



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**22 MARCH 2022**

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**Tuesday, 22 March 2022**

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms Burch) (10.00): Members:

Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal.  
Yanggu ngalawiri, dhunimanyin Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari.  
Nginggada Dindi dhawura Ngunnaawalbun yindjumaralidjinyin.

The words I have just spoken are in the language of the traditional custodians and translate to:

This is Ngunnawal country.  
Today we are gathering on Ngunnawal country.  
We always pay respect to Elders, female and male, and Ngunnawal country.

Members, I ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

## **Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee Report 4**

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (10.02): I present the following report:

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 4—*Inquiry into the Public Health Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)*, dated 21 February 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I would first like to thank every person and organisation who made a submission to the health and community wellbeing committee inquiry into the Public Health Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2). This bill is a response to calls from human rights bodies such as the ACT Human Rights Commission to implement primary legislation to manage the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, providing powers to implement COVID-19 management directions to better enact human rights safeguards. This legislative framework enables greater accountability and transparency regarding decisions taken in the ongoing management of the COVID-19 pandemic for the next 18 months.

Protecting public health is a key responsibility of government. The balance of individual human rights and the protection of the public is a complex issue that requires thoughtful and transparent processes to ensure that the needs of the collective do not unduly suppress the rights of the individual.

In a unicameral parliament, the Legislative Assembly's committees are vital in providing the house of review function of a senate or legislative council. These processes are pivotal to the proper scrutiny of legislation and to ensuring that the voices of the community are listened to by members and reflected in the decisions that we make.

As the chair of the committee responsible for the inquiry into this legislation, I was a witness to written and oral submissions from key legal, medical and human rights bodies that, in principle, supported the intent and design of this legislation, while providing a range of important reflections on the balancing of rights. These organisations included the ACT Law Society, the ACT Human Rights Commission, the ACT Council of Social Service and the Health Care Consumers Association of the ACT.

With the help of the diligent secretariat, the committee received and analysed over 1,100 submissions to this inquiry. These submissions focused on the key question of how to appropriately balance human rights with the mitigation of harm to vulnerable people through the transmission of COVID in high-risk settings. Most of these submissions were from individuals living interstate and overseas concerned largely with the philosophical issue of the impact of public health measures on civil liberties.

I would like to give particular thanks to the committee secretariat for their diligent and highly professional engagement with all of those who made submissions to this inquiry. Committee support went above and beyond throughout this process. They were highly adaptable and gracious in providing support to enable the committee to undertake its important function.

I am pleased that, as a member of this place, I can be actively involved in the scrutiny of legislation, and I am grateful for the community's high level of engagement with this process.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Advertising—public spaces and transport—petition 35-21**

*By Ms Clay, from 523 residents:*

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the ACT Assembly: Public space advertising is a socially, economically and environmentally destructive and fundamentally undemocratic practice: giving a collective community asset to a private company. It is also hugely unpopular in the ACT, having been the subject of sustained community campaigning to protect our relatively ad free status.

Ads have begun creeping into our city:

- Illegal ads, such as billboards at the Canberra Centre, McDonalds ads on bus shelters, or digital billboards in Bunda Street, are proliferating.
- New types of ads, such as parked billboards and developer ads on construction site hoardings.

- More public transport ads, the sudden emergence of tram advertisements and window blocking ads on buses, which literally make people sick.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to:

- Direct Transport Canberra and Access Canberra to immediately remove all existing illegal advertisements.

Introduce specific offences for roadside advertising using parked vehicles.

- Remove public transport advertisements that block passengers' ability to see outside.
- Review and update the rules for what advertising content is allowed on public transport and apply these rules to bus and tram shelters as well as vehicles.
- End bus shelter ads by committing to not renewing the Adshel contract.

Noting that advertising contributes to approximately 0.586 per cent of the total cost of TC operations, the petitioners also request the Assembly undertake consultation on the community support for replacing all public transport advertisements with locally commissioned artwork.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having more than 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services*

### **Sport—Reid Oval fencing—petition 39-21**

*By Mr Rattenbury, from 190 residents:*

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly:

Reid Oval is used by a diverse group of people for activities including cricket, football, soccer, jogging, outdoor training and people walking and playing with their dogs. It is centrally located and bounded by Limestone Avenue, Euree Street, Elimatta Street and Anzac Parade.

A steel tube and chain link fence runs along approximately half of the Limestone Ave side, with the remainder only steel tube without the chain link. These large openings allow easy passage of errant sporting equipment, children, animals, etc onto the nature strip and Limestone Ave.

Kangaroos regularly cross Limestone Ave from Mt Ainslie to feed on the grass of the oval at dawn and dusk. The risk of harm to children, pets and kangaroos from passing motorists is quite high, there have been several 'close calls'.

Dogs are permitted off-leash when no scheduled sporting events are occurring, provided they are under effective control. However, it is not always possible to identify when kangaroos are present on the oval and dogs have run onto Limestone Ave.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the Government to extend the current Reid Oval steel tube and chain link fence along the entire

length of Limestone Ave, and repair broken segments to reduce the risk of sporting equipment, children and animals inadvertently crossing into the path of motorists.

### **Community language schools—rapid antigen tests—petition 3-22**

By **Mr Braddock**, from 57 residents:

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly: since the ACT Government announced the plans to return to schools, free Rapid Antigen Tests have been offered to students and teachers in public and private schools. This ensures that schools are able to detect and isolate positive cases before this affects large numbers of people.

Conversely, ACT's 46 Community Language Schools, servicing over 2 000 students and run by more than 300 volunteer staff, have not been given free access to RATs. This is putting a further financial burden on our already overstretched and under resourced schools.

Without access to free tests, the Community Language Schools will not be able to offer a safe working place for volunteers. Further, we are likely to be affected by severe staff shortages and be forced to close or stop our classes, which offer a critical community service to Canberra's migrant and refugee communities.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the Government to supply all teachers of Canberra's Community Language Schools with free Rapid Antigen Tests, commensurate with the supply given to public school teachers.

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.*

### **Ministerial responses**

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

#### **Phillip—swimming pool—petitions 42-21 and 47-21**

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Sport and Recreation, dated 8 February 2022, in response to two petitions lodged by Mrs Jones on 30 November 2021 concerning Phillip Pool.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 30 November 2021 relating to the petitions (42-21 and 47-21) lodged by Ms Giulia Jones MLA requesting *'the Government to:*

- *provide a grant to fix the Phillip Pool and assist in ensuring this occurs;*
- and*

- *keep the Phillip Pool open until it, or another outdoor pool, is available and open for the people of Woden for the long term*.

Following a formal request from the lessee of the Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre (PSISC), the planning and land authority agreed to provide temporary relief to lessee from the requirement to open the pool facilities for the 2021-22 summer season, up to 30 March 2022.

The commercial prospects, operation and future of the PSISC, inclusive of the pool facilities, is a matter for the owner of that property, noting the lessee has had use, occupation and benefit of the property for over 40 years. As a result, I can advise the ACT Government does not support the petition request to provide a grant to the PSISC lessee to *“fix the Phillip Pool and assist in ensuring this occurs”*. Furthermore, in accordance with existing lease provisions for the PSISC site, the ACT Government will expect the pool facilities will reopen and be available for public use for the 2022-23 summer and beyond.

While the closure of the swimming pool at PSISC for the 2021-22 summer season is unfortunate, the ACT is well catered for when it comes to the provision of public and private aquatic facilities. There are a number of government aquatic facilities located within a 10-kilometre radius of the Woden Town Centre including Stromlo Leisure Centre, Manuka Pool, Canberra Olympic Pool (in the city), Lakeside Leisure Centre (Greenway) and Active Leisure Centre (Wanniassa). There are also several private aquatic facilities located in Woden and the surrounding area that offer a range of services to the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this matter.

### **Woden—indoor sports facilities—petition 23-21 and 48-21**

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Sport and Recreation, dated 8 February 2022, in response to two petitions lodged by Ms Davidson on 30 November and 1 December 2021 concerning a multipurpose sports stadium in Woden.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letters of 30 November 2021 and 1 December 2021 relating to the petitions (23- 21 and 48-21) lodged by Ms Emma Davidson MLA requesting *‘the ACT Government invest in a multi- purpose sports stadium in Woden’*.

I am pleased to advise the ACT Government is progressing a number of ACT Government school projects in Woden Valley in the coming years, which will see additional indoor sporting infrastructure made available for community use outside of school hours.

This is in addition to recently completed projects, including Evelyn Scott School in Denman Prospect, which includes a full-sized two-court gymnasium.

Funded projects to be delivered during the current election cycle include:



- Garran Primary School - In the 2021-22 ACT Budget, funding was allocated to prepare to modernise Garran Primary School. The redeveloped school is expected to be ready in 2024-25 and will include a single court gymnasium which will be available for community use outside of school hours.
- Further funding was also allocated in the 2021-22 ACT Budget for master planning and forward design works for new and expanded school capacity in the Molonglo and Woden area. Typically, new and expanded schools are master planned to include a gymnasium with up to two indoor courts dependent upon budget funding. As a result of this work, it is anticipated additional indoor courts will be provided at new and refurbished ACT Government schools in Woden and the surrounding area in the coming years.
- Installation of adjustable height basketball rings at Melrose High School to support training for junior basketball teams.

The ACT Government does not own dedicated indoor sport court facilities, however there are dedicated indoor facilities under private ownership in the ACT. Alongside the initiatives outlined above, the private sector will continue to play an important role in providing indoor sport court facilities across the ACT.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this matter.

### **ACT Policing—Coombs and Wright—petition 45-21**

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, dated 8 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Mrs Jones on 11 November 2021 concerning the convenience store in Coombs.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 11 November 2021 regarding petition number 45-21, lodged by Ms Giulia Jones MLA on behalf of the petitioners regarding crime prevention at the Ajijo Grocery and Convenience Store in Coombs. This letter is my response, pursuant to Standing Order 100.

The ACT Government notes the petitioners' concerns regarding:

Visible and regular police presence in the vicinity of the Ajijo Grocery and Convenience Store

ACT Policing's highest priority is always the safety and security of the community and its workforce.

When discussing crime in the ACT, it is important to remember the advice from successive Chief Police Officers that Canberra is a very safe city – one of the safest in Australia. The ACT Government continues to work with and invest in ACT Policing to ensure that incidents of crime remain low and that they are

responded to quickly when they do occur. While the ACT experiences low crime rates compared to other jurisdictions, the ACT Government acknowledges that property crime does not discriminate; it can affect anyone and is often opportunistic in nature, requiring residents and business owners to always remain vigilant.

ACT Policing is committed to maintaining its visibility and presence throughout Canberra, including in Molonglo. The Officer in Charge of Woden Police Station attended several local events throughout 2020 and 2021 to proactively engage with the Molonglo region and will continue to do so as COVID- 19 restrictions allow. Target areas for patrolling are based on intelligence drawn from a number of sources – including community involvement and engagement directly with ACT Policing. ACT Policing’s Intelligence Team analyses a variety of information sources to identify patterns, convergences and prioritisation to maximise crime reduction opportunities and increase community safety.

The Chief Police Officer for the ACT has acknowledged publicly that, as Molonglo continues to grow in population, ACT Policing expects there to be an increase in reportable crime. Population growth is a contributing factor to increases in crime in any area.

In consultation with the ACT Government, ACT Policing is transitioning to a community-focused, proactive model of policing under the Police Services Model (PSM) to ensure the ongoing safety of the Canberra community. This includes a Strategic Accommodation Plan that will consider future policing needs. Additionally, education and public messaging are important components of crime prevention, community safety and enhancing confidence in police. ACT Policing is committed to raising awareness of community safety through active engagement with the entire community and the delivery of effective safety messaging.

ACT Policing Intelligence advises on patterns of offending in the area surrounding the Coombs Shopping Centre and officers will continue to work with the building owner and tenant to share the responsibility of ensuring the community is safe. ACT Policing encourages continued reporting of suspicious behaviour by members of the community, in order to be able to prioritise its resources effectively and efficiently.

#### Sufficient police for a faster response time

Canberrans can be assured that police resources have always been available to support and protect our community – and always will be. Like all organisations, ACT Policing has to manage its resources appropriately in line with operational priorities, which impact police response times. ACT Policing prioritises its responses to life threatening emergencies first, followed by incidents where there is an immediate threat to a person or property.

Canberra’s condensed geography means that officers can move across the territory in a timely manner, with police regularly undertaking duties in different patrol zones if resources are required. ACT Policing has access to many resources to respond to incidents in Molonglo, in addition to those located at Woden Police Station, and its dispatch system ensures the closest and most available resources are allocated. While police stations will always be a part of

the police ecosystem, ACT Policing officers have more communication tools and technology than ever before, which allows them to do more of their work on the road and respond faster to crimes when they are occurring.

The ACT Government is continuing to ensure that Canberra remains adequately served by our front-line police officers and that ACT Policing has the resources necessary to keep our community safe. It may reassure petitioners to know that the ACT Government's investment of \$33.9 million over four years towards a new PSM is delivering more than 60 new ACT Policing personnel – the first step towards a more visible, proactive and connected police service. In 2022, additional ACT Policing recruitment will expand proactive, prevention-focused policing and drive a more mobile, targeted policing presence connected to the needs of the community. ACT Policing is recruiting a further ten staff for PSM roles including an additional Proactive Policing Team of nine sworn members and an additional unsworn Aboriginal Liaison Officer. In 2022-23, ACT Policing intends to further expand frontline proactive policing presence, improve community engagement and expand multidisciplinary vulnerable people capability through additional recruitment.

Through the transition to the PSM, ACT Policing is developing the ability to more effectively deploy its resources based on intelligence and manage its workforce efficiently.

I trust this brings the petitioners assurance that their concerns are understood and have been acknowledged by the ACT Government.

### **Belconnen—cricket facilities—petition 46-21**

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Sport and Recreation, dated 24 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 2 December 2021 concerning cricket infrastructure investment in eastern Belconnen.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2021 regarding petition 46-21, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA. The petition calls on the ACT Government to invest in additional club-only and community use cricket infrastructure in eastern Belconnen, co-located with West's homegrounds:

- **Option 1:** Repair the existing club-only nets at Aranda and provide additional community use nets nearby; or
- **Option 2:** Expand the existing club-only nets at Kaleen Enclosed oval and provide additional community nets nearby; or
- **Option 3:** Provide new club-only nets at Macquarie Enclosed Oval, and provide additional community use nets nearby.

The ACT Government is aware of the need to upgrade sportsgrounds to meet growing participation and make best use of the large sporting asset base we are fortunate to have across the city. To this end, the ACT Government has committed to \$60 million in investment in sport and recreation infrastructure over the term of the current Government.

The TCCS Sport and Recreation Facilities team works closely with Cricket ACT to determine priority works for premier and community cricket grounds. These works typically include oval renovations, maintenance of natural grass and synthetic playing wickets and maintenance and repair of training cricket nets.

In 2021-22, works to upgrade and improve oval surfaces and natural turf wickets were undertaken at Chisholm and Stirling Enclosed ovals. Synthetic wicket pitches were repaired or upgraded at Deakin Mint, and O'Connor Ovals. Cricket practice nets were upgraded or repaired at Amaroo, Gowrie, Hackett, Isabella Plains, Nicholls, Reid, Rivett, Stirling, Watson, Waramanga, and Weetangera. Works are scheduled on nets at Harrison and Deakin West practice nets during 2022. To date in the 2021-22 financial year, TCCS has committed \$348,700 to repairs and maintenance of cricket facilities across Canberra including new nets at Taylor and upgrade works to the pitch at Melba.

In response to the petitioners' options, I have included some detail below.

**Option 1**

The Aranda nets have been upgraded over the years and currently consist of a 4-bay club training facility. In discussion with Cricket ACT, it has been identified that while these nets could have some improvement modifications undertaken if prioritised, no Belconnen clubs are currently using them for training.

However, TCCS are working with Cricket ACT to identify and progress priorities.

**Option 2**

Kaleen Enclosed has 4-bay nets which are of a high-quality standard with a synthetic grass surface. There is limited room for further expansion of these nets due to space, proximity of trees and slope requiring major infrastructure works. The enclosed oval nets are not available for community use as they are locked behind gates and are only available for hire bookings.

**Option 3**

Provision of new facilities at the Jamison Enclosed oval cannot be accommodated due to site constraints including the proximity of trees, aspect and slope.

Club specific nets located in the Belconnen region include Holt, Kaleen Enclosed, Weetangera, Aranda and Charnwood. All have extended run ups and synthetic surfaces and are in a very good condition, noting my previous comments regarding extra modifications that could be made to Aranda if usage warranted such investment.

Community nets available in the Belconnen region include Holt and Charnwood with synthetic surfacing. Accessible and functional concrete community nets are also located at Scullin, Latham, Giralang and Higgins.

As to prioritising future works, the ACT Government will continue to work with Cricket ACT to prioritise works on cricket infrastructure across the region. To that end, this request has been noted.

I trust this information is of assistance.

**Play spaces—playground fencing—petition 30-21**

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport and City Services, dated 24 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Mrs Jones on 2 December 2021 concerning the right for children to play in a safe place.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 2 December 2021 regarding petition 30-21, lodged by Mrs Giulia Jones MLA. The petition seeks for Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) to create a standard for fully fenced playgrounds incorporating the needs of families of children with autism; construct the playgrounds at Kambah and Throsby with at least 1.6 metre fences; repair all fully fenced playgrounds and create an equal geographic distribution.

The ACT Government recognises the critical role and value of play in enriching the lives of Canberrans of all ages. Our play spaces are highly valued across Canberra and we want to ensure they keep getting better as our city changes and grows.

There are over 500 public playgrounds located across the ACT. As each playground varies in age and condition, safety audits against Australian Standards are regularly conducted with more than 26,000 safety inspections undertaken on Canberra playgrounds last year. In relation to repair works, all play spaces are comprehensively audited, including through a Safety and Compliance Assessment. As issues are identified through assessments, they are risk assessed and ranked to form the basis of the annual works program.

The ACT Government recently released the draft ACT Play Space Strategy for community consultation. Feedback from this petition will be considered with other feedback received through that consultation to inform finalisation of the Play Space Strategy in 2022. The draft strategy identifies an intent to continue to expand the number of fenced playgrounds, to review implementation of safety inspection processes and to continue to incorporate relevant Australian Standards into the ACT Municipal Infrastructure Standards (MIS) (for example, MIS 21 – Recreation Facilities).

The ACT Government is currently considering the proposal to adopt playground fencing standards into the ACT MIS that align with guidelines from Kidsafe Australia and the Building Code of Australia (BCA), which at a minimum comply with the BCA-SPSC standard/Australian Standard 1926.1 *Swimming Pool Safety – Safety barriers for swimming pools*.

The current approach by TCCS to consider fencing components in the rolling program of playground upgrades is a direct outcome of feedback from the 2018 Better Suburbs Play Spaces Forum. The forum emphasised the need to make playgrounds more inclusive, safe and suitable for families with special needs, in particular for children with Autism and Asperger related conditions, their parents and carers. In addition, achieving an equitable distribution of playground upgrades was also a key outcome of the forum and is an important consideration in the government's priority-setting process.

The new fences at the playgrounds at Kambah and Throsby have been constructed to be 1.2 metre high following TCCS discussions with Marymead and others in relation to specifications and requirements to meet the needs of children and families with special needs. At the current time the ACT Government's focus is on continuing to increase the number of fenced playgrounds across Canberra, rather than updating existing fencing at these particular playgrounds.

I trust this information is of assistance.

### **Health—eating disorder support services—petition 34-21**

By **Ms Davidson**, Minister for Mental Health, dated 28 February 2022, in response to a petition lodged by Dr Paterson on 30 November 2021 concerning eating disorder services in the ACT, including an update to the ACT eating disorders position statement, in response to Dr Paterson's e-petition "Starving for Services—Lack of Eating Disorder Services in the ACT".

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 30 November 2021 regarding petition No 34-21, Starving for Services – Lack of Eating Disorders Services in the ACT lodged by Dr Marisa Paterson MLA.

The enclosed *Update to the ACT Eating Disorders Position Statement* is the Government Response to petition 34-21. This updated position statement has been developed to respond to the four areas outlined in the petition. It provides a further update to that tabled in the Legislative Assembly in August 2020.

This *Update to the ACT Eating Disorders Position Statement* details actions that have been undertaken by the Expanding Public Health Services for Eating Disorders in the Territory Project (established in July 2019) to progress work on both the ACT Government and Commonwealth commitments to improve access and support for people with an eating disorder in the ACT.

*(A copy of the attachment is available at the Chamber Support Office).*

### **Motion to take note of petitions**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

### **Advertising—public spaces and transport—petition 35-21**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.08): I would like to make a few comments on one of the petitions lodged which I have sponsored, the "make and keep Canberra ad free" petition. That petition has received over 500 signatures, and it comes on the back of a

long-running campaign to keep Canberra ad free. It is a campaign that has had support from over 90 per cent of Canberrans.

The petitioners, in their terms, draw the attention of the ACT government to the fact that public space advertising is socially, economically and environmentally destructive, and that it is creeping into our private spaces.

The petitioners also note that it is usually unpopular in the ACT. It has been the subject of sustained community campaigning to protect our ad-free status, and ads are now creeping into these spaces. We are seeing illegal ads in places such as billboards at the Canberra Centre and McDonald's ads on bus shelters. We are also seeing a proliferation of non-illegal ads—ads that are not already banned but that perhaps government should stop and think about.

A lot of the ones that have been raised with me personally as concerning are the ads that are on light rail and bus windows. They tend to make people literally feel travel sick. We are also seeing a lot of messaging that is actually not very helpful at the moment. There is a particularly favourite worst one in my electorate, in Jamison, which is an Afterpay ad with a young person eating fries, and it recommends that young people go out and get into debt to buy more fast food. It is not a very helpful message to be proliferating at the moment.

We know we have a lot of environmental problems. We know a lot of those environmental problems are based in over-consumption. We know we have a lot of mental health problems. We know a lot of those mental health problems are based on the fact that people are made to feel unhappy and are constantly told that they are less than they should be, that they should buy more, have more and do more. It is just not very helpful messaging.

I am very supportive of this petition, and I am looking forward to seeing the ACT government's response to it.

### **Community language schools—rapid antigen tests—petition 3-22**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.10): I wish to talk to my petition about community language schools being supplied with free rapid antigen tests. These tests are essential to health care and keeping our community safe. The ACT has 46 community language schools servicing over 2,000 students and run by more than 300 volunteers. They play an important role for the Canberra multicultural community in maintaining and retaining our cultural heritage.

At the beginning of this term, during the return to school, rapid antigen tests were given free of charge to students and teachers in public and private schools. They were also distributed to community organisations working in aged care and disability, to protect our most vulnerable.

However, now that supply is no longer an issue, we have not seen the same level of supply going out to other community groups which are also servicing the needs of our children. Community language schools were not included in this policy, which made

the return to face-to-face learning much more difficult and stressful for staff and students alike.

They were also not made available for those who are undertaking home-schooling. The COVID committee only last year recommended that “future restrictions about gathering for home-educated children are consistent with the restrictions placed on school-educated children”. While the distribution of RATs is not the same as a restriction on gathering, giving an equitable distribution of RATs to community schools and home-educated children to allow gathering is indicative of the spirit of that recommendation.

While RATs are now more readily available, I have tabled this petition with the hope that future policies will include other forms of education, such as community language schools and home-educated students.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **COVID-19 pandemic response—update Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.12): I rise to update the Assembly on the government’s response to the evolving COVID-19 situation in the ACT and across Australia, and the steps we have taken to keep Canberrans safe.

In the period since my last update in February, case numbers and rates of hospitalisation had largely stabilised here in the ACT and across the country. However, in more recent weeks we have seen an uptick in cases and hospitalisations in the ACT and at a national level. This change reflects the emergence of a new subvariant of the Omicron strain, and we are monitoring the situation very closely. All jurisdictions continue to move towards “COVID-normal”, with minimal restrictions and public health social measures.

In the last month we have observed the two-year anniversary of the ACT Public Health Emergency Declaration and the one-year anniversary of the first COVID-19 vaccine administered in the ACT. One of the more recent innovations in our response, the COVID-19 clinic at the surge centre in Garran, has treated its 800th patient.

For two years, Canberrans have worked together to slow the spread of this virus—two years of Canberrans social distancing and practising other COVID-safe measures, wearing masks in certain settings, and following the public health directions, and one year of Canberrans eagerly coming forward to get vaccinated. This was all done to protect loved ones and the most vulnerable members of our community.

As a community, Canberrans have displayed remarkable resilience, resolve and compassion. It has been a very challenging two years, but Canberrans’ hard work has paid off, putting us in a strong position as we move to living with COVID and being COVID-smart.



The BA.2 Omicron subvariant is now known to have been circulating across the country since late January 2022. It has become the dominant variant in New South Wales over the last month and now also appears to be the dominant variant here in the ACT.

Evidence from across the world indicates that the BA.2 subvariant is even more transmissible than the original BA.1 Omicron variant. However, the evidence collected so far also suggests that the new variant presents similar risks of causing severe illness. Importantly, BA.2 has been made a research priority around the world and there is no evidence of significantly reduced vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic disease.

With high rates of vaccination across the country, Australia remains in a good position as we continue to transition to COVID-normal. The ACT continues to work closely with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions as the COVID-19 situation evolves, to ensure our restrictions are proportionate and effective in responding to the level of risk in the community.

As at 8 pm on 20 March, there had been a total of 67,243 cases of COVID-19 recorded in the ACT. There were 6,014 active cases, with 39 COVID-19 patients in hospital, of whom four were in intensive care, with none requiring ventilation. Sadly, 38 people have died with COVID-19 in the ACT since the start of the pandemic. The ACT government extends its sincere condolences to their families and loved ones.

We are seeing transmission in our schools and in early childhood education and care settings. This is not unexpected given that these are environments where young people and educators are spending many hours together. I know this is a cause of significant anxiety for some parents. However, while children under the age of 12 are all either unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated, rates of severe illness and hospitalisation remain rare in this age group.

We have also seen a significant cluster of cases in the Australian National University's residential student accommodation. ACT Health worked closely with the ANU to assist in managing this cluster.

Importantly, overall hospitalisation rates are currently within the capacity of our hospitals. The vaccines are doing their job, interrupting chains of transmission and reducing rates of severe illness. With case numbers increasing over the last week, the ACT government is carefully monitoring the situation to ensure our response continues to remain proportionate.

The public health team within ACT Health has also commenced planning preparations for winter to ensure that our response to the pandemic can adapt to various scenarios in a manner that is flexible, scalable and agile. This planning includes considerations of testing and vaccination needs, as well as equipment requirements. We will continue to update the Assembly and the community as this work progresses.

The ACT's COVID-19 vaccination program continues to be world leading, with 96.2 per cent of eligible Canberrans aged five and over having received two doses of vaccine. As of 21 March, Canberrans also continue to be among those leading the nation in their uptake of paediatric vaccines, with 79.7 per cent of five to 11-year-olds having had a first dose, and 33.6 per cent having had a second. With booster or third doses, there is 71.7 per cent coverage of people aged 16 and over.

Our vaccination coverage is an exceptional achievement that has put the ACT in a strong position as we move to living with COVID. It represents a strong partnership between the ACT government, primary care providers, and a range of community partners, as well as the commonwealth government. We wish to thank everyone who has contributed to the vaccination program. We also thank every Canberran who has come forward to get vaccinated and to receive their booster dose once eligible.

We strongly encourage anyone who is eligible and has not yet received their booster or primary doses to come forward to ensure the best protection for themselves and the community. Vaccinations are readily available at ACT government clinics, as well as through GPs and pharmacies across Canberra. The Novavax vaccine is also available for primary doses in more than 20 ACT GP clinics and pharmacies.

The ACT government's Equity to Access Program continues to make a vital contribution to our vaccination program. The program ensures that every member of our community can get vaccinated and be protected against COVID-19, regardless of their personal circumstances. The Equity to Access Program provides people who are not connected to mainstream health services with the opportunity to get vaccinated in a way that is appropriate and accessible for them. This includes people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living with disability and their carers, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and people living in social housing or insecure accommodation.

As part of this program, the government has resumed operating pop-up vaccination clinics. ACT Health has run seven walk-in pop-up clinics so far this month across locations in Canberra city, Turner, Gungahlin, Conder and Kambah. Fifty-four vaccine doses, primarily boosters, were administered at these clinics. Next week, additional clinics will be held across the territory in suburbs including Isabella Plains, Conder, Coombs and Turner. These clinics play an important role in making vaccination accessible to people who may find it difficult to travel to the AIS or other vaccination clinics.

The ACT Health directorate will continue to work with community sector partners and healthcare providers to identify areas of the community where targeted programs and assistance are needed. Canberra Health Services also continues to offer in-reach vaccination to patients in settings such as hospitals, mental health units, dialysis centres, adult incarceration centres, disability hubs and methadone clinics.

This year the Equity to Access Program has delivered 351 vaccine doses to members of our community who may not otherwise have been able to access this vital health care. This brings the total to almost 2½ thousand vaccine doses in the program's

lifetime. Equity is a core value of this government, and this program is well and truly delivering that.

In addition to our vaccination program, the ACT's test, trace, isolate and quarantine—TTIQ—policies also continue to play a crucial role in our COVID-19 response. Pressure on our testing system had eased since my last update in February. Over the last month, ACT government testing sites have conducted between 1,281 and 3,689 tests per day, with an average wait time of around 30 minutes to an hour. Over the last week, however, we have seen an increase in demand for our testing clinics, which reflects the increasing case numbers. The demand for testing clinics will be carefully managed and the ACT government will respond accordingly, noting that there is now also an adequate supply of rapid antigen tests—RATs—across the community.

Over recent weeks, it has become much easier for Canberrans to find RATs on the shelves of local pharmacies, supermarkets and other retail outlets. Eligible concession cardholders can access up to 10 free RATs over three months under the national rapid antigen testing concessional access program. In addition, at its meeting on 11 March, national cabinet agreed to extend the concessional access program until 31 July 2022. Over the three-month period, an additional 10 free RATs will be available to eligible concession cardholders.

The ACT government also continues to provide RATs to essential workers within the ACT public service, workers who provide support to vulnerable people and to all ACT schools. With RATs now playing a significant role in our testing system, from 11.59 pm on Friday, 25 February, anyone who tests positive to COVID-19 via a RAT is required to report their result to ACT Health via the online notification form available on the ACT COVID-19 website.

We have seen a strong uptake of RATs in the Canberra community. As of yesterday evening, Canberrans had reported 22,759 positive RAT results since the form to report these results went online. This is approximately 34 per cent of total cases reported in the ACT. A person who tests positive, whether by PCR or RAT, is also required to notify their employer or educational institution of their result, if they attended these places during their infectious period. Persons who test positive for COVID-19 are also encouraged to take reasonable steps to notify any potential high risk or moderate risk contacts.

In recognition of the ACT's exceptional vaccine coverage, and to bring us in line with other jurisdictions, the ACT government has also amended quarantine requirements for international travellers. From 11.59 pm on 21 February, unvaccinated travellers arriving from overseas are only required to quarantine for a period of seven days. While unvaccinated travellers still need an exemption to undergo their quarantine period in Canberra, vaccinated travellers no longer need to complete an online declaration prior to entering the ACT.

From 11.59 pm on 16 March, the guidance for overseas travellers was also amended to permit travellers to enter high-risk settings and education settings after returning a negative COVID-19 test within 24 hours of arrival in Australia. Previously, international travellers were restricted from entering these settings for a period of

seven days for education settings and 14 days for high-risk settings. International travellers who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the nine weeks prior to their entry into Australia are also no longer required to undergo a COVID-19 test within 24 hours of their arrival into Australia.

Madam Speaker, Check In CBR continues to play an important role in our TTIQ strategy. As of 4 March, the app now sends you a notification if you have checked in to a location around the same time as someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. If you receive this message, you should monitor for COVID symptoms and get tested if any develop. These notifications will only be sent if you have checked in at a high-impact location, including registered clubs, licensed bars and pubs, nightclubs, strip clubs and brothels. We continue to ask other businesses and venues, where Check In CBR is no longer mandatory, to keep displaying their QR codes, allowing people to use the app voluntarily to maintain a record of where they have been.

Madam Speaker, as you know, the Chief Health Officer and her team are continuously reviewing current public health social measures to ensure that they are proportionate to the current level of risk. Until late last week, we had seen a fall and then stabilisation in case numbers, indicating a decreased level of risk to the community.

In addition, given the ACT's porous border with New South Wales, there had also been a need to adjust our settings to align with changes announced by the New South Wales government in order to avoid confusion. This is essential in ensuring compliance. The Chief Health Officer therefore recommended changes to several public health social measures. From 16 February, the government began a program of gradually easing restrictions across a range of areas.

Restrictions on visitors in health facilities have been eased, allowing Canberrans easier access to their loved ones while in hospital. Patients are now able to have two visitors per day. For adult patients, the two visitors must be at different times. However, children and young people admitted to hospital can have two parents or carers visit them at the same time, with one parent or carer permitted to stay with them overnight. Women admitted to hospital for birthing-related care can now have two support people with them.

Visitors to high-risk wards, such as the Canberra Region Cancer Centre, may be asked to undertake a RAT prior to visiting. There are many patients in these wards who have treatment that lowers their immune system response, and it is important to reduce the risk of infection to these vulnerable patients. Compassionate exemptions to these restrictions will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the patient's care team.

Restricting visitors to healthcare facilities is not a decision that is ever made lightly. While it is important to protect the health and safety of patients and staff, we are conscious of the impact these restrictions have on the community. The government acknowledges the difference it makes to patients when a loved one can be with them while they are in hospital, and the distress caused when this is not possible. We hope that the easing of restrictions has offered some relief to patients and their loved ones.

The ACT government also recommenced category 2 and 3 elective surgeries at Calvary Public Hospital from 21 February. The reduced pressure on our frontline COVID-19 response has allowed redeployed healthcare staff to return to the hospital. Since 21 February, Calvary Public Hospital has gradually returned to full capacity and is working to an average booking of 40 or more elective surgery procedures per day. In addition, Calvary Public Hospital is also working actively with their private hospital partners to deliver, at no extra cost to the territory, elective surgeries above that number. This will accelerate catch-up for the temporary pause in elective surgeries.

With the latest increase in case numbers, our health workforce is again being stretched as co-workers test positive. My thanks go to those teams who continue to step up to care for our community. Significant recruitment is occurring across the system to ensure we can safely staff all areas.

Canberra businesses were also able to largely return to business as usual from 6 pm on 18 February. Density limits on all restricted businesses have now been removed, as well as restrictions on eating and drinking standing up, and dancing in hospitality and other public venues.

In addition, event organisers now have one less thing to worry about, as events are no longer required to have ticketing or pre-registration. From 11.59 pm on 25 February, the government also removed the requirement for events with more than 2,000 attendees to seek an exemption. Organisers of events of more than 5,000 people will still need to submit a COVID safety plan to ACT Health for review. The ACT government has also changed its advice regarding working from home. Employees can now return to the workplace where it suits them and their employer.

Mandatory face mask requirements were also eased from 6 pm on 25 February. Canberrans are now only required to wear a face mask if they are on public transport, including buses, light rail, taxis, rideshare and demand response vehicles; an employee or visitor in a high-risk setting, including hospitals, residential aged-care facilities, correctional facilities or residential accommodation facilities; a worker who provides services to a person with a disability; a worker for in-home and community aged-care providers; a staff member, visitor or student in years 7 to 12 in all indoor spaces at a school or early childhood education and care setting; or inside the Canberra Airport terminal or on a domestic flight in or out of Canberra Airport. In these settings, exemptions are still in place for people who cannot wear a mask safely. It is also important to note that, while masks may no longer be mandatory, they are still strongly recommended in indoor settings where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

I will be tabling the Chief Health Officer's 24th report on the status of the public health emergency due to COVID-19. The report covers the actions taken by the Chief Health Officer and ACT Health's COVID-19 response in the 30 days to 7 March 2022. The Chief Health Officer has advised that it remains necessary to maintain the effective TTIQ and public health social measures that I have just outlined.

At the beginning of my statement I noted that we have now observed three significant milestones: the first anniversary of the first COVID-19 vaccination administered in the ACT; the second anniversary of the Public Health Emergency Declaration; and the 800th patient treated in the COVID-19 clinic at the surge centre in Garran.

I am sure we can all agree that it has been an extraordinary two years. Our community has been faced with unprecedented challenges. Governments, communities and individuals—particularly young people and people who are more vulnerable to COVID-19—have been forced to make changes and sacrifices that we would never have considered or thought possible before 2020. We have faced these challenges together. Canberrans have displayed incredible adaptability, strength and compassion.

I want to acknowledge that these milestones represent countless hours of hard work on the part of our public health team and healthcare workers, who have been on the front lines of our COVID response since the very beginning. The government expresses its sincere thanks to every one of these workers for their invaluable service. We would not be in the good position we are in today without your hard work and dedication to the community.

There is good reason to be cautiously optimistic as the ACT continues to move towards a new normal. The government continues to focus on supporting the Canberra community as we learn to live with COVID by being COVID-smart. Thank you again to Canberrans for your continued efforts to protect the health of our community. I present the following papers:

Status of the Public Health Emergency due to COVID-19—Chief Health Officer Report 24—March 2022, dated 8 March 2022.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)—ACT Government response—Update—Ministerial statement, 22 March 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Economy—government priorities**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (10.32): Madam Speaker, it has been two years since we entered a period of uncertainty like no other in our lifetimes. Governments across the world—national and subnational—launched huge public investment programs, from wage subsidies and business support programs through to paid pandemic leave schemes. Central banks engaged in monetary policy settings that, for the most part, had only really been set out in textbooks and economic journals. It is fair to say that the word “unprecedented” has been used to within an inch of its life in the past couple of years, but for good reason.

Here in the territory our response has been underpinned by simple principles: significantly expand our healthcare system to protect our most vulnerable and protect jobs.

Economists will occasionally confess to forecasts being wrong the day after they are released, and the pandemic has only exacerbated that forecasting uncertainty. Here in the territory we endeavoured to be as transparent as possible. We released the first set of budget forward estimates of any Australian jurisdiction after the pandemic was declared. We also updated our approach to forecasting to include both upside and downside scenarios, to outline the potential impacts of different assumptions around pandemic-induced economic impacts.

We sought to keep our community as informed as possible about the future and give as much certainty as we could to households and businesses so that they had the confidence needed to support their own spending and investment decisions, despite all of the uncertainty. Against this backdrop, Madam Speaker, it is now time to look up and to lay out our priorities for economic recovery and sustainable growth.

Last week I did just that, launching the ACT's economic development priorities for the next four years. The priorities are mission oriented. We presented a forward-looking policy document that sets out our ambitions to continue to grow a highly productive, diversified and progressive economy for the future.

Before outlining the three missions in CBR Switched On, our economic development priorities, it seems timely to provide an economic update across a few indicators that shape the context from which I laid out our missions for the future last week, a context that I think is best surmised with two words, and we have heard them from the health minister this morning: cautious optimism.

Entering the COVID crisis, the ACT economy was resilient, strong and increasingly diverse. In the five financial years before the pandemic, our strategy to grow our economy had seen the total number of ACT businesses grow by around 20 per cent, from just over 25,000 to more than 30,000 by mid-2019, with close to 20,000 additional jobs created in our economy.

The ACT's real gross state product growth for the fiscal year 2020-21, the first full year of pandemic impact, was 2.8 per cent, an extraordinary result in Australian and, indeed, international contexts. What it marked was this territory's 31st consecutive year of economic growth. Thirty-one consecutive years of economic growth. No other state or territory in Australia has achieved that outcome. We consistently outperform the Australian economy and, despite the impacts of the pandemic, the future growth trajectory of our economy remains broadly on track.

Turning to household spending, we know that an effective public health response, as we have just heard from the health minister, remains crucial to confidence and our economic recovery. This is what underpins consumer and business confidence and it is what has seen our economy bounce back through all of the setbacks over the last two years.

We have had a run of really encouraging data in the first quarter of this year that reflects back on the final quarter of 2021. The December 2021 quarter national accounts show that, as measured by state final demand, the ACT economy was 5.8 per cent bigger by the end of 2021 than it was before the start of the pandemic in the December quarter of 2019.

That is worth reflecting on. It reflects on the resilience, the robustness, of this economy that it grew by nearly six per cent over two years of a pandemic. What we know is that when restrictions are eased safely and are supported by health advice, households have the confidence to go out and spend.

In the December quarter, after the ACT's longest and most restrictive lockdown due to the Delta outbreak, household spending increased by 8.4 per cent. The largest increases were in areas such as recreation and culture, with a 22.5 per cent increase, and spending in hotels, cafes and restaurants, up 29.2 per cent.

It is clear, Madam Speaker, that in spending more time in these sorts of venues, Canberrans felt the pressing need for a new outfit; that if you are going out, buying new clothes and shoes is clearly a factor, because clothing and footwear sales increased by 40.4 per cent in that December quarter. So as we transitioned out of our leisure wear, Madam Speaker, into things to wear to hotels, cafes and restaurants and to engage in recreation, that flowed through strongly into the clothing and footwear area of retail activity.

More specifically across retail trade turnover, it increased by 19.2 per cent in the month of November last year, to \$616 million in that month, which was the highest monthly outcome ever recorded in the history of the territory by the ABS and higher than our very strong three-year monthly average of \$542 million.

Retail trade has clearly improved significantly in the ACT as a result of closed national borders, despite the impact of health restrictions. Looking at January, after the impacts of Omicron in late December, retail trade turnover increased further on these record results by just under half a per cent over the month and 1.7 per cent over the year.

And finally, looking at the labour market, when reviewing all of the labour market indicators together—that is, the single-touch payroll data, job vacancies, our payroll tax collections, population growth and the ABS labour force survey—I believe the foundations are there for ongoing employment growth.

I am somewhat loath to focus solely on the labour force survey, given the volatility around the statistical approach of the ABS for smaller jurisdictions. Let us be frank: according to the ABS we apparently had the highest unemployment rate in the country in December and then the lowest in January, with an unemployment rate of 3.2 per cent. In February the unemployment rate fell even further to three per cent, the lowest rate across all of Australia's states and territories. So in looking at the labour market, we do look at that wider range of indicators, not just the monthly labour force survey.



Later this week, I will table the territory's budget review. This will provide an update on the government's financial forecast projections and economic indicators over the forward estimates period, which, as I have previously indicated, will be an improvement on the fiscal and economic outlook outlined in the 2021-22 budget delivered last year. The budget review will be delivered with a dual focus in mind, continuing the necessary measures to address the immediate public health emergency and investing to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of Canberrans.

The ACT government will continually build on and deliver our values-based vision for economic growth now and into the future. It is with all this in mind, Madam Speaker, that I have cautious optimism about our economic prospects over coming years. That is not to say that there are not risks on the horizon. I say "cautious" because we can see the immediate or anticipated impact of inflationary pressures, the potential tightening of monetary policy settings, the significant geopolitical instability the world is experiencing and the broader spectre of housing affordability. So we must plan for the upside and the downside.

With that, let us look to the future and our economic development priorities. As part of launching the priorities for the coming years, we reached out to some of Canberra's prominent change makers, seeking their view on our city and its future. As the chair of the CBR Innovation Network, Hala Batainah, has said, Canberra is a community that is not afraid to stand up for our values, to lead and to stand out.

This city is recognised as a progressive, sustainable and innovative city that values knowledge, people and ideas. Our economic future is looking bright. And it is time to look to the future with confidence and with cautious optimism—a future that will firmly place Canberra as an even more attractive city in which to live, work, study, do business and, importantly, invest in.

Last year, I convened an economic advisory group to reflect upon our 2016 statement of ambition and advise on how we could recalibrate in the post-pandemic world. The group did this together with Dr Tim Williams, who co-authored the 2016 statement and who has again shared his expertise and passion for our city. The starting point for this work was an evaluation of the outcomes of the 2016 statement. So let us look to those.

As I have mentioned, since 2016 our economy has grown by 20 per cent, our population has grown by more than 29,000, and we have welcomed more than 5,300 new businesses. Pre-pandemic, our international education sector became the first \$1 billion export industry for the territory and our largest services export. Our visitor economy achieved an annual expenditure of \$2.5 billion in March 2020. We delivered the transformation of the Northbourne corridor with the first stage of light rail. We have refreshed our CBD and are renewing our town centres.

We have attracted and retained talented people, specifically through our investment in the CBR Innovation Network, that has in turn added \$100 million to the economy and helped to create more than 400 new jobs. We set an ambitious target to achieve 100 per cent of our electricity from renewable sources by 2020, and we got there. We

are implementing the \$150 million Sustainable Household Scheme to help Canberrans transition to a clean energy future.

We have implemented policy reforms and legislation that recognise, celebrate and support our commitment to diversity and inclusion. We are the first government in Australia to implement a wellbeing framework, putting the wellbeing of Canberrans at the core of government decision-making. This focus on wellbeing sets our city apart and will help Canberra attract those seeking a better work-life balance.

I turn now to the key missions of our economic development strategy, Madam Speaker. It is clear that the most successful cities collaborate. This is one of Canberra's greatest strengths, and one of our greatest opportunities, because of our size and our smart, connected community.

We have adopted a mission-led approach for the next phase of economic development, providing an open invitation to share in and shape Canberra's future. The three key missions outlined in CBR Switched On set ambitious objectives that are bold, but they are realistic. Importantly, everyone has the capacity to contribute to a mission-led approach across a diverse range of disciplines.

The first mission, Madam Speaker, is for Canberra to be a city that gives you back time; a city that prioritises wellbeing and liveability. Canberra is many things to many people. As National Gallery of Australia director Nick Mitzevich describes it, we are a city of nature, of world-leading cultural institutions, Australia's heart of government and a city that is easy to get around.

Across the world, the pandemic has forced people to reassess how they want to live and work. Canberra is uniquely placed to meet the need for a better work-life balance. We will achieve this through better design, implementation and access to secure digital services, as well as improvements in urban planning and transport links. We will make it even easier for business to emerge and grow. We are nation-leading in that regard. Unlike other jurisdictions, we have one layer of government at a subnational level, making it easier for business to set up and get decisions faster.

The second mission is to move towards a net zero emissions city and go beyond with environmental responsibility and concrete actions. The ACT government has already committed to net zero emissions by 2045 and decarbonised our electricity grid. But we can go further and faster, through delivering the Big Canberra Battery; through increasing the energy efficiency of our buildings, homes and businesses, which will bring down energy bills; through phasing out, in a measured way, fossil fuel gas; and through driving down transport emissions, including significantly expanding the number of zero-emissions vehicles in the territory.

The 2020 bushfires and the flood disaster on the east coast have highlighted, in the most devastating way for so many Australians, the need for climate adaptation and resilience. So we are taking action now to prepare our city. By meeting our targets and building on our status as an early mover on climate action, we can attract new talent, ideas and investment to Canberra. As Mineral Carbonation International CEO Sophia Hamblin Wang has said, the ACT government's ambition in this space has enabled

the broader community to be ambitious too and has fostered a melting pot of people and ideas in Canberra.

The third mission is to prioritise further knowledge-based economic growth, based on inclusive innovation and responsible investment. As University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor Professor Paddy Nixon has said, Canberra is a place that uses its people and, ultimately, its knowledge to lead, to innovate and to set itself apart. So our ambition is to position Canberra as a city where innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship are encouraged and celebrated.

Innovation precincts already flourish in Canberra, based principally around our tertiary education and research institutions. Our focus is on making these precincts the norm and further establishing Canberra as a city-wide hub for developing and trialling new ideas like vehicle-to-grid solutions and virtual power plants.

We will continue to support and encourage our entrepreneurial ecosystems with relationships between higher education and research sectors, the business community and government. We will work to make investment in Canberra even easier through an investment facilitation service. Investors will be attracted to the opportunities that our city presents, the values that we represent and the ease with which they can do business. The ACT government will prioritise investment that provides a return to the community by enhancing liveability and delivering environmental and social benefits.

By focusing on aviation access, for example, we will continue the recovery of our tourism industry back to a visitor expenditure of \$2.5 billion annually and beyond. We have put forward some projects that will contribute to achieving the missions. This is not an exhaustive list and we expect that this list will grow as we progress. These not only have direct benefits to the government and local businesses but create additional benefits for our community.

The first example is zero-emission homes and communities. The Big Canberra Battery provides a decentralised network of community battery infrastructure. This, combined with incentives to remove gas from homes and reduce transport emissions, gives Canberra an opportunity to pilot the world's first decarbonised suburbs.

This is an investment that could lead to savings that will support more public and community infrastructure. We will continue to support households to increase their efficiency through rooftop solar and upgrades to heating, cooling and ventilation. We can show the world that decarbonisation can be achieved whilst at the same time creating jobs, growing our economy and saving households and businesses money.

The second example is the Canberra Airport freight hub. Canberra Airport is uniquely positioned to connect the Canberra region to expanding domestic and global markets. We will continue to work with the airport to secure direct international services and re-establish Canberra's international aviation connections. Direct aviation access enables the realisation of Canberra as an international freight hub.

Continued and coordinated investment in the transport networks surrounding the airport will enable the efficient movement of goods, increase access to markets and enable private sector investment in supply chain and logistics infrastructure.

Cross-border collaboration is critical for this project, Madam Speaker, with this key transport hub providing a critical economic growth connection for the diverse economies of the broader Canberra region.

The private sector has a key role to play in achieving the overall ambition—for example, by creating the physical space that encourages collaboration, lifestyle and innovation. We have the physical space, we have the policies and planning processes that can work together to encourage interesting and exciting precincts where Canberrans can live and work in new ways.

A recent successful case of organic precinct growth is the transformation of Braddon from a lot of vacant lots and second-hand car yards to the vibrant residential, cultural and shopping hub we experience now. A more designed, and perhaps even more startling transformation of space, is the New Acton precinct, that turned an area largely abandoned by Canberrans into another exciting destination venue for work, for living, for entertainment and for dining.

The next proposed precinct location undergoing planning and approvals processes is the Dairy Road project. This time the location is between the industrial suburb of Fyshwick and the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. The developers, the Molonglo Group, will be working with the planning authority to deliver a project based on the principle that indoor and outdoor life will be valued equally. A new wetland will be established on site, native planting will reflect the surrounding landscape and the architecture will be a framework for ecology. Energy harvesting and efficient consumption will make it easier for residents to reduce their impact on the environment.

Dairy Road is also, importantly, proposed to provide opportunities for local enterprises to incubate new ideas, to fabricate new products, to establish partnerships and to make direct connections with customers—all part of an economy that is cleaner, fairer and more responsible.

In conclusion, our city offers a rare combination of opportunity and liveability, with community wellbeing and inclusion at its heart. Our mission now is to work with willing partners across the community to ensure that Canberra is prepared for these new challenges and is able to grasp the opportunities that will come from the next phase of our city's economic development.

We are a city of knowledge, Madam Speaker, a city of ambitious people with big ideas, and together, off this very strong foundation of sustainable, inclusive values, we can keep switching Canberra on and we can keep growing our economy.

I present the following paper:

CBR Switched On: ACT's Economic Development Priorities 2022-2025—  
Ministerial statement, 22 March 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Status of women and girls in the ACT**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (10.58): As Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge International Women’s Day, which occurred on 8 March, by providing a statement to the Assembly on the status of women and girls in the ACT.

I am tabling a longer statement which provides a more substantial overview, but in this shorter statement I would like to reflect specifically on some of the challenges and achievements of 2021. Although this statement is specifically about the status of women and girls, I am using these terms inclusively, referring to anyone who describes themselves as a woman or non-binary.

I would like to begin this statement by acknowledging that 2021 was a challenging year for many in the ACT, and women were significantly affected by the impacts of COVID-19. Women are working on the front line of this pandemic, in female-dominated healthcare and social assistance workforces. They are also over-represented in less stable employment, including casual work without access to paid leave.

Throughout the pandemic, many women working from home have borne the heavy load of remote learning and unpaid care work. For some women this has resulted in decreased work hours and negative impacts to their mental health. Yet, despite the many challenges the pandemic continues to pose, women in our community have demonstrated tremendous resilience and have been integral to our community’s ongoing recovery.

In understanding the significant challenges many women experienced in 2021, including the pressures on their health, time and economic security, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the commitment, resilience and ongoing support provided to our community by the women’s sector. The efforts of the women’s sector in 2021 are to be truly commended, particularly given the complex and ongoing nature of the pandemic.

Despite its challenges, 2021 saw significant advancements in the second year of implementation of Equity Together, the Second Action Plan 2020-22 under the ACT Women’s Plan 2016-26. After two years of implementation, six of the 29 actions in Equity Together have already been fully delivered and the rest are now all underway. These actions were the result of extensive consultation. We have listened and acted on what our community has told us.

I am happy to report that recent work led by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate has seen the ACT government complete action 4.1 of the Second Action

Plan to implement the Justice Housing Program. To support accommodation and support services for women, we provided funding of \$1.371 million to COVID-19 homelessness programs to extend their operations to 30 June 2023.

Unfortunately, as we know, for many women their most significant concern is safety in their own homes, for themselves and their children. Increased time at home due to the pandemic has also placed some women at higher risk of violence. In the ACT we are committed to working with our colleagues in federal, state and territory governments to continue to coordinate our efforts to improve responses to domestic and family violence.

We continue to implement initiatives under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children and actively contribute to the development of the next national plan. We allocated \$35.9 million over four years to expand our evidence-based approach to addressing domestic and family violence. I would like to make special mention of the \$1.5 million we committed over four years for our landmark Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program.

In 2021 we saw the continuation of the Family Violence Safety Action Pilot, which has significantly improved the flow of information between police and other agencies in respect to high-risk victims and perpetrators. We invested \$2.1 million in a new whole-of-school approach to preventing gender-based violence by creating a culture of gender equality and inclusion. In July 2021 we collaborated with the University of Canberra to host a roundtable on the topic of respectful relationships, sexuality and consent education in ACT schools.

I am very pleased to share that we officially launched the online portal MindMap in October 2021, one of our commitments under Equity Together. MindMap is a dedicated portal for children and young women to help navigate Canberra's mental health system to find the right services and support.

The Police, Ambulance and Clinical Early Response, PACER, initiative in the ACT has continued to create a safer, more dignified platform for providing emergency mental health intervention, including for women and girls.

I would like to highlight Corrective Services for its release of the Walking with Women on the Pathway to Change Framework, which will incorporate improved gender response and culturally appropriate and trauma aware practices for women in custody or under community supervision.

We updated a further three sportsground pavilions in 2021-22 to provide better amenities for women and girls, taking the total number of sportsground pavilions upgraded in recent years to 28.

I commend the ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT Fire & Rescue, ACT Policing and Transport Canberra and City Services for the steps that they took in 2021 to listen to women within their organisations and provide women with valuable opportunities for leadership and development. I encourage you all to find the full details of the initiatives these agencies have implemented in the tabled statement.

We continued our work to achieve our target for 10 per cent female employment in construction in the ACT. Significantly, since 2019 CIT's trade skills programs have seen a 34 per cent increase in female student enrolments across all trade skills training areas. CIT construction has also seen a 75 per cent increase in female enrolment numbers since 2019.

I am pleased to advise that preliminary data on the ACT government Girls in STEM grants scheme suggests that the program has resulted in an increase in the confidence of girls to engage in robotics and coding classes, an increase in the number of girls attending STEM clubs, an increased proficiency in the engagement with technology and higher engagement in STEM competitions.

In the ACT we have been working towards the target of 50 per cent female representation on all ACT government boards and committees. I am happy to share with you that, as of January this year, 55 per cent of representatives on ACT government boards and committees were women. It has taken years of commitment to achieve this target and I am incredibly proud of this outcome.

We have also commenced planning for the future of the ACT Women's Plan. This year we will begin consultations for the Third Action Plan of the Women's Plan, which will be released in the 2022-23 financial year.

Madam Speaker, while there is much to be proud of as we reflect on the achievements of 2021, I encourage us all to remember that the women in our community are diverse and that intersectionality must be front of mind for all of us.

I would like to leave you today by taking a moment to reflect on the resilience and strength of women in the ACT. There is no denying that COVID-19 has created significant challenges for all of us. But what is clear to me, from the women we celebrated at the Women's Awards earlier this month, to the women working in our hospitals, schools and testing centres, supporting the vaccine rollout and shouldering unpaid care work at home, is that the impact of women in the ACT is further reaching and more lasting than anything else we saw or experienced last year.

So thank you to the women of the ACT. You deserve your recognition.

I present the following papers:

Women and Girls in the ACT—Annual Statement on the Status 2022—  
Ministerial statement, 22 March 2022.  
Annual Statement—March 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (11.06): I thank Minister Berry for delivering her statement today. As she described, the impact of the pandemic has been felt very keenly and directly by Canberra women, because not only do women dominate fields

such as nursing, community services, child care, teaching and others that were dramatically affected by the ACT lockdown period but they are also the primary caregivers for children and elderly parents. So the constraints of the pandemic took a real toll on the health and wellbeing of women throughout Canberra and demonstrated an ongoing need for families to share the load.

This year International Women's Day had two themes that were celebrated at various events: "Break the Bias" and "Changing Climates: Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow". I do love March now because there are so many International Women's Day events that it is more like International Women's Month.

There were a lot of events that many of us attended. The number of events continues to grow each year, with Canberra women, and of course men who support them, gathering to have important conversations about the issues women today are facing. But what is important is not just to have conversations but to effect change and make things different to how they were in the past.

Women in Canberra are resilient, they are empowered and they work hard, despite the obstacles that they may face. I would like to acknowledge that the ACT government is doing some great work in this space, but there are things that I think we can also improve on.

I would like to congratulate the minister. As she mentioned, the government has recently achieved its target of 50 per cent female representation on ACT government committees—in fact, just over 50 per cent. It is a wonderful achievement and I congratulate them on achieving it. However, there is still work to do in the private sector and a lot of work to do on equal gender representation on boards.

Minister Berry mentioned the ACT Women's Plan earlier. The First Action Plan 2017-19 of the ACT Women's Plan recommended that the ACT government establish procurement strategies that prioritise contractors with gender equity strategies. When I asked the minister recently how many ACT government tenders had been awarded to candidates with a gender equity strategy in the past four years, she was unable to answer, as this information is not reported on. It is frustrating to hear the government talk about inclusivity and improving gender equality when they are not measuring or tracking the initiatives or targets that they are putting in place. For all we know, there could have been zero tenders awarded to candidates with gender equity strategies over the past four years.

Also in the First Action Plan, there was a recommendation that the ACT government collect and analyse gender disaggregated data for ACT government services, programs and events. Yet when I asked the minister recently about gender disaggregated data on public transport uses, for instance, I found that we do not collect that information. This is despite some evidence and some claims that women have different travel patterns to men. This may be because they are more likely to work part time or in casual positions, and they may have caregiving duties or further responsibilities relating to unpaid work.



I find it curious that we do not collect this information, because I feel it relates women's travel habits to safety and women's perception of safety in our community. If we collected more information about women's travel arrangements and habits, we may be able to make more informed transport decisions about why they may or may not be using public transport.

Instead of having this gender disaggregated data which may assist us to improve our public transport network for women, we had a government backbencher moving a motion telling women that they should change their travel habits and get on their bikes more—based on what evidence exactly, I am not sure. Whilst that motion absolutely had good intentions, it is the government's job to have a good transport network that appeals to people to give active travel a go. We need to do more, I believe, on the disaggregated gender data front.

Nevertheless, I do congratulate the minister on the work that they are doing. I know that she has a genuine commitment to improving the work, the home and, in all sorts of other ways, the life of women in the ACT. I am happy to support her on a vast majority of those initiatives that we believe are very worthwhile. We will continue to work as closely as we can.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Mental health in the ACT**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (11.12): In the 28 months since November 2019, Canberrans have experienced bushfires, storms, a global pandemic and the economic, societal and personal challenges arising from them.

We have breathed in smoke, wrestled with insurance claims for hail damage, self-isolated, self-tested, been vaccinated, worn masks, lost jobs, been ill, been afraid of being ill, cancelled plans, faced loss, learned to work from home and talked to our loved ones on Zoom. We have all missed things that we will never be able to get back.

Over the past four weeks alone, we have watched unprecedented floods tearing through places we have travelled or where we have family and friendship connections, and we have seen war break out with a degree of criminality and sadistic violence not seen in Europe for many, many years.

It does not feel as if the world is becoming a safer place in 2022, and it is part of being human to be affected by it all. Whether we started this tumultuous period with lots of resilience or with very little, most of us will feel like we are struggling occasionally. We know that some people are at greater risk of wellbeing impact than others, people for whom these events pile on top of challenges and heavy workloads that they are already dealing with, such as those with existing mental health conditions, people with disability, carers, veterans, frontline workers, teachers, seniors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our multicultural community and more.

For a large number of Canberrans, our workloads have increased, we have had more reasons to be anxious, we have lost income or we have become more isolated. As Minister Berry noted, many women have had the combined increase in unpaid workload as carers and supporting young people studying at home, and the pressures of working from home or reduced income from the economic impacts of the past two years. So very many of us fall into one or more of these categories or are close to someone who does.

Is there anyone who has not been affected in some way? It is normal to feel exhausted, stressed and even burnt out. But there is help available, and none of us has to do this alone. The ACT government is here to support Canberrans through the many services that help our community with wellbeing. Some of them are well known and have been around for a while.

For example, we fund MIEACT, who do an incredible job in speaking to our community on mental health, and who use speakers to talk about their personal experience of mental illness, encouraging people to speak about their mental health and breaking down stigma. Many people have told me that they have found MIEACT's online resources on managing stress to be very practical and helpful.

The ACT government was one of the first governments in Australia to fund the Way Back Support Service, which provides direct and practical help for people who have made a suicide attempt, thereby significantly reducing the likelihood of further attempts. We also fund the Perinatal Mental Wellbeing Centre, formerly known as PANDSI, to carry out their essential work in protecting and improving the mental health of new mums.

We know through research that protecting mum's mental health has a significant multiplier effect and is one of the best things we can do to protect the mental health of the whole family. The ACT government also funds the ACT Women's Health Service, with counselling for women experiencing barriers to accessing other health services, including women who have experienced violence and trauma or are from a multicultural background.

Others are newer, or you may simply not have heard of them because you have never needed them before. We have recently opened the Safe Haven in Belconnen, which is the first of its kind in the ACT. Safe Haven provides a safe, welcoming and supportive environment for people who are struggling and need to talk. This service is something that I would like to replicate in other parts of the ACT.

We also recently launched MindMap, as Minister Berry mentioned earlier. This is a dedicated portal for ACT children and young people up to 25 years of age, and their carers, to help navigate Canberra's mental health system and find the right service and support. A key part of this new service is the clinical and non-clinical youth workers who can support young people while they are waiting for their first appointment with a new service, holding the space and reducing the worsening of symptoms.

In the last budget, the ACT government provided funding for Parentline, which does vital work in providing assistance and advice to parents to protect the mental wellbeing of their children and to give exhausted parents a few more tools in the toolbox to be the caring, supportive parents that they want to be.

In May last year I also opened the latest addition to the range of step up, step downs in the ACT, with a purpose-built facility in Garran providing the ability for people to step up from the community when they need extra support, or providing people with a place to go to when they leave hospital, if they still need a little extra support.

In January of this year the Eating Disorders Clinical Hub was launched, which is a vital component to developing a modern and multi-model eating disorders model of care. The reason these services exist is that they are vital, not just for individuals but for the health and wellbeing of our community as a whole. They are everyone's business.

A supported community benefits all of us. In other words, do not wait until you just cannot cope any more, but do seek support early. Talk to friends, family, neighbours and workmates about how we are all feeling and where to get help. Today you might be the one giving a helping hand or suggesting a number to call. Tomorrow it might be you who is in greatest need.

As the ACT's Minister for Mental Health, I want to urge everyone to check in on each other, as well as checking on yourself. Are you really okay? If you are not, the best thing you can do is to recognise it early and reach out for the help that any one of us might need sometime.

I present the following paper:

Mental health in the ACT—Ministerial statement, 22 March 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 13**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.18): I present:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 13, dated 15 March 2022, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR CAIN:** Scrutiny Report No. 13 contains the committee's comments on four bills, 31 pieces of subordinate legislation, proposed government and private members' amendments to one bill, and two government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

#### **Report 4**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.19): Pursuant to standing order 254C, I present:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee—Report 4—*Inquiry into the Electoral Amendment Bill 2021*, dated 16 February 2022, including a dissenting report (Mr Braddock), together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. The Electoral Amendment Bill 2021 was presented on 2 December and proposes to lower the voting age to 16 years for ACT elections. The committee received 18 written submissions and conducted an online survey to enable a more accessible means for people to participate in the inquiry, and 438 people completed the survey.

A major theme during the inquiry was the fact that the bill would require young people, aged 16 and 17 years, to vote in ACT elections and impose offences and penalties for non-compliance. The committee did not support the bill, and instead recommended that the ACT government explore alternative ways to further engage young people in the democratic process.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this inquiry, particularly those from the community professional associations. I would like to thank the other members of the committee, Dr Paterson and Mr Braddock. I offer a special note of thanks to the previous chair of this committee, who was chair during the majority of this inquiry, Mr Jeremy Hanson. I especially thank the secretariat, going through a few pairs of hands in this case—Ms Brianna McGill, then Ms Julia Agostino, and Dr David Monk and Ms Miona Ikeda, who are currently supporting us extremely well. I commend the report to the committee.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (11.21): I do not agree with the committee's conclusion against the bill, on the basis that there was no substantive or empirical evidence to support the assessment of, and potential impact on, the mental health and wellbeing of young people. There was also no reason to believe the positive benefits extensively documented by overseas jurisdictions that have extended voting rights would be negated by compulsory voting in our jurisdiction. No evidence was presented to support the argument that it would not automatically translate.

The committee report summarises the arguments presented but does not analyse the strength of evidence and rigor that lay behind the submission statements. Submissions to the inquiry and accompanying hearings could be regarded on a spectrum ranging from expert to layperson, with a level of supporting evidence ranging from extensive to personal opinion. Community voices and expert evidence should play different roles in committee deliberations. Lived expertise often adds a depth of perspective and insights that are not represented through other means. In this case, however, we are dealing with a hypothetical change in voting age, so Canberrans were not able to speak of their experience with such a change.

Hearing the concerns of the public about proposed changes to policies is an important way to gauge public understanding and support of an issue. This may help in determining next steps—for example, where work may need to be put into accurate and evidence-based education and communication. Evidence-based policy must have mind to but look beyond the vagaries of public opinion to understand the likely impacts of any kind of government policy.

Submissions in support of extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds included strong evidence in the form of references to peer-reviewed journal articles across a range of relevant disciplines including psychology, sociology, education, youth studies and medicine. Much of this research drew on extensive empirical evidence across the jurisdictions that have expanded voting rights to those who are 16 years and older.

Submissions that did not support extending voting rights had far less or no supporting evidence, relying more on perceptions, anecdotes or opinions. As Bessant et al said in their submission, “arguments made against reducing the voting rely more on prejudice than rigorous empirical evidence.” We are therefore unable to rely on the substance of those arguments, and see these submissions as contributing to our understanding of public concerns. The evidence for cognitive development and capacity was directly applicable regardless of jurisdiction and regardless of whether it was compulsory or voluntary. We can conclude from this that the weight of empirical evidence is that there are no credible grounds for continuing to believe that young people lack the relevant cognitive and moral capacities to enable them to vote.

The most consistent concern across all submissions in the hearing was exposing young people to criminal penalties and the court system. I agree, this warrants further attention. Critically, the concerns identified by the committee are not unique to 16- and 17-year-olds and apply to Canberrans of all ages and across many different offences, whether they are vulnerable or not. For the population as a whole the benefits of compulsory voting are seen to outweigh the costs of the consequences. It is perhaps time to re-examine the infringement policies more broadly and their inequitable impacts across the community. My motion, which will come forward in this place on Thursday, will hopefully go some way to addressing these issues.

Whilst acknowledging the inconsistency in voting across jurisdictions that the bill would present, I am of the view that young people already have demonstrated capacity to manage cross-jurisdictional variations in other aspects of life. Whether it

be road rules, public transport concessions or tertiary study applications, there are inconsistencies across jurisdictions. I also note that New South Wales, South Australian and Victorian parliaments are all actively considering this very question of whether to extend voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds.

Schools should be encouraged to provide students an understanding of the democratic system, how to critically analyse political statements and offerings, and how to ensure votes are valid. However, any encouragement or inducement to vote in a particular direction in a learning environment is not acceptable. I support the need for strong guidelines around electoral campaigning in schools. And we need to make sure these are in place to ensure this does not happen. But I note that in the ACT students in their final years are frequently aged 18 and older. There have been no reports of politicisation within school grounds, or adverse effects or experiences within ACT schools. This is despite there being existing student cohorts who already have the vote.

I do not support recommendation 2—the ACT government exploring ways to further engage young people in the democratic process—because, frankly, it is a substandard offer in lieu of the franchise.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to respond to this inquiry. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members for their consideration of the bill. The inquiry process has demonstrated the value of committee inquiries into bills, enabling a wider range of community views to be heard, combined with presenting and testing evidence and viewpoints.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (11.28): I speak here because I was part of the committee when this committee started. I am no longer. Mr Cain took over from me. I speak as someone who has a personal interest in this and on behalf of the Liberal Party. I am very glad that this very flawed piece of legislation has been rejected by the committee. I support both the recommendations as I read them here—to not support the bill but also to further engage kids. I cannot understand why the Greens or other committee members—if the bill is rejected, as it should be—would not want to engage young members in our community and find other ways to do that.

I look forward to reading this report, but certainly the recommendations note—and the public submissions and the public hearings showed this—that what the two members of the Greens want to do is to force children to vote and to impose criminal penalties on them, if they do not, turning children into criminals if they do not vote. There are other jurisdictions that have younger people voting, but I am certainly not aware of any jurisdictions in the world that want to turn children into criminals if they do not vote. It is an extraordinary position of the Greens to want to do that.

Sixteen- to 17-year-olds already suffer an enormous amount of pressure at school as they are growing and developing. They are facing all the challenges of the HSC. I have a boy who is going to turn 16. I have children that have been through those teenage years. I have seen them; I have seen their friends. The last things they need are heightened levels of anxiety, more things to worry about, more opportunities for bullying. We certainly heard in the public hearings about more opportunity for bullying.

That is what the Greens want to do, so that 16- and 17-year-olds will be bombarded with political paraphernalia from all the parties on their social media. There is enough bullying and hostility on social media as it is. What we would see is political parties of all spectrums, from the far-left extremist Extinction Rebellion and the Greens to the far right, bombarding those children, who are struggling to get through life with heightened levels of anxiety as it is. The potential for bullying, as we have heard, is extraordinary.

Now, why do they want to do this? It is very clear. Previously, the Greens did not support compulsory voting for young people. That did not get through so they completely back flipped on their policy to say, “No; it should now be compulsory.” Why?—because they think it is to their political advantage. They think that they have a message: their doomsday view of the world. They can use fear to scare a whole bunch of people and say, “Vote for us or you are going to die of climate change.” We have heard Ms Clay say in the Assembly that that is a good thing. She saw kids out there with signs saying, “You are going to die of climate change,” and “You will die of old age. I will die of climate change.” She thinks that that is a positive thing. That is a message that kids do not need to be pushed at them all the time by Extinction Rebellion and that end of the Greens political spectrum.

Of course, they will promise free things for them, because everything is free in this Greens utopia. It is all free: “Don’t worry, kids, we will give you everything for free,” potentially even the decriminalised drugs, which Mr Pettersson is trying to get through! We will see if that comes through.

It is really a Machiavellian attempt to exploit young people. That is what this is about. It is grubby. It is trying to politicise children for the Greens’ own grubby political ends to try and to get more votes in their column. I say to the Greens: stay away from our kids; let kids be kids. Let them go to school. Let them grow up free of the political messaging that you are trying to bombard kids with out there. Stop trying to politicise our children and stop threatening our children with criminal penalties, because this bill says, “Vote, or we will impose criminal penalties.” What sort of people are the Greens that they think that, just to get more votes in their column, they should behave this way, and use this sort of threat to children to impose criminal penalties on them? What sort of people are you?

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.33): I am not sure if I want to call a point of order or simply respond to something that Mr Hanson stated that was not correct. I believe I heard Mr Hanson say that I had personally said, “Vote for the Greens or you will die.” Was that something that Mr Hanson has said?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Pettersson): Ms Clay, I—

**MS CLAY**: I will simply make a speech rather than a point of order. It is really important for democracy that the people in this room elevate the voices of the people in Canberra. I have been to a lot of climate rallies, and I have read out some of the signs written by the people who attended those rallies because I think it is important that we listen to the messages from those people who are really worried and scared.

Those are not my words. I have not put those words in anyone's mouth. I have read out messages that have been written by children, parents and adults about climate change.

I also think it is really important—particularly in this room but in all of our public duties—that we make sure when we quote someone that we quote them truthfully and accurately. So please take a little bit of care, if you are quoting me, that you are quoting my words, and that you are not attributing somebody else's words to me. That is quite important to me. Truth and honesty is quite important. And it is really important when you are attending rallies or listening to your constituents' voices, that you hear what they are saying and acknowledge that. That is not a politicised message. If you are saying, "Somebody has raised this concern and now I am repeating it," that is simply giving a voice to somebody else.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (11.35): It was not my intention to speak today. It was my intention to reserve my remarks until the substantive debate when the bill returns to the Assembly.

**Mr Parton:** However—

**MR DAVIS:** However, Mr Parton! However, it was impossible to sit in my office and listen to Mr Hanson's comments without coming down and offering an alternative view—a counter proposal.

*Mr Parton interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** The member will be heard in silence, Mr Parton.

**MR DAVIS:** It is not often that I seek to amplify the message of the Canberra Liberals, nor is it often that I encourage the people of Canberra to listen intently to the contributions of the Canberra Liberals, but on this occasion I would like to ask every young person in this city to go back and listen to Mr Hanson's speech. I would like to encourage every young Canberran to hear for themselves the contempt that the alternative government holds young Canberrans in. The patronisation of young people in Mr Hanson's speech and the suggestion that young people could not possibly handle the competing stresses in their lives, and that the empowering act of voting—the empowering act of deciding who gets to make decisions for them and about them—would be an added burden, an additional stress.

I put it to you, Mr Assistant Speaker, to everybody in this chamber, and to those in the Canberra community, that the decisions being made in this place, and particularly decisions being made up on the hill, are contributing to stress and anxiety, not just in young people but in the entire electorate. The Canberra Liberals are suggesting that young people are being protected, shielded or guided from the stress or burden of holding us to account and keeping us in line, and stressing to all of us what they think and feel about what we say and do once every four years.

It will do you a favour, "kids", to take a point from Mr Hanson. They are not "young people", "drivers", "workers" or "students" but "kids". That is how Mr Hanson is



fond of coming in here and referring to them. That may play to a certain part of Mr Hanson's electorate, but it is patronising. It dismisses the strongly held views, ambitions, hopes and determinations of young people in this city who this legislation seeks to empower.

We should always raise an eyebrow of concern whenever anyone in elected office is afraid of being held to account by more people in their community. Irrespective of who you vote for, irrespective of your position on this particular legislation, everybody in our community should raise an eyebrow when anyone in elected office shows fear, resistance or contempt for the idea that more people within their community, more students, more workers, more tenants—

**Mr Hanson:** More schoolchildren.

**MR DAVIS:** —more students. That is right, Mr Hanson. More students would—

**Mr Hanson:** More schoolchildren. Make them criminals. You want to make them criminals.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson.

**MR DAVIS:** —seek to hold this government, this parliament and everyone who seeks to serve within them, accountable. Everyone should be very concerned about that. There will be a lot of opportunities to have robust, substantive, detailed debates on this legislation when it comes back to the Assembly. I look forward to even more Canberrans engaging in a very considered way in that debate, as they have through this committee process. We heard from Mr Cain, in his tabling statement, talk about how many people took part in the survey. We know that this is an issue that many Canberrans care about, with strong views on both sides. I accept that, but we have a responsibility in this place to make sure, when we are having conversations with the electorate about complicated issues on which there are strong views, that we do it honestly and we do it earnestly.

I hope that we can do that. I hope that we can treat young people—future ratepayers, future mortgage holders, future electors—irrespective of whether this legislation passes, with a little bit more respect and with a little bit more regard for their intelligence, for their values, for their views, instead of treating those young people, as Mr Hanson says, like kids.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (11.40): I was not going to say anything as well, but I feel the need to do it since I have five children. Four of them would be of voting age if it were to drop down to 16. I have a 14-year-old, a 16-year-old, a 17-year-old, 19-year old and a 20-year-old, and I feel compelled to thank Mr Hanson for defending the rights of these children who do not want to be politicised in their school environment or at the shops where they like to hang out.

I feel that the whole discussion has been hijacked by the Greens, because one of the main points that was raised in the inquiry was the increased amount of bullying being done to children in schools. I have seen and heard from my own kids that when a rally

is happening about climate change, if they do not go this will happen: “If you do not go, you must not care about the future. If you do not care, you must not care about your children’s future. If you do not care, then you do not care about me.” That is putting pressure on the kids who do not want to go to a rally or anything else but want to stay in school and to learn.

Putting extra pressure on children and bullying them in schools or outside of the school environment was a main point that was discussed in the inquiry. It was dismissed by the Greens; that particular issue was not mentioned at all. We all care about children being bullied in school. We know that children suffer increasingly through mental health. Kids have committed suicide because of bullying.

*Mr Davis interjecting—*

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you really want to add that into your mentality when kids are being bullied at school? Do you want to add politicising them to their curriculum when they are at school? I do not think it is right, and I support the committee’s decision in not supporting the bill. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Public Accounts—Standing Committee Report 6**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (11.43): Pursuant to standing order 245C, I present:

Public Accounts—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Inquiry into the Financial Management Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)*, dated 25 February 2022, together with a dissenting report (Mrs Kikkert) and a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for the Tenth Assembly. The public accounts committee examined the bill, hearing from a number of witnesses including the relevant minister, officials from the relevant directorate, the Office of the Legislative Assembly and officers of the Legislative Assembly. The committee has made six recommendations as part of its inquiry.

Finally, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the relevant minister and directorate officials, as well as the Clerk, the ACT Auditor-General, the ACT Ombudsman, the ACT Integrity Commissioner, the ACT Electoral Commissioner and all of their respective staff. On behalf of the committee, I commend the report to the Assembly.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I now wish to address my dissenting report as a private member. Specifically, I dissent from recommendation 2, and offer a different recommendation.

As part of the inquiry, the Office of the Legislative Assembly and the officers of the Legislative Assembly, the ACT Ombudsman, the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor-General and the ACT Electoral Commission all raised concerns that the bill may undermine their offices' independence. Specifically, the Latimer House principles state that parliament should be serviced by professional staff, independent of the regular public service. In order for the parliamentary service to be independent of the regular public service, it is a precondition that neither the government of the day nor public servants who serve the government of the day, in any way direct or influence how the parliamentary service performs its works.

In fact, section 8 of the OLA Act mandates that the Clerk and the office staff are not subject to direction by the executive or any minister in the exercise of their functions. This creates conflict with clause 1281 of the bill, which empowers the Chief Minister to determine a framework for evaluating whether services or works required by a public sector entity should be provided by the public sector or an external provider. The ACT government's defence that similar powers can be found in the Commonwealth Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act, PGPA Act, is not accurate. Nowhere in the PGPA Act is a power conferred on the commonwealth finance minister to direct parliamentary clerks or other independent statutory offices in relation to the performance of their functions. The ACT government assurances have not convinced or assured independent statutory office holders that they must be taken seriously. Introducing legislation that even implies the potential undermining of independence damages government credibility and must be avoided.

I therefore propose the following alternative recommendation: that the committee recommend that the bill be amended so as to explicitly state within the proposed new part 9A, that the Office of the Legislative Assembly and the officers of the Legislative Assembly are exempt from the operation of the part. I wish to go on public record that I believe that the Assembly should not pass this bill in its current form. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MS BURCH** (Brindabella) (11.48): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure.

On Thursday, 10 February 2022, the Legislative Assembly resolved that the notice of motion moved by Ms Lawder, which would have the effect of establishing a select committee on estimates 2022-23, be referred to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. As members would be aware, in the last Assembly this committee recommended that the 2020-21 budget be referred to standing committees as a trial, and that, at the completion of that process, this committee would undertake a review to ascertain whether or not it offers up benefits over the existing process. The 2020-21 budget was referred to standing committees as recommended, but as the annual reports were also referred at around the same time, the standing committees were asked to review both the budget and annual reports together. The 2021-22 budget was also referred to standing committees in October 2021.

In order for the committee to evaluate whether examination of the budget works better for standing committees or as a select committee on estimates, it was considered that having the 2022-23 budget examination undertaken by a select committee would mean that the Assembly could more easily evaluate both processes to ascertain which works best. Accordingly, the committee recommends that a select committee be established for the next budget examination so that an evaluation of both scrutiny processes can be undertaken by this committee later this year. The matter is listed for discussion this Thursday.

## **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (11.49): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. At a private meeting on 14 February 2022, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the Family Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The committee supports the policy intention of the bill but sees value in a public discussion about how it would operate in practice. The committee called for submissions on 18 February, with a closing date of 7 March, and will hold a hearing on 11 March, before reporting to the Assembly by 14 April 2022.

## **Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.50): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

I wish to inform the Assembly that during the period 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021 the standing committee considered six statutory appointments in two ACT government organisations. In accordance with continuing resolution 5A I now table a schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—10th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2021.

## **Public Accounts—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (11.51): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, in relation to the following Auditor-General's report:

Auditor-General's Report No 13 of 2021: Campbell Primary School Modernisation Project Procurement

The committee has resolved to inquire further into the audit report. The committee's inquiry will focus specifically on the conclusions and key findings

in the audit report, the government's response, and its implementation of the audit report's recommendations. The committee expects to report to the Legislative Assembly on the Auditor-General's report as soon as practicable.

**Sitting suspended from 11.52 am to 2.00 pm.**

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (2.00): The Attorney-General is absent today due to illness, so Minister Cheyne will assist members with questions in the Attorney-General, consumer affairs and gaming portfolios, and I will endeavour to assist members with questions in the water, energy and emissions reduction area.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Housing—affordability**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the most recent land ballot in Whitlam had 12,417 applicants trying to purchase 101 blocks. Why won't you release more land for detached housing to meet demand and increase choice?

**MS BERRY:** As the Leader of the Opposition will know by now, I hope, the ACT government is responsible for around two per cent of the land release in the ACT. Over the last year until December, the private sector, for example, released around 170,000 and the ACT released over 4,000—less than two per cent of the land release active within the market in the ACT. So whilst we play an important role in land management that the ACT government is responsible for, we are not the only ones that provide land for sale, or homes for sale, for purchase across the ACT.

In addition, land is finite and needs to be managed carefully. We need to make sure that land is appropriately developed over a period of time to ensure that the generations after we have left get to enjoy the city that we all enjoy, the bush capital.

On top of that, we know that Canberrans want a mix of housing choice. People want to be able to choose the kind of dwellings that they live in. Some people want to live in homes with large blocks to garden in; some people want to move into apartments where they can enjoy their spare time on the weekends with their family, and where their front door leads out into the community that they can enjoy.

As I said, the ACT government is responsible for two per cent of the land release and housing sales in the ACT, and we have not slowed down. We have not constrained development. We continue, in fact, to provide more than we have in previous years.

**MS LEE:** Minister, is it a condition of your coalition agreement with the Greens that you will only drip-feed land for detached housing to the market?

**MS BERRY:** No.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, what message do you have for the 12,316 Canberrans who will not get a block of land for detached housing in Whitlam—buy a flat or move interstate?

**MS BERRY:** As members in this place will know, there is an affordability issue, a housing and land issue, across the country. The ACT government is not immune to that. As I have said repeatedly, the ACT Suburban Land Agency has not constrained the provision of land through its Indicative Land Release Program. It continues to provide and develop land for purchase across the ACT. In fact, it is private developers that are able to constrain and hold on to land to make a profit.

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** But the Suburban Land Agency has not done that. We continue to provide land for sale for the ACT community.

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** Madam Speaker, the continuous interruptions are making it very difficult for me to answer these questions. I am trying my very best, but it is very difficult when there are continuous interruptions around the land release program.

For the Indicative Land Release Program, in previous years, from 2017-18 to 2020-21, the land released totalled 14,663 dwellings. The government, through its land agencies, delivered 14,503 dwellings, which is a variance of just 160 dwellings, or one per cent. I know that the opposition likes to suggest that somehow that one per cent indicates a constraining of land supplied. It is simply not the case. When private developers were holding on to land and not providing it for sale in the community, the Suburban Land Agency was continuing to do that.

What we have had across the country is a unique response to COVID that nobody predicted. Not a single person predicted that the housing market would go this way. It was quite the opposite. But in the ACT, for our part, for the two per cent that the ACT government provides, we are continuing to provide that land for sale.

### **Teachers—recruitment**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, in answer to a question without notice on 10 February, last sitting week, you said that there was one permanent full-time position that was not able to be filled before the start of the school year; there was only one position vacant.

Minister, the ACT jobs website is currently advertising many jobs for teachers, mainly gazetted on 3 March, including multiple full-time, permanent roles for early childhood, primary and secondary classroom teachers. There are also adverts for school leader C and B positions, and there are advertisements for multiple roles for casual and temporary classroom teachers. All these positions are being recruited now, when you said in the last sitting period that there was only one vacancy. Minister, did you mislead the Assembly?

**MS BERRY:** No.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, how do you explain the difference between your answer of only one vacancy in the last sitting week and multiple adverts for teachers of all levels across multiple schools only a week later?

**MS BERRY:** Most of the positions that have been advertised are temporary positions. The question I was asked was whether there were full-time vacancies. At the start of day one, term one, there was one full-time position vacant.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, how many teachers are needed in ACT schools right now?

**MS BERRY:** I do not have that number off the top of my head, so I will have to take that question on notice.

**Mr Hanson:** You said it was one last time. What is it now?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members!

**MS BERRY:** I believe the question was: how many teachers are required?

**Ms Castley:** Now, in the ACT.

**MS BERRY:** Now, yes. I will take that question on notice.

### **Health—specialist waiting times**

**MS CASTLEY:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. In August 2020 you provided information to the Canberra Liberals about the number of children on waiting lists to see a specialist in the ACT. You revealed that 568 children were waiting up to 606 days to see an ear, nose and throat specialist; 543 children were waiting up to 258 days for a paediatric appointment; and 707 children were waiting 540 days to see an immunologist. You said, “Canberra Health Services is working very hard on several initiatives and plans to improve those waiting lists.” Have the waiting lists improved?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Castley for the question. I will take the detail of the question on notice, but obviously there have been some significant impacts in relation to COVID-19 on the capacity to get through some of these things, and we have seen continued pressure on our hospital system and on specialist outpatient appointments more generally. So, while there have probably been improvements in some areas it may be that numbers have also increased in other areas. As you would understand, these things go up and down over time, so I will take the detail of the question on notice—obviously it was a very detailed response to a question on notice last time—and provide an update to the Assembly.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what do you say to the anxious parents and carers who have been waiting up to 19 months to get a foot in the door just to have their children see specialists?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Castley for the supplementary question. It is really distressing, and I am always really concerned when I hear these stories, particularly about children who are delayed in getting access to a specialist appointment. In fact, I had a conversation with my office just this morning about paediatric ear, nose and throat, how we are going with that and what more we can do to attract ear, nose and throat specialists but also to ensure that children in particular can get access to those appointments. We know that it has been an ongoing challenge in the ACT to attract ear, nose and throat specialists and to have sufficient capacity in that space. It is something that we continue to work on. As I said, just this morning I was following up again with my staff in terms of how we are getting on with that.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how many of the 707 children who were waiting 540 days to see an immunologist in August of 2020 have now been lucky enough to see one?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Parton for the question, but I will take it on notice.

### **Legislation—draft planning bill**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the minister for planning. Minister, you have just released the consultation draft of the new planning act, which includes new planning regulations and a set of fact sheets. The community certainly want to hear presentations on this act, but there are lots of people who will have targeted questions as well. Can you set out the opportunities that the community will have to ask directorate officials questions about the planning act, and why do there seem to be only five public opportunities for consultation listed on the website?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. It is an important one, as we go forward with the new planning bill. As you heard, I announced consultation last week, so anyone with an interest in Canberra's planning system can make a submission on the draft bill. They have until 15 June this year to have their say. I am aware that many people, of course, have views on planning in Canberra, so I look forward to hearing those community views as we go forward.

The ACT government will be running a series of information sessions where people can find out more about the bill and ask questions. These information sessions will be held on a range of different days and at a variety of times, as we know that not everyone can make it to evening meetings or on weekends.

People can have their say in three different ways. They can make a quick comment, they can write a short statement against any of the chapters that interest them, and they can send in a submission as well. The Your Say page has a range of fact sheets to help them understand the key changes in the bill. The government will also be meeting with our key community and industry partners twice during the consultation period, in a workshop-style format, to seek feedback. So there are quite a number of opportunities there.



**MS CLAY:** How will you facilitate public consultation that allows members of the public to hear one another's views and ensure that these views are published?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** People can ask questions at the sessions that I have talked about, or through the Your Say website opportunity. The government will be meeting with other key stakeholders, too, and people can feed their submissions up through those channels, if they want to—for example, community councils, ACTCOSS, Pedal Power, Greater Canberra, the Conservation Council, the Environmental Defenders Office, the Master Builders Association, the Housing Industry Association, the Property Council and several others. We have been seeking input from these groups as well, as we have gone forward to this point.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, given the poor track record of consultation on the planning review, as evidenced last year, and verified by community council chairs and community feedback, what reason can you give the community now that this consultation opportunity will be both genuine and transparent?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I reject Mr Cain's comments outright. The consultation period has been very detailed, and continues to be so. We have a strong, open process of consultation in the planning system; and, indeed, with the planning bill that is out for consultation at the moment—three months, as I said, before we come back to the chamber. Of course, there will be further debate in this place as well. I think there is plenty of opportunity for people to have their say. Reflecting on the comments from the general public from our launch last week, it was well received. The comments were very positive towards the consultation that the directorate and I have been doing.

### **Planning—planning and development system**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management, Minister, how is the ACT government improving the planning system?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** We have been working very hard to ensure that we can provide a better system, an outcomes-focused system, for the ACT.

**Mr Hanson:** Why is it such a mess after 21 years of government?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** We have been reviewing our planning system to improve and modernise the way that we plan for our city's future.

**Mr Hanson:** Haven't you been in government for 20 years?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson!

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I know that Mr Hanson is not interested in our city's future, but many of us are. The vision for the modern planning system is that it is accessible, easy to use and delivers improved development outcomes. Over time, the current Planning and Development Act has become complex and hard to use. We have faced new challenges and have made piecemeal changes to amend the legislation.

In developing the new planning system we have examined reforms in other jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas, and we have adopted elements where they suit the ACT. I was pleased to release last week the new planning bill for consultation, for three months. I look forward to what the Canberra community proposes for that bill.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members!

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Our chief planner, Ben Ponton, has said that people are at the heart of our new planning system. This means that we are planning our buildings, our public spaces and our suburbs in a way that will look at how people use those spaces into the future.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I remind members of the standing orders, which say that those on their feet should be heard in silence.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what changes are being made through the development of a new planning act?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for the question. Some of the features that I am most excited about are the recognition of the customs, traditions and knowledge of the traditional owners of the land, the Ngunnawal people; the new principles of good planning; increasing the time for public consultation on significant development; removing the EIS exemption process; and introducing additional transparency by making applications and decisions available on the planning website.

**Mr Parton:** I wonder what he's like when he's not excited.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** One proposed change where I am particularly keen to hear from the community, including Mr Parton, when he has the chance, is the principle of good communication. Moving to an outcomes-focused development assessment system will change our decision-making criteria and allow our assessors to take a step back, look at the development proposal as a whole in the locations proposed for and make a decision on whether this is a good outcome overall. Assessors will also be able to look at cumulative impacts, which is something that the community has been encouraging us to do for some time. I am excited about those changes. I am aware that others in the community have different views, but I again encourage everyone to have their say.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how will the new act help to grow a sustainable city that grows jobs?

**Mr Hanson:** He is excited as well.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, as jovial as it might be, it is out of order.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I refer to the term “ecologically sustainable development” that has been included as a fundamental feature in the object of the draft bill. It refers to the planning system ensuring that environmentally sustainable considerations are at the forefront of the planning system. The expanded decision-making criteria for development assessments mean that our assessors will be able to take a broader look at the environmental outcomes of a proposal in making a decision.

The draft bill also proposes to remove the EIS exemption process so that every proposal triggering this threshold will require a scoping document. We can deliver these environmental outcomes while also growing jobs. The greater certainty of process that is included in the draft bill will provide greater investment certainty, attracting jobs and businesses to Canberra. The outcomes-focused criteria and expanded decision-making criteria will allow development assessors greater ability to protect our commercial and industrial land for business investment.

### **Health—mental health**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, tomorrow will mark two years since the ACT entered our first lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on the difficulty of the last two years for the mental health of people in our city, could you please outline the work the government has done to support the mental health of the community as we continually readjust to changing circumstances?

**MS DAVIDSON:** Thank you for the question. It is important to recognise that—with the additional economic and workload pressures on people, as well as the worries about public health and what that might mean for individuals who may also have other underlying health conditions that they are worried about—this does take a really big toll on people’s mental health and wellbeing. It is perfectly normal for people to be feeling anxious, worried, exhausted, burnt out or any of those things, based on what they have experienced over the last two years, but there are a whole range of community mental health services that can help them at an early stage before things reach crisis point.

The ACT government has committed additional funding to mental health services, both during the August to October lock-down last year and in 2020. We have also committed significant additional funding to mental health services in the most recent budget. A range of these services are available to people all over Canberra and of all ages, but we particularly recognise that there are some people for whom these impacts will be felt most acutely, and that includes people who had pre-existing mental health conditions, young people, people in our multicultural communities as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, seniors and people with disability. So we are doing everything that we can to try and make sure that there are plenty of services available to people at an early intervention stage and in their local communities.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister what particular supports have been made available to my constituents in Tuggeranong?

**MS DAVIDSON:** That is a very fair question. There are a range of supports that are available to people who are in the Tuggeranong area who need mental health support and wellbeing support. This includes headspace in Tuggeranong as well as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for young people who are needing a bit of extra support. I note, as well, that the CAMHS Southside service to the end of February only had an eight-day wait for a first appointment, which is called a CHOICE apartment. This is quite helpful to people who are looking to get access to a service and find out what else they might need.

There is also the adolescent intensive home treatment team, who help to reduce the number of people who end up in the emergency department for crisis care. They have had 577 referrals from the time they started in March of 2021 through to the end of February 2022. We also have services like HAART, the Home Assessment and Acute Response Team, who take a lot of referrals for rapid response from community referrals or from the Access Mental Health line, but they are also receiving increasing referrals directly from GPs. There will be a number of GPs in the Tuggeranong area who are making use of that service.

The PACER service has also been helping a lot of people on the south side to reduce their need to go to a hospital for acute care. We also have a step-up, step-down service in Kambah for young people aged 18 to 25 years. And the MindMap service, which is an online portal for young people, which I was talking about this morning. It also has youth workers who are available by phone or online text to help young people who are waiting for their first appointment or to help them to find the right service for what their individual needs are. I am investigating the need for more prevention and early intervention services. (*Time expired.*)

**MS CLAY:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, could you outline your vision for future priorities for the mental health system in Canberra.

**MS DAVIDSON:** Yes. Continuing on with the work that was started by Minister Rattenbury with the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, we are continuing to look at ways we can deliver more prevention and early intervention services to people who are in the community, helping them to solve problems before they reach an acute-care crisis.

There are a range of ways that we are doing that. You will have seen that some of those things have been coming to fruition with things like more step-up, step-down services, more funding for or community sector and NGO partners who are delivering services to people with specific needs in the community, and more services that can be delivered to people without their having to go to hospital. The more we can do that the more people will be able to avoid going to a hospital in-patient service and will be able to solve their problems and stay in a recovery space for longer.

### **Public housing—maintenance**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the national *A Current Affair* television program recently

highlighted a Housing ACT unit of concern in the suburb of Wright that had been trashed by the previous tenant and subject to squatters in recent months. As a part of the program, a Housing ACT spokesperson confirmed that the property has now been secured, cleaned and repaired, and is expected to be reallocated to a new tenant in the coming weeks. I alerted your office to this issue months and months ago, back in January, and tenants had for months prior to that been alerting Housing ACT and Programmed. Given that this has been an issue since late 2021, why has it taken so much time for the unit to be secured, cleaned and repaired?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Parton for the question. I note Mr Parton's correspondence to my office around this particular issue, and the issues raised by tenants who were living in that complex as well. I think there were a number of reasons for that. Some of it cannot be disclosed because it is of a personal nature concerning the previous tenant. However, I think I have responded to the correspondence that Mr Parton wrote to me, and he should receive that soon.

**Mr Parton:** I don't believe so.

**MS BERRY:** I think I signed it today. We have had a bit of a backlog in correspondence across a number of areas in the government, so I apologise for the delay, but you should receive a response to that letter.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why did it take a national news program to finally push your government to deal fully with this issue?

**MS BERRY:** No, that was not the case at all.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what are the repercussions for any tenants who destroy land and property in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** They have a requirement under the tenancies act to be good tenants and to not destroy their properties. When that occurs, on some occasions they may be required to give up their tenancy.

### **Lakes and waterways—pollution**

**MS LAWDER:** Madam Speaker, my question is to Minister for City Services. Minister, I have asked previously about mowing grass near our lakes and waterways, but why are you allowing grass cuttings from public land mowing to enter our lakes and waterways and consequentially pollute these natural water assets?

**MR STEEL:** Well I thank the member for her question, I am happy to follow up in relation to a specific location that she might be referring to. The practice is generally often not to mow the direct edge of a waterway, whether it be a lake, pond, river or stream, so that the nutrients from mowing do not then flow into the waterway, or move into the waterway.

But if there is a particular location where that has occurred, happy to bring that to the attention of TCCS to make sure that it does not happen in the future.

**MS LAWDER:** How can your government promote that it is committed to improving water quality when your directorate is responsible for directly adding to the poor water quality of our lakes?

**MR STEEL:** I will take that as a comment, Madam Speaker; there is no question in that.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, when will you ensure that maintenance tasks such as mowing start implementing processes to protect our waterways and stormwater assets?

**MR STEEL:** Well, Madam Speaker, we have a range of different ways that we help to improve the quality of our waterways through the practices that we implement in relation to public open space. These includes mowing, but they also include the more than 250 gross pollutant traps which are cleaned on a regular basis to stop rubbish moving into our waterways, and we will continue to undertake that work, of course.

We do need to make sure that we continually mow our public open spaces, that is part of an important amenity process for the community, and we have had to undertake more mowing over the last year because of the wet weather conditions that we have been in. And that does mean that there is a large amount of clippings that are, unfortunately, retained on site. Of course, we are trying to minimise the amount of that material that goes into our waterways and the guidelines around the practices for the maintenance of our open spaces ensure that that occurs.

### **ACT Health—nurses and midwives**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, how will nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios benefit our healthcare staff and their patients?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Of course, the implementation of ratios is something that has only ever, in Australia, been done by a Labor government, and we are very proud to be meeting our election commitment.

The ACT government is delivering on this commitment, of course, because nurses and midwives told us what they needed, and we listened. The implementation of nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios will not only improve the quality and safety of care that our community receives but it will also improve the lives of our hardworking and dedicated nursing and midwifery workforce.

Increasing the number of nurses on a shift will allow nurses more time to deliver clinical care and support for their patients. Research shows that ratios can significantly improve outcomes for patients, with decreased hospital acquired complications in the clinical area.

Implementing ratios will also create safer workplaces for the dedicated nurses and midwives working in our healthcare system. Ratios will guarantee more staff on wards and an increased mix of skills on each shift. There will be a dedicated team

leader nurse on the morning and afternoon shifts who will be there to support nurses in their clinical role. Nurses will be able to come to work knowing that there will be enough nurses working with them to provide the care that their patients need. On night shift, they will know that they have the best nurse-to-patient ratio in the country.

We know the nurses who work within a mandated ratio system feel a greater sense of satisfaction about their work, and they have more time to meet the individual needs of their patients. Ratios also reduce the risk of burnout, with research showing that nurses are more likely to stay working in a health service with mandated ratios.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, can you please outline the timeline for hiring the additional staff required to meet these ratios?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Mr Pettersson. And the government, of course, invested \$50 million dollars in the ACT 21-22 budget to hire an additional 90 full-time equivalent nurses across our health system as part of the first phase of implementing nurse and midwife to patient ratios. The government worked closely with the Australian nursing and midwifery federation to develop this first phase of ratios implementation. And this is set out in the latest ACT public sector nursing and midwifery enterprise bargaining agreement.

Implementation of phase 1 commenced from 1 February this year, and I am pleased to inform the Assembly that Canberra Hospital and that Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce have already recruited more than 50 of the target 90 additional full-time equivalent nursing staff. This is really a wonderful achievement, particularly given the challenges that have faced our health services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment for phase 1 is expected to be completed by the end of this year—indeed, by the end of June. Nurses hired in the first phase will be working across 21 of our general medical, surgical and acute aged care wards, as well as in our adult mental health units at both Canberra Health Services and Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce.

While we continue to work towards fully implementing phase 1 of ratios, we are also, Madam Speaker, now turning our attention to phase 2. Phase 2 will expand ratios into additional speciality areas such as women's and children's health, critical care, cancer, and more mental health units.

These areas will be determined in the next nursing and midwifery enterprise agreement, which we will begin negotiating in the very near future—indeed, some of those initial meetings have already taken place. We have begun consultation with nursing staff from both hospitals and their feedback on the implementation of phase 1 of ratios will inform how we progress into phase 2. I look forward to continuing to progress this very important Labor initiative.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what other programs and initiatives is the government implementing to improve the welfare of our healthcare staff?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question, and it was great to get out to Calvary the other day to talk about ratios and to hear some of their experiences, and the feedback from Calvary themselves about what a difference ratios have made.

But it is just part of the ACT government's commitment to supporting our healthcare staff in the public health system and promoting safe work environments where they can flourish.

Sadly, as you would be aware, Madam Speaker, occupational violence, bullying and harassment are serious issues for healthcare workers worldwide. With health care consistently ranking as one of the most affected industries. To combat this, the Nurses and Midwives: Towards a Safer Culture strategy has sought to address issues related to workplace safety on multiple fronts over recent years. A key aspect of the strategy is the safe wards model of care trial in the ACT. The safe wards model is an evidenced-based initiative to reduce conflict and containment in inpatient healthcare settings.

The safe wards trial was also found to be a strong fit with strategies that address occupational violence, as well as promoting broader culture change strategies that imbed respect, inclusion and collaboration across wards. The majority of nurses surveyed for the safe wards post implementation review across the four wards said that the model had reduced conflict and containment in their workplaces. Nearly half of all safe ward's nurses had heard positive feedback from patients regarding the model's impact on their care. And we are now considering recommendations to implement the safe ward model in more care settings.

In addition, the government has launched a community awareness campaign, reminding healthcare consumers to be kind towards our staff and to respect the rights of ACT Health employees. While not targeting staff directly, this campaign supports staff and seeks to encourage them to speak up when they experience or witness unacceptable behaviours—as indeed does the rollout of the Speaking Up for Safety program. Canberra Health Services has also implemented several measures to create safer work environments, and this includes changes to design of work environments et cetera. (*Time expired.*)

### **Education Directorate—Campbell Primary School procurement**

**MR CAIN:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, during the recent annual reports hearings you said that you were first made aware of the lack of probity in the Campbell Primary School procurement when the Auditor-General's report was released late last year. You also said, and I quote, "there was nothing wrong that was done, and the procurement processes were followed." The Auditor-General's report says, "the procurement process ... lacked probity." Minister, are you saying that the Auditor-General reached an incorrect conclusion?

**MS BERRY:** No, Madam Speaker.

**MR CAIN:** Why did it take an Auditor-General's report for you to know what was going on in your directorate?

**MS BERRY:** Well often the outcome of Auditor-General reports are not known until they are released.



**MR HANSON:** Minister, are you now conducting internal reviews of previous procurement decisions in your electorate, following the damning report from the Auditor-General.

**MS BERRY:** Well, the Education Directorate has taken into account the suggestion made by the Auditor-General in her report, and a number of changes have been made in responding to that report, as a directorate. The government will respond—

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, on a point of relevance. The Auditor-General's report is about changes to process moving forward. My question was directly at a review of previous procurements and whether there is an internal review occurring to previous documents.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, I would appreciate you getting to that point in the time you have left; I understand it was taken quite early.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you. And Madam Speaker, of course, the ACT government will respond to that report in due course.

**Mr Hanson:** Is that a no, or a yes? Or a—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** It means that your question has been answered, Mr Hanson.

### **Yerrabi Pond—amenities**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I understand that City Services are planning to install some solar lighting around Yerrabi pond as a trial. The Friends of Yerrabi Pond would like to know some more details. Could you please provide an update to the Assembly?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Braddock for his question. The government is committed to improving the recreational amenity around Yerrabi Pond and as part of the first tranche of \$300,000 that we are investing in improvements to Yerrabi Pond, on the basis of community consultation that was undertaken, we are looking at improving the lighting around Yerrabi Pond.

We are going to start through a pilot of solar lighting which will be constructed along a 180-metre stretch of the northern end of Yerrabi Pond, starting with the Bizant Street playground and heading west. There will be six solar lights installed in the pilot, and the solar lights will illuminate to 100 per cent for around five hours in the evening and then revert to a dimmed mode of 20 per cent until dawn. Whilst in that dimmed mode, inbuilt passive infrared sensors in the lights will activate upon movement detection and the lights will return to 100 per cent illumination to make sure that people feel safe, particularly in those dark corners of Yerrabi Pond—when they are out exercising, for example, Madam Speaker.

So we are looking forward to this pilot occurring because it will also help to inform further lighting improvements around Yerrabi Pond. As Mr Braddock would be

aware, we have some funding to undertake feasibility for improved lighting on the north western side of the pond, including missing sections around the pond and Gungahlin skate park. And that work is expected to be completed mid-year, ahead of us then seeking funding for further construction work.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Is the funding for this lighting included in that \$300,000 package you have just mentioned?

**MR STEEL:** For the pilot project, yes. The lighting is already funded through the ACT budget. Further funding will be required to undertake extended lighting improvements around Yerrabi Pond and we need to undertake the feasibility first, to understand where we can make those improvements, whether solar lighting is appropriate around the whole of the lake and which sections could be improved through the use of solar lighting.

This is also something that we are currently installing at the new Mawson park and ride on Beasley Street, which is under construction as well. We are looking forward to this lower cost form of lighting providing a sustainable option; it may mean that we can reduce the cost and the difficulty of needing to install utilities to support the lighting.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, will the government consider replacing old lights or installing new solar lights as part of the planned revitalisation works in the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore?

**MR STEEL:** Later on this month and into April, we will be consulting on improvements to the Tuggeranong foreshore with the Canberra community. We have not heard at this point what they would like to see around the lake. We would like to see whether lighting is a priority compared to other things. Lighting certainly is available in some parts of Tuggeranong foreshore at the moment, and we will certainly be seeking feedback from the community about what improvements they would like to see, and that includes lighting but a whole range of other things as well.

### **Schools—staffing**

**MRS KIKKERT:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, how many teaching staff are currently absent from ACT schools due to COVID-related issues at the current time?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, I will have to take the detail of that question on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, at what level of staff shortages will ACT schools be closed and children sent home for remote learning?

**MS BERRY:** Well that will depend on the circumstances and individual schools.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what notice and support will you give families who will need to adjust to home learning if you decide to close schools because of COVID?

**MS BERRY:** Well the ACT government's Education Directorate and our schools are well prepared, should the unfortunate circumstance arise that we do need to go to education outside of schools as a result of the impact of COVID on the teaching workforce within our schools.

We have a number of supports available online through Google classrooms to provide students and their families with educational tools for a period of time, should that be required. We will give as much notice as is possible; however, COVID has challenged us with being able to provide more notice than we would like and, sometimes, these decisions need to be made quickly. But I understand, and I know I receive communications from my school regularly, for my own kids, and that communication is going out to all schools on the situations as they arise within schools. I am confident that schools will provide as much information and advice as they possibly can, should those schools need to close, in close consultation with Health.

### **Women—International Women's Day**

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, we celebrated International Women's Day earlier this month. How was the day recognised in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Dr Paterson for her question. And this year on 3 March, I was really proud to host again, the 2022 ACT Women of the Year Awards, and it was a chance to be able to present ACT women's awards to some of Canberra's amazing women.

In addition to the awards themselves, I was able to hold a reception for the ACT Women of the Year Awards finalists, and this was an opportunity for me to be able to personally congratulate them on their achievements and to hear more about the work that they are doing and which they were nominated for, as well as to thank them for their ongoing contribution to the status of women and girls in the ACT. This year, the ACT Women of the Year Awards also celebrated the biennial update of the virtual ACT Women's Honour Roll.

The ACT government is committed to fostering gender equity in Canberra workplaces, including through improved gender equality and leadership, and workforce participation. Our second action plan of the ACT women's plan includes a really strong focus on the construction industry. On International Women's Day this year, I hosted a morning tea with several members of the construction industry to hear firsthand about some of the challenges being faced by women in the industry—namely, insecure work and the casualisation of that workforce.

I also had the opportunity to meet with participants in the ACT government's Return to Work program workshops. This program supports women who have been out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities, with skills to apply for work and to get back into the workforce.

On the evening of the International Women's Day, monuments around Canberra, were lit up in purple in recognition of the day. In the lead up to International Women's Day

each year, we release a report on the progress of the actions under the ACT women's plan. This was the second year of the second action plan 2020-22 Equity Together. Of the 29 actions, six of those have already been fully delivered and the rest are underway. This year, we will start work on the third action plan which will be launched in 2023. *(Time expired.)*

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what were the winners of the ACT Women's Awards recognised for?

**MS BERRY:** The ACT Woman of the Year winner, Kelli-Ann Jackson, is the group leader of the Women's Adventure ACT. Through her role, she has positively impacted the lives of thousands of women and gender diverse people in the ACT.

The ACT Senior Woman of the Year winner, Lee-Anne Daley, is a proud Wiradjuri woman from Wellington with many years' experience working alongside the Aboriginal community controlled health sector. Lee-Anne works with vulnerable families, including facilitating the Strong Women's Group and Koori Girls group.

Through her work as cofounder of the Girls Leadership Network and founder of Girls Run the World, the ACT Young Woman of the Year winner, Asha Clementi, is inspiring young women to pursue their leadership dreams. Girls Run the World has placed over 100 participants in diplomatic missions, creating unique opportunities for young women and empowering them to explore careers within international affairs.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what is the ACT government doing to improve gender equity in Canberra workplaces?

**MS BERRY:** When it comes to women's workplace participation and leadership, the ACT government has a leading role to play. There are many positive steps being taken by the ACT government to improve women's participation and leadership.

The ACT Public Service Women's Mentoring Program is just one example of the programs supporting women in the ACT government. Increasing the participation of women in traditionally male dominated and higher paid roles is also an important step towards gender equality.

Through Equity Together, the ACT government is also working collaboratively to deliver a number of actions to support increased numbers of women in the construction industry. The ACT government has been working in collaboration with peak industry bodies, unions, training providers and others to deliver programs and policies that have been designed to encourage and support women.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

## **Leave of absence**

Motion (by **Mr Braddock**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Rattenbury for today for health reasons.

Motion (by **Ms Lawder**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Milligan for the remainder of this sitting week for personal family reasons.

## Papers

**Madam Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to subsection 17(5)—Auditor-General's Reports—

No 1/2022—Management of detainee mental health services in the Alexander Maconochie Centre, dated 2 March 2022.

No 2/2022—Fraud Prevention, dated 3 March 2022.

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 15—Annual report 2020-21—ACT Auditor-General's Report No 9/2021—Corrigendum.

ACT Audit Office—Progress report on the operations for the period from 1 July to 31 December 2021, dated 10 February 2022.

Bills referred to Committees, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended—Correspondence—

Bill—Inquiry—

Family Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 14 February 2022.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, dated 17 February 2022.

Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 17 March 2022.

Legislation (Legislative Assembly Committees) Amendment Bill 2022—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, dated 21 February 2022.

Standing order 191—Amendments to the Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2021, dated 14 and 16 February 2021.

**Mr Gentleman** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 21—Auditor-General's reports—Government responses—

No 10/2021—2020-21 Financial Audits—Overview and No 12/2021—2020-21 Financial Audits—Financial Results and Audit Findings—Copy of letter to the Auditor-General from the Treasurer, dated 11 February 2022.

No 11/2021—Digital Records Management.

COVID-19 2021 Pandemic Response—Select Committee—Report—*Inquiry into the COVID-19 2021 pandemic response*—Government response.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 30F(3)—2021-22 Infrastructure Program—Progress report—Year-to-date 31 December 2021.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 4—*Inquiry into the Public Health Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)*—Government response.

**Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Court Procedures Act—Court Procedures (Fees) Determination 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-1 (LR, 10 January 2022).

Crimes (Surveillance Devices) Act—

Crimes (Surveillance Devices) Amendment Regulation 2022 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2022-1 (LR, 27 January 2022).

Crimes (Surveillance Devices) Body-worn Cameras Guidelines 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-9 (LR, 10 February 2022).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act and Financial Management Act—

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Appointment 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-6 (LR, 25 January 2022).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Appointment 2022 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-5 (LR, 25 January 2022).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Appointment 2022 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-4 (LR, 27 January 2022).

Nature Conservation Act—Nature Conservation (Scientific Committee) Appointment 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-8 (LR, 10 February 2022).

Planning and Development Act—Planning and Development (Canberra Urban Lakes and Ponds) Land Management Plan 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-10 (LR, 10 February 2022).

Plastic Reduction Act—Plastic Reduction (Public Event) Declaration 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-3 (LR, 24 January 2022).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Application Order 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-2 (LR, 24 January 2022).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Manuka Oval) Declaration 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-11 (LR, 10 February 2022).

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation Declaration 2022 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-7 (LR, 31 January 2022).

## Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee Report 4—government response

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (2.51): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee—Report 4—*Inquiry into the Public Health Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2)*—Government response.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (2.51): I want to speak briefly on the government's response to the health and community wellbeing committee's report on the inquiry into the Public Health Amendment Bill 2021 (No 2).

I would first like to acknowledge the committee for its work on the inquiry into this bill and, indeed, the committee staff. As recently noted in the *Some Assembly Required* newsletter, the inquiry received more than 1,000 submissions, of which most came from interstate, with a small number even coming from overseas.

While the Clerk of course made no judgements about the content of these submissions, I would venture to suggest, from what I read, that the vast majority of submitters had not read the legislation, the explanatory statement or my introduction speech and indeed had quite the wrong end of the stick as to what the bill seeks to achieve. Nevertheless—I quote from *Some Assembly Required*:

Each person was contacted to verify their contact information and to provide information on the submissions process. A small percentage of submitters chose to have their name withheld and many of the submissions contained highly emotional language ...

The huge number of submissions, all needing to be individually vetted, redacted, and published, required an 'assembly line' type workflow to be organised.

I want to thank everyone involved in that process, and thanks also to those ACT-based organisations and individuals who did make substantial and thoughtful submissions to the inquiry.

As members of this place would be aware, the bill seeks to amend the Public Health Act 1997 to include a new regulatory framework to address an anticipated situation where COVID-19 continues to present a significant public health risk that cannot be effectively addressed through existing notifiable condition provisions but which no longer justifies the ongoing declaration of a public health emergency.

I referred this matter proactively to the committee, in recognition of the complex matters we are seeking to address. We recognise that COVID-19 will be with us for some time and that there will come a time when a public health emergency is not the appropriate legislative arrangement to manage that reality, but neither is having no legislative framework. Ensuring that the government and Chief Health Officer can continue to implement baseline public health social measures while building in more oversight, accountability and transparency is the driving intent of this bill.

In recognition of the human rights implications, I referred the bill to ensure that members of the Legislative Assembly, stakeholder organisations, statutory authorities, including the ACT Human Rights Commission, and members of the public had the opportunity to review the proposed legislation and provide feedback for the government to consider prior to debate on the bill.

As I stated in my introductory speech when tabling the bill, the government has worked closely with the ACT Human Rights Commission. In the process of considering the standing committee's report, the government have again engaged with the ACT Human Rights Commission to inform our responses to each recommendation. I would like to publicly acknowledge their thoughtful and constructive engagement with the ACT Health Directorate throughout this process.

The government's response accepts in whole, part or principle eight of the 10 recommendations and notes the remaining two. I believe this represents an acknowledgement of the diligent work of the committee.

In the next week or so I will circulate government amendments that will give effect to the government response. The government believe our proposed amendments will provide a balanced approach in ensuring that directions under the bill achieve their intended outcome to protect the health and wellbeing of Canberrans from COVID-19 while balancing key human rights considerations and limitations.

Fundamentally, this bill is about providing a road map out of a public health emergency, and the extraordinary powers that that entails, and into an environment of living with COVID-19 while still being able to take the necessary baseline measures to protect our families, friends and community, particularly those who are most vulnerable to poor outcomes from COVID-19. I look forward to the Assembly's consideration of the government's response and the proposed amendments, and to the debate on this bill, which I expect to occur in the April sittings.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Housing—affordability**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (2.56): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:



- (a) the ACT is experiencing a housing crisis;
  - (b) demand for detached housing is significantly exceeding supply;
  - (c) recent land ballots for detached housing have had thousands of applicants vying for only a small number of blocks. For example, the most recent ballot for land in Whitlam had 12 417 applicants for 101 blocks;
  - (d) the ACT Government deliberately constrains the supply of land for detached housing;
  - (e) a report prepared for the ACT Government in 2015, known colloquially as the Winton Report, showed that Canberrans overwhelmingly have a preference for detached housing, a result that has been ignored by the government;
  - (f) the ACT Government did not agree with recommendation 2(c) of the Auditor-General's Report No 4 of June 2020 on Residential Land Supply and Release, which recommended that the Government publish future projections for housing supply and demand;
  - (g) the ACT Government's land development targets are not based on projected market demand, forcing many Canberrans into apartments;
  - (h) according to the latest ABS data, Canberra's residential property prices grew 28.8 percent between December 2020 and December 2021;
  - (i) the ACT Government only plans to release 4171 blocks of land for detached housing over the next five years to 2025-26, and based on their past performance it is unlikely to deliver that amount;
  - (j) the ACT Land and Property Report for July to December 2021 has not yet been released, which means the Government's progress towards the target of 631 blocks this financial year is not publicly known;
  - (k) the ACT Government's conveyance duty concessions on multi-unit dwellings do not alleviate demand for detached housing; and
  - (l) while there are macroeconomic settings that affect the price of housing across Australia, the ACT government controls the release of land;
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to acknowledge:
- (a) there is a housing affordability crisis in Canberra;
  - (b) the 70 per cent infill strategy is leaving many Canberrans behind;
  - (c) the demand for detached housing in Canberra is significantly exceeding supply; and
  - (d) the ACT Government has a role to play in meeting the demand for detached housing in Canberra; and
- (3) also calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) use the policy levers it has available to ease the housing affordability crisis in Canberra by releasing more land for detached housing;
  - (b) commission a new housing choices survey similar to the Winton Report of 2015; and
  - (c) release ACT land and property reports within one month of the end of the relevant reporting period.

We have a housing crisis in Canberra. The median price for a detached house is over \$1 million, and we have the highest median rent in the country. In the face of this unfolding challenge over the past few years, the Labor-Greens government has failed to act. It has failed to hit its own—already inadequate—land sales targets. It has failed to plan for and meet demand for detached housing, and it has failed thousands of Canberrans that deserve to have the right to live in their own home.

This Labor-Greens government knows that Canberrans want the option to live in houses and not be forced into high-rise towers if that is not their choice. This government's own housing choices community survey of 2015, known as the Winton report, showed that almost 85 per cent of Canberrans would prefer to live in a detached house. There is also support for dual occupancies and townhouses, and only 1.7 per cent want to live in an apartment block of more than three storeys. This is a government that has simply chosen to ignore this inconvenient truth.

Recent land ballots have seen thousands and thousands of people applying to buy fewer than 100 blocks in some suburbs. Whitlam, only this month, had 12,417 applicants for 101 blocks. Macnamara, in February, had 8,700 applicants for 71 blocks. Taylor, in November last year, had 7,484 applicants for 115 blocks. In a previous ballot in Whitlam, which took place in March last year, we saw 7,566 applicants for 92 blocks.

As if these figures were not bad enough, to make the situation worse, despite the overwhelming demand for land to build detached housing, this Labor-Greens government only plans to release 4,171 blocks over the next five years. I repeat: 4,171 blocks over the next five years. Even taking its already inadequate land sales targets into account, we know that this Labor-Greens government does not actually deliver on these targets, and we get no adequate explanation as to why.

It is unbelievable that this Labor-Greens government is so out of touch that it actually believes its housing strategy is a success. In fact, only over the weekend we saw the ACT Greens almost breaking their arms while patting themselves on the back to congratulate themselves on social media about everything that they have apparently achieved in government on housing.

Let us look at the record under Labor and the Greens. We have median house prices of over \$1 million. We have seen a whopping 28.8 per cent increase in house prices in the last year alone. We have the highest median rents in the country and we have tens of thousands of desperate Canberrans lining up to bid, sometimes for fewer than 100 blocks. This is on top of whopping increases in electricity under their watch, and shockingly high rates and land tax that are forcing many Canberra investors out of our city, taking more and more affordable rental properties off the market.

Whilst Labor and the Greens are busy high-fiving each other on a job well done, let us not forget the thousands and thousands of Canberrans for whom the dream of owning their own home is no longer a possibility. This is the result of a complacent, arrogant government that is out of touch with what the Canberra community need and want.

While this government likes to blame the pandemic for every one of its failings over the last two years, this is a government that has had 20 years to plan for today's Canberra—a Canberra that is seeing eye-watering prices for houses, for purchase and for rent; that is, if you can even get one. This is a government that is leaving behind thousands and thousands of Canberrans who are seeing, before their very eyes, their dreams of owning their own house disappear.

Whilst the Chief Minister, as he is known for doing, is quick to shift the blame elsewhere, his favourite target being the federal government, the figures do not lie. If the Chief Minister wants solely to blame tax settings and interest rates and to ignore supply and demand, perhaps I will remind this chamber again: 12,417 applicants for 101 blocks in Whitlam just this month; 8,700 applicants for 71 blocks in Macnamara in February; 7,484 applicants for 115 blocks in Taylor in November last year; and 7,566 applicants for 92 blocks in Whitlam in March last year.

I have always acknowledged that there are many complex factors behind housing affordability, but there are factors that are specifically within the control of the ACT government, and the Chief Minister's refusal to acknowledge this, his refusal to take any responsibility for thousands and thousands of Canberrans not being able to access their own home, shows just how out of touch he and this government are with our community.

The reality is that this government has had over 20 years to plan properly and sustainably for the growth of Canberra, and to ensure that we have more leafy green suburbs delivering a wide range of housing choices for all Canberrans. Instead, it is wedded to an infill agenda that is not serving the community's needs and wants.

Canberra, the bush capital, Australia's capital, as a sustainable and climate-friendly city, does not have to be the badly developed concrete jungle being created before our very eyes under Labor and the Greens. It should be a city where locals can choose to live in a house with a backyard if that is what they prefer. It should be a city where multi-unit dwellings have a role as a choice for Canberrans who seek it, but they should not be the only viable option.

Canberra, the bush capital, Australia's capital, is a city where people should have easy access to open spaces, smartly designed public transport and well-maintained road and cycle infrastructure, no matter where they live. Canberra, the bush capital, Australia's capital, is a city where every Canberran should have access to good local schools, and health, essential and city services.

Owning your own home is a dream of many Australians, and indeed many Canberrans, but it is a dream that is slipping away for many people under this Labor-Greens government. Whilst I again acknowledge that there are many factors that play a role in housing affordability, my motion calls on this government to use the policy levers that are within its discretion, the factors that are within its sole discretion and control, to take action, to make a plan and to ease the burden of unaffordable housing for so many Canberrans.

I acknowledge that it will not be an overnight, miracle fix, but it will go a long way towards giving confidence to so many potential Canberra homebuyers that there is hope. Lest members opposite cry that the Winton report was of a very different Canberra seven years ago and that Canberrans' wants and needs have changed since then, my motion also calls for the commissioning of an updated housing choices survey so that we can get an updated view of what our community needs and wants from housing.

But let us not forget the over 12,000 applications for 101 blocks in Whitlam. Let us not forget the over 8,000 applications for 71 blocks in Macnamara. And let us not forget the over 7,000 applications for 115 blocks in Taylor. These are figures that speak for themselves.

I urge all members in this chamber to show some respect, show some empathy and show some acknowledgement of the many Canberrans who desperately want to be able to work towards owning their own home. I urge all members in this chamber to say loudly and clearly to these Canberrans that we are listening and that we are taking their concerns seriously. I urge all members in this chamber to support my motion.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (3.06): I thank Ms Lee for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. No-one can deny that housing affordability is an issue and that cost of living pressures are on the rise. This is an economic reality.

The ACT government is working hard to address this reality with economic programs to deliver secure, well-paying jobs, with a public and affordable housing program that will deliver 400 new public housing dwellings and 600 affordable rentals, as well as a range of broad tax relief grants and services targeted at ensuring that we meet the community's needs.

Meeting the challenges that we face in government requires hard, detailed work. It is not enough just to put out a media release or to say, "Bulldoze this or that piece of nature space and put more single block homes on it." Maybe the Canberra Liberals will start thinking about bulldozing Namadgi next. There are no simple answers to delivering a well-planned city with homes and communities for everyone. Building a sustainable and connected Canberra requires more than just releasing blocks; we have to keep innovating and working through the environmental, planning and economic issues we face to keep Canberra the great city that it is.

It is a reality that around Australia, and around the world, demand for property is at record levels. Nobody predicted this. It was quite the opposite. The prediction was that there would be a real slump, but the opposite happened. While we are doing everything we can to meet Canberra's demand, we have to be realistic and recognise that it is not just a question of supply.

*Ms Lee interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** The suggestion that land supply is driving price increases is simply not correct. House prices—

*Ms Lee interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** Mr Assistant Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Opposition in silence.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Davis):** Yes, I think that is fair. I ask all members on my left to allow the minister to be heard in silence.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. House price increases since COVID-19 have been driven by record low interest rates and tax incentives for investments in property, each of which are the responsibility of the commonwealth government. That is why, over the border in New South Wales and across the whole country, property prices are on the rise.

It is very easy and simplistic just to say, “Release more blocks,” but that is not a realistic answer to housing prices. It takes much more than a headline to develop a really great neighbourhood. We know that to meet Canberra’s needs and still deliver a sustainable city a mix of housing choices is required, and that is what Canberrans want; they want choices. They want to live in a city that keeps its natural beauty and has great services and amenities. Our single dwelling release targets reflect that mix.

The 2021-22 to 2025-26 indicative land release program shows 25 per cent of releases, or 4,171 dwellings, as single dwelling blocks, out of a total of 16,434 dwellings. The Suburban Land Agency and the Ginninderry joint venture are delivering against this target. It is simply not correct to say that single dwelling releases are far below expectations. It is also not correct to say that the government is constraining land supply.

For example, the estimate for releases by the SLA and the Ginninderry joint venture for 2020-21 was 1,194 single residential blocks. They released 1,113 blocks, which represented 93 per cent of the estimated releases for that year. The SLA and the Ginninderry joint venture had released 218 single residential blocks as at the end of December. This exceeded the forecast of releases for the first half of this financial year, which was 173 blocks. That is on top of the private sector releases that are not included in the ILRP.

For the four years 2017-18 to 2020-21, the indicative land release program identified land releases totalling 14,663 dwellings. The government, through its land agencies, delivered 14,503 dwellings, a variance of just 160 dwellings, or one per cent. The ILRP target for the next five years is 16,434 dwellings and the SLA is already working hard to make sure it meets that target.

Unlike private sector land developers, the government have taken the approach, over the last four years, of maintaining land supply. Not only are we not constraining land;

we are doing things above and beyond what private sector developers have done, to keep the supply up. Right now there are no blocks available over the counter in the private New South Wales sector estates of Googong or South Jerrabomberra, or in the Molonglo Valley estate of Denman Prospect.

When the private sector was reducing its inventories and limiting new releases, the SLA continued to release new blocks to the market, even if it did not sell at the time. The SLA no longer has single residential blocks available for purchase over the counter; however, land is still currently available for purchase through the arrangement with partner builders. There are approximately 192 blocks available in Whitlam and Taylor, including 100 affordable housing blocks.

What all this means in terms of today's motion is that the ACT government's ILRP is not the cause of house price increases. In fact, the annual ILRP itself represents, as I have said continuously today, less than two per cent of the ACT's total established housing market. We simply cannot bulldoze away those economic facts.

I have summarised what the government is doing to meet our housing needs and keep developing our city responsibly. But let me illustrate the difference between the government's approach and that of the Canberra Liberals. If Ms Lee and Mr Cain gave us a map tomorrow of all the places that they would develop for homes and we agreed, the reality is that the building and construction industry is also seeing really high demand and cost increases. It costs money to develop new suburbs. It costs money to build homes. And the very same economic factors that are driving home prices are affecting the construction industry.

This motion, as it stands, is not a realistic plan. Canberrans want more than just slogans or campaigns; they want concrete deliverables. The amendments I will be putting forward make clear what the challenges we face really are. The amendments also set out a clear picture of what the government is doing to meet those challenges. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all text after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes that:

- (a) house prices are rising nationally and internationally, and the ACT is affected by these increases alongside other jurisdictions in Australia and across the world;
- (b) the ACT Government is using the levers it has available to improve housing affordability, including:
  - (i) reducing stamp duty every Budget;
  - (ii) abolishing stamp duty on off the plan unit purchases up to \$600 000;
  - (iii) a land release program that supplies dwellings at above the rate of population growth;
  - (iv) the Home Buyer Concession Scheme;
  - (v) aiming to deliver 600 additional affordable dwellings by 2025-26 (along with an additional 400 public housing dwellings); and

- (vi) the Pensioner Duty Concession Scheme;
  - (c) the ACT Government's Housing Choices Collaboration Hub brought together a diverse group of Canberrans to discuss the future of housing in Canberra, with the Collaboration Hub showing a preference for infill development, for a wider range of housing typologies at a range of different price points, with a focus on development that allows people to age-in-place;
  - (d) preparing land for release is a considerable budget outlay for studies and infrastructure;
  - (e) unchecked urban sprawl will destroy the bush landscape that surrounds Canberra, risking that we lose protected flora and fauna forever;
  - (f) concentrating our development in our existing urban footprint improves sustainability and allows a more affordable lifestyle, close to shops, services and public transport;
  - (g) Canberra's population is growing while our household size is shrinking and ageing, meaning that we need to find suitable options to allow people to downsize in their preferred location;
  - (h) according to the latest ABS data, Canberra's residential property prices grew 28.8 percent between December 2020 and December 2021;
  - (i) building industry costs for materials and labour have significantly increased in recent months;
  - (j) the increased costs for building materials has made it challenging for local industry to deliver on some projects, and a large scale increase in building activity as a result of rapid land supply will likely create further affordability challenges;
  - (k) while housing remains affordable for most Canberrans, there are some that are struggling in the current housing market; and
  - (l) there are macroeconomic settings that affect the price of housing across Australia, and these settings that are within the control of the Commonwealth Government are the major driver of increasing land prices; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) call on the Commonwealth Government to address housing affordability using the economic levers available to it and waive the ACT's historic housing debt to the Commonwealth;
  - (b) continue to deliver land and housing options that provide diverse and affordable housing options to give Canberrans choices; and
  - (c) keep supporting environmentally sustainable development that offers the amenity and services Canberrans need and expect."

Mr Assistant Speaker, the ACT government is using the levers that it has available to improve housing affordability, including reducing stamp duty every budget, abolishing stamp duty for off-the-plan unit purchases up to \$600,000, a land release program that supplies dwellings—

*Ms Lee interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Minister Berry, just a moment. Ms Lee, for the second occasion: you will have an opportunity to reply to the minister in your closing remarks. There have been a few occasions when I have not pulled you up and now I have to. The minister needs to be heard in silence.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. The government has a land release program that supplies dwellings at above the rate of population growth; the home buyer concessions scheme, aiming to deliver 600 affordable rentals as well as 400 public housing dwellings; and the pensioner duty concession scheme. We are already taking all of these steps to address housing affordability across the board with the tools that we have, which I have identified at the jurisdictional level.

I once again ask that the opposition lobby their federal coalition colleagues to consider what the Australian government's actions could be to address housing affordability as well. Here is a short list. Firstly, they could waive the historic ACT housing debt held by the commonwealth, to enable savings to be directed into more social housing. That ACT housing historic debt is \$98,326,683.01, including the interest of \$32,879,649.67 after we have paid that off. If the Canberra Liberals could lobby their coalition colleagues on the hill and have that debt waived, that would make a significant contribution to the ACT's social housing supply.

They could develop a national housing and homelessness strategy—actually develop one; support the Community Housing Industry Association's social housing and renovation program; reform the federal tax settings which currently benefit property investors over first-time buyers and renters; recognise housing affordability as a national issue; and increase funding to the states and territories through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. They could also increase commonwealth rent assistance.

However, the ACT government will not wait until a federal election. We will continue to take action. The ACT government is committed to strengthening our social housing supply through increasing, growing and renewing the territory's public housing stock and, in turn, reducing homelessness and contributing to a safer, stronger and more inclusive community.

I go back to the start of my response to Ms Lee's motion today to explain, again, the numbers. The ACT government's responsibility, which it takes very seriously and is delivering on, is that we provide two per cent of the housing and land supply in the ACT. As I said, that was around the 4,000 mark up till December last year. The private sector have active in the market over 170,000. It is two per cent that we provide in the ACT as part of our land release program.

I think that to suggest that the ACT government is in any way constraining supply is incorrect, when I have outlined in detail the difference between the ACT government's approach to the supply of land, through the indicative land release program, and that of the private sector. It is clear that the ACT government is doing much more than its share in this space.



I commend my amendment to Ms Lee's motion to the Assembly.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (3.17): I thank Ms Lee for bringing this motion to the chamber. I rise to speak today in support of the amendments to the motion that is being debated. As has been discussed and agreed many times in this chamber in recent months, the ACT does have a housing affordability crisis. Despite suggestions from some in this chamber that this is a contested point, it has been acknowledged and it has been discussed at length.

As has been discussed many times in this chamber, we are not alone in facing this wicked problem. We continue to examine and explore what we can do to alleviate this situation that has seen an extraordinary increase in home prices in detached and other forms, not only here but across the country. Again, as we have previously discussed here, there is little evidence to suggest that this increase is solely based on supply.

Economic analysis regularly points to issues such as record low interest rates, tax settings and the like as specific reasons for this issue. The reality of an overheated market, particularly in the context of severely limited international migration and the economic uncertainty created by the pandemic, cannot be explained away by a simple statement that we just need to flood the market with more land. Even if we had it, even if we had the capacity to get it ready to be released to market, the increase in house prices for greenfield sites, infilled sites, freestanding properties or apartments demonstrates that there are other things at play.

We must also acknowledge that we find ourselves in the midst of not only a housing affordability crisis but a climate emergency and an extinction crisis. If we do not address the issues of ecological decline, climate change or unsustainable resource use, our housing will not only become less affordable; our city will no longer be liveable. Further, this path will see the inequality crisis turbocharged as well. Even if simplistic solutions were an option, they would do nothing to address the underlying issues that are driving inequality, including housing stress and homelessness.

As a minister with responsibilities that range across homelessness and housing services, the environment and sustainable building and construction, I do not have the luxury of considering one issue at the exclusion of all others or presenting Clayton's solutions that are not achievable and do not actually address the complex issues we face as a community.

There has already been a discussion of the importance of ensuring that we get the balance right in relation to future development so that it occurs in a way that respects our obligations to this generation and future generations, is respectful to our environment and protects the environmental values that we are stewards of. The 70-30 split in relation to land being developed and delivered by government is a reflection of the reality that the land that sits within our territory is not a limited resource and we need to plan our future development in a way that delivers better outcomes for individuals, households, neighbourhoods and the city as a whole.

When there are discussions about the additional release of greenfield sites, let us be really clear on what we are talking about. As already outlined, the SLA have a steady program of land release in Molonglo and Gungahlin. In partnership, they are working to deliver Ginninderry. With the development of these new areas there is a need for transport facilities, schools and community infrastructure, to name just a few of the additional things that need to be delivered. These require significant resources and planning.

Once these divisions are released, there are actually very few areas that do not come at significant environmental cost. Right now there are preliminary investigations regarding land on the western edge. We already know, thanks to significant citizen science, that there are significant environmental values contained on some of this land, and we need to properly assess what we need to protect and what might be suitable to develop.

The Conservator of Flora and Fauna stated, as quoted in yesterday's *Canberra Times*:

... Bluetts Block contained important woodlands and birds, according to evidence from the community.

“It contains very significant endangered box-gum woodlands and also some orchids ... some antechinus and some common dunnarts, which are, despite the name, not that common across the ACT ...”

As a government, we have ruled out both land west of the Murrumbidgee, due to its environmental values, and Kowen Forest.

In relation to some of the discussion about inland development, I think it is important for a nuanced discussion about what the community wants in relation to the evolution of our city. The ACT Greens, for many years, have supported the idea of a more compact city, one that promotes more sustainable living at an individual, a household and a community level. Good planning, design and strong quality drivers should deliver better housing options and deliver homes that are more liveable and comfortable, particularly in the context of climate change—and they will save residents time and money.

I see much discussion on the types of options that are available for people as they move through their life cycle. While young families may be looking for detached homes, families with older kids or those looking to downsize are often looking for other options such as townhouses, a part of the market that is more scarce than detached homes. Many people are interested in the lifestyle benefits delivered by living in apartments.

We need significant discussion about the choices, about what types of homes we wish to build, the size and the design of our homes, how we promote intergenerational living, how homes relate to the landscape on which they are located and support living infrastructure, and what liveability and amenity factors should be standard. These are all really important discussions that are currently underway as we progress through the planning review.

As outlined in the proposed amendments, the ACT is doing the heavy lifting in relation to doing all we can to address housing affordability, from changes to tax settings, support for first home buyers, support for socially minded landlords preparing to rent out their homes at affordable rents, directly delivering more social housing and working with partners to deliver affordable housing. We absolutely need housing choice and, as outlined in the proposed amendments, the ACT government's housing choices collaboration hub highlighted the interest in "a wider range of housing typologies at different price points, with a focus on development that allows people to age in place". That is not always detached houses.

It is also useful to touch on the issue of building quality, as it is a point of discussion relevant to this debate. This is an area that I am actively working on, building on the significant body of reforms that have been introduced in recent years. We continue the policy work that will see more transparency and accountability in relation to developers and other building professionals, and improvements in certification, regulation and compliance. This is a body of work that we are progressing in a way that is in step with the national discussion but that ensures that the ACT is at the forefront of ensuring that the homes we build today will be fit for purpose, accessible and climate wise into the future.

I am sure that we will again return to the discussion about housing affordability and preference in this chamber. We should. But when we have these conversations, let us ensure that we bring all the issues to the table and we continue to work to improve affordability in a way that does not have an irreversible cost, either for people or for the planet.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (3.26): I reject Minister Berry's amendment and support Ms Lee's motion. It is comforting to know that this motion has been brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition, because we are facing a housing crisis in Canberra. The median price of a detached house is over \$1 million and we have the highest median rent in Australia. As shadow minister for planning and land management, I wholeheartedly support the Leader of the Opposition's motion.

This Labor-Greens government need to acknowledge that they are the sole provider of land in the territory and they have failed repeatedly to meet their own targets. The line that land is in the hands of private developers is otiose because the land was originally issued by the ACT government, of course.

This Labor-Greens government has had over 20 years to plan properly and sustainably for the growth of Canberra. The Labor-Greens government has had over 20 years to ensure that we have delivered duplexes, apartment buildings, standalone dwellings, urban centres, leafy green suburbs and—this is so important, Mr Assistant Speaker—a wider range of housing choices. That is what Canberrans are calling for. We cannot begin to talk about housing choices when people cannot even afford a place to live in the first place.

I would suggest that the Chief Minister, as an economist himself, surely sees the problem in front of him, yet he continues to deny it. As Ms Lee said, it is the Greens

who are pulling the strings here, with their densification agenda. Of course, this does not give the Labor Chief Minister much room to move. Why doesn't the Chief Minister pull the levers in his control and, for example, start releasing land—perhaps even just enough to meet the government's own targets? That would be a good start. The Greens, wedded to their 70 per cent infill agenda, and a Chief Minister committed to strangling supply are responsible for this housing affordability crisis.

I have heard a few things in response to Ms Lee's motion today, and I want briefly to address them. We have heard that there is an affordability crisis across the country, but we are the ACT. Just because something is happening elsewhere, and given our distinctive land tenure system and the role that the government plays, that is not an excuse; that is a diversion.

We have heard about the Winton report, the government's own requested survey of Canberrans' housing choices. It is pretty hard to find, by the way, because Canberrans showed what they wanted and the government decided it was not interested in delivering on what Canberrans wanted. A very important part of Ms Lee's motion is to find out what this community wants from its government. Surely, that is a question that any sensible and responsible government would be asking.

We have heard that only two per cent of the land release is done by the ACT government, but the other 98 per cent was also released by the ACT government. Is it like saying, "We had no role"? No; you had a role. You have played the role, and continue to play the role, of strangling supply of what Canberrans want. And shame on you, Minister. Shame on you!

As an economist, the Chief Minister said some rather interesting things during annual reports hearings. As best I can, I think I have summarised his economic approach to supply and demand. Here is the only way that I can describe it. If you restrict the supply of a highly demanded product, you do not affect the price of that product. I am not quite sure what to call that, but maybe we will see how this takes with the economic community. I think I will call it "Barronomics". "Barronomics": supply does not affect price. It is a very novel economic theory. I would struggle to find much support for that in economic textbooks.

Ms Lee's motion deserves support. I say to this whole Assembly: Canberrans are making their views known. Just look at the numbers rolling up, and for what kind of land? It is the land they cannot get, because of the government's decisions. "Barronomics", Mr Assistant Speaker, is barring home ownership, and it is a bar to housing choice and housing affordability. I support Ms Lee's motion and reject the amendment proposed by—

**Ms Berry:** A point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Davis): Mr Cain, there is a point of order. Minister Berry, on a point of order.

**Ms Berry:** I believe that the member is referring to the Chief Minister inappropriately under the standing orders. He should not be making up names and referring to the Chief Minister in that way.

**MR CAIN:** Excuse me, Mr Assistant Speaker—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Hang on, Mr Cain; just one moment. Minister Berry, do you have a standing order which you reference, to assist the chair?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, I do. I am looking for it now, if you could just bear with me.

**MR CAIN:** Mr Assistant Speaker—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Hang on, Mr Cain. I am asking Ms Berry to draw my attention to where the point of order has originated; then I will make a decision.

**Ms Berry:** It is under standing order 55, “Personal reflections”, which states:

All imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on Members shall be considered highly disorderly.

**MR CAIN:** No, I reject that, Mr Assistant Speaker. I am just describing an approach to economics that seems to be held by the Chief Minister; simply put, “Barronomics”.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Minister Berry, I take your point. I will allow Mr Cain to continue. Mr Cain, now that we can all draw our attention to standing order 55, we would all agree that it was a mild skirt, so I will allow you to finish speaking, but I would ask you to keep standing order 55 in mind in future.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker; a very sensible approach, I would think. I was close to closing. I support Ms Lee’s motion wholeheartedly. The Canberra Liberals want to hear what Canberrans want. We are interested in their views. Surely, a responsible government should do the same.

**MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.34):** I rise to speak in support of the amendment to the motion. We have discussed on many occasions that we are experiencing a housing affordability crisis. It is real, it is really affecting Canberrans and it is awful. It is not just being experienced here in the ACT; it is being experienced all across Australia.

This Australia-wide housing crisis means that we need solutions right across our nation. We cannot deal with it on our own. The crisis is multipronged. Simplistic framing and simplistic solutions are not going to work. We have heard a lot today about what the nature of the problem is. Some of the solutions we have rolled out, and there are some more solutions. I am pleased to be part of the government that is engaging in this in a mature and considered way.

We have also heard quite a bit about 70-30, and we have in our parliamentary and governing agreement a commitment that the ACT government should require at least 70 per cent of its new housing development to remain within Canberra’s existing urban footprint. This is really important. If we do not put limits on this, we will just end up with endless urban sprawl.

Our services are centralised. We do not want our community travelling great distances across the territory to conduct everyday activities. We want our citizens to have a compact, efficient city. We need to have transit-oriented development so that households have the option of walking, riding and catching public transport to meet their daily needs. It is no good if we keep sprawling. We need more infill development and smarter, more efficient development, not endless urban sprawl.

In fact, the ACT Greens are great environmentalists, and that is why in our election platform we have actually called for more than that. We have called for 80 per cent of new development to be infill, not 70 per cent, because we want to protect our bush and our grasslands. We do not want to keep sprawling and sprawling, and destroying more and more of our habitat and our environment.

We have chosen to do this because we know it is so important that we protect critical environmental areas. It is part of our strategy to limit the ecological destruction that is being caused by endless unsustainable development. It is part of our strategy to make sure that we are protecting habitat and protecting our endangered species. Minister Vassarotti has listed a number of those endangered species and she has explained to us why it is really important that we protect this habitat.

It is not just for aesthetics. We know that Canberrans really value the bush capital; they really value our green spaces. But we need to protect these endemic areas. If we do not do it, they are gone. Once they are gone, you cannot bring them back. We need to protect these for our children and for our children's children. We know that it is important to protect our environment, and that is why we know that we need a healthy environment. I moved a motion on that in a recent sitting, and I was happy that all of the parties here supported that motion. Sometimes it seems that we can get really good tripartisan agreement to protect our environment and to make sensible policy choices, but sometimes we seem incapable of having a mature conversation about it in here.

It is really important that we preserve a healthy environment and that we acknowledge that as a right. It is a right that human beings have access to a healthy environment. It is a right within its own right. We need to make sure that we are protecting this environment for the species, for the plants, for the animals and for future generations.

Our parks and bushland should not be taken for granted. If we want them to be here forever, we need to protect them right now. That is actually really important in a lot of the choices we are making, not merely on housing affordability but in our new planning system. We need to make sure that we are protecting our environment in that new planning system, and I was pleased to see that there are a lot of measures in the exposure draft that do just that.

It is also really important that we do not simply consider our greenfield land as empty land. We have heard a lot about the western edge. We have heard from a lot of people in this room about the western edge. Sometimes we have members of the same party on one day saying that we should bulldoze the western edge and release it, and on the next day we are told that we should protect the western edge and save precious areas like Bluetts Block.

I am happy to be part of an evidence-based environmental party that is quite clear on this. We have heard a lot about the careful approach that we are taking to the western edge, and it is really important that we gather the evidence, protect the environment and make considered, rational choices about this.

We need to make sure that our future development, including all of our housing development, is environmentally sustainable, that it takes into consideration all of the environmental impacts and that it seeks to avoid more environmental harm. I am glad that we have Minister Vassarotti, Minister Berry and the directorates working to ensure that our future development will be high quality, accessible and connected with public and active transport so that it is usable for the people who end up living there, and that it will be environmentally sustainable.

Of course, we have a housing crisis. We know that; we have acknowledged that many times. But it is really important, whilst we are experiencing a climate crisis and an extinction crisis, that we put together a comprehensive response that deals with all of these problems at once, rather than picking off simple solutions that are not solutions at all.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.40): I thank Ms Lee for raising this important issue. The ACT government agrees that affordability is a significant issue right across Australia, including here in the ACT. Our planning strategy and housing strategy both include actions to improve affordability.

The ability of the ACT government to influence affordability is limited. This is a problem that is not unique to Canberra. There is evidence of this issue in cities and regional areas across the country. A wide range of factors have resulted in rising house prices. These include, but are not limited to, commonwealth tax policy, historically low interest rates, financial deregulation, investor sentiment, and increasing house sizes. The two key policies driving house price increases are the commonwealth government's position on capital gains tax and negative gearing.

I will give an example of the reasoning behind that. These policies have turned housing into an investment earning asset, allowing investors to create wealth. Unless this changes we will continue to fight an uphill battle when it comes to supporting owner-occupiers and, of course, housing affordability. All governments in Australia should work towards ensuring that growth in property prices does not exceed growth in wages over the medium term.

While the commonwealth government is responsible for the primary levers that could be used to address housing affordability, CGT and negative gearing, the ACT government is committed to increasing the supply of more affordable homes and supporting Canberrans to access the housing market. I will go to Ms Luci Ellis from the Reserve Bank. Quite recently, she said:

The combination of negative gearing with concessional capital gains means that it is very attractive to leverage into investor property.

She also said:

In Australia, additions to the housing stock have run ahead of population growth for a number of years.

We can see that, nationally, even though supply is increasing, prices are continuing to go up. This is clearly an issue across Australia, as I said, and not just in Canberra. The government is doing what it can with the levers that it has, and the actions taken by the government are listed in the amendment.

It is quite perplexing that Ms Lee is suggesting that if we built less of the housing that is affordable and more of the housing that is more expensive, we would be better off. Releasing more land to create new outer suburbs is not free and easy, and it is not a solution to housing affordability. It is expensive to develop new estates. We need to make sure that our communities are well served with power, water, roads, schools, parks and other infrastructure.

The environmental risks of carelessly releasing more land are also significant. Once that land is built on, we do not get it back. West Murrumbidgee is a great example of an area that just does not stack up on environmental, infrastructure or planning grounds. It is a beautiful part of the world. It is also hard to get infrastructure out there. Once people move into west Murrumbidgee, its location and physical attributes mean that traffic would be funnelled through the Tuggeranong town centre, with very poor connections to other centres.

Land release is a careful balancing act, and providing housing and protecting the environment are also a major part of that. It requires careful consideration of what life would look like for future residents. Will they continue to have the same “liveable city” experience that Canberra is known for, or are we simply making suburbs which require people to get stuck in congestion on the way there? How affordable is a house if you are spending time in traffic and money on petrol? That could be a different aspect.

Like my colleague Mr Davis, I am also a former real estate agent, and the old adage “Location, location, location” is a cliché for a reason. When you are buying a home, you are buying more than just the physical structure; you are also buying into the community. The government is not able to simply magic up more land that is walking distance from Canberra’s city centre. We can increase the density in desirable locations but we cannot create more land.

It is also important to bear in mind that, as our city grows, our household size is also shrinking. People are choosing to spend their retirement in Canberra, and we need to ensure that people who are downsizing have housing options to age in place. If we have good downsizing options then this will free up our existing freestanding single residential houses.



The ACT government is also unlocking land supply through zoning changes that support greater density. This assists with supply and housing affordability. Contrary to the rhetoric from the opposition, urban densification is key to affordability. We have chosen this in a strategic way, and in strategic locations such as transport corridors and town centres. This reduces costs to ratepayers by more effectively using existing infrastructure. It reduces costs to families by ensuring that they have lower transport costs. It provides the opportunity for people to get a foot in the door of the property market or, alternatively, to downsize in locations that are close to shops, services and transport. It aids in liveability by reducing travel time and creating more time for family and other activities.

I am glad that the opposition has finally come clean on their opposition to a 70 per cent infill target. This motion is the opposition leader's personal commitment to endless urban sprawl and environmental destruction. Today she has committed to fundamentally changing the nature of the capital. Under the Liberals, it is clear that Canberra will no longer be the bush capital; rather, it will be the urban sprawl capital. I am sure that my—

*Ms Lee interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Davis): Members on my left! Minister Gentleman, take your seat. Ms Lee, I have reminded you in particular that, as the sponsor of the motion, you have a right of reply at the end of the debate.

**Ms Lee:** If that is the case, Mr Assistant Speaker, can I invoke the point of order that Ms Berry did, and say that Mr Gentleman is making very smart comments about me—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lee, there is no point of order.

**Ms Lee:** that have some reflection on me. That is what I am getting at.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Please take your seat, Ms Lee. Ms Lee, there is no point of order. Minister Gentleman was reflecting on counter-policies, not individuals, so you know—

**Ms Lee:** He literally said that it was my personal—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** that is not a point of order. You know that is not a point of order, Ms Lee.

**Ms Lee:** He said those words, my personal—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lee.

**Ms Lee:** “The leader's personal”. That is what he said.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lee, there is no point of order. I am not ruling in your favour. I ask members on my left to remain silent while Minister Gentleman finishes his remarks.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Not only are the Canberra Liberals committed to destroying the environment but this policy will also drive up the cost of living for Canberrans. It will do this by making them live away from work. It will erode liveability.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Minister Gentleman, just one moment.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Could we stop the clock?

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** I am not a parent but I am starting to relate to parents in the room. Members on my left, please.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Members on my left, please, I do not want to remind you again. I appreciate that there is a lot of spirited debate on this subject, but please do not take advantage of the relative naivete of the assistant chair. Keep your remarks to yourself and allow Minister Gentleman to conclude.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Mr Assistant Speaker, I have already lost four minutes. Could we stop the clock, please?

**Mr Cain:** A point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Minister Gentleman, there is a point of order.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** If we could stop the clock, please—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** We can stop the clock. Mr Cain on a point of order.

**Mr Cain:** Surely, the minister, when describing our policies, should describe what they actually are.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Mr Cain, I just ruled on that point of order. Please take your seat. That is not a point of order.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Mr Assistant Speaker, I will go on. We have heard the opposition talk about bulldozing forests. We want to ensure that we do not have ghettos in those areas. Ms Lee will need to provide services that our community needs—electrical infrastructure, roads, schools, public transport, medical services and the like. They are very expensive, the further away that you build. The costs of this will fall to all ratepayers. But you cannot bulldoze with less rates. It is the magic pudding economics that failed her predecessors, and it fails her today.

Lastly, Ms Lee's commitment in this motion will not impact house prices in existing suburbs. There is a simple factor of supply and demand in those suburbs, as I have talked about—location. The only way to moderate prices in these suburbs is for the federal government to act in their taxation policy. They must remove the incentives that favour investors and existing landholders, and they must provide opportunities for Canberrans to downsize and stay in their existing communities.

Currently, the federal government's settings do not incentivise this. If you do not believe me then just have a look across Australia. The clear theme to affordability issues in existing suburbs is right across Australia. I will be reminding our constituents in the south about the Liberals' commitment to bulldoze to the west of Murrumbidgee, and I will be out there reminding Canberrans that every nature reserve, park, green space and bushland they love will likely be bulldozed by the Canberra Liberals—

**Ms Lee:** Telling lies? Is that what you will be doing?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** and that this will not have any impact on any prices in existing suburbs.

**Ms Lee:** Telling lies.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Mr Assistant Speaker, Ms Lee has just said that I will be telling lies to our Canberra community. You cannot do that in the middle of a debate. I would ask you to ask her to withdraw that.

**Ms Lee:** Mr Assistant Speaker, I accepted your ruling, when Mr Gentleman has gone on and on—

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lee—

**Ms Lee:** with complete mistruths about what I, apparently, have intentions to do.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Ms Lee, take a seat, please.

**Ms Lee:** And his time is up.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Take your seat. We have reached this situation because Minister Berry earlier brought up standing order 55 in a point of order. I ruled against Minister Berry, I ruled against you, Ms Lee, and I ruled against Mr Cain when he tried the same thing. However, on this occasion, I think the Leader of the Opposition knows that to call a colleague a liar in this place or to accuse them of lying—

**Ms Lee:** I did not call him a liar. I said, "Is that what you are going to be doing? Are you going to be lying?" He can answer the question.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** is unparliamentary, and I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw.

**Ms Lee:** I did not call him a liar, Mr Assistant Speaker. I said, “Is that what you are going to be doing? Are you going to be lying?”

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** I am asking you to withdraw.

**Ms Lee:** If you want me to withdraw that, I will withdraw that, but I did not call him a liar.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you. Mr Gentleman, have you concluded or do you require an extension of time?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have; thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.51):** What we see here today is the amazing contrast between us and them. Earlier in the month, the Chief Minister said that the ACT government’s decisions have no impact on the price of housing in Canberra. That is what he said in the hearing. He said something like, “Yes, it is tough, but it is not my problem.” Today, the Leader of the Opposition has a motion that steps up to the plate and accepts that the ACT government should—and must—take some responsibility in putting downward pressure on housing affordability in whatever way it can!

This is one of the biggest issues facing our city today, and for the Chief Minister to say that it has nothing to do with him and his government is just ludicrous. It is absolutely ludicrous. This government should be focusing on the things that are within its control. If Labor and Greens do not have the will—because that is what it gets down to here—to make change in this space, we are happy to highlight what they should be doing, because this is desperately important to so many people.

How many times does the Liberal Party need to bring this issue to the forefront before there is meaningful action? How many times do people of Canberra who are in search of a home—whether it be a first home, a family home, or a forever home—need to bring to our attention the crisis facing their house-owning prospects or even their renting prospects? Surely this government cannot continue to ignore the people. The government can reject us all it likes, but it cannot continue to reject the people of Canberra.

In its original form, this motion more than anything else signals that there is an issue that is as important to us as it is to the people of Canberra. I lived in hope that Labor and the Greens would think twice before amending it but, as is often the way in here, we have seen a knock-down-rebuild of what was probably a nice four-bedroom home on a sensible block into a multiunit! That is what has happened here. I note that the first “calls on” from Ms Berry goes straight to the commonwealth government—the feds. I ask: what on earth are Labor nurses going to do if Albo ends up in the Lodge? If that occurs—note that I say “if”—whose fault will everything be? That is going to be pretty interesting. The government would have to find some new writers then.

And when it comes to writers, I want to know who wrote paragraph (b), which calls on the ACT government to continue to deliver land and housing options that provide diverse and affordable housing options to give Canberrans choices. That is straight out of a stand-up comedy routine! When I read that I thought, “No, that cannot possibly be the case.” The state of the housing market in the ACT is not okay, it is not improving, and you cannot continue to turn a blind eye to that problem.

Many Canberrans want to buy a detached home. That was reported in the Winton report, which showed that the majority of Canberrans wanted detached housing. The government did not listen. They have chosen their own narrative to conclude that most people want medium-to-high-density dwellings. We continue to hear this argument—we heard it from Ms Clay, Ms Vassarotti and Mr Gentleman—that it is about the climate impact of urban sprawl.

Again, I say that if the market is calling for detached housing and we do not deliver that to the market, the market will go to South Jerrabomberra, Googong and Bungendore and purchase detached housing there, so the commute into Canberra will be greater. The climate does not stop at the ACT border. The arguments about endless urban sprawl if we do not provide detached housing to the market are ridiculous, because the urban sprawl will just get greater and greater. Where in the housing strategy is there a safe backyard for children to play? Where is there a safe backyard for dogs to roam? Where is there a secure yard for family gatherings of more than five people that simply will not fit on a standard apartment building balcony, if you are lucky to get a balcony?

Canberrans want housing. This was further noticeable in the recent land release ballots, which we have covered off in this debate today. I think the challenge is far from over for many Canberrans trying to buy a detached home or a block of land to build, and many of them are moving interstate to buy in areas that are affordable for them and yet are still 30 to 60 minutes’ drive away from Canberra.

One of the things that has not been talked about much of late is how much those people have been affected by the skyrocketing petrol prices. I was speaking to a business owner the other day who told me most of his staff live in interstate venues. A stack of them live in Bungendore and some of them live in Goulbourn. He is staring down the barrel of having to come up with pay subsidies so that his staff can still get to work. These people purchased a home way over yonder because they could not afford one in the ACT, and now they cannot afford the commute.

The lack of land release each year, with the amount of people registering, should be enough evidence that this government is not doing enough. There are three political parties represented in this parliament, but it is very clear that only the Canberra Liberals are serious about addressing the housing affordability crisis. We will not be supporting Ms Berry’s amendment.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (3.57): I thank Ms Lee for bringing this very important motion before the Assembly. There is a housing affordability crisis in Canberra. This motion calls on the ACT government to acknowledge this reality. As I

repeatedly try to teach my children, it is impossible to begin fixing a problem until one is willing to admit that the problem exists. Sadly, like children, the government have too often followed the path of near or even outright denial.

I know, however, that over the weekend, Chief Minister Barr came close to making this acknowledgement. In the *Canberra Times*, he said:

It's pretty clear if you are on a high income, housing affordability is not an issue in Canberra. The issue is if you're not on a high outcome.

What a revealing statement! According to Mr Barr, there is no housing affordability crisis for people on fat paycheques. The crisis only exists for those Canberrans whose incomes are not so high. This statement perfectly sums up the prevailing attitude of those opposite, who, for many years now, have governed and made important decisions on behalf of financially comfortable Canberrans whilst ignoring the economic turmoil that those decisions have visited upon everyone else in this territory.

I remind this government that although those struggling to keep a roof over their heads may not be in the majority in the ACT, they are real people who matter, and there are more than a few of them. As last year's *Vital Signs Canberra* report revealed, one third of Canberrans are just squeaking by. The December 2020 rental affordability index found that a couple with children pay a higher proportion of their income on rent in the ACT than anywhere else in Australia, including greater Sydney. This is true whether only one parent works or both parents work.

Another favourite tactic of children is to try to blame the problem entirely on someone else. We have seen this tactic employed so often in this Assembly that at this point it has become a farce, with both Labor and Greens determined to blame their policy failures on the commonwealth in whatever way they think people might be gullible enough to believe. Consequently, this motion calls on the ACT government to acknowledge that, whilst there are macroeconomic settings that affect house prices across the nation, this government has a role to play in ensuring that the supply of land for housing—over which it has complete monopoly control—keeps up with demand. Instead, we have a government that sets unacceptably low land release targets and then fails to meet its own targets year after year. This would be funny in a sitcom about an embarrassingly incompetent and painfully out-of-touch government! In real life it is tragic, and it is harming the one-third of Canberrans on lower incomes who Mr Barr glossed over in his recent comments.

I am certain, however, that Mr Barr understands the central role of his own government. At least he does when it suits the point he is trying to make at the time. For example, just last week the Chief Minister told the *Canberra Times*, “Almost everything that affects your day-to-day life is delivered by state and territory governments.” This was, he said, an important lesson in national civics. Indeed! But as soon as the topic turns to this government's woeful record on housing affordability, an issue that certainly affects the day-to-day lives of many Canberrans, suddenly those opposite are willing to cast aside basic civics in favour of shifting blame.

To the ACT government: enough with your excuses. Stop it. It is time for you to grow up, accept the responsibility you know you have as the government of this territory and do something. This includes using the policy levers that you know you have to help ease the housing affordability crisis gripping this territory. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.03): Maybe I should be more surprised, but sadly I am not. Everything that has been spoken about in this debate by members of the government, Labor and the Greens, was just so predictable. We get the standard lecture, and they divert, “It’s not our fault; it’s the commonwealth government’s fault.” But the economic reality that this Labor-Greens government fails to acknowledge, to accept and even to see, is that there is a factor that is within its control. Instead of blaming everything else, all of the factors that are outside their control, how about looking at some of the levers that the ACT government actually control? And what do we get? An amendment from Ms Berry which puts forward one solution, which is—do you know what?—to go and lobby the federal government to waive our historical debt.

This is a government that cannot balance the books. It is now crying poor and is expecting the federal government to fix the problems, to get it out of the predicament that it finds itself in. Instead of complaining about factors that are beyond this government’s control, how about focusing on the factors that it actually does control, like land supply? This is a government that is so utterly and completely out of touch with reality that it cannot even accept the figures in black and white: over 12,000 applications for 101 blocks in Whitlam; over 8,000 applications for 71 blocks in Macnamara; and over 7,000 applications for 115 blocks in Taylor. These figures do not lie.

Whilst we are on figures—I noticed that Ms Berry threw a lot of them around—out of the 4,171 blocks that this government intends to release over the next five years, let us also be clear and transparent about what those blocks mean. That is about 800 blocks a year. Twenty-five per cent have actually been allocated for detached housing. When you look at those figures, they are woefully, inadequately—and almost criminally—low. As we know from experience, the government cannot even meet those targets.

It is funny, because all members in this chamber went to great lengths to say, “Yes, there is a housing crisis; let’s all acknowledge that there’s a housing crisis.” Yet this government could not even bring itself to agree to the very first paragraph of my motion, which literally states, “The ACT is experiencing a housing crisis.” This goes to show the attitude of members opposite! They cannot even bring themselves to agree to that one paragraph. You would think that is the one thing that we all agree on, and apparently they do. But they could not bring themselves to do it.

What we heard today from all three ministers were condescending remarks, a lecture and a whinge about how: “It’s all too hard. You guys don’t understand; you just think it’s all simple and you just come up with some simple solutions.” That is absolutely disrespectful to the tens of thousands of Canberrans that have been putting their hands up, desperately hoping that they are the one in 100—the one in how many!—that might actually get access to a block.

There was talk about, “You don’t understand. Don’t you realise that we need infrastructure and the protection of our local environment?” That is a given. Any local government that has responsibility for having development will take those factors into consideration. Why? Because we are a great and beautiful city. Our people expect nothing else. That is a given.

With respect to Minister Gentleman, I do not even know where to go, in responding to his work of fiction. But to say that we have not even thought about these considerations is actually laughable. This is how out of touch these ministers are with the reality.

Everyone talked about choice. “It’s about choice.” Let us ask the tens of thousands of Canberrans. Is it a choice when you are one of 12,000 bidding for one of 100 blocks? Is it a choice when you are one of 8,000 bidding for one of 71 blocks? Is it a choice when you are one of 7,000 bidding for 115 blocks? That is not a choice, and this government should be ashamed of itself for even contemplating saying that that is a choice. Deliberately strangling land supply, resulting in tens of thousands of Canberrans bidding for the meagre blocks that are available, driving up the prices, and then saying, “Yes, it’s a choice,” is so incredibly disrespectful to our community.

This is a government that is so utterly and completely out of touch with reality that it cannot even acknowledge the magnitude of the problem that we have. Only last week, in an address to a Committee for Economic Development of Australia event, the Chief Minister said—and I know Mrs Kikkert referred to this, but I have to say it again:

It’s pretty clear if you’re on a high income, housing affordability is not an issue in Canberra.

“Not an issue in Canberra.” The qualifier here, of course, being “if you’re on a high income”. Is this not the Chief Minister lecturing to Canberrans, “Hey, just get a better job”? It is so arrogant, and this type of arrogance and out-of-touch comment could only be topped by the Chief Minister during annual reports hearings, when he basically shrugged and said that businesses should just pay staff more. These are businesses who, especially for the last two years, have had to remortgage their own homes to keep their doors open and to keep staff employed.

Talk about arrogance; talk about being out of touch. And it is this kind of attitude from the head of this government that has resulted in policies that see tens of thousands of Canberrans lining up for those meagre allocations of blocks.

Of course, perhaps the only other explanation is that he is heartless and he does not care about the Canberrans who actually want to dream of owning their own home. Perhaps it is a reality that this policy is driven, of course, by the Greens and by Labor’s desire to keep their political partner happy, as opposed to serving the needs and wants of the Canberra community.

The ACT government does not control all levers but it does control some. I have acknowledged numerous times that this will not be a miracle fix overnight and that there are many complex factors that go into housing affordability. But for ministers in



this place to stand up and say that they have no factor, no role and no control whatsoever on housing supply is laughable; it is utterly ridiculous.

Minister Berry says, “Do you know what? We only control two per cent of the land sales.” That is utterly ridiculous when they have control over the land they release to the private sector. It is like saying, “Do you know what? As the ACT government, we only control 60 per cent of the budget because we give some of the rest of it to community groups and organisations. We don’t control the budget.” It is an utterly ridiculous statement to make, and Canberrans will not be fooled.

It is absolutely clear from this debate—from the numerous debates that we have had, all initiated by the Canberra Liberals—about housing affordability that Labor and the Greens have no appetite and no will to do anything to ease the burden of unaffordable housing that we have in the ACT. The Canberra Liberals are the only party that takes seriously the concerns of tens of thousands of Canberrans when it comes to housing affordability. We will not be supporting Ms Berry’s amendment.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 13

Noes 6

|             |                  |             |
|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| Ms Berry    | Mr Gentleman     | Mr Cain     |
| Mr Braddock | Ms Orr           | Mr Hanson   |
| Ms Burch    | Mr Pettersson    | Mrs Kikkert |
| Ms Cheyne   | Mr Steel         | Ms Lawder   |
| Ms Clay     | Ms Stephen-Smith | Ms Lee      |
| Ms Davidson | Ms Vassarotti    | Mr Parton   |
| Mr Davis    |                  |             |

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Climate change—carbon footprint calculator**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.18): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government is committed to taking action for climate change adaptation and resilience, including having transitioned to 100 percent renewable energy;
- (b) the ACT Government has in place a range of robust programs to support households and businesses to lower their energy consumption, including through ACTSmart and the Climate Choices program;

- (c) ACT Government business support for climate change action includes the community clubs program, business sustainability awards, a business recycling program, business rebates for energy and water efficiency upgrades, “Solar for business” program, a lighting efficiency web tool for businesses to check the efficiency of their lighting setup and the “Straws Suck” campaign;
  - (d) there are many organisations and stakeholder groups in the ACT undertaking important work to help individuals, households and businesses transition to renewable energy sources, lower their transport emissions and take other climate change activities;
  - (e) there are many online carbon footprint calculator tools, however:
    - (i) the vast majority of these are customised for household use; and
    - (ii) there is no clear, authoritative carbon calculator for businesses in the ACT (nor in any Australian jurisdiction or at the federal level);
  - (f) the effects of COVID have had a profound impact on our local businesses and the ACT Government has had in place a range of support measures;
  - (g) there is opportunity for continued assistance for local businesses by helping them reduce their running costs, through energy savings and other environmental initiatives; and
  - (h) a single, authoritative online portal and carbon calculator for ACT businesses, together with guidance to help businesses implement actions, would be a positive contribution and support for local businesses, while also contributing to positive environmental outcomes; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) as a founding member of the Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum, bring forward the development or adoption of a carbon footprint calculator for businesses as an item for the Forum to investigate, including consideration of:
    - (i) the potential for Forum members to collaborate in creating a calculator for businesses across member jurisdictions;
    - (ii) existing tools that could be adopted or adapted for use by businesses operating in the ACT;
    - (iii) providing a clear pathway and guidance to assist businesses to reduce and/or offset their carbon emissions; and
    - (iv) an accreditation scheme, rewards and incentives, promotional opportunities, and/or gamification for commitment to business carbon reduction goals; and
  - (b) report back during the November 2022 Legislative Assembly sittings.

I am really excited to table in the Assembly today a motion that will provide ongoing support to our local businesses across the ACT. A constituent recently reached out to me, stating:

I’m a local business owner who wants to move our business towards carbon neutrality. However, there is no clear pathway or guidance for businesses to do

this, provided by the federal or state governments; just a lot of different companies offering different services locally and overseas.

It would be great if there was a site for ACT businesses, provided by the ACT Government, to be able to calculate their carbon and sign up to reduce or totally offset their carbon emissions—especially for small and medium sized businesses.

It's a confusing space and we don't have the size to engage a consultant to formally organise reducing our carbon. Even calculating our carbon usage in terms of energy is not easy.

If the ACT, as a climate leader, could assist businesses through a platform and suggest private offset providers to commit to reducing their carbon this would make a great difference.

If, as a business owner, you could easily calculate and commit to a range of carbon goals this would get a lot of uptake and be in line with the ACT Government's commitments.

This got me thinking, and I did some research and fact-checking. The business owner was right. We have an excellent online carbon calculator for households in the ACT, the home energy assessment tool, provided by the ACT government through the Actsmart team within EPSDD. It helps households, particularly renters, to identify the quickest and most effective ways to reduce their energy bills, improve the comfort of their homes and receive a tailored report on how to reduce their energy costs.

Further to this, the Actsmart team also offers a wealth of resources, tips and advice for households about heating, lighting, draught-proofing and more. There are also the Sustainable Home Advice Program; the Sustainable Household Scheme, with a variety of subsidies, rebates and incentives available; and the Actsmart Eco Challenge. I commend everyone involved in these programs across the ACT government. They are a fantastic resource and a critical help for households to contribute to our net zero emissions policy.

For businesses, it seems that individual service providers nationally and globally provide some online calculators to assist businesses in understanding their energy and carbon costs and ideas to help reduce these—and, of course, expert consultancy assistance for a fee.

The ACT government offers a wide range of business support for climate change action, including the community clubs program; the Business Sustainability Awards; a business recycling program; business rebates for energy and water efficiency upgrades; the Solar for Business Program; a lighting efficiency web tool for businesses to check the efficiency of their lighting set-up; and the Straws Suck campaign. This is all great, and an online carbon footprint calculator for local businesses seems the next logical step.

This is why I am calling on the ACT government today, through this motion, to investigate the development of an online portal as a one-stop shop for local businesses to calculate their carbon footprints and help them reduce their energy costs financially

and environmentally. I see this as a win-win-win: for government, support for local businesses and for local businesses to be able to reduce their running costs while doing something positive for the environment. This benefits us all. It is a constructive way to provide ongoing assistance and support to ACT businesses, who are still reeling from the effects of COVID, while also providing positive environmental outcomes.

The ACT government is always looking for new and innovative ways to support local businesses, and never has this been more important. Throughout the pandemic the government has supported local businesses through a wide range of programs, including the Small Business Hardship Scheme; the COVID-19 business support grants; commercial tenancy support measures; waivers on food business registration, outdoor dining and liquor licensing fees; payroll tax exemptions for apprentices and trainees; and rental relief for tenants of ACT government-owned properties.

As we start to move towards a new normal in the ACT, it is important that we continue to support businesses through programs and activities that are financially sustainable for the ACT government and community. It is equally important that these programs and support measures have practical, pragmatic and tangible outcomes while providing long-lasting solutions.

We already have over 900 businesses across the ACT and in Queanbeyan signed up to be better business recyclers. This is great and demonstrates the great interest in our community for this kind of challenge. To uphold our ACT government commitment to reduce carbon emissions, we need to support local businesses as best we can. We need to cut straight to the chase and create one clear, authoritative reference point for local businesses, where they can submit some basic information, calculate their carbon footprint and be guided on when, where and how to make the best upgrades and savings.

I envisage that local businesses will be able to use the carbon calculator to potentially help with things like lighting upgrades, the installation of solar panels, installing insulation, upgrading appliances and draught-proofing, amongst other things. I note that many businesses operate leased accommodation across the ACT. This is an important factor in considering the development of this online calculator.

The Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum was founded in November last year—initiated by the ACT, South Australian and New South Wales governments—to work together on solutions, to prioritise policies and to develop practical solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving net zero emissions. Subnational governments across Australia and internationally are invited to join the policy forum, and I am proud, and not surprised, that the ACT government is one of the founding members. Led by our progressive and forward-thinking Chief Minister, we have some of the country's most ambitious climate change policies and activities.

This motion I am presenting to the Assembly today will help ACT local businesses to contribute to our net zero emissions target. The motion calls for the involvement of the policy forum, including consideration of the ways in which members of the Net

Zero Emissions Policy Forum can collaborate and share resources, as well as looking into existing tools that can be adopted and adapted to the local ACT context.

One ambition of the forum is to provide a shared suite of tools across jurisdictions to address the policy challenges of achieving net zero emissions. An online carbon calculator for local businesses, tailored for regional or unique circumstances, lends itself very well to this vision and will be a good early contribution to the work of this group from the ACT government. Through this motion, consideration will also be given to ensure that local ACT businesses have a pathway and clear guidance to assist them to reduce or offset their carbon emissions.

I am also calling on the ACT government to consider an accreditation scheme, rewards and incentives, promotional opportunities, and/or gamification. This will help businesses to engage with the calculator and commit to their carbon reduction goals. Gamification has proven an effective method of committing to and achieving goals, whether they be environmental or related to health and fitness, financial savings, productivity, e-commerce and business rewards programs.

In exploring opportunities to assist businesses to offset their carbon emissions, I would anticipate that this would be a suitable suggestion for programs and activities which ACT businesses can contribute, endorsed by the ACT government and the Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the many, many businesses across the ACT taking positive, constructive steps to lower their greenhouse gas emissions. I want to thank the many organisations and groups in the ACT who are assisting local businesses in their endeavours to become more environmentally friendly.

Mr Deputy Speaker and colleagues, the development of an online carbon calculator is a practical solution that will be easily accessed by all local businesses in the ACT. Thank you.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (4.28): I thank Dr Paterson for bringing the motion forward this afternoon. As she has indicated, as a founding member of the Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum, the ACT can work with other Australian subnational governments and, indeed, international partners to develop practical solutions to the challenges of climate change and to accelerate the transition to a net zero emissions future.

The motion before us this afternoon calls on the ACT government to take the concept of an online carbon calculator for businesses to the forum for consideration on how it could be developed and implemented. I am very happy to do so, and I thank Dr Paterson for the suggestion.

It is fair to observe that there are a range of carbon footprint calculators that are currently available online. However, they are predominantly focused on the emissions associated with an individual's lifestyle and resource consumption. While these calculators can be applied to estimate emissions from business operations, more

complex or larger organisations would certainly benefit from engaging in a specialist carbon advisory service. However, there is considerable merit for small business to be able to benefit from a single, authoritative carbon calculator that is more specific to their operations.

In a jurisdiction of our size, creating our own carbon calculator that is specific to both our climate and businesses may be prohibitively expensive. The Net Zero Emissions Policy Forum provides a mechanism for state, regional and subnational governments across the world to exchange knowledge, capabilities and policy resources to address common challenges. This idea, I think, is exactly why the forum was established, to enable jurisdictions to not have to do everything on their own and to share knowledge. The objective of the forum is to provide, effectively, a library of best practice emissions reduction policies, a platform for governments to connect with their peers, and to facilitate joint problem solving through interjurisdictional taskforces and collaborative work.

The ACT, as a founding member, can suggest priority areas for collaboration and encourage member jurisdictions to pursue the development of a single authoritative carbon calculator for Australian businesses. I hope to have the opportunity to call for consideration of this initiative, as a founding member of the forum. We are currently working with jurisdictions to find a date when everyone can attend for the first meeting of the forum. It is hoped to be next month, in April. This meeting is intended to determine priority focus areas and inform the future workplan of the policy forum.

So this is a timely motion. It gives me, as the ACT's representative on that forum, hopefully a tripartisan priority to take forward to the initial meeting. The intent of the forum, as it has been established across party lines, is, as much as we possibly can, to put party politics aside to work on practical solutions for our respective communities. This motion has been put forward in that spirit, and I hope that it will be supported by the Assembly. I commend it to you all.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (4.32): I move the following amendment:

Omit paragraph (1)(a), substitute:

“(a) the ACT Legislative Assembly has tri-partisan commitment for climate action and taking necessary future steps to achieving net zero emissions by 2045;

(ab) the costs and benefits associated with businesses reducing their carbon emissions;”.

The Canberra Liberals support Dr Paterson's motion in principle, but we felt it was very important for the motion to accurately reflect the tri-partisan support for action on climate change that we have in this place. All members in this chamber agree that action on climate change is vital for the future of our city, our country, and, indeed, our world. The Canberra Liberals have made our position clear on this.

For years, all three parties have demonstrated their commitment to taking action on climate change and giving the Canberra community opportunities to make the changes

to their lifestyles where they can. But we must also recognise that the ability to make significant changes to our lifestyle requires a certain level of privilege—the privilege that certainly all members in this chamber enjoy. For many Canberrans, it is simply not possible to lay out tens of thousands of dollars on an electric vehicle. For the 38,000 Canberrans living in poverty, electricity prices rising by hundreds of dollars per year could literally mean the difference between putting food on the table and not.

The same applies to businesses in the ACT, especially small and medium enterprises, and particularly on the back of some of the most challenging years they have faced, and many are still facing. Dr Paterson's motion is focussed on empowering Canberra businesses to look at their carbon footprint. It gives them the tools to reduce it where they can, rather than imposing harsh mandates. Every Canberra business is unique and has individual opportunities and challenges to reducing its carbon emissions. Certainly the conversations that I and my team have had with businesses across Canberra—Ms Lawder and I were talking about this earlier—have shown that an overwhelming majority want to reduce their carbon emissions. They want to make an impact. But it has to be realistic, and it has to be viable.

Not all organisations, of course, are at the same stage of the journey, and we cannot expect smaller businesses to have the resources and expertise that bigger companies have access to. We need to demystify carbon measurement and make it really simple and straightforward for businesses of all sizes to understand what they can do. That is why it is important for a carbon footprint calculator to also consider the costs for businesses to reduce or offset their carbon emissions. By including a cost consideration in Dr Paterson's motion, the net zero emissions policy forum will be able to develop a comprehensive guide for businesses, giving them the information and tools to reduce their carbon footprint in an appropriate and sustainable way. That is the crux of my amendment: to include those aspects.

I thank Dr Paterson for bringing this motion today and look forward to continuing to work with all members in this chamber to ensure that the ACT is at the forefront of climate action.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (4.36): I rise to speak in support of the motion and the amendments, noting that many of the comments that I am making today would usually be made by Minister Rattenbury in his role as minister responsible for climate and emissions reduction. He is unable to be in the chamber today.

As I noted, we support the motion as an initial investigation into whether such a tool would add to our emissions reduction efforts and whether it would be a useful option to support businesses wanting to reduce their emissions. The ACT government is already doing a lot to support ACT businesses that want to cut their energy costs, to reduce waste and to reduce emissions. There are a range of programs currently on offer that Dr Paterson has already touched on. I would like to provide just a little bit more detail about some of these programs, as they provide a great foundation on which to build our support for business.

Firstly, in relation to energy and water, the ACT government runs a free program for small businesses providing onsite energy and water assessment; a tailored report outlining opportunities to reduce electricity and gas bills; and a 50-50 rebate capped at \$5,000 to replace inefficient gas and electrical appliances with efficient electrical ones, and upgrades including to lighting, space heating and cooling equipment, refrigeration systems, hot water systems, insulation and appliances. Since 1 July 2012, 1,200 businesses have participated, with 600 businesses having claimed a rebate. Businesses who undertake an upgrade save on average \$2,400 per year in energy bills. The program is capturing data on an annual basis the energy savings around CO<sub>2</sub> and what these savings are providing in terms of bills.

In relation to waste, we also run the business recycling program, which provides free advice, education and signage to assist with reducing waste and increasing recycling. Over 960 businesses across the Canberra region are participating in the program. With dedicated support from the team, accredited businesses have all achieved reductions in waste to landfill—some over 90 per cent. Data collected through the participation of the program, including for paper and cardboard, mixed recycling, organics sent for recycling and waste to landfill, is used to calculate emissions reduction achieved from each business.

In relation to transport, EPSDD's fleet advisory service supports Canberra businesses and community organisations to transition their vehicle fleets to zero emission vehicles. The service provides free, independent and targeted information on, and experiences with, zero emission vehicles and associated technologies to give equipment and support for businesses to adopt these vehicles in their fleet. The program is being publicly launched with Minister Rattenbury on 4 April 2022. Further support will be provided in 2022 to community organisations with access to the sustainable household scheme providing interest-free loans of up to \$15,000 to help with the purchase of electric vehicles for this sector.

The community clubs program is a free program for ACT community clubs who have, or have had, a class C gaming licence prior to 1 July 2021. Participating clubs received a free onsite energy assessment, a tailored report outlining opportunities to reduce electricity and gas bills, and a co-contribution rebate capped at \$75,000 to replace inefficient gas and electric equipment with efficient electric equipment. Small clubs that spend less than \$400,000 on electricity are required to invest one dollar for every dollar of program support, while large clubs—those that have more than \$400,000 in electricity bills—are required to invest three dollars for every one dollar of program support. To date, 16 clubs have registered, with 12 having received onsite assessments.

In closing, I note that we know that many ACT business want to reduce emissions, reduce energy costs and improve sustainability, and we remain committed to supporting them to achieve these goals. Thank you.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.41): I would like to thank Dr Paterson for bringing this motion forward today. It is really good to be part of a government that is working on so many solutions. We know that we are in a climate crisis, and it is really important



that we get everyone at every level—government, businesses and people in the community—working together to try and deal with this crisis. I am really happy to be part of a government that has brought in 100 per cent renewable electricity, and I would really like to see this calculator go a little bit further than electricity. We already have renewable electricity, so we do not need to reduce any further the carbon footprint on that. We can make great gains with more efficiency, and we can make really big strides forward in that, but we need to be looking at our whole footprint at this stage of the game.

Minister Rattenbury commissioned the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment to take a more holistic view of our carbon footprint, and Minister Vassarotti tabled that report at the end of last year. It was a really interesting report. It showed that our total carbon footprint in Canberra is actually 16 times higher than just the little bit we have been dealing with so far—the electricity, transport and waste—and we have good, solid, mature policy on electricity, transport on waste. We have 100 per cent renewable electricity. That is fantastic. We have a lot of really good programs for efficiency and batteries. We have agreement, and we are now moving ahead, with helping people to transition off gas in an orderly way to make sure that we are not replacing old gas appliances with new gas appliances. That is the best, cheapest and easiest way to do that. We have a lot of things going in the right direction there.

We have a bit more trouble with transport. We know that transport is a really big part of our emissions footprint at the moment, and we are trying as hard as we can to give people lots of good choices so that they can shift to zero emissions transport. It is good to see so many good choices. EVs are wonderful. They are expensive; not everybody can afford one and there is zero emissions public transport—buses and the light rail. Zero emissions active transport is the original zero emissions transport, as is simply travelling less. COVID brought us a whole new world of flexible working arrangements—working from home and simply driving around less. These have come at a really good time, with petrol and diesel prices going up. We understand that we need to make these changes for so many different reasons.

We also have some really good policies coming up with respect to waste, which has been a bit of a problem for a lot of us who come from the recycling sector. We have been worrying about our waste for a long time. We are finally rolling ahead with a FOGO trial, and that is going to make sure that we are no longer sending food waste to landfill, where it releases methane, which is a really potent carbon gas—a greenhouse gas. It really good to see that rolling out. We have a Love Food Hate Waste program that is also helping us reduce our food waste, but we need to crack on and start dealing with the rest of the footprint.

Before having this role, I ran a carbon diet project, where I cut the footprint of my household by 75 per cent by running different experiments. It was an interesting experience. It showed that it is quite a complicated field if you are coming into it new. There is a lot of information out there, and I understand the need to try and synthesise some of that and make it a bit accessible and a bit easier for people to understand, but it also shows that we have a lot of problems in our society with consumption. There are a lot of areas where we can make changes. Most of those areas, I am pleased to

say, will lead to a richer and cheaper lifestyle—if you can have both of those things in a mixed metaphor in one sentence! My family found that we spent much less money. We worked out what we valued, and we did more of that. We cut out the junk and we thought hard about some things—things that a lot of people in our society have known for a long time are high-impact activities, but which the government and the economy have not made much effort to focus attention on.

Flights have a really high impact. Food waste has a really high impact, and using different types of food can give us much better meals and better health while having a much lower impact. The Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment highlighted the general consumption of stuff. She looked at our built environment, what we build our buildings with, what we wear, the clothing we buy and the food we buy. All of that stuff has a big impact. The good news is that any carbon calculator will probably, first and foremost, follow the hierarchy that we know is established in this field, which is that first of all you avoid, you reduce and then you run through a whole lot of ways to swap out, look at what you need and what you do not need, and look at better options. At the very bottom of that hierarchy you think about offsetting. It is really important that we make sure that we guide people through that sensible hierarchy and that we help people avoid creating the carbon in the first place and run through good decision making.

It is also important that we remember that we need a just transition as we move into a cleaner and greener economy. This is a bit of a restructure. We are changing our lifestyles and our consumption patterns, and we need to bring people along. We need to make sure that everybody can afford a realistic and reasonable lifestyle as we do that, and we need to help people understand so that they can plan for the future. It is about making smart choices and just transitions. As with our gas, it is about replacing old appliances with new electric ones. As with our transport, it is about thinking ahead and making the smart choice about the right type of zero emissions transport for you when it is time to make that choice. So it is really good to do some forward planning on this.

I am happy to see this. I am doing a bit of work on the circular economy this year, and I am pleased to start talking about general consumption, and, in a realistic way, talking about the impact Canberrans have as a fairly wealthy, high-consumer city, because it is quite important that we link all of these things together and make sure that as we solve one environmental problem, we are not simply creating another environmental problem. It is really important that we help people make good choices that link things together and create a truly circular economy.

Now, it will be good if we can provide some useful information to the business community and make sure that we are putting that together in a smart way that fits in with government policies. It will be really important to make sure that we are always going back to first principles and giving people sensible policy choices rather than greenwashing. There is a bit of temptation in this area to give people quick and easy answers, and it is really important to help them through the journey, but I am genuinely confident that we can help every business in Canberra that wants to participate to massively reduce their footprint. I suspect that most of them will end up saving money and finding out that they have better ways to do the things now.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.48): I thank Dr Paterson for moving this important motion today on behalf of the businesses in her electorate and, indeed, across the ACT.

As we have heard, the ACT leads the nation in taking action to combat climate change and reduce our emissions. We know fundamentally how supportive the Canberra community is of clear, practical steps which reduce our carbon footprint. Canberra businesses, large and small, are identifying and implementing changes to their operations which give them and us a competitive advantage. As consumers look to spend their dollars with businesses that are committed to sustainability, those businesses benefit—and, of course, our environment and our broader community benefit.

It goes without saying that the pandemic has presented enormous challenges for Canberra businesses. Even as we have reopened, business owners are more time-poor than ever and are now facing supply chain issues and the national problem of labour shortages.

As Dr Paterson's motion highlights, a clear, authoritative carbon calculator for business in the ACT would help them to implement efficiency boosting changes. Helping businesses to cut their costs is beneficial and, when that is done in a way that also reduces their carbon footprint, of course, it is even better.

A central, authoritative calculator provides benefits without the burden; indeed, by providing clear guidance, it reduces existing burdens. Ways to further encourage businesses, in ways that benefit them and are easy, are also worthy of exploration, and I commend the inclusion of these suggestions.

I certainly note and support Ms Lee's and Ms Clay's comments before, that businesses need changes to be realistic, that businesses are at different stages, that the transition needs to be just and that the information and guidance need to be sensible and useful. I think the motion goes to that.

While our economic recovery is progressing well, we recognise the importance of maintaining the right environment for businesses to succeed and thrive, while encouraging behaviours that have the potential to provide serious benefits, including to businesses and the environment, and this motion strikes the right balance.

I would also like to remind members that the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service remains available, providing up to four hours of free specialist, tailored advice to businesses. Legal, financial, wellbeing and general advice is available through this ACT government funded program. It is delivered by the Canberra Business Enterprise Centre, and we thank them for their service. I thank and commend Dr Paterson for moving this important motion.

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.51): I would like to thank all of my colleagues for their support of this motion. When the constituent came to me with this issue, I thought, “This is a solution; there is something that we can do here, a very easy step, to achieve what could be really great outcomes for the ACT.” What was reiterated by everyone in their speeches is that we are about solutions on this; we are about reaching net zero emissions by 2045. I thank all of my colleagues today for speaking on this and supporting the motion.

I note and agree with Ms Lee and Minister Cheyne that every business in the ACT is unique. Many have expressed their desire to make these changes, and to tackle climate change and reduce their running costs. This is a way that we can support businesses to be able to do that.

In closing, I would like to thank the Assembly for supporting this motion today.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Ginninderra electorate—public art**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (4.53): I love public art and, if I had my way, we would have much more of it in Canberra. I have visited a number of cities both in Australia and overseas that are filled with intentional beauty, including colourful murals, playful water features, statues, kinetic sculptures and so forth. After such visits, I have often returned to Canberra with envy.

I realise that constructing fountains and commissioning sculptures can be expensive, but paint is not, and the most inviting cities in the world are often the most vibrant, with pops of colours almost everywhere. This includes murals painted on the sides of shops and other buildings or applied to public infrastructure such as bridges and walls.

Significantly, the word “public” means “of the people as a whole”, or “concerning ordinary people”. This means that, for public art to be truly public, it cannot be concentrated in only one section of a city, especially if that section is in the city’s commercial hub or governmental centre.

Art creates a sense of space that can be especially important in a place like Canberra, where our colonial past has disrupted ancient cultures and obscured the spirit of the country on which this city has been built. Art also tells stories. Such stories can both help define us and challenge our identities. They can inform us about the past and inspire us to create even better futures. Art exposes us to beauty and ideas outside ourselves. All of us, including our children, need to be exposed to beautiful things.

We need art in our suburbs, and not just in the centre of this city. Last month the ACT government announced the ACT Surface Festival, providing support for 35 artists to paint murals across 30 walls and structures. That is a lot of art, but was it scattered across the city? Did it bring colour to outer suburbs such as those in my electorate of Ginninderra? No. The stated purpose was “to enliven the built environment of Braddon, Civic and the national triangle”; in other words, the city centre.

I rise today to speak on behalf of the residents in my electorate who would love to see more public art in Belconnen. I share that desire. This could be as simple as supporting the painting of murals at local shops or on public infrastructure. I specifically urge the ACT government to support the equivalent of the recent Surface Festival across this city’s suburbs, including those in Belconnen.

### **Hamish Lindsay—tribute**

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (4.56): I rise today to remember the life of Hamish Lindsay, who passed away in January this year. Hamish was born in London in 1937 and he was a lover of both space and the ocean.

In September 1962, President John F Kennedy committed the United States to send a man to the moon and return him safely to earth, and so began the exciting era of space exploration. Hamish Lindsay played a role in this great adventure. Hamish trained at the Muehea tracking station near Perth, before moving to Carnarvon in WA for the Gemini missions. He then went to Honeysuckle Creek, where he was a space tracker for the Apollo missions, and then to the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex at Tidbinbilla. He later moved to the High Court in a technical role.

Hamish wrote a number of books and he was a prolific photographer. I was pleased to see Hamish at the 50th anniversary of the Apollo moon landing, a mission in which the Honeysuckle Creek tracking station near Canberra had an important role to play, and one that Hamish was, of course, involved in. Despite being unwell even at that time, Hamish was able to attend the anniversary in 2019, and I know how much that would have meant to him.

I am sure his loved ones will treasure his photographs in the years to come. He also wrote a number of books. Hamish certainly was an old-school space tracker. My thoughts are with his loved ones, ex-colleagues and everyone who knew him. Rest in peace, Hamish Lindsay.

### **Brindabella electorate—Lake Tuggeranong**

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will call Mr Davis on the condition that after his speech he can tag-team with me so that I can deliver one!

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (4.59): As a fellow member for Brindabella, I have got your back, Mr Deputy Speaker. In the context of embracing the very special part of the world that we call home, Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise yet again to speak about Lake Tuggeranong, because it would not be a sitting day in this place if I did not. I am

forming quite a habit. Indeed, what started as an interest for me at the beginning of this term has become a deep obsession, and I have an almost one-eyed, dogged commitment to improving the water quality and the lakeside amenity at Lake Tuggeranong for my constituents in Brindabella.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, the government committed \$4.5 million in the 2021-22 ACT budget for revitalisation of the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore. This is the culmination of investments that have been made in the Tuggeranong town centre over recent years, including the Anketell Street redevelopment and, recently, the laneways to the lake project. You might recall it from all of the construction that we experienced during those pre-poll weeks in the ACT election in 2020.

The revitalisation works are underway now that that money has been allocated and, as a local member, I took it upon myself to survey my constituents. I want to thank all 433 of them who took the time to complete the survey. What I think is really incredible and what I give a lot of credit to my constituents, the good people of Tuggeranong, for having done is that, in completing the survey, it was not a tick and flick, yes or no, I like or I do not like. People took the time to go in-depth in the free-form text box and give me some really explicit, really detailed proposals on how that \$4.5 million allocated in the budget can be spent in a way that best serves the people of Tuggeranong.

You heard me speak before about Mikey in Greenway, who has some very specific ideas on the type of bins the government should procure to stop birds from getting in and picking out the fast food. We have heard some really interesting proposals about innovative ways to filter the water through air, particularly on the northern edge, and these keep coming. I have completed the listening report and lodged it with the Minister for Transport and City Services, Minister Steel.

I have also provided the report to Minister Rattenbury, in his capacity as the Minister for Water, and his department officials because, unsurprisingly, Madam Speaker, from one member for Brindabella to another, water quality was something that many in my community wanted to speak to me about when it came to Lake Tuggeranong. As one of my constituents put it so aptly in responding to my survey, "What is the point of \$4.5 million in investment on a foreshore upgrade? Nobody will want to enjoy sitting next to stinky water." I think that does sum it up. It impresses upon me why, as a local member, I have a real responsibility to make sure that I am speaking not just with Minister Steel but with Minister Rattenbury, making sure that the works that they are doing in Lake Tuggeranong complement one another and ensure the continued liveability of that beautiful amenity in Tuggeranong.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank friends from the Tuggeranong Community Council, the Tuggeranong Lake Carers group and the Lake Tuggeranong Sea Scouts, who recently hosted the Clean Up Australia Day event on the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore.

In particular, I want to give a shout-out to Laura from my office. Many in this chamber know her fondly for some pretty impressive acrobatics that she managed to perform at the western edge of Lake Tuggeranong, getting an awful lot of plastics out

of one of the drains there. For anything that I can be accused of, do not let it be said that my team do not go above and beyond in everything that they do, including cleaning up the lake.

I want to encourage all of my constituents to contact me. While I will do these listening reports or these surveys on a particular area of government investment from time to time, because it is really important to concentrate the mind on particular things that the government is doing, my door, my website, my email and my Facebook page remain constantly open.

I was struck by the number of constituents who took the opportunity, in doing the Lake Tuggeranong survey, to raise with me other municipal issues around the area, be they in the Tuggeranong town centre or across the electorate of Brindabella. I want to encourage everybody to always get in touch with me with feedback. I can only be as good a member to the people of Tuggeranong as the feedback and advice that I receive from those constituents and then relay to decision-makers—cheque-signers in government, as it were, Madam Speaker—to make sure that the good stuff keeps flowing down south, where the sun shines brighter and, in a few weeks or months, the water will be a little cleaner as well.

### **Ginninderra electorate—Cook community gardens**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.04): On Sunday I had the honour of joining with the Cook community garden to celebrate their 21 years and to launch a beautiful short history of the gardens by Julie Gorrell titled *Bush to Bounty*.

Madam Speaker, many seasons have been captured in this tender and tended space—of plant and personal growth, and blossoms of friendship and produce. It is a thriving space, transformed from a bush paddock a little over two decades ago. As founder and original convenor Keith Colls tells it, they had wanted some small funding for one community garden, but the ACT government came back and said, “How about building three, with commensurate funding?” And they did.

With a can-do attitude, in a matter of days it and the gardeners in Kambah and Holder had the location scoped out and constructed, with the only professional help coming from a licensed plumber and draftsman. It is now firmly part of the landscape, the history and the fabric of Cook.

Members in this place may have visited on an open day or simply pondered what is going on when driving past on Bindubi Street or heard about it from a friend. Places like the Cook community garden become so special because of the people, and Cook is nothing without its members. Members and gardeners got it off the ground, literally, and are responsible for regular maintenance works and upgrades and willingly donate their time, materials and expertise—everything from irrigation, given that there is quite significant run-off from Mount Painter, to an upgraded pergola recently.

The *Bush to Bounty* booklet captures stories about individual members, who show that a garden is a place that is abundant with generosity. It is a hub for sharing: sharing gardening knowledge, swapping seeds and supplying vulnerable people in our city with fresh, locally grown vegetables through Canberra City Care.

It is a place for hobby—or perhaps obsession—and simply might be a space that is better suited than one’s own garden. It is also clearly a place of perseverance—against the elements, against pests of the animal and the human kind and in developing one’s own understanding of the plot and everything that might come of it.

The garden is clearly also a haven to disconnect but, importantly, one to reconnect, with friends or with skills or with preserving tradition or remembering family members. Most tellingly, it is a place of harmony and health and it is a tonic that suits any condition.

Julie’s booklet reflects all this and more. I really do commend her and all those who contributed to it. It is a wonderful snapshot of history and the communities that we do not just find ourselves in but create. It was wonderful to gather together to celebrate the 21st birthday with the launch of this booklet, and to hear from Keith and Julie, and early gardeners Raz and Janet.

My special thanks to all the members who made me so welcome on such a special occasion, and especially to convenor Peter Weddell and former convenor Mike Avent for their tour through the garden as well, which is a burst of colour and produce, from Jerusalem artichoke flowers to pumpkins and dill, tomatoes—still—and dahlias. It was a really lovely occasion, one that I found quite difficult to tear myself away from. I trust that they will continue to thrive there for decades more.

### **Aboriginal heritage—personal history**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (5.07): I have been on a bit of a journey in the last six months and I just wanted to share some of it with this chamber because I think it is important. For a long time, for many years, I have been aware of my Aboriginal heritage but I have never really attempted to find out much more about it. That is for a couple of reasons, and I guess one of them is that I feel like a bit of an impostor in the space.

In the last six months I have been encouraged by some of my relatives and some Aboriginal friends to examine it more closely. I think one of the other reasons I have not in the past is that my father—at the end of the day, there is no other way to explain it—was ashamed of his Aboriginality. It was just never discussed, Madam Speaker. It was never discussed, and it led to an information void for me.

And so, armed with my grandmother’s birth and marriage certificates, I wrote away to Aboriginal History WA to find out more about where I came from, and they certainly did not let me down. They sent me this amazing collection of documents in a wonderfully presented folder titled “My Family History”.



It shows that my father was the child of Adeline Ninyette, who was the daughter of Elsie Ninyette. Elsie's parents were Jack Ninyette and Rose Bennell. On the vertical pedigree chart, Jack Ninyette is listed as Jack Ninyette but also is listed with a tribal name that I would not even try to pronounce. And back it goes from there to the Winmars, the Cables and the Kicketts.

The folder contains pretty much every known official document pertaining to my Aboriginal ancestors, and it makes for fascinating reading. There is a newspaper report about a court case in which Jack Ninyette was charged with supplying an Aboriginal native named Horace Newell with a bottle of stout. The quote from the accused is, "I didn't give it to Horace." It was a classic "he said, she said", based on evidence from police, and the judge did not believe my great-great-grandfather, sentencing him to 14 days in jail or £20. Of course, he would have done the time because he would not have had the £20.

Jack was quite the athlete. The *Eastern Districts Chronicle* of 2 June 1911 shows the handicaps for the 130-yard Sheffield Handicap, a running race, run by the York Athletic Club, and Jack came from the back mark of 13 yards in a field of 30.

There is a series of letters between bureaucrats at the Department of Native Affairs regarding a warrant for the removal of Kandi Bennell from Pingelly and Brookton to the now infamous Moore River settlement. Relatives intervened, according to this trail of letters, stopping her from being taken there, which, by all accounts, was a very, very good thing because the Moore River settlement was not a good place.

The stark racism of the time pervades these documents. There is one here that was personally signed by the infamous AO Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, who was not portrayed in a good light in the movie *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. This document is from 1933. He starts the note by saying:

The Ninyette family have lived for about two years in a cottage in Kipling Street Narrogin. The whole family appear to be well dressed and superior for half-castes, but I gathered from what I saw that the condition of the house was what was only to be expected in the case of such people.

I visited Western Australia last week. I was moved by my visit to the Bilya Koort Boodja, the Noongar cultural centre in Northam. Maybe I am naive, but I will admit that I just did not know how bad things were for my ancestors. I did not know that they forcibly removed all Aboriginal people from Northam just prior to 1940 and took them off to the Moore River settlement, and then it was illegal for any Aboriginal person to set foot in Northam. I did not know. I was heartbroken to read the horrible stories of Sister Kate's mission, where my grandmother repeatedly lived for a period of time. I was genuinely emotionally affected by the experience.

I did meet face-to-face with Noongar Elder Kevin Fitzgerald, and I have to tell you the thing that tickled me the most when I first rang him. I had been given his number. He answered the phone. He said, "Hello. It's Kevin." I said, "G'day, Kevin. It's Mark Parton calling you," and he said to me straight up, "You're that politician fella, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, I am. How did you know that?" He said that he and some others

were sitting around a few months ago talking about me because of something that came up on Facebook and his wife said to him, “Do you know this Mark Parton fella?” Kevin told me that he replied by saying, “No, I don’t know him, but I’m pretty sure he’s Noongar. I reckon he’s Noongar.” I reckon Kevin is a pretty good judge. I said to him, “Kevin, I look Norwegian. How could you possibly have known that?” but he is a good judge.

The story is not over, and there is more to come, but thanks for indulging me. Thank you.

### **Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—closing the gap**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (5.12): I thank Mr Parton for sharing his story with the Legislative Assembly. I think it is an important one.

I rise today, Madam Speaker, to mark last Thursday, 17 March, which was National Close the Gap Day, a day for all of us, but particularly for those of us in positions of leadership within government, to reaffirm our commitment to closing the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples between them and other Australians. The continued gap in outcomes demonstrates that, despite the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities, despite the resilience and determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the harms of colonisation and institutional racism continue to be felt. Close the Gap Day is an opportunity to sharpen our focus on what still needs to be done.

The government is guided in its work by two key agreements, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which represents a partnership between all Australian governments and the coalition of peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body organisations; and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028, which represents a partnership between the ACT government and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. I will soon deliver the government’s first annual report statement against these agreements, providing key data and tracking our progress against the significant commitments.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold the cultural knowledge, the lived experience and the ingenuity to help close the gap. They have the answers. Governments must be focused on investing in partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve our shared goals, and our work through these two agreements demonstrates the value of this approach. As an example, both agreements commit the government to supporting the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to grow and develop, allowing it to deliver more services which will help to close the gap.

The government is progressing a number of initiatives which align with this priority. These include the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation service; ongoing co-design of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm model of service; the establishment and evaluation of an

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific standalone suicide prevention, post-prevention and after care service in the ACT; the development of a new purpose-built facility for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation; and work in the child and youth protection system to support the establishment and expansion of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and, more broadly, to implement the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way review.

This is part of the work across government which will further be supported by the \$20 million healing and reconciliation fund. The fund represents a new way of partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to advance the priorities under the agreements and other identified community priorities. Initial projects identified have included the establishment of a Ngunnawal language centre, expanding the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, restoring Boomanulla Oval and Yarramundi Cultural Centre to community control and supporting a treaty process.

In addition to treaty being a priority for the healing and reconciliation fund, the 2020-21 budget included funding for an independent facilitator to undertake consultation with the community. Due to the impacts of COVID-19 this work has experienced some delays. However, after consultation with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, Professor Kerry Arabena has now been contracted to consult with the community about the next steps for a treaty process.

On Close the Gap Day last week the Chief Minister and I were privileged to attend a special meeting of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council with Professor Arabena, which marked the commencement of these discussions. It was an honour to sit together with the Ngunnawal traditional owners, the Chief Minister and Professor Arabena in the Mabo Room at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to witness the start of this community conversation.

I was particularly pleased to hear Professor Arabena's title for this work: Healing Project. We know that the toll of intergenerational trauma weighs heavy on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and I hold great confidence that Professor Arabena's focus on healing and bringing families together will ensure that this is a process that recognises the burden of trauma and seeks to ease that burden through healing.

Treaties are agreements between governments and traditional owners and can include measures that reflect rights and reparation owed because of the ongoing social, economic and cultural impacts of colonisation. This process will take time and we are still in its early stages. Our government is committed to walking with and being led by traditional owners every step of the way. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of Professor Arabena's work with the community in the coming months and to seeing the community take the next step towards an important act of self-determination and reconciliation.

## **Environment—National Landcare Awards 2021**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for

Sustainable Building and Construction) (5.17): On 10 March I was privileged to attend the 2021 Landcare Awards, which had been postponed from last year due to COVID. It was a fantastic evening in celebration of the Landcare movement and acknowledged some truly outstanding contributions.

Here in the ACT there are over 70 groups and thousands of individuals helping to preserve and restore our precious natural systems, whether in our nature parks, our suburbs or on farmland, and it was great to see their work recognised. The winners of many of these awards will now go forward as nominees for the 2022 National Landcare Awards in August.

At the awards night we saw the recognition of partnerships like the ACT Healthy Waterways project with the Southern ACT Catchment Group, the Ginninderra Catchment Group, the Molonglo Conservation Group and the ACT government. The awards recognised the importance of World Water Day, and there was recognition of the importance of caring for the land in an agricultural context—which was where Landcare first began—in an award given to Mount Majura Vineyard.

Indigenous land management, citizen scientists, the involvement of young people, community groups and youth leadership were all highlighted in these awards. I would like to highlight something else too, which is that the benefits of this work do not just flow in one direction towards our much-loved Australian landscapes and ecosystems. The land gives back to the people who care for it.

Last year KPMG released a report suggesting that Landcare volunteers obtain significant physical and mental health benefits from their work, as well as health cost savings of around \$400 per person, which equates to over \$57 million a year nationally. That is more than 140,000 people living better, happier and healthier lives, thanks to their work with Landcare. It is now one of the largest volunteer movements in Australia.

As Doug Humann, the Chair of Landcare Australia, has said:

For decades, those involved in Landcare have testified to a greater sense of self, both physically and mentally, resulting from an enhanced link with their local environment. This in turn has boosted community wellbeing and it has long been the desire of the Landcare movement to quantify the significance of these benefits. Clearly, these ground-breaking new figures speak for themselves and the importance of volunteering and engaging with Landcare activities within the community.

Those figures include 46 per cent of respondents reporting a clear improvement to their mental wellbeing and 93 per cent feeling a connection to the land, with 90 per cent experiencing a stronger connection to their community.

The ACT government is interested to examine how environmental volunteering benefits us here in Canberra, as well as how it can be improved and the potential opportunities that we are failing to capture. The Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity is currently working on this and is open to

submissions until 6 May, so I really hope that we will hear from a wide range of stakeholders and concerned citizens about how we can harness the additional benefits.

I encourage everyone here in this Assembly to wish our National Landcare Awards nominees success, not just in August but for their future work for wildlife protection, biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.22 pm.**