



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

TENTH ASSEMBLY

19 SEPTEMBER 2023

www.hansard.act.gov.au

Tuesday, 19 September 2023

Leave of absence.....	2893
Mr Domenic Mico OAM (Motion of condolence)	2893
Petition: Woden—arts facilities—petition 26-23	2899
Motion to take note of petition.....	2900
Paper (Out-of-order petition)	2900
Petition: Woden—arts facilities—petition 26-23	2901
ACT Youth Assembly (Ministerial statement)	2901
Government—commercial forests (Ministerial statement)	2903
High-risk weather season—preparedness (Ministerial statement).....	2907
Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee.....	2916
Paper (Out-of-order petition)	2916
Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee	2916
Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee	2917
Standing orders—suspension.....	2917
ACT Teacher Quality Institute Amendment Bill 2023.....	2918
Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2023.....	2921
Standing orders—suspension.....	2921
Ministerial arrangements	2924
Questions without notice:	
Sport and recreation—international events	2925
Sport and recreation—international events	2925
Tuggeranong—sporting facilities	2926
Housing ACT—vacant properties	2927
Tuggeranong—community health centre	2928
Kingsford-Smith School—safety	2930
Margaret Hendry School—safety	2932
Schools—performance	2933
Access Canberra—services	2935
Jacka—land release	2936
Environment—Canberra Nature Park	2938
Tuggeranong—sporting facilities	2939
Molonglo Valley—playing fields	2940
Electoral Amendment Bill 2021	2941
Public housing—Calwell.....	2942
Papers.....	2944
Lake Tuggeranong—water quality—government response	2944
Urban Open Space Land Management Plan—draft.....	2949
Retirement villages—dispute resolution—government response.....	2949
Municipal services—maintenance	2951
Standing orders—suspension.....	2971
Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Voice to Parliament	2975
Adjournment: Natural disasters—Morocco and Libya.....	2999

Tuesday, 19 September 2023

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.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Barr (Chief Minister) for this sitting due to his attending ministerial duties.

Mr Domenic Mico OAM

Motion of condolence

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) (10.01): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Mr Domenic Mico OAM, a leading figure of Canberra's arts and multicultural community, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

It is with deep sorrow that I stand before the Assembly today to commemorate the passing of Mr Domenic Mico OAM. Whilst we are all mourning, we are taking the chance to celebrate the richness that Domenic brought to all of our lives. Domenic, a distinguished figure in our community, departed this world on 12 September 2023. I extend my heartfelt recognition to Domenic's wife, Vicki. I also acknowledge the presence of other dear family members and friends who are with us today and those who are watching online.

Domenic was born in the province of Reggio Calabria, in Casignana, Italy, in 1946. He embarked on a journey of migration to Australia with his parents during the fifties. Over the years he dedicated himself to the pursuit of knowledge, engaging in studies in community theatre and visual arts in Italy, immersing himself in various forms of

drama, creative writing and theatre at Canberra Tech, and ultimately obtaining his graduate certificate in arts management from QUT.

For more than half a century, Mr Mico wore many, many hats, serving as artistic director, CEO, producer, critic and commentator. His profound connection with Canberra's multicultural and arts communities enriched our city immeasurably, contributing significantly to the vibrancy and diversity of the place he lovingly called home. The enduring legacy of Domenic encompasses several cultural institutions, including the National Multicultural Festival; the Canberra Day celebrations, which later evolved into the Canberra Festival; Smith's Alternative bookshop; and the Tuggeranong Arts Centre.

Among the numerous honours that recognised Domenic's outstanding contributions to Canberra's arts and multicultural communities were the Australia Council's Ros Bower award in 1982; the Centenary Medal in 2001; an Italian knighthood, bestowed on him in 2005; the prestigious Medal of the Order of Australia, granted in 2018; and his inclusion among the esteemed group of 75 individuals who have left an indelible mark on Canberra's identity.

For me and my family, our relationship with Domenic started at Blue Folk, in west Belconnen, in the eighties. Domenic and his family lived at Strathnairn, where he and his band of merry artists set up Blue Folk, where kids from west Belconnen spent their school holidays. It was here that we clambered over a pirate ship that was launched into the dam and participated in performances for our parents which I never really quite understood at the time. The imaginations of the committee, and especially Domenic, took us all on an amazing journey, sharing wonderful times together with our families.

I would go on to run into Domenic in so many different spaces over my life—over a kitchen table at a friend's place or at a multicultural arts event—and every time he never missed the chance to talk about his latest idea. It was always about people. He was always on a mission to make things better. Activism was well in his genes. It was only last month that the ACT government had the privilege of presenting Domenic with an inaugural ACT Lifetime Achievement Award during the 2023 Multicultural Awards event. This award serves as a fitting testament to Domenic's unwavering commitment to enriching the cultural and artistic fabric of Canberra throughout his remarkable five-decade journey.

On behalf of the ACT government, our collective thoughts and condolences are with Domenic's wife, Vicki; his children, Rocco, Kama, Sophie and Nicholas; his siblings Anna, Johanna, Rina and Tony; his extended family; and the many friends whose lives he touched so profoundly. Domenic, you will be well missed by us all.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (10.06): On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, we pay tribute to Domenic Mico OAM, who passed away on 12 September. I acknowledge many of Domenic's loved ones who join us in the chamber today. Many of us here in this place would be very familiar with Domenic's contribution to our arts and multicultural communities, which spanned 50 years. It is impossible to put into words the contribution that Domenic made to our city and the legacy that he leaves behind.

After migrating to Australia, Domenic and his family moved to Canberra in 1956. He spent his childhood in the inner south of Canberra and went on to study at the Canberra School of Art, where he later taught. He was a giant of the arts scene. He founded the Canberra Day celebrations and the National Multicultural Festival, where he also served as artistic director between 1997 and 2009.

Domenic started the community arts colony at Strathnairn, as the Deputy Chief Minister pointed out, and was instrumental in establishing the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. He was an artist, a playwright, a critic, a director, an aspiring politician and a leading figure in the local Italian community. Above all, Domenic was a strong voice for Canberra's multicultural community. From the many community groups and committees of which he was a member, to his original works and plays detailing the migrant experience in Australia, he was a champion of diversity and inclusivity.

In 2001 Domenic was named by the *Canberra Times* as one of 75 people who had shaped the national capital. It was in the same year that he also received the Centenary Medal. In 2005 he was awarded an Italian knighthood, and in 2018 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to the arts. Earlier this year, Domenic was awarded the inaugural multicultural community Lifetime Achievement Award, an award that recognised his commitment to cultural enrichment over many decades.

Domenic's passion and commitment to all things creative have been instrumental in shaping Canberra, and his legacy will not be forgotten. In the many tributes to Domenic, the words of his family touched me the most. In their statement, they say:

Domenic fundamentally loved people, regardless of where they came from, what they looked like or who they loved. Domenic believed in the best of humanity and the world. He knew we all have more in common with other people than we have differences.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I offer our sincerest condolences to his wife, Vicki; his children, Rocco, Kama, Sophie and Nicholas; his extended family, loved ones, friends and colleagues; and the entire Canberra community. He will be missed.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (10.09): There are some people who it can truly be said to have made a huge difference to the life of our city. When Domenic Mico arrived in Queensland from Calabria with his parents in the 1950s, Canberra was a small town of little more than 20,000 people. Realising its potential as a fast-growing city with a burgeoning arts scene, Mr Mico moved here to study at the Canberra School of Art, later teaching there.

His legacy across the arts is lengthy. Having founded the Canberra Day celebrations, which became known as the Canberra Festival, he also founded the Blue Folk community, Tuggeranong Arts Centre and Strathnairn Arts. Domenic Mico's vision also helped found the National Multicultural Festival, which this year celebrated its 25th anniversary. His background in the Australian-Italian community meant that he had his own migration and cross-cultural story, and through the National Multicultural Festival he was able to help others develop their own identities and tell their stories.

We know and love this festival because it helps tell our collective narrative as Canberrans. With so many of our community from multicultural backgrounds, it pays to celebrate that fact through myriad artistic and culinary performances. It allows us to explore the world through the eyes of fellow Canberrans, reminding us of all the exciting influences from which we can draw to make our city even more enlightening.

We pride ourselves on being a progressive city, and progressive cities need daring artists to help them push boundaries further. This was embodied by Mr Mico's work. As has been noted, this gained him three significant national honours: the Centenary Medal in 2001, the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic in 2005 and an Order of Australia in 2018.

Mr Mico was one of the founding members of Strathnairn Arts in the 1980s—which Minister Berry has spoken so fondly of—as its artistic director, along with an interdisciplinary group of musicians, singers, poets, actors and artists. Strathnairn Homestead became their base. Never shy of a challenge, Mr Mico also reportedly cared for the animals: four goats, some sheep, some horses, chickens, geese and ducks, a peacock, doves and a donkey called Pedro.

Just over a decade later, Mr Mico cast his creativity further across the city as he spearheaded the development of the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. The Tuggeranong community will remember him doing experimental, elemental, exciting things like floating art out into Lake Tuggeranong and then setting it on fire. That would have been a sight to behold. By all accounts, this typified Mr Mico's dramatic, inclusive art. In a similar vein, his attempt to bring ancient Greek mythology to Tuggeranong once ended in tragedy, when a visiting theatre group's Medusa prop sank into the lake. My sources do not run deep enough to know whether anybody waded into the lake to retrieve it.

Mr Mico was also a prolific playwright. In fact, many of you listening may have been inspired by reading a play or being part of one of Mr Mico's 28 plays, which were rolled out across ACT schools, drama groups and beyond from the 1970s onwards. He even tried his hand at politics and was an active member of the Democrats, running for office in 1994, as well as speaking up against war, notably against the military build-up in Afghanistan post-9/11.

When people pass, it is important to reflect on what spirit they have left and how it could continue inspiring us. Domenic Mico had a lot of ideas, and he spread those ideas to many corners. Some of those might have seemed a little daring at first, and there were, no doubt, many more which we do not even know about. So if you have an idea—an idea that might challenge or excite—why not try it? We Canberrans are willing to give it a go, after all, and will definitely talk about it. We might even end up liking it a lot.

Domenic Mico left us at 76, having often challenged us and dared us to see the world differently. On behalf of the ACT Greens, I extend my condolences to his wife, Vicki, and four children in particular, but also to all of those who knew and loved this clever and creative contributor to our community.

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) (10.14): I rise to speak today of the life well lived of a community artist extraordinaire, Mr Domenic Mico OAM. Mr Mico's contribution to the arts community and the people of Canberra is beyond measure. I had the true pleasure of working with Mr Mico in my time as president of the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. In 1991 he was the area's first community arts officer and then became director of the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. It actually owes its existence to his extensive efforts to secure funding for its establishment and ongoing renewal, Madam Speaker, as you would remember.

Mr Mico lived and breathed the belief that the arts are for everyone, regardless of one's background, age, language or postcode. His efforts did not stop at the production of art. Art was not only a talent of and a passion for Mr Mico; it was also a gift he gave freely and openly to the people of Canberra.

You would have heard more than once that he and travelling artists he hosted built a large artwork and floated it onto Lake Tuggeranong, only to set it alight, to the delight and occasionally the horror of his audience. Mr Mico did not just create room for the arts in a literal sense but in a metaphorical sense also. Some may have scoffed at the smouldering sculptures or the many eccentric and experimental projects and productions, but as time progressed it was Domenic who was proven to be right. He gave to the people the delight of art for art's sake. Mr Mico's work was not only for the people of my seat of Brindabella but also for the people of Canberra.

To his family, we extend our condolences and our heartfelt thanks for sharing with us the incredible talent and the amazing gift of the life of Domenic Mico OAM, whose contributions will outlive us all.

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) (10.16): It is with great sadness that I, too, rise today to pay tribute to Mr Domenic Mico OAM, who passed away on Tuesday, 12 September after suffering a severe brain bleed. I acknowledge the presence in the Assembly of Domenic's wife, Vicki, and his children, Rocco and Nicholas. His daughters, Kama and Sophie, cannot be here today. Domenic had a big Italian family. I acknowledge his siblings, who are also here—Rina, Anna, Johanna and Tony—their partners and his nieces and nephews and friends.

For over 50 years and across many roles, including artistic director, CEO, producer, painter, critic and commentator, Domenic was instrumental in enriching Canberra through his deep connection with the multicultural and arts communities. The National Multicultural Festival, the Canberra Day celebrations, Smith's Alternative bookshop and the Tuggeranong Arts Centre are just a few of the cultural institutions that make up his enduring legacy.

As you have heard—but it is worth repeating—Domenic's many accolades, which celebrate his contribution to Canberra's arts and multicultural communities, included being awarded the first Australia Council Ros Bower award in 1982; the Centenary Medal in 2001; an Italian knighthood in 2005; a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2018; and being named as one of 75 people who have shaped Canberra's identity. Just

last month I had the real honour of presenting Domenic with the ACT Lifetime Achievement Award at the ACT's 2023 Multicultural Awards. It was a privilege, and it was very humbling to be able to spend time with Domenic and with Vicki, and to have had the opportunity to recognise him in that way. It will stay with me for my lifetime.

It is no secret that Domenic was deeply proud of Canberra and what the arts could achieve. He had ambition for both. Through his vision and drive, he changed how Canberrans think of their city and the role that the arts have to play in it, and he was, naturally, a proud and fierce advocate for the multicultural community.

The Canberra Day celebrations that he founded once solely consisted of a parade of floats along London Circuit. Domenic wanted to diversify the parade and decided one year to enter a float named the *Roman Empire*. The *Roman Empire* needed actors, and Domenic used his unique charm to convince his younger brother, Tony, to play the role of Julius Caesar, complete with a toga and an olive branch crown; and his younger sister, Johanna, to play a Roman guard, dressed in armour and feeding Caesar grapes. Johanna said the parades were so popular that she had to explain to her co-workers, who saw her feeding grapes to a Roman man on a float, exactly why she was there.

His dear friend Helen Musa, who I acknowledge is also present here today, has shared many memories of Domenic and some special anecdotes. Helen describes Domenic as having a unique way of getting different people together. One of the best examples that many people here will understand was bringing political rivals—Labor's Bill Wood and the Liberals' Gary Humphries—together to jointly open the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. He deeply cared for Tuggeranong.

He delighted in Canberra as a canvas, particularly Lake Burley Griffin. Springbank Island was used as the setting for *Pirates of Burley Griffin*, and the Handel opera *Ariodante* was set by Lake Burley Griffin. We heard from the other ministers about his memorable creations at Lake Tuggeranong.

Indeed, Domenic never settled for the everyday. He was always seeking to make a splash and to showcase Canberra to the world and the world to Canberra. He brought large-scale events to Tuggeranong and huge shows to the National Multicultural Festival, including a whole orchestra of blind musicians from the Middle East and a troupe of dancers from Easter Island. This was possible only because of his deep connections into communities and the confidence that many embassies had in him.

Helen explained how proud he was when Bruce stadium was taken over for a performance of Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* and traffic was backed up all around it. He was proud of the intrigue, excitement and flurry that the arts can create and what it meant for Canberra and Canberrans.

Domenic began his career as a painter, studying at the Canberra School of Art and then in Italy. He returned to painting at the end of his life, with exhibitions that explored the cosmos, the four seasons and changing light. Many of us have seen that beautiful picture that has been displayed since Domenic's passing. His last exhibition was entitled *In the shadow of light* and it opened in June 2021 at Kyeema Gallery in Hall.

It is easy to understand why Domenic was so greatly and widely admired. As a city, we are poorer for the loss of Domenic, but his passion and his generosity mean that Canberra's arts and multicultural communities and the very fabric of our city are forever enriched. His legacy is an indelible one. He was instrumental in driving and then cementing our city's confidence as being experimental and inclusive, and with a reputation for being able to throw a party.

Our thoughts are with Mr Mico's wife, Vicki; his children, Rocco, Kama, Sophie and Nicholas; his siblings, Anna, Johanna, Rina and Tony; his extended family and his many, many friends. We miss him dearly.

Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.

At 10.23 am, the sitting was suspended until the ringing of the bells.

The bells having been rung, Madam Speaker resumed the chair at 10.27 am.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation:

Woden—arts facilities—petition 26-23

By Mr Cocks, from 220 residents:

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly the lack of ACT government investment in art and culture in the Woden Town Centre. Woden is a place for people to embrace arts, culture and creativity. These nourish our collective wellbeing, and connect our emotions, ideas, stories and heritage.

A well located multi-purpose arts facility for visual and performing arts and music would complement the proposed CIT, encourage local activity on our streets and provide confidence to the private sector to establish a day and night economy, a 'vibe' in the core of Woden.

Buses from across Canberra's south hub into our growing town centre, enabling our diverse community to access the arts, socialise and have fun through creative activities.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call upon the Government to:

- Invest in a multi-purpose arts facility for visual and performing arts and music in the Woden Town Centre.
- Investigate options to include a multi-purpose arts facility in the proposed CIT, particularly opening up onto the west plaza to activate the core of Woden.

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

Motion to take note of petition

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

Debate interrupted.

Paper

Out-of-order petition

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.27), by leave: I table the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Petition to build and maintain Canberra's cycle network—Ms Clay (1268 signatures).

This Pedal Power petition, with over a thousand signatures on it, is calling on the government to deliver on the promises in the draft Active Travel Plan. It is a really great plan. The Canberra community and the active travel community are really, really enthusiastic about what we have in this plan. It could take us a long way forward with our footpaths and our cyclepaths. My colleague Simon Copland put together this petition at Pedal Power. It did not run for very long. It got an awful lot of support in a very short space of time.

The petition is calling for this to be implemented as the top priority: to design, build and upgrade Canberra's active travel and cycling network within the next five years and to build on the network by inviting feedback from the community about identifying extra missing links. We all know about how many of those we have. I think we all hear about them very regularly from our constituents. The petitioners are saying that this is a feasible and valid social investment that will increase people's health, reduce emissions and assist in the cost-of-living crisis.

It is great to see so many people in active travel getting active about speaking up for the facilities that they need. We are certainly aware, in our office, of how important this is. We are very conscious of the transport model hierarchy, which puts active travel for pedestrians and cyclists right up the top. We are very aware that we have this fantastic plan and that all we need to do is just fund it and build it and Canberra could once again be a really great cycling destination.

This is a way forward. This is a way to take us from 3.5 per cent of trips being made by bike up to something much more significant, which we can see in other cities around the world. We really want to get there. It is really important, in a time of climate change, that we have some valid, cheap, simple and low emissions alternatives and it is important for cost of living. For those who can ride, it is a really affordable way to get around Canberra, if you have the right infrastructure to help you. I am hoping very much that this petition might lead to some great action over the coming years.

Petition

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the petition so lodged be noted.

Woden—arts facilities—petition 26-23

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.30): I would like to speak, just for a few moments, in response to the petition for a Woden arts centre. I would particularly like to note that the Woden CIT will include a double height multipurpose hall that will be suitable for live music and arts activities. I would like to thank Minister Steel for the work that he has done to make sure that we will have this kind of arts facility in Woden town centre in the future.

I would also particularly like to thank Ms Clay for the work that she has done in progressing the Greens' commitment to having some facilities for the arts in the Woden town centre. We came into this term of the Assembly really committed to ensuring that we could create these kinds of spaces. Through the work that Ms Clay has been able to do with Minister Steel, I think we are going to see some really great results.

One of the great things about this particular facility is that it will have a kitchen attached as well, and a multipurpose hall, which means that it can be used for all kinds of arts activities—not just for live music but also for multicultural activities and for all sorts of large community gatherings where we really want to get creative in how we express our ideas. On a day when we have been hearing so many great speeches about how much the arts and artists contribute to the life of our city, it is wonderful to see that we will have this in our new Woden CIT.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Youth Assembly 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) (10.32): I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the 2023 ACT Youth Assembly, a democratic process to draw out key ideas and policy recommendations and encourages the direct participation of young Canberrans aged 12 to 25 years.

This year the ACT Youth Assembly was held on Friday 23 June 2023 and featured plenary sessions and interactive discussion forums. As always, the Assembly provided

an opportunity for a rich exchange of views, ideas and solutions to issues of relevance to young people.

The ACT government partnered with the ACT Youth Advisory Council—or, as they are affectionately referred to, the YAC—to plan and deliver this important event. YAC members were mentored by professionals with expertise on the selected forum topics, to develop their forum structure and outlines to deliver to the Assembly. I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the YAC, who did great work to develop an interactive forum and spent considerable time researching and planning for this important event. It is important to me as Minister for Education and Youth Affairs to have a direct link to young people in our community. The YAC are generous with their time and advice, ensuring that young people have a voice in parliament.

With the support of the YAC, young Canberrans gathered at the 2023 ACT Youth Assembly to talk about the big issues that are affecting them now and into the future. There were three different topics young people could choose to discuss in more detail: gender equality, the cost of living and social inclusion.

The cost-of-living forum participants explored the barriers and issues that young people and their families face as a result of rising living costs. In the cost-of-living forum, young people discussed the increases in the cost of living and the impacts of this, particularly for low-income households. They discussed housing costs and noted that young people often do not fully understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants or how to seek assistance, if needed.

They also discussed transport costs and the importance of transport for employment and education. Participants also noted the cost of health care, including mental health supports; the impact of missing out on recreational activities due to associated costs; and the cost of food, particularly nutritious food. A key theme was the impacts that struggling with these costs have on young people's health and wellbeing. The importance of financial supports, informational resources and the awareness of the availability these was also highlighted.

The gender equality forum discussions centred around how gender stereotypes are affecting young people of all genders. Young people discussed how a variety of issues around gender stereotypes can prevent people of all genders from existing comfortably. There was a focus on the importance of appropriate accountability for gender-based discrimination. There was another focus on education and sporting institution staff having sufficient training and guidance to intervene in these situations so that young people can feel safe.

Participants also talked about sex education that is provided in schools and the need for it to be equitable and unbiased; include information on all genders; and particularly help change negative perceptions of menstruation.

Young Canberrans who attended the social inclusion forum worked together to identify key issues that create barriers to social inclusion for youth and the impact that this lack of inclusion has on young people and their communities.

In the social inclusion forum, participants discussed how education plays a key role in addressing discrimination and the exclusion of young people. This includes through the

curriculum, teachers and school environments. It was noted that there is a need for genuine support to be provided to students in schools who face exclusion and a need to foster cultural awareness and inclusivity. Young people indicated that these supports need to be strengthened to ensure approaches like zero tolerance to bullying are to be successful.

Participants also discussed how young people are affected by ageism and need to be taken seriously in all areas of life, including decision-making, and be afforded autonomy and self-determination. Also highlighted was the need for better information and supports for young people to understand their rights, including discrimination legislation, safety information and public campaigns. It was noted that this includes increased awareness of where to access information as well as support to understand the information.

Over 65 young people aged from 12 to 25 shared their voices and advocated for themselves and their peers through these interactive sessions. They brought unique perspectives and different lived experiences, but all participants did have one thing in common: a passion about making a difference in their community.

As our city grows, this is exactly what we need—young people who are engaged in our democratic processes. This helps the ACT government continue to deliver on policies, programs and services that strengthen an inclusive community for everyone.

The YAC is currently collating into a report all the feedback heard and this will be presented in the coming months. I look forward to hearing the ideas and solutions proposed, and I want to thank every young person who was involved at the 2023 ACT Youth Assembly for their contributions.

I present the following paper:

ACT Youth Assembly 2023—Ministerial statement, 19 September 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Government—commercial forests

Ministerial statement

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) (10.38): It is my great pleasure to update the Assembly on the management of the territory's 8,000 hectares of pine plantations and talk more about how the government responsibly manages this important industry.

The ACT's pine plantations are located in Kowen, Pierces Creek, Uriarra, Hyles, Majura, Ingledene, Miowera, Fairbairn, Isaacs and Tuggeranong. These plantations are managed by a small, professional team in the ACT Parks and Conservation Service within the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

The ACT has a long and proud history of sustainable forestry. The area we now know as northern Namadgi National Park was an important source of hardwood timber during Canberra's early development as a city, leaving a positive legacy of management trails, historic arboreta and a healthy and diverse ecosystem. Likewise, the establishment of pine plantations in the catchment of the original Cotter Dam serviced a growing city while managing the impacts of erosion and degradation caused by past land management practices.

Today, our plantation continues to provide a source of sustainable timber for the region, and it contributes to our economy and provides a wide range of recreational opportunities and amenity value to the ACT.

I recently attended a national meeting of forestry ministers, and I was struck by the importance and value of a sustainable timber industry in Australia. Decarbonising our economy means we must strive to reduce our use of carbon-intensive materials like steel and plastic and move as fast as possible towards renewable, locally grown materials like timber. At the same time, we must also ensure that our production methods are truly sustainable in an environmental sense.

It is important to highlight the way a well-planned and managed pine plantation estate can contribute to multiple outcomes, including the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity. I have seen firsthand the high quality work that has gone into the re-establishment of the Ingledene Forest, with an impressive level of planning and execution undertaken to enhance wildlife corridors, re-establish native vegetation, protect cultural heritage and, of course, establish a crop of pine trees to supply an ever-more important demand for sustainable building materials.

The ACT's softwood plantation estate also makes an important contribution to carbon sequestration and assisting the ACT in relation to its net zero policy target. Timber plantations contribute to decreasing the ACT's carbon dioxide emissions through the combination of carbon sequestration during forest growth and lifetime storage of that carbon in durable products.

The Black Summer bushfires in 2019-20 reduced timber supply from pine plantations across south-east Australia, while at the same time demand is growing for sustainable timbers to support industry and growing cities. These forces are expected to remain influential in the coming years, noting that plantations are grown on a rotational planting-harvesting regime of 28 to 30 years.

The ACT harvests around 70,000 to 80,000 tonnes of logs per annum. These are sold to Capital Battens sawmill located in Fyshwick; Hyne Timber sawmill at Tumbarumba in New South Wales; and the Visy Pulp and Paper Mill at Tumut in New South Wales.

The ACT's wood production is significant given the demand for softwood logs, the lack of softwood estate expansion nationally in the past 30 years and the impact of the Black Summer bushfires.

The ACT's pine plantations are specifically zoned under the Territory Plan and will continue to provide a source of sustainable timber that contributes to an industry with growing demand. The government will continue to revisit its proprieties for this land as opportunities for harvesting are realised.

For example, the government will replace pine planted in the Lower Cotter Catchment after the 2003 bushfires after harvesting with native vegetation, consistent with the 2018 Lower Cotter Catchment Reserve Management Plan.

The ACT's plantations are open to walkers, cyclists, runners and equestrians year round, and tens of thousands of incidental visits each year are recorded by our forest management team. The ACT's plantations feature over 450 kilometres of multiple-use forest roads, which are available via permit bookings for events such as 4WD training and motor sport rally use. The ACT's plantations provide unique camping experiences for hundreds of visitors each year at the Old Kowen Homestead campground and the Blue Range Hut at Uriarra.

The ACT's plantations host numerous events each year for a large variety of community organisations, such as Canberra Sled Dog Club, Canberra Off Road Cyclists, ACT Mountain Bike Orienteering, Kowen Marathon, National Capital Endurance Riders, Capital Field Archers, Dual Sport Motorcycle Riders Association and the Brindabella Motorsports Club as well as providing offroad training venues for the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue, Australian Federal Police and commercial 4WD training companies. Many of these sorts of uses would not be appropriate in our nature conservation estate but can be accommodated with minimal impacts in those plantation areas.

Bringing together the economic, social and environmental features of the ACT's pine plantation estate while considering the potential declining area of land available for plantations, contract renewal opportunities and community interest will require the government to carefully plan the role that pine plantations have in the ACT into the future to ensure maximum efficiency, returns, sustainability and community benefits.

I am pleased to advise the Assembly that this planning approach is well underway. In 2022, the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate commissioned an independent benchmarking review of the ACT's current plantation business model against plantation operations in other jurisdictions. The review provides assurance that the ACT forestry estate is efficiently and effectively managed by the government and provided ongoing guidance and information on approaches to manage this important natural resource.

The government's current ownership and management of the forestry estate effectively integrates commercial objectives and community recreational benefits with risk management. For example, the ACT government's forestry staff are members of the Parks Rural Fire Service Brigade and directly implement plantation fuel reduction and access improvement programs through the annual Bushfire Operations Plan.

Our foresters are enhancing public access to the ACT forestry estate with examples including off-road trail building and maintenance activities covering mountain bikes, endurance horse riding, sled dog running and off-road motorcycle events.

It is really pleasing to know that the ACT government has developed the knowledge, skills and experience over decades to manage this sustainable resource. Current plantation management is delivered by a small in-house team of professional foresters

and partially delivered through a services agreement for the management of harvesting and haulage subcontracts.

The benchmarking review has provided several areas of focus for the government to further strengthen its effective management of the forestry estate. This includes reviewing contracts arrangements when they fall due to improve the commercial value from these.

Establishing a clear statement of intent for management of the ACT's plantation assets, both commercial and non-commercial aspects, will help to strengthen the government's current arrangements for the management of the forestry estate. For example, the Parks and Conservation Service Forestry section are improving strategic management and annual planning processes, introducing performance targets and clarifying functions and transparency in financial reports to the government and the ACT community.

Other areas of focus include increasing revenues from log sales, refining cost-effective management of risks through insurance arrangements and considering opportunities for plantation expansion.

As plantation pines in the Lower Cotter Catchment are harvested and not replaced, it will be important for the government to consider options to ensure the relative efficiency of pine plantation management is managed.

As previously mentioned, pine plantations are specifically zoned under the Territory Plan and any new plantation estates will require a full Territory Plan variation. The government will continue to carefully consider the replanting of pines in plantation areas against other land use priorities. New plantation opportunities will also be considered but are expected to be challenging due to competing land use, environmental and cultural priorities and requirements.

A further challenge for the management of the ACT's forestry estate is building the resilience of the forestry estate to a changing climate where there is less rainfall, hotter summers and greater risk of bushfires. Recent national guidance material has been produced to assist pine forest estate managers to build resilience. This is a strong focus not only for the ACT but also for the industry across south-eastern Australia.

The government recognises the importance of the contribution of the ACT plantation sector across our regional economy and the significance of its ability to deliver high-order environmental outcomes by meeting our need for renewable resources from sustainable management.

In July this year, forestry ministers from across Australia welcomed commitments from all states and territories to a workplan focused on the priorities of increasing resource security and domestic supply volumes; expanding the production of timber and wood products; expanding forestry's contribution to climate change mitigation; expanding timber industry workforce opportunities and capacity; and continued sustainable management of forests.

Each of these national priorities is well reflected in our future vision for plantations in the ACT as we look to uphold our economic, environmental and social standards of

responsible forest management to the very best of our ability and for the benefit of all in our community.

I commend the professional, diligent and innovative work being undertaken by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to enhance the ACT's forestry operations and for managing this important resource for the benefit of the ACT and our broader community.

I present the following paper:

ACT Forestry—Ministerial statement, 19 September 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

High-risk weather season—preparedness Ministerial statement

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) (10.51): I rise today to provide the Assembly and the Canberra community with an update on the extensive work being undertaken by the ACT government to prepare our community, our emergency service personnel and our critical whole-of-government partners for the upcoming high-risk weather season.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the government-wide approach to preparing our territory for the 2023-24 high-risk weather season and the full range of hazards that we may see over the course of this summer.

As you would be aware, each year the ACT's high-risk weather season commences on 1 October for bushfire, extreme heat, storm and flood. This, of course, increases our overall territory level of emergency risk. That includes the risk of security emergencies, cyberattacks, pandemics, and biosecurity emergencies.

As the minister with responsibility for emergency management in the ACT, I am pleased that I can provide the Assembly with the assurance that the ACT government is ready and prepared to respond and recover from any emergency that may impact our territory this summer.

While the Canberra community enjoys the benefits of living in the bush capital, it comes with risk that requires preparedness, sound plans and shared responsibility. Although we have just come out of three consecutive La Nina events, climate and weather patterns also indicate that bush and grass fire, extreme heat, storm and flood risk remain just as prevalent for our community.

Being prepared, no matter the emergency, places a responsibility on all of us to ensure that the Canberra community can assist our frontline personnel to minimise the effects of natural hazards and build a more resilient community for years to come. As

Minister for Police and Emergency Services, I encourage all members of this Assembly to reinforce with our constituents the importance of taking the necessary steps to prepare homes and local communities for any emergency threat.

The Climate and Water Outlook, released by the Bureau of Meteorology on 10 August 2023, indicates that there is a high chance of below average rainfall and above average temperatures for October to December. The bureau has also issued an El Niño alert. El Niño typically increases the chance of below average spring rainfall for the eastern half of Australia as well as above average daytime temperatures for the southern two-thirds of Australia. These conditions, combined with above average grass fuel loads to the northwest of the ACT, will increase the risk of grassfires during the summer months.

As we move into the spring and summer period, it is expected that the ACT and the east coast of Australia will continue to experience hotter and drier than average conditions. While the Seasonal Outlook released recently from the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Advisory Council indicates average fire potential for the ACT, we know that we can expect hotter and drier conditions heading into summer and must continue to be as vigilant as we can. Average fire potential does not mean that we are immune to risk, particularly in and around our grasslands to the north and west.

The ACT government is working to reduce risk and prepare for emergencies. Canberrans should continue to prepare for the season by taking actions to reduce the bushfire risks around and within their property, and to review their survival plans.

Hot and dry conditions also mean that we are likely to see more extreme heat and heatwaves this summer than we have for the last few years. Extreme heat is serious and it can impact many more people than some other emergencies. We are working hard across government to ensure that our whole community knows that we are likely to face extreme heat conditions this summer and to know the best ways to stay cool and hydrated during those difficult times.

Forecast hot and dry conditions does not mean that we are immune from the risk of storms and flash flooding. While the Bureau of Meteorology is not predicting an increased risk of storms and floods this summer, we remain primed to the possibility of windstorms, severe weather and potential heavy bursts of rain. This risk is front of mind for our ACTSES as they finalise their preparations and stand ready to assist our community no matter what challenges the summer brings us.

There are many ways in which the ACT government prepares each year, informed by the lived experiences of previous years, the lessons identified and the improvements made from those lessons. Previous seasons have presented us with some unique challenges not only here in the ACT but also across Australia and provided important and valuable learnings.

The ACT government has undertaken comprehensive and dynamic reviews of the response and recovery phases of these events and identified key areas in which improvements can be made and which are currently being implemented or progressed to implementation. These include communication and coordination; decision-making; intelligence collection and collation; and transition between response to recovery phases.

In 2022 and 2023, the ESA undertook a review of the ACT Emergency Plan to effect changes arising from updates to the ACT Emergencies Act, passed through this Assembly in 2021 and 2022. The review acknowledges the important lessons learnt from the devastating Black Summer Bushfires, including the Orroral fire here in the ACT.

Notwithstanding, further non-urgent reforms have been identified, and the Security and Emergency Management Senior Officials Group, our most senior ACT government emergency management officials group, have determined to undertake a more comprehensive review to provide for continual improvement. This work will be led by the Justice and Community Safety Security and Emergency Management Division and will deliver a holistic update to our important emergency plan.

The ESA's annual preparedness program provides a comprehensive assessment of critical actions to be undertaken to ensure the agency's readiness for the upcoming high-risk weather season. The preparedness program addresses all natural hazards to ensure the ACT community is bushfire, flood and storm prepared.

The ESA has undertaken both internal and external preparedness workshops with key stakeholders, including the delivery of both an incident management and an operational exercise program to suitably qualified personnel.

The operational exercise program provided two tabletop discussion exercises for ESA executives and senior incident management personnel from both our paid and volunteer ranks. This was designed to undertake a more thorough program of incident management practices to elevate the outputs of an ESA incident management team to include a greater focus on strategic planning. The ESA has worked tirelessly to maintain skills and kept up to date on current safe practices through virtual and online training and refreshers.

Of course, ESA preparedness works in close partnership with critical preparations across the whole of ACT government to ensure that our first responders are supported during an emergency, that our community, environment, infrastructure and economy is safeguarded and that we can recover from an emergency as best we can.

Throughout 2023, the ACT government has worked concertedly to review the emergency plans that sit within each directorate, provide training to those officers who are essential in any large emergency, run emergency response and recovery exercises and develop new capabilities that will limit the impacts on our communities no matter the emergency.

This preparedness was recently the subject of a briefing to all senior officials in government with responsibility for emergency management to solidify the 'one-government' approach to our emergency arrangements, as led by our Security and Emergency Management Division.

I am pleased to report that these senior officials agreed that the ACT is more prepared in 2023 than in any time in our past. While there are always more ways in which we can improve, we are on a strong path to provide for and protect the ACT community.

In relation to aerial firefighting capability, the ACT, through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, has contracted one light helicopter with specialist intelligence gathering capability and two medium helicopters to provide dedicated aerial firefighting services to the ACT for the 2023-24 high-risk weather season.

The use of the SIG helicopter for the season will provide a valuable asset in early detection and confirmation of active fires. The high-definition and infrared camera on board will allow for imagery to be streamed into the ESA Incident Management Room in real-time, providing critical fire line and hot spot information. This significantly enhances bushfire fighting operations by allowing key decision-makers to better understand situations as they unfold.

The SIG has also been successfully used to assist the ACT State Emergency Service with storm and flood response and ACT Policing for search and rescue for missing persons.

I can also report that our ACTRFS remains closely engaged with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre and their colleagues in the NSW Rural Fire Service in particular regarding the sharing of large air tankers. As we know, Canberra has played a vital role in supporting nearby New South Wales as well as ourselves when a large air tanker is required to provide assistance to our helicopter fleet and the firefighters on the ground.

The ESA has undertaken vital preparedness work to maintain and improve the Canberra retardant mixing plant and large air tanker base and to maintain 50,000 litres of firefighting retardant pre-mixed and ready to be deployed at short notice.

EPSDD, through its annual Bushfire Operational Plan, has proposed 690 activities to manage fire fuels across the territory's parks and reserves, including activities undertaken by TCCS, which are identified in the EPSDD Bushfire Operational Plan.

The 2022-23 year has seen the completion of the fuel reduction activities across areas managed by PCS and TCCS, including 858 hectares of prescribed burns; 117 hectares of ecological burns; six hectares of cultural burns; approximately 67 kilometres of fire trail maintenance; 72 kilometres and 166 hectares of chemical treatment of fuels including fire trail verge vegetation control; over 763 hectares of physical fuel removal; 3,944 hectares of stock grazing across unleased territory land; and 8,622 hectares of grass slashing when and where required.

In addition, the ACTRFS undertook and supported burn activities across 118 hectares over multiple locations, including land owned by rural landholders, the National Capital Authority land and other Commonwealth land.

It is important to note that prescribed burns can only be delivered under particularly favourable weather conditions to ensure both firefighter and public safety but also to ensure the desired reduction in fire fuels, ecological considerations and smoke management. If conditions are too wet, too windy or too dry and hot, prescribed burning cannot be carried out.

The ACT government also undertakes a range of other methods to reduce fuel loads and fire risk, including slashing, physical removal, spraying and grazing. Particularly

in in areas where we are not able to undertake burning or at times when we are not able to burn safely, these other methods are effective techniques for reducing risk.

During 2022-23, ESA reviewed and upgraded the ACT Bushfire Management Standards. The standards are now notified and available on the ACT Legislation Register. The updated standards align us with NSW Rural Fire Service's Planning for Bushfire Protection 2019, while also building on them to include ACT specific requirements, including land management and access.

The new standards also give ESA staff assessing development the ability to evaluate them against clear guidelines, including sensitive-use developments, such as aged care facilities, schools, and hospitals.

We also acknowledge the potential impacts on our community from the silent emergencies that we may see this summer. As temperatures rise across the country, our energy use will be closely monitored by the Australian Energy Market Operator, and the energy policy team within the ACT government will ensure that we are responding appropriately to any early warnings that we are given to the potential for energy supply concerns.

Across government, the Energy Emergency Coordination Emergency Plan is being reviewed to ensure that our standing arrangements are in the best shape they can be. Our coordination teams are participating in national exercises and additional staff are being trained in emergency management procedures to provide surge and continuity for this critical area of government before the hottest part of summer arrives.

The ACT government works hard throughout the year to increase community awareness, through dedicated campaigns such as the ESA 'Be Emergency Ready' initiative but also the ongoing awareness raising and community building of our whole-of-government public information team and Community Services Directorate's social recovery reference group.

The ESA campaign, in particular, utilised digital, radio, print and out-of-home advertising to encourage the Canberra community to complete an emergency survival plan. As a result of the campaign, there were more than 35,000 visits to the "Be Emergency Ready" page on the ESA website. Additionally, 3,088 emergency survival plans, factsheets and other emergency preparedness collateral was downloaded from the ESA website.

Across government, we are also working harder than ever to ensure that our ACT communities are as prepared as they can be before emergencies arrive. Our ACT Ambulance Service has worked especially hard over winter with our colleagues in the ACT Health Directorate to review the ACT Heatwave Plan, which prepares our communities for how to beat the heat.

The ACT Health Directorate have led the way in providing information and factsheets to critical care settings, schools and GPs on how to stay well in prolonged extreme heat. In advance of any heatwave, we will be looking to provide more information to our communities.

The ACT government continues to maintain strong cross-border relationships with its counterparts in New South Wales as well as the services available nationally through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authority Council and other national forums.

ACTRFS members have continued to work with members from the four surrounding New South Wales RFS zones to further strengthen working relationships and to develop a better understanding of operational command, control and communications. The ACTRFS has also worked collaboratively with surrounding New South Wales districts, providing valuable input towards the drafting of their new bushfire risk management plans. The new plans also recognise bushfire threats that may originate from the ACT or cross over into the ACT from New South Wales.

The ACTRFS has been heavily involved at a national level as well as locally to implement the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, AFDRS. The new national system went live on 1 September 2022, providing increased community awareness of fire risk that is nationally consistent. The ACTRFS is actively involved with the next phase of AFDRS researching developing indices for ignition likelihood, suppression success and damage impact.

Over the previous 12 months, ACTSES supported interstate deployments to South Australia and New South Wales, demonstrating ACTSES's agility and capability to react swiftly to requests for support while improving on its cross-border relationships. ACTSES and NSWSES are currently writing their joint MOU to better portray their relationship between these organisations for support to both training and operations.

More broadly, the Security and Emergency Management Division of JACS has worked closely with the New South Wales Reconstruction Authority to plan for the recovery from emergencies and ensure that we are working together to support our shared communities.

Working to support communities not just in the ACT but also the surrounding New South Wales region is critical to ensuring that we can deliver the best supports possible to people affected by emergencies.

The ACT government and the National Emergency Management Agency will be participating in a jurisdictional high-risk weather season summit in September, as an end-cap to a body of work undertaken throughout 2023 to enhance our shared responsibilities in preparedness.

This briefing will provide a common understanding across emergency management of the risks and preparedness for the upcoming high-risk weather season and cover a range of topics, including the meteorological and climate outlook, summary of observations, responses, and contributions from the Commonwealth during the 2022-23 high-risk weather season, and Australian Government Crisis Management Framework. The summit provides an opportunity for each jurisdiction to update their preparedness, risk outlook, and identified likely areas for potential Australian government assistance.

The ACT government has provided significant support to our international colleagues. This has included 35 ACT firefighters deployed to support Canadian authorities address unprecedented wildfires, and ACT Fire and Rescue providing support to

Türkiye following the February earthquake. This has given our firefighters invaluable experience, working across borders, to sharpen the vital skills that we will use here at home for the benefit of the ACT community. I would like to thank our emergency services personnel who deployed, putting themselves in harm's way while helping vulnerable communities overseas and reinforcing the ACT's reputation for being good global citizens.

We have of course seen the devastating impacts of climate change in the Northern Hemisphere over the past months and our hearts go out to all of the communities affected by these events. Whether it is wildfires in Canada and Europe, extreme heat in Asia or severe hurricanes in the USA, there are valuable lessons that we can learn from experiences in other parts of the world.

Our emergency managers from across the ACT government watch these events closely, work with and learn from colleagues in other countries, and develop strategies that allow us to continually improve on how we manage emergencies in the ACT.

We are of course aware of the impacts of climate change on our territory. We see the evidence of those changes most dramatically in our emergency management areas. We have witnessed over the last five years more frequent and severe bushfires but also more frequent and intense storms and rainfall. Other climate influenced emergencies are also on the rise, and our emergency managers are adapting to this challenging environment.

However, we also recognise that it does not just fall to emergency management to combat the challenge of climate change. I was recently proud to unveil the first electric fire pumper in the Southern Hemisphere at ESA and also the first in a series of electric support vehicles for the ESA.

This complements the fleet of other electric vehicles already in service across the ACT government and also the full range of actions that the ACT government is taking to adapt to our new climate reality.

I would like to pay tribute to the former ESA commissioner, Commissioner Georgeina Whelan. In many ways, we are able to report on our preparedness, particularly that of the ESA, because of the commitment that Commissioner Whelan had to the safety and security of the ACT community. We thank Commissioner Whelan for her time leading the ESA and her drive to always improve on how we manage emergencies.

As we move into another high-risk weather season, the first since 2018 without Commissioner Whelan, I am confident that the ESA will continue to maintain its high levels of commitment and community service to the ACT.

The government is acutely aware of the threat that a range of hazards present to our city, and we will continue to make the investments needed to deal with this, as our city grows.

Our city is well prepared—better prepared than ever before—and this is because of the hard work of our staff across government and, of course, our volunteers. There is,

however, only so much preparation that can be done by the government, and I encourage the community to prepare as well. This is a shared responsibility. Together, we can all play our part in keeping our community safe during the 2023-24 high-risk weather season.

Once again, I thank all of those involved.

I present the following paper:

ACT high risk weather season preparedness and seasonal outlook 2023-2024—
Update—Ministerial statement, 19 September 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.16): I would like to thank Minister Gentleman for acknowledging the difficult, sometimes dangerous and absolutely critical work that first responders do every day, but particularly during times of emergency, to keep our community safe. I join him in thanking everyone who is working on preparing for particularly high-risk periods. It is so important to ensure that we respond to emergencies quickly and effectively.

I also recognise all those who prepare for and respond to social recovery needs in emergency situations. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Community Services Directorate and our community organisation partners. These organisations play an important role in ensuring we are ready when our community faces disasters. It is through their hard work that recovery can begin immediately and that support remains in place so that those effected, and our community as a whole, can recover in the longer term. Social recovery is a critical pillar in any crisis or emergency management response. If priority is not given to the social impacts of a disaster, we know that other pillars of recovery, including economic, infrastructure and environmental recovery, are slower and less successful.

During times of emergency and crisis, it is especially important that we have plans in place to respond and support our community in a safe way. In the ACT, social recovery is a core responsibility under the ACT Emergencies Act 2004 and the ACT Community Recovery Sub-Plan 2022. Under the ACT social recovery arrangements, our Community Services Directorate is responsible for the provision of immediate relief such as emergency accommodation, food, water, clothing and emergency finance, the operation of ACT evacuation centres and recovery centres, and leading interjurisdictional and national liaison on social recovery for the ACT.

Providing a safe space through evacuation centres for community members to go to during an emergency such as a bushfire is a vital part of social recovery. Evacuation and recovery centres are operated by CSD, working with ACT Health, ACT Domestic Animal Services and community organisation partners. These agencies work together to ensure needs for shelter, health services, mental health support and other

community supports are met during an emergency. The ACT Education Directorate also plays a role in managing facilities when shelter is needed, while Transport and City Services ensures roads are clear and facilities can be safely accessed.

The horrific fires of late 2019 and early 2020 highlighted the need for services in a whole range of emergencies, including heatwaves and periods when Canberra was affected by dense smoke. The ACT Heatwave Plan was updated in 2023, led by the ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Health. The plan aims to minimise heatwave related risk to the ACT community by encouraging resilience in response to and recovery from a heatwave event. In the event of an upcoming heatwave, the ACT government will provide public health messaging on how to prepare for and respond to heatwave conditions, health advice and available supports. This messaging includes where people can go during heatwaves and smoke events, such as ACT libraries, community or senior centres, malls and clubs that will provide non-alcohol drinks for guests seeking refuge, and other places that are cool.

CSD is already working with ESA, the Education Directorate and community partners to prepare for the 2023-24 high-risk weather season. This ensures that we will be ready with an immediate emergency services response and that Canberrans will also be able to access immediate community supports delivered by the organisations that know them best, supported by the ACT government to deliver these services.

Minister Gentleman has outlined the work being done by emergency services to plan for the upcoming high-risk season. I would like to add to his outline of these preparations by outlining the work being done by the Social Recovery Sub-Committee. The subcommittee is a forum for the ACT government, led by CSD, to work together with community partners to plan for the response to and recovery from all types of emergencies. The subcommittee supports the planning and operations of social recovery in the ACT, including providing leadership and operational support to prepare for and deliver social recovery services during and following an emergency, as detailed in the ACT Community Recovery Sub-Plan.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge that our responsibility to help in an emergency does not end at the ACT's border. Canberrans are also good neighbours and part of our preparations include being ready to help out when needed, particularly in nearby areas of New South Wales. The 2019-2020 bushfires and the floods in the Northern Rivers region in 2022 were a vivid example of how climate change is resulting in larger and more catastrophic events and how important it is that we work together to respond.

The ACT government is represented by CSD on the national Social Recovery Reference Group. A key operational component of the reference group is the interjurisdictional assistance memorandum of understanding. The aim of the MOU is to enable timely, targeted and effective deployment of community recovery support workers across jurisdictional boundaries.

It is important that we are ready and have plans in place for emergencies, not just for how we will respond immediately but also for how we can become a more resilient community. I thank our public service across many ACT government directorates and our committed and highly skilled community sector and acknowledge the hard work

underway to prepare for and respond to the needs of Canberrans during and beyond emergencies.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 34

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.22): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 34, dated 18 September 2023, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings and revised extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings for report 33.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR CAIN: Scrutiny report 34 contains the committee's comments on six bills, 13 pieces of subordinate legislation and two government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I would like to thank the secretariat of my committee and fellow committee members for their work on this report, in particular our legal advisors Mr Stewart and Mr Argument. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Paper Out-of-order petition

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.22), by leave: I present the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Petition to build and maintain Canberra's cycle network—Ms Clay (1268 signatures)—Attachment.

This was tabled electronically, but we need to table in hard copy as well.

Economy and Gender and Economic Equality—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.23): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality.

Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into micro, small and medium businesses in the ACT region. The terms of reference for the committee's inquiry are to inquire into and report on matters relevant to both public and private businesses across the ACT, including business conditions for non-employing and small to medium businesses between one and 200 employees in the

ACT region. This includes factors which encourage or discourage micro, small and medium businesses in providing their goods and services in the ACT; factors which encourage or discourage women-led micro, small and medium businesses in providing their goods and services in the ACT; factors which encourage or discourage micro, small and medium businesses to employ people with disabilities; and ACT government initiatives, taskforces, programs and budgets which assist Canberra businesses. There is a particular focus on the statistics of businesses applying for government grants, programs and initiatives; the statistics of businesses that are the recipients of government grants, programs and initiatives; and the feedback from businesses on the effectiveness of these grants, programs and initiatives in promoting and growing Canberra businesses.

The terms of reference also include ACT government regulatory practices and their effects on promoting and growing Canberra businesses; comparisons with the regulatory environment for micro, small and medium businesses in other Australian jurisdictions; ACT government promotions of Canberra businesses, both domestically and internationally; and any other related matters.

Health and Community Wellbeing—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (11.25): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing. On 29 August 2023, a bill for an act to amend the Children and Young People Act 2008 was tabled in the Assembly. On 6 September 2023, the Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2023 was referred to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing.

Subsequent to the committee's invitation, the Minister for Families and Community Services and officials, on 18 September 2023, provided a briefing to the committee on matters informing the bill. After careful deliberation, the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing has decided not to undertake an inquiry into the bill.

Standing orders—suspension

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) (11.25): I move:

That, in relation to the ACT Teacher Quality Institute Amendment Bill 2023 to be presented today:

- (1) standing orders 172, 174 and 175 be suspended to allow the Assembly to debate the bill in the same sitting period, having not been considered by the relevant standing committee or the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety in its legislative scrutiny role; and
- (2) the provisions of the resolution of 2 December 2020, as amended, which refers all Bills to the relevant committee, be dispensed with.

The Teacher Equality Institute Amendment Bill, which is being presented today, is a bill which needs to be introduced and debated this week. This is a bill which needs passage to pre-emptively avoid any undue anxiety for our great ACT teachers and school communities. Minister Berry will outline the details of this urgency during her introduction speech.

This motion suspends a number of standing orders and an Assembly resolution to allow the debate of this bill on Thursday. Standing order 172 prevents debate of a bill in the same sitting period in which it is presented, standing order 174 refers bills to a select or a standing committee for potential inquiry, and standing order 175 prevents debate of a bill which a committee has determined to inquire into until a report from the inquiry has been provided to the Assembly. The provisions of the Assembly resolution of 2 December 2020 refers all bills to a relevant committee. As is clear, these provisions would prevent the urgent debate and passage of this bill during this sitting week, and this is why I move today to suspend them. This is a necessary step to provide surety and avoid anxiety in the teaching community. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.28): We will support the motion. We have been briefed on this matter by the minister's staff. We understand the urgency and the reasons behind it. I can indicate that we not only support this motion but will support the bill when it comes back for debate on Thursday.

Question resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Amendment Bill 2023

Ms Berry, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement, a Human Rights Act compatibility statement and the following paper:

Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia—Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

Title read by Clerk.

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) (11.29): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I present the Teacher Quality Institute Amendment Bill 2023. The amendments in this bill will update the TQI Act to give flexibility to teachers regarding the time taken to move from provisional registration to full registration and will validate teacher registrations issued by the TQI. The purposes of this bill are to support the ACT teacher workforce in progressing along their teaching career path and assure the community that teachers in the ACT continue to provide a safe and quality education.

The Teacher Quality Institute is the registration body for our teachers here in the ACT. They have been issuing teacher registrations since 2011. Only registered teachers may

be employed to teach in schools. There are two categories of teacher registration in the ACT: provisional registration and full registration. Provisional registration acknowledges that recently graduated teachers and teachers returning to the profession may not have sufficient recency of teaching practice to meet the proficient level of the standards. They are capable teachers who have met the seven graduate standard levels. Full registration acknowledges that a teacher has provided evidence that their knowledge, skills and teaching practice meet the proficient-level standards.

The intent of the categories of provisional and full registration is to allow teachers time to develop their skills and knowledge at the provisional level and to encourage them to move to the proficient level of the standards within a reasonable time frame. The functions of the TQI Act align with the nationally consistent registration framework which was agreed to by all education ministers back in 2011. I have tabled a copy of the framework today. The framework states that the process for achieving full registration should be flexible to accommodate different contexts and experience. The maximum period for meeting the requirements for full registration is five years, with provision for extension on a case-by-case basis.

Recently, the TQI identified these issues with the TQI Act: an unintentional ceiling of 180 teaching days for provisional registration, a maximum allowable period for provisional registration, and an invalid regulation. To be clear, the TQI's practice is in line with the nationally consistent registration framework and is in line with the practice of other jurisdictions. However, our legislation was drafted in a way that does not allow this degree of flexibility.

Since 2011, the TQI's practice has been to allow teachers who have taught for more than 188 days in the previous five years but are not otherwise eligible for full registration to be issued provisional registration. Where teachers have taught for more than 180 days, the TQI's practice in issuing provisional teacher registration contravenes the act. The unintended consequence of the way the act was drafted is that a teacher who does not move to full registration after 180 days is not eligible for any kind of registration. They are not eligible for either category of registration and therefore they are unable to be registered and unable to teach. Effectively, this creates a ceiling of 180 teaching days, after which teachers must progress to full registration. There is no option to remain at provisional registration. If they are not eligible for full registration, then they are not eligible for either category of registration and are no longer entitled to teach.

Clearly, this was not the intent of the legislation. These clauses were drafted poorly and this drafting is not in line with the national framework. The following scenario demonstrates this issue. A teacher who is in poor health and has taught for 180 days but has not compiled their portfolio of evidence to submit to their professional guidance panel cannot continue teaching after the 180 days. They cannot be provisionally registered as they will have taught for more than 180 days in the past five years and they cannot move to full registration.

The national framework is designed to allow flexibility in how quickly teachers move through the categories of registration. This is to acknowledge that each teacher's circumstances are different and, while one teacher may be able to demonstrate evidence of the meeting of the proficient standards after one year of teaching, another

teacher may need more time. We would not, under any circumstances, wish to deny these teachers the right to teach in the ACT.

The *Framework for teacher registration in Australia* states:

The maximum period for meeting the requirements for full registration is five years, with provision for extension on a case by case basis.

While the TQI Act allows for some flexibility—a further one-year extension up to six years—it does not provide sufficient flexibility to allow the TQI to respond on a case-by-case basis to individual circumstances.

The TQI has interpreted the act in the way the national framework intended by allowing case-by-case consideration of teachers and circumstances if they need more years to move to full registration. If a teacher works for a year as a provisionally registered teacher, they can accompany their partner on a four-year overseas posting, for example. On returning to the ACT to teach, that teacher has only one more year to meet the proficient standard before their time to apply for full registration expires. If they are unable to do so, for myriad of reasons, they are not eligible for provisional or full registration. This is once again clearly problematic and not the intention of the act.

An additional issue in the regulation is that there is no head of power in the TQI Act. Regulation 9(1)(b) requires teachers to have taught for 100 days in the previous five years to be eligible for renewal of their full registration. This regulation is not authorised by the act, which makes the regulation invalid. The bill resolves this issue by clarifying that teachers who hold full registration and wish to renew their full registration must be able to demonstrate recency of practice, which is a minimum 20 days of teaching in the previous year or 100 days of teaching in the previous five years.

Validating past registration decisions is required due to the issues that I have outlined. The TQI has invalidly issued registration to approximately 900 teachers across our public, Catholic and independent schools. The TQI has assessed that the invalidly registered teachers are in all other ways eligible and competent to teach and pose no safety or educational risk to children. It is prohibited to teach without a valid registration and to employ a teacher who is not validly registered, which is why it is important that we resolve these issues with urgency. The bill would validate past registrations that have been impacted by these issues and all decisions made by employers and the TQI about these registrations.

Teachers and teacher employers do not need to have concern. Impacted teacher registrations will be validated by the changes to the act. Parents and carers can be assured that the committed and professional teachers who are teaching their children today are qualified and competent to teach. They are rigorously assessed and screened to determine suitability to teach and provide a safe learning environment for all school children in the ACT. They meet all eligibility requirements except the teaching period which they have exceeded. They hold the required teaching qualification and current working with vulnerable people registration and they meet the English language proficiency requirements and work rights requirements.

I introduce the ACT TQI Amendment Bill to the Legislative Assembly to validate registrations impacted by the previous wording, all decisions by the TQI related to those decisions, and all employment decisions made by employers related to those registrations. For an employer, this includes engaging a teacher to teach at a school, conducting the performance development program with a teacher, promoting a teacher or imposing disciplinary action. For the TQI, this means any regulatory actions taken by the TQI, including suspension, cancellation or imposing a condition on their registration.

The bill also proposes amendments covering teaching days to allow time and encouragement for teachers to develop their knowledge and practice so that they move from meeting the graduate level of the standards to meeting the proficient level within a reasonable time frame. The amendments for teaching days for renewal of full registration ensure that all teachers, including full-time, casual and contract teachers, are recognised and valued as experienced teaching professionals.

It is vital that the community remain confident that their children are safe at school and are receiving a quality education. It is also critical that teachers can continue to teach and schools can continue to operate. It is therefore essential and urgent to amend the legislation to clarify registration eligibility requirements for teachers and to validate the registrations impacted. I commend this bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Hanson**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2023

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.41): I seek leave to present the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2023.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

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) (11.41): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Ms Vassarotti from presenting the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2023.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.41): I spoke at length last week about the government bringing things on without having the decency to talk with us about them beforehand. What I mean is bringing things on by leave. It is discourteous, and it shows the dysfunction and disorganisation of the government ministers. This is the second one today. At least in the first instance, the government had the courtesy to talk to us about why it was required to come on by leave and what the plan was—that it was going to be debated later this week and it is an important issue.

That is not to say that the Nature Conservation Act amendments are not important, but the government knew this was going to come on. It was foreshadowed in the Manager of Government Business meeting last week that there would be an environment bill, so why then were they so disorganised that they had to bring it on by leave?

I was going to say it is showing what a complete storm this is, but I guess that would be unparliamentary language. It is completely disorganised in that the government have not been able to prepare this in advance and do this in the correct way. They are flying by the seat of their pants. They are bringing things on willy-nilly whenever it occurs to them, without the proper notice and with no information about whether it might come back this week, as we have just seen with the TQI amendment bill.

No doubt the minister is going to say how important this bill is. It is quite likely that I am going to agree that it is very important, so why could we not have a conversation about it and why it is important for it to come on by leave rather than by the normal process of doing things? If it is so important, why was it not better organised? Why was it not better managed so that they did not have to seek leave for this? If it is so important, why was it not prioritised to come on in the normal process?

Last week I spoke about myriad occasions when things come on by leave. Why can't this government get their act in gear? We have had self-government here for over 30 years and this is a government that has been in power for over 20 years, yet time after time they come in here saying, "This is last-minute. It is so important and we must do it quickly." Why can't they get themselves organised? It is completely dysfunctional and discourteous.

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) (11.44), in reply: I thank Ms Lawder for her comments on this suspension of standing orders. As she has mentioned, this is a quite important bill. I commend this motion to the Assembly to allow it to come on.

Question resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

Ms Vassarotti, by leave, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong-Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.45): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I thank the Assembly for the ability to move on this bill today. It was actually an administrative error in my office that created this situation. The bill is important and I thank you for enabling me to do this today.

I am pleased to introduce the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2023 to the Assembly. The bill will bring into effect the Assembly's resolution of 23 November 2022 about the use of non-animal-friendly fruit netting in our suburbs. The bill will prohibit the use of inappropriate fruit netting at ACT residential premises to protect our wildlife from net entanglement that may lead to injury or death.

This change from unfriendly to wildlife-friendly netting may seem small, but it can impact on the survival of vulnerable wildlife. Every year, thousands of native birds, small mammals and reptiles get entangled in netting draped over fruit trees and bushes. Many of these animals do not survive and many are euthanised as they are left with permanent injuries that prevent them from surviving in the wild. For example, in the past 10 years, there were 802 flying fox rescues recorded in the ACT alone. Nearly half of those rescues were due to net entanglement and, sadly, a quarter of those rescued from netting could not be saved. Net entanglement is identified as a serious threat to the threatened grey-headed flying foxes in the ACT in the draft grey-headed flying fox conservation plan.

Today, I am proud that the ACT government is taking action through this bill to restrict the use of inappropriate fruit netting as a means to protect wildlife. By protecting our wildlife, we protect biodiversity and, essentially, the processes that support a healthy ecosystem for all Canberrans. Similar legislation was passed in Victoria in 2021, and recent Victorian data showed a drop in wildlife rescues due to net entanglement since the legislation commenced. We are hoping for similar results here in the ACT.

Colleagues, whether we see the same thing happening in the ACT in the coming months will depend on the decisions that we make today. The Nature Conservation Amendment Bill introduces provisions that make it an offence to use prohibited fruit netting to cover plants in residential premises. Prohibited fruit netting is defined as netting that has a mesh hole size greater than 5 mm x 5 mm when fully stretched. ACT residents can still use netting to cover their plants, provided it is wildlife-friendly netting with mesh holes less than 5 mm x 5 mm. Netting with smaller mesh sizes greatly reduces the risk to animal entanglement and supports a productive fruit harvest while diminishing the risk of harm to vulnerable wildlife.

The bill also provides that retailers selling the prohibited fruit netting in the ACT must display a prominent sign stating that the net's use is restricted due to the risk of wildlife injury or death. The sign must reference the Nature Conservation Act 2014 and state that penalties apply to offences. These signage requirements for businesses selling prohibited fruit netting will assist in putting a person looking to buy new fruit netting on notice.

While Victoria has prohibited the use and sale of netting that is not wildlife-friendly, it has been determined that prohibiting its sale in the ACT may be in breach of the Commonwealth's Mutual Recognition Act 1992. The act does not allow the ACT to introduce legislation that would ban the sale of products when other states and territories have not done so. While prohibited netting can still be sold in the ACT, the signage requirement provisions in the bill will inform and deter ACT residents from buying unsafe netting. There are already retailers, such as Bunnings, that have ceased to sell non-wildlife-friendly netting. We are optimistic that other retailers will follow suit.

The offences under this amendment carry a strict liability offence. Consultations with internal and external stakeholders show support for the inclusion of a strict liability offence to ensure that a sufficiently robust enforcement system can operate while allowing for a quick and effective response to non-compliance. Because strict liability offences can be made when a person knows or ought to know their legal obligations, there will be significant public awareness and education surrounding the new offences, including a net swap program. As is consistent with regulatory approaches across the ACT, our approach will be one of education first. However, if consistent non-compliance occurs, additional regulatory action will be taken.

The bill will commence on a day notified by the Minister for the Environment in order to allow time for operational measures to be put in place, including education and awareness activities and the commencement of the net swap program. The ACT government has partnered with ACT Wildlife to deliver the swap program whereby ACT residents can swap their non-compliant netting for wildlife-friendly fruit nets free of charge. With these measures in place, we are confident that the ACT community can transition to wildlife-friendly fruit netting with ease.

The ACT has already outlawed cruel and unnecessary “opera house” netting traps to protect platypus and other native wildlife such as Murray River crayfish. This included successful net-swapping programs to swap these destructive traps.

Canberra, as the nation’s capital, is home to many amazing and unique native wildlife. I am confident that the provisions in this bill will strengthen the wildlife protection and animal welfare in the ACT while ensuring that residents can transition to appropriate fruit netting without the additional burden of cost. I call on my other state and territory counterparts to follow Victoria’s and the ACT’s lead and ban the use of inappropriate fruit netting to protect our wildlife across the country.

I wish to thank my ACT Greens colleague Jo Clay for leading this change and bringing this to the Assembly through her motion in November 2021. I also wish to thank ACT Wildlife, who are a key partner in this project. Their firsthand experience and knowledge of the dangers of improperly installed wide-gauge fruit tree netting has guided this legislative reform, and, once again, the ACT Wildlife’s work in running the net swapping program highlights the invaluable contribution that environmental volunteers can make to conservation in the ACT, with many hours donated by volunteers to make this possible.

I would like to particularly thank previous and current ACT Wildlife flying fox coordinators Denise Kay, Clare Wynter and Stephen Bartos for their tireless work to rescue and better protect flying foxes. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Lawder**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Sitting suspended from 11.54 am to 2 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

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) (2.00): The Chief Minister will be absent from question time, and so I will attempt to assist with any questions in his portfolio areas.

Questions without notice

Sport and recreation—international events

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, the 2023 Rugby World Cup is currently underway in France and more than two million people are expected to attend matches, and another 800 million to watch on TV and streaming sites. The tournament is expected to bring in an economic boost of €1.5 billion to the Paris region alone. In question time last week, you said that had “no advice to provide” when asked about the bidding process for the 2027 Rugby World Cup and the 2029 Women’s Rugby World Cup matches. As minister for sport, as the Deputy Chief Minister and Acting Chief Minister, why do you not know whether the ACT will be involved in these major events?

MS BERRY: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, but I can say that we have not heard back yet on the 2027 bid, and in my response to the questions on those issues I did say that if I had more advice that I would provide that information to the Assembly, and so I will do that in response to the question that I had last week—or this week.

MS LEE: In relation to the bid that you have not heard from, can you please provide more advice to the chamber when you made the bid and when you expect a response?

MS BERRY: As I said, Madam Speaker, we have submitted a bid to Rugby Australia to secure four games as part of the 2027 World Cup; however, we have not heard back from them.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, can Canberrans expect tournament matches to be held in the newly constructed Canberra Stadium by 2027?

MS BERRY: That is a hypothetical question, Madam Speaker, and I cannot respond to that.

Sport and recreation—international events

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, the ACT did not host any games in the 2022 men’s T20 cricket World Cup or the 2023 FIFA women’s World Cup tournaments, and you appear to be a bit wishy-washy about the ACT’s bid for Canberra’s involvement in the upcoming men’s and women’s Rugby World Cups. Minister, isn’t it embarrassing that the nation’s capital has not been represented in the last two major international sports events held in Australia?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with the premise of the opposition’s question that we have been wishy-washy. I have been clear about the applications put to secure games in the ACT.

Ms Lee: When?

MS BERRY: We have not heard back yet.

Ms Lee: When did you apply, I asked.

MS BERRY: Madam Speaker, it is just ridiculously immature. We have not heard back from Rugby Australia, and the 2029 World Cup has not come up for bids yet. So, just to be clear: when that opportunity arises, the ACT government will consider it. With regard to the T20 matches, and the other matches, these are really in the event space within the Chief Minister's portfolio. I can attempt to assist the opposition with its questions, and I will get some advice and bring it back to the Assembly at a later date.

MS LEE: Minister, why is your government not promoting Canberra through international sporting events to a global audience and providing Canberrans the opportunity to watch world class sports without having to go to Sydney?

MS BERRY: We are.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, are Canberrans always missing out on major international sporting events because of a lack of adequate sporting facilities, or are you just not interested?

MS BERRY: We are not missing out on international sporting events. The ACT government is always interested in promoting the ACT as a place where people can come and play sport, and where spectators can enjoy the best possible elite sport.

Tuggeranong—sporting facilities

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation and relates to community sport infrastructure in Tuggeranong. Minister, on 31 May this year, I asked you about the temporary facilities that have been put in place at the Gordon District Playing Fields after the pavilion was vandalised, but I continue to receive a lot of representations from my constituents in the area, including sports teams who use the fields, about the inadequacy of those temporary facilities and the strong desire to see the pavilion repaired. Can you provide an update on the work that has been done to date on the pavilion and the temporary facilities and when the people of Gordon can expect to have those facilities fully operational again?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Davis for the question. As members will know, in this space I have had members contacting my office, both from the Canberra Liberals and from the Canberra Greens, to represent the interests of the community at Gordon, following two fires and incidents of vandalism. The ACT government has worked very closely with the sports organisations that use those facilities to ensure that there are facilities in place so that community sport can continue at Gordon while insurance issues and issues around the building infrastructure can be addressed. That process is continuing. However, in the meantime there are the completely off-grid solar operated canteen facilities, as well as the portaloos that have been put in place. I have been asked about when they would be removed. However, the community has asked that those

portaloos remain in place, so we will have those facilities in place temporarily until we can get the insurance issues resolved and can put in more permanent structures.

MR DAVIS: Minister, specifically, when do you expect to have the Gordon playing fields pavilion operational again?

MS BERRY: I do not have an answer to that question. As I said, the government is still working through insurance issues with regard to the two incidents of vandalism on those structures. Once that is worked through, we will have a better time frame and I will be able to inform the Assembly.

MS CLAY: Minister, what investments has the government made in community sports facilities throughout Tuggeranong over the past two years?

MS BERRY: There have been infrastructure upgrades all across the ACT, but, specific to Tuggeranong, there have been some lighting upgrades at Gowrie that I can recall that will be happening this year, I understand. If there are any others that I can identify specifically, I will get those and will provide them to the Assembly.

Housing ACT—vacant properties

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, the ACT is in a housing crisis with over 3,000 people currently on the public housing waiting list. I refer to a complex on Lowanna Street Braddon that we are all well aware of. This public housing development, which has 10 dwellings, has sat empty and boarded up for over seven years, after only being in service for a few years.

Minister, why is this much needed public housing complex still vacant and unused after seven years?

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Parton. I may have responded to inquiries from you about this particular complex and the challenges that were in place when it was built. The option to repair some of the building's infrastructure issues was not recommended, and the recommendation was to demolish and rebuild the structure. Unfortunately, it was tied up for a lot of that time in legal matters with the developer—and getting advice about what was the best outcome for the structure. It is a long period of time. I accept that. I believe that there were also some issues with ACAT that also caused further delays; however, I will get an update for the Assembly on where that project is up to and provide that at a later date.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many other public housing dwellings are sitting vacant and unused across the territory?

MS BERRY: Mr Parton is aware, and the Assembly is aware, that there are a number of reasons why properties will become vacant across the ACT. A number of those will be vacant due to repairs being required to ensure that those places are safe and inhabitable for public housing tenants to live in. Some of those homes are on the growth and renewal program, so they are in the process of contracts being awarded for demolishing—

Mr Parton: A point of order, simply on relevance. The question was very specifically about how many other public housing dwellings are sitting vacant and not about the reasons for their vacancy.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the Minister is responding to your question, Mr Parton. Ms Berry?

MS BERRY: Thank you Madam Speaker. I was just providing some context for the reasons why properties might be vacant. I do not have a specific number as of today's date, but I will take that detail of the question on notice and provide a response to the Assembly. Sorry—I have it in front of me. It is 548. For the reasons I have explained: some of them are being made available for tenants; some are undergoing maintenance and repair; there are 32 going through assessment and planning decisions; and 31 are new acquisitions, so they have been purchased off the market and are awaiting final approvals for public housing tenants.

MR COCKS: Minister, is it acceptable that these 10 dwellings have sat vacant for 2,555 nights at the height of Canberra's housing crisis?

MS BERRY: As I said, there are a number of reasons why public housing tenancies become unavailable for allocation. It is important that dwellings that are substandard are brought up to a standard. We need our public housing tenants to be living in properties that best suit their needs—

Mr Cocks interjecting—

Ms Lawder: Seven years!

MS BERRY: Sorry, I misunderstood the question. I thought you were talking about these vacancies.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! Ms Berry, my advice would be to just ignore the interjections and continue with your answer.

MS BERRY: You are right, Madam Speaker, I should ignore them, but I misunderstood. I thought they were talking about these vacancies and the concerns about them, but the interjections were about Braddon, and I thought I had explained the reason why there had been some time in that. Of course, that is absolutely not our preference, and we want people to be in homes. But we need homes to actually meet the needs of tenants and to be suitable and safe, so, they need to be maintained and upgraded to ensure that we have public housing that meets the needs of our tenants. None of us here would want our public housing tenants to live in homes that are not safe.

Tuggeranong—community health centre

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, you have announced several investments in new infrastructure in Tuggeranong. Can you outline what this funding will go towards?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. As I spoke about last week, and will continue to keep the Canberra community well informed about, the ACT government is investing in new health infrastructure in Tuggeranong. These investments will expand the services provided in the region and for the southside of the ACT. The \$16.6 million investment for the ACT's new health centres include more than \$14 million for the design and construction of the South Tuggeranong Health Centre. This ensures that it will reach full design and construction in Conder over the coming years. A tender for this work was released in August.

This builds on the 2022-23 ACT budget with the design and construction of the new southside hydrotherapy pool. Eight and a half million dollars was committed to deliver the new hydrotherapy pool at the Tuggeranong Lakeside Leisure Centre. Last week I announced the development application for the hydrotherapy pool is open for public comment and will remain open until 22 September 2023.

So, Madam Speaker, this is an exciting time for Tuggeranong with these new facilities able to build on the excellent facilities that are already in place in your electorate. With our Tuggeranong Walk-in Centre, Community Health Centre, Child and Family Centre in Tuggeranong town centre and the Lanyon Family Centre delivering maternal and child health services in south Tuggeranong, we will continue to deliver even more services in south Tuggeranong for people of all ages.

DR PATERSON: Minister, can you provide further information about the community consultation that was undertaken as part of developing these investments and the opportunities consumers will have to provide further input on these facilities?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. In 2022 the ACT government undertook a three phase community consultation between August and December on designing ACT health services for our growing population. The consultation, YourSay engagement and a deliberative panel of community members from each of ACT's regions was convened. Feedback identified common barriers and issues with accessing health care and the need for better information about health care choices. Other key elements identified were the need for coordinated and integrated services; innovation in the delivery of care; virtual care; and access to services, particularly community based services such as walk-in centres and community health centres. These findings are informing the work we are doing across a range of infrastructure and service projects, including our new health centres and the more than \$1 billion north-side hospital.

As part of the continued development of our important infrastructure and service developments, additional community feedback received over the coming months will help to inform planning, design and clinical services for our new facilities. In individual projects this will be through consultants we are engaging to progress the work, such as the South Tuggeranong Health Centre, and of course, forums like the ACT Health Infrastructure Consumer Reference Group which has been established in partnership with the Health Care Consumers' Association. We will also continue to engage with the HCCA, other stakeholders and non-government organisations to develop our services and to communicate with the community. A really great example of that is working with our non-government partners in the development of the \$49 million Watson Health Precinct. I announced the development application was

open yesterday for public comment. We have been working with Marymead CatholicCare, Ted Noffs and Winnunga Nimmityjah on the development of this precinct and these facilities. So the development application is open and I encourage people to have a look at it and provide their feedback.

MS ORR: Minister, how are these projects reflected in the planning for future community health infrastructure projects and the services that are currently provided closer to people's homes?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. The new health centres across South Tuggeranong, and the ones planned for the Inner South, North Gungahlin and West Belconnen, and key projects in the community like the southside hydrotherapy pool and the Watson Health precinct, are all part of Labor's plan to deliver more health services closer to home.

In July, we released the ACT's updated Health Infrastructure Plan that included reviewing community health assets and developing a long term program for the upgrade, renewal and construction of community health facilities right across Canberra. This will help to ensure community health facilities are in the right location; are functional for consumers, patients, their families and of course, clinicians; and that our facilities are environmentally sustainable. Community health facilities provide crucial care to Canberrans, managing health conditions before a person needs to go to the emergency department, supporting discharge from hospital and assisting people to recover from illness in the community. I will be really pleased to announce reaching major milestones across a range of health infrastructure projects this year, from development applications to opening our newer services such as the Weston Creek Medical Imaging service.

Community health care is an essential role in our region and it links other established services such as non-government organisations, our primary care providers and pharmacies, to help Canberran's access care closer to home and to live healthier lives. In the Watson Health Precinct we also have the opportunity to provide targeted services to First Nations Canberrans and to young people who need mental health and alcohol and other drug support.

So unlike the Canberra Liberals, who can only focus on the past and poor commitment to delivering a hole in the ground in the middle of a functioning hospital campus, we will continue to deliver infrastructure, new services and a plan for the future that will deliver more access to health care across the ACT.

Kingsford-Smith School—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I refer to the special purpose review into Kingsford-Smith School. That report shows that the school was understaffed for all of 2022, that teachers expressed concerns about their safety and that students report a recent change in threatening behaviours with no known consequences.

Staff also report student behaviour is impacting learning expectations and that strategies to improve attendance and engagement have not had the desired results, and

most staff report a lack of follow-up from the directorate to deal with the issues, to the point that some no longer even bother reporting their concerns through RiskMan.

Minister, given these issues have been raised for years with you by us, parents and teachers, why has this appalling situation been allowed to fester and worsen under your watch?

MS BERRY: I completely reject the premise of Mr Hanson's question. On the issue he has raised regarding special purpose reviews, they are put in place to understand where the gaps are within a school environment. They occur generally every five years; however, should there be circumstances where a school and the Education Directorate believe that a special purpose review is required in between the five-year review process, that occurs to identify the issues and to work with the school, with the school community, with the teachers, with the school principal and with the staff and students to overcome those issues and put the necessary extra supports in place so that that school can thrive and continue to be a great public school, like all of our public schools here in the ACT.

Kingsford-Smith School is another great public school. The review that has been described was a review that was conducted in November last year—over 12 months ago. There has been significant work within the school community to address the issues that were identified in the review to support that school to be an even greater public school in the ACT.

I had the chance to go to Kingsford-Smith School last Friday on a visit with Anne Aly to visit the Koori Preschool, which is a particularly successful part of the Kingsford-Smith School community, providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families with free access to preschool for three- and four-year-olds and also wraparound supports and then continue that cultural growth throughout the school as well as positive behaviours for learning and making sure that it has a positive impact on everybody that goes to that school.

Every child goes to that school because they want to learn, and teachers and school principals are at that school because they want to provide the very best opportunities for students at that school.

MR HANSON: Minister, what strategies will change or have been changed at the school, given that the report shows that the existing strategies are not delivering the required results?

MS BERRY: As I said, that report was from almost 12 months ago, and there has been significant work at Kingsford-Smith School to continue to build on that strong community and strong culture that the school has developed over a number of years.

Significantly, there has been work around ensuring that the Positive Behaviour for Learning program and student engagement and peer support programs are in place. They have had an ongoing focus on student pathways through work experiences as well as work placements.

There is work commencing shortly with the Education Directorate to look at the senior campus building and some of the building and infrastructure works. Both staff and students will have an opportunity—

Ms Lee: It is not working, though, is it?

MS BERRY: The review was 12 months ago, I would remind you, Madam Speaker, and a lot has happened in that 12-month time frame.

I would rather talk about the success of this school and what it is doing for its community in West Belconnen than continue to downgrade it, teacher bash, principal bash and bash a community that is working hard—like some of the media reporting that has been occurring over the last couple of days.

I have been incredibly disappointed, and I will speak for this school and defend this school and every public school, despite some of the challenges that they might be experiencing, knowing that they are doing their very best to overcome those challenges and provide the very best outcomes for their students.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what have you done in the past 12 months and ongoing to make the directorate more responsive, since the report states clearly that that was not occurring?

MS BERRY: As I said, there has been significant work in our public schools but particularly in Kingsford-Smith School and with the community to overcome the issues that were raised in the report. That is what the review is for—to identify where the challenges are and then work with the school community to overcome them. That is what the Education Directorate has been doing—working with that school to do that.

Margaret Hendry School—safety

MR HANSON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I refer to the special purpose review into Margaret Hendry School. Minister, the report found that not all children are learning basic foundational skills, particularly in the early years; that low literacy growth and development impacts their level of engagement; and that current structures do not support improved student outcomes.

In addition, the report shows that the school has a very high staff turnover, with the school unable to attract experienced educators. Staff do not feel confident to raise concerns with senior leadership—in fact, some teachers felt blamed for occupational violence. Minister, what are you doing or have you done to address the low literacy rates and failures that have caused children, especially in the early years, to fail basic foundational skills at this school, as has been reported?

MS BERRY: As I said, these reviews are there to identify the challenges that schools might be experiencing so that the Education Directorate and the government can work with those schools to overcome those challenges and put in strategies, whatever they might be, to support teachers and school staff and the school communities to achieve a great outcome for themselves and for the students that are at that school.

Nobody wants our young people to be falling behind in any of their schooling as a result of some of the challenges that our schools might be facing. One of the challenges that we have talked about a number of times now in this space is the

challenge of schoolteacher vacancies and workload issues that have been increased as a result of COVID, I should say.

What the ACT Education Directorate has done has ensured that there are literacy mentors based in that school to support the teachers. There is also a booster reading program, which is operating in small group programs for students who have more complex needs. The school is working really hard to implement the Positive Behaviours for Learning program, and next term the Education Directorate will be providing—sorry, this term the directorate will be providing even more supports, including additional school leaders, community liaison officers, as well as embedding a director of school improvement within the school.

I know that the school is working as hard as it can with the Education Directorate to overcome these challenges, and we will support them every day to make sure that they can get there.

MR HANSON: Minister, have you let our teachers down when they are saying they feel that they will be blamed if they report violence?

MS BERRY: Absolutely not, and I encourage teachers every day to report violence. That is the only way that we will understand the issues that are occurring in our schools, so that we can work with schools to overcome them. I am on the record for encouraging schoolteachers to report incidents of violence, and I will say it again. Not asking for help, not reporting violence does nothing to address the issues. We need to know about what is happening in our schools so that we can address them.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will you intervene to improve results at this school?

MS BERRY: I have been getting updates on this school from the Education Directorate, and I have asked them to update me regularly on the challenges that they are facing, and I will support them, I will support the school principal and the schoolteachers and that school community to overcome them, but what I will not be doing is talking that school community down.

Schools—performance

MR HANSON: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, in the *Canberra Times*, on 18 September 2023, an article stated:

Reviews of two schools should be sounding alarm bells for parents and teachers—and be prompting a major rethink of the Education Directorate's overall strategy.

It went on:

But the fact is at the moment the quality of a child's education is a lottery ... It will take strong leadership from the ACT Education Directorate to truly make the public school system equitable.

Minister, why has your government so drastically failed in leadership on equity in education that your failure is now published in two reports and a major newspaper article?

MS BERRY: Again, I reject the question and the premise of the question that the opposition leader has made, and the premise of the articles that have been published. I understand that there will be people who have different views about how education systems work across the country and here in the ACT, but my focus has been to ensure that public schools in the ACT are the most equitable, and I will continue to do that.

In my time as minister in the ACT I have ensured that all school students—the first in the country—were provided free Chrome books in the senior secondary years, and all I got from the opposition was a whole lot of laughing about how that could possibly improve equity within our schools. I can tell you that happens when every school student gets access to modern technology that helps them to learn, when every school student who needs to get access to wi-fi, and when every school student who needs additional financial support can access the future of education equity fund. Let us not forget about the comments that were made about free lunches within our schools. If that is not a minister doing everything she can to provide an equitable outcome for every student, regardless of where they come from, then I do not know what is.

MR HANSON: Minister, when will your government deliver the resources that these schools desperately need?

MS BERRY: We are. We are delivering those resources, and I have just given a good handful of the resources that have been provided, which were laughed at by the opposition when they were provided. With regard to literacy, of course there are a lot of changes happening within our schools as a result of changes to the Australian curriculum. Those changes provide for a new version, which is being implemented in the ACT in 2024. In the ACT, our school systems provide a systemic, evidence-based approach to early literacy instruction through the 10 essential instructional practices, which I have provided to the Assembly in answer to previous questions.

In our ACT public schools we have literacy champion networks which consist of 141 teachers and leaders who are tasked with embedding those 10 essential practices. These literacy champions offer individual targeted mentoring and support for teachers in their schools. The new educator network provides an introduction to the 10 essential practices, and on how to implement them in the classroom. So, our schools are ready, and they are being supported to be able to continue to deliver a great education, but, importantly, to deliver on the new version 9 of the Australian curriculum, as all education ministers have committed to.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will you stop treating the resourcing of teachers and the quality of education in the ACT as a lottery that is stacked against children in certain schools due to failures under your leadership?

MS BERRY: I absolutely, again, reject the premise of that question from the opposition, because in the ACT we have the highest-paid teachers in the country. We have some of the highest paid teachers in the country working closely with our school communities and teachers to ensure that our school staff are supported to deliver a great education to our schools.

What that means is understanding the workload issues that they are experiencing, the challenges that COVID has brought on our community—which still exists within our schools—and the violence that our teachers are facing every day from our community.

That needs to stop and needs to be reported by our schools. I have been the only one in this place that has been standing up for our public school communities. The only one! When it comes to talking about public education, all the opposition can do is talk about misery, defeat and failure. They have never, ever spoken positively about the success of our public schools in the ACT. I always will.

Access Canberra—services

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, how does Access Canberra measure customer satisfaction?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the question. We know the value and importance of quality customer service throughout almost every aspect of our lives, from doing the shopping to going out for a meal or a drink at a bar. Access Canberra is the government's key service delivery organisation. It is the touchpoint for most residents to our government. That is why it is critical that we are providing quality customer service to help make it simpler and easier for more people and more businesses to interact with government.

Each year, Access Canberra conducts a customer satisfaction survey and publishes the results on the Access Canberra website. Eighty-eight per cent of people surveyed had used Access Canberra services in 2023. Once again, the 2023 results are overwhelmingly positive, with the community reporting strong satisfaction when transacting with Access Canberra in person, by phone and online. Customer satisfaction in Access Canberra service centres again received a score of 92 per cent in 2023. Key drivers to the satisfaction include short wait times but also, importantly, the knowledge of those working at service centres, the fairness of staff and the ease of information provided. The government is continuing to invest in the training of staff at Access Canberra as well as in service and information improvement across its service channels.

MS ORR: Minister, what are the average waiting times for customers attending Access Canberra service centres?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. I am pleased to advise that, for the month of August, the average wait time was five minutes and 46 seconds. Wait times are updated in real time on the Access Canberra website and Canberrans can check the website before attending a service centre to plan their visit. Mobile queuing is also available to support queue management at busy times and improve the customer experience while waiting for service. We know that Canberrans greatly appreciate services like mobile queuing and the extensive list of digital services that Access Canberra has to offer, with the use of digital services at its highest in 2023. Of course, we have our bookable appointments which have been incredibly popular, especially since we have expanded those to all our service centres. With the refreshed Access Canberra website, though, I would like to take this opportunity to remind Canberrans that the vast majority of transactions can be completed online. People can also call Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what about wait times for customers calling Access Canberra?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The average wait time for calls to Access Canberra for August was one minute and 14 seconds. The government continues to invest in Access Canberra to improve the caller experience and ensure that people are able to get the information or services they need. This includes providing more information to callers during the busiest times to call the contact centre. Generally, 9 am to 10 am and 12 pm to 1 pm are those busy periods. This information allows customers to make an informed decision on when to call for a shorter wait. People should not feel frustrated having to deal with the government, and our survey results show that, overwhelmingly, people are satisfied with the services they are receiving, but we are continuing to set new goals for 2024 to continue improving that user experience.

The contact centre also continues to support the Canberra community during weather events, taking calls and logging jobs to support the State Emergency Service. Customer satisfaction with our contact centre increased again in 2023, up to 85 per cent for the total number of calls. I want to take the opportunity to thank our frontline teams at Access Canberra for their hard work, their professionalism and their dedication to assisting the Canberra community. They are always looking for ways to improve, and I sincerely commend them.

Jacka—land release

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I note that the SLA website suggests that there are currently 119 single residential blocks of land for sale in Jacka for an average price of \$640,000 and an average block size of 490 square metres. In addition, I note there are 24 single residential blocks still for sale in Whitlam for an average price of \$736,000 and an average block size of 573 square metres. These are quite expensive blocks of land.

Why are there still a significant number of blocks of land for sale in these developments? Is it the price that is putting people off?

MS BERRY: A lot has happened in the housing market over the last couple of years: particularly leading into COVID, and then with some of the challenges that countries around the world have faced around construction supplies—

Ms Lee: These are blocks for sale now!

MS BERRY: This has all impacted blocks for sale in the ACT as well. However, what we are seeing in the housing market more recently is that it has remained a cautious market that has been impacted by the 12 interest rate increases and the inflationary pressures that have been put on everybody, as well factors including housing finances, borrowing capacity and loan eligibility. So, there have been a number of factors outside of the ACT's control, which include: the Reserve Bank's decisions; the former federal government's decisions around HomeBuilder; COVID, of course; and, as I said, building and construction supplies.

What we are also seeing in the ACT is that private estates—including Denman Prospect, South Jerrabomberra, Googong and Jumping Creek—all have blocks available over the counter also. So, there is a significant change from where we

started three or four years ago, when we had 400 to 600 homes available over the block. Once COVID restrictions were completed, they sold within weeks.

We are now moving back to a more cautious market, as I have described, where we have more blocks available over the counter. We will have a look at what is happening with the market as changes occur across the country, particularly around interest rate rises. That is also having a significant impact on the decisions of families, who are deciding whether to purchase and build homes of their own or purchase off the existing market.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you consider these blocks of land to be affordable for Canberra families?

MS BERRY: Certainly, the price has definitely changed over the years, and that has been driven up by a range of different circumstances that have been out of our control in the ACT. One of those levers that is out of our control is the tax setting of the federal government around negative gearing and capital gains. That has also had an impact on the price of land.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MS BERRY: I think people will make decisions about whether they purchase land based on their own family circumstances. Certainly, the circumstances of families around the ACT, and across the country, have been shown to be quite challenging, with cost-of-living increases occurring. But there are decisions, as I said, outside of our control that have made people change their minds about whether they will purchase land right now—like those of the Reserve Bank, because of the fact of what has occurred with interest rates. When the interest rates were very low, we saw those 400 to 600 houses and land on the counter go out the door very fast, but when the interest rates started to rise, significantly and fast, people made different decisions. That is what is happening across the board—not just with ACT government land but with private land purchases as well.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you consider auctioning these blocks of land to allow the market to dictate the price?

MS BERRY: The Suburban Land Agency makes these decisions based on their own forecasts—

Mr Cain: You're the minister! I think you're the minister for the Suburban Land Agency!

MS BERRY: I do not make those decisions lightly. Those are decisions that the experts within the Suburban Land Agency investigate to see whether there are opportunities that could be taken; however, having land available over the counter has been the preference to ensure that homes can become available to more people. Auctions could have the negative impact of pushing prices up even further.

Environment—Canberra Nature Park

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, many Canberrans worry that special places in nature, places that include critical habitat for endangered species and many which are critical habitat themselves, are not in our formal reserve system through the Canberra Nature Park managed by ACT Parks. Recent petitions calling for Canberra Nature Park protection for Ainslie Volcanics, Callum Brae and Bluett's Block received over 1,500 signatures but government responded to say they will not be including these areas in reserves or the Canberra Nature Park. The primary stated reason appears to be a lack of resources to maintain new areas of protection. Minister, do you have enough resources to protect critical habitat in areas that are not currently in the Canberra Nature Park?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Clay for the question. I do acknowledge, of course, the interest in various sites in Ainslie being incorporated into the Mount Ainslie Nature Reserve in the recent petition. I note there is a mix of tenures in the area, including one site managed by PCS, another managed by TCCS and a site privately leased and subject to a potential development. The decision not to incorporate the sites in the petition was considered by cabinet collectively, as is the standard process. As part of that consideration, of any proposal for cabinet, advice from relevant government entities was considered. In this instance, it included Transport Canberra and City Services as well as the Conservator of Flora and Fauna and the Parks and Conservation Service within EPSDD. As part of this process it was acknowledged that there are some environmental values present on the site and I have acknowledged that in the response to the petition.

I do appreciate that the community and stakeholders often identify sites that contain environmental values, however, it is the government's job to strategically prioritise sites for management and conservation and make sure that resources are deployed to manage values in the ACT holistically. In this instance, significant work and resourcing would be required to bring the sites up to the standard appropriate for a nature reserve. So in direct response to Ms Clay's question, whilst we can protect the biodiversity values of the site as it currently stands, to bring it up to the value of a nature reserve would cost government quite a bit more in outright costs and also in time and resources. Just because it is not part of the nature reserve does not mean it does not receive any support from government, or values that are not recognised. We do quite a bit of work, particularly with the volunteers on the ground, in protecting those sites.

MS CLAY: Minister, what criteria does government apply when deciding whether an area should be protected as part of the Canberra Nature Park?

MR GENTLEMAN: There is quite a bit of criteria that is considered, particularly in relation to environmental values. Most of this work is shown on the EPSDD website and the Conservator of Flora and Fauna puts those considerations in place and gives advice as well. So quite a bit of study and work that would go into setting it as a nature park.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how have you responded to the Conservation Council's calls for a biodiversity network given the ACT's environmental crisis?

MR GENTLEMAN: We do consider the petitions and papers put forward by the Conservation Council very seriously and we take onboard the comments they make. There are many very qualified people that sit on the council and we take their views onboard as very qualified people. But we also take onboard the views of other people in government as well in regard to our community as a whole city. That means we look at other opportunities, not just in conservation, but opportunities for people to live in the future in the city as well and provide for them at the same time.

Tuggeranong—sporting facilities

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, a vital indoor community sporting facility in Tuggeranong was recently damaged by flooding and the lease for private basketball users terminated.

Previously, the centre was closed for a long period, partly due to disputed responsibilities over maintenance of a car parking facility, and organised basketball competitions were also affected by water leaks in another Tuggeranong facility.

Minister, what measures will the ACT government take to ensure that Tuggeranong residents maintain access to indoor sporting and recreation facilities?

MS BERRY: I have been advised of the issues at The Dome with regard to flooding and the significant impact that that has had on the Scorers basketball academy, in particular, and some of the users of that facility in Tuggeranong.

I know that that has been a great concern for the Tuggeranong community and certainly for the Scorers' team, who had put a significant financial upfront program in place for infrastructure but also a lot of time of their own to make that a success. I was as disappointed as anybody to hear that their program cannot continue as a result of the flooding in The Dome.

Of course, the ACT government has made a significant commitment to Tuggeranong to build a new ice sports facility. That, frustratingly, is taking some time; however, it is in the ballpark or the ice rink of the developers of that proposal. That process is continuing, and I really do hope to have an update soon on what that facility will bring to the Tuggeranong and broader community.

The idea for that facility is that it will include an indoor facility in addition to the ice rinks. I know that it will be welcomed by Tuggeranong and certainly the ice sports community and the everyone else in the ACT.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what provisions will the ACT government put in place to better maintain and repair existing sporting facilities in Tuggeranong?

MS BERRY: The ACT government has made a significant investment into sports facilities all across the ACT. As with questions earlier around infrastructure upgrades across facilities in Tuggeranong, a few other facilities that have been upgraded in Tuggeranong include the Wanniasa Oval, Kambah 2 as well as Greenway. And, of course, I talked about the Gowrie lights which are being completed.

The female facilities upgrades that I have referred to in Kambah, Wanniasa and Greenway are part of the ACT government's program to upgrade facilities all across the ACT to ensure that they are female friendly.

We have sports facilities all across Canberra that received significant funding for a range of different purposes, including just business-as-usual maintenance, grass-mowing programs across several thousands of hectares, watering, general maintenance of fields, changing over from winter to summer sports and back again as well as ensuring that our indoor pavilions and facilities are fit for purpose.

We have just completed our survey of sports communities about their priorities for infrastructure going into the future. I will soon be able to talk more about what that survey result shows us and certainly the aspirations for our sports communities moving forward.

MS LAWDER: Minister, will the government consider working collaboratively with the owners and occupants of local sporting facilities to ensure that Tuggeranong residents, especially children and young people, have the facilities to meet demand for indoor basketball facilities in Tuggeranong?

MS BERRY: We are certainly working with Basketball ACT around basketball facilities for the ACT but particularly in the Belconnen area. Having been a basketball player myself, and I know Ms Lawder used to dribble around the court occasionally with the basketball—

Ms Lawder: Sometimes playing basketball!

MS BERRY: I withdraw the comment that Ms Lawder was possibly dribbling around the basketball court. I am sure she was a great three-point shooter!

Basketball is a sport which takes you across different parts of the ACT, including Tuggeranong and Belconnen. I know that it is a sport that is growing and I know that we need to have more facilities for people to be able to enjoy that sport.

Certainly, I have committed as education minister to ensure that all our new high schools have a double gymnasium for basketball clubs to use for training and competition if possible, to working with Basketball ACT to ensure that they have the appropriate court servicing and sprung rings so that they can be used for competition if possible, and to ensure that our primary schools have at least one gymnasium that also has suitable facilities.

We will work with all our clubs. As I said, we have just completed the survey of sports communities across the ACT, and we will see what the results are of that survey and the aspirations of sports communities into the future.

Molonglo Valley—playing fields

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, when residents were initially informed about new sporting fields in the Molonglo Valley, they were told that eight fields would be built to accommodate the growing

population. The latest information regarding the fields, though, indicates there will be only four rectangular fields and one oval, representing a decrease of 37.5 per cent compared to what you promised. Minister, when can the people of Molonglo Valley expect the further three fields that were part of your promise?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Cocks for the question, and there have been some challenges with regard to fields and the typology of the land that was selected as part of the sports facility in the Molonglo area. This is not the end of sporting infrastructure in that area, a growing area; in fact, I believe it has surpassed Gungahlin as a growing part of this city, and certainly sports infrastructure is something that we will take very seriously as that part of Canberra grows. We have budgeted in the ACT budget for detailed planning of those sports fields, and so we will be able to inform the community what that looks like shortly.

MR COCKS: Minister, where in the Molonglo Valley have you identified that you can build the additional three sporting fields to accommodate the growing population?

MS BERRY: The Molonglo Valley is still very much growing, and part of the Molonglo Valley is still in very much a planning stage. Certainly, with our new schools we will have further sports facilities, including indoor sports gymnasiums as well as outdoor sports.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why do residents of the Molonglo Valley need to wait until it is too late for the completion of such important pieces of infrastructure?

MS BERRY: I engage regularly with the Molonglo Valley Community Forum about infrastructure and the need as that community grows, and I will continue to do that. We are very much focused on a secondary school and college within the Molonglo area. I have always been available to that community forum to engage with them around infrastructure, and to ensure that they are provided with regular updates on the work of the Suburban Land Agency, in particular, moving forward, to ensure that that community has the facilities that it needs as it grows.

Electoral Amendment Bill 2021

MR BRADDOCK: Attorney General, on 27 July, I wrote to you concerning my proposed amendments to the Electoral Amendment Bill 2021, which concerns lowering the voting age to 16 for territory elections and providing for new voters to receive a warning notice rather than a fine if they fail to vote. Attorney General, are you aware of any legal impediment to lowering the voting age?

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is an interesting question about what constitutes compulsory voting. I am sure that members will know that voting needs to be compulsory in the ACT in accordance with the Proportional Representation (Hare-Clark) Entrenchment Act 1994. Mr Braddock and Mr Davis have presented a bill to lower the voting age to 16 for territory elections. In my view, this is an important and positive reform because it enfranchises young people who already work, pay tax, potentially drive a car, and are affected every day by government regulations and decisions. Young people have a powerful vision for the future, and they will have to deal with dramatic, life-altering events such as climate change based on decisions our elected officials make today.

A concern of lowering the voting age is that people under the age of 18 will be fined or penalised through the criminal justice system for failing to vote. So Mr Braddock's and Mr Davis's bill, for which amendments have been circulated, proposes that a new voter will be considered to have a valid and sufficient reason for failing to vote if they have not voted at their first election, and they will receive a warning notice from the Electoral Commission rather than a default notice.

Essentially, there will be no fines for people under 18 who do not vote. The question then arises: does this undermine compulsory voting in such a way that it is contrary to the Act that I referred to earlier? The Electoral Act already imposes a duty on voters to enrol and to vote. For voting to be considered compulsory I do not think it is necessary, then, for the government to apply sanctions for a failure to vote.

I have read comments in the newspaper that cited issues about the importance of compulsory voting, noted concerns about undermining compulsory voting, and noted concerns that the proposed approach would create a two-tier system. What I would argue is that opposition to the bill based on these concerns must be based on a policy and political decision, not a legal one.

MR BRADDOCK: Are there any legal considerations in favour of the ACT lowering the voting age?

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, can you hold that thought. I am looking at standing order 117(c)(iii), which says that questions shall not ask the ministers for a legal opinion. I am going to converse with the Clerk for a moment. Members, I rule that supplementary question out of order.

MR DAVIS: I have a second supplementary question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Be very mindful about the question you ask.

MR DAVIS: Does a police officer issuing a warning for an act of speeding on ACT roads make the speed limits optional?

MADAM SPEAKER: I am ruling that question out of order.

MR DAVIS: Madam Speaker, on your ruling, the Attorney-General is the first law officer. I have asked a legal question about the current legal framework.

MADAM SPEAKER: The standing order says that you cannot ask for a legal opinion. I have ruled it out of order. If you want to contest that, feel free.

Public housing—Calwell

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, a couple of weeks ago you formally opened 30 new townhouses in Calwell as part of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program. Can you tell me how these houses represent the government's approach to public housing?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. I know that members for Brindabella will be interested in the Calwell housing project and how we are growing public housing across the city, but particularly in the suburb of Calwell. The ACT government has been working hard to renew its public housing stock to meet the needs of those currently in public housing, as well as those on the wait list.

We are committed to public housing that matches how people want to live and where they want to live: homes with enough space for pets or the appropriate number of bedrooms for all the kids; homes in places that people want to live, whether that is close to friends and family or preferred schools and services; homes that are economical to run and are comfortable places to spend time. We know that it is important and it is different for everyone. That is why the ACT government is carefully calibrating its public housing portfolio to ensure a range of public housing options are spread all across the territory. We have also focused on ensuring public housing is close to amenities like shops, public transport and recreational spaces. These are all the things that enable convenience and quality of life but also wellbeing. This government's vision is for public housing tenants to have an equal chance of happiness as everyone else.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what approach to accessibility and adaptability was taken in the construction of these homes?

MS BERRY: These 30 beautiful new homes in Calwell are a prime example of the ACT government's commitment to adaptable and accessible public housing. These homes have a fit-out that will enable tenants with a disability to live their life as easily and with as much dignity as possible. Importantly, these homes can be modified to support people to age in place. This government is investing in public housing that meets the needs of current tenants with a disability as well as those on the wait list. I am proud to report that, as at 30 June 2023, 94 per cent of builds in the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program were either class C adaptable or to Liveable Housing Australia's gold standard.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what features do these properties have that will help deliver on these goals?

MS BERRY: Sometimes when we talk about "accessible", what it actually means is not easily understood by people who do not have a disability. I am pleased to say that all these homes in Calwell are class C accessible, with lots of room around doorways as well as in the living spaces. The kitchens are built with removable cabinetry and adjustable-height benches which can be lowered or raised to meet the needs of individual tenants without costly or significant modification. The other feature that I was really impressed with was the sliding door tracks being set down flush with the slab, making access for people with limited mobility, walking frames or wheelchairs safer and easier to navigate. Design features like these make Housing ACT homes adaptable to suit a range of needs. Homes like these make the public housing portfolio more versatile and prepared for the future.

With that, I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Papers

Madam Speaker tabled the following papers:

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

Bills—Not inquired into—Children and Young People Amendment Bill 2023—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing, dated 18 September 2023.

Estimates 2023-2024—Select Committee—

Answers to Question on Notice—

No 162, dated 18 August 2023.

No 172, dated 18 September 2023.

No 180, dated 12 September 2023.

No 195, dated 14 September 2023.

Answer to Question Taken on Notice No 104, dated 18 September 2023.

Schedule of unanswered questions taken on notice and questions on notice, dated 18 September 2023.

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

ACT retirement villages ombudsman—Possible establishment—Assembly resolution of 22 March 2023—Government Response, dated September 2023.

Grass clippings—Impact on ACT waterways—Assembly resolution of 24 November 2022—Government response, dated September 2023.

Legal Aid Act—Legal Aid (Commissioner—ACTCOSS Nominee) Appointment 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-205 (LR, 7 August 2023)—Revised explanatory statement.

Urban Open Space Land Management Plan—Draft—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, undated.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Planning Act—

Planning (Exempt Development) Regulation 2023—Subordinate Law SL2023-21 (LR, 11 September 2023).

Planning (General) Regulation 2023—Subordinate Law SL2023-20 (LR, 11 September 2023).

Lake Tuggeranong—water quality—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) (3.04): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Grass clippings—Impact on ACT waterways—Assembly resolution of 24 November 2022—Government response.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (3.04): I rise to speak on papers presented by Minister Gentleman, which includes a response from Minister Steel to my motion from November 2022 that called on the ACT government to protect Lake Tuggeranong from grass clippings and leaf litter.

Lake Tuggeranong is at the heart of our community in Brindabella, and many residents take pride in the lake's beauty and have a vision for what the lake could and should be. Dedicated community groups like the Southern ACT Catchment Group, the Lake Tuggeranong Rowing Club, the Tuggeranong Community Council, the Tuggeranong Lake Carers association and the Lake Tuggeranong Sea Scouts value and take pride in the lake as an integral part of our Tuggeranong community.

Sports facilities, community spaces, the library and Lake Tuggeranong College all surround our lake, and I want all residents in our community to be able to enjoy the lake at its fullest. I am excited that work has finally started on the new infrastructure improvements around the lake's foreshore, which will bring in better playgrounds, park facilities, widened paths, better furniture and lighting, and a revitalised boardwalk. These developments will bring Lake Tuggeranong closer to the vibrant foreshore that we know it can be.

Of course, it is not only people in our community who appreciate our lake. Our lakes can and should be home for wildlife and flora species, and our policies and programs should ensure that they have healthy environments to thrive in. That involves investing in programs to clean our lake's water, which Minister Shane Rattenbury has been doing a great job of. Stage 1 of the Healthy Waterways Program saw the government build seven water quality infrastructure assets in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment as part of the \$93.5 million co-investment with the Australian government. These infrastructure projects included rain gardens, a wet garden and water restoration projects, which will help clean stormwater that runs into the lake before it gets there.

Stage 2 of the Healthy Waterways Program will see up to 10 new water quality projects constructed in the Lake Tuggeranong catchment alone. I was very excited to see one such project begin construction in July this year, when I was pleased to join Minister Rattenbury for the announcement. The project involves the removing of 500 metres of concrete stormwater drains and replacing them with natural elements in Calwell and modifying almost 54 street kerbs in Kambah. That will help redirect stormwater flows across existing greenspace.

The project will also plan stormwater recycling infrastructure at the Kambah playing fields. I know a number of community groups feel particularly excited about this initiative as well. But, of course, Mr Assistant Speaker, it must be bold printed and underlined that all of these wonderful projects risk taking two steps forward and two steps backward if the ACT government is not itself investing in best practice mowing and grass clipping.

Residents of Tuggeranong have long been concerned about the health and water quality of our lake. They are rightly worried about the amount of organic litter that ends up in Lake Tuggeranong, which causes issues like blue-green algae blooms. My motion of November noted that work undertaken by the University of Canberra, funded through the new Office of Water, showed that sediment in Lake Tuggeranong released 113 kilograms of phosphorous in the 2018-2019 season, while their modelling suggested that only 80 to 100 kilograms of phosphorous is needed to cause algae bloom outbreak conditions. Clearly, we have comfortably exceeded that threshold for many years.

Algal blooms have kept our lake closed from recreational swimming for nearly 100 days every year. With the ACT government investing in important community educative programs like the Leaf Collective, which helps inform households about the impacts their grass clippings and leaf litter can have on our urban lakes and waterways, it is imperative that the government leads by example and should be cleaning up after itself.

For this reason, I put the motion to the Assembly in November that called on the government to explore better ways to improve the collection of grass clippings and leaf litter from our own mowing program to protect our urban lakes and waterways. Some of the options I proposed included trialling dedicated street sweeping programs in line with intensive mowing and leaf litter seasons, and I have certainly had it raised with me by a few constituents in Tuggeranong that they would love to see the new electric street sweeper we see through the city streets make its way south soon. I proposed providing more training to our mowing technicians, who we know have worked particularly hard over the spring season, and trialling a post-mowing program to collect grass clippings and other organic matter for proper composting.

Some simple and modest investment ideas have been raised with me by constituents, including the reasonably obvious one proposing netting to be fitted in stormwater drains and collected to stop as much of the big leaf litter and grass clippings heading into the waterways as possible.

I look forward to consulting with Minister Steel and working through the response that has been tabled today and assessing any changes that have been made to mowing practices as a result of that Assembly resolution. Additionally, my motion called for further consultation with the community on the government's Urban Open Space Land Management Plan. I was pleased to see that plan receive community and stakeholder engagement through YourSay, including in-person consultations in every region, including in Tuggeranong.

The draft plan has a section called "Operating in an environmentally sensitive way", which details improvements to mowing and grass litter practices. I was pleased to see this addition, with specific practices mentioned for the areas surrounding Lake Tuggeranong and other lake areas throughout the territory. Through this section, the plan addresses a number of the concerns I have raised in my motion, including for mowing to not occur within five metres of water bodies and for staff training to ensure that proper practices are followed. I look forward to the release of the report reflecting the YourSay consultation on the draft plan and the release of the final Urban Open Space Land Management Plan in time for summer.

I sincerely hope the full implementation of this plan will ensure that our urban lakes and waterways are treated with the utmost care and respect. I hope that significant effort is made to reform our mowing programs and practices to protect the health of our natural environment and improve Lake Tuggeranong as a vibrant community hub.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (3.11): I rise to speak further to Mr Steel's statement about the government's response to the Assembly resolution on grass clippings and their impact on Canberra waterways.

As the minister with portfolio responsibility for addressing the challenge of improving Canberra's water quality, it is timely that I update the Assembly on recent insights into the role that grass clippings play in the pollution of waterways. These come from the government's ongoing works as part of the ACT Healthy Waterways Program.

Healthy waterways research underway by the University of Canberra, the Australian National University, the CSIRO and consultants is shedding light on why problems like blue-green algal blooms in Lake Tuggeranong, and the existing growth of water plants in Yerrabi Pond, arise.

In summer, Canberra's lakes and ponds are warm, still, sunlit and nutrient rich, which is perfect for growing water plants and algae. The one factor that we can control is the level of nutrients in the water. Phosphorous has been identified as the main nutrient that determines the growth of blue-green algae in Lake Tuggeranong and is likely to be a major factor driving algal blooms in other lakes and ponds.

The more phosphorous you have, the more algae you get. High levels of phosphorous can come from grass clippings in gutters or from a range of other sources. However, preliminary research findings suggest that grass clippings in gutters could indeed be a major source of nutrient pollution. The amount of grass clippings in gutters varies locally and seasonally. The overall impacts on a catchment are therefore difficult to accurately estimate, but we are working to get a better understanding.

Research to date suggests that anywhere between four to 60 per cent of the estimated annual supply of phosphorous to the lake via stormwater is from grass clippings and organic matter. The research teams are providing the government with information that should soon allow us to more accurately estimate the input of nutrients to Canberra's lakes and ponds from grass clippings and to identify the other sources of nutrients to these water bodies.

One of those other sources is leaves. Of course the mowers do not distinguish between grass and leaves, so if there are leaves that have fallen on the grass, they may end up in the gutters as part of the mowing. Leaves may also be blown or raked into gutters. Grass and leaf litter do not need to be washed into a lake to cause a problem. The research has shown it only takes one to two days for most of the nutrients in grass and leaf litter to leach out into stormwater if the litter is continuously wet, so grass and leaf litter in gutters can serve as a nutrient source simply when it rains.

Not only are grass and leaves a source of phosphorous in catchments, but once delivered to the lake by the stormwater system, the dissolved forms of phosphorous

are much more readily taken up by nuisance algae than other forms. These research findings are both good and bad news. On the one hand, grass and leaf litter in gutters is likely to be a driver, possibly a major driver, of algal blooms like those seen in Lake Tuggeranong and Lake Burley Griffin. On the other hand, there are ways that grass and leaves can be kept from gutters, which means we can envisage making big gains in our quest to reduce the frequency and duration of blue-green algal blooms in our urban lakes.

It is not acceptable that stormwater is being polluted with nutrients. It is far harder and more expensive to filter pollutants, especially to dissolve pollutants, from stormwater than it is to stop the stormwater from getting polluted in the first place. Stopping pollution from occurring must be our top priority in our efforts to clean up our lakes and other waterways.

Minister Steel has already indicated about the many steps that government is taking to ensure that we manage verges so that grass and leaf litter does not end up in the drains. Through the ACT Healthy Waterways Program, the Office of Water are supporting their colleagues in Transport Canberra and City Services, who are working to find cost-effective ways to manage verges and sports fields to avoid waterways being polluted.

It is not just the government that manages road verges. It is important for our community to understand the importance of their role in managing their verges and gutters as well. As part of the ACT Healthy Waterways Program, the government has funded the Leaf Collective program, which aims to ensure that residents and gardening or landscaping businesses are aware of the impact that grass clippings and leaves in gutters are having on waterways, and residents have viable options for either composting or disposing of grass and leaf litter so that it is kept from the gutters.

So far, the Leaf Collective pilot campaign results have been very encouraging. For example, there has been exponential growth in the uptake of the campaign offerings—that is, website traffic, social followers, leaf bags ordered, and trees and drains adopted. And more organic litter was collected in areas where the pilot ran than in other areas of Canberra. The government is aware that many more campaigns will need to be conducted before grass and leaf litter is no longer a major source of water pollution, but we are encouraged by the early results.

In summary, the government, businesses and broader community will all need to play a part in ridding our gutters of leaf and grass litter. While it may seem like a bit of organic litter in any one gutter is a minor problem, when you factor in the thousands of kilometres of roads in the ACT, there is a very large amount of litter just sitting there waiting for the next rainstorm to pollute our waterways. It is difficult and expensive to remove pollutants from stormwater, so it is sensible and necessary, where possible, to stop the pollution from occurring in the first place. Clean gutters of course look better and will mean that the government spends less on cleaning out pollutant traps. Once the avoidable pollution has been dealt with, then the government will have a chance to solve water quality problems by building new wetlands and other water quality infrastructure.

Improving the quality of the ACT stormwater, lakes and ponds remains a focus for the government. The budget this year provided a further \$8.2 million to the Healthy

Waterways Program, taking the total funding provided in this term of government to \$29 million. This funding will help to ensure that initiatives like the Leaf Collective, and others, can begin to solve some of the ACT's most pressing water quality problems. I thank Minister Steel for the response.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Urban Open Space Land Management Plan—draft

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) (3.17): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Urban Open Space Land Management Plan—Draft—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Braddock**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Retirement villages—dispute resolution—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) (3.18): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

ACT retirement villages ombudsman—Possible establishment—Assembly resolution of 22 March 2023—Government Response.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (3.18): On 22 March 2023, the Assembly passed a resolution requiring the government to investigate the establishment of an ombudsman for retirement villages. Two petitions were also presented on this topic in November 2022.

I want to start by thanking everyone who contributed their time and expertise to this investigation, and Mr Pettersson for presenting the resolution. I particularly want to acknowledge the ACT Retirement Village Residents Association and the Vintage Reds, whose thoughtful contributions and diligent advocacy on behalf of retirement village residents has been especially valuable to the government throughout this process.

Housing is fundamental to wellbeing, and retirement village living is an attractive housing option for many older Canberrans. The legal framework that governs the sector should make resident wellbeing a priority. Residents should feel safe and supported in their homes. We know that housing disputes, at any stage of life, can be extremely stressful. For older people, this stress can be amplified by other barriers—for example, health conditions, difficulty accessing technology or social isolation. As

such, it is important that retirement village residents have access to affordable, fair and user-friendly dispute resolution options.

This is a key aim of the ACT's retirement village legislation. This legislation was reviewed relatively recently, with significant changes made both in 2016 and 2019 to provide for internal dispute committees in villages and the ACT Human Rights Commission as places residents could go to resolve a dispute. This Assembly resolution, and the two previous petitions, provide a timely opportunity to assess the effectiveness of these reforms.

The report I am tabling analyses these reforms, along with other dispute resolution options available to retirement village residents in the ACT. It details the consultation and research informing the government's investigation and the key messages arising from the investigation. The government has given careful consideration to the proposal for a new ombudsman to be created. For the reasons outlined in the report, we have formed the view that establishing an ombudsman is not the most effective response to the issues raised in the resolution. In particular, the report finds that the ACT's Human Rights Commission offers accessible, collaborative, and efficient dispute resolution services but that it is currently under-utilised in the retirement village sector. Across the board, in all areas that the commission operates, there is high satisfaction with its complaint handling process. The government has identified that there are opportunities to increase awareness of the commission and the breadth of its powers.

As a result of this investigation, the commission has identified additional steps it can take to promote its services, including by working together with a retirement village's residents association. The government also intends to write to village operators in the ACT to remind them of their obligations to establish an internal dispute committee and to outline our expectation that operators take steps to make sure residents are aware of the committee and its functions.

I will continue to engage with residents and their representatives, and operators, to listen to feedback and ideas for how the government can best support the retirement villages sector.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (3.22): As the Minister for Veterans and Seniors, I would like to speak briefly about Minister Rattenbury's response on behalf of the government to the proposal for a retirement village ombudsman in the ACT.

Firstly, I would like to thank the individuals and groups, including John Beagle, the ACT Retirement Village Residents Association, and Vintage Reds for their strong advocacy in this area. It is this kind of strong community engagement and looking out for each other that makes our community so connected and cohesive. I also want to thank Minister Rattenbury for being so engaged in this work and for taking the time to meet with stakeholders to consider the proposals that were put to government. My office has received some really positive feedback about the level and quality of engagement by Minister Rattenbury, directly, on these matters.

As Minister Rattenbury has outlined, the government has carefully considered the proposal to establish a retirement villages ombudsman and is of the view that establishing an ombudsman is not necessarily the most effective response to the issues raised. However, the government has identified that there are opportunities to improve and strengthen existing mechanisms to better support the rights and safety of older people in retirement villages, such as enhancing awareness of the ACT Human Rights Commission's powers to resolve disputes and ensuring that village operators are meeting their obligations to resolve disputes via their internal disputes committee.

As the ACT Minister for Veterans and Seniors, I would also like to reiterate the ACT government's commitment to supporting older Canberrans through the Age-Friendly City Plan and focus area 2 of the plan: "Safe, Secure and Free from Abuse". We have delivered on actions under this plan, such as legislating to make the abuse of older people a criminal offence, and other actions which I regularly update the Assembly on. However, we still have further to go, and I will continue to keep the Assembly updated on the progress of the Age-Friendly City Plan, as well as on the additional efforts the government can take, particularly in the prevention and early intervention space.

In closing, I again thank the community for their advocacy in this space and Mr Rattenbury for his ongoing work and engagement with stakeholders on how the government can best support retirement villages residents and the sector.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Municipal services—maintenance

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.24): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) under this Labor-Greens Government, basic suburban maintenance has been steadily declining;
 - (b) road maintenance, grass mowing, illegal dumping, weed control, community path maintenance, street sweeping, upkeep of community amenities, public streetlights and graffiti are all areas that residents continuously report to be an issue in their neighbourhood;
 - (c) despite the ACT's population growing substantially in the past decade, the Labor-Greens Government's investment in city services has failed to keep up with demand and community standards;
 - (d) in 2004, *The Canberra Times* reported that the ACT Department of Urban Services had more than 80 mowers at its disposal. Today, the ACT Government has 82 mowers in their fleet, 12 of which are dedicated to sporting fields;
 - (e) in 2023 alone, 705 pothole-related compensation claims were made to the ACT Government regarding vehicle damage from ACT roads;
 - (f) the City Services website lists a 60 working day target to advise applicants of the ACT Government's position in relation to the claim.

However, the average amount of days claims took to be completed was 69 days in 2023, not including the days for Shared Services to process the payment; and

- (g) across Canberra, residents are frustrated at the lack of basic suburban maintenance in their neighbourhoods, particularly in the warmer months; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) develop a suburban maintenance strategy to improve the cleanliness of Canberra suburbs;
 - (b) publish the suburban maintenance strategy by the end of the 2023 calendar year; and
 - (c) report biannually to the Assembly of the progress of this strategy and the suburban improvements that have been made as a result.

I am pleased to speak today on the motion listed in my name on the notice paper, calling on the Labor-Greens government to develop a suburban maintenance strategy to improve the cleanliness of Canberra suburbs. They will publish the strategy by the end of this calendar year, the 2023 calendar year, and to report biannually to the Assembly on the progress of the strategy and specifically the improvements that have been made as a result.

This motion follows the continuous community concerns from residents that my office receives and I know my colleagues receive. I know that people on the other side of the chamber have talked about the concerns they get from residents as well—concerns about the state of their neighbourhoods. We all deserve suburbs and neighbourhoods that we are proud of, that are attractive and well-maintained and safe for all of our residents.

I think there is not a single member of this Assembly that does not get regularly contacted about basic suburban maintenance issues in their electorates, whether it is damaged footpaths, broken streetlights, overgrown grass, pothole-plagued roads, street sweeping, playgrounds in need of repair. It is something we all hear regularly about from frustrated Canberrans.

Just this morning I got an email from a woman in Bonython who had been waiting over three years for a dead tree to be removed. She told me that for years it has been marked for removal with a yellow X on the trunk. In fact, the yellow X has been refreshed a few times! She reported it and other residents have reported it multiple times. According to my constituent, the tree has a huge limb over the footpath. Debris is constantly covering the path and residents regularly have to clean it up because it causes a trip hazard, particularly to elderly residents. This kind of story, while it might seem small and insignificant to some people, is similar to those I hear over and over again from Canberra residents. There are so many examples that I could talk about.

When residents do the right thing and report these issues, as the government tells them to do, the issues are often still left untreated for months and sometime years. Just yesterday a resident in Tuggeranong was telling me about some pine log barriers that had been removed from a reserve near their home. They reported this two weeks before Christmas. What they said was they saw the mowers come along—there is a

gate, one of those metal gates that you can unlock—and apparently, the mowing people did not have the key, so they knocked down some of the pine barriers to get access to mow. We all know that mowing is important, but when the mowers left, of course, the pine barriers were left pushed out of the way. This was an area where local residents had fought hard for years to get the pine log barriers installed because of poor behaviour of people in cars on this bit of reserve and what they referred to as drug-dealing, with people parking there and passing drugs between cars. So they were happy when the pine log barriers were installed. Prior to Christmas last year, they were knocked down and moved out of the way. The resident reported again in March that the pine log barriers were still down. They were only replaced in August of this year, a good eight or nine months after they were first taken down and reported! It is not good enough. Canberrans deserve better and they expect better from this government.

I know the minister will point to a lot of money that they put into city services, but that is what is required. Every year we get more and more suburban infrastructure added to Canberra—there are more footpaths, there are more ovals, there are more drains and gutters, there are more trees planted. We need a commensurate budget to accommodate our growing city, we do not need to leave the budgets at about the same amount and then suddenly announce a bonus, a blitz in the budget and expect residents to be grateful that we are suddenly playing catch-up to try and address these ongoing issues.

A few years ago, I think it was 2018, we had a lot of community consultation done to establish the *Better suburbs statement*. There has been a lot of work done on that project and they identified a number of key areas that local residents care about, especially those on the better suburbs citizen's reference group. I think these issues still remain valid. These key areas are still the ones that are so important to local residents. There has been a lot of work done on the Better Suburbs strategy. Let us not abandon it. We need to make sure that the time and effort that people put into this deliberative democracy process is honoured and used in the way in which it was intended. I am sure we all share those same aspirations. We all care about footpaths and cycle paths, and roads, and libraries, and lakes, and waterways and all sorts of other community infrastructure.

The *Better suburbs statement* focuses on the future of our suburbs and what areas people would like to see prioritised, but we need to see more concrete information about what is being done. We need to see information focused on suburban maintenance and progress reports that clearly outline exactly what local issues have been fixed in specific suburbs.

The latest Better Suburbs update lists that in 2022-23 there was \$3.8 million invested in new active travel infrastructure and programs to support safe active travel to school. I am sure you can speak to many people in our suburbs—especially the older suburbs—who will tell you that they do not really know what “active travel infrastructure and programs to support safe active travel to school” encompasses. In some cases, it appears to be some signs spray-painted onto footpaths, but those same footpaths are cracked and broken and have tree roots underneath them lifting them up! It is not safe active travel to school when you have safety hazards all the way along the footpath. We also see alongside of those footpaths overhanging branches and bushes and litter along the way.

People want to know what they are getting for the money they pay in their rates, and they deserve to be informed and kept up to date. We do not just want a glossy progress update. We want people to know that when they make a complaint via Fix My Street something is being done. When I write to the minister when people make a complaint or put in a concern—they are not always complaining; they want something done—he tells me all the time that they can put in a complaint via Fix My Street. Too often I hear from residents who say they have gone back to look into their complaint on Fix My Street and it is marked as closed online, but they do not know what has happened to it because they can still see the same problem exists on their footpath or their trees or their potholes. They do not understand what that means. Has it been passed on to another area? Does someone somewhere think that it has been fixed and that is why they have closed it? Are they never going to do it and that is why they have closed it? People deserve better information. We want the government to be much more transparent about what they are doing, what they are not doing and why.

It has gotten to the point where many Canberrans just do not believe what the minister is saying when they hear things like “We have fixed so many potholes this year.” We did have so much rain over the past few years and had that proliferation of potholes. A lot of them were fixed. Of course we are expecting the sort of opposite effect this year with an El Niño effect, but I can tell you that in many areas in my electorate, at least around Tuggeranong, many of those potholes are already re-emerging. They are already coming back despite the fact that we have not had a lot of rain, so people are asking questions about the value for money on the repair jobs that are being done.

On potholes, of course, we still have the huge number of complaints that people made and claims that they made for damage to their cars and their tyres as a result of the proliferation of potholes. It was a pothole pandemic, if you will. One constituent that I spoke to last Friday told me that he is still waiting for compensation. In June, he received an email from the department telling him they are still looking at it and, “Do not bother me again. Stop contacting me. You are just slowing down the process.” This is nearly a year. Last Friday, he still had not been compensated or told no about his compensation claim from October. We are now in September. The best part of a year!

Which brings me to the point, that we have so many people working so hard to try to maintain our suburbs. The mowing. We know what a difficult time they had last year with so much rain, with the mowers getting bogged, et cetera. People are trying to fix potholes and you need the right weather conditions to fix potholes. People are trying to resolve complaints about pothole compensation. Is the government starving these areas of the resources they need to do their job properly? You are putting these frontline workers in the firing line by not giving them the tools and the resources they need to do their job properly. It is not their fault. It is the government’s fault for not prioritising better local services and making sure that residents get what they are paying for when they pay their rates.

It comes back, if you like, to that old saying: “Roads, rates and rubbish.” People expect that, for their rates. You can go on more and more and more and get nicer and nicer things, but those basics need to be done well. You know what they say, “If you cannot get the little things right, what hope do you have of getting the big things

right?” That is the problem with the government. This is why we need them to be accountable and transparent. We need them to provide detailed updates on exactly what has been fixed in our suburbs.

We can see to some degree on the mowing map what is happening: what has been mowed recently and what is coming up for mowing. Let us apply that to all of these types of issues. People deserve to know, they expect to know, they have a right to know what is going on with the government, with the money that they are spending and what is happening with those limited resources. There is not enough information for residents on the Fix My Street website.

We are not trying to discredit the work that our city services teams do, nor am I saying the minister does not care about these issues. I do not believe it is true he is not interested in our suburbs; I think he is interested in our suburbs. But we need to make sure they have the resources to do the job right and by providing a strategy, detailed information and updates in a way that is keeping everyone honest about exactly what is going on with our basic suburban maintenance. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (3.37): Our government is making a wide range of investments in city services and suburban infrastructure to support our growing city and to make sure that it remains a liveable place and one that will be home to more than half a million people by the end of this decade—in fact, much earlier than that. We are proud of our investment that is delivering upgrades at shopping centres from Calwell to Charnwood, right across the city; new play spaces from Chisholm to Casey; planting over 54,000 trees—that is obvious as you drive home from work. We are delivering \$24 million in active travel infrastructure and mowing over 5,200 hectares of open space.

It is no secret that our climate is changing, and that is having an impact on our city, as it is everywhere else. From roads to footpaths and streetlights, eastern Australia has taken an absolute battering from 2020 to the start of this year, with constant La Niña weather cycles that are now only abating. Annual rainfall was significantly above average from 2020 through to the start of this year. Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, which is placing our infrastructure assets under considerable strain. It is not unique to the ACT. Governments and local councils right across the region are experiencing accelerated road degradation and increases in the likelihood of defects such as potholes. With Australia likely heading into a drier period with the El Niño weather pattern in the coming year after an unseasonably warm past few months, we are likely to face a new set of challenges for our roads. It is undeniable that extreme weather events are going to continue to be hard on our infrastructure.

Last year, through the 2022-23 budget review, the ACT government delivered a record funding increase—up to \$153 million, a 52 per cent increase—over the next four years in road maintenance funding as part of a strategic road maintenance program that has been developed based on research with the National Transport Research Organisation, or as they were known then, the Australian Road Research Board. This is excluding the Roads to Recovery funding from the commonwealth.

The program provides a key focus on preventative maintenance, extending the life of roads through proactive resealing, which is decreasing the occurrence of potholes and road defects into the future. The program also continues to rapidly address safety hazards as they are identified and includes some rehabilitation work to more permanently address those, including 150 per cent increase in asphaltting.

As we head into the warmer months, Canberrans have a lot to look forward to: Floriade, picnics by the lake, trips down the coast and, of course, our road resurfacing program for 2023-24, which is about to commence. This annual program will help to ensure our suburban streets but also our major arterial roads in particular, which will be a greater focus of the program, remain in good condition and safe for all road users.

This week, our asphalt resurfacing work will be completed on sections of the Tuggeranong Parkway at Weston Creek. I drove over it this morning. It was very smooth, just near the Molonglo River. We are also progressing road rehabilitation projects, with construction to commence in coming months on David Walsh Avenue in Forde as well, which uses an innovative foam bitumen product. Design work is underway for further works on sections of the Monaro Highway, Kings Highway and Sulwood Drive. These works are already making a difference.

Whilst the government acknowledges road defects may still be present on our network at any given time, it is hard not to see that the quality of our roads has increased substantially in the past year alone. The additional funding, combined with drier weather and the tireless work of our crews, has allowed the opportunity to deliver the maintenance needed to provide the standard of roads that our community expects. The ACT has an extensive road system. It is not possible for TCCS to know where every defect is, as it becomes known at any given time, or to undertake repairs immediately.

To give an indication of the extent of the task for TCCS, over the last financial year, Road ACT crews and contractors repaired more than 12,000 potholes. It was an incredible effort. I want to commend the hard work of our patching crews and particularly their efforts during periods of challenging weather to make our roads safe for Canberrans. We are hoping for a little bit more of an eased period ahead so they can concentrate on other preventative activities.

Persistent rain over the last several years has contributed to the higher-than-normal number of claims received by TCCS in 2022 and early 2023. In response, TCCS has employed additional resources to double the size of the claims team to help with the increased workload and streamline the claim application process. TCCS is continuing to work through the backlog of claims received in the past year, with the remainder expected to reach a resolution in the coming months.

Severe weather has also had an impact on our extensive path network, which is why I was pleased to announce an investment of more than \$26 million in the budget in upgrades and maintenance work to the ACT's walking and cycling network, which of course, reflects the policy we have through the draft Active Travel Plan. This includes over \$5 million in additional funding for path maintenance on top of existing baseline funding, representing an over 40 per cent increase to address path defects. The ACT government is also developing a new strategic path maintenance program to deliver a

high-quality path network for all Canberrans based on the Active Travel policy. This new strategic program will be a step change in how the ACT government maintains and preserves our extensive path network, which is different to our road network. It requires a different approach and I am looking forward to sharing more details on this program with the Assembly.

Our mowing program has also been challenged by this series of wet weather events. High saturation levels and lots of sunshine between bouts of rain has meant significant and unprecedented grass growth. It has required parcels of grass that could be mown four or five times a season needing to be mown almost double that amount. To respond, the ACT government has been investing in more mowing staff and more safety staff to ensure our mowers can spend more of their day mowing the grass that needs to be mown. We have also created the rapid response mowing team. We have piloted the team. We continued funding in the budget. It is a team that helps with those mowing needs in between regular mowing passes. They are there to support and identify the hot spots to respond better to the community when they raise line of sight issues and to help manage areas that need a little bit more attention.

We are also adapting our techniques, identifying new mowing practices, and exploring ways to make sure our urban open space is better maintained and cared for. The draft urban open space land management plan, which we have been consulting on, gives an opportunity for TCCS to update mowing manuals, identify new parts of the mowing map and to consider whether mowing some parts of open space is even necessary in the first place. That is an ongoing process. The draft was tabled in the Assembly just before this debate. Discussion with the community continues.

The government continue to support Canberrans to let us know about issues across the community through Fix My Street. Ms Lawder is correct; I do ask her to pass on information about Fix My Street to her constituents because it is a useful tool for them to use to raise issues, particularly in the first instance, so that the government is aware of them and we can schedule them into our program of work. They, of course, have to be prioritised and triaged to make sure we can get on with the most serious and the highest risk work, so we can improve the look of our city and make sure we deal with those issues right across the ACT government, particularly though to respond to maintenance requests and other municipal issues. It is a tool we want to continue to improve over time based on community feedback. I certainly encourage members of this place to use it. I am sure they will still continue to write to me too and that is fine, but in the first instance, it is a very good tool to go to. I certainly use it myself when I see an issue in my community, and I encourage members to do that as well.

Ms Lawder raised the Better Suburbs process. I think she suggested we had discontinued the use of the *Better suburbs statement*. In fact, I have now tabled twice in the Assembly, and I will not table a third time, the government's update on our response to the *Better suburbs statement*, which is a biannual update that I have been consistently committed to providing, to make sure we are responding to those recommendations that came from the community. It is across storm water; it is across a whole range of different municipal issues, such as footpaths, play spaces and dog parks. We have made consistent investments throughout every budget to make sure we respond to those recommendations. This includes our largest ever suburban infrastructure program, which is investing in many of the things that they raised

including the play spaces that they identified as priorities under the Play Spaces Forum, which was part of the Better Suburbs process.

So I encourage all Canberrans to continue to raise municipal issues with us. We will also be, of course, proactively identifying strategic programs of work, as we have done across roads and as we will do in relation to paths. We will continue to develop our urban open space management plans and practices that sit underneath that, whether it is in relation to mowing, sweeping, a range of different issues. We will continue to make investments in each budget to make sure we have the resources to properly manage our city. It goes to tree maintenance, where again there was a massive investment in the budget of over \$20 million into tree management, which included more funding for tree maintenance staff. So we are making those investments to deal with the issues that come up proactively, but also to manage community requests, which are reactive requests made to the government as we go along.

So in recognition of all that is being done, I move the amendment circulated in my name and I commend it to the Assembly.

I move:

Omit all text after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government has been systematically increasing funding for city services right across Canberra, including;
 - (i) a 52 percent increase in road maintenance funding over four years compared to baseline funding for the same period, including an up to 150 percent increase in asphaltting;
 - (ii) an over 40 percent increase in funding to support path maintenance from 2022-2023 to 2023-2024;
 - (iii) \$24 million of funding to support urban tree maintenance and planting in the 2023-2024 Budget;
 - (iv) \$2.6 million funding in 2023-2024 to support more mowing and continue a rapid response mowing team;
 - (v) \$8.7 million in repairs and maintenance upgrades for new streetlights in 2022-2023 and a further \$500,000 in funding for streetlight infill in 2023-2024;
 - (vi) \$11.8 million in repairs and maintenance for stormwater and an additional \$11.7 million in new stormwater infrastructure in 2022-2023; and
 - (vii) an extensive program of shop upgrades, local playground upgrades and new dog parks as part of our big suburban infrastructure program;
- (b) the ACT has over the past three years experienced La Nina conditions with wetter weather having an impact on the road network and mowing operations and that extreme weather events like these are increasing due to a changing climate;
- (c) the Transport Canberra and City Services directorate is taking steps to adapt to a changing climate by identifying new strategies for city

services as part of the draft Urban Open Space Land Management Plan, the Urban Forest Strategy, and by undertaking more preventative maintenance on our road and path networks; and

- (d) work is ongoing to improve the Fix My Street system to improve customer experience and better integrate the system with business units to help Canberrans identify municipal maintenance to the ACT Government at any time; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue making ongoing investments to support better city services as our city grows;
 - (b) continue to investigate the impacts a changing climate will have on our city services and prepare changes to the city services delivery model to address them; and
 - (c) make ongoing and regular improvements to the Fix My Street system ensuring Canberrans continue to have an effective way to report any municipal issues.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.48): I briefly want to speak on this motion. I am really grateful that Ms Lawder has brought this to the Assembly. There are many hot button issues in Yerrabi, and I have to say that this is probably the most talked about. Even while I was doorknocking yesterday, a number of people raised with me the concern about how our local areas are not being maintained. It does not seem to matter whether you are in one of our older suburbs, like Kaleen or Giralang, or one of the newer suburbs in Yerrabi; people are concerned about the messy state of affairs.

Ms Lawder raised the issues with Fix My Street. People often say to me that they have lodged multiple Fix My Street requests. They go and check on their request and it is closed. Nothing has been changed. Often people need bollards replaced at playgrounds for the kids or the playground is actually broken. I know that one of the shopping centres had lodged many Fix My Street requests about footpaths in Gungahlin. It was not until I wrote a letter to the minister that those pavers got fixed. It took two people being taken to hospital and a letter. It just should not be so. As I said, it is a big concern for residents in Yerrabi.

If we want to talk about mowing, I have got one guy near where I live in Ngunnawal who mows the main road because the roundabouts are really dangerous to see around. This happens year after year after year. We also have people picking up rubbish every other day, out at Yerrabi Pond, down in the foreshore area, and doing their own weeding and sweeping of the street, where the government just has refused to help out.

There are many areas where people are requesting lights because there are dark footpaths that people are afraid to walk down. The streets are littered with rubbish. I cannot tell you the last time, if ever, that I saw a street sweeper in Yerrabi. You only have to look down Hibberson Street, at the garden across the walkway where you come from Big W to the Woollies entrance. Those gardens are never maintained. There are weeds. One of the gentlemen who work with the *Big Issue* and other people who sit at those areas do the weeding. This should not be so. This is the government's job and it is the government's responsibility.

One concerning comment that I get from people often is that tourists who have not been to Canberra for years say that it looks messy now. Canberra as a whole is so different from what it was years ago. It is messy and unmaintained now. Canberrans deserve better than this. Our tourists definitely deserve better than this.

Clearly, the Barr-Rattenbury government do not care about how our suburbs look. That is why I am really grateful that Ms Lawder has moved this motion today. The Canberra Liberals are concerned. We do care, and we want the best for our tourists. We want the best for our residents. We pay a lot of money and all sorts of taxes, rates and things like that, and we deserve to have the best maintained suburbs that we can. I commend Ms Lawder's motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.52): It is interesting that, as soon as we are debating basic suburban maintenance in this place, those on the other side evacuate. I am sure that if we were talking about the Voice it would be packed like a FIFA World Cup stadium, but we will see later on.

At the core of this motion is the basic premise that this progressive, virtue-signalling, extreme socialist coalition government does not give a flying city services truck about the people out of the suburbs, and it shows. Governing a city of this size is about so much more than declaring climate emergencies, banning plastic forks, decriminalising meth and heroin, and doing whatever the hell the union tells you to do. This Assembly, this parliament, is supposed to be replicating the services that city councils provide, but under Labor and the Greens we get so caught up in big picture rubbish that the little suburban details are neglected and ignored. I think that is really well highlighted in this motion from my friend and colleague Ms Lawder.

I know that quite a number have already spoken, and I promise that I will not speak for long, Mr Assistant Speaker. When I delved into our email archives, I did not have to delve far to find examples of issues that my office had dealt with in this space in recent months. One constituent contacted my office about some potholes in Chisholm. He had logged them twice through Fix My Street, as this government would want us to do. It took representation from my office to the minister to get something done, over six months after it was initially logged with Access Canberra.

Another constituent raised footpath issues in Theodore: a cracked and broken footpath which presented a significant danger to people using it, causing them to walk on the road, which presents its own obvious issues. Another constituent raised the issue of overgrown grass near Wanniasa Hills Primary School. Once again, it took another letter from my office to the minister to get something done.

The Tuggeranong United Football Club play at Kambah 2 playing fields, off Laidlaw Place in Kambah. They cannot even get a decent driveway to access the playing fields. The current one has deteriorated to such a point that it is near impossible for cars to safely traverse it. There are also no clearway markings at the designated ambulance gate, which means that the gate is often blocked, so an ambulance would not be able to use it. It is basic stuff.

A Richardson resident contacted me back in June to convey his concerns over the lack of street cleaning. He is fortunate enough to live in a lovely oak tree lined street,

which sounds good until autumn comes and the leaves start to fall. Once it rains, the street turns from a picturesque setting to a dangerous place to walk, ride or drive. After he raised the issue with Access Canberra and my office, it became apparent that there was no scope for additional street sweeper runs during autumn.

Dangerous trees are another area of concern, especially in the southern part of my electorate. I had a constituent contact me regarding some gum trees behind her property in Gordon. She had been worried about the trees for nearly three years and had logged three separate jobs through Fix My Street. Unfortunately, limbs from these trees fell before there could be any action taken. They damaged her swimming pool and her fence. It was incredibly fortunate that it was only the fence and the pool that were hit by the debris, as her grandchildren often play in the backyard.

These are only a few examples of many, many more. It is evident that there is a failure by this government to ensure that it delivers on basic urban services. This is a government that is so hell-bent on constructing this over-budget, terminally-delayed tram that it neglects basic urban services across the ACT. This shameful neglect by this government is no more evident than in my electorate of Brindabella. The people of the Tuggeranong Valley expect their skyrocketing rates to go towards the delivery of basic urban services. Instead, they are left with pothole-ridden roads, overgrown grass, unsightly graffiti, illegal dumping and unsafe footpaths.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.56): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this important motion to the Assembly. I want to draw members' attention to the sunny days and beautiful weather that we have been having recently in the ACT. With this sunny weather and current spring season, our city once again looks like it is overgrown and unkempt. It is an eyesore. The shabby state of the territory comes into sharp contrast when you travel out of Canberra. There are hay fields at the side of our roads in the ACT and then you cross the border into New South Wales and they are gone; the sides of the roads are well maintained and well kept. Travelling to the South Coast last month, it was a relief to my eyes to finally see a well-kept city and what it could look like. It is a reminder of the days long gone here in the ACT, and it is all due to the neglect and under-resourcing of urban services.

Ms Lawder's motion notes that in 2004 the *Canberra Times* reported that the ACT Department of Urban Services had 80 mowers at its disposal. Almost 20 years later the ACT has only added two more mowers to its fleet, having only 82 mowers to serve the territory. Twelve of those mowers are dedicated to sporting fields. That means there are actually only 70 mowers to cover an area that has grown substantially. In 2004 there were 97 suburbs and now there are 117, with an additional 13 planned. This means there are an additional 20 suburbs already, with more coming. How are they going to maintain those when they cannot maintain what they have now?

Then there is the problem of the roads. In 2023 alone, 705 pothole-related compensation claims were made to the ACT government, regarding vehicle damage from ACT roads. The City Services website lists a 60-day target to notify applicants of the ACT government's position in relation to their claims. However, the average number of days that claims took to be completed was 69 in 2023, not including the days taken for Shared Services to process the payment. Some constituents tell me they

have been waiting almost 12 months to have their claims assessed! No wonder Canberrans are frustrated with the lack of basic services.

Over the last 12 months I have run an electorate-wide survey in Yerrabi. The results were not surprising. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents said the issue most important to them was maintenance of public areas. Sixty-eight per cent of people are unhappy enough with the maintenance of our public areas that it is our number one issue. I think this comment from one of the constituents captures it well.

Canberra looks run-down and daggy. I moved back to Palmerston after a few years in Sydney and was shocked. The public areas are unkempt, overgrown and contain broken fencing.

There were many comments in response to my survey, such as this constituent, who said:

Everything and anything. There is a general lack of any maintenance, let alone any minor improvements being made to local infrastructure.

Another said:

Maintenance of public spaces and green areas is almost non-existent. This is leading to further decay and degradation, potholes, overgrown gardens and grass areas, graffiti, low maintenance are all issues in the greater Gungahlin area.

This constituent reflects what we all feel and the query we all have:

The whole area looks like an unkempt mess. Even visitors we had over Christmas asked, "Where the hell do your taxes go? This place looks like a third world country."

I have contacted the minister on many occasions about dumping in our suburbs, as reflected in this comment:

Increasing rubbish by roadsides, on verges and in parks, from food wrappers, cigarette packs and dog poo bags to piles of disregarded furniture, mattresses, et cetera.

They are just a few of the responses I have received. Although they are different in nature, they all come back to the same underlying issue: a complete lack of care from this ACT government when it comes to the regular maintenance and upkeep of our urban areas.

ACT residents pay through the roof in rates. This goes to show not only the government's negligence with taxpayers' money but the lack of proper road maintenance, resulting in potholes and damaged roads, rendering our streets unsafe. The basic government responsibility is delivering safe and accessible roads and footpaths, yet this Labor-Greens government continues to fail at providing this service or even to resource it properly.

Ms Lawder is calling on this ACT Labor-Greens government to get back to the basics and actually care about the condition of our streets again. After being in government

for over 20 years, you would think that they would have the basics covered by now. I support Ms Lawder's motion on the deliverables from this ACT government.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.02): The trees have blossomed, puffer jackets have been put away, Floriade is upon us, magpies are swooping, and we have a motion here about mowing and potholes. It must be spring again! Minister Steel has already gone into all of the technical challenges and issues that the government is dealing with, so I will not waste the chamber's time repeating them. Suffice to say that the Greens will be supporting the minister's amendment to this motion.

I thank Ms Lawder for raising city services in her motion, as it is a chance to discuss a range of matters that are close to where everyone lives. City services are about more than mowing and potholes. We need to think about the water bubblers, the bike trails, the playgrounds both for toddlers and for bigger kids, the water quality of our lakes and waterways, the skate parks, the sportsgrounds, the urban wetlands, the community farms, and the art installations. There is so much that we ask City Services to do in this city—far too much to discuss in a single motion. A hyper-fixation on mowing and potholes does the rest of those services a disservice.

Where I think this motion is coming from is discontent with the city's priorities. There is an old-fashioned view of the world that a city is judged on how well manicured its streets are: perfect gardens fronting cottages and the streets swept daily, with not a leaf or a blade of grass out of place. It is from such a sense of priorities that we frequently see calls for additional mowing and street sweeping. I do not necessarily agree or disagree with these priorities. I can respect that there are certain people, and indeed certain neighbourhoods, where it is the priority of the local residents that we achieve this.

We need a system that respects the variations and priorities suburb by suburb. This is the reason that the Greens pushed so hard for participatory democracy in our budgeting program. We got a commitment and a parliamentary agreement for a pilot program in five suburbs. I am still sad that it got downgraded to two suburbs, because the government was struggling hard with the concept and needed to call in consultants to help. That pilot is now rolling out in Page and Richardson. People get to pitch ideas for their neighbourhood. The suburb will get to pick a winner and the government will implement that idea without prejudice. If it means a new playground at the local shops then that is what happens. If they want to build a community herb garden on some vacant land then that is what they will get. If they want their budget allocation spent on more frequent street sweeping or mowing, so be it.

I want this pilot to be a success, and I want to see it roll out to all suburbs. Participatory democracy, which includes participatory budgeting, allows us to better target neighbourhood priorities, no matter what they are, and we have examples of this from outside Canberra that we can point to. I had the opportunity recently to talk to Trina Massey and Jonathan Sri, current and former Greens councillors for Brisbane City Council. I was excited to see how they used participatory democracy to empower the local community to make decisions about what they want to see in their local neighbourhoods.

To their surprise, the community had a definite preference for table tennis tables, and that is what was installed. I do not know what the people of Richardson and Page are going to ask for, but I am keen to hear, because they are experts, given their lived

experience in their local area. If the residents of Richardson and Page decide to use their budget for mowing, potholes and road duplication, I respect their decision, but somehow I suspect they will value something else.

The Greens celebrate the small projects. Whether it be grinding down the edges of a concrete path that has lifted, installing and maintaining a water bubbler, improving the amenity of a local park, all of these small projects provide stackable benefits that outweigh the small initial outlay. Improved physical and mental health, community engagement and interactions—the economic benefits of these small projects are out-sized, given that they are performed by local small businesses who then reinvest that money back into the Canberra community. These small projects are also more likely to be done on time and on budget than our larger infrastructure projects. Small projects are less likely to be subject to capacity constraints and labour shortages.

Budgets are about priorities. For example, the government has performance indicators measuring the quality of our road network but lacks similar performance indicators for the path network. This is despite repeated calls from the Greens to do so. The Greens have been calling for an improved investment in our path network for years and very much welcome the recent budget announcements. Our budget priorities also need to reflect the change in how people live in Canberra. With the increase in people working from home, more people are staying within their local neighbourhood, walking their dogs in the morning, stopping at a park bench to enjoy the shade of a large tree and quenching their thirst from the water bubbler. With this change in behaviour, we need to adjust our budget priorities so as to invest more in our local areas. With our growing population, in particular seniors and mobility-impaired people, we need to put extra emphasis into our local suburbs to make it practical, safe and accessible for them to move around their neighbourhood.

Prioritising grandstanding infrastructure with ribbon-cutting opportunities in the budget can be to the detriment of smaller things. We need to spend a greater proportion of our budget on bettering our suburbs. Road duplications and spending take up a disproportionate share of our infrastructure budget. As climate change impacts continue to deepen—something acknowledged in the government's amendment—we, as a government, must also adapt our budget priorities. Duplicating roads for zero emission vehicles will not achieve our emissions reductions targets. We need meaningful behaviour change towards active transport in order to effectively reduce our emissions to the required level.

Every budget decision that prioritises private vehicle use works against this goal and works against the improvement of our local suburbs. Every road duplication is an expensive exercise in induced demand that will detract from our emissions reductions efforts and carve holes in the budget that have to be made good elsewhere. Sure, mowing roadside verges and filling in potholes is important, but there is more to our city than what we observe when we drive around at 80 kilometres per hour. As the parties take various initiatives to the next election, I encourage the residents of Canberra to think about what they prioritise.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.09): I will not speak for long today, but I wanted to rise to talk briefly about some of the issues my electorate faces and to somewhat agree with what Mr Braddock was saying. City services are about more than just the roads

that we drive on to get to our homes and to get from our homes to work. It is about a whole lot more than that, and where we see that really clearly in the Murrumbidgee electorate is around our local shopping centres. There are places like Mawson where you contend with deep potholes just to get a parking space so that you can do your shopping. That is not a big thing for me. My car can deal with that and I can walk past a pothole, but it causes a real problem for our older residents. Those people are dealing with the potholes and end up tripping over in our parking areas.

City services are about the state of our shopping centres as well. I spend a lot of time out in the community and I hear from people all the time saying, "What has happened to our city? Why are things looking so neglected? Why are things so dirty? Why is there so much rubbish? Why do we have to put up with this?" while the government is pursuing its own little vanity projects. We see it in Mawson. We see it in the Woden Town Centre where I was meeting with businesses this week who pointed out the state of the town square. The state of the public spaces around Woden Plaza has got to such a point that people are remarking about it as they walk the extraordinarily long distance from the temporary bus interchange to get to the shops. People are astounded at the condition that our nation's capital has descended to.

It is a problem throughout our electorate. In Weston Creek there are significant problems. Over there, quite frequently I hear about the footpaths. We have heard a lot about footpaths today. It impacts our daily experience of our city. It might be older people, as I have already spoken about, who have a fall because there is a broken footpath; it might be young parents who cannot easily take their kids for a walk because the stroller cannot navigate a broken section of path.

There are real impacts that we have seen from the neglect of this city by the government, but, when you hear the minister speak, it sounds like he thinks he is doing enough. He talks about money a lot, but he is not saying a lot about effectiveness. Through you, Deputy Speaker Parton: Minister, regardless of how much money you are spending, something is not working. Something is not working, because people are still having to reach out to me to contact you on their behalf because they cannot get it fixed through the systems that are in place.

It would be remiss of me to allow this debate to pass without speaking about the Phillip business district. The business owners have been trying to contact the minister and the government to get some action on lifting the condition of the Phillip business district for years and years. I know the minister visited the business community before the last election. The business community thought they might have had the ear of the government. They thought they might get some improvements, yet they are still waiting. You still walk along streets that look like they have not been touched in a decade, except for little patches and uneven places that show that things are so bad that they had no other choice.

City services have a direct impact on our residents' lives all the time, every day. It is about more than driving 80 kilometres per hour. There is neglect across more than just our roads, and it is time to end the neglect and fix the problems in our city.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.14): I speak today in support of Ms Lawder's motion regarding city services and in rejection of Mr Steel's amendment. I have lived in the

Belconnen region for over 20 years and watched many suburbs in my electorate fall into disrepair. As many here would be aware, one of the reasons I joined the Liberal Party in late 2016 was that I thought our city was becoming ugly. Unfortunately, that view is confirmed because of the poor care shown by this government for our most basic services. Residents of Belconnen come to me extremely frustrated at the lack of basic suburban maintenance. It is the core function of government, surely, to get this right. The numerous stories I have heard and photographs I have received from Belconnen residents are quite astounding.

Trees are of concern for residents around Belconnen. As Ms Lawder touched on, many trees have been declared dead and have been marked to be removed. Some sit there for over 12 months and are still marked for removal, getting more dangerous each day. One example is a large area of dead trees surrounding the oval in Latham. Twenty-plus trees have been marked for cutting down for well over 12 months. Bits and pieces of them are starting to fall and are a hazard to anyone using the oval and surrounds. New trees have gone in, but the removal of old trees has not yet happened.

Footpath maintenance has been highlighted by several speakers today and by many of my constituents. It is a regular complaint. Cracked, uneven and damaged footpaths will often be requested to be fixed via Fix My Street multiple times over many months. I am often told that members of the public are unable to walk to their local shops or around their neighbourhood due to dangerous paths. As I have said before, a cracked footpath is to walker what a pothole is to a car. It is a hazard. Faded and damaged parking signs around shopping centres are cause for concern. They are difficult to read and can lead to confusion. Bus shelters are often reported as being damaged and worn down. I hear that seating is often damaged and unusable. This often leads to vulnerable members of the community having to stand and wait for a bus, which could be harmful or dangerous, or they could risk being hurt by sitting on damaged seating.

The grass beside roads and paths has become so long you cannot see oncoming traffic in some places. Grass has also been reported to be long around playgrounds and community areas and is a hazard for walkers, particularly children. Dead and dangerous gum trees and fallen branches on nature strips and around houses is a constant theme of complaints that I hear about, often resulting in three, four or more Fix My Street applications and several weeks to months of waiting for removal. I have heard that residents have been waiting over two years in one case for the removal of hazardous material.

Debris on footpaths and cycle paths is also a common complaint. Branches, gravel and debris from mowing often sits untouched. This causes dangerous conditions for those who wish to cycle or walk. Many are pushing strollers or walkers. Many constituents find Fix My Street to be a waste of time, with little or no response from the government and several months of waiting for repairs.

Streetlights are also a feature of complaint—a basic amenity for security at night. I am told streetlights are broken, flickering or not working. Recently, a constituent in Bruce informed me that they had been asking via Fix My Street for a repair to their streetlight for several months. That was when I was door-knocking there recently. The resident made several applications on Fix My Street and there has been no response.

Streetlights provide important pedestrian and vehicle safety and reduce street crime. Waiting months for repair or even a response from the government should not be happening. It is a basic function of government to get these very basic services right and delivered well to enhance our beautiful city and make it a safe city for our residents.

Belconnen residents should be proud of their suburbs and their communities. Instead, they are feeling left behind with suburbs that are continuously awaiting repairs, upgrades or general maintenance. We could keep talking about potholes. It is a common complaint, of course, among road users, many of whom end up paying hundreds of dollars to repair damage to their vehicles. I remind members of Tillyard Drive, which was significantly damaged and was left untended for so long that it had a Christmas tree and presents placed in it with the hope of drawing attention to it.

The residents of Belconnen and of Canberra deserve better. They deserve better response times to their requests and better maintained suburbs. They deserve a better government. An Elizabeth Lee-led government would look after these basic things and enhance our beautiful city.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.20): I would like to speak briefly about Ms Lawder's motion and the comments made. I am really pleased to see her raise this topic. I know she has a lot of concern about these issues. She talks about them a lot and brings forward really carefully thought through motions like this one. These are core issues for Canberrans. I have brought forward a couple of motions on path maintenance and mowing because they are really key concerns for our residents and for our environment.

I first want to speak about paths. I am not going to speak too long about paths because a lot of other speakers have spoken about them at length and I do not want to waste too much of the Assembly's time by repeating points already made. We all hear similar complaints about cracked paths, missing links, tree roots raising paths, and uneven paths. I brought a motion forward in June and that was agreed to—that was really great to see—to build a safe, connected and convenient cycle network, to set accountability indicators for our paths, footpaths and cycle paths, and to increase our repair and maintenance budget for that. That was passed.

I was really pleased to see that we got some more funding in the budget. We have an additional \$5 million for path maintenance. That was really pleasing to see, and we have a really good asset plan coming forward. A lot of people are concerned that we may not follow through with the level of ongoing maintenance and funding that we need to fix the problems we have with our footpath and cycle path network. I tabled a petition on aspects of that this morning.

It is really important that we provide enough dedicated and ongoing funding for this maintenance. I spoke about the 2021 path audit when I brought forward the motion. A lot of defects were identified—9,000 defects—and a lot of those still need repair. We know that we need a much bigger pool of funding to be able to deliver this. We need to make sure that our basic path maintenance is undertaken so people can use our public and active transport and enjoy our city and our suburbs. If you cannot walk safely to the bus stop, you are not going to catch a bus, so we need to do better.

Our climate change strategy is really strong on active travel. It prioritises walking and cycling and active travel infrastructure ahead of a lot of other infrastructure. It says that it is an essential action to address climate change, and we are simply not going to be honouring that if we do not spend enough to maintain it.

We have a lot of line items in our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement that talk about footpaths, cycle paths and active travel. We did see a funding increase, but we have not seen the level of funding increase that we need and we have not yet seen a long-term and ongoing commitment. I am hoping that we will get closer to the minimum that we know we need to see—at least \$20 million a year—dedicated for active travel going forward to make sure that we are fixing our links and maintaining our network really well.

I also want to speak briefly about mowing. Again, this is an issue that comes up a lot in Canberra. People have different views. Suburban tidiness is really important to a lot of residents. Mowing is a complex issue. I brought forward another motion to the Assembly last August on this subject, and we got down to the lines of the right mowing in the right place at the right time. Different types of mowing are needed in different areas. Sometimes you need a bit of mowing for conservation value and to remove some of the biodiversity mass. Sometimes you need to protect areas and mark them out on the no-mow map. It is great that we have a mowing map and a no-mow map. I still regularly hear from people who are maintaining land care and park care areas or are maintaining areas that they have marked on the no-mow map that the mowers still come through, and that is really upsetting. They have spent a lot of time planning, they make a real connection with the areas and they see the damage caused when those no-mow areas are not respected.

We are seeing progress. We passed a resolution to make sure that all our relevant government and community stakeholders are talking with one another on the Biodiversity Conservation Forum. I understand that is happening now, which is really great. We have more support for training, education and signage, and for more barriers and fencing to help our ACT government employees and our contractors know where they should be mowing and where they should not be mowing. It is a work in progress. We need to keep working on this to make sure that we are maintaining our mowing where we need to, but also, very importantly, respecting our environment and not mowing the no-mow areas.

We have had a lot of rain in recent years. I am not going to go into the climate conditions that we are facing. I think that has been pretty well covered by the motion and the comments today. We are facing more challenges. This kind of work is going to get harder as we go forward. We are not going to be able to look after our city with minimal resources anymore. We will be experiencing stranger, more challenging and more extreme conditions on a pretty regular basis, so we need to get really good at this. It is absolutely essential. It is essential for our environment, but it is also essential for us as we live here. We need to look after these areas so that we have access to them and we reduce our urban heat. We need to look after nature in our immediate environment.

It is good to see that we are having a conversation about this again in the Assembly. The 25 of us here often have a lot in common. We probably often hear similar things

from our constituents. Not everybody in the community has the same views, but often they will raise the same problems. They may have different ideas about how those problems should be addressed, but we are often hearing about the same problems.

I am really pleased to see a government that talks about putting an ecological filter on our urban land management. I hope we keep doing that. I am pleased to see a government that is providing a bit more funding for our footpaths. We need a lot more, and I hope we keep doing that. I hope we can make sure we keep looking after Canberra. One of the things people love about Canberra is the urban environment—our network of bush reserves, the birds in our suburbs, the trees and the shrubs, and the grasses that are everywhere you walk your dog, ride your bike to work or wander out to pick up the kids from school. It is a real patchwork connected by wildlife corridors and green spaces. There are lots of volunteers looking after the land, and we really need to help people look after it and make sure that we are improving it as we go.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.28): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this important motion before the Assembly today. When you email Minister Steel, you always get a response: a robotic, automated response. The response is that it will take six to eight weeks to investigate the issue contained in the email and a ministerial response to be provided.

The reason for this lengthy waiting period is that he receives a large amount of correspondence every day. Likely, much of this correspondence is from constituents and from MLAs sending him representations on behalf of constituents. These constituents email him and us, because they have given up on waiting for the minister to do his job and keep the footpaths clear and unbroken, the roads pothole-free, the trees trimmed, bus stops and parks maintained, and the stormwater drains unblocked. They have given up on waiting for the routine maintenance and on waiting for Fix My Street, and they have attempted to go straight to the top by directly emailing their local members.

My suggestion to the minister, if he wants to reduce the amount of correspondence coming into his inbox, is that he works smarter not harder. Practice preventative maintenance, rather than reactive maintenance—or, as the Auditor-General put it back in 2017, in her report into the state of Canberra's footpath network:

A systematic approach would assist in avoiding higher costs resulting from a failure to identify and rectify small defects before they become large.

If the minister and his Labor-Greens government funded city services adequately, he would likely see a marked decrease in emails begging him to at least do the bare minimum and keep the footpaths intact.

I would like to review just a few of the issues that have caused me to contribute my own share of emails to the minister's inbox. In February 2023, I wrote to the minister on behalf of Kippax Fair shoppers, calling on him to fix the potholes in the Kippax car park. In March 2023, on behalf of Hawker residents and businesses, I called on the minister to fix the pavers at the shops, which were buckling and creating trip hazards. In March, May and August, I wrote on behalf of Charnwood residents about a dangerous tree looming over their home that had been marked for removal some time

ago but had not been dealt with. In July, residents from all over Ginninderra reached out to me, asking me to urge the government to prioritise weed removal in Flynn, Bruce, Holt and Charnwood. Last month, I wrote on behalf of the constituent to have the minister prevent pooling at the Chandler Street bus station stairwell by installing drainage and also to improve their maintenance and lighting. Finally, just today I wrote to him about footpaths so damaged in Macgregor that users of mobility scooters found going off-road onto the nature strip to be more navigable than sticking to the path.

This motion is timely as we are about to enter growing season, and it is about time the minister got a wake-up call. He must wake up from his self-made delusion that he is doing a good job. Having to provide updates on what suburb improvements he has made, twice a year, as called on by Ms Lawder, should help with this. His delusions have gotten so bad he is literally conjuring footpaths in his mind and then putting on the public record that they have been built, when they have not in reality been built.

When I questioned the minister in March 2022 about his progress in building footpaths from the community path priority list that was current as of February 2021, he said that 17 had been built. Let me break that down. That is 17 paths out of the 562 that were on the list. That is a completion rate of 3 per cent in a little over a year. Those 562 priority paths equate to about 250 kilometres of new path waiting to be built. Added together, the construction of those 17 paths equates to 6,023 metres of path being constructed. That is only 2.4 per cent of the 250 kilometres outstanding—a drop in the ocean of what needs to be built! If he keeps going as he is going, it will take 41 years to complete all of the footpaths on his so-called priority list. Those are less than rookie numbers, and the worst part is they only get lower.

Of the 17 paths that the minister claimed to have built, six were in my electorate. So I checked. They had not been built. Construction had not even started. Taking those six paths away from the minister's claimed count of 17 means he only built 11, a mere one per cent of the priority list, and that is only if the other 11 claimed to have been built in other electorates were built. Wanting to give this minister the benefit of the doubt, I gave him two more opportunities to verify. Once in April 2022 and another time in September 2022. In April, he doubled down and confirmed the paths were built. Then in September, he confirmed that only five of them were built, with the last one only in the design stage.

Finally, when I asked him again by a question on notice to confirm the state of the footpaths in June this year, something must have clicked, and he has now confirmed that those six footpaths were not in fact built. They only ever existed in the fantasy where he is a competent minister! It took him two years to verify that these footpaths did not exist and, according to the answer to my question, it apparently cost him 1,200 minutes and \$2,009 to do so, not counting how much it cost to give me three wrong answers! What a waste of time and of the taxpayers' money! It only took my staff 30 minutes to confirm these paths did not exist, and that was without all the resources this minister has at his disposal. I would encourage all members of this place to take a look at question on notice 57 from the 2020-21 annual reports and verify for themselves that the paths this minister claims he has built in their electorates were in fact built.

In his defence, the minister may say that he built other paths that were not from the priority list. In the 2020-21 annual report, he may brag that he exceeded the community path increase target of 35 kilometres by an additional 30 kilometres. What he may not say is that this government is only responsible for building 19.5 kilometres of path, far below the original target of 30 kilometres. The remainder was built by developers who later gifted the paths they had built to the government.

This minister is performing so poorly in this area that he has to rely on hefty donations from private developers to prop him up. Canberrans cannot trust this minister to maintain our suburbs when he brags that he is increasing funding for community path maintenance by \$5 million. Remember that he also claimed for two years—

Mr Steel: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mrs Kikkert, if you could be seated.

Mr Steel: Mrs Kikkert has effectively claimed that I am corrupt and have broken the law by accepting donations from developers, which is against the law under the Electoral Act, and she should withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am just wondering if we can stop the clock here.

Mr Steel, my belief is that Mrs Kikkert's use of the word donation was not in regards a donation of money or legal donation. It was in regard to the developer's constructing paths that were then passed to the government and that the context of her comments was not in regards to a political donation of money. My view is I do not think the use of the word donation is referring to a political donation. Mr Gentleman.

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) (4.38): I seek leave to move dissent from the Speaker's ruling.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

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) (4.38): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Gentleman from moving a motion of dissent from the Speaker's ruling.

This is a very important topic, as we see more and more fraught the commentary from those opposite in regard to ministerial responsibilities. The government, of course, takes their role very, very seriously in regard to how we are perceived in the public

eye. It is shameful, I think, for Mrs Kikkert to use these sorts of commentary against the minister. Even in this sort of debate, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is very important we ensure that parliamentary debate is according to the standing orders and it is proper and respectful. So it is, therefore, I think, important for you, as a Speaker to understand where an inflammatory remark, such as that made earlier today against Mr Steel, is withdrawn from the *Hansard*.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Gentleman. In the interests of time, because I know we have another hefty debate coming up, I am just going to make the offer, Mrs Kikkert—I do not know if you are of a mind to, off your own bat, withdraw that comment? Then we can be done, we can move on and you can finish your speech.

Mrs Kikkert: Thank you for the opportunity. What is shameful is that the minister is unable to do his job but there is far greater debate than this so I will withdraw that comment because this is far more important than a political debate between us.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mrs Kikkert, if you could now be seated. Given that Mrs Kikkert has withdrawn that comment, can I take it that this issue is closed?

Mr Gentleman: Yes, thank you. I withdraw the motion to suspend standing orders.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know we had stopped the clock. My understanding is that you had about a minute remaining—55 seconds. So if you want to tidy that up in 55 seconds, Mrs Kikkert, let us do that.

MRS KIKKERT: So this minister is performing so poorly in this area that he has to rely on developers to prop him up. Canberrans cannot trust this minister to maintain our suburbs. When he brags that he is increasing funding for community path maintenance by \$5 million, remember that he also claimed for two years to have built paths he never did! When he cites his *Better suburbs statement* committing to prioritise community paths, remember that in 2021 he only managed to build one per cent of the paths on the priority list.

Canberrans only need to look around in any given suburb to see that this minister is not up to the task of maintaining our city. Ms Lawder's call on the government to create a suburban maintenance strategy will increase this government's accountability and transparency. It is sadly needed, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.41): I will start by noting the minister said he thought I was suggesting abandoning the Better Suburbs strategy or statement, which is not actually what I said. I would like to invite him to apologise and withdraw that. Otherwise, maybe I would go around saying things that he did not say, like he has abandoned the Better Suburbs strategy; that he does not care about all the work that was done through that community consultation process; that he is going ahead doing whatever he likes irrespective of what the community has said is valuable and important to them in the *Better suburbs statement*.

We can see here that we had around 80 mowers in 2004; now we have about 82 mowers, 12 of which are dedicated to sporting fields. In the nearly 20 years since 2004, how can we have a similar number of mowers when we have so many more

suburbs, so many more ovals, so many more verges and so many arterial road areas to maintain? It beggars belief and it is no wonder that this is one of the complaints that we get so frequently.

There have been many times that many of us have brought motions to this place about mowing, including mowing into our lakes and waterways. I wrote to the minister about an instance at Lake Tuggeranong where a mower was putting their clippings directly into Lake Tuggeranong. The minister sort of told me I was dreaming. He said: "This would never happen. The mowers are under strict instruction." Luckily, I then provided the minister with photographs where you could see the mower and the grass clippings going directly into the lake. Apparently this was all fine because it was an SLA mower, not a City Services mower, and that was I guess the only response I got. Nevertheless, it was a government mowing opportunity and those clippings were going directly into Lake Tuggeranong. These are the types of things that we are pushing uphill against all the time. Every time we raise very real issues that constituents raise with us, we are told we are dreaming. We are told that everything is fine. We are told that there is nothing to see here.

Of course, according to Labor there is nothing to see here. The minister has spoken on this motion, and a couple of the Greens have. The other Brindabella Greens member has not spoken, where previously in this place he said about how frequently he is contacted by people on these basic suburban issues, yet where is he today? The minister says everything is fine and apparently not one other Labor member in this place gets issues raised with them about basic local suburban maintenance!

So what I would say to anyone out there in the rest of Canberra is do not bother complaining to your local Labor member about basic suburban issues, because they do not care. They do not care one whit about your mowing, about your potholes, about your streetlights and about all those basic suburban issues. On that I would like to make a point about Mr Braddock, who said there is more to suburban issues, suburban maintenance than mowing and potholes, and I agree. Unfortunately, apparently Mr Braddock had not actually read the motion. I could point him to point 1(b) which clearly talks about road maintenance, grass mowing, illegal dumping, weed control, community path maintenance, street sweeping, upkeep of community amenities, streetlights and graffiti. Instead, Mr Braddock chose to speak about road duplication, which is not a suburban maintenance issue. It is a pet topic of the Greens, who we all know hate roads and hate cars. I would pay a lot more attention to Mr Braddock's views about this if he did not rock up to the Assembly every morning in his own big car! So really, if we are talking about hypocrisy, this is one example of rank hypocrisy. Ms Clay was, I thought, very helpful in her measured contribution, talking about the fact that these are core issues for Canberrans, and I thank her for her contribution.

I reiterate to the minister: you are putting our hardworking frontline staff in the firing line here by not giving them the resources that they need, and we will not be supporting the amendment today. We will not be supporting this proposed amendment: 1(a)(i) about increase in road maintenance funding. This is an admission that it has been terrible over the past few years and that is why we are having to increase the road maintenance funding. Our roads have deteriorated to such a state that we need a big injection of funds!

Point 1(a)(ii) in the proposed amendment talks about an increase in funding to support path maintenance. Again, this is an admission that they have let our paths get into a parlous state and now it is taking a big effort to try and get them to a decent situation.

Point 1(a)(iii) references \$24 million of funding to support tree maintenance. How does that compare? The figure of \$24 million makes it sound like this is a really big important amount. Do not forget, though, we have wasted \$76 million on the HRIMS system, and that was apparently no big deal for the government! Yet they try and big-up \$24 million for our trees.

Point 1(a)(iv) states:

\$2.6 million funding in 2023-2024 to support more mowing and continue a rapid response mowing team;

This is from the same government that have wasted the best part of \$10 million on the whole CIT contract saga with—what was it?—a complexity and systems thinker! This is a good example of complexity and systems thinking here! They are trying to make things sound so important, but really it is because they let them get to a terrible state in the first place!

They also tried to big-up millions of dollars in repairs and maintenance for stormwater and new stormwater infrastructure. Well, of course you cannot build new suburbs without new stormwater infrastructure, so this is really important. Of course there was quite a damning Auditor-General's report a few years ago about our stormwater infrastructure assets. Our stormwater assets are one of the single largest assets of the ACT government apart from public housing. So it is no wonder we have to spend money on them and we have to improve stormwater assets that are decades and decades old.

This proposed amendment does not bring any improved transparency or accountability. It does not bring any comfort whatsoever to residents who raise these issues again and again with their local members, although apparently not with Labor members. Labor members have not bothered to speak on this motion today! So either they have not had any issues raised with them or else they just cannot be bothered talking on it today.

We have so many instances that we could all talk about—examples that our constituents raise with us—issues that are raised again and again and again on Fix My Street, and they never get any feedback. Sometimes if they come to one of their local members, especially one of their local Liberal members, we write a letter and we might get a result for them and that is fantastic. It is rewarding when we can do that. But why is the Fix My Street system not working for them? Why is it when they go back into it that their complaint has been closed? This is what people are concerned about, and this is why they keep coming to us and asking us what we can do to make this better for them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, they are a government that waste money hand over fist; wantonly throws away taxpayers' money and ratepayers' money. Boom, boom, boom, boom. They do not care, but they try to make it sound really important when they spend

\$2.4 million here, \$11.5 million there, on fixing problems that they have neglected for decades—fixing problems they have made themselves and then they want us to be grateful for it! That is why we will not be supporting this amendment today.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15		Noes 8
Ms Berry	Ms Orr	Mr Cain
Mr Braddock	Dr Paterson	Ms Castley
Ms Burch	Mr Pettersson	Mr Cocks
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury	Mr Hanson
Ms Clay	Mr Steel	Mrs Kikkert
Ms Davidson	Ms Stephen-Smith	Ms Lawder
Mr Davis	Ms Vassarotti	Mr Milligan
Mr Gentleman		Mr Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Voice to Parliament

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.55): I, and also on behalf of Mr Pettersson, Ms Orr, Mr Braddock, Ms Clay and Mr Davis, move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- (b) 50 years after the 1967 referendum, which confirmed that First Nations people must be counted as part of our national census, in May 2017, the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* was developed. The Statement was presented in Mutitjulu in the shadow of Uluru on the lands of the Anangu people when 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates from 13 regional areas put their signatures on a historic statement;
- (c) the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* addressed to the Australian people, invited the nation to create a better future through substantive constitutional change and structural reform;
- (d) the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* describes immutable truths and a spiritual sovereignty of First Nations people which co-exists with the Crown. It calls for a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Australian Constitution and a Makarrata Commission to supervise agreement-making and truth-telling about First Nations history;

- (e) the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 (the Bill), introduced by Hon Mark Dreyfus MP, Attorney-General, will—if passed at a referendum—amend the Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia; establish an advisory body known as the Voice; and to give Parliament the power to pass legislation related to the Voice;
- (f) The Constitution would be amended to include a new chapter, which would be titled “Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”;
- (g) Australians will be asked to vote Yes or No on a single question on October 14: “A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?”;
- (h) the “Yes” campaign is a movement that advocates in favour of the proposed amendment. The “Yes” campaign accepts the gracious invitation of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* to join Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to walk with them in a movement for a better future;
- (i) supporting the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the Voice strengthens our commitment to exploring new pathways to create better outcomes for all Australians and guides us towards significant progress towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- (j) proud Yamatji Noongar woman, Senator Dorinda Cox, has stressed that a successful referendum will amplify First Nations voices. The voices of First Nations people will be heard, and the Government will have a responsibility to listen and act;
- (k) there has been a concerning surge in the misinformation online, particularly on social media platforms, related to the Voice and the “Yes” campaign. This misinformation has regrettably provided an outlet for racist attitudes and sentiments to be aired, particularly in the media and social media;
- (l) numerous claims circulating among social media influencers and political figures distort the nature of the proposal, potentially jeopardising the referendum’s credibility and success;
- (m) despite Meta’s increased financial support for third-party fact-checking, social media platforms are still grappling with the challenge of effectively curbing the dissemination of misinformation linked to the referendum. A significant number of misleading posts persist unchecked and unremoved on prominent platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (referred to as “X”), and TikTok;
- (n) Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has openly voiced concerns regarding the tactics employed by the “No” campaign in the run-up to the referendum. Recent revelations indicate that volunteers associated with the “No” campaign were directed to instigate fear among voters, maintain anonymity, and raise concerns about potential financial compensation to Indigenous Australians in the event of the Voice’s establishment;

- (o) the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has established a disinformation register specifically related to the announced referendum. This register compiles notable instances of disinformation that the AEC has identified concerning the referendum; and
 - (p) the proliferation of this misinformation has contributed to the promotion of harmful stereotypes and prejudices, and negatively impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their supporters. It should be called out; and
- (2) calls on all Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly to:
- (a) acknowledge and support the implementation of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* in full, including the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament;
 - (b) condemn the misinformation and disinformation that is being spread about the referendum; and
 - (c) promote fact-checking to curb the spread of misinformation and disinformation on the Voice and the upcoming referendum.

I would like to thank my colleagues—from Labor, Mr Pettersson and Ms Orr; from the Greens Mr Braddock, Mr Davis and Ms Clay—for their collaboration on this motion to support the Voice campaign, which is something that I feel deeply passionate about.

I view this as a very important motion that will go down in history, in the *Hansard*, as the final words of this chamber on this matter before the 14 October referendum. It is truly heartwarming to witness Australia’s unity in supporting the Voice referendum over the weekend walks all across the country. Across the nation, people are engaging in meaningful conversations, setting up information stalls and proudly wearing “Yes” T-shirts to express their solidarity with recognition and the Voice. This collective effort demonstrates a commitment to acknowledging, respecting and listening to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, fostering a sense of inclusivity and striving for a more equitable and just future for our country.

Last year, I tabled a motion calling for the support of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, including the Voice referendum. I am glad to be here today to present this combined motion that calls for support for a yes vote, and a broader call to end the disinformation that is being perpetuated.

The 1967 referendum in Australia stands as a watershed moment in our nation’s history, marking a pivotal step towards the path we find ourselves on today: the constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians to be counted in the census. With 90 per cent of Australians voting yes to amend the Constitution, the referendum not only symbolised a profound shift in public sentiment but also shattered the barriers of discrimination that had marginalised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for generations.

This historic milestone nearly 60 years ago serves as a testament to Australia’s commitment to progress, to reconciliation, and to a future where the voices and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are honoured and respected as equal drivers in their own future.

On 14 October, we can take another step forward. What is it all about? The question to be put to the Australian people at the 2023 referendum will be:

A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.

Do you approve this proposed alteration?

The proposed law that Australians are being asked to approve at the referendum would insert a new section into the constitution:

Chapter IX Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

129 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

In recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia:

- i. there shall be a body, to be called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice;
- ii. the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice may make representations to the Parliament and the Executive Government of the Commonwealth on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- iii. the Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, including its composition, functions, powers and procedures.”

The proposed constitutional change is simple, but why is this simple change so important? I spent 15 years of my life living and working in remote Aboriginal communities, most specifically in the Northern Territory. My time in these communities had a profound impact on me. There is nothing more beautiful than the remote lands of this country. I have had the great honour of a lifetime to live in Arnhem land, in Maningrida. I was an anthropologist, living, breathing and learning community life and culture.

I had the Dreaming stories of this land explained to me. I had the honour of walking song lines that traverse these remote lands and learning the stories of the spirits of the country. I learned language and played witness to profound practice of this ancient culture through ceremonies and women’s business that I was invited to join. I loved the children, and I found wonderful friends in the women I got to know through the hundreds of hours I spent sitting around card games.

However, there was another side to life out there that played out in the township. The township was a stark daily reminder of colonisation. Many of the Elders of the community vividly remember when the government declared the site a township—a

site where land rights of different tribal groups has become contested, as is the case in many townships, and this plays out in our own city here in the ACT, in Canberra.

I will describe a moment that had a great impact on me. I was with three other women sitting on the very edge of the Liverpool River, where the river enters the Arafura Sea, sitting on the red earth with the dry season winds blowing, in the shade of a gum tree. These women were close to my age, in their 30s or 40s, but they were all grandparents.

One woman, who was one of my closest friends, had suffered brain damage and her face had been distinctly disfigured as the result of being beaten by her husband to nearly an inch of her life. I had known her as such a vibrant, dynamic, funny and beautiful woman, and she now sat next to me barely saying a word—a shell of her former self.

Another woman had just come back to Maningrida from Adelaide, where she had been a carer for her two-year-old grandchild who was in hospital with major heart complications and was fighting for his life—a condition stemming from the extreme poverty he had grown up in and caused by complications from exposure to the scabies parasite.

The final woman sat there with her grandchild sitting on her lap—a child bigger than would normally sit on your lap. This child had very confronting symptoms of brain damage caused by fetal alcohol syndrome. This woman was the child's carer, and her daughter, the mother, was lost in the long grass of Darwin and had not been seen for many months—a situation that caused great distress.

This was just one day, one moment, in these women's lives. The devastation and the trauma I describe here is just one moment, and this does not even halfway capture the challenges that these women face daily and over their lifetime. There were stark differences between my life experience and that of these women, and we live in the same country and are all apparently entitled to the same things. This is not just a case of "some have it lucky"; this is a blatant and shameful example of systemic neglect, systemic discrimination, and a continuation of policy development that never once asked Aboriginal people how they thought the policy would impact.

It was moments like this that fuelled my deep commitment to see the Voice referendum succeed. There are the current daily circumstances that proliferate in communities all over Australia, including in the ACT: the extreme poverty, the violence, the disease—leprosy is still a thing in northern communities—the deaths, the tragedy and the racism. It simply cannot go on. We have to do something different.

Why is a Voice so important? Because, despite what No proponents say, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a longstanding history of experiences of colonisation. Even after the 1967 referendum, there is a half-century history where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not consulted or engaged in any way about the policies that impact them. This is not a thing of the past.

I have spoken in this chamber before, in my maiden speech, on the impact the Northern Territory intervention had on me. I want to again highlight some of the impacts this intervention had. On 21 June 2007, I watched the then Prime Minister John Howard announce a package of measures that would affect just about every aspect of Aboriginal people's lives in the Northern Territory. To do this, they had to suspend the Racial Discrimination Act. That very act of suspension tells you all you need to know about that legislation: it was racist.

The measures included the compulsory acquisition of townships—confirmation that this was about the Howard government's longstanding agenda to weaken land rights in the Northern Territory—compulsory health checks, discriminatory changes to welfare, investment in housing, appointing government business managers, and banning alcohol and pornography in communities. This was all to be implemented through police and Army personnel appointed to 72 tiny communities.

The fear, misunderstanding and misinformation in the community was palpable—the fear that the government was coming again to take their children. The Army trucks were deployed and drove into the community on the 600-kilometre road from Darwin, arriving in full force. Police set up checkpoints at every point of entry and exit. In the following days, there were planes, large and small, landing on a tiny remote airstrip, full of politicians, bureaucrats, doctors and lawyers.

As instructed, the townships were compulsorily acquired, government business managers were sent in, health checks were conducted, and incomes were quarantined, and this was Australia in 2007. In my maiden speech I said:

I witnessed firsthand what it actually looks like when government has unprecedented powers, and powers directed to target a specific racial group. This was a pivotal moment in my life. It enshrined in me an understanding of the systemic level of racism and ongoing colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in this country.

I did not know at the time, when I entered this Assembly nearly three years ago, that such a pivotal moment for change would be upon us now. I could never have imagined it back in those dark Morrison days. But here we are, with a referendum that could change the trajectory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' lives in this country.

I implore the people of the ACT and the Assembly to block out the noise, to read the official documentation, and to vote in a way that puts politics aside; to vote in a way that recognises this beautiful country's need to continue to take steps forward—a step forward with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters; an Australian community united to see a future that must be different.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.07): For today's motion, I want to start by reading out the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. It is not long and it is really quite beautiful. I will read the words. They are obviously not my words. This is in the first person. They are somebody else's words brought in here. The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* says:

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is a really simple call for truth, treaty and voice. On 14 October, we all get to vote on one part of this, on the Voice. More than 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support recognition through the Voice. I support recognition through the Voice. I will be voting yes. I have seen the difference when we listen.

I grew up in Canberra in the 80s. I learned Captain Cook history in my local school. I did not know a single First Nations person when I was growing up. I also did not know much about the colonisation of our country, and I did not bother to find out. I suspect I could have. We did not have phones or the internet back then, but I was a big reader. We had a library, there were documentaries on the ABC and SBS, and there was a community around me. I am sure I could have asked questions and I could have listened to the answers. I honestly cannot remember doing that when I was a kid. I did not know a lot; I did not ask a lot. I remember some of the politics flashing by: Mabo; the fuss about saying sorry; stories of bad things happening to people who were not me. But watching some events flash by is not the same as listening.

I am really pleased to say that my daughter is growing up in Canberra and she is having a completely different experience of life. She is nine years old and she has been listening since she was in day care. Duncan and the Wiradjuri Echoes used to visit the kids at Macquarie day care and they used to share their culture and their stories. My daughter listened, and she has a much deeper understanding than I ever had.

When she was three or four—I cannot quite remember; I have done that thing parents do, where it is all blurred into one big log of early childhood—I remember she came to me during the week of Reconciliation Day. We had not really spoken about it a lot. We had spoken about it a little bit, but she knew it was special and she knew it was coming. I think there had been a lot of conversation about it at day care. She said she wanted to say sorry, so she decided that she would send a card to Duncan. She could not write, so she dictated it to me. Her card said, “I am sorry we took your land.” It has shown me how important it is that we listen.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (5.13): I would like to thank my colleagues: Dr Paterson, Ms Orr, Mr Pettersson, Mr Braddock and Ms Clay. It reflects really well on this Assembly when multiple members across parties can co-sponsor a motion, and it goes to what I think the heart of the Voice referendum campaign is about—that it is above politics; it is above partisanship; it is above the argy-bargy and daily differences that we inevitably squabble about in this place. We have a tremendous opportunity—I would argue it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—to collectively, as a nation, make a profound decision about what kind of country we want to live in and what kind of country we want to inherit to the next generation.

I will be voting yes. I will be proudly encouraging my constituents to vote yes, and I will be actively campaigning until the referendum to ensure the ACT has the strongest yes vote. I will be doing that for a few reasons. One reason is that, while I would never wish to pretend that I understand or can truly empathise with the experience of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in our country, I can empathise slightly with having your humanity under public scrutiny and public vote.

I know what a yes feels like. I know what it feels like the day you wake up after your country voted yes and acknowledged you, heard you and wanted to represent you. I can empathise with that. I can also accept both what I have learnt and what I continue to learn as a white Australian: we have so much more to learn from First Nations people.

I look at some wonderful examples that come to mind of First Nations people I have met with Minister Vassarotti, as the environment minister, who are doing tremendous work re-educating us settler folk on how to better manage and care for country. That is just one example of the continual education that we need and the opportunity that we will have the day after the country votes yes, the day after we finally enshrine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the birth certificate of this country.

I also want to say for the record that, while I will be voting yes and while I will be actively campaigning for yes, I will be actively trying to have conversations with white Australians. The reason is that I accept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not a monolith. There is a diversity of opinion within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and indeed in my electorate, that I have consulted, and I think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been paternalised by white decision-makers for too long.

So I will not be telling First Nations people what is right and what is wrong in the lead-up to this referendum, but I will be trying to speak to Canberrans and people in Tuggeranong who look like me and have had experiences like me, and I will try, with whatever capacity I have, to open minds and open hearts to the positive opportunity that a constitutionally enshrined Voice to parliament can give our nation to turn over a new leaf and make one big step in the journey of reconciliation. “Reconciliation” is a word we hear often from Aunty Violet Sheridan when she speaks to many of us in this place and at events that we attend, and she has been speaking strongly in support of a Voice.

I think the reason why the journey to reconciliation always hits my ear is that, at the moment, we are very consumed by a conversation around the Voice, and inevitably we will need to and want to consume ourselves with the other calls in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*: truth-telling and treaty. These things are all strings in the bow of reconciliation, of bringing together a divided and hurting nation. We can pretend all we like that we are not, but we are. We are terribly divided. We are terribly hurting. I think that this is the first really big step, acknowledging, of course, the work that has been done. This will certainly be the biggest thing that has happened in my lifetime so far. I am excited about the opportunity.

I acknowledge the stories shared by my colleagues, Dr Paterson and Ms Clay, so far. I direct anyone who is listening to what I have had to say to listen to these people as well. I will finish there, but I just want to say that I really hope that we vote yes. I hope that we do that to reflect on our city and reflect well on our country. I am committed to campaigning for yes. I am not afraid of yes. I am hopeful and optimistic for yes. I encourage people to learn about yes. I reject absolutely the cynical claim: “If you do not know, vote no.” I implore every Canberran: if you do not know, ask, because there are First Nations people willing to explain to you why it is so important.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.19): I do not believe that a single vote will be changed by my delivery of this speech today. My position on the Voice is already on the public record and recorded in *Hansard*. Regardless, I welcome the opportunity to co-sponsor this motion and talk today.

Today, I do not want to talk as a privileged white man and lecture as to why I support the Voice; I want to take the opportunity to elevate the voice of Aunty Violet Sheridan, a woman I deeply respect.

Aunty Violet is a pillar of the community in Canberra and the region. She is a passionate Ngunnawal elder who shares her cultural knowledge and expertise with the entire community. She generously donates her time at events and schools and for a broad range of organisations in her effort to bring all Australians together.

Aunty Violet does not have the privilege of being heard in this chamber. So, with her consent, I want to take the opportunity to present her words as well as I can.

I freely acknowledge that I cannot bring the wisdom, history or the culture that she brings to these words. These words are from her speech that she delivered to the March for Yes that occurred on Sunday here in Canberra. She said:

I'm hoping this referendum makes it, and I say from the bottom of my heart again, thank you and I hope Australia's listening to everybody around Australia.

Today I speak to you, not just as a Ngunnawal Elder, but as someone who has witnessed the changes in our land, our peoples over the years, our roots here in Canberra are deep and our connections to this land is unbreakable.

This land has heard the stories of our ancestors, for countless generations it holds the knowledge, the wisdom passed down through the culture, traditions, supporting the voice to parliament is a way of saying that our history our stories our wisdoms matter, not just to us but to all Australians.

This isn't just about the past it's about the future, our voices deserve to be heard in the decisions that shape our lives of our children, our grandchildren.

This isn't a political matter, it is a matter of respect and justice.

We invite you to walk with us and vote yes in this referendum.

Aunty Violet, I apologise for my imperfect rendition and state that any mistakes are mine alone.

I also want to say, Aunty Violet, thank you for those words. Thank you, after everything that has been said and done over more than 200 years, for generously saying, "We invite you to walk with us and vote yes in this referendum." Thank you for your invitation. I am delighted to take that up.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (5.22): I rise today to speak wholeheartedly in support of the constitutionally enshrined Voice to parliament. In just under four weeks time,

we are all heading to the polls. Every single Australian is going to cast a vote in response to a single question on 14 October.

I, of course, say yes and will be voting yes, as are all state and territory Premiers and Chief Ministers, both Liberal and Labor; businesses big and small; our national sports heroes and music stars; and, more importantly, the countless Australians in very corner of the country. We have chosen to walk together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to create a better future, and we are making history through substantive constitutional change and structural reform.

Unfortunately, those opposed to these reforms are not solely comprised of those who have in good faith decided their no vote. There are amongst them those who are actively spreading misinformation and hate, which ironically enough promotes the vision, the very thing which many say they are so allegedly against.

Throughout all this mudslinging and misinformation, I have heard no serious calls for the abolition of any existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander institutions or representation. But, for some reason, the constitutionally enshrined Voice is a bridge too far and for some the end of democracy as we know it!

When we undertake to do something as serious and important as changing the Constitution, we should all agree to stick to the facts. But No campaign talking points like “If you don’t know, vote no” are encouraging ignorance of the facts entirely.

To those people out there who are confused about the Constitution, the referendum or what the Voice will actually do: that is okay. We live in a society that imposes rights and responsibilities. In this country we have the right and obligation to vote. With that comes a responsibility to ensure that you cast an informed vote. If you feel you have got questions and want to know more, come have a chat. There are so, so many people who would love to share with you their lived experiences. You can even search online for endless amounts of factual and unbiased information about the referendum.

Unfortunately, there are too many who want people to take the easy route of giving up, not finding accurate information or, worse, relying on the comments section of social media websites and ultimately voting no. Let us try to resist that.

We have let the issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples fall to the wayside for far too long. These problems are real and they are detrimentally impacting our fellow Australians right now.

The opportunity presented by the Voice gives me a lot of hope that we will finally recognise First Nations people in our Constitution and pay respect to 65,000 years of culture and tradition. We will do it through the establishment of the Voice, a First Nations body that will provide advice to parliament and executive government on the matters that affect their lives, so that better decisions can be made. Ultimately, in the long run, better decisions will lead to better results in the areas like Indigenous health, education, employment and housing. It sounds great to me.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (5.26): I rise today to talk about a joint motion from Dr Paterson, Mr Pettersson, Mr Braddock, Ms Clay, Mr Davis and me. Our motion is to support and help protect the integrity of the upcoming Voice referendum.

This motion is being introduced at a critical time. As we all know, Australia has an important decision to make on 14 October. Today, with it being Tuesday 19 September, there are only 25 days to go until 14 October. It is absolutely crucial that this referendum has integrity by helping to fight the spread of misinformation and ensure information about the Voice is factual.

I know that there has been plenty of discussion on the Voice over this year, particularly in the last couple of months as both the Yes and the No campaigns have taken off. I am sure we will have had many conversations in our personal lives with family and friends about the Voice and how we are going to vote. I guarantee that our social media has also been inundated with content on the Voice. That is why we need to help ensure that this information that is so accessible and readily available is factual and provides Canberrans with all the information that they need.

What we are being asked to vote on is very simple. It is this: do we want to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution by enshrining a Voice to parliament which will provide advice to government on policies that affect them, or not. It is that simple.

If the Voice referendum were to be successful, it would result in a body made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and allow them to communicate directly to government on the issues that affect them and on how the government can address these issues. What better way to address these issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than by hearing directly from them and listening to how they think these issues can be addressed?

The Voice is about recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our Constitution and paying respect to 65,000 years of culture and tradition. The Voice is about listening to advice from a body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about matters that affect their lives, in an effort for government to make better decisions.

The Voice is about making practical progress in Indigenous health, education, employment and housing, so that our First Nations Australians have a better life. The Voice will not have veto power. The Voice is not about controlling funding or interfering with the courts. The Voice will work alongside existing organisations and our traditional institutions.

Without a doubt, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face more challenges than non-Indigenous Australians and they have to overcome many more obstacles throughout their lives. The life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is eight years shorter than non-Indigenous Australians. Suicide rates are twice as high and there are worse rates of disease and infant mortality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I could go on and on about the inequality and discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but clearly our current approach is not working and something needs to be done to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The call for the Voice did not come from politicians; the Voice is the result of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* that was developed in May 2017, 50 years after the 1967 referendum which confirmed that First Nation Australians must be counted as part of our national census, in the statement read so gracefully by my colleague, Ms Jo Clay.

This now leads me to my concern about the misinformation and disinformation that is being so quickly spread. As a supporter of the Voice, I, like many other members, have been engaging with our constituents in many ways, including announcing my support for the Voice on social media.

While I do not think it is overly helpful continuing to repeat the misinformation being spread, I would like to touch on my experience with it. For example, over the weekend, I, along with Ngunnawal elder Aunty Violet Sheridan, Dr Andrew Leigh and Mr Petterson held a community barbecue where we invited the community to pop in for a sausage and have a chat about the Voice. The negative and No supporter comments on the social media ads that we put out to advertise the event attracted comments that quite honestly were shocking and a real eye-opener to how far we have yet to come as a nation.

Promoting this barbecue in support for the Voice has attracted many disrespectful remarks and even some outright lies about what the Voice is and how it will affect non-Indigenous Australians. People have left comments on my social media accounts stating that, if the Voice were to be successful, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be getting free homes and cars or that non-Indigenous Australians should be fearful that their homes will be taken away from them, and many other comments of a similar vein.

Another common attitude that is being spread within the community is the belief that there is not enough information on the Voice. I, along with many who are campaigning on the Voice, know that there is still a lot of awareness-raising to go. The purpose of the barbecue that we had over the weekend was an opportunity for people in the community to come together to chat about the Voice and to seek answers to questions they may have.

If you truly feel as though you do not know enough about the Voice, there are things you can do. One thing you can do is to do your own research on the Voice. The Voice has been covered extensively for months now on both sides of the argument. The Australian government, the Yes campaign, the No campaign and many other accredited institutions have extensive information available about the Voice.

It is important that everyone knows what they are voting on. It is our responsibility to access the official information that has been released and not to rely on the unchecked

information that is so often spread through social media from questionable or unreliable sources.

In closing, I am encouraged to see public support from many members in the chamber across all political parties, and I would like to make the following very clear: a Yes vote can and will make a real difference. A No vote will continue to deny Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the chance to have input into the policies that affect them.

For anyone who is undecided, my recommendation would be that, if you want to help improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, then vote yes. We as a community can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a voice on the issues that affect them and give them a say on how we together can walk with them to fix these issues.

I hope you will all be joining me in voting yes on 14 October as well as supporting this motion today. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (5.33): The referendum to be held on 14 October is an opportunity for all Australians to have their say, to have their vote, on this important issue. For so many Australians it is personal. This is an issue that will be determined not by any one political party or even one parliament, but by every single Australian.

It is important to note that this is not a vote that is before the ACT Legislative Assembly, and none of us in this chamber carry the votes of anyone else at this referendum. Every single Canberran, every single Australian, will have the opportunity to have their say.

In March this year, I confirmed on behalf of the Canberra Liberals parliamentary team that this referendum will be a free vote for all Canberra Liberal MLAs. Indeed, it is a free vote for each and every Australian who will have their vote counted at the ballot box. That is why we will not be supporting this motion.

It is abundantly clear that there are a range of views on this important issue in our community, across the political spectrum and amongst our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. To compel members of this chamber to have a vote would be a disservice to what Ms Orr described as the integrity of the referendum. We must respect the integrity of the referendum.

There is no doubt about my personal view. I will personally be voting yes, but I acknowledge and respect that there are different views on this. This motion seeks to dictate to members in this chamber how to vote on this very important and, for some, very personal issue and is seeking to deprive all members the right that is being afforded to all Australians, which is to have their own say at the ballot box on 14 October. That is something that we cannot support.

I do note, however, the concerns that have been raised about misinformation and disinformation that is making its way into the public debate. It is incredibly difficult

and disappointing to see and hear the nature of some of the discussions from both sides that have become personal, divisive and, frankly, downright offensive. It is important to ensure that we are encouraging everyone to do their fact-checking and to make an informed decision when they go to the ballot box on 14 October.

The Canberra Liberals remain committed to ensuring the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, and I encourage every single person in this chamber to engage in a respectful debate as we all head to the ballot box on 14 October.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (5.36): I am really pleased to join with colleagues here across the Assembly to support this motion today. I feel really privileged to live on the beautiful lands that are the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people. I pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and thank them for being my teacher and sharing their knowledge. Locally, we are forging a new story that is based on respect, relationships, learning and listening. I thank traditional owners, Elders and knowledge-holders for their generosity, for their patience and for their forgiveness. I feel so very grateful for the friendship that local traditional owners have offered me.

As a nation too, we are participating in a historic moment. This is a chance for us nationally to start a new story and to start a new journey together. We have the chance to start to make things better, not just for First Nations people but for all of us. While there are those who wish to use this as a moment to create division and fear, I embrace the approach of love and kindness.

This does not mean expecting everyone to hold exactly the same view. But for me, I am listening closely to the perspectives of First Nations people, who speak of the potential that can be offered through this step of embracing the Voice in our foundation document. Fact and accuracy is vital in this conversation, and I join with others across the chamber in imploring those participating in the discussion to ensure that it is conducted in a manner that is factual, accurate, kind and respectful.

I have listened to the diverse voices in the community and understand the different perspectives. Overwhelmingly, the perspective I do hear from First Nations people is that this is an important step. I reflect on the perspective of Australian Greens First Nations spokesperson, the proud Yamatji-Noongar woman, Senator Dorinda Cox, that is captured in this motion: that a Voice to parliament will not only amplify the voices of First Nations people, but it will place responsibility on the government to listen and to act.

The ACT Greens remain strongly committed to justice for First Nations people of Australia. We are committed to the Voice. We are also committed to truth and treaty and the three actions sought in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Enshrining a First Nations Voice to parliament in the Constitution is an important step in this process. We have reflected, a number of times, that we understand that a Voice to parliament, in itself, will not be enough, but it is a positive and a constructive step in this journey.

In participating in this moment, the ACT Greens recognise that First Nations groups were Australia's first sovereign nations, and this sovereignty was never ceded. This

land was forcibly taken from First Nations people, and this injustice has not yet been addressed. As a nation, we have unfinished business.

We recognise that the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* is an invitation from First Nations people to the rest of Australia to respond to this injustice. The Statement from the Heart emphasises the need for reshaping our relationships and being truthful about our history, alongside implementing major constitutional and structural reforms. The statement does also call for a process of agreement-making, work towards treaty and truth-telling about our history. It invites non-Indigenous and First Nations Australians to come together to deal with our past and to forge a new path together.

The discussion of establishing a Voice to parliament provides a unique opportunity for us to start to change our story as a nation and to right the wrongs in the establishment of our nation. But this is the beginning of the discussion, rather than the end. The Voice to parliament cannot be implemented in isolation. We must also progress the further goals with truth-telling and treaty. Realising all these goals will be a way for us to fully heal, to right the wrongs, to build a new foundation and to move forward together.

I am proud to support this motion today, as a Voice to parliament will make a difference. I was so proud to join with thousands of Canberrans at events this last weekend and to see the support for this step. I am proud to be actively campaigning to ensure that people are informed when they vote in the referendum. I am so proud to express that I will be an enthusiastic voter for Yes when we get the opportunity to express our view on 14 October.

I have noted before that we have work to do as a community. It takes more than us voting Yes next month. We need to meet the generosity of First Nations people with our own generosity. We need to drop our defences and our deflections; to own our unearned privilege; to acknowledge the devastating and intergenerational impact of a nation built on the lie of terra nullius; and to acknowledge the frontier wars, and the ongoing dispossession and denial of human rights for those who were here first. Truth-telling means we will hear truths that are difficult to hear. Truth-telling means we need to respond to these difficult truths.

As my colleague Jo Clay has noted, the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* concluded with the following statement:

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

The ACT Greens are walking this journey with you. We will walk it with you today in 2023—on October 14, on October 15 and beyond. We thank you for your generosity and your invitation. We look to a new future: united and healed.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.43): I wonder why we are down here debating this motion. I cannot remove myself from the conclusion that this Labor-Greens government has run out of things to talk about. The Voice referendum is a national referendum that will be conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission. It does

not actually have anything to do with this parliament, other than the fact that all of us here as adult Australians will vote in the referendum.

I speak in this debate, Madam Speaker, as the only member of this chamber with Aboriginal ancestry. And I, for one, will be deliriously happy when this whole process is over, because it has been a most unpleasant ride. I am voting yes. At the start of this process I genuinely believed that I would fall on the No side. I had long conversations early on with Senator Jacinta Price and with Warren Mundine, and their arguments were compelling. But I also spoke at length to people from my mob—the Noongar mob of Western Australia. Most notably, I spoke to David Collard, who participated in the process of constructing the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. We spoke for a long time. Those conversations, and the information that I have gathered about my relatives and the injustices done to them, have pushed me to the Yes side of this debate. I just cannot, in my heart, vote no. But that just me. That is my personal choice, Madam Speaker.

I know that this is a personal issue for a lot of people, as was displayed by Ms Clay. She was, again—and I am sure it is not the first time—genuinely moved by the emotion of that statement and by the emotion of the whole debate. It is about emotion for a lot of people.

I still recall when I went to the Bilya Koort Boodja Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge in Northam in Western Australia, and I saw the information wall that is put up about Sister Kate’s mission, which I have been led to believe is where my Auntie Jean was born, because that is where my grandmother was apparently living at the time. I did not know anything about Sister Kate’s mission—and wow! When I saw what went on at Sister Kate’s Mission, I was crushed. This is my father’s mother, so I can understand the emotion in this debate.

I made my yes vote position public when I was asked by a journalist some months ago. But I also made the point that I would not be campaigning for Yes, and I was very clear about the reasons why. Every adult Australian has the chance to have their say in this referendum. Millions will vote yes, millions will vote no, and they will do so for a myriad of reasons. Some of those reasons will be deeply personal, and yet for many Australians they will simply have examined the available information and arrived at a conclusion.

In Australia, we accept that it is possible for two sensible and intelligent people to assess the same information and arrive at a different conclusion; that is a part of our democracy. It has certainly been a hallmark of the conservative side of politics that we do not instruct people how to think. It has always been my personal view that it is not really for elected members to tell anyone how to vote in a referendum—as much as I respect the politicians of this world like Anthony Albanese, Peter Dutton, and, dare I say it, Jeremy Hanson and Andrew Barr! That is my view. I know there are many people in this chamber who disagree with that, but that is my view. I will not be doing it. I certainly will not be signing up to a motion which calls for me to support the Yes campaign.

Respectfully, I would say, Madam Speaker, that I do not want anyone standing up in this place on a soapbox and suggesting that this motion is about stopping division and racism, because this motion, at its core, aims to fan the flames of division. This motion was drawn up in the knowledge that not every member of this Assembly is

voting yes; that is why it was drawn up. It was drawn up as a way to unmask the “racists” and expose them for all to see, and I just cannot subscribe to it. This motion was drawn up to create as much division as it could possibly muster, and those sorts of tactics are among the reasons that the Yes vote is tanking in the polls.

Has there been disinformation? Wow! There certainly has! There has been a stack of it! It was alluded to in the notes section of this motion, but none of the disinformation that has come from the Yes side is spoken of in this motion. Much of the disinformation that has been spread has led to harm. I have copped abuse. I got smashed on Facebook over a particular video that is not even related to the referendum, because people thought, somehow, that it was. If you want to campaign for one result or another in this referendum, that is up to you. But I will not be dragged into it in this way by a motion in this chamber. As far as the referendum goes, it is a yes from me. As far as the motion goes, it is a no from me.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (5.49): I thank the members who brought this motion to this place today. Of course, this is not the first time that we have debated this topic in this place, and I am glad we do have the opportunity to continue our discussion and to reaffirm our commitment today, in the last sitting week before the referendum on 14 October. It is a matter, I believe, befitting our time and our consideration.

I have said before, the Uluru statement is a historic document. It is historic in its generosity. It is historic in its scope of vision. It is historic in the change that it will effect, should the coming referendum succeed. I hope it will succeed. I know that many others in this place share that hope and are using their time, energy and influence to back in the Yes campaign; as are so many other Canberrans, who are working to have conversations both in their own community and reaching out to our region across the border.

Indeed, I was in Queanbeyan on Sunday afternoon doorknocking for Yes, where we know that it matters most, in a state which is counted in both criteria for the referendum results—the majority of states and the majority of Australian voters. However, despite our reduced constitutional importance, the Chief Minister has stated his ambition, and one certainly that I share, to see the ACT record the highest Yes vote in the country. This is an important goal, not just on the off chance that our votes turn out to be crucial for success, and I hope that it does not come down to that, but also, and more importantly for me, to demonstrate to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that we are a city that respects their voices; we are a community that respects the knowledge inherent to their cultures and the solutions they hold to the ongoing harms of past policies and practice, and, yes, indeed, colonisation.

Madam Speaker, our community is politically engaged, progressive and active, and it is fantastic to see this energy being put into the Yes campaign. We saw this on show over the weekend at the Walk for Yes, and it was inspiring to be one of the thousands of Canberrans standing shoulder to shoulder in a march of solidarity supporting the Yes case with Aboriginal leaders like Aunty Violet Sheridan, representatives from

across the political spectrum and Canberrans from all backgrounds, including a strong showing from our multicultural community.

Many have said that this should not be considered a divisive issue. It is not about changing life for non-Indigenous Australians. It is about strengthening our democracy with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice that has the backing of the Constitution, in lieu of the economic and cultural backing that already gives a voice to so many in our community.

The Voice will not have the powers of parliament. It will certainly not be above the parliament, but that does not mean it will not be important. Enshrining the Voice in the Constitution gives it weight and longevity: that is the point. It is the next crucial step in righting historic wrongs and the ongoing impacts of past policies and practice. It is the next step towards a reconciled Australia. It is the next step towards a unified Australian identity that we can proudly share.

I am pleased that so many of us in this Assembly are unified in our support for the Uluru statement and for the Voice to be enshrined in the Constitution, as called for by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When I am asked why I am supporting the Voice, it really comes down to two things: solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and respect. Yindumara: respect for people; respect for process.

Madam Speaker, there is a lot of misinformation out there in the No campaign, but I am always disturbed when I hear people talking about this as something that has come from politicians, as a Canberra voice. The reality is that this idea of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* emerged from a decade-long process. Following 2007, when both major parties went to the election with a commitment to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution, a process was started, and that culminated in the Uluru convention after a series of regional dialogues around the country asking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people how they wanted to be recognised in the Constitution. It was a bipartisan idea, and the Uluru statement was the outcome of that process.

For me, it is about respecting that process and respecting those voices. I acknowledge Ms Lee and those Canberra Liberals who have joined, as part of the Liberals for Yes movement, in support of this campaign and that Ms Lee is indicating a kind of neutral stance in this place. It is, I think, unfortunate that Mr Hanson is actively using the Canberra Liberals' platform to encourage a No campaign. If the Canberra Liberals had simply gone neutral, with each of them doing their own thing, that would be one thing; but Mr Hanson is promoting a link on social media, and I am told if you put in your details and register to volunteer you are greeted with the message saying, "Thank you for registering to volunteer for the Liberal Party of Australia No Campaign."

This is another example of Ms Lee and Mr Hanson being completely split: split on policy, split on values, split on this campaign. It is really unfortunate that the Liberal Party generally, led by the federal Liberals, chose to go down this path, because the only reason this campaign is divisive is because they chose to make it that way. Mr Dutton believes in recognition—

Mr Cain: We're not led by the federal Liberals! It's a free vote for us.

Mrs Kikkert: A dictatorship is good for you, huh! You want us to dictate just like you and just like your leader!

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please! Up until now, everyone has been heard in silence and with respect. It is critical that this debate, no matter what your position on it, is held with a sense respect. Please remain silent.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Dutton has confirmed that he supports recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution and going to a referendum to achieve that. Mr Dutton has confirmed that he supports a legislated Voice to parliament, which is what this referendum would deliver. It is absolutely clear that the only reason he does not support this referendum is because he believes that a No vote would undermine Anthony Albanese, and I think that is sad. I will be standing in solidarity and respect with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and voting Yes and continuing to campaign for Yes.

Ms Cheyne: Madam Speaker, I seek your guidance, please, on unparliamentary language. Mrs Kikkert called either Ms Stephen-Smith or the Labor Party "dictators". Given, I understand, words like "fascist regimes" have been ruled unparliamentary before, I would seek your advice.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I will caution Mrs Kikkert to be mindful of language. She can choose to withdraw. As I have said, some debates in this place need to be held with respect and regard, and this, to me, is one of them. We have had that up until the last few minutes. Please continue with respect and regard.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.58): I want to add some remarks to this debate because I think it is a very important one. I am pleased to support the motion today. I am pleased to see non-executive members of the Assembly working together to put together a motion that creates the opportunity for this place to discuss this very important national issue.

Certainly, from my point of view, the ACT Greens remain deeply committed to justice for the First Nations people of Australia. We are committed to truth, treaty and voice, the three calls from the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. On 14 October, we have an opportunity to create change and to deepen our commitment to advancing justice for First Nations Australians.

I acknowledge that there are a diversity of opinions out there, but, for me, it is clear that there is a need for change and so I will be voting yes. For too long, First Nations Australians have been excluded from decision-making and have lacked adequate representation in our halls of power. It is time to change that.

Enshrining a First Nations Voice to parliament in the Constitution is an important step in the ongoing process of facing the truth of our history and finding ways to move beyond the injustice and dispossession. I am, however, keenly aware that a Voice to parliament in itself will not be enough. We cannot stop at the Voice and say we have

achieved justice. We need to go further, and we need to continue to listen to First Nations Australians about what those next steps on this journey should be.

It is a shameful chapter in our history that First Nations Australians were only granted the right to vote in 1962 and that they were not counted in the census until after the 1967 referendum. That is shockingly recent. The cultural and physical violence inflicted on First Nations people and the forceful taking of their land is a deep injustice that has not been addressed. The consequences of this trauma are ongoing, with First Nations peoples continuing to experience unacceptable rates of poverty, incarceration, child removal and poor health outcomes.

To respond to this injustice, the Statement from the Heart emphasises the need for reshaping our relationships and being truthful about our history, alongside implementing major constitutional and structural reforms. The statement calls for a process of agreement-making, working towards a treaty, and of truth-telling about our history. It invites non-Indigenous and First Nations Australians to come together to deal with our past and forge a new path together.

Establishing a Voice to parliament provides an opportunity for us to further the important conversation on what we need to do to transform our story, to heal the deep suffering at the heart of our nation's history. But establishing a Voice is the beginning of the discussion, rather than the end, and we must also prioritise work towards truth-telling and treaty. These goals cannot be forgotten or compromised because they are more challenging.

It is time to change. It is time to accept the generosity of First Nations people in being willing to work together. It is time to acknowledge the devastating intergenerational impacts of a nation built on the lie of terra nullius, on the dispossession and denial of human rights for those who were here first. Truth-telling means we will hear truths that are difficult to hear, and we will need to respond to those difficult truths. It is time to be brave and to embark on a journey that can help our nation heal from some of the darkest chapters of our history.

Establishing the Voice to parliament will mark an important moment in this journey, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to vote in support of this change. This motion today gives us an opportunity each to reflect on that, but also, in light of some of the comments that have been made today, to understand the opportunity we have, as elected representatives of our community, not to tell people how to vote but to raise our voice in raising the issues of why—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please.

MR RATTENBURY: We have an opportunity to raise our voice on why we think this matters, no matter your perspective on it. That is, I think, an opportunity we have as leaders. I do not agree with the notion that we should not put a view out there; that we should not share our views with others; that we should not, as leaders in our community, take the opportunity to share our understanding of this issue with others

in our community. We do it on lots of other issues, and I think it is appropriate for us to voice our view to some extent, regardless of what it is, on this issue. That is why I am comfortable to stand today and participate in this debate. I welcome the opportunity to reflect on this very important question that our nation will be asked to answer in just a few weeks time.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (6.03): Paragraph 1(i) of this motion draws attention to the need “to create better outcomes for all Australians”, including “closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians”. There is not one member of this Assembly who would disagree with the importance of this. I know that members of the territory’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community certainly would not.

The gap here in the nation’s capital is very real. Tragically, it also begins very early. As measured by the Closing the Gap Information Repository, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are born healthy and strong in Canberra is not improving. The latest Australian Early Development Census found that Canberra has the nation’s lowest rate of Indigenous children who are on track across all five domains, at only 27.3 per cent.

The figures get much worse if I look at my shadow portfolio of corrections. The Australian Bureau of Statistics latest *Prisoners in Australia* report reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in the ACT are imprisoned at a rate 19.6 times greater than non-Indigenous males and 17.5 times greater if age-standardised data are used. Both measurements are the worst rate ratio of any Australian state or territory.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the ACT are imprisoned at a rate 47.4 times greater than non-Indigenous women. Please note that I did not just say 47.4 per cent. No; it is actually 47.4 times greater. Similar to the situation for men, this is Australia’s worst rate ratio, coming in at more than double the national average.

Although the imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has increased across the entire nation over the past decade, it has increased faster here in Canberra than anywhere else. Admissions of First Nations people into the ACT’s prison have surged by an average of 5.7 per cent each year.

According to more data from the ABS, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recidivism rate here is likewise the nation’s most dismal. Fully 94 per cent of Indigenous detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre have a prior conviction. This Labor-Greens government is good at locking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people up, but it then fails to provide the supports and services they need to succeed once they are released.

Detainees in our prison had no access to structured education for approximately two years. Employment opportunities continue to be very limited, as does access to computers and higher education. The promised reintegration centre still has not been funded. Years after it was created, the transitional release centre has not been used to its full potential. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

A thorough investigation of the situation could make the actual situation much clearer. This is one reason why, since July 2020, local Aboriginal community leaders have been asking the ACT government for a fully independent board of inquiry into the territory's justice and corrections systems. From July 2020 till now, those opposite have failed to grant this unanimous and persistent request.

As I pointed out in last week's appropriations debate, this response shines a light on the priorities of ACT Labor and the Greens. The inquiry into the handling of the Bruce Lehrmann case was announced last year, and by February this year the government had provided \$4.3 million to fund it. If the inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system was on this government's agenda, it would have been completed by now.

Clearly, this is not on the agenda, and it is not hard to understand why. As I have mentioned before, in preparation for a meeting with Aboriginal community leaders in 2020 to discuss this matter, Minister Stephen-Smith asked the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs to provide some guidance to the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. As revealed through a freedom of information request, the first piece of advice was that "the meeting needs to have modest goals for what will be achieved by government". In other words: "Don't get anybody's hopes up that this government will do anything meaningful to address their concerns."

This approach stands in stark contrast to something else that this motion calls on members of the Assembly to note. Paragraph 1(j) boldly states that "the voices of First Nations people will be heard" and, importantly, "the government will have a responsibility to listen and act". I can assure those opposite, including the many Labor and Greens MLAs who are jointly moving this motion, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans would be thrilled if they had a local government that listened to them and then took action, as this paragraph promises. The bitter reality is that they do not.

They have spoken today about how we need to show them respect, we need to walk with them and we need to listen to them. Solidarity is great. However, they are quick to say yes to impress but slow and fail to support. There is perhaps no better evidence of this government's blatant disregard for the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than its agonisingly slow response to the Our Booris, Our Way review into the territory's child protection system.

As I pointed out last week, the all-Indigenous steering committee first met in February 2018, and by August that same year it had delivered four early recommendations. In doing so, the committee asked the Labor-Greens government to implement those four recommendations immediately, to accelerate improvements to the child protection system so that the community might see change during the review. That was five years ago.

As reported in the update tabled in May 2023, not one of those first four recommendations has been fully implemented, according to the implementation oversight committee. In fact, the committee accepts that only two—only two—of the

36 recommendations have been completed, with one more that has moved to the monitoring stage.

Things may finally be starting to improve, according to the committee's chair, but that improvement is relative to a very low starting point. Instead of working cooperatively with a government that is responsible, listening and acting, the committee has instead faced what the chair described as "ferocious indifference when it came to a commitment to action to implement recommendations". The chair has also noted that "throughout the review many attempts were made to diminish our voices and our decisions".

A pattern of irresponsible indifference can be seen in how the ACT government treated the 2009 *We Don't Shoot Our Wounded* report, produced by the Victims of Crimes Coordinator in collaboration with the local Indigenous community. This report makes 12 recommendations to protect and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and young people who experience domestic violence. The government completely ignored this report for 10 years, until the minister was forced to acknowledge it and then apologise.

I stand today to call on this territory's government to start acting like the responsible government idealistically depicted in paragraph 1(j) of this motion. Words are cheap. Indigenous Australians in this territory need far better outcomes, not the ferocious indifference they have been getting from ACT Labor and the Greens.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee) (6.13): This always was and always will be Aboriginal land, and sovereignty was never ceded. Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal. This is Ngunnawal country.

I know that there are many people and families who have a connection to the lands of the ACT and region. Canberra has always been a place where people come together to share knowledge and ideas. I pay my respects to First Nations Elders, past, present and future, and I pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are listening today.

To become a truly reconciled nation, to be able to truly care for country and for each other, we must listen to, understand and support our First Nations people. This is why truth, treaty and voice are so important, and it is why I will be supporting a referendum for an Indigenous Voice to parliament, as well as the work of truth-telling and treaty.

The reason I talk about this is that I listen to Elders and I listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders. I listen to Aunty Violet. I listen to Selina Walker, the co-chair of the ACT Reconciliation Council. I listen to Katrina Fanning, the 2023 ACT Citizen of the Year. I listen to Dr Matilda House. I listen to Chrystale Langford, the 2023 ACT Elder of the Year. What they tell me is that they want us to have conversations about who we are as a nation and who we want to become.

The reason I also do this in AUSLAN is that we need these conversations to be inclusive. To do the work of truth, treaty and voice, we need to be all in. So I encourage everyone to listen to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people about the referendum because they are the people who most need to be heard and understood right now.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (6.15), in reply: I would like to close the debate this evening. I thank the co-sponsors of this motion and thank the members of the Assembly who engaged in the debate.

I will make only a couple of very brief comments on what a disappointment the Canberra Liberals really are. Ms Lee was very insistent that this was about having a free vote. I am not quite sure. I do not understand why the Canberra Liberals could not have a free vote on this motion if that is so important to them. It is difficult to watch a leader, Ms Lee, so hamstrung by her own party room.

I will leave this debate today as this is the last time that we will discuss the Voice before the vote. I strongly encourage Canberrans, if they have questions about the referendum, to engage with their local members in the Assembly. Let us join with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to change in this historic moment and say yes to a Voice to parliament.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Ms Berry	Ms Orr
Mr Braddock	Dr Paterson
Ms Burch	Mr Pettersson
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury
Ms Clay	Mr Steel
Ms Davidson	Ms Stephen-Smith
Mr Davis	Ms Vassarotti
Mr Gentleman	

Noes 8

Mr Cain
Ms Castley
Mr Cocks
Mr Hanson
Mrs Kikkert
Ms Lawder
Mr Milligan
Mr Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Natural disasters—Morocco and Libya

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) (6.20): I want to speak briefly this evening, as an MLA and as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, to send my

deepest sympathies and condolences to the people of Morocco and Libya and to their Canberra family and friends after the awful natural disasters earlier this month, where thousands of lives have been tragically lost.

A devastating 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck Morocco's High Atlas Mountains in the Al Haouz province, about 72 kilometres south-west of Marrakech. I, along with the rest of the world, have watched in horror and with anguish at the catastrophic impacts caused by the earthquake; 3,000 people have been killed. Marrakesh is, of course, a UNESCO World Heritage site. There have been reports of a number of buildings of historical significance in the city being badly damaged and thousands upon thousands are homeless.

Storm Daniel struck north-east Libya, with torrential rain leading to flooding and sweeping away entire neighbourhoods, taking thousands of lives, especially near Derna. The flooding resulting from Storm Daniel has caused destruction of critical infrastructure, and much of north-east Libya remains difficult to access. We understand that it has caused extensive damage to critical infrastructure, buildings, electricity and water supply, telecommunications and farmland.

My heart goes out to all those who have been especially affected by the significant loss of life and livelihoods. The images of devastation are truly heart-wrenching. In Libya, there is the loss of at least 4,000 people and potentially another 10,000. I think that is hard for any of us to comprehend.

I welcome the Australian government's swift and meaningful response to provide two separate \$1 million contributions in emergency humanitarian assistance to both countries, directly supporting those affected. This will be delivered through local organisations, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to deliver immediate life-saving assistance, including emergency shelter, first aid, protection and psychological support.

This will be an incredibly difficult time for Australians and, of course, Canberrans who have family in Morocco and Libya.

Through you, Madam Speaker: Canberrans, if you do have concerns about family and friends in either country, please try to contact them directly before calling the Consular Emergency Centre. If you have been affected and require emergency consular assistance, contact DFAT's 24/7 Consular Emergency Centre on +61 2 6261 3305. Again, our thoughts are with all those affected.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.24 pm.