartment dwellers—and you have a few of those—that do not necessarily have the ability to put solar panels on their roof can buy a share in a solar farm and actually reap the benefits of solar generation rather than having their own panels. Plus there are economies of scale and so forth. We have the land and potentially you have the population.

I believe that yes, there is a way of sharing that and we would be very keen, as a council—and other councils in the region might as well—to be looking at that sort of model where we have a community-owned solar farm with individuals tapping into that. And I think that would be of huge benefit.

Mr Tegart: There are actually a number of items that have emerged, and we have raised the issue of the state of the environment. The other part is also partnering with the state government of New South Wales. There is a group called Location-Leadership, which is cutting edge technology in terms of spatial imagery and forming relations amongst all agencies to have a collaborative approach to gathering information, doing the analysis, storing it on cloud and making it available to all agencies. Of course, the ACT is the island in the middle of that. So it would make sense to have some arrangement with the state government to also have access to that information.

I say that in the context that, through the financial services at state government level, they are reviewing their shared services model at this point in time. So where they do exchange between agencies, they are doing it at a cost rather than at a profit or having a margin attached. So there may be some opportunity for the ACT to jump inside that and then, in turn, be able to relay that information through the state of the environment, state of the region type of reporting, putting that point forward.

The second issue is that there is currently a federal appetite. And we have heard some examples of renewable energy here already. The south-east corner has some of the greatest opportunities in terms of the range of renewable energy projects. We have heard of wind farms, solar farms. Obviously at Eden and Bega we have tidal and wave energy pilots underway at this point in time. There is tourism attached to that. People actually want to see how it works and how it operates and so forth. That happens already in Europe. So there may well be an opportunity collaboratively to tap into that federal appetite for investing in renewable energy infrastructure in this region to

ultimately link into the national grid.

A suggestion may well be—and we floated it some time ago with Minister Combet—that the councils form a company in renewable energy on the same bases as Southern Phone where all the councils own the company, with a \$2 share. It is already registered, established, it requires a simple change to articles of associations for the company. And its role would be to map out with some pretty detailed analysis, no doubt, that across the next five, 10, 20-year horizon—we know where the fossil fuel energy pricing premiums are likely to head—if we were able to bulk-purchase power with initial government investment by federal government, with a \$330 million pool available for local governments to this point in time under clean energy futures, we could pre-purchase the power, redistribute that power through our customers through the Southern Phone network, by way of example, or ACTEW, whatever the case may be. The margins go, in fact, back into investment in renewable infrastructure and, therefore, we reinforce investment in renewable infrastructure in this region. So we are going to benefit ultimately with lower prices.

There are a mix of things that are around that are capable of being explored, but it requires some serious clout, and the ACT might be able to provide that because of the scale that you can provide to that investment project.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about noxious weeds. I have a friend who farms in Goulburn, and he was talking about how some of the weeds—and I am not an expert on the names of the weeds—on his land are noxious weeds and are identified as noxious weeds. However, you can drive into Canberra or some of the other council areas and they are being planted in the middle of the road. Is there a way that people can work out how to manage that in some way with farmers or landowners or is it just in the too-hard basket?

Ms Abbey: We do have a weeds authority which, in different areas, is different things. And I agree with you on that problem. We have a neighbour who, on one side of a fence, has a weed. We spray it and, on the other side, he is not required to because of a different council area. They have different areas where they have identified it. I think part of my comment when we were talking about environment and collaborative approach is that we probably need a bigger picture across a wider area, and part of that is a resourcing problem from a council perspective.

I think what happens, particularly when there is a large outbreak of different kinds of weeds, is that in a council area there is no way for it to be controlled. So they actually take it off the noxious list just because it got too hard, which is not necessarily the right reason for doing it. It covers too much of the area and they cannot afford to actually manage it. So they take it off the list. I think that is a problem. It is a regional problem. And it is something that we probably need to look at from a bigger picture point of view.

Mr Bascomb: Palerang is the funds holder for a southern tablelands regional weeds group, which is a multi-council group which is looking at this problem. Yes, the issue is the different jurisdictions having different classifications of weeds. The other one is the state actually sort of giving up on certain weeds and saying, “We’ve lost the battle. It’s too late. We’re not providing any funding for control of those. We’ll concentrate

on new and emerging weeds.” As one of my staff has quipped, we get paid more to map them than to control them. And that is probably a fair case across all of our councils. We can tell you where they are, but we have absolutely no money to actually do any control work on them, which is a real issue.

Theoretically, we can bankrupt a farmer by requiring spraying. But clearly, we cannot do that. Particularly during the drought we took a very, if you like, softly, softly approach and worked with the farmer to develop a five-year plan or a 10-year plan to manage those weeds, and that has created some grief among farmers across fences who might have had a more aggressive policy. But we had to work within the means of the individual farmer to afford the control program. We are not in a position to assist at all whereas, in the past, we may have been with state funding.

Mr Stewart: Coming from a rural shire, it is unfortunate, with the weed problem, that the funding from the state government keeps decreasing each year. And the rules are changing. We have got quite a good weed control program in our shire, because we are very rural based. But as you get more lifestyle farmers come into your area and they do not know how to maintain the land, that is when the problem grows. I think that is what you will find up here where a lot of the traditional rural land has gone into urban lifestyle development. The people there are genuine but they just have not been brought up to control the thing.

From a council point of view, to go to state government through the department of agriculture or those sorts of bodies to get funding to keep the programs going, the good solid programs to be maintained—they are not classified as a very sexy item for governments—they do not like doing it. So the whole program drops off.

But you will find in areas like ours, where most of the area is managed by professional farmers and that, the problem is maintained because it is their responsibility. It is an asset for them to maintain. If they let the weeds take over their business, that is a deterioration factor. But when you get into the areas where the land is getting changed to lifestyle development, if they were on five acres or 10 acres, to keep the land clean and to be productive, that means nothing. It is a lifestyle thing, and that is where you run into problems. And I do not know how you are going to address it.

Mr Kettle: I have not much more to add to what Bob said, actually. We have not got a significant area of rural land, but we do have some, and we have a lot of council land. So it is also very hard for us, when we are finding it difficult to keep up with weed control on our own land, to go down the road and smack somebody. So we have got to work very collaboratively.

Mr Taylor: Madam Chair, you may be aware of the state government’s proposal to establish Local Land Services, which commences on 1 January next year, I think. That will have a major but at this stage unknown impact on environmental issues, because we do not know what is going to happen to the work that has been done and is being done by the catchment management authorities. And it has already been flagged that weed control is on the list to be taken over by Local Land Services at some point in the future. Again, the local government role in environmental issues in terms of what we are allowed to do and what we have to do, I think, is still in a state

of flux in New South Wales. I think the ACT needs to be aware of that. We do not quite know how it is all going to settle out over the next few years.

The other thing we would like to raise is, again getting back to the port of Eden, whether there is capacity to think about the waste. I drive into Canberra and see that mountain of waste you have got in south Canberra. In Pambula, which is close to Eden, we have a local company that is actually an engineering company manufacturing and exporting to Europe a process that takes putrescible waste and turns it into fertiliser. But that leads to the possibility of thinking of all the organic waste from the south-eastern region. If there is a market worldwide, particularly in Asia, for organics, whether they be putrescible or just green waste, we should accumulate those and ship them out of Eden. But the bulk of that would come out of the ACT and would certainly give scale to any thought like that.

Mr Lynch: I do not know about weeds. You said they are not sexy. I do not know about that. From a different perspective, weeds are a big issue. And while we are talking about the environment, I just raise an issue which is high on our agenda, and I would assume it is in other local government areas: biodiversity offsets. I have spoken about this at SEROC before, and I believe we should be lobbying to have levels of government probably exempt from having to provide those offsets.

We are going through a process at the moment where we are trying to provide some public infrastructure, and because of the cost of the biodiversity offsets, it probably means that we are not going to be able to provide that social benefit to the community. You talk about the triple bottom line. There is just too much weighted towards the environment currently. So it is definitely a hamstringing of what we are doing. I do not know how other local government areas are handling it, but it is a real problem.

Someone spoke about a threatened species list. I know, as we were doing the offsets and we were going through doing our studies, as we were doing the studies, more threatened species were coming on that list. So when we finished, we had to go again. It is a big issue for local government or for government in general. I do not know what we are going to do about it, but I would love to see everybody lobby for some sort of exclusion.

Mr Thomson: Just going back to the issues of natural disasters, extreme weather events and climate change, one of the issues that local government in New South Wales has been lobbying for for a long time is to try to get an emergency services fund or all emergency services coming under one umbrella. Climate change is no longer a debate, because we know it has happened and is happening. What form it takes is, I suppose, maybe going to be debated.

So the things we recognise are that we are going to have more extreme events, and many of those will impact on the residents of SEROC. To an extent, the playground for SEROC is Bega Shire, Eurobodalla Shire and the Snowy Mountains. Very much we sort of share those playgrounds. And those playgrounds are where a lot of those extreme events are going to happen and going to impact.

I think it is important that we are actually looking after your residents and your people who are placed at risk. And sometimes that places a quite extreme burden on local

government areas in those coastal places, particularly. What we have been lobbying for is to get all of those emergency services falling under one financial pool.

I know that several years ago, when we caused a furore here in the ACT when we decided we were not going put lifeguards on a beach or beaches, very much the people's perspective in the ACT was: "That's where we go to enjoy our holidays. You will look after us. Therefore, you will put on lifeguards."

We are not immune and we are not isolated from the needs of the community of the ACT, Queanbeyan, Goulburn, whatever. So, I think anything that we do from a ROC point of view to try to push to get this better financial arrangement for all our emergency services—fires in Canberra spread to Queanbeyan or whatever—is something we need to work together on to get a better outcome so that we can better deal with those extreme events.

Mr Overall: In terms of natural disasters—it is more of a local issue between Queanbeyan and the ACT—at risk, of course, is Lake Burley Griffin because of Queanbeyan being located in a floodway and the sewerage treatment plant adjoining the Molonglo River. As we saw in the December 2010 flood, one of the retention dam walls was eroded and that affected waters downstream quite significantly.

That will always be the case in terms of natural disasters, and until such time as we have a new sewerage treatment plant or a significantly updated state-of-the-art plant with water recycling. I am just flagging that we have been doing a lot of work in upgrading our sewerage treatment plant planning. It is our intention to approach the ACT to join with us in advocating to the commonwealth that if Lake Burley Griffin has to be protected as an iconic tourist attraction, as part of the national capital, which it is, there will be a need for a contribution from the commonwealth to secure that and safeguard it. We have the funding to upgrade the plant to meet our needs, which would be to a standard that you would find right across Australia. But if we are going to have a state-of-the-art facility at no risk to the national capital, it will require approaches to the commonwealth.

MS PORTER: My question is around emergency services. Some time ago I attended an emergency services conference, and comments were made by numbers of people who lived in areas where people were starting hobby farms and things like that. They were saying that a lot of people were coming into the area who did not want to be involved in their local fire brigade or emergency services because they were just interested in their farm and they did not think they necessarily had the skills to go out and fight fires or do those sorts of things. Also there were a number of businessmen who were setting up remote businesses and using the internet to communicate and also were not interested in being part of those emergency services in their regions. They were businessmen and they did not think they had the skills or were not interested. It was causing a huge shortfall in voluntary labour in those areas. Is this still a problem or are people coming to terms with it in their regions?

Mr Harrison: My personal experience would be exactly the opposite of that. Being involved with the rural residential areas along the eastern border of the ACT, one of the things that we promote as one of the greatest features of our communities there is the willingness that people display in contributing to the voluntary labour community,

if you like. Having said that, we might have a population along there of 6,000 people, and you might only have 600 people in the voluntary organisations, but it is still a very good contribution that is made.

There are a lot of different ways that people can contribute in a voluntary sense. It is not everybody's game to go and play with fire, but that is not the only way that people contribute in a voluntary sense. I would say that that is a fundamentally positive part of the communities that we have in the rural residential areas.

In general, if I pop back to something that Bob said, certainly, within these communities, one of the things that characterises these communities is that they are fairly well educated compared to the state average and they are fairly well cashed up based on the SEIFA indices that were mentioned earlier on. Most of the people we find in these areas along the eastern boundary of the ACT actually have an interest in improving the environment there. The areas around Bywong and Wamboin, in particular, were very badly overgrazed areas, having regard to the movement of the population. They did largely come out from the ACT; they are the people, as we say, who work in the ACT and who have lived in the ACT, and they come out because they have an interest in improving the environment there. That land now, for the most part, you would not recognise as chronically overgrazed land. So I am putting in a bit of a plug for the communities out there and saying that actually a lot of them are doing a fantastic job.

Mr McCormack: I would like to make a comment on the bushfire organisation. I was a captain for over 30 years in a number of brigades. The problem we are seeing today in the rural areas is that the regulations now are impacting on the volunteers. To drive a tanker, you have to be qualified. It does not matter if you have been a truck driver all your life; you still have to have the paperwork now. You cannot have a chainsaw on a tanker unless you have a qualified person with a ticket to use that chainsaw.

The red tape now is really affecting the rural brigades. In my area, when I went there 30 years ago, 50-odd members used to attend the bushfire meeting. Now you would be battling to get five. A lot of that problem is caused by the fact that the younger people have left the area as well. I believe the red tape and the amount of time that has to be spent on attending these courses is affecting a lot of our volunteers. We are now switching over to fighting fires in a lot more modern way with aeroplanes and that sort of thing. I think we saw at Bookham and in different areas that planes really played the major part in fire suppression. That is what is happening, but it is costing a hell of a lot of money. While governments are prepared to spend that money, that is the way we are going.

Getting back to the weeds point, in our shire we have four weeds officers. We run what we call a helicopter scheme in our shire. The council hires a contract helicopter spraying vehicle. We advertise through the tender process, and we also put out the chemical to tender, and council supplies that chemical spray to the landholders with no mark-up. Our staff oversee the program. They load the helicopter and that sort of thing.

You have to remember that in our area, adjoining the Abercrombie River, which runs through the northern part of our shire, for a lot of that country, the cost of eradicating

serrated tussock, which is one of our major weeds, would cost more than the land is worth. It is more than the land is valued at. So we really cannot force those landholders to try and eradicate serrated tussock because it is going to keep coming up for 30-odd years. You can spray it this year, but in 10 years time it will be back there thicker than ever. That is the problem that we have. We are certainly pushing landholders to keep weeds off their boundaries and to protect their neighbours, but I believe that the control of serrated tussock in the rougher and steeper country is virtually impossible.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that, everyone. I am mindful of the time now. Thank you all for your contributions today. This has been an important activity for the committee to get your views and knowledge about cross-border and regional issues as they affect the ACT and our region. There were no questions taken on notice, but if the committee has any further questions for you, we will send them through via the committee and ask that you respond to those within 10 days. It is important that if any further thoughts come to mind as a result of this committee hearing today, we can have further submissions as a result of that. So if there is something you think you have missed in your initial submission that you wanted to send through, please do so.

Again, if you have any other questions about this hearing or the process from here into the future, you can contact the secretary. Thank you all very much, again. For those of you that are staying here, enjoy your stay. We hope to see you all again very soon.

The committee adjourned at 1.55 pm.