



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

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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 9.02 am.

NEIL, MR ROBERT, ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the third public hearing of the Select Committee on Regional Development. Today we will hear from a range of witnesses. We are starting this morning with the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Mr Robert Neil. Mr Neil, are you familiar with the privilege statement that is in front of you?

Mr Neil: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement or would you like us to go straight to questions?

Mr Neil: I would like to provide the committee with a little bit of background. The commissioner's office has in the past written state of the environment reports for the region, from about 1994 until 2009, on a cost recovery basis. In 2009 there were changes to the local government act which changed the way local councils reported on their environment. It also linked them more closely to their community strategic plans. So it was decided mutually by the councils and me that we would not do a regional report. I have now left with them the thought that if they want my office to do a regional report for them in 2016, when all the councils align and have a single formal reporting time frame, I am happy to do it.

In the meantime we are trying to keep in touch with the region—and I think it is very important that we do that—through some of the workshops around the environmental things that they deal with. We have also gone through all of their draft state of the environment reports and tried to pick out the common themes across the region and in the ACT. They are around air quality, biodiversity, land, waste and water—not surprisingly.

The main thing we are trying to do is to make sure that the common environmental issues are not overlooked as part of this regional approach.

THE CHAIR: Do you want to start off with a question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Yes. I will have another question later. My first question, having regard to what you have just said, is: with the regional report that you said that you would do if they requested it, who pays for that regional report and those other services that you said that you provide? Is that a fee-for-service kind of arrangement that we have?

Mr Neil: The writing of the state of the environment report—and it has been the case since Dr Baker wrote the first regional state of the environment report—has been done on a cost-recovery basis. So the local councils pay the office to do it. Clearly, there is a cost to us in time and energy, but there is a cost recovery.

MS PORTER: When you do these other incidental things that you talked about, when they ask for advice and things, is that on a fee—

Mr Neil: No, that is part of our engagement with the regional community. It is a core part of what we do.

MR WALL: In the submission that you made, Mr Neil, it says that there was an MOU signed between the ACT and New South Wales governments in 2011. I was just wondering what priority actions were identified and how they are progressing.

Mr Neil: That MOU focused mainly on economic things—things like transport, health and education, the things where it was quite clear that the ACT government was very heavily connected to the region.

MR WALL: So it is a broader MOU, not one consolidated around the environment and sustainability?

Mr Neil: No, which is why we said—

MR WALL: Sorry, my apologies.

Mr Neil: But part of the submission was that you actually needed to include the environment as part of that MOU.

MR WALL: From your perspective, Mr Neil, what has that delivered in terms of your responsibilities?

Mr Neil: There is some work that has just come out of the regional councils, through SEROC. One is a waste stream mapping exercise that has been done across all the councils. I think that is a really smart start, to at least try to get some things in common that we all share and that there is no contention around. I think that is a really good idea.

The recently released nature conservation strategy is consistent with the New South Wales biodiversity strategy in that it recognises the vital role of biodiversity and connectivity across the region. It specifically recognises the collaboration between the ACT and New South Wales—the Kosciusko to coast project. There is also a focus on the greater Goorooyarroo area. Rather than having the ACT looking at their side and New South Wales looking at their side over the border, there is a more collegiate approach.

The recently released water strategy, if it is put into practice, will be very good. It clearly recognises the need for broader catchment management. So there are things happening. They are slow, like most things, but there is some genuine engagement within the region.

For me personally, when we look at the ACT state of the environment report, we will clearly have to look at the ACT and its role in the region. You cannot separate the ACT from the regional context when you look at things like climate change and biodiversity.

MR WALL: You mentioned that some of the implementation has been slow. What is

the cause of that? What is the bottleneck? Where are the hold-ups?

Mr Neil: That is probably a question better directed to governments. It is about making sure that they try and get comprehensive policies. I think it is not unreasonable that they take a little time. For people like me, I find it a little frustrating, but if the outcome is good and solid, it is probably worth the wait.

MS PORTER: I have a supplementary, chair. Mr Wall mentioned the waste area, which you refer to on page 4 of your submission. You said there were no specific recommendations around managing waste on a regional scale, but you did say that you thought this was an area where we could collaborate and that obviously there would be some benefits from that. From your experience how do you see this being achieved?

Mr Neil: I think that we have a common problem with the waste that we generate. I know there is some collaborative work—and I think there may even be an agreement between the New South Wales EPA and the ACT EPA around transporting waste interstate. We all have a common need to get rid of our waste. It may be that, on a regional basis, some of the recycling becomes cost effective. That is the work that SEROC have done with their waste mapping strategy, to try and identify where there are common themes and where there may be an economic benefit in doing that.

MR SMYTH: Commissioner, at the bottom of page 2 you talk about putting together the paper “Progressing sustainability in the ACR”. Why did the commission feel the need to put that together?

Mr Neil: That was part of the regional state of the environment report. At that stage progressing sustainability was not really an explicit part of state of environment reporting. The then commissioner took the view—and I think it was the right one—that if we were going to try and progress sustainability generally, we needed to at least provide some advice, some indication, of how we think that might occur.

MR SMYTH: When was that document put together?

Mr Neil: That would have been for the 2009 regional state of the environment report.

MR SMYTH: What has happened since 2009 to address the issues raised?

Mr Neil: As I said, the individual councils now do their own reports. The ACT government has signed up as part of SEROC, so we now have a formal relationship rather than an observer relationship with our local councils. Clearly, the reporting mechanisms and the changes to the New South Wales local environment act have caused the councils to pause. That reform is still going on now. I think councils are a little bit challenged by the potential changes. I think you are all aware now that they are looking at the local councils again across New South Wales.

MR SMYTH: With reference to the office’s report, you identify four key areas. Has there been any advancement towards sustainability in the region through renewable energy, water, land management and building adaptive communities?

Mr Neil: Clearly, renewable energy has expanded, not quite exponentially but quite dramatically through the region, from Upper Lachlan virtually through to Cooma-Monaro. With our water security, in the ACT and Queanbeyan context, we have improved the potential for our water security. With our biodiversity, we are working more closely to improve the biodiversity links. As I said, there is the ACT nature conservation strategy and some of the demonstration reaches, such as the Murrumbidgee demonstration reach. That all provides some indication that there are improvements.

MR SMYTH: And building adaptive communities?

Mr Neil: That is quite a challenge across the board. When I look at the ACT—and I am sure the New South Wales local region is the same—I think we have done well around bushfire preparedness, which is just another form of adaptability and resilience. I do not know that we have built that firmly into our biodiversity or into other sectors, but certainly the emergency management section has done a really good job, and we could probably learn a little bit from that. Over time, you would hope that adaptation and resilience are not separate items but core business. With the risk management approach that they have done in emergency services, it is just part of their core business. It would be good to see that across all sectors—that we think about those things as part of our core business and that they do not become an adaptation measure or a resilience measure; they are just normal business.

MR SMYTH: You then looked at the 2011-12 reports, and you picked up five issues. The new one seems to be air quality. Who is having an effect on whom? Are we hurting their air quality, are they hurting ours or are we hurting each other?

Mr Neil: No, those common themes have come from my office just looking at what each of the local councils is doing, and air quality came up as an issue within local councils. Whether it is air quality from open fires in a close community or whether it is more broadly from industry—I do not think that is the case. We do not have the level of industry so that we have severe problems with air pollution. It was just one of the common themes that each council had actually looked at. That is not to say that they have a problem, but that is one of the things that they were very keen to look at and it was part of their thoughts on what environment reporting would contain.

MR SMYTH: On page 3 you say that the 2011 state of the environment report had several recommendations for a regional approach. You go through them in your document. Are you happy with the progress on the areas that you have identified?

Mr Neil: “Happy” is an interesting word. I would prefer to see quicker progress on these things. But I am not unhappy. I do understand that intergovernment relations are quite challenging, particularly when you have all of the local councils, New South Wales government and the ACT. So it is not an easy ask, but I think there is quite a bit of leadership out of the SEROC group. That has been my experience. The general manager has been pretty engaged. I think there is genuine progress. It is just a matter of what priorities are put on that progress. As with most things, I think we focus on the economic and we probably need to put a little more weight behind the social and the environmental when we do this sort of thing.

MR SMYTH: For instance, in the section “Biodiversity”, the report suggested a number of things. Have (a) and (b) happened?

Mr Neil: They are integrating the biodiversity corridors as part of the land use planning—there is no question about that—and they are also mapping the connectivity corridors. With respect to identifying appropriate clearance thresholds, I do not think the government agreed with that. But there is research occurring to help guide development around decisions in terms of offsets. As yet we do not have the offsets policy.

THE CHAIR: Mr Neil, earlier in your submission you talked about coming together with the councils and SEROC, coming up with some common issues that could be worked on around sustainability and environmental and conservation matters. Are you aware of what some of these common issues might be and do you have any ideas yourself on what councils and governments could come together and work on?

Mr Neil: Clearly, one common issue is our water quantity and water quality. That is impacted by land use, including development. That is one area where I think there is a very strong opportunity to improve outcomes, not just for the local region but the broader Murray-Darling system. You need to coordinate some of the restoration work that you are doing in rivers, otherwise we could be doing a whole lot of work in one part of the river when there is a more problematic area that needs higher preference in terms of remediation further up the river or further down. There is definitely a need to look more broadly at a catchment level. There is no question about that.

The government, I think, responded to the Lake Burley Griffin report in May this year. Basically, they have accepted most of the recommendations, or accepted them in principle, which is always a little difficult. I am not quite sure what that actually means, other than they think it is a good idea. It is probably resourcing related. But there is a will and they have a task force. There are local council representatives on that task force and the NCA. So there is a genuine attempt to try and look at that. I understand the New South Wales government is looking at paring back the catchment management authorities. It will be interesting to see how it all plays out.

One thing that is quite apparent is that everyone shares the concern of the final outcome, which is poor water quality and polluted lakes and rivers. How they transfer that common concern for outcome into actions is clearly what I am interested in.

As to the biodiversity side of things, as I said earlier, there is quite a bit of work now between the ACT government and the New South Wales government around biodiversity corridors and broader assessments of things like Gorooyarroo. We can look at our side, but they are actually looking more broadly at the whole thing. That is not to say there are not a lot of challenges around our land use and land use planning and how we manage that. But, in the end, if all three environmental, social and economic considerations are put on the table and there is a little bit of transparency around how the decisions are made I think we can look forward to improvements on a regional basis.

THE CHAIR: Just as a supplementary to that on common issues, during one of the previous hearings—it might have been through the annual reports hearings—there

was a discussion around flora and fauna and pests across the region and a regional approach like you are saying with water quality. For instance, you will have plants that are allowed in Canberra that are a pest in paddocks in Goulburn.

Mr Neil: I was not aware of that. Pest plants and animals generally do not stop at the border. It is a bit like living next to your neighbour. If you treat your weeds and they do not treat theirs it does not take long for them to jump the fence. Cooperative action on a broader scale for pest plant and animal management is something that would be very good to see. I think it happens in small areas. I would like to see it on a much broader scale. I think that is a very valid point and I appreciate your raising it. I think there is some scope there.

MS PORTER: In relation to fauna rather than flora, Ms Berry mentioned the weeds. As you know, we have a kangaroo management plan here where we recently had a cull. Are you aware of any regional approach to kangaroo management? Kangaroos hop across the border and back again. I know that they have a management plan for the kangaroos at Government House, for instance. The kangaroos actually swim across the lake, the big bucks, to get there, and jump the fence as well. It is problematic. It is difficult for us to try and manage that issue.

Mr Neil: I am not aware of any regional kangaroo management plan. Certainly, the ACT government has one. The individual institutions have them. I suspect that if we looked at the licence allowance in New South Wales for shooting kangaroos, the ACT would look fairly compassionate. The licences to cull or to shoot in New South Wales are clearly quite substantially more than in the ACT.

MS PORTER: Greater?

Mr Neil: Greater, yes.

MS PORTER: So more kangaroos are culled in New South Wales than in the ACT?

Mr Neil: Yes.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

MR SMYTH: Just going back to the biodiversity area, on page 3 of your submission you talk about the lack of adequate data. Has that been improved since 2011?

Mr Neil: I cannot answer that, Mr Smyth. There probably is an improvement. Whether or not the data that they now collect is done at the expense of previous data I am not sure. As part of the 2015 state of the environment report that is something we would be looking at but, as far as I am aware, most of the programs they have continued. I am not aware, other than some of the connectivity mapping, of new and additional programs.

MR SMYTH: You talked of the offsets policy which, of course, has not been released. How important is that policy in terms of getting the connectivity right and making sure that the biodiversity corridors are delivering?

Mr Neil: I think there is the potential to take a fairly strategic look at offsets and work out where we can get the best value in the ACT in offsetting land for particular ecological communities. When it does come out I think I would be looking for that high level analysis where we start to identify now an area which we think is good for offsetting into the future.

MR SMYTH: So if we are going to get long-term sustainability in the region, without having the offsets policy on the table or without the accurate data it is almost impossible to progress?

Mr Neil: I agree on the data. I think that without robust and reliable data you do not know what you are losing or you do not know what you are gaining. We need to have good data.

THE CHAIR: Mr Neil, thank you for your time today. We are going to have to leave it there because our next witness is by phone link and we do not want to keep him waiting unnecessarily. Thank you very much for your contributions today.

Mr Neil: Thank you.

TOMS, MR STEVE, New South Wales Cross-Border Commissioner

THE CHAIR: We will now speak to Mr Toms via teleconference. Mr Toms, you have seen the privileges statement?

Mr Toms: Yes, I have seen it.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement or would you like for us to go straight to questions?

Mr Toms: My opening statement would simply be that—and it supports the submission that I have put in—basically the whole concept of a cross-border commissioner is a new role that the New South Wales government has created. It was initiated in 2011. I came into being in March 2012, so just a bit over 12 months ago. It is a completely new position. Quite clearly, in the past there have been various mechanisms to resolve cross-border issues, particularly on a jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction basis, but perhaps not a very clear process for resolving issues that residents, business et cetera might want to raise in a public sense and try and get resolution to those issues. In the past they have relied on going through local members, which those issues still do, and then trying to get into the bureaucracies in various ways.

It has been, for me, an interesting role and somewhat challenging to get around all of the New South Wales borders. New South Wales is perhaps a little bit unique in having the most number of populated borders. Obviously the ACT is one of those. As part of the process, I have produced a listening tour report and have a current business plan, but many issues continue to be raised along the way. That is just a brief statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Toms. I might kick things off just by asking about some of the work that you have been doing over the last 12 months as the Cross-Border Commissioner and what opportunities you have identified in your relationships with other states, Queensland and Victoria, for example, that might be able to be utilised in a relationship with the ACT.

Mr Toms: Certainly, one of the good things about the role is that because it is looking at all borders it does have the opportunity to see what I call the geographic, the social and the economic issues that exist around all borders and to look at where there are solutions that can be shared. I think that is an important part of the position. It is one, I would have to say, that is certainly a work in progress. The last 12 months have been very busy in trying to build up relationships and understand connections and so forth. Generally speaking, in terms of dealing with cross-border issues, I have been able to build up good relationships with Queensland and also the ACT government generally through premier and cabinet and its equivalents. I am in the process of building up those relationships with Victoria, and it has been a little bit more difficult. The issues are somewhat less in South Australia.

In terms of things that can be shared, I guess there are a couple of examples I would quote. The ACT obviously has an MOU with New South Wales, as New South Wales

does with Queensland and Victoria. They are 2011 MOUs so they have all been produced since the current New South Wales government came to power in 2011. It is good to see that there is that strong interest in having those MOUs.

A couple of interesting examples that I have seen in terms of cross-border issues in the Tweed area, both the Tweed Shire Council and the Gold Coast City Council—obviously the Gold Coast is quite a big entity with a very high population base—is that they have shared a common list of cross-border issues that they both see as relevant to each council. They have then passed those up to their respective state governments and also to me. That has been a great process of being able to get issues that are of common interest to both sides. I draw a parallel, perhaps, with the ACT and its surrounding councils in that respect in being able to come up with some common issues that both sides certainly stand around and work on as a basis to get them clearly into government's eyes. That is one example.

There are other examples. One that I think is quite unique is in Albury-Wodonga, with the Albury hospital actually becoming part of the Victorian health service. That is something that is fairly unique from what I can see around New South Wales borders. It has obviously been an interesting process because of different industrial awards and a whole range of things like that. Those are a couple of examples that I would raise.

THE CHAIR: Mr Toms, just a supplementary to that one—the Albury hospital being included in the Victorian health system: are you aware how long has that been going on for and how successful it has been?

Mr Toms: My understanding is that that process started about three or so years ago. I believe it has had its teething problems, but to the extent that it shares resources it is a very positive thing. My understanding is that it is progressing in a positive direction, although I am certainly not inside that process. I can only take on the feedback that I get, which at times can be ad hoc. The principle of sharing resources within what is, I guess, a common community of interest obviously makes sense. I certainly note that the ACT and New South Wales have what I understand to be a very positive relationship in terms of sharing health services under the current health agreement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Porter, did you have a substantive question?

MS PORTER: It is really following on, chair, from your discussion. Mr Toms, it is about the communities of interest question. Obviously, people in Albury have more interest in the people of Wodonga and people in Queanbeyan have more interest in what we do here in the ACT than what happens in the parliament in Sydney. Can you just expand on the opportunities and the difficulties that face us with regard to where the towns intersect and how we do foster those communities of interest and work with each other to achieve the best outcomes?

Mr Toms: Starting with the MOUs, particularly the MOU that exists between ACT and New South Wales, they cover a whole range of things, including regional planning matters, health, education and emergency services. I believe they are great starting points. The jurisdictional differences in terms of legislation and so forth create frustrations, I guess, for some of those communities, but sitting above all of that is the opportunity that the critical mass of the joint communities of interest provides. In a

sense, they provide their own critical mass to try and overcome issues.

I know that in Albury-Wodonga over the years there have been a number of developments in the cross-border setting, including, back in the 1970s, the concept of an Albury-Wodonga growth centre. This led to the development of an Albury-Wodonga corporation, which was a commonwealth-based corporation, but it had to be registered in the commonwealth and in both states to be able to operate across borders in that interjurisdictional sense. That was overcome by that joint registration of interest.

Where there is goodwill on the ground and people want to work together, I think fundamentally that is the greatest requirement. Where that exists and where people recognise their joint communities of interest and work within that, through MOUs and so forth, I think it is certainly very positive.

MS PORTER: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wall.

MR WALL: I have a change of topic. School holidays is an issue that often gets raised with me by both businesses and parents alike, particularly with the discrepancy between school holiday dates in the ACT and New South Wales. In your role as commissioner, have you had any discussions about changing or aligning school holidays in your state with the ACT, to have some consistency?

Mr Toms: Yes, I can certainly talk on that point. I have made representations on the back of representations that were made to me, particularly through the listening tour, that this was a critical issue for residents. Both ACT education and New South Wales are looking at the next school term blocks, which is for the period 2016 to 2020. I have made representations to the ACT department of education as well as New South Wales education.

The feedback I have got is quite positive in that what I am hearing from New South Wales education is that, for the first time, the two authorities have actually started talking together ahead of determining the school terms. Whilst I think that process is still being sorted out, I am fairly hopeful that there will be give on both sides and that it will move fairly close to being coordinated school terms, which obviously results in school holidays that match each other much better.

MR SMYTH: Mr Toms, you talked about the listening tour in your answer to Mr Wall. I know you have done a report and it is on the website, but can you summarise the issues that you encountered for this area in your listening tour and what you would like to see happen?

Mr Toms: What I found around most borders was that many of the issues were similar. At the same time the dynamics between various borders also creates its own challenges. Certainly, in the education area, school holidays was one issue that had been raised. The whole question of school student enrolments and the way tracking of students works in terms of student records was raised as an issue—the risk of kids falling through the cracks and missing out in both systems or not being properly

accounted for by either.

There were some issues raised around vocational training, training of apprentices. The building industry certainly talked about issues around long service leave and different licensing requirements. I note on that point there is the process going on at the moment through the national reform process of a national occupational licensing system, which is currently still being discussed in terms of where that heads.

There were some issues around child protection. There were a number of matters around health, but a lot of those seem to be working fairly well. I have had recent requests regarding breast screening and some challenges that have occurred recently where New South Wales residents were being serviced within the ACT but that process had dropped off. I believe there are discussions going on now to try to resolve that.

Around land use planning, there are obviously a number of developments around the ACT border, particularly south Jerrabomberra, south Tralee, that have been quite controversial. With transport, there are things around road rules, bus driver authorities, transport planning, public transport and road infrastructure. They have all been raised as critical issues.

MR SMYTH: With the issue of breast screening, when you say New South Wales had dropped off, had female residents of New South Wales been excluded or were they not being informed? What was the issue there?

Mr Toms: I believe that in the order of 2,000 New South Wales residents were normally having breast screens done in the ACT and, for whatever reason, ACT breast screening were unable to deal with those New South Wales residents. There were problems because of the records that ACT held about when breast screens were required and those sorts of things. I believe now that those records have been shared and that there is in process at the moment a development between the two breast screening organisations on either side of the border to come up with an MOU which will resolve the impasse. That is something that I am about to do some more follow-up on, to see where that has got to.

MR SMYTH: Sorry, could you repeat that? You are about to do some follow-up?

Mr Toms: Yes, I am in the process of doing some follow-up just to see where that MOU process has got to.

MR SMYTH: You mentioned land use and particularly the Tralee issue. Are you aware of the recent developments there and what the implications might be for cross-border relations?

Mr Toms: I am not sure exactly what you are referring to. I understand there has now been agreement certainly between south Tralee development and Canberra Airport in terms of a way forward there. There are various planning processes underway on the New South Wales side to get that development moving and also joint discussions with the ACT in terms of service planning and infrastructure planning to try and facilitate that development.

MR SMYTH: So you will maintain a watching brief on that issue?

Mr Toms: Yes. I have been lobbied, I guess, in various ways about some frustrations, but my understanding now is that all the parties that need to be talking together are talking constructively together. I am looking now to monitor that that continues on.

MR SMYTH: You mentioned bus companies under transport. Are there still issues concerning recognition of bus licensing in New South Wales and the ACT and whether they can operate interstate?

Mr Toms: The issue around bus driver authorities is one that comes up on all borders. It is something that I would have to take on notice in terms of the ACT border. It was raised, and I know there has been some positive work done in terms of integration between Deane's bus service in Queanbeyan, for instance, and the ACT bus service in terms of service levels.

In terms of driver authorities as it relates to the ACT, as I say, it has been raised with me, but I need to do more research on it to get to the bottom of how much of an issue it is. Certainly, up in the Tweed-Gold Coast area, where a common bus line offers services on both sides, they need joint driver authorities and it is creating a lot of frustration for them. It looks as though there may be grounds for a resolution up there, which I am hoping to ensure rolls out to other areas.

MR SMYTH: You mentioned child protection. What were the issues raised there and have they been resolved?

Mr Toms: One of the things that keeps coming up with child protection is particularly around the reporting, where somebody might report in one state, and what the jurisdictional or legislative responsibilities are as to how the follow-up works for that and how the protection processes work. Again, that is something that I know has been raised very critically on the Queensland border. It was certainly raised as part of the listening tour for the ACT. To date, it is something that I have not been able to drill down into in terms of the ACT stuff. But it is certainly one aspect that is on the radar for further attention.

MR SMYTH: Was the complaint that reports made in New South Wales were not passed on to the ACT, was it vice versa, or was it about either side of the border?

Mr Toms: In terms of the ACT, I do not have that at my fingertips at the moment, but if you are interested, I can certainly follow up on that.

MR SMYTH: That would be kind; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter, you have not asked a substantive question yet. Do you have a substantive question?

MS PORTER: No. My substantive question was around the communities of interest, so I am satisfied with that. That is something I have been concerned about for a long time—the fact that people do not necessarily relate to their parliament or their

government if they are a long way away from it and they are more likely, obviously, to relate to the one that is closest. The Queanbeyan-ACT one is a very good example.

Going back to the school holiday matter, do you think there will come a day when we will ever have school holiday terms right across Australia which actually work together?

Mr Toms: In answer to your question, I really do not know. To date, my understanding is that each state—certainly it has been the case with New South Wales—essentially determines school terms as an intrastate issue. There are a certain number of principles regarding how school terms are set up, in terms of how they sit around Easter, the principles around whether or not each term has to be the same length and those sorts of things. There are a number of principles that I know New South Wales looks at and I suspect each state has its own set of principles which result indirectly in differences.

I think the ACT and surrounding areas are fairly unique in the number of children that are crossing the border. But it also raises questions about implications for the spread of holidays perhaps in a tourism sense.

MS PORTER: Yes, there is always an impact when you change something.

Mr Toms: Yes.

THE CHAIR: On the school holidays, I was looking at the report into your listening tour. It talks about the effect that school holidays have on work experience programs and education opportunities. I cannot see in your report what sort of feedback you had from tourism operators and businesses who get that extra week in a school holiday period. For example, in Queensland they get three weeks of school holiday visitors to a tourist park because the ACT is not aligned with Queensland.

Mr Toms: No, I had not had any representations from interests other than residents, and I guess around school transport. Many people have raised that one of the criteria for determining school terms is the economic side of it. But in the investigations and the questions that I have asked, that is actually not one of the principles that is formally adopted as such.

THE CHAIR: I have a question regarding registration of vehicles, which was also raised during your listening tour. In the ACT we have a system now where cars are no longer required to have registration stickers and they can be identified through our new RAPID system, but of course New South Wales vehicles cannot be identified. Have you heard of our new system for identifying registered vehicles, and how do you think that could work collaboratively with New South Wales?

Mr Toms: I am not sure of the implications of the question. New South Wales has now adopted a similar thing of not requiring registration labels on vehicles.

THE CHAIR: In the ACT, of course, we are surrounded by New South Wales and a lot of New South Wales vehicles visit the ACT. ACT vehicles can be identified by our ACT RAPID identification system, not New South Wales vehicles.

Mr Toms: You are saying the ACT system is not able to pick up New South Wales vehicles?

THE CHAIR: We asked the question in the Assembly, and it was not able to. It was a question around that. I do not think the New South Wales system can identify ACT vehicles as well.

Mr Toms: That would be a question I would certainly be keen to put to transport in New South Wales, to find out about that. I dare say it is something that the two transport agencies would be able to resolve, if they are not working on it already.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Toms, for your time today. We will send you a copy of the transcript of today's hearing. Thank you very much.

Mr Toms: Thanks for the opportunity.

SLOAN, MR CRAIG, Chair, Regional Development Australia ACT

VAN AALST, MR ROBERT, Executive Officer, Regional Development Australia ACT

THE CHAIR: Mr Sloan and Mr van Aalst, welcome. Are you familiar with the privilege statement in front of you?

Mr Sloan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement or would you like to go straight to questions?

Mr Sloan: I would not mind making an opening statement just to give members a bit of information on who we are and what we do, probably what some of our current activities are and where we see opportunities. The Regional Development Australia program was initiated by the federal government in 2009, driven by the desire to better join up the diverse array of regional development organisations operating across Australia supported by the various levels of government.

The RDA ACT is part of that national network of 55 RDA committees, a network that represents all of Australia—so right across the remote, rural, metropolitan and regional regions. We have a broad set of objectives aimed at enhancing the economic, social and sustainable development of Australian communities. Each of the 55 RDA committees comprises committee members who are appointed on the basis that they collectively understand the challenges, opportunities and priorities of their region. Committee members are appointed jointly by the commonwealth Minister for Regional Australia and their state and territory counterparts. Appointments to RDA committees are made utilising an open and public expression of interest process and are refreshed on a cyclical basis, currently four-year terms with half committee renewal every two years.

The RDA ACT committee was formed when the Australian and ACT governments signed an MOU in 2009, which provided for financial and in-government support from both governments. The commonwealth, through the federal Minister for Regional Australia, asked that RDA committees undertake five core functions: consult and engage with the community, support informed regional planning, overseeing the development of a strategic regional plan, promote whole-of-government activities, promote government programs and facilitate community and economic development. In addition to these five core functions, RDAs become involved in activities that help to pursue sustainable development priorities in their region, including undertaking specific requirements linked to funding agreements with the relevant state or territory.

RDA committees also have a significant role in prioritising applications to the commonwealth's Regional Development Australia Fund, or RDAF. RDA committees can also act as catalysts to link regional stakeholders into a range of other relevant government funding programs that will assist the development of their region. Importantly, RDAs are brokers or linkages between the wide range of stakeholders that they engage with. An important aspect is that RDAs sit between the levels of government and can, to a degree, operate independently.

As well as financial support provided by the nationwide federal RDA program, the RDA ACT committee is also supported through a deed of grant with the ACT government. Within the ACT government the RDA ACT works closely with the Chief Minister and Treasury directorate as the central coordinating agency and with other directorates as needed. The ACT government's agenda for RDA ACT is that, as well as undertaking the role defined in the commonwealth's funding agreement, it assists the ACT government with its regional engagement agenda to progress initiatives and activities that align with the MOU on regional collaboration between the ACT and New South Wales and assist with regional engagement and interaction with local governments through the South East Regional Organisation of Councils, SEROC, forum.

The RDA ACT committee and secretariat, which Robert heads up, undertakes a range of activities as part of the day-to-day operations. The RDA plays a lead role in advocating the ACT's role in a wider region. It is pleasing to note that over recent times many more ACT government directorates and many private and not-for-profit sector organisations are talking more overtly of their regional role. Very few organisations now see themselves in an isolated ACT perspective.

One of the more important activities undertaken by the RDA is the production of a strategic regional plan, which is developed subsequent to consultation with a broad range of stakeholders across business and industry, education and training, research, environment and community sectors. The RDA ACT's strategic regional plan since 2011-12 has described five pillars of development for the ACT. These include a resilient and diverse economy, an exemplar of environmental sustainability, strengthened opportunities through education, a connected Canberra and empowered communities. The pillars work to guide the work of the RDA ACT.

Some examples of the activities that we at RDA ACT have been involved with include SERREE, the South East Region of Renewable Energy Excellence. We have taken a lead role in forming the SERREE initiative that is bringing together a network of the region's renewable energy stakeholders to explore opportunities and synergies that will develop the region as a national exemplar of renewable energy excellence.

In late 2012 the RDA, along with fellow RDAs in the southern inland and far south coast, were successful in gaining project funding from which we set up a secretariat officer who was employed. He is developing that network and working very closely with the local mayors and other key stakeholders across that broader network.

Another one of our activities is the greater capital region initiative, where the commonwealth department of regional Australia has provided project funding to undertake cross-regional economic development activity. The contributing partners to this work are the three RDAs in the ACT, southern inland and far south coast, as well as the ACT and New South Wales governments and the commonwealth department of regional Australia. Local governments of the region participate via SEROC.

This project is currently in the process of undertaking a number of actions and activities that will further examine the potential for development of regional economic activity. These activities include waste and resource mapping, skill shortages and

training needs across the capital region and investment attraction across the region. The project hopes to work in with the work of the ACT government in this respect. Whilst the range of activities is currently fairly limited, really due to the limited project funding, it is hoped that further opportunities will come to light during the actual process.

Another activity that we are undertaking is a broadband readiness program, or telework hubs. RDA ACT, in partnership, again, with RDA southern inland, undertook some feasibility work on the development of smart work hubs in a number of regional centres around the ACT within the C+1 region. Concurrently a number of the regional local governments are looking at the opportunity to develop facilities which might include a smart work hub. This would help to promote teleworkers and opportunity for many of the ACT workers who reside in the regional community belt surrounding the ACT. Increasing telework opportunities could relieve some pressure from regional roads, support the regional towns by keeping workers local, and support the integration of the regional towns and cities into the ACT economy.

The RDA ACT has been involved in a range of events and activities that have highlighted the potential benefits that an east coast high speed rail might bring to the country as a whole and to this region specifically. It supports the Sydney-to-Canberra leg as the first stage of this development. The RDA has worked with the Canberra Business Council, the Australasian Railway Association, local governments of the region and some outside the region and, importantly, has advocated to the federal department and political representatives.

A range of other activities and cross-regional priorities have the potential to be further developed not by the RDAs in isolation but, in many cases, with the relevant governments taking a lead role. These include delivery of government services, cross-border public transport, planning, land and infrastructure, emergency management response coordination and improved utilisation of regional assets, including utilities.

The RDA is also keen to develop the economy and industries of the ACT and region. There are a number of areas which have the potential for industry development which cross the borders and include the ACT and various parts of the south-east New South Wales region. These include renewable energy, waste management, resource recovery and recycling, freight and logistics, tourism, sport and agriculture.

In summary, we believe the RDA has an important role in advocating for Canberra's role in the wider region, better linkages and efficiency to working cross-border, better coordination between commonwealth, ACT, New South Wales and local governments for the benefit of the south-east New South Wales-ACT region, expanding the benefits and assets of the ACT out into the regional areas, and taking advantage of the critical mass that a population base of some 600,000 brings. We are very happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. You have pretty much covered some of the questions I was going to ask. But I can build on that. You have talked about the role that the RDA ACT has in engaging the broader region. I am wondering how that role can be strengthened, particularly given the Chief Minister has established the regional development portfolio, through your interactions within the region.

Mr Sloan: That is a good question. I think one of the great outcomes was the Chief Minister establishing that office and really allowing us to work very closely with that team. That team work with us almost on a daily or weekly basis. They sit on our committee as observers and have great input into that. One of the real challenges is how we engage with the broader region, and I think that team is looking at doing that. Their work in SEROC, and understanding what is coming through that forum, is a good example of that. It can be a frustrating forum in terms of what some of the local governments actually want from the ACT but, importantly, what we need to do a lot better is really understand the capability we have, not through the ACT government but, I think, through the private and community sectors to see what it is we can actually offer back into the community without the reliance being on the ACT government.

Mr van Aalst: I would agree with that.

MS PORTER: I want to go to your statement about the learning hubs being connected to the broadband and, therefore, being able to stay in one's own region. You have talked about the pressures on roads and transport and so on that would be relieved from people staying in their own locale. However, we are seeing a lot of people, for lifestyle reasons, actually purchasing land outside of the ACT not because they want to work there but because they want to live there. How do you think we can address the issue around people wanting those large rural blocks and still commuting? Obviously there is pressure on our roads and also on the environment in relation to that.

Mr van Aalst: I think there is a real synergy for the ACT working with the surrounding regions in a number of areas, but one is lifestyle and the opportunities we have. Within the ACT we have got lots of high density developments happening. We have got the typical suburban developments. These regional lifestyle blocks around the ACT complete the suite, I guess, of lifestyle options that are available in the ACT, which goes to liveability and attracting people to live here as well.

It is an important factor, that connection back into the ACT. I think, as you mentioned before about the roads and as Craig mentioned, the roads into the ACT need to be capable of handling the traffic on a daily basis. There are increasing numbers of commuters from Yass—from all areas, actually—Queanbeyan, Goulburn, Cooma and the Wamboin area as well. The roads need to be up to scratch to handle the increased load as the years go by.

The telework option is something that will add, I think, not only to the sustainability of increasing that catchment of the ACT and to those regions; it gives people that extra lifestyle option as well. The current federal government has a policy of 12 per cent of all public servants doing some form of telework by 2020. That, I guess, was the catalyst for us looking at what we could do to advocate that for this part of the world, for this region, and also to help the local regions keep employees in their area in the daytime so that they spend their money locally on child care or buying their lunch or services during the day.

It needs to be a mix because not everybody can telework. There are obviously a lot of

positions that have to be front and centre, the front-line services et cetera. There has to be a mix of addressing that connection from the region into the ACT. It needs to be physical—there does need to be a physical connectivity with roads—but there also needs to be the capability for people to telework and to commute electronically on a daily basis as well.

MS PORTER: I am not a great IT expert. In fact, a lot of people will tell you I hardly know anything about IT, but anyway. With regard to the different models of the rollout that is being discussed at the moment, is there a cost to the end user that is going to be more difficult in the rural areas as far as that rollout is concerned—that is, if we go with the node, or whatever it is called? I just wondered about that, because it is obviously a great distance from the road on many occasions for the person that is trying to run their business from home.

Mr van Aalst: I will not claim to be an expert in the NBN-type technology, but the consultant that we got to do the telework feasibility work out in the region was looking at centralising telework hubs in regional towns rather than to homes. I am aware that the department of broadband were very keen to also include opportunities to work from home as well, and in many parts of the region around the ACT it will be serviced under the current NBN plans by wireless and satellite. So there will not be a direct optic fibre link to many of the small towns anyway.

When the consultant did his report for us a couple of months ago there were significant costs in establishing decent connections even into the towns and the cities around the ACT. The report that he provided, I guess, highlighted that with the rollout of NBN those connections may be cheaper because they are being rolled out anyway to those towns and that some of the costs that were quoted to him by private providers and our current national telecommunications provider were quite expensive to get significant bandwidth into regional centres.

MS PORTER: You mentioned that roads need to be kept up to standard in order to enable people to continue to commute where it is more appropriate for them to do that than work directly where they live. How is the relationship between the different road builders? It is councils, isn't it, over the border and in the ACT it is all within this government? How is that managed? I have lived in the country. I recall many years ago driving along the road when suddenly the tarmac just disappeared and you were on dirt because you were in another local government area and that local government had decided that they did not need to tarmac the road.

Mr van Aalst: Road funding is a complicated beast, and it has been probably forever. Local governments spend a lot of money on roads, but very little of it do they put in themselves. They normally get assistance from the state and/or federal government. As you increase the cost or the size of the project, you need to get a greater cocktail of funding from different sources.

It is a complicated beast, and I think it probably always will be. It requires, I guess, an understanding across the community and all levels of government and all the stakeholders involved that the improved infrastructure, the improved roads, will actually benefit the region. You then need to fight on a competitive level against other parts of the state and other parts of the country for the funding. You need to argue the

case. I think that is the important thing; there needs to be an understanding that having those transport links efficient and effective is critical to the local economy.

Mr Sloan: Yes, and I think certainly for the region, Mary, our role is very much about talking particularly to southern inland, as the RDA that surrounds the ACT, and also down to RDA far south coast, about what are the priorities, what are they hearing from their local governments about the road priorities. For us, it is a case of linking it all together and saying what do we, as the ACT, think is the biggest priority for us. It is about talking to them and how do we then help advocate for some of those funding opportunities that might come. It is not about every road. I think in the ACT our role is to say which are the important linkages into the ACT rather than trying to support everything. Funding is not endless and we have to cherry pick which ones we want to support.

MR SMYTH: Does the RDA have an opinion on what roads need to be upgraded?

Mr van Aalst: It is probably not something that has been prioritised, outside a general discussion that they should be prioritised. The Barton Highway is clearly one in desperate need of upgrade, just for capacity. The number of vehicles coming from Yass and the Yass valley region into the ACT is increasing tremendously. It is one of the bigger population growth areas of the region. So that is probably one of the priority ones.

MR SMYTH: Is the problem that people cannot buy large quarter-acre blocks in the ACT and it forces them further and further away? Can the problem be addressed by having some diversity of block size in the ACT?

Mr van Aalst: I probably do not have an opinion on that one.

Mr Sloan: Possibly, Brendan. We have not really explored why people are crossing the border. But there is no doubt that people go for lifestyle choices. Affordability of housing comes into the mix as well. If you can get what you are looking for at a cheaper price and it just means you are travelling another 10 minutes to your workplace or kids schooling, people will choose to cross the border.

It is an interesting challenge for us in this region, with Canberra and C+1, about how we manage the population as it continues to grow and where it actually resides. Part of the challenge not just for us but for a whole heap of other organisations, including the government, is about what we need to do to make Canberra an attractive place to live. Part of that very much comes down to affordability of housing and housing choice. The regions become very good at providing an alternative, and you are seeing people crossing the border to live in New South Wales or people coming to the region actually now choosing to reside in the region.

By itself, that is not necessarily a bad thing. One of the things about looking at the whole regional development is: do we want everybody living in the ACT? We do not. The bottom line, with one of the other hats I used to wear, was wanting to attract everybody into Canberra. I have had a light bulb moment; we need to have a very strong regional community surrounding the ACT for us to continue to grow and to prosper.

What we are really trying to foster through our work is how to help those communities to grow and maintain their communities, rather than having the ACT sucking the life out of them by bringing everybody into Canberra. If that happens, we are going to have a belt around the ACT that is pretty dead. That is not what we want. If we can have a vibrant region—particularly with C+1—it will stretch into the broader region as it links up the corridor towards Sydney and certainly as it links down to the coast. So we are not about stopping people or trying to stop developments in the region. It is more about the ACT making sure it is doing enough to make Canberra an attractive place for its residents and for business as well.

MR WALL: On page 15 of your submission you talk about the delivery of government services. You say that the primary focus of the ACT government has been on collaboration in the health and education sectors. You conclude the second paragraph by saying that “there is much more that can be done”. In your opinion what more could be done and in what areas?

Mr van Aalst: There is always more that can be done. There are a number of areas. I know that one of the reasons for greater interaction with the SEROC group, for example, was to see what opportunities there might be to share services—whether it is procurement, whether it is back-of-house IT, whether it is the purchase of X, Y, Z or a whole range of services. It makes sense to do it in a block as you can save a lot of money, and there will be benefits for the ACT and benefits for the regional councils as well.

We are not directly involved in that activity. You would have to look at the costs and the benefits, I guess, of each strand of potential area of collaboration to list the priorities. In a general sense, it makes a lot of sense to work more closely together, and you get economies of scale.

MR WALL: Are you suggesting getting rid of some of the duplication in recruitment and services, and make efficiencies in that way?

Mr van Aalst: It has to make sense to do that, though. Some organisations may not think that it is beneficial to outsource their IT services, for example, to the ACT. I know some of the local governments are already sharing stuff. They are sharing their IT, they are sharing their procurement and their HR services. That is being done more and more, not just across local government and governments but across other sectors as well. It is really up to those organisations to go through those hard negotiations. In many cases they do not like to lose the power. But there are benefits to be gained, probably, and especially in costs.

Mr Sloan: There is the government’s telehealth, and the pilot with pushing that out to the region. To me, further enabling technology will allow a lot more to be done. Anything we can do that takes the pressure off emergency departments in our hospitals is worth exploring. I think that is a great pilot and, hopefully, it will see services being provided in those smaller regional hospitals, rather than people having to come in to big centres like Canberra.

On the education front, with respect to where work needs to be done, when you look

at the ACT, we have some of the country's best educational and research institutions sitting here—the ANU, UC and CIT. We need to be able to push those services out into the region rather than suck the people from the region into it. So it is about working with them to see how we provide our businesses here in Canberra with the opportunity to provide services into the region. So how do we cleverly enable the universities, the CITs, to provide their courses in the region rather than the students having to come in to Canberra to attend or partake? That is where we see that a lot of work can be done.

MR SMYTH: At the bottom of page 12, you have done a small summary in a box about the future challenge. How are you going to address the future challenge? Is enough being done? Is the government doing its part? What needs to be done to address the challenges you have outlined there?

Mr van Aalst: I think it is not just a challenge for government; it is a challenge for the whole community. We often get caught up in thinking about what the government does or what particular governments do, whether it is ACT, New South Wales, commonwealth or local. But there are so many other factors to society than just governments. There are community groups, there is the business sector and the not for profits. There is a whole range of sectors of the community. By thinking more broadly than just the ACT and thinking not just of a population of 370,000-odd people but of 400,000, 500,000 or 600,000—however big their reach is—they can actually extend the range of their services, become a lot more productive at what they do and expand their area of delivery. There is a real potential benefit there, as we say, in extending that relative advantage that we have here in the ACT out into the region. We have service delivery agencies in the ACT that are fantastic. They do some terrific stuff.

MR SMYTH: How do you make that happen?

Mr van Aalst: We advocate that the ACT is part of the region and it is not in isolation. I think we have done a reasonable job on that in the last three years. If you look at most government policy documents these days, they talk about regional engagement. If you look at some of the strategic plans of some community organisations and business groups, they talk about regional engagement. One of our major roles is advocating that Canberra is not an isolated island in the middle of New South Wales; we are actually part of a vibrant region, and we can take advantage of the assets, including the people, that are out in that region. We have to reciprocate and make life better for them as well, and that may well happen.

Mr Sloan: Importantly, Brendan, at the last SEROC meeting there was probably a bit of a feeling of, “This is what all the local governments want from the ACT.” I said in that meeting that it should not be about what the ACT government can provide to local governments; it should be about local governments identifying what their needs are, bringing them back through a network like the RDAs, where we connect in with the community, to see what we have outside government that can provide services. So a lot of it is about where we use the smarts of the ACT to provide those goods and services into the region rather than everyone seeming to be heading down to the Chief Minister's door and saying, “This is what we want.” It should not be about that. If we do need to get government support, that is when we should come knocking.

Our businesses and community organisations here in Canberra will benefit significantly once they understand the ability to tap into providing services into the region. We are very good at looking overseas, but, to me, there are a lot of opportunities for our businesses to be doing more in the region, and I think that is what we need to really work closely on to make it happen.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much. I think we will have to leave it there. Thank you, Mr Sloan and Mr van Aalst, for your time today. The secretary will provide a copy of the transcript for you, and we hope to see you again.

Mr Sloan: Thank you.

Mr van Aalst: Thanks very much.

SULLIVAN, MR MARK, Managing Director, ACTEW Corporation
EDGHILL, MR DUNCAN, Group Manager, Business Development, ACTEW Water

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Mr Edghill and Mr Sullivan, from ACTEW. Are you familiar with the privilege statement that is in front of you?

Mr Sullivan: I certainly am.

THE CHAIR: A fairly obvious question. Would you like to make an opening statement or would you like us to go straight to questions?

Mr Sullivan: Madam Chair, I am quite happy to go almost straight to questions, but I will give maybe a very short scene-setter. ACTEW has been involved in regional matters for a long time. Our biggest dam is in New South Wales. We are the bulk water supplier to Queanbeyan. Our second largest water processing centre is in New South Wales. Of course, we deliver our used water—be it stormwater that has gone through a system of lakes, ponds and other systems, or sewage which is treated largely at the lower Molonglo and is released as effluent—into New South Wales. It becomes part of the water supply of New South Wales.

We have been in the place for a fair while. We know that we are dependent upon regional development and cooperation in respect of catchment management. If we want good water quality at the catchment level, we depend not only on Canberra and the ACT to deliver that good water quality but on a whole range of people.

We think the agenda is getting a bit more exciting. Particularly in the water space, it is getting a bit more exciting. We see it as an opportunity to assist the ACT government in its policy objectives, but we also see it as a clear commercial opportunity for ACTEW Corporation. So that is the context in which we are here.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Sullivan. Ms Porter, do you have a substantive question?

MS PORTER: Yes, thank you, chair. Good morning, gentlemen. On page 3 of your report you talk about removing red tape. You are aware that the government has been making a concerted effort towards doing that through a roundtable discussion and various measures. It has been talking with people about how that can be addressed effectively. Do you think that there have been improvements, and where would you see us making further improvement?

Mr Sullivan: Overall there has been improvement. If you look at the history of the water agreement between the ACT and Queanbeyan, there was a period not long ago when the ACT sought to condition the supply of water to Queanbeyan basically by requiring almost a veto of Queanbeyan development ambitions. In recent years, probably with the negotiation, again, between the ACT government, the commonwealth and New South Wales on Googong Dam, which resulted in the ACT finally securing a lease on the Googong Dam and then subleasing it to ACTEW, we saw the removal of that. We saw basically a recognition by the ACT that, so long as

Queanbeyan's development ambitions are in line with New South Wales planning processes, they would not seek to, if you like, become the de facto planner of Queanbeyan. I think that lifted a hell of a lot in the relationship between both the ACT and Queanbeyan and ACTEW as a supplier of services.

Clearly, we will always face working across borders. Working across jurisdictions means that some would say we will necessarily see duplication, whether you call it red tape or whether you call it other things—regulation, compliance, reporting. If you work cross-border, you tend to accept there should be duplication. I would hope down the track that we should not accept the fact that there should be duplication, and that if you can file a set of compliance regulatory documents with a jurisdiction, they should be accepted by another jurisdiction.

That is where we probably still see some frustration. If you build, for instance, a pipeline that crosses the ACT into New South Wales and it discharges into a creek in New South Wales going into a dam in New South Wales but which is part of the ACT's water supply, you understand what cross-jurisdictional issues can do in terms of red tape. Wherever you go on this matter, you will strike them.

MR WALL: Mr Sullivan, the submission that you made to the committee talks about some of the other opportunities that you are pursuing in developing ACTEW's business in cross-border council jurisdictions. In particular you mention supplying water to Googong. In what other areas are you pursuing new investment or development of infrastructure?

Mr Sullivan: Googong is a particular, real example where we have been cooperating with the developers of the Googong township as well as Queanbeyan City Council. The supply of water to Googong required some new infrastructure outside the bulk supply of water to Queanbeyan. So a pump station has been built within the confines of the Googong Dam area. We will own, operate and utilise that to deliver potable water to the reservoir servicing Googong township.

We would like to think that we will have a role in some wastewater processing in Googong. We certainly look at the development ambitions that lots of various groups of people have, which stretch from, in the Queanbeyan City Council area, places like Tralee. If Tralee connects into the Queanbeyan sewerage system, it would be an extraordinarily expensive exercise to do that. To connect into ACTEW's sewer system it is not such an extraordinarily expensive operation. So, to us, there are straight commercial opportunities which would be attractive to a developer and should be attractive to Queanbeyan, I think.

On the other side, on the western side of Canberra, between the Canberra border and Murrumbateman there is clearly an area where Yass and developers and all sorts of people have ambitions beyond farmlets. We certainly see, in terms of movement there, a commercial opportunity.

The other thing we are watching very closely is that there would appear to be an inevitable rationalisation, possibly at the council level in New South Wales but certainly at the water processing level. New South Wales have more water utilities than the rest of Australia combined. They are generally small. There is probably an

unsustainable economic model in terms of funding them. Possibly—and I am not talking about our region here—there are concerns around whether or not those water utilities can provide water to Australian drinking standard quality on a long-term, sustainable basis. If there is movement in that sphere, we see an opportunity to be part of the commercial opportunities that come from such a movement.

MR WALL: You mentioned the likelihood of being involved in wastewater treatment in Googong and Tralee. Who bears the cost of the infrastructure that is required for those connections?

Mr Sullivan: The developer bears the cost of the infrastructure. CIC, the developer of Googong, will build the pump station. In that wonderful thing we do, they then gift it to us. One thing you learn about that is that often the capital cost of an asset is the least of your worries about an asset. Basically what we then have to ensure, and where we are moving generally with Queanbeyan, is to say that we want a good, proper, understandable and transparent pricing basis for our water supply to Queanbeyan, including Googong township. Clearly, the operating costs and other things in our systems in providing water will be recouped through water pricing on a good, transparent commercial basis.

Mr Edghill: Many of the opportunities that we are looking at are not actually infrastructure opportunities; they are in the provision of services. When you talk with the local councils, they are often resource poor and they are constrained just in the number of staff they have available to operate treatment plants, for example. Particularly when they are upgrading plants to more sophisticated systems, there is a gap between the knowledge and expertise of their existing personnel compared to what ACTEW have. Some of the services we could be looking at include everything from simply helping to train up their staff and earning a fee for doing so through to providing ad hoc operational staff on an as-needs basis, through to other areas of their operations, such as combined procurement and other non-capital-intensive services.

MR SMYTH: Just on the charges—

THE CHAIR: Mr Smyth, did you have a substantive question?

MR SMYTH: I was just following up on what was already asked. On the charges, the ICRC obviously sets the charges for the ACT. How are the charges set for New South Wales?

Mr Sullivan: Historically, they have largely followed the ICRC regime. We had in place a five-year charging agreement between Queanbeyan and the ACT. If you looked at that, you would see it almost as a subset of the ICRC process and it reflected most of the principles of the ICRC determination. The ICRC, in determining Canberra water prices, takes account of what is happening in Queanbeyan. So we now have in place a one-year agreement. The linkage there to the ICRC decision is that we sought and had agreed a price rise in terms of bulk water equivalent to the price rise in water pricing in the ACT. Most importantly, we have an agreement in place that we will have negotiated a new long-term agreement on water pricing by next July.

MR SMYTH: Is it envisaged that they will be roughly equivalent?

Mr Sullivan: No, the basic driver is that Queanbeyan is our largest customer, and that is how we should regard them. They are the largest commercial customer that ACTEW has.

MR SMYTH: So Queanbeyan City Council buy off ACTEW and then they sell on to Queanbeyan's residents and businesses?

Mr Sullivan: Yes. They have said—and I think it is reasonable—that what they want is an understanding of the pricing basis for water to Queanbeyan. There would be no question, for instance, in terms of our bulk water catchment supply processing and trunk lines, that that should be part of Queanbeyan's pricing. The amount of work that we do in reticulating water around the ACT off the trunks bears little or no relationship to Queanbeyan. In fact Queanbeyan have their own responsibilities to reticulate our bulk water once it arrives into their network.

The next agreement, I think, will look less like a mirror of the ICRC submission and more like a transparent large bulk water contract between ACTEW and Queanbeyan, which would meet the mayor's need to say he would like it to be transparent and understandable. He wants there to be no "second person"—a sense of them being less important than Canberra. So there would be no sense of saying, "If we start running out of water, you lose, we win." He clearly wants to be able to go to his ratepayers and say, "This is the basis of our water security." Queanbeyan's water security is basically based on the ACT's water security. So this year we will negotiate that pricing agreement.

MR SMYTH: Currently what is the price of whatever the unit is in Queanbeyan as opposed to the unit in Canberra?

Mr Sullivan: Queanbeyan pay, I think, slightly more for water than Canberra. That is because there is the cost of reticulation in Queanbeyan and whatever charges the Queanbeyan City Council put on top of the water. They pay the same water retraction charge and utilities tax as we do. That survived a challenge in the court system last year. I think they pay probably slightly more than Canberra does; a consumer would pay slightly more.

MR SMYTH: Are there any risks from the surrounding shires and city councils to our water supply? We obviously control all of the catchment for Bendora, Corin and Cotter. Googong is only partway up the hill, and a lot of development has gone on in the catchment. Does that sort of development add to the cost of the storage, particularly in Googong?

Mr Sullivan: Catchment development is always a risk to a catchment. Like our Brindabella catchments, you like them to be as pristine as possible. If you are dealing with wild horses and other things, that is fine. Certainly, the Googong catchment is much more developed and that poses risk. The more large scale the development, the lower the risk. Googong township, I must say, is a very good example of risk mitigation. The biggest area we have got is basically how do you assist in erosion control and what measures can you put in place with the agreement of landholders, councils, water authorities, catchment authorities and others that has an end result for

us of a better product?

That is why we are now working in, say, the upper Murrumbidgee, and working closely there with land groups, and are willing to invest money in assisting, say, a landowner to address erosion control where we can find, through imaging, during a storm event where major silt and clay flows are coming from. You generally find that the landowner is very appreciative of someone who, rather than saying, "Here's a notice; fix up your land," says, "Look, how can we all assist in this?" The more development encroaches on catchments, the risk profile goes up, and you have got to mitigate that risk. But risk mitigation is not beyond us. Compared to, say, large urban catchments in Sydney and so on, we have got a reasonable chance of managing catchments.

MR SMYTH: Flows into Googong post this development phase, say, over the last 20 years of lots of small lots and country estates—is the harvesting of water by small farm dams affecting the inflows?

Mr Sullivan: I think the impact on inflows of things like property dams is minimal compared to climate variability, for instance. The biggest worry we had was that, until the last two years of rain, we had seen what appeared to be a marked change in Googong's capacity for coastal surge rain to fill it. That is how Googong generally fills, through surges of rain from the coast. Almost throughout the entire duration of the drought we saw a marked decline in that. Googong has now been full for two to three years, and it will probably remain that way for some time.

I think, Mr Smyth, there has been some attempt at estimating the impact of dams. At one level you have got to work out their utilisation rates because full dams do not interrupt water supply once they are full. So at the moment there would be no interruption. I think it is not great, but clearly it is part of the equation.

THE CHAIR: Mr Sullivan, you have talked a lot about the Googong township as one of the development opportunities for ACTEW and you have touched on the Murrumbidgee. What other local councils are you working with, and what opportunities does that provide for the ACT?

Mr Sullivan: We are working with Palerang and Queanbeyan. We are working with Yass. We have talked to Goulburn. We have talked to Cooma. As I say, the range of possibilities it has for us is to go from the delivery of soft services, like advice and expertise, right through to potentially we could own and operate plant on their behalf. Clearly, if the region is going to develop, as important as it was for Canberra to have water security for it to develop—and Canberra is in a unique position in the inland cities at the moment of being able to say that we have secured water for our development, which attracts business and attracts people. If you look at those councils, Queanbeyan would say, "Well, we're okay. We run off the back of Canberra." Yass has added to its dam capacity, but Yass is probably still marginal in terms of water security. It would not take a large drought to see Yass back in water restrictions. Yass has no capacity whatsoever to provide water and other services, as I say, probably including Murrumbateman and certainly from Murrumbateman back to the border. Certainly, the Yass City Council have continued to speak to us and continued to speak publicly of the fact that it is, to them, a possible mutual opportunity. We will talk to

any council in our region. The ones that matter most to us are those who are involved in our catchment, and that is Palerang, Queanbeyan and Yass.

THE CHAIR: When you talk about opportunities for future regional development, you talk about the streamlining of standards and approval practices. What are some of those? Can you give an example of the sorts of things you are referring to?

Mr Sullivan: I guess the clearest one would be environmental approvals, the multitude of environmental approvals and environmental compliance issues if you deal cross-border. If a region is seeking to develop and it is in a cross-jurisdiction I think there needs to be effort on both sides to say, "How can we align?" There are plenty of models on how to do it. There are agreements in place where the commonwealth have said, "If we trust a state or territory process, we will regard it as being the equivalent of ours." It may be that an approach to New South Wales would say, "If these approvals come from this side of the border, they hold for the other side of the border."

The Murrumbidgee-to-Googong pipeline involved environmental studies for the commonwealth, the ACT and the New South Wales governments. You had to write them in a style that each of them required. So it gave a consultant three writing styles to write the same report to meet the compliance requirements of three jurisdictions. It was good business for a consultant. The base data did not change at all. We probably had three primary areas of discussion with three authorities being slightly different. So you said, "Well, our biggest concern is this," "Our biggest concern is this," "Our biggest concern is this," and you wondered why they were not the same.

They are very practical issues. When we supply drinking water to Queanbeyan, while we have a banner which is Australian drinking water standards, we can have a whole set of New South Wales requirements in respect of that water going into Queanbeyan. We fulfil all sorts of compliance obligations into New South Wales which are different to the compliance obligations we meet in the ACT. If we, for instance, agreed that in the end there could be a joint infrastructure proposal which was taking water out of Canberra towards Murrumbateman, it would be important that we try and avoid the fact that we have another compliance regime, which is New South Wales-based, on water that is coming straight out of a processing centre which is meeting all of the ACT standards. Otherwise, we charge. The thing business does around compliance regimes is add them up and sometimes add a margin and say that is a cost. It can be a significant cost in water.

MS PORTER: On the bottom of page 3 it talks about regional projects may indirectly benefit the ACT by attracting workers into Canberra or by providing additional business for Canberra businesses. Would you talk a little bit about that, the kinds of things that you would see doing that?

Mr Sullivan: I think Canberra is a regional hub. For instance, if we got a regional opportunity to rebuild the Queanbeyan sewage plant it would look to Canberra for part of its workforce. But, as with the major projects that we have been involved with, it would draw people from the broader region. We looked at the geographic spread of people who worked on the dam. We had a hell of a lot of workers from western New South Wales—much more from western and south-western New South Wales than,

say, people down the highway from Sydney. The economic impact of infrastructure projects outside of the actual project is quite positive. If you are the area where people generally come and shop, where they want to live and where they want to interact, it draws people to Canberra.

MR SMYTH: Just following up on that, the Auditor-General announced yesterday that she is now going to do an audit of the project we were just talking about. What will she find in regard to the delivery of the project?

Mr Sullivan: She will find, undoubtedly, that we have delivered a project which has resulted in the ACT having water security for a generation. I think she will work very hard. The Liberal Party in the Assembly asked for a similar inquiry to be conducted into why the dam had gone from \$138 million to \$363 million. It never seems to be mentioned anymore. Of course, the ICRC came out of that inquiry saying that \$363 million was a very good and robust budget and reconciled it back to the \$135 million.

I think she will say the extra \$45 million on top of that is money well spent, that the contracting arrangements for alliancing were extraordinarily well done and that it is a project which, at the moment, I think ACTEW and the community are quite proud of. I hope we improve that pride in the project. We should never underestimate the fact that we are the only close urban jurisdiction in modern history to have achieved approvals to build a dam, and it has been done. I think it is one of those great inquiries where everyone, from every point in the globe in terms of their view on this dam, has welcomed it. All I hope is that when it is concluded we will welcome the result.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Sullivan.

MR SMYTH: Is there an update on the final cost of the dam?

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Smyth. We are out of time, so we will finish up.

MR SMYTH: It would be a short answer, I am sure. Is there an update on the final cost of the dam?

Mr Sullivan: It holds. It is the previous—

MR SMYTH: It holds as is?

Mr Sullivan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Sullivan, and thank you, Mr Edghill, for today. The secretary will provide you with the transcript of today's proceedings.

Mr Sullivan: Thank you.

Sitting suspended from 11.04 to 11.15 am.

McCANN, MR NOEL, Director, Planning and Government Relations, Canberra Airport

SCARANO, MS KATHRYN, Assistant Director, Planning and Environment, Canberra Airport

THE CHAIR: Are you aware, Mr McCann and Ms Scarano, of the privilege statement that is in front of you?

Mr McCann: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief statement or would you like us to go straight to questions?

Mr McCann: I think it would be useful to make a brief statement, if that suits the committee.

THE CHAIR: Yes, no problem.

Mr McCann: First of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to come and talk with the committee. We, as you know, made a short written submission back in April. We live in a dynamic world, and the region is very much a part of our home ground. Recently, just this week, our managing director, Stephen Byron, and our head of aviation, Matthew Brown, were in Singapore. They presented to Singapore Airlines a joint document. I am not sure if the committee has a copy of it. I only got a copy this morning. It was put together with Andrew Barr and his department, with a foreword by Andrew Barr. I would recommend that the committee get copies of it. I could provide them but I would have to run this off.

THE CHAIR: We can get copies, thank you, Mr McCann.

Mr McCann: The major point that I was leading to was that there is a regional map in this document that deals with 800,000 people within two hours of Canberra. Kathryn and I have been out consulting since January this year on our next master plan. In our region we have been to Wagga and to Batemans Bay, where we picked up SEATS—the South East Australian Transport Strategy—people for all the shires down at the south coast, plus on the mountains around us. So we have very much a regional focus.

We would certainly like competition in the ground transport system. We do not believe there is competition at the moment. We would also like no border—no regulation stopping cabs from Queanbeyan picking up and dropping people off. They can take people to the airport from Queanbeyan or Bungendore but they can only pick up people that are going back to New South Wales. We think that is just a small part of the issue.

Ms Scarano: Noel has touched on public transport connections across the border and around the ACT. The other issue would be road connections around the airport in its local region and also arterial connections throughout the region, and reaching out to those million or so people that are within a two to 2½-hour drive of the ACT.

MS PORTER: Mr McCann, could you give us some clarification about the competition with the transport system you were referring to. Could you expand on that a little bit, please?

Mr McCann: In the past the airport subsidised Deane's as a regional bus operator to operate in and out of the airport from Queanbeyan and Civic. There was a constraint on them. If they went past Russell hill they could let people out but not pick them up to take them into the city and so on. Therefore, we think that it should be seamless. Even now, a bus line coming into the territory is allowed to do a small amount of picking up and letting down, yet there are passengers at the stop who—

MS PORTER: So it is similar to the taxi issue that you were describing?

Mr McCann: The taxi issue, in the airport's view, is a lack of supply and a lack of competition. We went to the airport in 1998. The airport was handling around 1.8 million passengers, and we are now doing three million. We were doing 3.3 million passengers prior to the efficiency dividend impact, but the taxi plates have nowhere near grown with the city and nowhere near maintained the level of service that is acceptable to the airport and to most of its customers. It seems as though we have a problem in our transport hierarchy. They are a public service, or serving the public might be a better term—they are there to service the public. Inefficiency and not having adequate cabs or relationships with buses and interlining is part of the issue that I think we need to work out across the region, and not just keep it separate as we do at the moment. This issue has been raised quite significantly by others with the Cross-Border Commissioner in New South Wales, but I do not see any traction about breaking down the barriers.

MR WALL: Mr McCann, I am guessing the transport issues go towards some of the red tape you mentioned in your submission. What are some of the inhibitors of the airport and its future growth and development?

Mr McCann: Do you mean the airport's growth and development or the region's growth and development?

MR WALL: Or regional. You make reference in your submission to red tape needing to be cut to deliver prosperity to the region, seamless public transport and so on.

Mr McCann: We have dealt with transport. In terms of the red tape about roads, it is more about dollars for roads and who is responsible. One of the major things we have been working on is supporting the South East Australian Transport Strategy people on the upgrade of the Barton Highway, the upgrade of the Kings Highway and some work on the Monaro Highway. The Monaro Highway is more part of a freight network, but it is still a commuter and a tourism route and capture for Canberra and the region, not just Canberra.

We see those roads as significant inside the ACT—and we are going to have a wonderful Majura parkway by 2016, which will be the final link between the Monaro Highway and the Federal Highway in the Majura valley. We have been pushing for attention to be paid to the east-west road link so that we can get the tourism and business traffic moving around not only within the territory but outside the territory,

coming in and out of the territory.

I am not quite sure with respect to ACT government lobbying, so this is an issue that we will probably take up next week in the meeting with Andrew Cappie-Wood and directors-general about our 2014 master plan, because it will be very focused on ground transport across the region. We would be looking for support from the ACT government on these roads that feed Canberra in terms of commuter traffic, tourism traffic and business traffic.

MR WALL: Do you feel that the ACT has not been vocal enough in campaigning to get these—

Mr McCann: I cannot say that they have or have not been. But we are really settling down to talk to the chief of the public service and his directors-general about it.

MS PORTER: So you are saying it is something that you want to discuss with the ACT government as to how the lobbying is happening and the nature of it, rather than there not being enough at the moment?

Mr McCann: Yes, and getting a cooperative approach to not only the federal government and the New South Wales government but also what role the ACT government can play in that. The Chief Minister is reaching out to the region on a number of issues, and this committee is a result of that. We are very supportive of trying to help the drive to break down what inefficiencies are in the system. We see the red tape issues, the non-alignment issues and the highway issues as a major thing for us to resolve.

MS PORTER: So it is across government. It is not just within the ACT; it is because—

Ms Scarano: It is the ACT and New South Wales. It is a cross-border issue.

MS PORTER: It is cross-border red tape rather than ACT red tape?

Mr McCann: Yes. Some of these roads will need federal funding, as we know, but the feds will not fund anything unless they have got designs and approvals. So they cannot fund anything. Our current Prime Minister calls it “shovel-ready”. So we are working through a whole process, as a result of the regional feedback to us. As we go out and talk to the region about them using our airport as their international and domestic airport, they are giving us back the issues of, “There’s a problem with cabs, there’s a problem with buses, there’s a problem with how we do business in and out of the territory.”

Even down in the snowfields, lodge owners or lodge people have shuttle buses and they are not registered in the ACT. They can pick up and set down their customers at the airport but nowhere else in the ACT. They are registered in New South Wales but not in the ACT. Why is that a problem? Those are simple, grass-roots, practical issues.

MR SMYTH: Going back to the road network, you mentioned the east-west road links. Specifically, what roads are you talking about?

Mr McCann: There are a couple of roads. First of all, there is Fairbairn Avenue. As a result of the Majura parkway, the down ramps to go to central Canberra are at Fairbairn Avenue. There are no down ramps at Pialligo Avenue coming south. So the traffic that feeds in to Civic, whether it is tourist, business or commuter traffic, will have an option at Fairbairn Avenue to turn right or left. At the moment, just upstream of the Majura parkway, it is a rural road, and when we get further up the hill, at Truscott Street, there is a bit of single lane each way with a bit of double lane running around roundabouts. Then we have a single lane each way running from Mount Ainslie turnoff into the War Memorial, just east of the War Memorial. So that is our new gateway to the city; that is a rural road. We have been lobbying the ACT government and the federal government about getting Fairbairn Avenue duplicated before Majura parkway is finished. So that is one issue.

We are now having a whole new community reinforcing the Weston Creek area at Molonglo. A lot of people might think that the first parts of it are really parts of Weston Creek, because it is adjoining, but that population is going to start trying to move across the city, because the major employment area of Canberra is around Lake Burley Griffin. We believe there needs to be plenty of attention given to the east-west road network, because, in old metropolitan terms, we have the western parkway, which is the Gungahlin Drive extension, completing the rapid transport link up the west side of the city, and the Majura parkway will finish the eastern parkway in the old metropolitan planning system. So we will have a rapid transport link up and down the east side of the city.

Even though we are putting in a couple of extra lanes on Parkes Way between Glenloch Interchange and Edinburgh Avenue at the west side of Civic, there is a whole bottleneck getting from Kings Avenue down on to Parkes Way of a night-time. In the morning it is at the next roundabout at Anzac Park and then the next area is down at the Coranderrk Street intersection on the east side of the city, yet we have a plan to almost build another Civic between ASIO headquarters and Allara Street, as part of the city to the lake proposal. The other part is the Griffin legacy plan. It involves 1.3 million hectares of space between West Basin and ASIO headquarters. It is a huge development over a long time, but just imagine the employment and the living aspects. We have got the north-south roads right but the east-west roads, we think, need to start getting more attention and more investment.

MR SMYTH: The government announced in the budget they will have an off-ramp into their new estate to the west of Majura Park, but there is still no northern access to Majura Park itself. Is it desirable to improve those links, for the transportation and movement of goods?

Mr McCann: In the original run-up to the environmental impact study for the Majura parkway, there was an alignment east-west that would have been at the north end of the airport, the future Kowen parkway connection. There has been a discussion, ongoing dialogue, between the airport and the ACT government about providing fundamentally a temporary link south off the Majura parkway to Majura Road at Mustang Avenue, which is where the service station and McDonald's are in Majura Park. We introduced the Ikea organisation to the ACT government, and Ikea are looking at both sites—the government site on the west side of the road, and they are

running hard on that, and going soft on our side, on the east side of the road. We do not have a problem with that. In fact, we offered to the ACT government that it was more important to have Ikea than not to have Ikea. Therefore we said, “If you’ve got a better site and they’re more happy with you, that’s fine.”

MR SMYTH: But a northern entrance would be desirable?

Mr McCann: We think we have seeded this Majura estate. In colloquialisms, we think it is a free kick for the ACT government to realise land value on their side, on the west side of Majura Road—this Majura estate. I do not think it is quite expansive in the budget papers to say, “This is what we’re doing.” I thought it was a planning study for the Majura estate rather than the road.

MR SMYTH: Read the estimates transcripts; it is very enlightening. You have raised some issues on roads. Then there are links to rail. The airport is still very keen to see the high speed rail come to the airport. What is the linkage, then, to the city? Do you see a light rail link between the airport and the city, or do you see the high speed rail coming past the airport and into Civic?

Mr McCann: First of all, we believe it is important that the high speed rail comes to Canberra. That is our public position. That is our behind-closed-doors position with the Chief Minister. It is consistent. We believe the operator will make the decision as to whether Civic is the right location or the airport. We think they will get more passengers out of the airport. That will be something for the operator and the developer of the high speed rail.

We would like the federal government to market test it rather than say we should kill it by committee—with great respect to this committee—and just talk about it. We would rather they market tested it. After the federal election we will be going public on a light rail network connecting employment and future employment and residential areas of the city to the lake, the airport, East Lake, around Lake Burley Griffin and so on. We have been working on this for a number of months as a contribution to the debate.

We have a number of people that we need to see before we do this public expose of our contribution to the debate. We believe light rail should be there. We actually did a plan in 2000 showing the international terminal on the west side—it was very similar to where it is going to be now—a high speed train link and then a light rail link and a regional bus link all in one area of the airport. They will not be in exactly the same spot, but they are within 50 to 100 metres of the same spot of the 2000 plan. So we have been working on this for a long time.

MR SMYTH: Just to finish on that: that gives you the hub but, of course, to have the full transport hub and have it protected you need to guarantee you have got the 24/7 access to the airport. Your submission recommends that the Canberra Airport be acknowledged as territory and state significant infrastructure so as to facilitate the protection of the ongoing 24/7 operations. Is there any risk to that? You mention territory and state, but what about federally significant infrastructure, given you are the only airport on the east coast, on the eastern seaboard, that operates 24/7?

Mr McCann: We are the one between Brisbane and Melbourne, the 24-hour operation. The federal government, through the white paper process that Minister Albanese commenced in 2008 and finished in December 2009, recognised Canberra Airport as a vital link in the freight chain and network of Australia and maybe cross-Tasman. The Sydney second airport study, again, reinforced that, and that was last year—March 2012.

Ms Scarano: Yes.

Mr McCann: That reinforced that we were the closest to Sydney to play that role. We believe that now we are positioning the airport with a heavy aircraft runway and a terminal with international capability we can play a major role. This document talks about us being the newest international gateway to Australia. That, we believe, is our role for the community. The whole thing has been recognised by the commonwealth but we do not see a lot of recognition from the New South Wales government. In fact, we see none. We would like the ACT government to help us to convince them that we are very important to the region. If we have got 800,000 people in our catchment and we have got half of those inside the territory then New South Wales has a lot of skin in the game.

MR SMYTH: Is it possible for you to provide the committee with a copy of that document?

Mr McCann: Yes, I can do that after the meeting. It is fundamentally a document from the economic development area. I am more than happy to get copies done and get them in here this afternoon.

THE CHAIR: No, we can get them. That is completely fine. You have been talking a lot about what you want the ACT government to do around roads in the ACT and federally. What plans does the airport have to improve its connectivity with the region? You have talked about the sorts of things you would like the ACT government to implement. What plans does the airport have to improve connectivity with the region?

Mr McCann: In the past we have contributed to roads and services to the airport. I think that was well recognised by Jon Stanhope when he was the Chief Minister. In terms of the future, we have invested inside the airport to provide the opportunity for the region to benefit from that infrastructure. Sure, we might get one to five per cent of the revenue spend of every passenger, but the 95-plus per cent is either spent with the airlines or the business community outside the airport. We are not putting our hand up to pay for any roads or anything like that, if that is what you are asking me, so I will put that on the table.

THE CHAIR: No.

Mr McCann: We are getting feedback from our wide consultations in the region that they need help, whether it is Regional Development ACT or the South East Australia Transport Strategy people. They have all got agendas. They are starting to align on what our region needs, what they can do for Canberra and what they can do for the airport, I guess, and what we can do for them. We are still sorting all that out. That is

part of our 2014 master plan that we are working on, the pre-consultation. It will discuss a number of those issues that are more regionally based rather than just airport based.

The terminal will be finished by Christmas time or soon thereafter. We think we can have it finished by Christmas and have the international capability, subject to the border control people making up their mind on their fit-out. It is designed to handle eight million passengers and be able to be reasonably extended without touching the internal part or the roads, because we have done that for the last five years with the public. We can grow it out to 12 million and we are currently doing three million passengers.

We have invested heavily in the future. We have got a runway that can handle 747s now, since 2006. We extended and strengthened it. We have been getting our infrastructure together, delivering on our commitments from master plans that we started in 1998 through to now, the 15-year ownership by Terry Snow's family of the airport. We are starting to reach out now by asking how we can help the community realise the asset they now have, because the airport is a public transport gateway.

MR SMYTH: Just to follow up on the roads: on the original plans there was also a southern road that I think entered close to the intersection of Canberra Avenue and Hindmarsh Drive.

Mr McCann: Yes. There have been a number of routes from Newcastle Street north. ACTPLA have talked to us over the last three years about different sets of roads to try and connect the airport to Fyshwick, which would then lead through. There is no concrete plan of that road. We think it would be a good bypass to Queanbeyan in the future.

MR SMYTH: So people would be coming out of Queanbeyan on Fairbairn Avenue? Is that Fairbairn or Pialligo Avenue?

Mr McCann: Pialligo Avenue.

MR SMYTH: Pialligo Avenue, rather than going past through the airport and then onto the Monaro. You would come in either at Hindmarsh or north of Fyshwick at Newcastle—

Mr McCann: You would come out near where the recycling facility is, just to the south-east of the airport.

MR SMYTH: As the airport grows and the region feeds into the airport that would put more pressure on some of those southern roads in particular. So having another exit-entrance complex would be useful.

Mr McCann: Yes. Our expectation is the more passengers we get and the more regional feed-in, all the roads will require attention.

MR SMYTH: And, as you say—

Mr McCann: Not only for the airport, but for—

MR SMYTH: As Majura Road drops them onto Fairbairn and then Morshead, if you can take some of that pressure out by diverting them to the south that would make it work more effectively.

Mr McCann: Yes.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. Thank you, Mr McCann.

Mr McCann: Thank you for the opportunity.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for taking the time to come and talk with us today, and thank you, Ms Scarano. The secretary will send you out a transcript.

HARWOOD, MS LYNNE, Chief Executive Officer, Communities@Work

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Ms Harwood. You are aware of the statement of privilege in front of you?

Ms Harwood: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make a statement before you begin or would you like us to just go ahead with questions?

Ms Harwood: I would just like to make a little statement.

THE CHAIR: Sure, go ahead.

Ms Harwood: The opinions I give today are those of Communities@Work. When I saw that you were working on a committee to develop and enhance how to work better in the region, I reflected on a situation we have worked on over the last two years for Communities@Work, which was about putting together an application for Regional Development Australia, which we were unsuccessful with, but that is fine. It was a really good process for us to actually look at how complex it truly is to get all layers and compartments of government to work together and be on the same page. I suppose our paper to you was to reflect on some of that and to maybe help champion how we can actually work as a whole region. Just because you live over the border it does not take away the fact that you need the services in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: With regard to the regional development submission and your idea of support for a centre of excellence and a base for provision of social and community services for the surrounding region, could you tell me how you see this hub for the greater capital region working in actual practice?

Ms Harwood: Certainly. I think it has got a many pronged approach to it. We are going ahead with a development at Dixon Drive with regard to generic community services, regardless of the fact that we did not get the regional capital development grant. What it is is the notion that clients come from New South Wales as much as they do from the ACT. Those people who are coming in to use our services—our RTO is a good example—regard Canberra as their region. The services in the New South Wales regions do not provide the level of skills, quality or reach that they need, and Sydney is not an option for them.

If they were in an area that was slightly closer to Albury or Wagga, it would be New South Wales visiting New South Wales, but because they live around the ACT and want to access, it is very difficult for them. We find with some federal moneys we can serve the broader community, and certainly with fees-for-service-paying clients we can serve the broader community. But with certain ACT funding grants, we just cannot serve. We end up cobbling together all sorts of bits and pieces and saying, “Well, if we have so many fee-paying clients from over here and we have so many ACT residents then we can supplement the rest from some New South Wales people.”

It seems like a very archaic way to put a program together, just because of where somebody lives when, in their minds, they live in this greater capital region and Canberra is their base.

There are also further programs where we would do more in New South Wales if we were given encouragement to do so. It may be that one layer of government is saying, “We really need help in this particular area.” In-home care is a good example. In-home care, which is a broader part of family day care, is desperately needed. In actual fact, the definitions around in-home care are very much more around remote and rural areas surrounding New South Wales.

Working with them, we have broadened into New South Wales. In a sense, we would like a centre for excellence that allows people from the broader capital region to come to us in certain instances, depending on what the services are, but for us to have a very central base where we can go out to the region efficiently and effectively and do rounds of the region in a very considered, concise way.

THE CHAIR: What are some of the risks with being a large-scale regional service provider?

Ms Harwood: I think one of the main risks is the layers of government—the extra administration and the extra explaining we need to do to keep all levels together. Obviously, geography creates its own challenges, but I do not believe that they are challenges that cannot be overcome. I think we demonstrate here in the ACT that we function from the bottom of Tuggeranong to the north of Gungahlin and we manage that well. I suppose it is putting a similar premise to that on a broader geographic scale. So I do not really see that as a problem.

I certainly see that there are some different issues in the more rural areas than there are in the ACT. It is about being very mindful of that and making sure we do not just have a one-size-fits-all methodology for that. But, apart from that, I actually do not really see much risk. I see opportunity. I see that, if we are all focusing on this greater capital region of 750,000 rather than the concise 400,000 of Canberra, it as an opportunity for us all.

MR WALL: Ms Harwood, you mentioned the centre of excellence for learning and development. There have been expressions from a lot of people in New South Wales wanting to use your services but there are some complexities. What are the challenges in having students that reside interstate coming in to use your programs?

Ms Harwood: A good example is that we have now combined our RTO with what we call the professional support coordinator, which is a federal-funded program which is about professional development of children’s services. So we have combined those two areas to actually alleviate some of the complications of not being able to serve New South Wales.

A good example is that this Saturday we are holding a biannual conference, and we have 300 childcare educators coming to the conference, a quarter of whom are coming from New South Wales. They are coming from as far afield as Jindabyne, Eden and just south of Wollongong. In actual fact they have expressed their excitement at being

able to come. We have been able to do that because we have strategically put together a couple of different funding areas to enable that broader reach than just being siloed to one stream.

MR WALL: So you have been able to do that as a result of changing your funding source to federal?

Ms Harwood: Not so much changing our funding source, but actually blending funding sources together. Because we have more flexibility with federal funding, we have been able to wrap that around ACT funding.

MR WALL: So it now requires you to get similar sorts of funding or grants from ACT, New South Wales and federal and tie it all together?

Ms Harwood: Yes. It requires us to be extremely strategic—and not that we should not be anyway—and quite creative and innovative with the limited resources that we have.

MR WALL: I imagine that in having to do that there is quite an amount of duplication of applications and submissions that you would be making. Instead of one, you would now be making multiple?

Ms Harwood: An enormous amount. Also, just from a database management perspective, you are constantly mindful of, “Does this person live over the border or do we have to put them in that part of the database?” It is not just a natural flow of operating a program; it is very much a calculated, conscious decision of putting people in the right boxes to make it all work.

MR WALL: Do you get any support from any of the jurisdictions in support or services to Communities@Work to help facilitate the management of those sorts of programs?

Ms Harwood: We do. A good example is our Yellow Van. So our Yellow Van serves Queanbeyan and Yass and it is about to start serving Cooma. In actual fact, we have done that with the local communities. In Yass we have had full backing from the Lions Club, the Rotaries, the Anglicans and the St Vinnies up there. They actually put together the package of how we could afford to go to Yass and serve the Yass community. We are currently doing that with Cooma, with the business council and the chamber of commerce down there, as well as the local service groups.

We find that the local communities are equally very innovative and flexible and equally understand the complexities of getting us to go and serve them. Queanbeyan is the same. We work very closely with the local communities. We find everybody indicatively is helpful and willing, but we find that then you just get hit with bureaucracy and process and, “Well, that can’t work because we have to do it this way,” et cetera. So the intentions are good wherever we go. It is process that lets us down or makes life complicated.

MS PORTER: Do you find that practical things, like obtaining insurance cover for people who are coming to your training courses from New South Wales, are issues?

Ms Harwood: We do. We certainly work very closely with our insurance brokers to make sure we are covered. We also find that from the volunteering perspective, too, because we have a lot of volunteers coming to work with us as well. We have over 300 active volunteers. Once again, we probably have about 20 per cent that are New South Wales residents, so we have to have both lots of insurance.

Where we are finding it most problematic at the moment is actually with our charities. There is the charities act of the ACT, there is a charities act of New South Wales and then there is the ACNC—and they all want different things from us. They say bizarre things like, “If you are attracting donations from interstate, you must have the full New South Wales charities act.” But we do not know on our database, especially if they are email databases, if people are interstate. So there are certain things that are not geographically bound but the rules are geographically bound.

MR SMYTH: What is the one thing that would make this happen?

Ms Harwood: I think having a true understanding. From my perspective one of the things that has been a very useful revelation over the last 12 months is the red tape committee that the CSD has been overseeing. I am on the forum there. I think that rigorous forum has been a forum to really talk about what are some of the really nonsense procedures that exist and that, if we removed them or we made them easier or more flexible, would really make life different.

I almost think it is some sort of open, rigorous forum like that where real players with real issues can discuss and we can actually work towards, “Well, that is a silly process. How can we?”—and it is all parties at the table working towards the efficiencies of multi-jurisdictional government process and how it affects day-to-day management of business. I think that would really help. As I say, everybody’s intentions are good. There is nobody I speak to who does not have good intentions about how the region can work better together. But the process just does not make it happen that way.

MS PORTER: So you are saying that the red tape committee is a good example of how—

Ms Harwood: It is a perfect example. It is one of the best government committees I have ever been on because it actually does things. We rigorously talk and rigorously give real-life examples and we rigorously work towards how we can alleviate some of those nonsense obstacles that get in the way when one hand does not know what the other hand has to do to achieve things. I feel that a similar forum that has an intention of really breaking down some of these processes and barriers, with all the right people at the table, would certainly go a long way to maybe solving some of the problems.

THE CHAIR: Can you give some examples of some of the things that have been raised in that committee that are public or have been changed?

Ms Harwood: Yes, absolutely. Andrew Barr declared the six-monthly reporting to 12-monthly reporting as a result of some of the issues. For instance, with procurement processes, what was talked about in contracts and what is reality was just not the case. So we have been working in-depth to make the procurement process easier from all

perspectives. There is the communication process between ourselves, as the community, and the department—actually understanding why they were not working and why things were difficult.

There are the payment processes from government. We were doing work in advance and we were having to wait for three to six months for a payment, and finding out it was really just a process that was not working properly, but because we did not take it high enough up the ranks, we did not get action. So it is minor things in the scheme of things, but when you put all those things together, it actually makes systems and processes flow much simpler.

Certainly, the major one was the six-monthly reporting where you report qualitatively on the outcomes of your contract and then you have to report from a finance perspective six-monthly. But the information they want is not the same information that you would actually capture to report in an annual report or something like that. So they have actually removed that for a 12-monthly reporting process.

There is a whole project working group. It has been running now for just over 12 months, and it continues to develop areas. One of the revelations—and a guy called Robert Gotts heads it—was that, when this was first formed, the perception of government was that they would be able to tell the community sector how to be more efficient, and the reality was the community sector was being efficient and it was being hit by government processes—just because they had always been done that way or just because the rule was set without really any understanding of the consequences of it.

It was actually quite a flip, and one which the directorate has really supported, because it was a matter of having openness in this conversation and saying, “Why do we do that process? Why do we have to do that three times?” One of the other major important things was where we proved we had 12 requests for the same document within a three-week period in which we had sent that document. They streamlined that so that there is one point; you send the document once and then if they have not got it, they can go and find it themselves instead of us having to send it.

With things like that, they sound minor amongst themselves, but when you are running a large organisation where every extra process makes life complicated, it actually alleviates so much duplication and inefficiency. I feel this is similar. It is probably on a bigger scale, because a rule of New South Wales, or federal or even at council level, can have an impact. While their intention is, “Oh, we want to be more inclusive of the ACT,” they do not realise that that rule actually contradicts what the rule of the ACT is, so we cannot do that.

As I said, we are getting very creative at cobbling together all the different funding sources to be able to match up. It is almost like a jigsaw puzzle. You end up putting everything together. So we can make it happen often, but it is more complicated than it needs to be.

MR WALL: You make note of some of the statistics of people with a disability that are in rural and regional areas. With the ACT beginning to transition to the NDIS in July next year, I would imagine that there are a large number of residents from New

South Wales that are currently accessing services in the ACT. What challenges and difficulties might that present when the ACT has transitioned to a different scheme to the whole of New South Wales?

Ms Harwood: Once again, it depends on what funding stream people are in as to whether they can access the ACT—New South Wales residents. We even have people in Jerrabomberra who we cannot service from certain funding sources. That is where the ridiculous nature comes across.

Right now, if you are a person with a disability, it depends whether you get an ISP, whether you get HACC funding, whether you are getting general ACT disability money. We have a couple of programs that are FaHCSIA funded which we can serve everywhere and then we have ACT moneys where we cannot. So right now it is pot luck. In the short term with DisabilityCare it is going to be more chaotic than not, but I think in the longer term it may well resolve some of these issues. Once again, it should not matter where your money is coming from; you should be able to access the service you need. I feel that DisabilityCare ultimately will achieve that. But in the short term it will not. In the short term it will be chaos.

What we find is that there are people very close by, just over the border, who really need more servicing support, and we simply cannot give it to them. We also find there are people a bit further afield and, if their family member needs some particular treatment or service, it would be really worthwhile them coming in and maybe being in respite or having family disability-friendly accommodation where they can do all the things they need to do. That is just not available either.

One of the biggest areas we did research on was a real unmet need, which is people with a disability who do have a reasonable disposable income and who want disability-friendly accommodation here in Canberra, either to be with their family or to be on their own and travel, and who also want wraparound services with that—maybe personal care, transport et cetera. That is potentially an area that could be self-funding. Definitely, all of those logistics are very relevant.

From our own strategic point of view we are observing the organised chaos of DisabilityCare at the moment; nobody quite knows how it is going to work out. We are trying to prepare for what the future will look like when we do have more flexibility with the money that will be out there. We want to make sure we are as ready for that as possible.

MS PORTER: Can I ask a supplementary, chair?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MS PORTER: You mentioned the volunteers before, and a high number of them being outside of the ACT, and you mentioned transport in your answer just now. Quite a lot of volunteers are providing transport services. Are they providing transport services for people who live in New South Wales to come into the ACT to utilise services here?

Ms Harwood: Once again, it depends on what funding source we are using for

transport. If we are using classic HACC transport funding, no, because we cannot even serve Jerrabomberra. We have to stick to our areas. If we are using ACT-funded community transport, no, because we cannot go outside the ACT. In actual fact, we have to stick to the inner regions of the ACT. However, we do have some FaHCSIA federal funding that we can provide.

MS PORTER: Do any of the councils in the region provide transport assistance?

Ms Harwood: Back the other way?

MS PORTER: To get the patient or the resident to the ACT for treatment or whatever it is.

Ms Harwood: Yes, sometimes, depending on their funding sources. This is the thing. If you can tap into a service that has more flexible funding, they can. Often we have actually agreed “Let’s meet on the border”—things like that. We often do that.

MS PORTER: You actually meet at the border and swap people from one vehicle to another?

Ms Harwood: Yes, absolutely. If a funding provider in New South Wales has just got New South Wales state funding and a provider in the ACT has just got ACT funding, there is no crossing the border. If either party have got some federal funding which has a broader jurisdiction, you can get more creative. But that is what I mean. You spend half your time getting creative with pots of funding.

Some of that obviously can be alleviated with fees for service, for those clients who are fortunate enough. Often we have a small cohort. It is a very distinct client base who are self-funding. They are usually people with a disability who may have had a compensation payout or things like that. They often have more discretionary funding. In order to alleviate all this nonsense of “Well, I can only come here or I can only come there” they will pay the cost of their transport needs or their other needs.

MS PORTER: Under the new scheme, they will have money so they will be able to purchase services, won’t they? So that will improve it, won’t it?

Ms Harwood: In theory, yes, and we are going with that. There needs to be a lot more negotiations at the moment around costings and things. Certainly in theory, yes. That is a great theory, and if we could do that across the board. If somebody needs a service and they are eligible for service then it should not matter where they live, within reason. Obviously I realise everybody has got their own areas of responsibility, but it should not matter where they live.

Even recently we have had a problem with our foster care and whether we are going to change our strategic direction in foster care. By nature, many of our foster carers come from the surrounding districts. They have the small holdings and the farms and the land, the space and the land that is actually conducive to them being foster carers.

It was spoken about recently that they are going to absolutely formalise the jurisdiction so that if a carer is living in New South Wales they must be sorted out

through DOCS and through New South Wales, not through the ACT. My question there was: we need to change our strategic approach to gaining foster carers because 50 per cent or more of our foster carers are from regional New South Wales. That is a more appropriate area for them to live and that is what gives them the ability to be foster carers in the first place. It is rules like that. I am sure that whoever is developing a policy or a strategy is doing it with good intention, but they have got no practical application as to what that means on a service delivery level.

MS PORTER: Some of it could be to do with legislation, of course, in the different—

Ms Harwood: The fact is that we know that the pie of government money, no matter which government it is, is not getting any bigger. So we all have to be wiser with the money. I understand that. Everybody wants to covet their piece a little bit more. I just think that creates inefficiencies, not efficiencies.

Certainly, there is so much scope for the region by us being a whole region rather than just a city. Somebody quoted the other day that the reason Ikea is coming to town is because we are a region of 750,000, not a city of 300,000. We would not get an Ikea. Whether you like Ikea or not, that is a good example of how we benefit from being a bigger region. If we applied that a bit more to our policy and to our decision making—and if those who are making decisions could make sure they understood the practical applications of their decisions—it would certainly make my life easier and our life as a service deliverer easier.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming along. The secretary will send you a copy of the transcript from today.

Ms Harwood: Thank you.

WATSON, DR CHRIS, President, Ginninderra Falls Association
FINLAYSON, DR DOUG, Treasurer, Ginninderra Falls Association
McFADYEN, MS DENISE, Partner, Surveyor's Hill Vineyards

THE CHAIR: Welcome. You are aware of the privileges statement in front of you?

Dr Watson: I have circulated that, yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Would you like to start with a statement and then we can begin with questions? Dr Watson.

Dr Watson: I have been president of the Ginninderra Falls Association since we were incorporated in February last year, in 2012. Today we are very privileged to be at the hearings. We are pleased that this select committee is following up the ecotourism report of Meredith Hunter, Mary Porter and Zed Seselja, which, of course, was a unanimous report back in August last year. We are very pleased to appear here. I am going to ask Dr Doug Finlayson, who has been the driving force with this particular submission to your committee, and also Denise McFadyen, who is a partner of Surveyor's Hill wineries, to speak. We are very pleased to have Denise here because we want to emphasise, as we do in our submission, the joint mutual advantage of development just downstream from Ginninderra Falls, the lovely Murrumbidgee Gorge right there at Wallaroo.

Dr Finlayson: I am assuming that you have had a look at the full submission which went in, I think, in March this year. I thought I would just run through a number of dot points, based on that submission, to emphasise one or two aspects of the submission. I am pleased to see that Steve Toms from the New South Wales Cross-Border Commission has been speaking to you, because many of the problems that we are encountering with trying to promote the national park and that part of the world as a tourist destination are cross-border issues—getting people to talk to each other and getting some agreement on financing and the way forward. We are trying not to get things stopping at the boundary.

In this submission to this particular select committee I want to emphasise that we will be addressing issues connected with tourism and transport. That is under section 5(a), and then 5(c) is the collaborative procurement by ACT government with surrounding local governments. We are trying to encourage stronger cooperation with the Yass Valley Council. Then 5(d) is environmental and conservation matters. The part of the world is the Ginninderra Falls area and the Murrumbidgee Gorge area up there. Since the closure of the national park in the 1990s, there is a whole generation of Canberrans that do not even know that there is a beautiful potential park there for them, and it is only five minutes drive up the road from Belconnen.

Dr Watson: Doug, it was not a national park; it was a private—

Dr Finlayson: It was a private park, yes. Anyway, we want to try and put that area into public ownership and promote that area as a tourist destination in cooperation with the wineries that already exist there. We think there is a huge potential. We want to create a regional national park which we think is a huge potential development on

the north-western boundary of the ACT, with its huge population. There are strong arguments for cooperation between the ACT government, the New South Wales government and the Yass Valley Council in doing this.

There is a huge population just sitting over the border in the ACT. As I said earlier, I think there is now a generation of Canberra residents that do not even know the potential of that area. It used to be open. I went down there when it was a private park. I used to go swimming there. But that was many, many years ago. That was in the 1960s and 1970s.

We think that the cooperation between the wineries in that part of the world and the synergism between the wineries and a potential national park will promote commercial opportunities. That is an important part of our submission.

We want to encourage cooperative work to achieve public access to the land in that part of the world. We are not dodging the issue; it will require a budget. The land in that part of the world is all in private hands, so there are budgetary considerations to be taken into account. We are not dodging that issue. Collaborative procurement, land acquisition and infrastructure development, we think, are important.

Lastly, we think there are business models appropriate for that part of the world in developing a national park. We see them in Victoria where local councils and state governments have developed national parks. So there are business models that can be applied to a national park in that part of the world.

I am now going to pass over to Denise who, hopefully, will give you a perspective from other businesses in New South Wales on the border of the ACT and the potential for tourist development.

Ms McFadyen: I can only speak briefly. We were approached by the association—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, could you just say who you—

Ms McFadyen: I am a partner in Surveyor's Hill Vineyards. There are three wineries along a road called Woodgrove Close, which is a cul-de-sac over a sort of shoulder from Ginninderra Falls. The properties at the end of the close have views of the Murrumbidgee Gorge, which would be part of the proposed national park. Our property has a boundary with one of those properties where the ambit claim would go.

Dr Finlayson: This map might help. If you have a look at the map, you will see the part of the world that Denise is talking about.

Ms McFadyen: I am also representing another winery, Brindabella Hills. Roger and Faye Harris and I were at a meeting with the association a couple of weeks ago where their plans were laid out to us. We thought that the idea of the national park was good in itself. Both of us know that we live in a beautiful part of the world and that the Murrumbidgee Gorge is, in its own way, as beautiful as the Ginninderra Gorge. I have not seen Ginninderra Gorge because since I have been living in that part of the world it has been closed. But I have visited the properties that have some access to the part of the Murrumbidgee Gorge that is under consideration here.

There are three wineries along this road, Woodgrove Close. There is another one, Pankhurst, which I know the association has talked to, but I am not sure of their position. I know that Surveyor's Hill and Brindabella Hills are both very supportive. We have semi-tourism businesses because we are cellar doors. We have got a restaurant. I understand Brindabella Hills are going to reopen their restaurant. We also do accommodation at our winery. There are other accommodation businesses in the Wallaroo area as well.

There is a general desire to promote the tourism and ecotourism businesses around Wallaroo. Of course, it is New South Wales, as you realise—the land we are talking about is all in New South Wales—but I am here to put our position, which is that we are fully supportive of the idea of the national park as described here. We would see it as an advantage to our businesses. We do not see ourselves being disadvantaged necessarily by increased traffic. In fact, increased traffic would be a good idea.

The businesses, of course, are in New South Wales, but they are Canberra district wineries, which the ACT government has a hand in promoting. Murrumbateman is much further out. These wineries are among the closest. There are a couple in the ACT, as you know, but the three that we are talking about are among the closest to the ACT. The people we employ live in the ACT. We are very much bound to the ACT. We are only, as the crow flies, a couple of kilometres from the border where we sit.

There would be advantages to the ACT economy, I think, and there would be advantages to our businesses. Certainly, I think overwhelmingly it would be amazing if this wonderful bit of country could become a national park and if people could have public access to it. That is quite apart from the economic considerations.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming along today and providing this additional information. As you know, Dr Watson and Dr Finlayson, I spent a lot of time in my childhood at the Ginninderra Falls, and I think Ms Porter has been there a few times as well. Other committee members might want to go out on an excursion with you to have a look at the area and see why you are so passionate about wanting to open it up to the public again.

I am interested in the business models that you talked about that happened in Victoria. Have you got any more information that you could share with the committee about those?

Dr Finlayson: I gathered that information when I was down on holiday, essentially. The Victorian government has parks down on the Great Ocean Road that are around the volcanoes, actually. I am trying to remember the name of them. Also there is the Hanging Rock national park, which is run by a local council. So both the state government and a local council have models that could be used for the Ginninderra-Murrumbidgee gorges national park. Both of these are pay on entry, but they have been going for a long while now. It is the sort of thing that you have to consider when you are creating a public space, a park of some kind.

Dr Watson: Damon Cusack of the Ginninderra Catchment Group has been involved in helping us for quite a while with ideas. He talks about the business model as well.

Any national park always has picnic facilities, a cafe and information centre. So we envisage that the first cab off the rank, of course, will be Ginninderra gorge, and that, itself, will bring in a lot of rangers. They will have to create tracks, lookouts and so on. There are some already there but they are in disrepair now.

Of course, people pay fees to go into national parks. So there will be a fee. That will engender money and it will help Yass Valley Council or the New South Wales government. It could well be—and I think this may already be taking place—that there may be interaction with the parks and wildlife service here in the ACT as well as with the appropriate New South Wales parks and wildlife service, who would run the show down there. As Denise said, it is only a matter of time, hopefully a bit down the track, when some land that will be purchased also down at Wallaroo gorge. But we really have to start with the core land purchase of the Ginninderra gorge, which is owned by two owners at the moment—Anna and John Hyles on one side and Emmanuel Notaras on the other. They are the key players right now.

Down near Wallaroo, you have Notaras as well, but you have other areas where I hope there can be conservation covenants and so on on this land. There are environmental restrictions, of course, now, but we do not want them watered down any more. It is difficult. In fact, we are going out to one of the properties, Denise, near you—and I might just hand this around, Mr Secretary—at Wallaroo. It would be good if we could get conservation covenants on this land. We have been in touch with bush heritage and so on, but because they are hobby farms, it is big bickies. So this is going to be hard. That is why I hope that, with questions now, we can see how to get this cross-border get-together with the ACT government, New South Wales and the Yass shire, so that it has good oversight and with a projection of what is going to happen first, while making sure that it is not sold off or degraded any further.

MS PORTER: Dr Finlayson—and I knew this before, anyway—you are the treasurer of the organisation. Does the organisation receive any funding from the ACT government, the New South Wales government or the federal government?

Dr Finlayson: Nothing whatsoever. It is not for want of asking. Unfortunately, we receive no funding. All our funding at the moment is from memberships and donations. We do not have a huge budget.

MS PORTER: You are in discussion with all three levels of government—the federal government as well—about your plans?

Dr Finlayson: We have talked to the local member, Andrew Leigh. He is supportive but he has not really given us any sort of leads in developing funding through the federal government as yet. We will leave that until after the general election.

Ms McFadyen: It is in the electorate of Hume.

MS PORTER: Yes, the local member will be changing in Hume.

Ms McFadyen: Yes, that is right.

MS PORTER: You may have already had some discussions with the current member

in Hume?

Dr Watson: Yes, we did write to Schultz. What is his Christian name?

THE CHAIR: Alby.

Dr Watson: Alby Schultz, and he was very supportive. We have, of course, had a lot of discussions with Katrina Hodgkinson, who is the New South Wales member for Burrinjuck, and Robyn Parker. I might, Mr Secretary, hand this out. We have in-principle support from the Yass Valley Council. Also—this is the point I was talking about—with Premier and Cabinet of New South Wales, we are waiting for their report. They have investigated some properties down there, including the Hyles and Notaras properties, and Barry Walker’s on the other side of the gorge. He was once mayor of Yass. There is also this guy, Alan Moore. So we are awaiting that report. We are hoping that this committee will catalyse this interaction.

Certainly, from the point of view of funding, I have spoken to Mary Porter on this before. There is a worry about funding, but we do say that 95 per cent of the users are going to be from the ACT and tourists. You are not going to get many people coming from Yass, let alone elsewhere in New South Wales. So we have to take our fair share. Barry Walker was interesting. He said to me, “Chris, obviously with infrastructure, you get the priorities all the time—health, education and so on.”

But with respect to a fair share of the infrastructure and the budget of the ACT, let alone federal and so on, it has to be seen that this is a very important area for recreation, preserving biodiversity down on the Murrumbidgee, and it is in our bailiwick here in the ACT, so somehow we have to get together and work out where the various fundings can come from. Mary is a bit worried about it politically for the ACT. It is going to be very difficult for everyone to apportion their budgets. But somehow this has to be on the agenda as well, and we will keep fighting for it. It is a difficult situation, isn’t it?

MS PORTER: Insurance, too, is a big issue that the landholders have experienced in the past with regard to this area, as you know. That has been very expensive for them. I think that is the reason why they eventually closed the area. That is my understanding.

Dr Watson: Of course, that was with the Hyles; they had a big insurance problem. Obviously, this, to us, has to be in perpetuity. It has to be in the parks service, and we have to get beyond the idea—private people come and go. With Alan Moore’s property, we are going out to see it. Actually he has sold it to someone else. So that can change as quick as a flash. That is why it has to be in public hands.

MR WALL: One question that springs to mind is that you mentioned the site is currently privately owned. What is the position of those landholders with respect to either procuring their land or opening it up again as a park?

Dr Watson: By and large—Doug and Denise might like to speak—we have already had a landowners forum late last year. There were eight landowners there, including the key ones—Hyles and Notaras—and they are supportive of the concept. Of course,

you still have to work out what they are going to get paid, but, presumably, that will be assessed in due course. There are just one or two people that do not want to join, but, by and large, most of the landowners are happy to divest portions—the gorge portions of their properties.

Dr Finlayson: As Chris mentioned, we did have a landowners forum last year. We were quite encouraged by that because, coming out of that, it was pointed out that the New South Wales government is assessing their land in terms of land value et cetera. That report was due out in July, out of the Queanbeyan office. So there were several months where the proposition of a national park was being assessed. We are encouraged by that work by the New South Wales government. That report goes back to Sydney for consideration by the minister there.

We are very much aware that this land is New South Wales. But when you look at the map, if you know where Ginninderra Drive is, it goes screaming right from the city and then right past Belconnen town centre and right to the north-west ACT border, and then it stops. So there is potential to continue Ginninderra Drive across the ponds there and link up with the Wallaroo Road. That, in itself, would be a huge improvement to the communication for tourists between the huge population in Belconnen and the wineries and obviously further down to the national park. Those are relatively simple things to do—put in a roadway, continue the road. We realise that is in New South Wales, but encouragement from the ACT government would be a huge step forward in that direction.

Dr Watson: The other night, of course, there was the planning—perhaps I should not say “so-called planning”—that has already commenced down there on the last fairly big areas of the ACT, with Riverview Pty Ltd. David Maxwell has been out there with members for Ginninderra and Andrew Barr. We are concerned that there is very good quality planning on outer Belconnen, but government planners have got to be in there and looking at all aspects of not only the environment and the Murrumbidgee corridor and the Ginninderra creek corridor, but all the other aspects.

I know our patron, Bryan Pratt, worries about sewage, lo and behold. You do not want sewage getting into either of those two rivers. Apparently, Riverview Pty Ltd are also working now for the land across the border—New South Wales land. It is only a few kilometres there. How do we get this integrated planning with the so-called ACT planners, government planners, and the New South Wales planners and/or the Yass Valley Council? This has to be very well integrated. Doug has talked about the appropriate roads.

Also, Bryan Pratt worries about the gateway roads down to this area of the falls and Wallaroo. You have got some existing so-called recycling estates which look terrible. We jumped up and down last year along the Belconnen tip. That is 100 hectares. That was a shocker for a while. I think they have taken a lot of the dreadful piles away. Also you have got Parkwood eggs, which is apparently on the table for being an industrial estate, possibly. So you have probably got to have some industrial estates. We cannot put them all over to southern Canberra, can we? Planning is terribly vital in all of this area.

The other night this came up at the Belconnen Community Council meeting. You

were there, Yvette and Mary. We are throwing that over to your committee to try and bring cross-border issues—it has to be planned as an integrated whole.

I might hand this extra bit out, Mr Secretary. This is an overview showing some of the biodiversity. The Hyles have a quarry right alongside the gorge, and that will be part of the buffer zone. That is an important cash cow to them right now, but hopefully that will be bought, because that quarry will have to be restored. But there you are; they need the money from that quarry. But we as a committee hope that that quarry will be the picnic area and that will be restored. So there is a lot to be done, planning wise. I do not think that shows the quarry. One of your maps might show the quarry. It is right alongside—

MS PORTER: It does.

Dr Finlayson: That quarry does have a finite life, by the way.

Dr Watson: I hope so.

Dr Finlayson: I will put on my geological hat. They are reaching through now to basement rock. So the quarry does have a finite life. But it is obviously a very good earner for the Hyles.

Dr Watson: Anna Hyles is still a member of our committee. They need the money but we want part of the buffer zone.

MR SMYTH: The map with the yellow park outlined—how big is that in area?

Dr Finlayson: That is about 700 or 800 hectares.

MR SMYTH: What does a hectare sell for out there at the moment?

Dr Finlayson: One-hundred hectares is a square kilometre. The New South Wales national park have a lower limit which they talk about for making something a national park. It is usually about 700 or 800 hectares. We link that area with the Woodstock nature reserve, which is in the ACT, so it would be continuous, and that would take it over the 1,000 hectares altogether.

MR SMYTH: What is a hectare out there selling for at the moment?

Dr Finlayson: A hectare is 100 by 100 metres.

MR SMYTH: What is it worth? I know what a hectare is.

Dr Finlayson: I have talked to a few people I know who are in the business of assessing rural properties. They tell me it is difficult, because the area that we are talking about is not what you might call prime grazing property. It is mostly the gorges, the steep slopes, the river banks et cetera. We are really not trying to take away any grazing property. Barry Walker is on the other side of the Murrumbidgee gorge and the other property, and the Hyles themselves have grazed cattle on their property. Notaras, of course, is well known out at the racecourse, and he has his

horses all over his property. We are not trying to take away or in any way lay claim to prime grazing land.

The advice I have got from professional property assessors who work in New South Wales is that it is difficult to put a dollar value on a gorge or a steep slope, and there are restrictions on what you can do on areas within the national park, or proposed national park.

Dr Watson: Barry Walker did tell me he thought buying at least the core areas of the gorge and part of the Murrumbidgee would be small beer in relation to ACT's budget. I do not know whether that is right or wrong.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time, so we will have to leave it there. Thank you very much for coming in and adding to your submission to the committee today. The secretary will send you out copies of the transcript.

The committee adjourned at 12.51 pm.