



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

28 October 2025

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Monday, 24 November 2025**.

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Tuesday, 28 October 2025

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10:00): Members:

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Ginninderra Falls—petitions 20-25 and 74-25

By Ms Clay, from 374 and 348 residents:

Ms Clay, from 374 and 348 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to work with the NSW Government and the future buyer of Ginninderra Falls to ensure that ecological, environmental and heritage concerns are addressed and that the area be included in a new national park (e-Pet 020-25 and Pet 074-25).

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning.

SDN Bluebell—petitions 51-25 and 75-25

By Mr Cain, from 596 and 7 residents:

Mr Cain, from 596 and 7 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to facilitate the relocation of the not-for-profit SDN Bluebell child care centre to premises suitable for an early learning centre (e-Pet 051-25 and Pet 075-25).

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.02): I rise today to support the petition, as has been presented, that speaks to the heart of the Belconnen community: the future of SDN Bluebell early childhood education centre. I am thankful to all those supporters of this petition. There were nearly 600 online supporters and a few on paper that I was able to manage getting during my travels around the suburbs. I want to thank those over 600 people who supported this petition.

The petition calls for the ACT government to take urgent action to secure the ongoing operation of this much loved not-for-profit early learning centre. For almost three decades, Bluebell has stood as a pillar of strength and support, nurturing generations of Belconnen's children and supporting families with the highest standard of care and education. Each year, more than 60 children have found not just a place to learn but also a place to belong, where dedicated educators have built lasting connections with families and the wider community.

The proposed closure of Bluebell at the end of 2025 would have been devastating to those families, and to those educators. It would have meant the loss of trusted educators, the displacement of children from a safe and familiar environment and yet another blow to affordable community-based early education in the ACT as provided by this not-for-profit childcare centre. That is why the petition calls on the ACT government to act, to explore government-owned lease options for new premises, to review restrictive CECA decisions and to strengthen planning rules so not-for-profit providers can continue to compete fairly with commercial childcare centres.

I am very pleased to inform the Assembly that the voices of parents, educators and the broader community have been heard. As a result of their determined advocacy, and also the support of other members of this Assembly, including Ms Clay, the lease has been extended until the end of 2026, and it was comforting to hear the government commit to assisting Bluebell find another location prior to the end of next year.

I sincerely want to thank the principal petitioner, Mr Corey O'Driscoll, and every parent, educator and supporter who stood up for this important cause. Their passion and persistence are a testament to what a united community can achieve when it refuses to accept the loss of something so vital and essential.

This outcome, while welcome, is only temporary. Bluebell's long-time future remains uncertain until a permanent home is secured. I will be monitoring the government's efforts to support Bluebell finding an alternative location. Continuity of care, stability for children and security for staff depend on this next step. Therefore, the petitioners have respectfully requested that the Assembly call on the ACT government to continue working with SDN to identify and secure a sustainable permanent site for SDN Bluebell early childhood centre in Belconnen, ensuring that this vital service remains part of our community for generations to come.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.06): I also rise to speak very briefly about the petition to save SDN Bluebell, signed by 602 residents and sponsored by Mr Cain.

From the moment Canberra found out that SDN Bluebell was slated to close at the end of the year due to a development application on their site, there has been such strong support from the community to keep this beloved early learning centre up and running in some way, shape or form. I think the strength of the reaction affirms what pretty much all of us in this team very quickly grew to understand, which was that SDN Bluebell is an absolute gold standard for high-quality not-for-profit early childhood education and care here in the ACT. We received so many kind and well thought out messages from parents and community members about Bluebell, the way it supported its children with incredibly high-quality education, the way it supported, valued and retained its staff, and the way everyone at the centre went above and beyond to foster a thriving community.

All of us have been pretty amazed, I think, by the strength of the advocacy of the parent community. For them to procure a Crown lease, seemingly within days of the announcement, coordinate letter ID-ing, media, a petition from Mr Cain and a motion from Ms Clay speaks to both the brilliant organising capacity of the parents themselves but also the profound positive impact that Bluebell has had on its local community.

This petition asks us to look at underutilised government-owned properties for early learning centres, review the CECA decision that prevented Bluebell's move to Westfield Belconnen, strengthen protections for not-for-profit providers in the planning system and ensure that the current SDN Bluebell site cannot be demolished without varying the Crown lease.

Our motion, when we moved it a couple of months ago, asked for clarification on whether the current DA proposed for the site was compliant. It asked for a demand and supply analysis for early childhood education and care centres in the ACT—which is due March next year for anyone following along—provide SDN Bluebell with support finding an alternate site if they needed to and to do the same for other not-for-profits at risk of closing.

To summarise all of that, I think it is safe to say that, thanks to community advocacy, this Assembly is ready to pull out all stops to save SDN Bluebell—we know when we are on a good wicket. It is my hope that if we all work together, we will be able to ensure SDN Bluebell continue to deliver their incredibly high-quality education to Canberra families for decades to come.

My final call is for us to ensure that all high-quality early childhood education and care centres in danger in Canberra get this level of attention. Not all providers have the engaged and extremely passionate community that Bluebell has. I want to make sure that this level of advocacy is not required by all centres in danger, as much as it is incredibly welcome. More is absolutely required on a systemic level to make sure that high-quality, not-for-profit early childhood education and care is protected.

Ginninderra Falls—petitions 20-25 and 74-25 Out-of-order petition

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.09): I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition relating to Ginninderra Falls.

Leave granted.

MS CLAY: I table the following out-of-order petition:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Ginninderra Falls—Protection—Objection to private sale—Ms Clay (2154 signatures).

I am pleased to speak today to an Assembly petition for which we got 348 signatures on paper and 374 online. In addition to that, the community has been running a change.org petition which got 2,148 signatures. In total, this petition has 2,870 signatures on it. It is not surprising that it has that much community support. This is an issue that is coming direct from the community. It is about Ginninderra Falls. For anyone lucky enough to have direct experience of Ginninderra Falls, I think it is pretty obvious why there are so many people who feel so strongly about it.

I was lucky enough to go there 20 years ago, when I was younger, and we did not know back then that it was this amazing place with First Nations cultural sites in it, that it had all of these amazing critters and wildlife and that it had such high ecological values. We just knew that it was beautiful. We went there and we had picnics and we walked and we swam, and it was astonishing. It is so beautiful we have film directors making multiple movies about the site at the moment.

It is this magnificent wonder in the backyard of Belconnen. It is a 10-minute drive from Kippax. Those falls have been closed since 2004, and it makes me really sad that so many people who call Canberra home have never been able to enjoy those beautiful falls and the surrounding area. A lot of them are only just now seeing images of it, which I think is partly why so many people are coming forward speaking up for the falls. It is really clear from these petitions that our community want to see those falls open again. Canberrans want to visit those waterfalls. They want to appreciate and protect the rare plant species, the endangered birds and the native wildlife out there.

We understand, and the Canberra community are really, really careful to understand, that this is a site of immense significance to our First Nations people and it has immense significance across the Ginninderra Creek and the Murrumbidgee River. For all of those reasons, we need to make sure that it is protected and also opened up again. An Aboriginal Cultural Values Assessment Report for the Ginninderry Development Project found the pathway that runs from the headwaters of the Ginninderra Creek near Mulligans Flat to its junction with the Murrumbidgee River has cultural significance for First Nations people in the region—and wouldn't it be great to put that back into First Nations hands for management?

Those falls are currently in the sale process, and we are not sure where that is at at the moment. People just want to see a really good outcome here through that process. They want to see that the ecological values of the land are protected, that the sites of significance for First Nations people are managed by First Nations people and that the region is made publicly accessible. We have heard from government that they have not valued the land. They did not consider purchasing the site and they did not put in an

EOI. They did not obtain valuations for the land for sale and they have not estimated the value of tourism and public access to the falls. I understand the SLA is involved in a working group that is looking at these cross-border issues—and that does give me some comfort.

People want the ACT government to be more invested in Ginninderra Falls. It is a magnificent natural asset right on our doorstep. The only road access to the falls is via the ACT. The falls sit in New South Wales, but you get there through ACT land. With Ginninderry, we have a growing population out in West Belconnen and we have a responsibility to ensure our surrounding environment is both protected and available for the community to enjoy, and we can balance those really well if we do it carefully.

I want to put out a huge thanks to Zarah and Benny and Linda and Dave and all of our many community volunteers who have spent weekends getting signatures for this petition and raising awareness about this beauty right next to West Belconnen. I also give a shoutout to Benny, who is making a film and who lent us some of his amazing images of the falls, which certainly reminded those of us who have seen it what we are missing now and showed it for the first time to a lot of new Canberrans.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.13): I want to speak briefly on the petition on Ginninderra Falls tabled by Ms Clay. I note that, yes, it does fall in New South Wales and it is privately owned. That is one of the challenges that ACT residents face in being able to access the facility.

I remember, like most other Canberrans around my age, spending a lot of time at Ginninderra Falls as a young person. Living and growing up in Holt, I rode my bike down there regularly every weekend to go and experience the falls as a privately-owned and operated beautiful nature space in the west of Belconnen. So, like everybody else, yes, of course I would love to see that place opened up again and for it to be cared for as a place of natural significance.

But I also acknowledge that there are only so many things that the ACT government can do in this space. The work that the ACT government is doing, along with the joint venture partners Riverview, out at Ginninderry, is working with Indigenous people and people with connections to that part of our city in understanding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander significance and the different parts of that area that should not be accessed by people, because of how significant it is in the Ngunnawal and Aboriginal space. So I think that is something that we also need to make sure that we highlight to the community: that, as much as we would like people to be able to experience this beautiful part of our world, we also want to make sure it is protected, that its cultural significance is protected and any heritage or environmental issues are protected as well.

So, whilst I agree and support the principle of the petition, I have to bring to the attention of the Assembly that it is not as easy as the ACT government just trotting on in and purchasing the site. Although, should there be opportunities, and particularly through the work that Ginninderry and our joint venture partners Riverview are doing out there, we would certainly be willing to investigate opportunities but in a reasonable way, taking into account all of the issues that I have raised, particularly on whether or not the

sale of that particular part of New South Wales is available for an ACT government to purchase.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Community events

Ministerial statement

MR BARR(Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.15): Community events are economic drivers. They attract visitors, support local businesses and generate significant revenue. By investing in the infrastructure and support systems that make these events possible, the government is making a direct investment in the local economy.

Most of us here attend or experience local events in either a personal or professional capacity. They draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to our city each year, and the ACT government continues to focus on delivering inclusive, low-cost and free events for all Canberrans and extending programming across longer timeframes and incorporating more diverse elements within our events.

The activation of public spaces with a community focus and collaboration is crucial to the success and health of cities. Increasingly, city centres are being seen as more than just districts of business and commerce; they must be places where people can come together for leisure and connection. As Canberra's city centre evolves into a hub for the community, this delivers economic dividends at both a local but also at a territory-wide scale. Increased visitation and spending support local businesses, of course. But the vibrancy and visibility of an active city centre strengthens investor confidence and reinforces the city's role at the heart of Canberra.

That same principle of activation underpins the City Renewal Authority's Placemaking Grants Program. Through this program, the authority supports the revitalisation of vacant and underutilised commercial spaces across the precinct, enabling cultural, creative and community activity that adds life to our public spaces. In recent years, the program has supported the Canberra Art Biennial, the Church Alleyway Jam and Blank, a program that transformed vacant ground floor space at 15 Moore Street into a creative hub for 12 months. Building on its success, Blank is now seeking sponsorship to activate more than 1,600 square metres of commercial space over the coming year.

Canberra's local and major events continue to strengthen our city's reputation as a vibrant and creative capital city. The Enlighten Festival delivers an entertaining and educational experience and attracts tens of thousands of visitors. In 2025, the government partnered with Erth Visual and Physical Incorporated, whose collaboration with the Canberra Youth Theatre gave around 40 young performers hands-on experience in large-scale performance and production. Over 20,000 people attended events across Glebe Park and the city centre and generated a little over \$2.5 million in local spending. This year's Winter in the City attracted more than 41,000 attendees, and the event featured partnerships with local businesses. As one business owner put it:

The Winter in the City fire performances were a perfect example of high-impact investment that moves the needle. We welcomed diners we had never seen before,

people who had not visited the city in years. That single event brought foot traffic, which shows what is possible when government invests strategically in activations.

This and other events deliver more than just short-term visitation spikes; they generate sustained increases in foot traffic and spending in the weeks and months that follow.

The evidence is that, when there are programmed regular events and activations, a place becomes more attractive for residents and visitors alike. So throughout the year events such as last weekend's La Fiesta, the coming Christmas in the City and major cultural events like Lunar New Year that celebrate Canberra's diversity and creativity will be supported. There are, of course, larger-scale events for the territory, including Floriade, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, Summernats and Spilt Milk, to name but a few. All of these further reinforce our city's reputation for high-quality experiences that engage locals and draw visitors from interstate.

Another example just beyond the city centre is Woolley Street in Dickson—affectionately known across all of Canberra as our China Town—which is home to over 20 Asian restaurants and eateries. Following extensive consultation through the Dickson Place Plan, the community expressed a strong desire for a local event to celebrate the multicultural history and identity of the area. From that feedback, Lunar New Year has become an annual celebration. In 2025, it was great to see every business in Woolley Street participating in the festival. Thirteen restaurants opened stalls along their shopfronts and over 300 local performance groups and artists took part, including multicultural community organisations. All the stallholders were local to Canberra. More than 15,000 people attended the event.

The government will continue to invest in events in the city centre's growth through grants and new digital platforms, which will be available through the resources of the City Renewal Authority, and a new city centre website has been created to serve as a central hub for exploring Canberra's precincts and upcoming events. Of course, major projects, such as the UNSW Canberra campus and the planned expansion of the Convention Centre, will further strengthen the role of Civic as the heart of our city, bringing more people into our central business and entertainment district and supporting business throughout the year.

I present the following paper:

Local community events—Ministerial statement, 28 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.22): The Chief Minister says the evidence is clear: when our city centre is programmed with regular events and activations, it becomes a vibrant destination for residents and visitors alike. But this raises an important question. If events make places more attractive, what is being done for our other town centres, which serve as large catchments and where significant communities live?

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Attorney-General, Human Rights, City and Government Services and Night-time Economy portfolios—government priorities—update
Ministerial statement**

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.23): I am pleased to rise to speak about our achievements in the first year of the term for my portfolio responsibilities. It is worth me noting that the draft version of this statement would have me speaking for about 45 minutes and, while that would have been permissible through the standing orders, I do not really want a repeat of that ChooseCBR ministerial statement ever again. So I have tried to keep myself under 20. By doing so, it means that what follows is just a snapshot. There is so much more that could have been included, and I look forward to giving those achievements a proper airing over time, too. I certainly want to stress this for the benefit of members: if they think there is something I am missing, there is plenty missing.

Mr Speaker, as you would well know, this has been a significant year for our roads, intersections, bridges and active travel. Belconnen has enjoyed two major milestones. The full duplication of Gundaroo Drive was completed, with the length between the Barton Highway and Ginninderra Drive restored to 80 kilometres an hour, and the contract for William Hovell Drive duplication was awarded to Canberra Contractors in September, with works to begin soon.

Down south, Sulwood Drive upgrades were completed with the second tranche of road rehabilitation now underway. The duplication of Athllon Drive has begun with enabling works underway, and active travel path upgrades and utility relocations on track for completion by the end of this year. In central Canberra, the first three stages of the Garden City Cycleway opened, changing pedestrian and traffic arrangements from Cooyong Street to Majura Avenue.

I think I can claim that 2025 is the year that Canberrans' collective interest in bridge building officially piqued. The final steel girders were lifted into place for the Molonglo River Bridge and the flyover on Monaro Highway in June and this month respectively—huge undertakings, where the completion of these projects will change travel and ease pressures for commuters.

To support road safety, from 3 November traffic detection devices will also detect seatbelt offences. This sounds straightforward but it has been a major initiative, and it just makes sense. Seatbelts are mandatory and they save lives, and these are rules that have been in place for decades. What changes now is that our ability to enforce will expand to cameras.

Access Canberra has continued to support school safety, particularly at the beginning of terms 1 and 3. "Smiley" picture visual messaging boards were introduced in late 2024 and have created a higher visual impact for motorists—and I have heard plenty of feedback about how useful they are. Standard Japanese Domestic Market style

numberplates became available to purchase at Access Canberra Service Centres just under a week ago. Non-standard numberplates will become available in early December. It may be niche, yes, but for those to whom this matter, this really matters, and I am glad we have been able to deliver on it—a real credit to Access Canberra.

We are well into the mowing season. As an annual activity, some might not classify this program necessarily as a standalone achievement. But with crews covering almost 40,000 hectares of public land to ensure our parks, verges and recreational areas remain safe, accessible and visually appealing, I do not think we can go far enough in expressing our gratitude. That same gratitude extends to our crews across the city who go about their work maintaining, cleaning, repairing and enhancing our city with diligence and quiet pride.

Tree planting has moved to a new phase where the planting continues but in greater concert with young tree care. Our Urban Forest Act is undergoing a major review and we are on track to soon make genuine, sensible changes without compromising its original objectives—something that you and I, Mr Speaker, are both looking forward to. The other side of this work of course is trees at their end of their lives. We were pleased to release a draft urban wood reuse plan for consultation earlier this year. The feedback received has been practical and constructive as we look to shape a more sustainable and circular approach to managing our urban timber resources. There will be more to say on the next steps here in due course.

Our shopping centre improvements program saw the completion of upgrades at Lanyon, Calwell, Evatt, Narrabundah and Macquarie, all in 2025. Our recreation improvements followed a similar completion trajectory: upgrades at Yerrabi Pond, the opening of a new recreation park in Casey, the delivery of new fenced dog parks in Franklin and Lanyon, and playground upgrades at Lyons, Kaleen and Macquarie shops. The opening of the Inner North Destination Play Space was cause for a huge celebration as a new flagship play space in that district. Looking ahead, we have some wonderful projects coming online, including water play at Emu Inlet, the Margaret Timpson Park playground and a swathe of playground upgrades in Tuggeranong.

The fact that our major waste infrastructure of FOGO necessarily had to be put on hold as we worked through the complexities of bringing forward the procurement and construction of a new recycling facility has been acknowledged in this place ad nauseum. Pleasingly, this year, considerable progress on the delivery of the new recycling facility has been made, with design work progressing well and the Hume building structure fully demolished by 22 September. This now marks the first major step in preparing the site for construction of the new recycling facility. iCBR also released the request for expression of interest for the FOGO facility to market on 1 July, while we expanded the trial to include additional households in multiunit developments in several suburbs—again, including in Tuggeranong—to further assist our understanding of how FOGO is approached in different unit types and complex arrangements.

I can confirm today that, from 3 November, Canberrans will be able to sign up for an additional green bin. That is another election commitment delivered. It is optional, but it does mean that interested Canberrans will have a second 240 litre green waste bin picked up fortnightly along with their existing green bin. This will attract a one-off

purchase and delivery fee of \$99.42, together with an annual service and admin fee of \$86.72, indexed. Green bin deliveries will take place later in November, with service expected to commence in December.

This year, 2025, is the year that all works, as part of the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Program, have been completed, marking a significant milestone in our journey towards environmental and community resilience; restoration of Namadgi National Park and improved visitor infrastructure sees the delivery of our promise to build back better and prepare for future challenges realised; and the rebuild works of the Yankee Hat Walking Track and Aboriginal Art Site, another major milestone, are strengthening community connection to country and embedding bushfire resilience.

In Canberra's north, the Budjung Galangi Grasslands opened. This is a 20 hectare grassland and woodland protected area in Franklin. In an otherwise urban environment, these grasslands protect critically endangered box-gum woodland and crucial habitat for threatened plants and animals, like the nationally vulnerable Superb Parrots.

Multiple hazard reduction burns were delivered in the autumn season—and there are a few going on right now, including one today at Pine Island—reducing our residual fire risks in the ACT to comfortably below target levels. This is hard work in often remote conditions and sets us up well going into our bushfire season. This year, a considerable number of Parks and Conservation staff also supported Canada through its most severe fire season on record, deploying 17 trained staff to assist with emergency response efforts in Alberta.

Efforts this year have seen the successful removal of feral goats from Rob Roy Nature Reserve. Again, it might not sound that sexy or remarkable, but it has marked the elimination of the last known population of feral goats within the ACT. Our Thermally Assisted Aerial Control Program remains a nation-leading initiative. The 2025 program has seen an expansion of the total targeted area—again, testament to the efficiency and dedication of our PCS team against the threats of pigs and deer especially.

As we all recognise, invasive plants continue to pose a significant threat to the ACT's parks and reserves, impacting habitat quality for our threatened species as well as impacting the overall health and look of our city. The formation of the City and Environment Directorate has strengthened collaboration on weed management across the ACT, including sharing spatial records and weed treatment data, to support coordinated planning, mapping and surveillance, allowing for control efforts to be prioritised and resources directed to high-risk areas.

A key element of weed management and other care for our natural environment is through ParkCare, Landcare and our catchment groups and associated entities—volunteer efforts for which we remain extremely grateful. Volunteers being able to use power tools has been a widely anticipated trial and it has been going well—one of a number of offerings to support a thriving volunteer community that feels safe, valued and empowered as they deliver tens of thousands of hours of support to the government and, ultimately, to the future of our city.

In terms of support to the broader Canberra community, between 1 October 2024 and 30 September 2025, Access Canberra Service Centres had over 289,000 customer visits

and undertook over 442,000 customer transactions with an average wait time of just 8 minutes 33 seconds. They also scheduled over 13,000 appointments. Access Canberra now offers an Auslan interpreting service through Convo Access at all service centres, accessed by simply scanning a QR code. Other accessible services include the TIS National for interpreter needs. There is also a weekly quiet hour and there is support for other disabilities too.

During the same period, the contact centre answered over 311,000 calls, with callers waiting an average time of four minutes and 50 seconds. On that, just last week, I had both the honour and also the very sad occasion of attending the funeral of Janice Seymour, who had been a long long-term member of the contact centre team and, indeed, had hired many, many people in Access Canberra and across government now more broadly. It is widely acknowledged within Access Canberra that the contact centre is seen as a bit of a training ground, and other parts of government are always hunting for contact centre staff because they are so well trained and their skills are so applicable across government. So they are being snatched all the time.

I think much of the credit for the training, the community service focus, the service focus overall and the attitude that is pervasive across the contact centre is because of Janice Seymour. I want to take this opportunity to extend my condolences to her friends and family, and to her many, many, many colleagues. It was very clear to me from the funeral last week just how many lives she had touched and how many friends she had in her workplace.

Access Canberra has continued efforts to create efficiencies, both for customers and service delivery more broadly, that have not necessarily received public attention but they have delivered major improvements include a single digital front door for Licensing and Registration Authority applications, which consolidated multiple contact points and streamlined them into one submission pathway. Additionally, there was a system solution implemented to automatically file public uploads into the record-keeping system, eliminating around 75,000 manual tasks annually. In March 2025, the Births, Deaths, and Marriages team operationalised legislative reforms supporting the use of inclusive gender descriptors in the register, delivering on a reform passed last term that I know is very dear to Miss Nuttall, as it is to me.

Utilising new powers afforded through reforms we made last term to the Liquor Act, in August this year Access Canberra progressed a special event declaration for over 40 special events for the coming year, allowing eligible businesses like licensed restaurants, bars, and clubs to stay open later automatically, reducing administrative burdens on those businesses. The second tranche of liquor licence fee reductions began on 1 July, extending support to medium cafes and restaurants, including general licences with capacities of up to 150 persons. We have also halved liquor fees for eligible venues with occupancies between 151 and 350 people that, on application, showcase artists, musicians and other cultural activities 10 or more times a year. Just last week, we led the nation again in introducing a law to help regulate the same-day delivery of alcohol, seeking to balance convenience with harm minimisation.

The ACT government continues to support an accessible, efficient, fair and transparent justice system. In addition to the investment and the broader review of budget funding for the justice sector, we also strengthened the capacity, capability and independence

of ACT Courts and ACAT, through a number of significant appointments this year, together with recruitment now underway for a tenth magistrate, aimed at improving processing times and addressing growing demand in civil and criminal matters.

In January, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Restorative Justice Scheme in the ACT. To ensure that this nation-leading scheme remains world class and responsive to the changing needs of the territory, a review of the scheme and its underpinning legislation has been completed and that review is currently before me.

The final legislative piece to support the ACT government's commitment to raising the age of criminal responsibility was passed, clarifying how existing police powers can be exercised in relation to people under 14 years of age, ahead of the age being raised from 1 July. Again, I extend my thanks to all involved. I know we will hear more about the work of the Therapeutic Support Panel, but I wanted to acknowledge the public comments and praise from ACT Deputy Police Commissioner Scott Lee and the support that ACT Policing has provided in operationalising these reforms. I think to hear from Deputy Commissioner Lee himself that these reforms are going well has been very, very welcome to all of our ears.

Significant policy work has also been undertaken to modernise our bail laws—in particular, the framing of the decision-making criteria which governs bail decisions. I intend to provide a further update on this soon. I announced at the same time as the release of the bail discussion paper, my intention to introduce legislation to provide for an indicative sentencing scheme for criminal matters within the Magistrates Court, its aim being to improve the experience of both victims and defendants in criminal matters and to facilitate more efficient finalisation of matters. The introduction of this legislation is imminent.

The ACT's Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime is being reviewed to ensure it is operating effectively and continuing to meet community expectations. There is a more substantive update due soon and there is detailed policy work on legislative reform to expand the pathway for human rights complaints for the Human Rights Commission to ACAT, and that work has begun. In March this year, the right to a healthy environment commenced. Just last month, the government supported the passage of the right to housing, introduced by the Greens. Our work on our election commitment of a roadmap and timeline for inclusion for the other remaining economic, social and cultural rights is ongoing.

I and my colleagues are acutely aware that there is still work to be done to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in the criminal justice system. The final report of the Jumbunna Institute has given us the clearest direction yet of the steps we need to take, and this work is beginning to be underway in earnest across the ACT government, with updates to be provided to the Assembly regularly.

As they say, Mr Speaker, the best is yet to come. I have foreshadowed plenty of reform and other work that is underway, but there is one I have not yet mentioned. I will speak in more detail on this later this week, but my proudest personal achievement remains the passage of legislation enabling voluntary assisted dying in the ACT. That our scheme commences in just six days is still quite remarkable to me, for so many reasons.

I thought it would be difficult to effectively hand the legislation over so that its implementation could be, as intended, led by ACT Health. But, in fact, it has been very easy: a testament to the officials, the workforce, the strength and clarity of the legislation and, importantly, the leadership of Minister Stephen-Smith.

With that, I commend this update to the Assembly.

I present the following paper:

One year on from the election: Achievements of the 1st year of the term—
Ministerial statement, 28 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.42): I want to thank the minister for her detailed statement and for the fact that it is not twice as long. There has certainly been a lot of activity in her portfolios, and she does have an extensive remit. I thank her for all of that work.

I want to talk about some of the environmental aspects of the minister's work. We have heard an update about that. There are a few areas in which the minister and the directorate are working with the environmental community where there has been some great progress, and there are some issues that need a little bit more work. There are a couple of really, really great examples of government moving ahead on environmental activities, and then there are a few things that I am hearing a lot of concerns about.

I will run through those; I will try to be brief. It is great to see the mowing. Mowing is always a tricky one to get right in Canberra. We understand that some people like the aesthetic look of mown areas, but we also have clear mowing maps in the ACT, and I am still hearing regularly from a lot of Landcare areas that sometimes the mowers come too close or that they are mowing over those. The real success stories I am hearing are where the directorates engage directly with the Landcare areas and bollards are going in place. That does seem to be working. That is good to see, but there are ongoing concerns about where the mowing is happening and the spread of weeds, grass and seeds into our waterways. This came up in the FrogTober FrogWatch surveys that we just did in October with volunteers. Whether an area has been mowed right up to the waterside is one of the key indicators of whether frogs are thriving there, so it has a big impact on a lot of our wildlife.

It is really good to see the tree planting, but, again, we sometimes still see trees being planted in grasslands or the wrong species planted, so I think there is a bit of ongoing work to be done to make sure that we are managing that really well on the ground. It was great to get an update today—and, also, recently in an email from the minister's office—about the trial use of allowing volunteer park carers to use power tools. This is good. For a long time a lot of them were frustrated that they could not use the simple tools that they can use in their backyards when they go out to do volunteer land care for the government, so it is great to see that trial coming to an end.

The request that came through me from one of the Landcare groups was whether we could extend this use to Transport Canberra and urban park area volunteers who are doing the same work. I am seeing a lot of nods; I hope that is under consideration. We take the point that there is a cost to government in administering these trials, but I think there is immense value as well. It has been costed at \$21.5 million worth of free labour that we get from our land carers, as well as the immense community and cultural value of letting people feel more connected to their environment and look after it. I think the value of that is enormous.

I am really, really pleased to see that urban wood reuse plan coming along. Everything I hear about that is excellent, and I think that is going to end up being a good example of a circular economy strategy that delivers great results. It is good to see that being done so well and continuing.

And it is great to see a really simple initiative of allowing people to have access to an extra garden waste bin. That will have enormous benefit for the community in helping them clean up their yards and will have great environmental impacts. That garden waste recycling scheme is a simple, cheap one that was set up a couple of decades ago—longer, I think—and it has been running really well. Extending work that is already effective is a great way to go.

I am still concerned about the delays on FOGO. I hear that the minister thinks it has been well covered. There was a conscious decision last term that the government would not run two procurements at once. Yesterday we heard from the climate change minister that, for the first time ever, the ACT will not be meeting its legislated climate change targets. We do not have the details of where that inventory lies, but we had decided to roll FOGO out Canberra wide by 2023, and choosing to delay that until 2028—I think that is the latest date—means another five years of food waste going to landfill.

These decisions have an impact on climate change and on our mitigation efforts. Similarly, it is great to see some progress with the new MRF—the materials recycling facility. We are looking forward to seeing that roll out. I hope that, between the new recycling facility and product stewardship, Canberra will get the level of recycling that Canberrans expect. They will probably be quite disappointed if they do not.

It is good to see that we now have embedded our right to a healthy environment in our legislation. That was a great achievement from last term. I know the commissioner is taking that right really seriously. She has said that she has already received the first half dozen complaints and concerns about a right to a healthy environment. It will be good to see how that unfolds. I think it will be difficult for the ACT government to uphold Canberrans' right to a healthy environment if we are not putting in the programs and the funding that we need to make sure that we are doing that well.

That brings me to my biggest concern, and that is about how we are going to look after our land and waterways if we do not shift the dial on our resources for our land and waterways. We did hear, in the last *ACT State of the Environment Report*, that it was not good news: our environment was getting worse, year on year. That is what that very long and detailed report said—and it said it explicitly in so many words. It described the funding at the time as meagre and demonstrably inadequate. We have had a bit of an update on that. We are now funding our environment proportionally even less than

at the time when that state of the environment report came out. At that time, I think we were providing 2.8 per cent of the budget to environment and climate, and that has now dropped to 2.7 per cent on climate environment.

If 2.8 per cent was not enough, I think 2.7 per cent probably also is not enough! It is good, but all of these programs need funding. All of these areas of land need management and resources. We understand the constant tension government experiences when people ask if an area can be protected and government says that we do not have the resources to protect it. That, to us, is not the right way around to be making those decisions. But it is great to hear quite a lot of the work that is going on in the urban environmental space.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mental Health Month

Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.49): I rise today to highlight recent activities undertaken as part of World Mental Health Day, Mental Health Week and Mental Health Month, which support the ACT government's commitment to building a kind, connected and informed community, working together to promote and protect the mental health and wellbeing of all.

In doing so, I would like to start by recognising and acknowledging those who have lived or living experience of mental illness or mental ill health, as well as those who are caring for someone with mental health issues. Every year, ACT Mental Health Month takes place in October, and events and advocacy are held throughout the month, aiming to encourage connection and reduce the stigma that all too often coincides with mental health. In addition to Mental Health Month, October also hosts the Mental Health Week and World Mental Health Day. This year, Mental Health Week was on 5 to 11 October. The Mental Health Community Coalition's theme for Mental Health Week was "The Art of Wellbeing". This aimed to emphasise that mental health and wellbeing looks different for everyone and that Mental Health Week is a time to reflect and share what this looks like for each of us. Across Mental Health Week there were a range of free events, workshops, wellness walks and mindfulness sessions. These aimed at connecting people in the community, acknowledging the important role of those with lived and living experience, and supporting people with the tools and knowledge to support themselves and others.

To celebrate Mental Health Week in the Legislative Assembly, I co-hosted a Wellbeing Priori-Tea event with the Mental Health Community Coalition that included information from MIEACT and a guided exercise with a senior official from the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing. During the event, we recognised that it is important in this workplace to look after ourselves and to support our own wellbeing so that we can continue to support our community. We learnt about the importance of selfcare and how to safely support someone needing mental health care. It was a great opportunity to take time out of our busy schedules and connect over the simple, everyday ways we look after ourselves, each other and our community. I want to thank everyone in the Assembly who attended that fantastic event.

Towards the end of Mental Health Week, World Mental Health Day was Friday 10 October. This is an international day that aims to increase public awareness about the importance of mental health, mental health services, and mental health workers worldwide. This year's theme was "Connect with Your Community," and I am pleased to say that through the events and connections with the community, we have honoured this theme here in the ACT. To start the day, I had the privilege of attending the blue tree painting event in Gowrie to raise awareness and deepen our community's understanding of mental health and wellbeing. Painting a tree blue may seem simple, but it is a powerful and non-confrontational way to start conversations that can save lives. This is a continued effort to support our community and highlight that help and support is available. I particularly want to recognise Mr Werner-Gibbings attending that event in his painting clothes, and all of those who have taken the time to have a look at the tree and have a conversation about it.

Following this, I was pleased to visit the Phillip Community Health Centre and meet with some of our CHS mental health workers. In particular, the Woden Community Recovery Service and the Eating Disorder Program teams shared what they do to provide mental health care and support recovery for people in the community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank every mental health clinician and support worker across government, non-government, community and private sectors. It is important to acknowledge their valuable contribution to the care, treatment and support of individuals and their families across our community.

As World Mental Health Day drew to a close, I attended the mental health sector awards, and was honoured to help present the awards. These awards celebrate the people, programs and organisations leading and driving change across the mental health sector and for our community. The nominees and winners are mental health champions for our community, leading and helping to shape a mental health system that is inclusive, person-centred and connected. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Mental Health Community Coalition, the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network and Carers ACT for organising the awards and for providing an opportunity for community leaders to be recognised for their ongoing dedication to supporting the mental health needs of our community.

The importance of this community focus is also why the ACT government partners so strongly with the mental health community non-government sector in the ACT, along with people with lived experience, to meet the needs of our community and to support people where they are. As an example of this, as part of the 2025-26 budget, the ACT government committed to investing \$9.4 million over four years to a range of child and youth mental health programs including Stepping Stones, WOKE, Youth Aware of Mental Health, Mindmap and the ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Sector Alliance. I was particularly pleased that the team at the Phillip Community Health Centre identified WOKE as having now become an embedded part of our youth mental health system and a really important evidence-based support for children and young people in our community.

Also in the 2025-26 budget, the ACT government provided \$506,000 over two years to support perinatal mental health in the community. This includes funding to support the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre to expand its services, and funding for the Perinatal Mental

Health Alliance, which aims to build awareness of perinatal mental health in the community and reduce the stigma around it. In addition to these budget commitments, there are a range of new services currently being developed, such as a youth trauma service and Medicare mental health kids hub, to further strengthen support for young people in our community. The mental health sector has been instrumental in shaping these initiatives, ensuring that they reflect the needs of our community. This reflects the fact that mental health support is most effective when it is compassionate, responsive, and informed by lived experience.

Mental Health Month, Week and Day are important reminders that mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and support services are all integral to community wellbeing. It is also a time to reflect on the many connections between mental health and other areas of health and wellbeing, and the importance of a joined-up approach across government and community. I look forward to delivering the ACT Mental Health Services plan to further articulate the ACT government's commitment.

It is a great privilege to be the ACT Minister for Mental Health, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with the mental health sector and our ACT community, especially those with lived and living experience, as we work together to build a community where mental health is understood and supported. In closing, if this statement or the activities of Mental Health Month have raised issues for anyone, I encourage them to reach out for connection and support. There are a range of supports and services available to help you. You are not alone.

I present the following paper:

Mental Health Month—Ministerial statement, 28 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.57): I was pleased to attend the mental health sector awards on Friday 10 October, and would like to congratulate all the terrific award-winners and all the nominees for their courage and leadership in helping to promote better mental health across the Canberra community. It is well-established that human connection is a key enabler of good mental health, so we need to ensure that we have the places and spaces across Canberra to support people coming together to pursue shared interests. That is why I will continue to advocate for community facilities across my electorate. We also need safe places for people in distress to seek help, so I again call on the government to progress work on a community-based safe haven in Canberra's south.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sport and recreation—sportsground maintenance

Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport

and Recreation) (10.58): As the sport and recreation minister, I am always proud to claim that Canberra has one of the most physically active populations in Australia, and this does not happen by chance. The ACT government plays a vital role in supporting our local sport and recreation sector by offering a diverse range of facilities to support participation across all levels. This investment is central to the government's commitment to community wellbeing, inclusion and healthy lifestyles.

It is no small feat to manage the diverse and extensive portfolio of sportsgrounds across Canberra. Our sportsgrounds comprise over 100 irrigated sports ovals that span more than 284 hectares. The network includes 97 hireable facilities, made up of 16 enclosed ovals, 46 district playing fields and 32 neighbourhood ovals. Each is designed to support a range of users, from elite competition and community sports to grassroots training and informal recreation. These grounds are strategically distributed across Canberra's suburbs to ensure equitable access for residents and sporting organisations.

The infrastructure supporting these sportsgrounds is also extensive. There are 70 training light installations, of which 14 have competition-grade lighting systems, enabling evening use as well as winter scheduling. Amenities across the grounds include 98 toilets, 58 sets of change rooms, 66 canteens, 30 drinking fountains and 58 storerooms, which collectively support the comfort, safety and functionality of the grounds for players, officials and spectators alike.

These sportsgrounds are collaboratively maintained, with scheduled mowing and weed control, line marking and the operation of smart irrigation systems that optimise water use based on weather and soil conditions. The teams also maintain lighting towers, change rooms, toilets and canteen facilities. This is essential in supporting the thousands of community members and sporting groups who use these grounds every week.

In the 2024-25 financial year, the ACT sportsground network supported more than 120,000 hours of activity, including over 41,000 hours of floodlight. Approximately 86 per cent of the total maintenance cost of sportsgrounds remains subsidised by the ACT government, ensuring that community clubs, schools and recreational users have access to high-quality, affordable sporting facilities.

Many of Canberra's sportsgrounds were constructed decades ago, presenting the challenge of maintaining infrastructure that receives high levels of wear and tear. These require ongoing upgrades to remain fit for purpose, to meet modern standards and the expectations of a growing and diverse sporting community. Unsurprisingly, demand for access to sportsgrounds is concentrated during evenings and weekends, placing pressure on facility availability and scheduling. This peak-time demand can lead to overuse of high-demand ovals, accelerating wear and increasing the frequency and cost of maintenance.

Water and irrigation remain among the most significant operational costs in maintaining irrigated sportsgrounds. While the introduction of smart irrigation systems has improved efficiency, the cost of water and the need to manage it sustainably continue to present ongoing challenges. In recent years, sportsground maintenance has undergone a quiet revolution, driven by the need for innovation, sustainability, and to be community focused.

A suite of new technologies and approaches is reshaping how these community assets are managed and used. This includes robotic line marking, now deployed across several high-use fields, and smart irrigation systems. These systems use real-time weather data and soil moisture sensors to optimise watering schedules, ensuring healthy turf while conserving water. Water sustainability is further supported by pilot projects around stormwater reuse at selected locations.

The use of mobile assets, such as repurposed shipping containers, has enabled the creation of modular change rooms, toilets and canteens. These units can be deployed as either temporary or permanent facilities, cutting construction costs by up to 50 per cent while maintaining functionality and comfort.

Floodlighting upgrades continue to be a priority, with recent works completed or underway at key sites, including Dickson, Reid, Kaleen, Lyneham and Wanniassa. The repurposing of Stirling turf farm into a multi-use sportsground is another example of how we are increasing capacity without the need for new land acquisition. Stirling 3 will be available for hire at the end of 2025.

Within my portfolio, the ACT government also manages 32 dryland ovals. As their name suggests, these ovals are not irrigated or maintained for formal sport. They provide the community with valuable open space for informal recreation, such as dog-walking and general play. In response to an Assembly motion in November 2021 which questioned the future use of dryland ovals in the ACT, I sought a review of these ovals, which was completed in 2022. This review assessed all 32 ovals to determine their value to be retained to accommodate future organised sporting requirements.

It was important to me that the review considered the need to protect the future interests of the sports industry so that additional community sporting facilities can be provided where and when they are needed in the future. At the end of the review, 14 ovals were identified for potential future reactivation. The case study project of reactivating Higgins Oval successfully in 2019-20 demonstrates what can be achieved. The costs to reactivate identified sites are variable, and are highly dependent on the site's characteristics, including its original condition and the future sport requirements of the site.

I am committed to expanding access to sport and recreation for Canberrans, but I am also aware of the fiscal impact of these decisions, including those to reactivate dryland ovals. That is why these decisions are made carefully, on a case-by-case basis, and will be guided by factors demonstrated by community demand.

My focus as sport and recreation minister always remains on maximising the use of existing sports assets across the ACT and investing in innovation to ensure that Canberra's sportsgrounds continue to meet the needs of a growing and active community most efficiently and effectively.

I present the following paper:

Sportsground maintenance update and potential reactivation of dryland ovals—
Ministerial statement, 28 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.05): I would like to speak briefly to the minister's statement and express my absolute support for bringing dryland ovals back online and made available for additional use by the community. This has been a consistent push by both the Greens—particularly my colleague Ms Jo Clay—and the sporting community more generally.

As the minister pointed out, Ms Clay started this entire conversation with her motion back in 2021, and I want to give her and the advocates she worked with on that motion full credit for where we are now. This is a deeply exciting development, and I am very glad to see that, when the Greens and the community bring these concerns to the chamber, we can get meaningful action. Four years is a long turnaround, but if it means we are going to get the best outcome possible, it is better to do it right than fast.

A key concern we have heard from the community is that they might not be involved in these upcoming discussions about their local ovals. I urge the minister to ensure that local community consultation will be a key part of this process. Having discussed a wide range of issues with constituents, I know that there are almost always ideas that no-one else has thought of that can be missed if we take too wide a view. Local communities know the spaces, they know the challenges and they know the demand from the area. If nothing else, early and frequent consultation can ensure that a community feels part of the project. We all know that there is no force on earth like that of a community that believes a project has been undertaken without their consultation and consent.

However, bringing dryland ovals back online is a very exciting initiative. We have been working for a long time to see this brought about, and I think this is the kind of forward thinking that the sporting community is hoping to see from their representatives.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.07): I rise to speak in response to Minister Berry's statement this morning on sportsground maintenance and potential reactivation of dryland ovals. The ACT government manages a significant number of enclosed ovals, district playing fields and neighbourhood ovals. I have stumbled across many of them over the past 27 years, trying and failing to prevent balls going past me, under me, over me, or through my hands.

Each of these ovals is important to our communities and it serves a purpose, being in high demand from various users for various reasons. I have a distinct memory of lying down with my brother on Holder oval in 1988 or 1989 and confirming by eye alone that the earth's service is indeed curved. I recall my science teacher father approving our result but being unconvinced by our method.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the maintenance teams who put so much effort and time into our ovals. The minister and the oval maintenance teams have been very responsive, consistently, when I have flagged maintenance requirements for Tuggeranong sportsgrounds. This winter, for example, I flagged to the minister that a number of the AFL posts at Gordon playing fields were not straight. The teams visited

the oval and got straight to work on fixing the issue.

As the minister noted, the ACT government manages 32 dryland ovals which provide the community with incredibly valuable spaces to get active, whether it be athletes training for an upcoming sport, mums and dads taking their kids there after a stressful day—or week—at work, or an older person who uses the open space to safely walk their dog.

In response to a November 2021 Assembly motion, the minister noted she would seek a review of the usage of dryland ovals, which was completed in 2022. I want to put on the record today that that I support the retention of our open spaces and reactivation of dryland ovals, particularly in my electorate of Brindabella. The review recommended that 14 ovals be retained for possible future reactivation as irrigated sportsgrounds. Unfortunately, at this stage none of these are in Tuggeranong.

In the review, Calwell Neighbourhood Oval—Calwell 4—Chisholm Neighbourhood Oval—Chisholm 2—Gilmore Neighbourhood Oval—Gilmore 1—Richardson Neighbourhood Oval—Richardson 1—and Theodore Neighbourhood Oval—Theodore 1—were recommended for possible repurposing. I hope that many, if not all, of them will remain as dryland ovals and open public space, particularly as many of these Tuggeranong ovals are likely to be managed by the Education Directorate in the future, due to their proximity to, and usage by, Tuggeranong’s public schools.

I recently undertook a piece of work listening to people in Tuggeranong about what they want to see from their dryland ovals. My team and I also assessed the visual condition of eight dryland ovals in Tuggeranong, their accessibility, how protected they are from real vandalism, the extent of work needed to revitalise them in a future reactivation program, how isolated they are from other ACT government-managed ovals—therefore, how important they are as community spaces—as well as how they are used currently and could be used after reactivation.

We found, overwhelmingly, that our community supports these community spaces staying as spaces. We also found that Calwell oval off Outtrim Avenue and Richardson Primary School oval should be considered for major investment to bring them back up to scratch for organised and social sport.

We found that Fadden Primary School oval could be considered for protection from cars due to its high community usage, and minor investment in Chisholm oval at Alston Street to support social recreation should also be considered. I hope that one day we may see Calwell oval, which was previously used by the mighty Calwell Swans AFL Club, come back to life as an irrigated oval. It has not been used since 2011, when maintenance ceased, but the surface is reparable, and it has high potential for junior sport.

Richardson Primary School oval is protected from cars. It is highly accessible. It is close to key existing and expected amenities. It has plenty of existing sports infrastructure in reasonable condition, and it is in an area of high demand for improved recreational facilities.

I thank the minister for her work on our brilliant sportsgrounds across the ACT, and I

hope and trust that her directorate will seriously consider improving the condition of existing sportsgrounds and our valuable community neighbourhood ovals in Tuggeranong.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.11): I would like to support the minister's statement about reactivating dryland ovals. We have many teams that are keen to use them. The minister stated that the ACT government plays a vital role in supporting our local sport and recreation sector by offering a diverse range of facilities to support participation across all levels, and that the minister's policy is not to leave physical activity to chance.

Given the government's involvement in ensuring that activity is not left to chance, I would like to see the policy document that plans the equitable distribution of the diverse range of facilities used to keep us being the most physically active population in Australia, including aquatic centres and indoor sports stadiums.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Child care—early childhood education and care incident reports—order to table documents—update Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.13): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on the significance of the 213A resolution which is currently underway relating to the early childhood education and care sector in the ACT.

On 24 June 2025, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed a resolution for the tabling of documents relating to reported incidents in ACT early childhood education and care services over the past five years. On 18 September, the Assembly agreed to a motion to change the scope of this resolution to exclude a range of documents, such as police evidence and witness statements, and to allow the timeframe to be extended until December 2025.

The initial discovery of documents identified almost 21,000 potential in-scope documents, many with highly identifiable information about children and educators. A team of public servants have been reviewing these documents, and I can now update the Assembly on the progress in delivering on this resolution.

I would also like to note the incredible work that this group of public servants have done—unlike Mr Emerson, who does not seem to care about the work of public servants in this town. This team have been doing incredible work under constrained timeframes, and with some particularly confronting information. I want to acknowledge and thank them for that work at this stage.

To date 2,446 in-scope documents have been confirmed, with review and redactions completed on 963 documents. Comprehensive reviewing to ensure names, dates of birth and contact details are redacted has occurred. This has been in addition to checking for other potentially identifiable information, such as personal health conditions, racial

background, and to ensure as far as possible that we are protecting the privacy of individual children and educators.

The documents reviewed to date have made clear that, in the ACT, we have a robust and comprehensive regulatory system. I note that there has been some interest in the work that regulatory organisations have been doing across the country, particularly in the *Four Corners* program on television last night, which was quite a chilling and sickening program to watch. It is important to make sure that we are hearing about what is going on in our community and responding to it appropriately.

That is why being transparent is important to me and the government. At the same time, we want to acknowledge that the majority of the workforce in the sector are dedicated professionals and are as horrified as the rest of us at the allegations that have been made across the sector about the predatory behaviour that is occurring in early childhood settings across the country.

However, this is not a new thing for the sector. The sector has been desperately calling for change for decades. Now, under a Labor federal government, the spotlight is clearly on the sector. It is listening, the community is learning about it, and there is now an appetite for significant change. Now is the time to act quickly and responsibly—and, most of all, to listen to the experts in the sector.

I was disappointed to see today that Mr Emerson has put out a media release with regard to the work that the ACT government and this group of public servants have been doing, in providing these documents to the Assembly. He has used this opportunity as another chance to create more fear and division in the sector, and to personally attack me. He is more interested in getting his face in the media than actually doing the important, vital work of holding this sector together, listening to them about the changes that need to be made, and advocating for the change that matters. It is grubby, it is unbecoming and it is unnecessary, particularly during such a challenging time, when we should be working together on making real change in the early childhood education and care sector.

It also shows some significant ignorance of how the early childhood education and care sector actually works in this country. I would strongly urge Mr Emerson to catch up, because the damage he is doing, having regard to the language he is using, is irreparable.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding quality assurance work provided to the early childhood education and care sector by the Children's Education Care and Assurance—CECA—within the Education Directorate. Recent reports of safety concerns in early childhood settings across the nation are deeply saddening, and they have alarmed us all. In the ACT, we continue to be committed to ensuring that every child receives safe, high-quality early childhood education, which is why the ACT government is committed to backing the sector in.

CECA serves as the ACT's regulatory authority under the Education and Care Services National Law. The national law is what regulates the early childhood education and care sector across the country. Our regulator oversees all approved education and care services in the ACT, including public and non-government preschools, Koori preschools, early childhood education and care services, family day care, and outside school hours care. CECA's core functions include quality assurance, audit and risk

management, as well as investigations. Their work encompasses assessments and rating of services, risk assessments, compliance, monitoring and investigations into potential breaches.

I am proud to highlight again that the ACT has the highest proportion of services rating as exceeding the National Quality Standard, at 43 per cent. CECA's dedicated investigations team rigorously assess every incident or complaint involving alleged or potential breaches.

The ACT leads the nation in incident reporting, a reflection of CECA's strong engagement with the sector. Reviews of 213A documents have consistently highlighted the professional and thorough work of CECA officers in safeguarding our children. Beyond regulation, CECA also support sector development. Their sector forums, which are held at least three times annually for the sector, are highly regarded and consistently reach full capacity. These events promote best practice and strengthen risk management.

I want to acknowledge the expertise, professionalism and dedication of everyone working in CECA. They are deeply valued, and their work is acknowledged. I thank CECA very much for all the work that they do every day. I look forward to continuing to update the Assembly on the work in the early childhood education and care space, and on solutions to overcome some of these really complex issues that the sector is facing right now.

I present the following paper:

Children's Education and Care Assurance—Ministerial statement, 28 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.21): I would like to thank Minister Berry for her update today on the release of documents relating to regulatory breaches and allegations of criminal conduct in the ACT early childhood education and care sector. I do appreciate and sympathise with the public servants who have been working through these documents who we have been told have been traumatised in reading some of them. I also sympathise with the children who have been traumatised by experiences of abuse and neglect in early childhood centres, and their families, who I note did not feature in the minister's statement today.

There has been a lot of reporting on this matter over recent months, including just last night, in a deeply disturbing episode of *Four Corners*. The revelations of child abuse that we have seen, which are undeniably the results of regulatory failure across the country, are absolutely horrific, and I look forward to hearing my colleagues across the chamber articulate their positions on this matter in response to the minister's statement today.

It is encouraging to hear the minister's comments that we have a robust and

comprehensive regulatory system in the ACT. But following evidence of significant regulatory gaps across Australia, allowing almost 150 paedophiles to gain access to children as young as one or two years old—children that are sexually abused, sometimes repeatedly, in early childhood settings—and given stories that we have heard from families and educators alike about concerns with the effectiveness of our system here in the ACT, the minister’s platitudes are not enough.

Given what we are seeing nationally, saying that we have a robust regulatory framework will not convince families who are deciding who to entrust with the care of their children. What is required are clear and repeated demonstrations that our regulatory framework is actually serving its purpose. I think it is time for the government to change tack on this issue and, rather than describing me as grubby for giving a toss about it, to start taking a proactive approach to scrutiny and transparency when it comes to children’s safety. Talking about the strength of our regulatory system while actively resisting scrutiny of that system is not the way to restore community trust in our early childhood sector.

During debate about the scope of this motion, I was asked by a Labor minister, “What is the purpose of all of this?” The purpose is to provide the level of scrutiny that our community expects; and, on the back of that, to ensure all early childhood providers in the ACT are following best practice, not just the good ones, and putting children’s safety, wellbeing and growth ahead of profit. We need more than assurances. We need to see steps being taken by the ACT government to ensure that the regulator is appropriately empowered and resourced to close gaps in the system—gaps that are ripe for exploitation.

Following the release of more than 200,000 documents in New South Wales, with thousands more continuing to be released every week, we have seen New South Wales Labor respond with tangible action. More than 30 legislative reforms have recently passed through the New South Wales parliament, including obligations for services to prioritise child safety, including compulsory child protection training and child-safe recruitment practices, parents being notified when serious incident investigations are commenced by the regulator, a 900 per cent increase in maximum penalties across all offences for large providers operating 25 or more services, new powers for the regulator, including enabling them to publish more information about high-risk services, including details of current investigations, authority for the regulator to suspend or revoke quality ratings during or following investigations, and strengthened whistleblower protections.

Yet here in the ACT, where this motion already had a significantly narrower scope in its original form compared to that of New South Wales, we would have seen the release of just 21,000 documents. But this was too much to ask for, giving rise to claims from the government that a push for this level of transparency was “breathtaking” and “perverse”.

I am not convinced by these claims. Unfortunately, the opposition were, and they agreed to team up with the government to delay the release of these important documents, as well as narrowing the scope of the order that had already passed through the Assembly, hiding key pieces of evidence from public scrutiny, like police statements, serious incident reports related to regulatory breaches and correspondence with complainants.

The consequence is that families here in the ACT will know less about what is happening in early childhood education and care centres and how they are being regulated than families across the border in New South Wales. This is not good enough for affected children and their parents and carers—parents like the mother I spoke with, whose son was sexually abused in a centre here in the ACT. The four-year-old boy told his mother that the educator who had touched his genitals had also been touching his friends.

Despite the severity of the allegations, she reported that nobody thought to ask other parents with children in the centre to speak with their kids about the issue, to determine if there were more victims—nobody, not the centre, not the regulator, not the police. It was the mother herself who approached parents at pick-up time to let them know about her son's disclosure and to encourage them to speak with their own children.

On the back of those conversations, the educator in question, the paedophile that sexually abused her son, was recently convicted of a second charge, a conviction that would not have happened without this mother taking it upon herself to try to keep what happened to her son from happening to other children. This is obviously not the job of parents. It is certainly not the job of children. It is the job of the regulatory system that the minister has today described as “robust” and “comprehensive”.

The minister has confirmed that we are now looking at the release of less than 2½ thousand documents—about a tenth of the documents I had originally sought to have released, with the then support of the majority of this Assembly, and 1.25 per cent of the number of documents already released by the New South Wales government.

We have also heard claims in this place—repeated today, effectively—that trust in the sector has been eroded because of this push for transparency, fearmongering and so on. The reality is that trust in the sector has been eroded because regulatory failure has allowed children to be abused and neglected in early childhood centres across Australia.

We can restore trust, though, by getting on the front foot when it comes to scrutiny. The government could show that it does not fear scrutiny by releasing this week the 963 documents that the minister has indicated today have already been prepared for release, and by releasing all remaining documents as a matter of urgency before the final sitting week of the year in early December, rather than waiting until Christmas, when they are due to be released quietly, while Canberrans are off holidaying.

The government needs to make its priorities clear. Does it care more about protecting our children from a threat that we can no longer deny is real, or does it care more about protecting its own reputation? We need access to these documents to give Canberrans the information they need to differentiate between good and bad actors in the early childhood sector. At the moment the entire sector is being tarred with the same brush. Again, that is not because of increased scrutiny on the sector, or because of my comments about this issue in the media, but because of blatant regulatory failure.

For as long as we do not see a proactive response here in the ACT, that will remain the case—good centres and dedicated educators being punished because of some of the actions of the dodgy major for-profit providers, who the ABC reported are responsible

for 88 per cent of the instances of sexual abuse exposed through the investigations into this issue interstate. They are providers for whom it is clear that the priority is not children's safety, but instead the pursuit of profit, and whose misguided priorities are having an immense impact across the entire sector, including on the not-for-profit and smaller for-profit providers who are genuinely putting children first every day.

It is incumbent on the government to take the steps necessary to provide the level of scrutiny required to expose any dodgy operators and, importantly, to vindicate the many fantastic providers and educators in the ACT who are following best practice in the way they look after children and in how they onboard, train and supervise their staff.

I was genuinely surprised that the major parties took the position they did on this matter in September. We are talking about child abuse and neglect. This is not an issue on which I would want to be on the wrong side of history, particularly in the face of irrefutable evidence that there are significant issues that warrant a meaningful and urgent response, from accounts of disgusting acts of abuse to disclosures from educators about insufficient wipes, nappies and even food being provided in certain major for-profit centres here in the ACT.

These very real concerns underpin my calls for the government to take this more seriously, to show more urgency, to stop resisting scrutiny and to do so by beginning to release these documents immediately. We owe this to our children, to victims who have been let down by the system and to the reputation of the good providers and educators who deserve greater recognition for their vital and tireless work in a thankless industry.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.30): I would like to speak briefly in response to the minister's statement and the wider context from which it comes. Like so many people, I was horrified by the reports from *Four Corners* over the past few days. Let me say plainly: the system is failing children, families, staff and communities. It is becoming increasingly clear that the current for-profit system of early childhood education and care needs to be fundamentally changed and that a business-as-usual approach from the government in the face of recent revelations would be wholly inadequate.

Every step of the way, it feels like the government has been fighting against this 213A. The most recent reporting shows that it is plainly necessary to restore a degree of faith in the system for the community. I do not say this lightly, and I am mindful of the workload and the degree of vicarious trauma that public servants are at risk of suffering, but at the same time we need the information contained in this 213A, because without it we will struggle to retain the trust of parents and we will struggle to avoid all educators being tarred by the same brush, despite the vast majority of them being good-faith actors.

I back Mr Emerson's calls for the timeline for this information to be released and brought forward wherever possible, or at least released in tranches like it has been in New South Wales. I also call on the government to make commitments to better fund our regulator. We cannot let early childhood education and care become the wild west. Between the slow-moving crises we have seen at Genius and Guardian, it is really hard to justify to our community that we have those settings and powers right, right now. The government needs to take the reins and ensure that early childhood centres are not

left to flounder with low staffing numbers and business models that place children's wellbeing at a distant second to profit.

We know have an oversupply and undersupply issue. There are a glut of centres opening. Many are focused on simply turning a profit but without the staff to ensure that they can maintain safe ratios in every single room. We are seeing staff driven from the field due to the terrible reputation of a handful of poorly managed centres rubbing off on them. We are constantly losing good educators, and every report like the recent *Four Corners*' report is the final straw for many more parents, educators and families. We need to do better and ensure that the system is managed, not simply allowed to function however is seen fit, regardless of the impact on families and educators.

I will quickly say before I close that I was surprised to hear Mr Emerson's name come up in Ms Berry's statement just then. It certainly was not in the statement circulated to us this morning. I would like to get that on the record. It is a shame, given the gravity of the situation, to cast aspersions on the character of other members, because this issue really should be above it. The individuals abusing children in our system are the problem. Our job here is to support kids, families, educators and the broader community. The public needs to have faith in the early childhood education and care system. That is when the system works best. They also need to have faith in us as an Assembly to ensure that there is transparency in that system. So I again call on the government to commit to transparency in the sector and to find ways to ensure all families know that their children are safe with trained professionals in early childhood education and care.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.34): I also rise to support Mr Emerson's call for the ACT government to start releasing the documents to regain trust in the regulation of the early learning sector and condemn calling him "grubby", and to support not-for-profit early learning centres—services that are driven not by profit but by purpose. Recent revelations have shown that our regulatory systems across Australia are not doing enough to protect children. Investigations have uncovered disturbing practices which are a horrifying breach of trust.

While state and federal governments have introduced reforms such as CCTV, mobile phone bans and increased fines, these are not enough. We need structural change. That means better supervision through improved staffing levels. It means asking hard questions about who owns our childcare centres, especially when it has been reported that most of the child abuse cases occur in for-profit centres. We must ensure all centres, regardless of ownership, are held to the highest standards of safety and care. Every child deserves to be protected.

I propose that we investigate the opportunity to co-locate not-for-profit early learning centres with our public primary schools. This integration would reduce costs, improve continuity for children and ensure consistent quality across the early years. This is not just an investment in early learning; it is also an investment in our future, in our communities and in the safety and wellbeing of every child.

Again, I support Mr Emerson's call for documents on complaints in the ACT early learning sector to be released in batches.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly

Sitting pattern

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.36): I move:

That the Assembly shall meet as follows for 2026 unless an absolute majority of Members request, in writing, that the Speaker or in the absence of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, or in the absence of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, the Clerk, fixes an alternative day or hour of meeting or the Assembly otherwise orders:

February	3 24	4 25	5 26	
March	17 24	18 25	19 26	
May	5 26	6 27	7 28	
June		10	11	12
September	15 22	16 23	17 24	
October	20 27	21 28	22 29	
December	1	2	3.	

There has been a genuine attempt across the floor to get to a point of consensus. I thank everyone for the transparency that was provided and the different positions that were put forward. Ultimately, I do not think anyone wins and we are all unhappy, which is probably the second-best outcome to consensus. We did not quite get there, but we are pretty close. As the mover of this motion and the person who originally presented the proposed sitting calendar to members of the MGB meeting, I thought it would be worth putting that on the record publicly for all persons to be able to review when they look back at history and ask, “Why was this put forward?” and we will hopefully pass it.

I think it is fair to say that much of the focus has been on the timing of the budget, the timing of budget estimates and the resulting first sitting week after budget estimates. As we worked through this, a lot of comparison was provided to pre-COVID times, returning to those days, but, respectfully, it is not as simple as comparing it to the pre-COVID era—not for the budget, not for estimates and not for when we return to the sitting pattern.

Starting with the budget, it comes down to the fact that the later in June we deliver the budget the more accurate the data and forecasting is. That is because we will have

enjoyed the maximum amount of time for the commonwealth allocations to states and territories to be determined and then reflected in our papers. That is not to say that a 30 June budget would provide perfect inputs and assumptions—I am very realistic about this—but it is true that the closer it is the more accurate we can be. Effectively, in the past we just accepted that the commonwealth inputs into our budget were not yet certain or were subject to change. You only need to look at the budget papers for the commonwealth funding that was provided to us pre COVID and the numbers to be effectively confirmed in the columns of the tables. If you go to the notes of those, you will read that this is because commonwealth negotiations were not necessarily finalised or the arrangements or distributions of allocations to states and territories were not finalised. In contrast, the payments from the commonwealth to the ACT in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 budgets are much better quantified and there is a lot less uncertainty. It is still not perfect, but it is a lot more accurate.

When the commonwealth provides such a considerable source of our revenue and in light of the state of our budget, being as accurate as possible is more of a necessity than it has ever been. It is easy for us here to forget, but the budget is not just about us. It is not prepared just for the Assembly's purposes. Many areas rely on its release. Combining that with increasingly complex budgets, increasingly complex federal financial relationships, ERC decisions needing to be ratified through cabinet, the time needed to print the budget papers and trying to lock in the figures for new initiatives early so that we finalise all the variables for a system coping with many inputs and variables—and we have those two much-loved but, for this purpose, pesky public holidays—you can already see how difficult it is.

From what the government originally proposed, we now have an earlier week for the budget. This takes into account reflections and observations that we heard in the lead-up to the budget and then through the budget estimates process. It is not ideal for us, but I also appreciate the general view that we could have gone further. I respectfully disagree, but ultimately we have landed on 10 June as the date that we are putting forward for the budget to be handed down. That will be an unusual sitting week. We will sit on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday instead of our usual pattern of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

The other point is that we are looking at re-aligning how some of the funds are distributed to our community sector organisations, in terms of the timing of those. For example, when there are budget review processes, instead of aligning them with a normal financial year, we can at least provide them with advice, if not financial certainty, in the December-January-February period, rather than up to the last minute when they are preparing for a new financial year, which was the main subject of our debate on this issue earlier this year. Those two things combined will do much to ease some of that pressure.

Turning to estimates, there was a question about the utility of estimates—before or after school holidays or split. Ultimately, this has been informed by wanting to be able to prepare following the budget being handed down. That is for all committee members and anyone else who wishes to attend the committee hearings, but also because Pegasus Economics needs three weeks to prepare its report. That is not just from what they have told us; it is also because it is in the terms of a recent contract that was signed. We appreciate the Greens putting forward several different suggestions. Ultimately, where

we have landed is that Community Day will occur before the school holidays and then the bulk of estimates will be after the school holidays.

Finally, we get to: when should normal sittings return? When we initially talked about this, there were some comments, such as: “Gee, the start of the September sitting week added a lot of pressure on all of us.” That is especially true when you consider the flexibility in recent years, with the estimates report able to be delivered out of session. I also note the very high committee workload from legislation referrals and own-motion inquiries, and that having an extra week for committee flexibility, for hearings or meetings, is more desirable than a parliamentary sitting week.

I expect there will be some contributions about limiting democracy or limiting what occurs in this place, but the point I would stress is that committees are places where a lot of information can be exchanged, where there are no time limits to questions or how they are answered, and where genuine dialogue can occur. Respectfully, I am not entirely convinced by the arguments that have been put forward that we need to have more question time or more private members’ motions. There are many ways in which members can prosecute issues, and they are not just contained in this chamber.

Finally, there was a question regarding how much Assembly business we will have on return to a sitting week. Ultimately, just like this year, if we have a lot of petitions when we return, we will extend the time for them. It is a matter of swings and roundabouts. We did not use anywhere near the petition allotment time today and I do not think there are any other petitions being tabled this week, but, in contrast, we extended the time for them in early September. We can do that again; we have that flexibility. There are lots of committee reports. We will make time for those and extend the time if necessary. Again, that is not really what takes up the time in the budget debate week. Just this year, we did not use anywhere near the full usual hours for sitting days for the budget debate. There was just one day when we sat until 6.30 pm. On most days, we finished at around 6 pm, and we still finished the budget with plenty of time to spare. We had to deal with plenty of other business, and we did that. Respectfully again, I reflect that the biggest contributors in budget debates are ministers. I will take responsibility for managing how long they speak, as well as executive business that we program.

Again, no-one here has ended up happy yet, but ultimately these are conversations that have been undertaken in good faith. I would reflect on two things. Firstly, this does not set a precedent. Twelve weeks is unusual. I absolutely respect that. We are putting forward an approach for one year. I would expect that, next year, we will see the bulk of legislative reform and the committee work coming from that. That is one of the reasons that justifies this sort of cadence to the sitting weeks. Secondly, there are the public holidays. I will rely on Minister Petterson to guide us on the appropriateness of having two public holidays following each other. That puts pressure everywhere, not just in this place but also across the public service. We will have a further look at that and see whether we can do some rebalancing, but there is certainly nowhere near enough time to do that for the preparation of next year’s sitting calendar, let alone the disruption for the entire city by moving a public holiday date. It simply was not possible at this time, but we will work on it.

I commend my motion to the chamber.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.48): It seems that nothing highlights truisms about politics and compromise than negotiating the Assembly's sitting calendar. The version of the sitting calendar that has landed on the notice paper is not what anyone wanted. It is certainly not what we wanted to see, on a couple of fronts. But, that said, it is the nature—indeed, it is a demonstration—of consensus. It is what every person in this place could agree to. Having each of those weeks is something that I think no-one disagrees with.

I want to raise concerns around a few aspects. The first of those is the budget. Minister Cheyne spoke at length as to why the government think they cannot do the budget earlier. It is incredibly important that we have a budget delivered in a timeframe that gives not only this place but also the community the chance to get across exactly what is contained in that budget. This year, we hit the intolerable situation where the community was left guessing as to what was going to be in that budget. Funded organisations were left guessing whether they would have ongoing funding, with days left before agreements expired and days left before we hit the end of the financial year. No-one knew exactly what was going to hit them. It is absolutely intolerable.

The estimates committee recommended that the date be brought back to no later than the first week of June. That position was already a compromise. It was a compromise because, certainly from my perspective, I was advocating for no longer than the end of May, because, historically, the ACT has been able to do it. In fact, regarding the suggestion of no later than the first week of June, on only one occasion before COVID has the government not delivered a budget before that date, and that was when there was a change of government. In the absence of extenuating circumstances, that was the position that we had. We would have adequate time to properly consider, properly debate and properly reflect on the numbers presented by the government before we hit the end of the financial year. That should be how it is now. We will certainly continue to push the government to do whatever it takes to get their systems in order so that they are technically capable of doing so. If, as the government seems to think, it is impossible to incorporate data provided by the federal government on the second Tuesday in May or by the end of that month, then there must be something not quite right with their systems. We will continue to push on that. This is a one-year deal.

The other thing I want to point out is the number of weeks. We have thought about the number of weeks in this place every year—certainly every year I remember, and certainly going back at least a decade by the look of it. When you go back to the number of weeks that the Canberra Liberals were in government, it was certainly far above what this government has done since. That said, politics is the art of compromise, it seems. The number of weeks that we are looking at next year take account of the fact that we have an incredible workload in our committees. After consulting with a number of committee chairs, I am persuaded that it would not be the right move to push for extra time at the expense of the Assembly being able to conduct its committee work. There is an incredible load going on in the committee space. Next year ought to be the peak of that load for the term, so on this occasion and this occasion only we will accept this slightly shorter sitting year, in terms of the number of weeks.

I would like to point out that we have some pretty deep concerns. On our side of the chamber, we are not all happy with this. We are not happy with it because of the message it sends to the ACT community about, amongst other things, the agenda that

the government is bringing. When a government is unable to have enough government business to actually fill a 12-week sitting calendar, it sends a pretty poor message. There are things that the community needs the Assembly to do. We need to get on with it and do those things. That is why this is only a one-year deal, because we need to look at the issues in committees next year and then we need to get on with making the reforms that Canberrans deserve.

It is intolerable to continue with the empty legislative agenda that we have seen so far this term. All we have seen to date has been, essentially, technical adjustments and small details. We are not getting on with the real reforms that Canberra deserves and needs. We are not here to mark time. There are genuine issues that should and must be debated that will affect the way Canberra develops in coming years. So, while we will agree this time, this year, we expect to see a bit more from the government in the future.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.55): The Greens are mostly supportive of the sitting calendar. That said, a few things need to be put on the record. The Greens continue to remain disappointed in the government's unwillingness to return to the pre-COVID conventions of delivering the budget in the first week of June. We are grateful for the improvement, relative to the last few years. A budget on 10 or 11 June will give the community sector additional notice about the funding that will take effect from the start of the new financial year. Last year, the budget was too late for the community sector. Programs like the Our Place Youth Foyer were left in limbo and the young people they supported genuinely did not know, right down to the wire, whether they would still have a home. Despite us asking the minister consistently for a clear answer, the answer we kept receiving was that their future was tied to budget processes which had not been finalised.

An earlier June sitting will also allow for a bit more time in which the government can discuss any contentious revenue initiatives with the crossbench prior to their implementation on 1 July. We saw the tension play out this year when the Treasurer failed to read the room and tried to drop a \$250 health levy on everyone. It felt like a seven-day scramble to fix government homework before rates notices had to go out. It should not have been. I am glad we will not have that kind of panic again.

The motion originally circulated by the Manager of Government Business omitted a 13th sitting week for 2026. Versions originally shown to the whips included that additional week in September, not dissimilar to the one we had this year. The practical consequence of deleting that sitting week in the post-estimates period will be to create a full three-month gap between sittings. For anyone following along, that is long enough to hold an election. It became apparent to us quite quickly that this would produce a very significant backlog of parliamentary business to clear during the September sittings, at the same time that government is keen to debate the budget. That includes petitions, inquiry reports, ministerial statements, government responses to inquiries, subordinate legislation, and probably a whole lot more. This year, these circumstances created a stressful September, and that was with three sitting weeks instead of two. Without an extra sitting week to function as a sort of pressure release valve, the September sitting period in 2026 will become a fortnight from hell or, perhaps technically, not a healthy or family-friendly working environment. I just want to see my housemates, man! Anyway, it is for this reason that I have circulated an amendment for an additional sitting week in August, to help clear the decks. This sitting week does

not need to include the tabling of an estimates committee report. That report can still be circulated out of session so that the government can work on a response, in much the same way if the sitting week were not occurring. The budget debate period in September would then, we could reasonably assume, go much more smoothly.

The Greens will undertake to minimise how much parliamentary business is directed at estimates committee members during that August sitting week so that they can still have the space to finalise their report. I would encourage other members to do the same.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

After “June 10 11 12”, insert:
“August 25 26 27”.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.58): I rise today to support Miss Nuttall’s amendment for an increase in the number of sitting weeks in this parliament. The ACT parliament is not just a legislative body; it is also the cornerstone of Canberra’s democracy—a forum where the government is held to account by the opposition and the crossbench on behalf of the people. As a unicameral parliament, the ACT Legislative Assembly must perform the deliberative and review functions which most Australian parliaments divide over two chambers. Unlike all other Australian parliaments, the Legislative Assembly does not just carry the responsibilities of a state government; it also oversees the full range of municipal services for a city approaching half a million people.

At the heart of this accountability is question time, which is a vital mechanism that allows elected representatives to scrutinise government decisions, challenge policies and demand transparency, but this process only works when parliament is sitting. Fewer sitting weeks means fewer opportunities for the opposition and the crossbench to question ministers, raise constituents’ concerns and ensure that executive power is exercised responsibly. The loss of one sitting week means the loss of 51 questions that hold the government to account. It also means fewer opportunities for non-government members to move motions on behalf of the community.

Democracy is not a part-time job; it demands our constant attention, our presence and our participation. To facilitate 13 weeks or more, the government needs to process the commonwealth budget in a more timely manner. It should not take four weeks to feed the numbers into the budget so that the ACT government’s budget can be brought forward to early June, freeing space in the sitting calendar.

Minister Cheyne said there are other ways to prosecute issues outside of this chamber. That is an interesting statement, given that a petition of almost 6,000 signatures about a poor outcome for the Phillip pool community was simply ignored. We should not reduce the opportunities to hold the government to account; we should sit more often and represent our constituents.

I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing forward her amendment to maintain the current 13 sitting weeks into 2026.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.01): I want to talk about the problem that Miss Nuttall’s

amendment addresses. The calendar, unamended, has a large midyear gap. There will be no sitting days between 13 June and 15 September. That is a three-month gap. It is like a caretaker gap, where the business of government stops. It is long enough to hold an election. A gap like that needs excellent project management by the government to make sure Canberra does not miss out on any legislation or reform that we need during that time, and I am not confident we are seeing that kind of project management by the executive at the moment.

We have seen a lot of cases in recent times that might show we need more regular sittings. At the moment, I am looking at disallowable territory priority projects. The government keep telling us how difficult it is to table a territory priority project with the Assembly for disallowance and how much delay that puts onto public housing. The government have chosen to factor in a potential three-month delay on that, and I wonder what the housing sector will think of that and what impact it will have on housing availability and homelessness. We heard extreme anxiety from the government when they were drawing up the rates notices, which had to be published by 30 June and which are disallowable instruments. The government did not have certainty about the revenue they would raise from rates. Why put a three-month delay on that?

In the September sittings, we saw Minister Pettersson put up what he said was an urgent disallowable piece of legislation to provide emergency access to the government insurance scheme for the horse racing industry. My personal view is that others would have been better recipients of that urgent executive attention, such as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, which had to cut frontline services for our community because they cannot pay their WHS premiums. But let's take Minister Pettersson at his word and say it truly was urgent to fix insurance for the horse racing industry. Maybe it really was about workers' safety. What happens to the next urgent workers' safety measure when there is a three-month delay in sittings?

Sometimes disallowable legislation takes effect when it is made and it can be repealed if disallowed. If there is a lengthy gap, it means the executive could implement a whole new system that is dismantled three months later. That is a really bad way to make policy and it is very poor for community and industry certainty. Sometimes disallowable legislation does not take effect until after the disallowance period is over. In those cases, the Labor government will have put a three-month delay on all measures going ahead. I find this unappealing and, depending on what the reforms are, it is dangerous.

Sometimes the parliament is pressured by the Labor government to table and pass a set of law reform in one sitting. That has already happened this term. Our parliament is set up to table legislation in one sitting and pass it in another sitting. That means members can read the bill, talk to their community and get advice from various stakeholders on whether the reforms are in the best interests of the community. It means that a parliamentary committee can look at the issue and can hold an inquiry into the issue if they think they need to. What does a three-month delay in sittings look like? Does that mean Labor will constantly ask the parliament to ignore the community, ignore stakeholders, not run inquiries, and pass laws urgently, with no time for consideration from one sitting to the next?

Here are some predictions for what might happen in that three-month gap. I very much

hope that these predictions do not come true. The parliament might see delays to some really important reforms during that three-month gap. The parliament might be pressured to take urgent measures that remove parliamentary oversight and accountability during that three-month gap. The government might not manage its project management well enough to accommodate a caretaker-length break in the middle of the parliamentary sitting year.

If Miss Nuttall's amendment does not pass, we will have the sitting calendar that the government have put up, and, if that is what happens today, they will need to manage their projects perfectly. They will need to make sure that we do not run into any of those problems. And, if that is the calendar that we have, please do not ask the parliament to get rid of our conventions and pass government reforms urgently because you have not managed your projects well enough to accommodate the three-month gap you have put into the middle of the sitting calendar.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (12.06): Labor will not support Miss Nuttall's amendment, but I want to take a moment to thank her for all her engagement and discussions on this over the last couple of weeks, and I thank everyone across the chamber that I have had discussions with on the calendar. I want to make a few personal reflections on the sitting calendar and the need for time for committees to do their work in this place.

This month alone, in addition to this sitting fortnight, I have been in committee hearings into the closing the gap bill; Auditor-General audit reports into the DHR contract payments and the Safer Families Levy; the homebuyer concession scheme; and men's suicide. All of those took place in a seven-day period. As well in that seven-day period and this month, I have had multiple report consideration meetings for some of those inquiries and other huge inquiries that have been taking place this year. That is a lot of work for one person. Three out of four of those inquiries involved one committee meeting together, and some of the reports had to be turned around really quickly. It is a lot to put on members of committees, the committee secretariat staff, who are doing an incredible job in turning around recommendations, report writing and everything else, and our offices. Non-executive members have pretty small offices trying to prepare for all of this.

I love my committee work in this place, but it takes time to be done properly and to give proper consideration to this work. It takes time for our staff to prepare this work, while also doing the important electorate and constituent work that we were elected to do in this place. It takes time to prepare for our chamber work. We have a double sitting this month. It has been a lot. And that is just this month. Next week, I have two more hearings into two different inquiries: the Payroll Tax Amendment Bill and the Lynham High School gym. Then there are two weeks of annual reports hearings. Then, in the following week, I have three days of hearings across two inquiries, and one involves two days of hearings into men's suicide. Then we have the December sitting week and two more days of hearings in the week after that into another inquiry. Between all this, committees still need to meet for ordinary business, referrals, to consider the evidence we are hearing in inquiries, to consider reports, and to agree on reports. Some of these inquiries have statutory timeframes because they are bill inquiries or there are major plan amendments, so they have to be reported on by a certain time. Some of them have things that have to be reported on by the end of the year. Some are Assembly resolutions to report back on by the end of the year.

The third sitting week in September added to all that is going on and trying to fit in all the hearings. Some of them have heavy content, like the men's suicide inquiry. It is a really important inquiry and I am really proud to be part of it, but it is heavy content and it takes a toll on the committee members, the secretariat, and our staff who are involved in all the work. That is just what is going on at this time of the year.

This year, I was also part of the estimates committee and the extra bit of estimates, when we all got back together for a second bit. I appreciate how much work it was for the committee, our staff and the secretariat. The weeks of endless hearings that rolled into each other day after day was only the start of it. We heard so much, and that had to be distilled into a report that was useful for the Assembly before the budget debate. Our report was actually pretty good. It was a pretty useful report, and that is a testament to the work of the committee and the secretariat in pulling that together. But the estimates committee, our staff and the secretariat also need time to have a break after doing that report consideration, before sittings come back, just like everyone else in the Assembly can over winter.

I want to reflect that, throughout this year—and I am probably going to miss an inquiry in this list; my office and I have been trying to come up with this list, but there has been a lot—I have participated in the MyWay+ inquiry, the Hawker Village inquiry, and the first lot of annual reports. There were some inquiries and deliberations of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure on standing orders and a member's conduct that we reported on earlier in the year. There was the inquiry into the Planning (Territory Priority Project) Amendment Bill, the Burrangiri respite centre inquiry, the supplementary appropriation bill inquiry, and all the other ones that I mentioned that I am doing over this month, next month and December. I have probably forgotten something in that list, but I want to show the work of one person on committees. I am on four standing committees, plus I was on the estimates committee. My colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins and I are on the most committees as non-executive members. We are on those committees and we contribute to those committees.

Ms Carrick: I am on three.

MS TOUGH: Ms Carrick is on three. Mr Emerson is on two or three. So there are people here on more than one committee. We have to balance that work. It is important work and we need to make sure we have a sitting calendar that allows that work to happen properly and not be squished around sitting dates. Sittings are really important. The work we do here is vital to what we do, but it is part of what we do. Please consider allowing committees the time to do the scrutiny, research, evidence gathering, and hearings they need to do without it being super squished in.

Consider how great it is that we have family-friendly arrangements in the Assembly. Not every parliament in Australia can say they have family-friendly arrangements. We are really lucky to have that. But it does not just apply to us as members; it also applies to our staff, and it applies to the staff of the Legislative Assembly. Our committee secretariat staff, the staff in the office of the Clerk, and everyone else, also deserve to have those family-friendly arrangements. One of the committee hearings I was involved in recently was in the school holidays. It puts pressure on everybody to cut school holiday plans short. Committee secretariat staff were trying to plan leave and make sure

people were here to cover the committee hearing. I want to put on the table the importance of family-friendly arrangements when considering the sitting calendar and all the committee work that goes on.

I finish by thanking all committee secretariat staff for their incredible work in programming all the committee work we do around sittings and members' schedules. I thank our staff. And I commend Ms Cheyne's motion to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (12.13): It is a very strange space that we are in at the moment. For so many years, while the Greens were part of the government, they were very happy to agree to shorter sitting calendars, but this year it has apparently become extremely important to shift, and to move an amendment in this way.

I am not without sympathy for the arguments that have been put forward, and I want to reflect on a couple of those. Ms Clay is absolutely right. The government will have to be absolutely perfect in managing its business, when it comes back after that long break. It will not have time to waste on a million ministerial statements, obsessively explaining to everyone just how good the government is. It will not have the time to waste on that. We will have to be absolutely focused on delivering the business of the Assembly, not just the spin.

I also want to thank Ms Carrick for the points that she raised, because she raised some very important points. We are a unicameral house and, importantly, here in the ACT, the house of review functions are fulfilled by our committees, which is fundamentally the reason why we came to the conclusion that we could not sacrifice the important work of those committees for extra days of sitting through interminable ministerial statements.

Still, I would make the point that this is a single-year agreement. On this occasion, we will not vote in favour of an extra sitting week in August. The timing of that sitting week would be awkward, to say the least. Having chaired the estimates committee this year, let me say that it requires absolute focus and dedication to get that report right. I am proud of the work that we did this year. Ms Carrick was on that committee. We genuinely invested huge amounts of time in getting that right and delivering what I believe is a good report that sets good recommendations that will land Canberra in a better position if they are followed.

Ms Carrick also mentioned petitions. I would note that the petition problem fundamentally is that our committees right now do not seem to have the capacity to examine the petitions that are brought. If we can give the committees sufficient time to respond to all the issues that we are seeing under this government, maybe we can start to get some recommendations that will drive a better government in the future. Indeed, I am looking forward to those that will inform a Canberra Liberals government in the future. But we need that opportunity to hear from and engage with the community. Those are really important opportunities to hold the government to account.

Given the rules that we have around when sitting weeks can take place, when public holidays are, when estimates must be held, and the number of days that we need for estimates, unfortunately, we got to the position where we could not support the additional burden that this particular week that the Greens are proposing would place,

not just on members like Ms Tough, but on the secretariat, on the staff, who already work incredibly long hours during that period. There is an incredible burden on those who are not paid MLA salaries, who do not have the luxury of grandstanding on particular issues. It would be petty of me to put my desire for one more week ahead of their wellbeing.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.18): I rise to speak in support of Miss Nuttall's amendment and thank her for bringing it forward. I want first to thank colleagues for negotiating an earlier budget day. I think that is a really positive outcome compared to what we had this year. There will be many in the community sector and more widely who will welcome that change. I acknowledge the work that happened behind the scenes and between various different members of the Assembly to ensure that that occurred.

I have to say that I find it incredibly disappointing that a consensus position could not be achieved on the number of sitting weeks, rendering Miss Nuttall's amendment necessary this afternoon. Major party consensus, of course, is not an Assembly consensus. Meeting in this place is our job. In comparison to other jurisdictions, the ACT sits for three weeks below average, and often these jurisdictions sit for four days a week compared to our three.

We are also doing more than just the job of a state or territory parliament. All other jurisdictions also have city councils that meet to make decisions about municipal services. Although I can understand the minister, as she indicated, not seeing the value in additional private members' time or question time which would have been brought by these three additional days, I cannot think of any compelling reason as to why the opposition would support a lighter sitting calendar.

This is not, as Mr Cocks described it in his initial remarks, a push for extra time; it is a push for the same amount of time. In 2013, Mr Hanson criticised the then reduction in sitting days, saying:

Quite clearly the Assembly is a mechanism for the Opposition to hold the Government to account, and it does appear that this is a Government that wants to reduce as much as possible the Opposition's opportunity to do that ...

Mr Hanson raised similar criticisms in 2021 in relation to the 2022 sitting calendar, as well as proposing that the Assembly meet every Friday of the sitting week specifically to address the issues that local councils would consider in other jurisdictions. I wonder how Mr Hanson intends to vote on the amendment that is before us today. Will he back a push for more sitting days or has his view changed on the importance of holding the government to account in representing local issues?

In 2021, Mr Hanson also condemned the "lazy leftie government" for agreeing to sit for only 35 days in the 2022 calendar year, speculating that the motive behind the decision was a desire to "get away on holiday as soon as possible". The motion that is before us, unamended, contains just 36 sitting days, so what gives? Is that extra sitting day enough? I do not mean to target any individual, and I hope Mr Hanson will forgive me for having done so. That is generally not my approach. Any of us who vote today to do less should be asked: why?

Given the level of responsibility that we are entrusted with in this job, I would anticipate all members would be interested in ensuring we have the opportunity to do the jobs we are paid to do as best we possibly can. That is not to say, of course, that the only valuable work happens when we are sitting, as Ms Tough has indicated, but there are, of course, issues that we do not end up having time to address during sitting weeks. All our inboxes are flooded with such issues, and it is our communities who pay the price when these issues are not pursued in this chamber.

Canberrans have been calling for more transparency, accountability and responsiveness from their elected representatives. Reducing the amount of time for which the Assembly sits does not achieve this. Six fewer private members' motions, over 150 questions in question time, including supplementaries, as Ms Carrick spoke to, legislation to be introduced and debated, as Ms Clay indicated, and, I imagine, a couple of 213As from the opposition: this is what we lose by opposing Miss Nuttall's amendment today, which I hope to see supported, at a minimum, by all non-government MLAs.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (12.22): I will be brief; I want to touch on two points that have not been addressed in this debate.

Firstly, there seems to be a sentiment from some members that the committee workload may diminish during years 3 and 4. To quote *The Castle*, "Tell 'em they're dreaming." That is a wishful thinking exercise. If anything, you find that it compresses, as you try and finish the work, as you get towards the end of the course of the term. The fact is that the number of bill referrals starts to increase as well. I think we should be very wide-eyed about the possibility of that committee work continuing unabated.

Secondly, there has been a lot of debate in terms of workloads here. I note that there are currently submissions in front of the Integrity Commission and statutory office holders standing committee inquiry into the Electoral Act and the election, talking about the size of the Assembly. A lot of the points that have been made here today are very pertinent to that point, as to whether we have sufficient members to be able to inquire into the breadth and range of topics that we have been asked to do, to fulfil our oversight obligations, and to conduct our local representative duties. That becomes a pertinent issue. Members might like to keep that in mind, without prejudicing the outcome of that inquiry.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (12.23): I support Miss Nuttall's amendment, and I do not support Ms Cheyne's move to reduce the number of sitting weeks from the current low of 13 to 12.

This long-term Labor government has been slowly reducing the number of sitting weeks over the years. In 2021, when the opposition brought a motion calling for additional sitting days, it was noted that, in the early days of the Assembly, it sat for 17 weeks. In 1991, the Assembly sat for 19 weeks and, in 2009, it sat for 14 weeks.

I have listened very carefully to the contributions that have been made by members in this debate, particularly around the load in terms of committee work and estimates hearings. Of course, we have to add annual reports hearings, too. It is important to note

that this work was also undertaken when we had the high load of sitting weeks.

Let us remember that we are the only jurisdiction in Australia that is not a slave to the tyranny of distance. We do not have the challenges that other jurisdictions face in requiring elected members to travel long distances and from remote regions to attend a central parliament. At most, our members may have to travel for about half an hour to get to parliament—perhaps more, with the increasing road closures and works in the city precinct.

Being able to attend parliament, to stand in this chamber, to have the right to have your voice heard in debates of public importance to our community, is a privilege. There is no other forum in which we can literally change the law.

Many members have spoken about the increasing load of committee work, and I do not think anyone here can disagree with that. I noted Ms Tough's workload, and I have a huge amount of sympathy. In my first term here, I remember that at one point I was on five committees, if you include the scrutiny of bills committee, along with a number of select committees. I know about the importance of committee work, and particularly during estimates, when we have a select committee undertaking a crucial function. It is an incredibly important role for our parliament, and a mechanism that delivers a good opportunity for cross-party collaboration. In many ways, it can be the most accessible way for the community to engage with our parliament.

This is not a debate about what is more important, whether it is committees or whether it is sittings, and it is not about what should take priority or what should have more time given to it. The work of committees goes hand in hand with what we as elected members do during sitting weeks.

It is in parliamentary debates during sitting weeks that we are in a privileged position to vote, have a vote, to record a vote, via the public record, and make changes to the laws that govern the ACT. It is in sitting weeks that ministers are held to account in real time, with no official to hide behind, during question time. It is in sitting weeks that non-executive members have the opportunity to bring motions that are debated and voted on by every member of the Assembly. It is in sitting weeks that non-executive members have the opportunity to bring bills to be debated and voted on, and, with the support of the majority, passed to become law in the ACT.

I am disappointed that the major parties have decided to support a reduction in sitting weeks for next year, and I am particularly disappointed that this is happening during this term. We have, for the first time in over 20 years, a make-up in this chamber where the government of the day is in a minority, without a governing coalition partner.

The opposition has been able to claim many wins on a number of important issues for our community because we have been able to gain support from the crossbench and strongarm the government to act on issues that it has neglected for so long. Leaving aside whether it is actually a good thing or not, we can take as an example the Oaks Estate motion, on which the government was forced to come to an agreement.

Whilst I acknowledge the valid arguments that have been made by many members in this chamber, I am not convinced to support the ACT Labor Party's move to reduce the

number of sitting weeks.

I can see why ACT Labor would want fewer sitting weeks. It is no secret that this government has trouble filling a sitting day. Ms Cheyne even indicated that, obviously, we do not fill many hours in a sitting week. It is no secret that this government has no control over the Assembly and it is happy to go through the hoops of negotiations, not only within their own caucus behind closed doors but with the opposition, the Greens and two individual Independents. I get it; I do. It cannot be easy. I imagine that, after a decade of complacency, with a majority governing arrangement, it cannot be much fun.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity in this Assembly this term—an opportunity for the opposition and the crossbench to really drive the agenda and to bring about much-needed, positive change that our community deserves, and actually win votes on motions and bills.

I am not going to pretend that a reduction of one sitting week will change the world, but it is yet another way in which this long-term Labor government can shirk responsibility and evade public accountability. I strongly believe that it is incumbent on the opposition, as well as the crossbench, to work together to make sure that this government is held to account on all their failings—and there are many—on behalf of Canberrans.

In saying that, I accept the views of the majority of my partyroom colleagues. I acknowledge and accept the argument that Mr Cocks has put forward in this debate. Respectfully, I disagree, and I made that very clear to my colleagues as soon as this issue was raised with us and made public.

It is a very difficult decision to not vote in the same way as my colleagues, but I cannot in good conscience stand in support of Ms Cheyne's motion. I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing her amendment. It is important to note with this amendment that it is not calling for an additional sitting week; it is calling for the status quo—the same number of sitting weeks that we had this year. I look forward to continuing to serve the people of Kurrajong in this Assembly.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (12.30): I, too, will be supporting the amendment calling for an extra sitting week next year. I note the arguments about the committee workload and how important committees are, and I certainly do support and believe in the work of the committees; but, as members would be aware, committees can make recommendations. They can hold public hearings and get the community involved. It is absolutely vital and important work, but a majority of MLAs in this chamber can change the law. They can support an important motion. They can give speeches in support of things that could be raised in a committee hearing or out in the community. I do not discount the importance of committees; but, as has been touched on, in a chamber that has responsibilities for both city-level and state-level governance, surely, that on its own is supportive of us being here as often as we can be.

As has been pointed out, we do not have to travel from another part of the country to be here. We all live here, so we have a convenience factor. We have a responsibility factor to hold this appalling government to account and to shine a light on their performance. To me, it seems rather obvious that every ACT non-government MLA

should be working as hard as we can to hold this appalling government to account.

The committee work, again, is important, but here is where we have the numbers to make a difference to the legal framework, to the governance of the ACT and to service delivery. Here is where we can make the real difference. I do not think that adding an additional week during what is a three-month break is adding a massive workload for us. I think it is vital that we have that extra week, bearing in mind that, usually, at the end of a year, and early in the next year, we probably have at least a two-month break. We are well looked after by the rules governing our workload, I believe. A lot of that is on us and it is about our choices—the choices that we make.

I am choosing to support an extra sitting week. Obviously, I see that that puts me apart from my partyroom colleagues. I am doing that in company with Ms Lee. I respect the arguments that they have presented. With respect, I think that an extra week, going from 12 to 13, is not an onerous addition.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Andrew Braddock
Peter Cain
Fiona Carrick
Jo Clay
Thomas Emerson
Elizabeth Lee
Laura Nuttall
Shane Rattenbury

Noes 15

Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr
Chiaka Barry	Mark Parton
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Ed Cocks	Caitlin Tough
Jeremy Hanson	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
James Milligan	

Question resolved in the negative.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (12.38): I will close the debate. I assume that a further division will not be called. There is nothing quite like a motion where we get to speak about ourselves. I get to have the last word, so I will take the opportunity.

In terms of the size of the Assembly and the committee inquiry that Mr Braddock referred to, speaking of deals, we did a deal this time last year that meant the size of the Assembly is not part of the inquiry into the election. We agreed we would do a separate one, so that it would have the attention it deserves, and not dominate discussions, as even this motion has proved, in terms of talking about ourselves, let alone what the size of the Assembly should be. I hope that is taken into account in future deliberations.

I say respectfully to Ms Clay that project management of our legislation program is not something that any non-executive member has awareness of or is in a position to comment on. But be careful what you wish for, I guess. In terms of the Phillip pool

petition, and Ms Carrick's claims that it has been ignored, I am utterly baffled by that comment. Ignored by whom? Minister Steel responded extensively to that petition. As is required under the standing orders, it was referred to a committee. I thought I would have a win, regarding whether the committee inquired into it. That is not true. The committee is inquiring into it, as part of the future of Woden town centre inquiry, so I do not know how it could possibly be claimed that it is being ignored.

I never thought, ever, that Mr Emerson would quote Mr Hanson, let alone do so extensively, but we may live in wild times. Quite honestly, Mr Assistant Speaker, some of the arguments put forward do not make an enormous amount of sense. There is no limit on the number of private members' bills that can be introduced on a sitting day or in a sitting week. They are private members' bills and, if you want to introduce them, you go for it. You can just do it. It is not the number of sitting weeks that will limit you. It will probably be around party discipline.

In terms of recesses, they are not unusual in commonwealth parliaments, at both the state and federal level. With respect to our cousins, Canada, both the House of Commons federally and Ontario as a provincial parliament have recesses in excess of three months. They still function and it is all right.

Mr Cocks made the point that I was going to make about unicameral parliaments, meaning that committees are effectively the house of review. In terms of us having two levels of government, given that I have responsibility probably for the vast majority of the municipal side of government, or local government, I can assure you that I get plenty more done when we are not in here. In terms of responding to everyone's overflowing inboxes, I did not follow the point that was being made there.

It turns out, as predicted, that no-one was happy. I expect that the predictions that have been put forward will not be realised. I would note that there were some claims about sitting weeks being eroded over time. I have looked back. I do not think that is the case. I think they have been responding to the circumstances of the day. I do not think that you can say on the one hand that this is the way we have always done it and we have had 13 sitting weeks forever, and on the other hand say we have never had a parliament like this. The two statements cannot coexist like that.

I have spoken too much. We need to get to the next matter so that we can adjourn the debate until a later hour this day. I commend this motion to the chamber.

Original question resolved in the affirmative.

Lakes and waterways—order to table documents

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (12.43): I move:

That the Assembly direct the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, with reference to standing order 213A, to table:

- (1) any briefings, documents or other information provided to the Minister regarding the quality of the ACT's water resources (including lakes, rivers and other waterways);
- (2) any advice, decisions, modelling, policies, or other documents held by the

ACTPS or provided to the Executive, which relate to the Water Abstraction Charge or how the Government manages its obligations under the National Water Initiative's pricing principles, including estimates of the environmental costs of water extraction;

- (3) an explanation of how the Government's policy of increasing the Water Abstraction Charge by 3 percent each year is consistent with the principles of cost-reflective, transparent and efficient water pricing;
- (4) any correspondence between the ACT and Commonwealth governments and agencies relating to the Water Abstraction Charge; and
- (5) a table showing, for each financial year since 1 July 2015, revenue generated by the Water Abstraction Charge and the cost of capital and other spending this revenue is intended to recover or fund.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Cheyne**) adjourned to a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.44 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Suburban Land Agency—land release

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. The minister has previously told the Assembly that the government does not have annual targets for its goal of delivering 30,000 new homes in the ACT by 2030. Could the minister please explain what milestones, targets or goals the government is using to assess its own progress towards the goal?

MS BERRY: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. She is right—I did explain to the Assembly that there is not a yearly target for meeting the land release program. That is because land release is a complicated and complex matter. It requires a range of different infrastructure projects surrounding particularly greenfields areas but also brownfields to make sure that land can be released for housing. We made an election commitment target of 30,000 by 2030. That is the target that we have set, and that is the target we expect to meet.

Of course, when years of the land release program go well that means that we are obviously ahead of our targets and, when we are behind, it means we need to catch up. I have already described the complexity and risk of a range of our land release programs going forward. We will commit to deliver those and update the Assembly as required.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how do you know if the ACT government is on track to achieve the 2030 goal?

MS BERRY: I get briefed, obviously, by the Suburban Land Agency, which is the ACT government's land release delivery agent, and also through the land release program, knowing where releases of land are expected to be scheduled and understanding the timeframes for those to be delivered.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you commit to annual public reporting that can be used to assess the government's performance against the goal?

MS BERRY: I already do that. So, yes, I commit to keep doing that.

Canberra Health Services—staffing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a code yellow is a situation where a staff shortage or infrastructure event impacts healthcare delivery—we have talked about it before—and may force the closure of hospital units, such as an emergency department. Minister, how frequently are code yellow declarations being made?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have said to Ms Castley before that code yellows are a regular occurrence. I would say on average I probably get about one code yellow notification every day. Sometimes there are multiples in a day; sometimes there are none for a couple of days. To clarify, Mr Speaker, this can be things like staff shortages in particular areas. So they call a code yellow when there is a staff shortage in the emergency department; in intensive care; in women's, youth and children's; or in other areas of either of the hospitals. What that enables them to do is to bring into effect some of the emergency provisions of the enterprise agreement so that staff who are called in to respond to those staff shortages can get the additional allowances that are available.

Other code yellows relate to infrastructure issues. They could be major infrastructure issues, but often they are quite small incidents where maybe there has been a leak from a significant storm or amount of rain, or some piece of equipment has broken down. So, as you can imagine, when you are running an operation of 11,000 staff and major hospital and community based health facilities, there are regular occasions where things break and need to be fixed, and sometimes that is a code yellow.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, where do you report the frequency, causes and impacts of code yellow declarations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not think we do publicly report the frequency, duration and impact of code yellow declarations. They are an operational tool to manage facilities and staffing and, as I have indicated, many of them are relatively minor issues. I have to also indicate that many of them are resolved very quickly and some can go on for some days, particularly around staff shortages during winter for example. In addition to code yellows, there will sometimes be notifications in relation to digital and electronic systems that do not necessarily come through as code yellows but will also be a brief interruption to service delivery. But, importantly the vast, vast majority of code yellows and other forms of interruption have no impact on the actual delivery of clinical services or the safety of patients or staff.

MS BARRY: Minister, will you commit to consistent public reporting of code yellows and other declarations that impact the health care of Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will commit to considering whether it is valuable to publicly report code yellows and other codes. People would be aware that code red, for example, is an indicator that there has been a fire somewhere. But again, just as in this place, that might be that someone has put something inappropriate in a microwave and that has caused a fire alarm and the attendance of fire emergency services. Other things are called for different reasons.

So I will commit to the Assembly that I will consider, and consult with Canberra Health Services about, the public reporting of these things, but I have to say upfront that I cannot imagine what value this will add to anybody in this place or outside of it, given that these are entirely operational matters and mostly resolved very quickly, and have no impact on the delivery of services or the safety of staff, patients or carers.

Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism

MS BARRY: My question is to Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, what progress have you made on reforms to the ministerial advisory council?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Barry for the question. I have not progressed any reforms to the council in my time as minister.

MS BARRY: What issues would you have been seeking advice on if you had a functioning ministerial advisory council?

MR PETTERSSON: I reject the premise of the question. There are a range of matters that the council is engaged on, and they provide effective and fruitful advice to government.

MS CASTLEY: How can multicultural communities, such as the South Sudanese community, be assured that you are across their concerns, given you have no framework for consultation and you have a poor record of engagement with communities?

MR PETTERSSON: I reject the premise of the question. I engage fruitfully with all multicultural groups that seek to engage with me, noting that not all multicultural groups do proactively seek to engage with government. However, as minister I do attempt to go out and engage widely, and I have, in my time as minister, engaged proactively with the South Sudanese community.

Climate change—emissions

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the minister for climate change. Minister, yesterday when launching the process to develop a new climate strategy, you commented that the ACT will be unlikely to meet its 2025 emissions reduction target. However, the most recent greenhouse gas inventory, released in December 2024, showed ACT emissions were already 50 per cent below the 1990 baseline, which is within the target band for 2025. What information are you basing your comments on to suggest the ACT will not meet its targets?

MS ORR: My comments were made in relation to the next target and the briefing that has been provided to me on the tracking for the target that is upcoming and for which I will be handing out the greenhouse gas inventory for prior to the end of this year, in the final sitting. The advice is that we will not make our target, with the final work to refine the accounting to be done. Once that final work is done, we will make it clear as to how much we have not met the target by.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, can you explain what the key changes are that have

led you to make this observation?

MS ORR: Again, this is on the advice that has been provided to me from the tracking that has been done in regard to our greenhouse gas inventory. As we finalise that through, I will be able to provide Mr Rattenbury with more detailed information as to the various different measures within that.

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I appreciate the minister's comment; I am sure it is true. I am obviously trying to ask what that advice is so that this Assembly might understand why the minister has made that public comment.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Orr, am I to understand from the first part of your answer that you are seeking to take part of that on notice? Is that what you are saying?

MS ORR: Not on notice, Mr Speaker. Mr Rattenbury has asked what has informed my comments. As I have said, it is the briefing that has come to me and the advice I have received that our overall target is unlikely to be met. As to the specifics, I will be tabling the inventory by the end of this year, in the final sitting, and then I will be able to provide Mr Rattenbury with the detailed information he is looking for.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are you able to inform us what the advice is that you received on the greenhouse gas emissions?

MS ORR: I refer the members to my previous question. I have said what the advice is. It is that we are not on track to hit our targets, based on where we are tracking.

Climate change—emissions

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, there is no mention of the ACT government's legislated emissions reduction targets for 2030 or 2040 in the discussion paper on the next climate strategy. Why have you not included these interim targets in your discussion paper?

MS ORR: The discussion paper that I released yesterday is to inform an overarching framework in the first stage of the development of our next strategy. That framework is the focus of the discussion paper. It outlines a number of key areas where we wish to progress work. It is not a detailed plan of all the actions that we will be undertaking or a final view on our sole response to this challenge.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, is it the government's position that having interim targets is an important point of accountability and measuring progress on the path to net zero?

MS ORR: Yes.

MS CLAY: Is the government still committed to 2030 and 2040 targets and to legislated targets?

MS ORR: My hesitation is not because we are not committed to these; my hesitation is about why the question is being asked. At no point have I come out and said that we are stepping back from these targets or the legislated targets that are there. If the Greens

need me to confirm for the record that the government remains committed to our legislated commitments, I am happy to do that, but I think this is a little bit of a distraction.

Gambling—gambling harm

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission's annual report indicates that gambling harm reports are surging. Roughly one in every 80 reports of gambling harm prompted a referral to self-exclude or engage with support services. Minister, are the government's policies just concentrating gambling harm rather than reducing it?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. This year, it was really great to see more data included in the Gambling and Racing Commission's annual report. This is information, particularly in relation to the Gambling Incident Register and self-exclusion, that I felt is very important to be transparent with the community about. What we have seen from the ACT prevalence survey is that the level of harm in the ACT has remained relatively unchanged over the past 10 years. We know that we need to do more to address this harm.

ACT Labor has both a long-term and a medium-to short-term plan to address this harm. The long-term plan is to reduce the supply of gaming machines to the community. We know that the closer you live in proximity to a gambling venue the more likely you are to experience harm. This was evidenced in the ACT gambling prevalence survey. It showed concentrations of harm in the town centres around Canberra, where we have more poker machines. That is why it is critically important that we work with the clubs to see the implementation of account based gaming over the next couple of years. There will be a range of measures related to machines and venues and it will include impacts, and there will be ramifications for self-exclusion. That is why it is really important that we very proactively address measures at machines to address gambling harm.

MR EMERSON: Minister, is the current regulatory system capable of ensuring that existing rules are actually followed given nearly a quarter of poker machines inspected in the past year were found to be in breach of ACT gaming laws and half of all venues inspected were also non-compliant?

DR PATERSON: There is significant opportunity to look at the code of practice, look at the incidents that are recorded and reported, and look at the regulatory activities that occur within venues. There is going to be significant reform in respect of the implementation of account based gaming. Through that process, there will be opportunities to update the language of our laws and regulations but also update them to ensure that they are best practice.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many millions of dollars did the Labor Party reap in the last five years through its clubs and its associated entities that have been funded by pokies?

DR PATERSON: You can go onto the Elections ACT website and see the annual reports of the ACT Labor Club and the 1973 Foundation. That will have all the information Mr Hanson is looking for.

Hybrid electric fire truck—warranty

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. The hybrid electric fire truck has been offline since June awaiting a traction-battery replacement and its warranty expires at the end of this year. Minister, does the government expect the replacement battery to be delivered and installed and the vehicle returned to frontline service before the warranty expires?

DR PATERSON: The warranty is not so much the issue; the issue is getting the battery into Australia, through Customs, and installed into the vehicle. These are all works that are currently under warranty. The ACT government is in constant talks with Rosenbauer in relation to these issues.

MR HANSON: Minister, does the contract provide for an extension of the warranty to account for time out of service due to vehicle failure?

DR PATERSON: These are all matters that the government is currently in discussion with Rosenbauer about.

MS MORRIS: Minister, do you intend to seek a warranty extension once the battery arrives to see if the truck finally works?

DR PATERSON: As I said in answer to the previous question, there are active discussions around the warranty and around getting this truck back on the road. I will be able to update the Assembly with more information in due course.

Drugs—decriminalisation

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On 21 October, the Australian Federal Police Association welcomed the Canberra Liberals call for the repeal of the government's dangerous drug decriminalisation laws. They say:

The promise that decriminalisation would reduce harm, free up police resources, and disrupt drug dealers has simply not materialised. The data shows the opposite. Drug use is up, supply offences are down, and Canberrans are less safe as a result.

Minister, have you kept your promise to reduce harm in our community?

DR PATERSON: I refute that Canberrans are less safe. I believe that as a result of the drug decriminalisation law change there are people in our community that may seek help now for their drug use that may not have previously. We have all heard stories in this chamber over many years of families who have lost loved ones because they have not sought help because they have been terrified of a criminal justice response to their drug use. As we answered in the chamber a matter of sitting weeks ago, there is a review under way for the legislation so we will be very interested to see that legislation in terms of drug use within the ACT. This is consistent with levels across the rest of Australia.

MS MORRIS: What confidence can Canberrans have in these reforms when police are

saying we are less safe as a result of ACT government policy?

DR PATERSON: That is not the message that I am getting from ACT Policing. I believe that the response to drug use in the ACT is now firmly a health one, and that is what it should be. This makes our community a healthier, safer place. The long term benefits potentially of this legislation are significant.

MR HANSON: What police resources have been freed-up to crack down on drug dealers?

DR PATERSON: ACT police have significant operations that they conduct daily to target drug trafficking and organised crime within the ACT. This is a significant priority for ACT police and they will continue to target the supply of drugs into Canberra.

Planning—transit-oriented development

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, how is the ACT government ensuring that the new planning reforms support transit-oriented development as well as encouraging more housing, jobs and community facilities around major public transport routes and town centres?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The Labor government is delivering integrated land use and transport planning along light rail and rapid bus corridors. This approach is designed to support transit-oriented development, creating more well-located homes close to transport, services, jobs and community facilities. By focusing housing growth along public transport corridors, we are building a better connected, accessible and sustainable city.

Transit-oriented development brings real advantages over traditional suburban sprawl. It creates vibrant, mixed-use communities and walkable neighbourhoods, and it reduces car dependence—making better use of existing infrastructure. It also supports more frequent and reliable transport services. Importantly, this approach can also support human-scale density developments that are liveable, welcoming and community friendly.

Transit-oriented development is part of our ACT government's planning reforms, which we are all united behind on the Labor side, helping us to enable 30,000 homes by 2030 while shaping the kind of city that we all want to live in—one that is connected, sustainable and thriving.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, could you please provide the Assembly with an understanding of how these reforms affect the different areas of Canberra?

MR STEEL: We are creating a more connected, liveable city by linking housing growth with rapid transport. In 2023, the *Inner north and city district strategy* identified parts of Downer and Watson as key change areas, thanks to their excellent access to rapid transport through light rail stage 1. These areas are well placed to support gentle residential densification, creating more housing close to services, jobs and transport. Consultation on DPA-09 is currently open, and I encourage the community to have their

say through the ACT's planning website until 4 November.

This work aligns very well with the ACT's broader planning strategy, which aims for 70 per cent of new homes to be built within existing urban areas. It is about making the most of the land and infrastructure that we already have, while ensuring our city remains compact, connected and environmentally sustainable.

A key part of that vision is the extension of light rail to the southside and to Woden. The development of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework will guide this project, creating an integrated land use and transport plan that supports: more housing; more local business activity; community facilities; and better connections for walking, cycling and public transport. Stage 2B will deliver 9 stops between Commonwealth Park and Woden, and this route will cross Lake Burley Griffin on a new bridge built between the two existing spans of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, then travel through the National Triangle and along Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen. The light rail to Woden is more than just a transport project: it is about shaping our city's future, supporting sustainable development, improving accessibility and ensuring that as Canberra grows we do so in a way that remains people focussed and connected.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how will the government's planning reforms that encourage transit-oriented development help deliver more diverse and affordable housing options near key transport corridors and town centres?

MR STEEL: To enable 30,000 new homes by 2030, as both Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development and Minister for Transport my focus is bringing these portfolios together to make sure that new homes are in the right places—close to jobs, services and great public transport. We have been doing that through machinery-of-government changes with the new City and Environment Directorate. I have announced that we are doing that through the new environment and transport forum, bringing transport stakeholders together with planning stakeholders to make sure that we get the most out of these planning reforms in terms of housing and that integration with transport.

When we plan for mixed-use areas near transport, more people choose to use public transport. That increased ridership supports more frequent, reliable and accessible services. When public transport improves, it encourages even more people to want to live, work and spend time in those connected, vibrant places. This creates a very positive cycle, one that we want to continue to support in Canberra: better public transport drives better development, and better development supports better transport.

Through the National Housing Accord, the ACT government has agreed, with all states and territories, to prioritise planning changes that support diverse, affordable housing close to transport, amenities and employment. That is exactly what we doing. It is a plan that supports sustainable growth, reduces congestion and helps Canberra transition towards a zero-emissions future.

Parking—Woden

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative

Industries.

Minister, business owners in Woden are reporting that public carpark spaces are being closed to make way for ACT government construction projects. This is limiting access for both staff and customers. How many general public, short-term or all-day car parking spaces have been closed specifically for the Woden bus depot project?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. I will have to take that one on notice, as Mr Milligan is no doubt aware. Carpark spaces do not fit neatly within my portfolio responsibility, but we will have endeavour to find that information for him.

MR MILLIGAN: How many all-day-parking spaces remain within a reasonable walking distance to all the affected Woden businesses? Approximately how many businesses do those spaces service?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you. I will take that on notice.

MR COCKS: What is the government doing to support local Woden businesses, workers and customers impacted by the construction of the bus depot?

MR PETTERSSON: I appreciate the work that the ACT government has undertaken throughout the construction of both CIT and the Woden bus interchange, engaging constructively with local businesses to ensure that they are informed how those construction projects are progressing. I understand that a lot of that work has taken the form of promotion of local businesses to workers who are engaged on those sites. But I am happy to take on notice any further activities that have been undertaken for both those projects.

Climate change—emissions

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, the discussion paper for the next climate strategy has a “vision for 2035” for our transport system. As members of the Assembly will be aware, transport accounts for around 65 per cent of the ACT’s emissions. Minister, why does the “vision for 2035” make no mention of the ACT Zero Emissions Vehicles Strategy, which points to a phase-out of the sale of new combustion engine vehicles in the ACT by 2035?

MS ORR: Again, I would point Mr Braddock and the Greens to my previous answer. This is about the framework in key areas. It is one component of what will be our next strategy, with more work to be done as to the actions and aligning those with the work that is already in place.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is the ACT government walking away from its commitment to phase out the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles?

MS ORR: Again, it is similar to asking me to recommit to commitments that are policy. I am happy to put on the record that we have not removed our policy commitments, noting that if I were suddenly to make a policy direction, this would mean I was being asked to announce policy in question time.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, how can the community and industry prepare appropriately for a zero emissions vehicle rollout if the government is being vague in its policy documents and not continuing to remind them of the impending change?

MS ORR: The government is not being vague. The government has a discussion paper on a framework for key areas to inform and embed our climate change action across government and the community. Unlike Mr Rattenbury, I think it is clear that we are here to have a discussion about the framework. The individual actions and other commitments will follow.

Climate change—emissions

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Government funding for climate and the environment has dropped from what the *State of the environment* report labelled as “demonstrably inadequate” at 2.8 per cent of the budget to 2.7 per cent of the budget. Meanwhile, in the first year of the Labor government, you have just announced the ACT is off track, for the first time, on meeting its climate targets. Is government performance linked with government funding?

MS ORR: Ms Clay has put the proposition that government funding has decreased as a percentage many times in various forums within this place, including annual reports and estimates hearings and whatnot. In addressing that, I have made it very clear that government spending as a total has actually gone up on the environment year on year. The percentage total that Ms Clay refers to is of one particular measure that focuses on one stream of environment funding. It does not look at the budget as a totality. There is a lot of work, particularly in responding to our climate action, that that particular percentage does not cover. So I reject Ms Clay’s premise that spending and funding has gone backwards.

I am not going to enter into a discussion on whether funding and performance are linked, given that I do not agree with Ms Clay’s premise on the funding. But what I would say is that where we find ourselves in our transition to a net zero future is something that will require a much more mature, considered and open conversation, and it will have to be a collective effort. A lot of work will be done. We have done a lot of the easier things— although saying that what we have done is easy is a bit uncomfortable, because it has not been easy at all. A lot of work has been done, but we really need to get stuck into the actual task at hand, which is decarbonising our economy and our community.

MS CLAY: What new climate policies and programs have you developed or implemented in your first year in the job?

MS ORR: Without knowing exactly where Ms Clay wants to go—and I feel a follow-up question is coming that might be something along the lines of, “How is this going to reduce our emissions?”—a lot of work is already in place and we will continue to build on that.

The work I have been focused on is how we take the next phase of our response to

decarbonise our economy—our net zero future—and how we do that in a way that is considered, sensible and achievable, and builds on what we have, continues to contextualise our response within the broader national response and international response, and makes sure that we fully understand and incorporate the increased knowledge, technology and benefits that are there, in order to respond to the challenges that we have. I will continue to have a watching brief in this portfolio because it is not static; it will continue to develop and change as we have greater understanding of the impacts we will face and as we have greater understanding of the responses that we have available to us. So Ms Clay can continue to ask me as much as she wants—what have you done between X time and X time—and my answer will always be: we have kept our eye on the task and we have done what we can within that period of time, noting that this is not a one-plus-one-equals-two problem.

Ms Clay: Point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. The question was: what new policies or programs have you developed or implemented? I do not think I heard anything about new policies or programs.

MR SPEAKER: I believe that the minister has been responsive to the question. I was going to say, “Minister, you have six seconds if you want to add anything else,” but I believe that she has been responsive to the question.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what will you do differently in next year’s budget to turn our emissions trajectory around?

MS ORR: I am not going to speculate on the outcomes of budget processes that have not been undertaken yet.

Roads—Athllon Drive

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport, I think—though I am happy for anyone to jump up. The project business case that went to cabinet for the Athllon Drive duplication in the last financial year had a total project cost of \$82.2 million. The Built for CBR website now estimates a total cost of \$98.6 million. Minister, how has the project managed to blow out by 20 per cent in less than a year?

MS CHEYNE: This is my area. I thank Ms Castley for the question. I am going to have to double-check, because I think, similar to when we were discussing the new recycling facility, that these figures of what was presented to budget cabinet may have been a previous business case compared to the one that actually went through. I wish to be as accurate as possible, so I will take it on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what would the duplication have cost if it had been delivered when it was first promised?

MS CHEYNE: I am going to have to go back. I am sure we put some figure on it at the time. But I think everybody in this place understands that there has been an enormous change in material usage and material costs in terms of the transport of them and in terms of labour. But, to the actual question, let me see if I can get something accurate.

MS MORRIS: Minister, who is responsible for the project cost tripling from around

\$30 million in 2016 to almost \$100 million today and delivery being delayed from 2024 to 2030?

MS CHEYNE: I feel like someone from my office is trying to give me the answer, but I cannot pull it off in time, so we might have to wait until after question time and matters arising. In terms of who is responsible, I think the short answer is that this is a project that we had been hopeful that we would be able to get underway much sooner than we have been able to. That has not been case, but we have remained committed to it. Now that we are in a position to progress with it, we are.

As the Chief Minister has made clear in multiple comments as we recognise one year of government in this term, the longer we wait, the more the costs go up. That is true for every project. The Athllon Drive duplication is an unfortunate example of that but is certainly illustrative. I would suggest the opposition take that into account when they ask us to delay other projects.

Mr Barr: If no-one is rising, all further questions can be placed on the notice paper, Mr Speaker.

Papers

Ms Cheyne, pursuant to standing order 211, presented the following papers:

Fossil fuel and gambling industries sponsorship in schools—Prevention and transition—Assembly resolution of 4 March 2025—Government response, dated October 2025.

Light Rail Stages 2A—Business Engagement Report—July to September 2025.

Official Visitor Act, pursuant to section 23DA(2)—Official Visitors Scheme—Annual Report 2024-25, dated 24 September 2025, together with a tabling statement.

Planning Act, pursuant to section 268(2)—Statement of leases granted for the period 1 July to 30 September 2025.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Major Events Act—Major Events (Cricket Season 2025-26 Events) Notice 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-273 (LR, 16 October 2025).

Property Developers Act—Property Developers Regulation 2025—Subordinate Law SL2025-20 (LR, 15 October 2025).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Macnamara) Determination 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-270 (LR, 16 October 2025).

Workers Compensation Act—

Workers Compensation (Prescribed Employers—Horse Racing Trainers and Attendance Activity) Fee Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-275 (LR, 20 October 2025).

Workers Compensation (Requirements for Operation of DI Fund—Horse Racing Training and Attendance Activity) Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-274 (LR, 20 October 2025).

Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act—Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Declaration 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-271 (LR, 16 October 2025).

Lakes and waterways—water quality

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (2.39): I move

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that constituents have raised concern with the poor water quality and inadequate maintenance of Canberra's major lakes and waterways, including Lake Burley Griffin, Lake Ginninderra, and Lake Tuggeranong;
- (b) the critical role that clean, safe and accessible water bodies play in supporting options for affordable active recreational opportunities; and
- (c) that in the context of the cost of living crisis and increasingly hot Canberra summers, access to clean, safe and well-maintained public waterways is essential for affordable recreation, social connection and public health, especially for young families;

(2) further notes:

- (a) that poor water quality and limited public information undermine residents' confidence and willingness in utilising local lakes and waterways;
- (b) media reports of sick animals and at least one confirmed death of a family pet due to unclean and unsafe water; and
- (c) that Canberrans and local families deserve lakes and waterways that are clean and safe to enjoy; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) ensure lakes and waterways are clean and safe this summer;
- (b) undertake a comprehensive assessment of the current underperforming water quality and maintenance practices across major lakes and waterways;
- (c) deliver a long-term plan by mid-2026 that ensures clean lakes and waterways for future summers that prioritises the community benefit and enjoyment of waterway leisure; and
- (d) provide real-time public reporting of water quality across major lakes and waterways so families have up-to-date, accessible information before visiting local lakes and waterways this summer.

I move this motion today because we are headed into another hot summer, and one of my favourite things to do is to take the dogs—now just one—to the lake. I know I am not the only one. It is usually really difficult to get a spot, especially at Lake Ginninderra. Canberrans love a good gatho at a place where there is plenty of grass to kick a football and enjoy the water. It is important to note that we are in a cost-of-living crisis, and families are relying on free outdoor recreation now more than ever.

Unfortunately, we have all heard the media reports of sick pets, faecal contamination and excessive algae, as well as rubbish—syringes and things like that—that infiltrates our waterways: Lake Tuggeranong, Lake Ginninderra and Lake Burley Griffin. These are not abstract environmental assets; these are places where kids learn to paddle for the first time, where families go when they cannot afford a holiday, and where people walk their dogs at the end of a long day. Canberra waterfronts are meeting places for families and friends for summer barbecues and playing games. An Australian ritual is to cool off at the lake. It should not be a pipe dream. Families should be able to enjoy the lakes without fear of kids and animals becoming ill, but, sadly, public confidence in Canberra's waterways has diminished.

Back in the 80s and 90s, when I was at school, our end-of-year party would always be at the lake. Back then, it was just called the “pontoon spot”; it is now known as Yerra Beach. Of course, we would tell the teachers it was filthy and we did not want to swim in the lake, but you could bet your bottom dollar that, by the end of the day, every one of us was somersaulting off the pontoon. It was safe. It was a bit dirty, but we absolutely loved it.

As I mentioned earlier, I loved taking my dogs to the lake for a run. Jack is my partner's dog. The recent stories have made me pause for a bit. Having lost my puppy unexpectedly, the other weekend I wondered whether a trip to the lake was a wise idea. The thought of having that happen again is not acceptable. I understand things have settled, and that is good. I have never second-guessed myself about a trip to the local lake before. I know where to find information about how safe the water is. It is easy for me to get that information and I may have a moment to second-guess, but I worry about the community. That is the reason I have this motion before the Assembly today.

When we hear from the community that families are staying away, we do not want them to do that. They say that, due to the neglect of the Labor government, there is a lack of long-term environmental answers for our lakes. We heard Ms Lawder talk about it for a long time in this place. Often lakes are inaccessible due to toxic blue-green algae and faecal contamination. It is a growing issue fuelled by stormwater run-off carrying fertiliser, organic material and animal waste straight into the water. The outbreaks are becoming more frequent and more severe during the warmer months. This is not just an environmental inconvenience; it is a public health risk.

I thank Minister Cheyne. She emailed a bunch of additional information yesterday on the latest outbreak. I appreciated being able to get my head around that so that I could understand the current state of play. The level of bacteria in recent summers has been high enough to trigger health alerts. It causes vomiting, infections and serious illness. Canberrans should not have to second-guess whether the local lake is toxic; they need to be sure. The state of ACT waterways is not a case of unforeseeable bad luck. These problems are predictable, seasonal and entirely solvable.

Other jurisdictions implemented effective nutrient-trapping stormwater pretreatment and wetlands rehabilitation programs years ago. Meanwhile, this government has relied on warning signs regarding temporary closures as its lake management strategy. Often you have to be at the water to see them. The solution is not complicated; it is early intervention, proper stormwater infrastructure and transparent public reporting. We need real-time water-quality dashboards. We need proactive treatment, not reactive

signage. These are reasonable and deliverable measures. What is missing is urgency and political will.

Canberrans deserve better. They deserve clean, safe and accessible water in a city where people do not want to gamble with getting an illness or a pet becoming sick after cooling down on a hot day. Understanding which lakes and what section of them is safe should be easy. The information should be accessible. The Access Canberra website is good—I had another look at it today—but not everybody knows where to find this information on a hot summer day in the middle of January. People might not be sure whether it is accurate information during the holiday season. Families should know what to expect before heading down to the lake.

This motion calls for the government to act now. Canberrans deserve clean and safe lakes this summer, and they deserve to know that the water is safe before dipping their toe in. Communities deserve to know that there is a plan that works. It is simple. The Canberra Liberals stand for practical, credible and family-focused solutions to this cost-of-living crisis, and, in this case, that means bringing back the lake picnic without fear of sickness.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (2.46): I certainly thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion forward today. This is timely and, as I have intimated to Ms Castley, Ms Clay and Miss Nuttall, the motion allows us to explore some of the issues in a bit more detail than question time would otherwise allow. I hope that, between Minister Orr and myself, we are able to provide some facts. I look forward to doing that, perhaps when an amendment is circulated. I will be able to provide some more detail then.

What I can say is that, of course, our hearts go out to any person whose pet has been lost in circumstances in our natural environment. Many of us rely on our environment being safe and our environment being a place that offers a degree of regularity. When our environment is anything but that or, tragically, the worst thing possible happens and we lose a pet, it is very difficult to work through that and also come back from it in a way that gives you confidence in that environment again. I wish to speak factually today, but certainly not disrespectfully to any person who has lost a pet in any of our waterways. The most recent examples are Scout and Lily Mae, and again my thoughts go to those families.

What has really come through in the last few weeks, and for me especially, is the type of blue-green algae that is particularly toxic to dogs and is not necessarily immediately recognisable to those of us who are familiar with the usual type that is streaky, blue-green and looks like scum or looks like slick paint across the surface of the water. *Tychonema* is benthic. If it is benthic, it means it grows near or on something that has to do with the lake floor. *Tychonema*, which is a type of blue-green algae or cyanobacteria, is not necessarily a problem in and of itself when it is undisturbed. It is well-documented that cyanobacteria is one of the longest-living organisms on the planet. It is certainly one of the earliest to have ever been documented, and it is always going to be present. When *tychonema* is disturbed or it grows at a prolific rate and ends up getting to a point where it detaches from its otherwise benthic environment, we start to see some dangers.

I would reflect that, since we received those reports—and those reports coincided with us beginning our new water testing season, which runs from October to April—the EPA stepped up its visual inspections of the lake. I know that visual inspections might not sound particularly scientific, but, when it comes to tychonema, visual inspections are a pretty reliable way of determining whether a risk is present, because of how it presents on the surface of the water. When looking at things like bacteria and microbial issues, and indeed some types of blue-green algae, we need to do testing of samples to really understand the alert level. Certainly, for the blue-green algae that we commonly think of, if it looks blue-green, murky, scummy or paint-like, that certainly indicates high levels of blue-green algae. Especially when it starts to dissipate, when we see some better conditions come through, it helps when the ACT government tests regularly to confirm that the risk has reduced to a lower level, and then we can get to a point where we can re-open our lakes.

The areas where we can be much clearer include: what constitutes a medium alert level or a high alert level; what leads us to closing a lake versus not closing a lake; and an alert when there may be the presence of something versus a hazard being present. Those distinctions will really help the community in making their own risk assessments. That is something that I will be looking at doing. I have recently been reflecting that, until the last four or six weeks, I did not have any idea what tychonema was. I have listened very closely to the experts—Matt Kamarul and Dr Su Wild-River from the EPA—when they have described it. They say it looks like faecal matter or organic matter. Once those mats detach from the lake floor, we start to see the risk. It can end up in the reeds and it can end up along the shore and on the beaches. That is, of course, where the greatest risk will be, where people and dogs enter the water.

If people know what to look for and know that things that look like organic or faecal matter might not necessarily be the organic matter that they would expect and that it may actually be incredibly toxic, that is an education exercise that we can undertake. We can improve the photos that we have online and we can improve the signs that we put out. I agree that the signs are too small, but, equally, we could have a billboard-size sign and, if it were there pretty much permanently, it would become part of the landscape. We will look at things that are more visually arresting so that people pay attention when the signs change. We can give a better indication of exactly what our testing results are coming back with as well—not just a medium alert level, for example, but specifics about the level of bacteria or the level of toxins present in the waterways, so that people can educate themselves as well. That is no problem and is something that the EPA is very willing to support. I cannot imagine that the Health Protection Service will have any issue with that either.

Further, there is still the important point that the ACT government cannot eliminate all risk. There is simply no way. That is true for our lakes and our waterways. As we head into the summer season, not just our lakes are valuable places of recreational activity; it also includes our waterways. Particularly in the ACT, our river systems can change drastically and dramatically, and they can change with very little warning due to conditions that might occur upstream and then flow into our systems. We cannot eliminate all risk. Drowning is obviously the most devastating outcome for Canberrans and, sadly for us, it is too common over the summer period. But we cannot eliminate all risk, so we are always asking people to look at exactly what the conditions are.

There are some amendments here, so I will get another chance to speak with an actual speech in front of me.

We could do all the testing in the world, but conditions could still change in front of us. So, absolutely, if you are going to enjoy our lakes and waterways, please, in the first instance, check online and see what the conditions are. Obviously, if the lake is closed, please do not go. If there is a medium alert level, please take that into account and what our advice is. If you do not see any of those alerts online, please turn up, but, when you are there, look for the physical signs. If the presence of something is detected while the EPA is doing their inspections, they and other officers will replace the signs there and then. So the physical signs can sometimes be more up to date than the online information. Finally, the point throughout all of this is that, given we cannot eliminate all risk, we need people to be aware of what hazards look like and to conduct their own visual inspections. With tychonema in particular, the biggest risk lies with the ingestion of it. Mr Speaker, I do not think you or I would be tempted to ingest tychonema, but you can imagine that, particularly at the areas where you enter the waterway, especially our dogs and younger persons, like toddlers, could see something that looks interesting or might have a particular odour. My dog loves rolling in anything that is smelly. It could occur. All you need is for a dog to have rolled in something like tychonema, which looks like organic matter but has serious toxins in it—neurotoxins that act extremely rapidly—and the dog will deteriorate rapidly. It is usually within 15 minutes. I appreciate that, in the tragic cases we have heard about, the owners of the dogs tried to rush them to a vet and it has not been quick enough because of how rapid the onset is.

The best thing that can be done is to avoid the water if you think there is any risk at all; otherwise, keep the dog away from anything that looks like faecal matter, organic matter or something unusual on the shoreline. That is not always possible. I know that dogs love running through the aquatic plants and other things, sniffing around and collecting balls, but please know that there is a risk that tychonema is in the water if its presence has been observed elsewhere.

Everyone has probably heard enough from me about the present state. I look forward to working through the amendments before us. I will be able to speak in a bit more detail about the original version of (3)(d) and the sensors that the EPA is beginning to invest in to provide some real-time monitoring.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (2.59): I thank Ms Castley for bringing the Assembly's attention to this important issue today. We have already seen the impact of poor quality waterways on our community. As Ms Castley's motion notes, there has been at least one recent confirmed death of a family pet as a result of toxic algae consumption, with warning signage installed after the dog's death. Signs are an obvious way of preventing incidents like this from happening. But, of course, we would not need that signage if we addressed the root cause of the problem—polluted, un-swimmable waterways that pose a serious health risk to both animals and humans.

It would be great to see more ambition with respect to the quality of our waterways. That is why I have prepared amendments backing calls made by the Canberra Wild Swim Club during the Assembly's inquiry into community sports for the ACT

government to become a signatory to the Swimmable Cities Charter. The charter was a product of the 2024 Paris Olympics, which saw a massive effort to turn the Seine River into a swimmable body of water. This sparked a movement across the globe, with a range of other cities committing to making their urban waterways swimmable.

The Swimmable Cities Charter emerged to champion the right to swim and all the effort that entails. There are currently 192 signatories from 100 cities and towns across 34 different countries. Of those 192 signatories, 20 are Australian, and include Sydney Water, Yarra Pools and the Parramatta Catchment Group. If the ACT government were to follow these entities' leads, it would represent a serious commitment to changing the status quo for our waterways, a commitment to ensuring lakes like Lake Burley Griffin are no longer accessible only for a small window of time but instead are part of a new status quo of universal access to a healthy, safe water system for our community.

As the Canberra Wild Swim Club stated in their committee hearing:

Signing up as a signatory would add weight to ensuring that governments recognise the value of our waterways and the benefits they provide to the wider community.

There are numerous benefits. Lake Burley Griffin, for instance, is the centrepiece of our planned city. It is a key driver of tourism to the national capital, providing access to nature while also being a walkable distance from Civic and, of course, all our national institutions. The centrepiece of our city being reliably swimmable could have a massively positive impact on Canberra as a destination, addressing what many perceive as our city's biggest drawback: the lack of a beach. If we actually committed to making Lake Burley Griffin swimmable reliably, we could, finally, have a very distinctly Canberran beach, providing a significant increase in amenity for our community as well as boosting tourism along the way.

Aside from the obvious potential beach benefits, swimmable cities also play an important role in climate adaptation. As we now look inevitably toward multiple degrees of warming, terrifyingly, it is not a matter of if but when our city will begin to seriously bear the brunt of climate change in a more consistent way: longer, hotter summers, more heatwaves and a higher risk to public health. We need to be thinking about how to create safe cities that offer everyone in our community accessible opportunities to cool down. As one signatory to the charter said:

When we think about climate change, urban heat island-effects and the increase of heat wave events, it is vital that urban communities have safe and accessible ways to cool off. A healthy, swimmable river—

in their case—

would be one such option, and will support both human health, and their connection to nature.

While I understand the upfront costs of meaningfully solving pollution in Canberra's waterways, particularly in relation to the naturalisation of concrete stormwater drains, we have to also consider how much it is costing us to continue with the status quo. There will be inevitable demands on our health system from not doing the necessary

futureproofing to ensure our city is prepared to the best extent possible for a worsening climate crisis.

I again thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion today and hope to see the Assembly work collaboratively to focus more closely on the many benefits of safe, healthy and swimmable waterways. I seek leave to move my amendments to Ms Castley's motion together.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

1. After paragraph (2)(c), insert:
“(d) the Canberra Wild Swim Club has called on the National Capital Authority and ACT Government to sign onto the Swimmable Cities Charter;”.
2. After paragraph (3)(d), insert:
“(e) demonstrate its commitment to safe, healthy and swimmable waterways by considering signing onto the Swimmable Cities Charter and reporting back to the Assembly on this item by May 2026.”. [Editor: please take in text from *Minutes of Proceedings*.]

Mr Emerson's amendments agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.04): I move:

In paragraph (1)(a), omit “and Lake Tuggeranong”, substitute: “Lake Tuggeranong and Yerrabi Pond”.

My amendment is a purely parochial local member amendment to make sure that Yerrabi Pond is not forgotten amongst the list of lakes. I appreciate the Chief Minister is a fan of parochial members who advocate for their districts, and I thought I would be remiss in my duty if I did not stand up to at least make sure this was the case. I am not being totally flippant; there is actually a dog swimming beach on the Amaroo section of Lake Yerrabi and it is also a well-loved community pond. Therefore, it is important, as part of the safety of the dogs that happen to utilise that area, that this also be included.

Mr Braddock's amendment agreed to.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.05): I will just add a few quick comments. I want to thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion forward. It is a very important one. I often stand in this place and talk about community safety, from a very different angle of policing, bail and law and order. But I want to acknowledge the importance of community safety in maintaining our waterways. Our lakes and our waterways are at the heart of many of our local communities, and it is important that they are safe for all of the community to enjoy, including our beloved pets.

I am so sorry for the Canberra families who have lost their pets recently as a result of simply enjoying our waterways. This is a tragedy, and it should not have happened. Anyone who has had a pet dog can recognise that this is a tragedy. I think witnessing this in our community would make any dog owner afraid to take their pets to their lake—which they should not be afraid to do so but they would be. Wouldn't it great if

we lived in a community where our lakes and waterways were clean and safe for children and for pets to use. Wouldn't it be great if we did not have to worry that our dogs might die if they played in the lakes.

Tuggeranong residents have long had concerns about Lake Tuggeranong. There are many conversations that I have had with residents over the course of my time in this place, where they have had concerns about their children. Some families that I have spoken to have experienced their children getting sick when they have innocently played in the lake. Reflecting some of these concerns, I have recently written to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water seeking reassurance on current test results and what preparations are in place for the coming warmer weather and whether our lakes will be safe for the community to use with the likely increase of blue green algae. We have already seen Lake Tuggeranong closed earlier this year due to contamination. I think we can all agree that no one wants to see anyone in the community get sick or any more pets to get sick or lose their life as a result of beautiful, innocent, recreational play in these areas.

I am concerned at the frequency of testing of the water quality in Lake Tuggeranong and the timely and effective communication of that testing to residents of any potential safety concerns that there might be. I think Canberrans deserve and want to see a more permanent and effective program for improving our water quality. The government does not have a very strong record on this. Some programs have started well but have had a lack of consistent commitment to improvements in the output of them. We have seen a creeping bureaucratisation of programs instead of practical action to clean up our lakes and waterways.

Tuggeranong residents, like I am sure all Canberrans residents, simply want to know that our lakes and waterways are safe for them to enjoy. Unfortunately, Ms Castley has had to bring this motion forward today because that is not currently the case. That is why it is very important that we pass this motion, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.09): I rise to support Ms Castley's motion, calling for safe and healthy waterways in Canberra. Canberrans have the right to enjoy our lakes and rivers as vital public spaces for recreation, exercise and connection with nature. Whether it is swimming, kayaking, walking our dogs or simply relaxing by the water, clean waterways offer low-cost and accessible ways to support our physical and mental wellbeing. But recent events have highlighted serious concerns. We have seen heartbreaking reports of family pets dying after exposure to toxic lake water. Dog owners are understandably anxious, and this should be a wake-up call.

The National Capital Authority has only recently agreed to year-round testing of Lake Burley Griffin, a response driven by increased use of the lake by swimmers and watercraft users. But this is just the beginning. Last year, several families experienced gastro-like symptoms after visiting an aquatic park in the lake. We have also seen swimming races and triathlons disrupted due to poor water quality. Yarralumla Beach is currently closed. I support the call by the Yarralumla community to build a wetland on their creek to filter water before it reaches the lake. I support Miss Nuttall's amendment for funding Healthy Waterways projects and Mr Emerson's for the ACT government to sign onto the Swimmable Cities Charter.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.11): I wanted to rise for a moment, initially to thank Ms Castley for bringing this but also to note the work of Ms Lawder, in the former Assembly, who tirelessly advocated for water quality across the ACT—of course, quite notably, Lake Tuggeranong—during her term here. Advocating for our waterways is something that the Liberals have a pretty long track record on. Sir Robert Menzies, not only the founder of the Liberal Party but also, in many ways, the godfather of Canberra—

Mr Braddock: The godfather?

MR COCKS: That is right: the godfather of Canberra. You heard it here! He stewarded the development of Canberra from a small town into the heart of the federal government and, in many ways, a great centre for learning and for administration. He certainly had it in mind that it would be the centre for the arts and for culture in general. Of course, Sir Robert Menzies was very fond of talking about the importance of water to the great cities of the world, including Canberra. I have a couple of quotes from him. He said:

Wonder to yourself what London would be like without the Thames or Paris would be like without the Seine.

I do not think I will repeat his comments on Berlin, but I will note that he mentions that it does not have a trickle of water running through it. But he did go on to say:

Water, water all the great cities of the world.

I think he was onto something, because, if you have a look at the life around many of our great cities of Australia, including Canberra, so much happens on and around water. Here I will take the opportunity to be a bit parochial again. In my electorate, around Yarralumla, there are sailing clubs, rowing clubs and dragon boating, all of which come together around this great body of water that we have at the heart of our city. If you go a bit further afield and have a look at the Murrumbidgee, you have places where people come together for picnics and for barbecues throughout the year. I certainly have burnt my feet on that sand more times than I care to admit. These are places that the community comes together, and Canberra needs to have places to come together, places for recreation, that are safe. It is a pretty important responsibility for the government to make sure the condition of our waterways is healthy and to make sure that, when people take their families and their pets to our waterways to enjoy these facilities, they can do so safely.

I have been somewhat flippant in some of the remarks and a bit facetious, but, when it comes down to that question, I cannot imagine what any of those families felt to have done something that they thought was absolutely safe, absolutely a normal thing to do, and to lose a beloved pet because of it. During the time I have been in this Assembly, I have lost two pets. To be fair, one was the day before I was sworn in. The pain that you feel from losing a pet can only be exacerbated when you know that it was not necessary. So I would encourage everyone in this place to support Ms Castley's motion.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.15): I move:

After paragraph (3)(d), insert:

“(e) commit to funding outstanding Healthy Waterways projects from Stage 2 and develop a plan for the next stage of Healthy Waterways by mid-2026;”.

Firstly, I would like to thank Ms Castley and the Canberra Liberals for bringing the Assembly’s attention to the important issue of Canberra’s water quality and the health of our lakes and waterways. As I mentioned in speaking to Ms Castley’s motion on the water extraction charge, water is one of our most precious natural resources and it should not be taken for granted. The territory’s lakes and waterways are part of what makes Canberra such a great place to live.

This motion also draws attention to the importance of public waterways for affordable recreation in the context of increasingly hot summers. As we know, adapting to climate change is one of the key challenges facing our city over the coming years and decades. Investing in our living assets, including our waterways, helps to keep our city cool and climate safe.

While Canberra’s lakes were originally designed to protect the downstream Murrumbidgee River from the water quality effects of urban development by preventing and trapping pollution, the Canberra community now expects our lakes, ponds and waterways to be used for recreational purposes. This has been the work of successive governments and many passionate community organisations and volunteers.

I would also like to acknowledge the concern from the public following the reports of sick animals and the reported deaths of family pets from algae exposure in Lake Ginninderra. I send my heartfelt condolences to the community members affected by this tragic turn of events. This motion raises awareness of these concerns and will hopefully drive the action and the attention that are needed on this important issue.

On the forthcoming Labor amendments, I would like to thank the minister and her office for working constructively with us on amendments to this motion and appreciate their work down to the wire on this one. In particular, this motion now brings to people’s attention the impact of climate change on our water quality. It is possible that blue-green algal blooms will become more frequent and toxic over time due to the increase in temperatures and extreme wet and dry periods. Longer and more frequent storm events will also exacerbate water quality issues.

Action on climate change is action on water quality, and we are pleased to see the amendments recognise that. We are pleased to see that the motion reflects the need for work to improve water quality in ACT lakes and waterways to ensure that they are as clean and safe as possible this summer, noting the compounding and exacerbating challenges with water quality.

We are also pleased to see that there is a commitment to assess water quality and an opportunity to identify potential projects within the current and future stages of the Healthy Waterways Program that will improve community benefit and enjoyment of waterway leisure. Most importantly, we welcome the commitment to provide real-time public reporting of water quality across major lakes and waterways.

In terms of what we would like to see, and the reason for moving this amendment, we

would like to have seen a concrete commitment to the delivery of the next stage and, indeed, outstanding projects from this stage of the Healthy Waterways project. I have talked a lot about this. In summary, this was a successful program under the previous Greens minister that saw improvements in water quality in the ACT.

The program works to build wetlands, ponds and rain gardens. It makes sure that our environment is taken care of by governments, businesses and residents. It informs the community as to how to better take care of our waterways and it also improves our understanding of waterways through monitoring and reporting. We would like to see a further funding commitment to this program. Just as importantly, we would like a plan developed on the next stage of Healthy Waterways by mid-2026.

If the government intends money appropriated in this year's budget to go towards Lake Tuggeranong's catchment plan, and if there is indeed no money for the previously scoped reconnection of the Tuggeranong Creek line at Richardson, we would have hoped that the government would have already begun planning for the next stage of Healthy Waterways and, in that context, mid-2026 would be a reasonable deadline. Further investment in this program will address the issues that we are seeing in water quality. A commitment to Healthy Waterways acknowledges the important role that Canberra's waterways play in the life of this city.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.20): We will not be supporting the Greens amendment today. This motion was purely about making sure we are good for summer, that we have a bit of a reporting plan in place and a way forward. I certainly did not intend for today's motion to be committing the government to money that has not already been laid out in the budget. We will not be supporting the amendment.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (3.20): On the question of Miss Nuttall's amendment, although I do not think I will find myself saying this in many debates this term, having regard to the Canberra Liberals' position, the government will not be supporting Miss Nuttall's amendment today. We will be looking at committing funds through our budgetary processes. We will also be continuing to keep a focus on what will best improve water quality.

My understanding and the advice to me is that the project that Miss Nuttall has referred to is one that has been reassessed and perhaps is not the best use of our focus. We will continue to look at ways we can improve our waterways, but the government is not of the view at this point that that particular project is the best way, so we will not be supporting Miss Nuttall's amendment today.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.21): I rise to speak in support of Miss Nuttall's motion, particularly in light of some of the comments that have been made. I enjoyed Ms Castley's introductory remarks. I had a similar childhood in Canberra. For me, many a fine summer during school holidays and at other times was spent at Lake Burley Griffin, being able to play in the lake. Subsequently, when I was a little older and got into triathlons, I did many training sessions in the lake. I think we are very lucky to have water bodies like this.

I have also spent a lot of time swimming in Lake Ginninderra. Having the ability to make use of our water bodies as recreational facilities, particularly as they are free, is incredibly important. Certainly, as a child, there was no way my family was able to buy a pass to the pool all the time. Having the lake as a free option was tremendous. They are a valued recreation facility.

With respect to Ms Orr's amendments, which she has circulated—I do not want to pre-empt her amendments—I want to touch on the fact that she makes the point that, historically, our lakes were built as large-scale sediment catchment ponds, essentially, a stormwater system designed to both move water quickly away from the suburbs and trap the pollutants and prevent them from getting into the Murrumbidgee River.

This is, of course, an incredibly important thing, but what has happened over time is that our expectations have evolved. Our community wants to be able to use these waterways as important recreational bodies. Community expectations of having cleaner water have been raised, and our scientific understanding of how to keep the lakes clean and how to improve the water quality have grown.

There are two issues with the lakes. We can get into a discussion about turbidity versus nutrient load and therefore algal outbreak. It is the algae side that Ms Castley has been particularly focused on, around the health of animals and the like. The turbidity is one that the community sees. They look at the lake and think, "It's brown and a bit murky." But that is a very different issue.

The reason that I particularly wanted to speak was to say that Miss Nuttall has put forward an important amendment. The whole point of the Healthy Waterways Program is that our lakes do have a historical purpose, and the only way that we will fix that, which is at the core of Ms Castley's motion today, over time, is to change the way our water system works in the territory. We need to prevent the pollutants from getting into the lakes, reduce the nutrient load and therefore reduce the algal outbreaks.

I think Ms Castley is wrong in rejecting Miss Nuttall's amendment and saying, "It's not relevant to my motion today." It is absolutely relevant. It is an "and" exercise. We agree with Ms Castley's central point, but there is no easy fix to this. In her original motion she called for the government to guarantee the safety of the lakes this summer. Anyone who understands the science of these lakes knows that the government is never going to agree to that, because we have a long-term problem with our water bodies that have a significant nutrient load on them that has built up over decades, and it is going to take a sustained effort to fix it.

Miss Nuttall's amendment goes exactly to that point. We need a sustained program, and we have had one. If we take a little history detour, we can go back to when the ACT was able to secure the near \$90 million from a previously allocated commonwealth fund to be put towards the beginnings of the Healthy Waterways Program. That has seen the creation of many of the urban wetlands and other naturalisation processes across the city. They are starting to have an impact.

Last term we committed another \$30 million of investment. What we have this term, and what Miss Nuttall was getting to, is that, at the moment, there is no plan. The Healthy Waterways funding has come to an end. There are no next steps. We are now

12 months into this government and there is still no next step. What Miss Nuttall is asking for—and she is spot on with this—is a plan. What is the next step?

We cannot stop. We still have nutrient load pouring into our lakes, which will make the problem that Ms Castley is concerned about worse. We need a plan, and we need a resource commitment to then implement that plan. That is what Miss Nuttall is asking for. She is not coming in here today and saying to the government, “I need to know what you’re going to do next week.” But 12 months into this term of government, we do not know what the direction is.

We have asked. When we ask, we get answers like, “Well, it’s coming,” or “There’s got to be a change in direction here; accept this.” That is fine; all I want to know is: what is the strategy? What is the plan? Perhaps even: when might we see it? You are a quarter of a way through your term in government and you have nothing for us. That is the problem here. We need to see something to give us confidence that there will be a strategy and that we will see a continued effort to improve our waterways. That is what Miss Nuttall’s amendment asked for, and that is why I urge members to support her amendment today.

Question put:

That **Miss Nuttall’s** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Andrew Braddock
Fiona Carrick
Jo Clay
Thomas Emerson
Laura Nuttall
Shane Rattenbury

Noes 19

Andrew Barr	Deborah Morris
Chiaka Barry	Suzanne Orr
Yvette Berry	Mark Parton
Peter Cain	Marisa Paterson
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Jeremy Hanson	Caitlin Tough
Elizabeth Lee	Taimus Werner-Gibblings
James Milligan	

Question resolved in the negative.

Miss Nuttall’s amendment negatived.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (3.32): By leave, I move the following amendments to the motion, as amended, together:

1. After paragraph (1)(a), insert:

“(b) that Canberra’s lakes were originally designed to protect the downstream Murrumbidgee River from the water quality effects of urban development by preventing and trapping pollution;

- (c) the community expects access to lakes, ponds, and waterways for recreational purposes;
 - (d) that climate change is expected to exacerbate water quality issues including blue-green algal blooms through increased temperatures, increased nutrient levels due to extreme wet/dry periods, increasing stagnation of water bodies, and stronger and more frequent storm events;”.
2. Omit paragraph (2)(b), substitute:
 - “(b) there have been media reports of sick animals and at least one confirmed death of a family pet due to contact with *Tychonema*, a type of blue-green algae, at Lake Ginninderra;”.
 3. Omit paragraph (3)(a), substitute:
 - “(a) work to improve water quality in ACT lakes and waterways to ensure they are as clean and safe as possible this summer;”.
 4. In paragraph (3)(b), omit “underperforming”.
 5. Omit paragraph (3)(c), substitute:
 - “(c) identify potential projects within current and future stages of the Healthy Waterways program that will improve community benefit and enjoyment of waterway leisure and report back to the Assembly by mid-2026;”.
 6. In paragraph (3)(d), omit “families”, substitute: “all Canberrans”, and omit “this summer”.

I think it is fair to say that this debate has had about as many twists and turns as a wild river, but it has shown the enthusiasm everyone in the chamber has for water quality in its various forms, and the definite love we have for our pets and the recreational use of our lakes. The amendments that I have circulated add a little more context and points to the notes in the section, acknowledging, as has been pointed out, that our lakes began as an area where pollutants could get trapped. This has historically provided us—and continues to provide us—with challenges in keeping our water as clean as we would like it to be for recreational purposes.

Given that our lakes act as a natural pollutant trap, we will continue to work through how we can clean the lakes and minimise the pollution there so that Canberrans can use the lakes as much as possible. It is fair to say this ACT government, and every previous ACT government, has not managed to master the entire cleaning of the lake, and that there will be times when there are pollutants in our lake and it will not be safe to go in. I know that Minister Cheyne will speak a little bit more about how we will continue to manage that so that we get the best balance between a clean lake that is safe to use and providing the community with the knowledge and the awareness of when it is not appropriate to be in our lakes for their own safety.

The other point that is added to the notes section is that climate change will continue to impact the way our lakes act. As a result of a warming climate, we are likely to see more algal blooms and more impacts from pollutants entering into our natural waterways system. That will be an ongoing and future challenge that we will need to continue to respond to. The other part goes to acknowledging the media reports of the illness and deaths of the pets that we have seen over the last few weeks. As per my comments in question time last week, of course our thoughts are with the families who

have lost their pets. I think everyone in this place is a pet lover. We have already heard that from a number of people, and I am sure everyone in Labor can add their voices, too. Certainly, losing one of your pets is a devastating thing and not something that any of us take lightly. We certainly continue to think about those who have lost their pets.

Our work on improving our water quality—and this goes particularly to the amendments that I have within the calls-on section—is something that is going to be continual. It is something that we will have to look at. What is not always appreciated is that the ACT is one of the leaders in new interventions and new techniques that we have put in place to date, and the work that we have done to trial new methods of cleaning our water system.

While we have learnt a lot, there have also been some things that have not worked as effectively as we might have hoped, but we take the lessons from that into the next iteration. While the comment has been made that everyone would just like to see a plan for what comes next, that plan is coming. I am not going to announce policy in the debate, but while it is convenient to sit here and say that we have not seen it, therefore it does not exist, that is not correct. We have a very strong policy development process which, as I have pointed out in many of my answers to questions on this topic, I am respecting and working through. We will have more to say on that shortly.

I move, now, to the changes to the calls-on. There is a very simple change to (3)(a), which acknowledges that—given our lakes are pollution traps, and that, given that they have pollutants going into them—we will continue to improve water quality to the best of our ability; acknowledges that there will still be instances of pollution that we will need to deal with; and removes some other wording. The big change. Though, is replacing (3)(c) with a new (3)(c) which identifies potential projects that will improve community benefit and enjoyment of waterway leisure and report back to the Assembly.

This is in place of the long-term plan. I have had discussions with Ms Castley—and Ms Castley has been very receptive to the pragmatics of this—and pointed out that if I was to develop a long-term plan by the time period in the original point (3)(c), I would have to be putting something to a cabinet process pretty much tomorrow. It would not, in my opinion, be likely to be a very good or thorough document. It would not have any community consultation, and I dare say that it would not have a lot of input other than what I go punch out on the typewriter or the laptop, after this debate.

In taking on board that feedback—and I thank Ms Castley for her constructive approach to this—I am happy to go away, have a look at it, and report back to the Assembly. Ms Castley is more than welcome to tell me when I report back in mid-2026, whether I have or have not met expectations and where we go to next, because I think it is encouraging to see people taking a constructive and positive interest in how we start to improve our waterways. That is probably the biggest change within the amendment.

The last thing I would like to say is that the last Healthy Waterways project focused very much on specific and discrete projects. A lot of these were infrastructure projects—rain gardens and certain areas of swales and creeks. All of these have their place, but the information in the briefing that has come to me, and certainly what has been on my mind as we look to what future options there may be, is how we actually stop pollutants getting into the system in the first place—not even needing these things

to be cleaned before they get into the lakes—because this is an issue we probably cannot engineer our way out of. We can put in place rain gardens, but they alone are not going to be the difference if we still have everyone using an abundance of fertiliser and putting more phosphorus than we can take out of the system into the system.

So I think that is going to be important to keep in mind as we as we move through this. It is not just about what we engineer; it is also about what we put into a system that has been designed to take pollutants and put them into our lakes. I will leave that thought I with everyone. I will be reporting back in the middle of next year, so I am sure we will have more to say. I look forward to engaging with members across the chamber as we continue to look at what we can do to improve our lakes.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.40): As foreshadowed, I have some further detail to add in support of Minister Orr’s amendments. In particular, I think it is worth repeating the fact that Canberra’s lakes and ponds are mainly designed as stormwater improvement devices for buffering run-off from urban areas, for trapping nutrients, soil and debris and for improving downstream water quality. That is why they were created.

The Canberra Urban Lakes and Ponds Land Management Plan will be due for an update as part of broader land management plan work, but its objectives are still accurate. The objectives are listed in order of priority, and I will read through them quickly because they are short. The first objective is to “prevent and control floods by providing a reservoir to receive flows”; the second objective is to “prevent and control pollution of waterways; the third objective is to “provide for public use of the lake or pond for recreation”; and the fourth is to “provide habitat for fauna and flora”. I think it is a credit to all those who work on keeping our waterways healthy that we can forget that one and two are not one and two and we in fact assume that the primary reason for our lakes is to provide for public recreational use.

This motion today—the crux of which I think we all agree with—is an opportunity for us to reset that perception in the community about why these lakes were created in the first place: to protect us, effectively, and, secondly to protect the waterways, the health of our rivers and particularly the Murrumbidgee and then as it flows into the Murray River. I would also note, in addition to some of the climate issues and external factors that Minister Orr has outlined, that there are events such as accidental spills or sewer breaks that are also beyond the control of government, in addition to other things that we cannot control like the weather, sunlight, rainfall and heat, to an extent—though I appreciate we can control it indirectly—and that all of these factors lead to poor water quality in these water bodies.

I would also note that, while there has been quite a bit of emphasis on Lake Burley Griffin and the National Capital Authority, we also work with the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council and the New South Wales government in terms of the management of the catchment of Lake Burley Griffin, and then there is Icon Water managing the sewer services throughout all of our catchments—and that, of course, can impact water quality as well.

I think it bears repeating that the reason that we do testing in the first place is because

we cannot guarantee that our lakes and waterways are safe. That is what we do to be able to provide as much assurance to the community as possible. But it simply is not possible for us to rule out all risk. Because of the management objectives of our lakes, there is always going to be risk and that serves their purposes.

I did flag that we are looking to see what we can do to improve the regularity of testing. There is no issue with it currently, I might add. I think it is very consistent with the national guidelines. But I can advise that the EPA has begun trialling a blue-green algae testing probe to support some more efficient field assessments. It has provided some useful indicative readings so far, but we are not yet fully relying on its probe data for public reporting, just because it has not yet been correlated with laboratory results under varying weather conditions and in the many different variety of algal bloom dynamics. We have some work underway to evaluate and validate its performance so that it can be integrated into future real-time reporting systems.

Again, I very much appreciate the intent of (3)(d), but it simply is not possible for this summer period. I very much appreciate the intent of this. There is a lot of consensus in the chamber today, at least around intent. It has been a good opportunity to talk through some of those objectives and why things are the way they are and to remind Canberrans about what they can do to keep their pets and their families safe—and, if they do not have a family, anybody. It is been well worthwhile to talk about it at length. I apologise that this speech has been just as long as my one that was part filibuster.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.47): In closing, I appreciate everybody's talk about lakes and puppies today—and it will continue with the next motion, I am sure. I want to briefly touch on Mr Braddock's amendment. Yerrabi Pond is very near and dear to my heart, but the sole purpose of this motion was about making sure we have a good summer ahead of us. I will certainly not be swimming in Yerrabi Pond as it is a settlement pond, but I do understand the dog beach—and, sure, let's wrap it in and make sure we take note of that as well.

Mr Emerson: yes, Swimmable Cities. We will let that one head on through as well. I also appreciate the conversation with Ms Orr this afternoon about the amendments they are moving. We have no issues. Of course, I would like it to be safe this summer. Obviously, we do not have the money to put in place whatever we need to to make that work within the next eight weeks, and so we have to be practical about this. One of the reasons, as I mentioned earlier, that we will not be supporting Miss Nuttall's amendment is that I do not want just more of the same. I do not want to throw money at something if it is not working as effectively and as efficiently as it can. I think it is important that, if we are spending money, it works and it is not a waste.

I look forward to hearing from Ms Orr in the near future about possibly other options or ways to move forward to ensure that we have cleaner lakes in the future for all Canberrans who wish to use our lakes and waterways.

Ms Orr's amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Woden and Molonglo Valley—dog parks

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.49): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Molonglo and Woden are the only districts without dog parks;
- (b) both districts are experiencing significant population growth: Molonglo is the fastest growing green field district, and Woden has significant growth in residential towers in the town centre;
- (c) in the ACT, dogs must be kept on-leash on public land unless otherwise indicated, however in Molonglo and the Woden Town Centre there are very few designated off-leash areas leading to limited options available;
- (d) the benefits of an off-leash dog park for dogs include exercise and physical health, socialisation, mental stimulation and behaviour improvement; and
- (e) the benefits of an off-leash dog park for people include the opportunities to meet locals and strengthen social bonds, convenience, training opportunities and stress relief;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) there are a number of Government-managed dog parks across Canberra, however there does not appear to be any overarching planning document that sets out the Government's policy; and
- (b) the only exception is the ACT City Centre Urban Design Guide which includes that parks and plaza areas can provide active social spaces to meet, linger and engage with others. These should be designed to include a diverse range of offerings that reflect the community's priorities, needs and expectations and include dog parks; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) undertake an options report for dog park sites in Molonglo and the Woden Town Centre; and
- (b) report back to the Assembly by June 2026.

I rise today to speak on behalf of the many residents in Molonglo and Woden who would love a dedicated, fenced off-leash dog park in their community. Dog parks are more than just recreational spaces; they are vital infrastructure that support the wellbeing of both pets and their owners. Dog parks are extremely popular, particularly for dog owners who reside in apartments. With the high concentration of apartments in both Molonglo and the Woden areas, there is an increased community need for facilities that provide a safe location for pet exercise.

Currently, Molonglo and Woden are the only districts in Canberra without a dog park. This is a significant gap in our city's infrastructure, especially considering the rapid population growth in both areas. Molonglo is Canberra's fastest-growing greenfield district and Woden is experiencing a surge in residential development, with numerous towers rising in the town centre. We do not have a dog park anywhere near all of those towers and there are dogs in those towers. In the ACT, dogs must be kept on leash on public land unless otherwise indicated. However, in Molonglo and the Woden town

centre, there are very few designated off-leash areas, leaving residents with limited options for exercising their pets safely and legally.

The benefits of an off-leash dog park are well documented. For dogs, these parks provide essential opportunities for exercise, socialisation, mental stimulation and behavioural improvement. For people, they offer a chance to meet neighbours, strengthen social bonds, train their pets and enjoy stress-free relief in a convenient and welcoming environment. It is time we addressed these gaps. A dedicated dog park in Molonglo and one in Woden would not only meet a growing community need but also enhance the quality of life for thousands of residents and their beloved pets.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.52): “The city council would like to remind everyone that dogs are not allowed in the dog park. People are not allowed in the dog park.” These immortal lines from the first episode of the podcast, “Welcome to Night Vale”, summarise how the bureaucracy surrounding specifically dog parks can often feel alienating and unintuitive. I know my office’s experiences in trying to get a clear answer on some aspects of the Lanyon dog park and the broader Lanyon dog exercise area have certainly upheld this community frustration, and I suspect our experiences were not isolated.

That aside, the ACT Greens will be supporting Ms Carrick’s motion. Although there are certainly some off-leash spaces in Woden and Molonglo, we acknowledge that a dog park is an important piece of infrastructure that the community needs. As Woden, in particular, densifies, we need to ensure that the government does due diligence in ensuring that there are public spaces set aside as safe from developers. Housing is always essential, of course, and when people live in houses, people also need third spaces in which to spend their time and connect with their community. Spaces to spend time with pets do exactly that.

From a southside perspective, this is perhaps exemplified by some of the difficult back and forth that the community had to deal with with the new Lanyon dog park and nearby dog exercise area. We certainly received some feedback that the saga was marked with poor communication, consultation and planning and that a lot of the community was deeply frustrated as a result. We do have the phrase “No dogs in the dog park” written on the whiteboard in my office even now.

But to get a bit broader for a second, we are living in a world where the housing crisis means we do not all have access to a yard. I know plenty of people are more than happy with that, considering the upkeep that most yards require, but there are things that we do need to adjust for as a result. More and more people, especially young people, are living in apartments. The ACT Greens believe that, no matter where you live, all Canberrans should be allowed to have pets. This is one of the reasons we pushed so hard to ensure that renters could have pets instead of landlords being able to put down unreasonable restrictions with no justification.

However, an important part about living in an apartment or smaller townhouse with a dog is that we absolutely need access to facilities to give them the time outside that they deserve. Canberra is a beautiful open city with plenty of places to go, but a dedicated dog park provides something special—a place for dogs to run around without concerns of them being a nuisance to other people or our beautiful wildlife. Everyone deserves

the opportunity to access the facilities needed for their pets. As a proud custodian of a small flock of assorted birds and incredibly amoral chickens, I know that pets are a part of the family. We need to ensure we back long-term planning for the facilities these animals and their owners need all across Canberra. We will be supporting this motion and hope the government is committed to proactive communication and engagement with the communities that these facilities will serve.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.55): I would like to thank Ms Carrick for moving another good motion. I tried to distract her last week so that maybe I could bring forward something in the future on this subject, because people in Woden especially have been advocating for a dog park for quite a while.

Every time we raise the question about dog parks, though, we are largely told, “Don’t worry, there are other off-leash areas that people can take their dogs to. Nothing to worry about here.” It is not the same as knowing that your dog is secure, in one of these dedicated off-leash dog parks. It is not the same for the people who are coming to the area, either. Those people who are wandering with their kids down to Mawson playing fields, for example, are not necessarily aware that it is allowed to be an off-leash dog area, and people can be taken a little bit off-guard.

It stands out to me that the people who have been advocating for this are kids and families. They are not looking to agitate around specific issues; they are not bringing the issue up because they want to attack the government. They are bringing it up because it would make a genuine difference in their lives. It would make a genuine difference in their ability to get out, with the family and the dog, into the sunshine, when the sun is shining, and enjoy the healthy Canberra air. It makes a difference to people’s lives when you can get out there with your family, exercise, and enjoy the company of your pet.

The value of pets cannot be understated. There is longstanding, strong evidence about the mental health impacts of having pets and being able to spend time with them. There is longstanding evidence that it helps to address problems with loneliness. It is invaluable for people who are homeless. The benefit that people experiencing homelessness see when they have a pet to connect with has been demonstrated over a very long time.

The Canberra Liberals, clearly, will support this motion. I thank Ms Carrick for bringing it today. I also want to thank Miss Nuttall for raising the question around people living in apartments, because Woden town centre has experienced very rapid change, and more people than ever are living in apartments. Those people do not have direct access to a place where it is easy to exercise their pet. Again, it would make a real difference if they did.

Our one concern, when we first looked at this motion, was that perhaps there would be a direct budgetary impact. I am pleased to note that Ms Carrick, very sensibly, has brought a request for the government to look at the options. When the government get around to delivering dog parks in Woden and the Molonglo Valley, they will have to allocate funding, and they will have to find offsets to be able to do so. That has to be done in a reasonable way, through the budget process, and I think this motion goes to that.

In closing, I would like, again, to thank Ms Carrick and everyone else who has contributed today. I think it is a good motion. The Canberra Liberals will support puppies.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.59): I echo Mr Cocks in thanking Ms Carrick for an epically sensible motion. Thank you; more of these. These are good; love these.

This is a great motion. I, like many Canberrans, love dogs. I love puppies. I even love a dog I have that hates me. But one loves me, so it balances out. They are part of our family, and that is probably pretty consistent with the family structure. They bring people together, and they contribute to the social fabric of our suburbs.

In talking about apartments, I live in an apartment. In fact, I have lived in an apartment for almost the entire time that I have lived in Canberra, in multiple different complexes. In the place where I have lived now, for almost 13 years, I have always had a dog there—always—and that has been the case, no matter what my human relationships have been like, whether I have lived alone or with someone else. I have always had a dog, and they really do make life better. They really are part of our family.

Anyone who has visited one of Canberra's dog parks also knows how much joy and connection they create for both people and their four-legged companions. Many of us have developed friendships over the years at our different dog parks, and they are hugely beneficial. Those benefits were outlined by Ms Carrick: dog parks improve behaviour, they reduce nuisance issues, and they strengthen community connection, when planned appropriately. It is also true that responsible pet ownership depends on having the right spaces that are safe, accessible and well-maintained areas, where dogs can run freely and where people can socialise.

Let me be clear: we certainly agree with the intent of the motion, and we have no issue with what Ms Carrick has called on us to do. I appreciate that this is not about unfenced off-leash dog areas; however, from looking at the map, certainly, in the Woden area, I would say that, to me, it looks pretty consistent with the numbers of off-leash dog areas in other parts of Canberra. But the really big area where dog exercise areas in general are lacking is, of course, in the Molonglo area.

This is, in part, to be expected, because of the conservation values that surround the river corridor there, and the number of very sensitive habitats that we need to prioritise. That said, it does not mean that people do not have dogs there, so I can certainly understand where Ms Carrick is coming from.

Fenced dog parks are not able to appear overnight; we do require significant planning consultation and investment. I know they do not seem like the most complicated piece of infrastructure that we have; but, as our experiences in Lanyon demonstrated, there is a lot that government needs to take into account when it is planning for these spaces, and in how it communicates. I do regret the consternation brought to the community regarding the Lanyon dog park—something that I think otherwise has been really celebrated—and the conversation around whether or not the off-leash area would

continue outside the fenced area. I am glad that I was able to clarify that and provide certainty as soon as I could.

For members' benefit, when considering sites for a dog park, we need to examine separation from residential areas, to minimise the negative impacts of noise and from the increased traffic from park users. We also consider adequate vehicle and transport access and a range of other factors in selecting a particular location, especially when it is intended to serve a large catchment area.

Ultimately, while they might not be complicated on the outside, they are purpose-built facilities. They do have fencing, shade, seating, water access, waste infrastructure and, in some cases, irrigation and drainage systems, and lighting, in some cases, all of which come at a cost. Our job is to make sure we deliver them in a way that is sustainable and equitable across the city.

Yes, there are more than a dozen dog parks already delivered across Canberra, from Yarralumla to Casey, Forde and O'Connor, and, of course, those recent investments in Franklin and Lanyon, all of which have become important parts of their local communities. While Molonglo and Woden currently lack a dedicated dog park that is fenced, there are several nearby options. The Duffy dog park on Warragamba Avenue, opened in 2022, provides a fully fenced facility with separate areas for large and small dogs, shaded seating and water access. I can tell members that, in the Italian greyhound community, Duffy dog park is where it is at. That is where most Iggy play dates are, and that is a sign of a very good facility, and a place that people trust. Again, it goes to the heart of Ms Carrick's motion.

The Yarralumla dog park, of course, remains a very popular space, and it is easily accessible from Woden and the Molonglo Valley, but not necessarily if you are in an apartment and without a vehicle.

In addition, we do have off-leash dog areas for exercise in the suburbs in the open grassed areas across Ms Carrick's electorate. I would note that the Holder wetlands and the Mawson Neighbourhood Oval are well-used local spaces where dogs can run and socialise when those ovals are not in use for sport. So residents do have multiple nearby options while planning for new facilities in Molonglo and Woden progresses.

Our election commitment was to investigate options for a new dog park in the inner south, and that is certainly the priority for us in the first instance. With that work already underway, the ask from Ms Carrick today and the timeline that she has presented, again, are eminently sensible and achievable.

While we did not collaborate on this motion at all, I am grateful for the considered approach that Ms Carrick has taken to this, how it reflects our own methodical planning and that it is realistic. This is not something that we can commit to overnight, but doing the investigation and being transparent about what the options are, of course, is something that we can commit to. I thank Ms Carrick again, and indeed all those who have contributed to this debate today.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.07), in reply: I thank everybody for their participation in the debate. I do not really have anything further to add. Thank you,

Minister Cheyne, for being cooperative about looking at the options for dog parks in Molonglo and Woden. I am sure people who are living in all those apartments will be really grateful when, hopefully, there is one within walking distance—as you say, for people that do not have cars.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

Motion (by **Mr Deputy Speaker**) agreed to:

That the papers presented under standing order 211 during the presentation of papers in the routine of business today be noted.

Lakes and waterways—order to table documents

Debate resumed.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.09), by leave: I move the following amendments together:

1. In paragraph (1), after “ACT’s water resources (including lakes, rivers and other waterways)” insert: “from 1 July 2015 to 28 October 2025”.
2. In paragraph (2), after “or other documents held by the ACTPS or provided to the Executive” insert: “from 1 July 2015 to 28 October 2025”.
3. In paragraph (4), after “to the Water Abstraction Charge” insert: “from 1 July 2015 to 28 October 2025”.
4. After paragraph (5), add:
“(6) pursuant to standing order 213A(f), that all documents subject to this order be produced within 30 business days.”.

I rise to move this motion relating to the government’s Water Abstraction Charge. In doing so, I note this charge is not exactly a hot button issue for constituents. It is not something which people are stopping me in the street to discuss, but do you know what does move a lot of people in our community? The cost-of-living crisis. Not only the issue, but the government’s failure over a number of years to actually do anything to support the community while they are struggling to get by and that includes the cost of water.

Looking at the budget papers, it certainly seems like there might be a water issue. The National Water Initiative, which the ACT government has signed up to, requires governments to price water in an efficient and cost-effective manner, but it is not clear that is actually happening. The Water Abstraction Charge, the WAC, is bringing in around \$42 million this year, but the budget papers show the functional expenditure on water infrastructure and water quality projects is only around \$20 million this year. So on the face of it, the possibility is there that there is a big difference here on what the government is charging Canberrans, and if they are over-charging Canberrans by more

than \$20 million a year, the government could possibly reduce the average household water bill by around 10 per cent a year.

Now, I acknowledge that this is not enough to make a difference for many, many households but I have been through a number of tough times in my life and I know that every little bit does count when it comes to making ends meet. So people should be able to expect that their government is doing everything that they can to keep household costs as low as possible rather than stinging them with additional costs on essential items that we all need—water.

Now, the opposition is not making an accusation of price gouging. We are simply noting that the possibility exists, and so this motion is simply seeking a range of documents that will help us determine if the government is doing the right thing by the people of Canberra.

Before concluding, I would like to note that the minister's office and Mr Rattenbury's office have both engaged with my office in good faith discussions about this motion. We certainly appreciate that and recognise that the time available for those discussions has been great. It has been a bit tight for all of us today. We have worked with the minister's office to develop some sensible adjustments, and while I am moving my amendments, I do note they are genuinely bipartisan. Thank you to the minister and her team. I commend the motion and the amendments to the chamber.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.12): I am pleased today to be speaking in support of Ms Castley's motion. The Greens have been concerned about transparency around the Water Abstraction Charge, also known as the WAC, for some time now.

The Greens believe the money generated from selling our water should be invested back into our waterways. Water is one of our most precious natural resources and it should not be taken for granted. The WAC helps price the true cost of water and it only makes sense that the revenue generated from this charge should be used to ensure our waterways stay healthy for now and for future generations. Not only is this important as our population grows and the pressure on our natural resources increase, but our waterways will also need to deal with the compounding impacts of climate change well into the future.

In preparation for today's debate, I went looking for the latest numbers on the Water Abstraction Charge. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, ACCC, releases a yearly water monitoring report. This report tells us how much each jurisdiction collects and spends on water planning and management. In the 2022-2023 financial year, the ACT collected about \$32.7 million of which I understand about 98.5 percent was from the Water Abstraction Charge, but we only spent \$13.4 million on water planning and management in that same year. That means that half the money we generate from selling water—one of our most precious natural resources—less than half of that goes back into making sure we are maintaining our waterways.

Now, 2023-2024 was a bit more promising. By mid-2024 we had collected \$36.4 million; however, our expenditure on water planning and management rose by 66 per cent. This was thanks to a healthy investment in Stage 2 of the Healthy Waterways project by my colleague, and the former Minister for Water, Mr Rattenbury.

By my calculations, that would bring us to about \$22.2 million spent in the same year on water planning and management, which still leaves us with \$14.2 million unaccounted for.

Do you know what that is? That is WAC. I promise this whole setup was not just about the fun, but it seems absolutely wack to me that we have this entire charge dedicated to raising revenue from the sale of our water and it is not all being spent on keeping our water clean, healthy and making sure we have enough for the future. I will be interested to see our water planning and management expenditure for this financial year because through all of our questioning in estimates, there is one outstanding item for Healthy Waterways Stage 2. There is no funding attached to that aspect of the Healthy Waterways program in this year's budget. So where is the rest of the WAC money going?

The Greens have been concerned about transparency around the WAC for a while. It was in our election platform last year because, frankly, it feels like a no-brainer to dedicate the money we get from selling our water to water. Transparency is important for the public as well, as they are ultimately the ones paying the charge and the ones who are invested in making sure we have clean and healthy water into the future. So we want to know what is going on with the WAC and this order for the production of documents will shed a bit of light on the subject.

Ms Castley's order asks for an explanation of how the government's policy of increasing the Water Abstraction Charge by three per cent each year is consistent with the principles of cost-reflective, transparent and efficient water pricing. We are also really eager to understand the value that the government assigns to the WAC, and I also think that we should acknowledge that it cannot just be about the sheer metric price of water. It has to be about recognising that this is a precious natural resource that we actually cannot functionally live without.

If we really want the WAC to do what it says on the bottle, it is about reinvesting the money we collect in the health of our waterways. It is about giving us the money we need to complete large-scale water projects that we have just been talking about earlier today because, frankly, if we do not, they will not be able to keep up with increased human activity, let alone the compounding impacts of climate change, and our systems will be thrown out of whack. So we support this order and will eagerly be awaiting the documents in the hope of understanding how to make sure the money raised through the Water Extraction Charge is, in fact, spent on water.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (4.17): Just a very brief one, to reiterate and acknowledge Ms Castley's comments of working together on this and to thank her for the amendments of putting in a timeframe and also allowing a little bit more time for the poor public servant who has to go back through actual physical files to locate some of these. Unfortunately, we did not always work in a digital world with a convenient search engine on our laptop. So again, thank you to Ms Castley for the amendments and agreeing to those and I will leave my comments there.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.17): Thank you everybody. I think we got to a great outcome and I appreciate everybody's input today.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Executive business—precedence

Ordered that executive business be called on.

Assisted Reproductive Technology Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

Ms Stephen-Smith, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.19): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise to present the Assisted Reproductive Technology Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2) which introduces important amendments to the Assisted Reproductive Technology Act 2024. These proposed changes reflect the ACT government's commitment to upholding human rights, grounding legislation in evidence and community consultation and promoting the wellbeing of Canberrans, including those who rely on assisted reproductive technology, or ART, to start or grow their families and donor-conceived people.

The ACT government recognises that ART is a complex and deeply personal policy area. Since the act's commencement, we have actively monitored its impact on the sector, consumers and the broader community. In March, following feedback from ART providers and clients, we passed amendments to expand transitional arrangements, allowing more individuals and couples with pre-allocated gametes to proceed with treatment, even where those gametes did not meet the ART Act's requirements. These changes were expedited to minimise delays and ensure families could continue their ART journeys without unnecessary disruption.

Beyond transitional concerns, stakeholders have raised issues about provisions in the legislation relating to the release of identifying donor information to recipient parents and donor-conceived individuals and the impact on gamete supply in the ACT. After engaging with a range of stakeholders the ACT government has concluded that amendments are necessary to improve access to donor gametes. The current arrangements for access to identifying information were introduced to improve openness and improve outcomes for donor-conceived people. However, some elements of the changes have had the unintended consequence of limiting gamete availability for those now seeking ART in the ACT.

ART providers have reported that very few existing donor gametes meet the donor consent requirements under the current law. ART services in the ACT rely heavily on international gamete banks, which are largely unable or unwilling to supply gametes that meet current legislative requirements. Where they can supply gametes, providers report the cost is significantly higher, often prohibitively so.

The amendments in this bill aim to balance transparency for donor-conceived individuals with access to fertility services for families and individuals. There are two main changes proposed by this bill. The most important regards access to information by parents of donor-conceived children. Section 67 of the ART Act currently allows parents to access all mandatory donor information, including identifying information, shortly after the birth of a child. This was intended to support openness and help families integrate the donor's identity into the child's life story early on.

However, it has become clear that this provision may not adequately balance donor expectations around privacy, boundaries and their non-parental role. Donors are concerned that early disclosure may lead to unwanted contact and expectations of involvement far beyond what they anticipated or consented to. International gamete banks use standard consent processes that do not accommodate the ACT's parental access provisions and they are unable or unwilling to seek such consents to supply gametes to the ACT.

To address these concerns, clause 9 of the bill proposes amending section 67 to restrict parental access to only non-identifying mandatory donor information. Identifying details would only be available where the donor has explicitly consented to early disclosure. Without donor consent, parents will still be able to access important non-identifying information such as the donor's country of birth, ethnicity and medical history.

This change aims to rebuild confidence and respect donor privacy, while continuing to support families in raising donor-conceived children with an understanding of their cultural and biological heritage. Additionally, this amendment supports placing the decision to access identifying donor information with the person most directly affected, the donor-conceived individual, rather than with their parents. Some young donor-conceived individuals may not wish to know their donor's identity, and while parents play a vital supportive role, it is the individual who should ultimately decide when and how to explore their genetic origins. This aligns with the original intent of the legislation: to uphold donor-conceived people's rights, support their wellbeing and ensure any contact or disclosure occurs respectfully and thoughtfully.

These amendments relate to information mandatorily provided to the donor register as required by the ART Act and do not affect the existing option for parents to seek voluntarily provided information from the donor register. Individuals, both donor-conceived people and donors, may choose to share their details with the register voluntarily in the hope of being matched with a donor, donor-conceived child or sibling. Parents may access this voluntary information subject to any restrictions set by the individual. As participation is entirely voluntary, this pathway does not impact the overall supply of donated gametes and remains unchanged.

The second main change relates to the age of access to the donor register for donor-conceived young people. Under section 66 of the ART Act, individuals may access mandatory identifying donor information from age 16, or earlier if assessed by a qualified counsellor as capable of understanding and complying with donor contact preferences and understanding that the donor has no parental responsibilities.

During consultation, ART providers and other stakeholders raised concerns about the provisions governing when donor-conceived individuals can access identifying donor information and the impact on the availability of donated gametes. The ACT government has a responsibility to uphold the core intentions of the ART Act, including promoting openness, supporting donor-conceived individuals and protecting their right to know their genetic heritage, while ensuring families can continue to access donated gametes without unnecessary barriers.

In considering changes to the age of access provisions, the ACT government has carefully weighed the human rights implications under the Human Rights Act. The right of donor-conceived individuals to know their genetic heritage remains a fundamental consideration. To better align with international donor consent practices, clause 8 of the bill proposes amendments to section 66 of the ART Act and creation of a new section 66A to establish two pathways for donor-conceived individuals seeking access to donor information.

The first pathway raises the standard age of access to mandatory donor information to 18, while retaining earlier access where a qualified counsellor assesses the individual as capable of understanding the obligations and effect of accessing identifying information about their donor.

The second pathway, under a new section 66A, allows access to non-identifying mandatory information for individuals aged 16 or 17 who have either not undergone an assessment by a counsellor or who have been assessed as insufficiently able to understand their obligations to enable access to identifying information. These counsellor assessments will be conducted by qualified professionals, such as psychologists or social workers, who will consider the individual's capacity to understand the implications of accessing identifying information.

This approach strikes a considered balance between current industry practice, gamete bank policies and the need to ease pressures on gamete supply and respecting the rights of younger people to be considered for earlier access based on developmental readiness. Importantly, this approach aligns with the National Health and Medical Research Council's *Ethical guidelines on the use of assisted reproductive technology in clinical practice and research*, which have been in place since 2004.

This bill also includes a small number of technical amendments to improve the clarity and readability of the ART Act. Clauses 4 to 6 update section 50 to introduce a new definition, "assessed by a counsellor," revise references to "commencement day" for part 5 of the ART Act and "mature donor-conceived person" to improve readability. Clause 7 makes a technical adjustment to how the definition of "mature donor-conceived person" is constructed, supporting the bill's key amendments. Section 51 of the ART Act currently outlines two ways a person may be considered a mature donor-conceived person for the purposes of part 5 of the ART Act.

To be a mature donor-conceived person, they must either be aged 16 or older (under limb A), or someone assessed by a qualified counsellor as capable of understanding and complying with the donor's contact preferences and non-parental role (under limb B). Clause 7 does not alter these limbs but introduces a new defined term, "assessed by a counsellor", to describe the test under limb B.

This amendment accomplishes two things. First, it facilitates the key amendment of this bill to increase the general age of access for donor-conceived people from 16 to 18, while still allowing access for those under 18 if assessed by a counsellor. Second, it enables the existing definition of "mature donor-conceived person" to be maintained so that other parts of the ART Act are not disrupted by the age of access amendments. For instance, a donor-conceived person must be a mature donor-conceived person to voluntarily provide their own information or contact preferences into the donor register.

Clause 10 amends section 67(2)(b) to introduce a new option allowing disclosure of donor information to parents of a donor-conceived person where the donor has given written consent, regardless of when the gamete was donated. This complements existing provisions and ensures donor consent is properly recognised. Clauses 11 to 15 update headings and definitions to more clearly reflect the scope of part 6 of the ART Act and improve readability.

Clauses 16 and 17 revise the definitions of "transitional period" that applies to part 12 of the ART Act and "commencement day" for section 132E, using specific calendar dates to improve clarity now that the legislation has commenced. Clauses 18 to 23 update key definitions in the dictionary to align with the bill's other amendments. Further detail is available in the explanatory statement accompanying the bill.

These amendments aim to improve clarity and confidence in ART services in the ACT. They uphold the rights of donor-conceived individuals and ensure families can continue to access regulated, compassionate fertility care. In developing these reforms the ACT government consulted with ART providers and listened closely to the perspectives of donor-conceived individuals, parents, legal and human rights experts and advocacy organisations such as Rainbow Families and Australian Solo Mothers by Choice. Their insights have shaped key elements of the bill and will continue to guide its implementation to ensure the system remains responsive, respectful and inclusive.

The ACT government has carefully considered the concerns raised and sought to balance competing priorities with integrity and compassion. The lived experiences of those affected have directly shaped these amendments. I want to thank those who have shared their personal experiences with me. Many stakeholders, particularly solo parents and LGBTIQ families, have shared how the uncertainty around gamete supply has impacted their ability to form families. These insights have been invaluable in guiding both the design and intent of these reforms.

ART is a complex area requiring balance and compromise. While these amendments address urgent local concerns, the ACT government remains committed to working with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions to support national consideration of ART and donor conception rules and regulations. A harmonised approach would offer greater certainty, consistency and equity for all Australians seeking ART.

Earlier this year, following reports of serious errors in the sector, the federal Minister for Health and Ageing commissioned a Rapid Review of the ART industry. The findings, available on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website, acknowledged that the current industry-led accreditation model is inadequate. In September, federal, state and territory health ministers agreed that the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care should assume responsibility for independent accreditation of ART services, based on updated national standards. This will include performance metrics, workforce guidance and clearer complaints pathways. The new framework is expected to be in place by January 2027. Further recommendations were also endorsed, including national engagement with ART consumers, donors and donor-conceived individuals to inform future reforms.

The ACT government remains committed to actively participating in this national conversation and ensuring our legislation reflects best practice. It is increasingly clear that ART must evolve with changing social norms and expectations. Again, I sincerely thank all stakeholders who have contributed to this work. Your insights, advocacy and expertise have been invaluable in shaping these reforms. Your voices have helped to ensure that this legislation reflects the lived realities of donor-conceived individuals, families and the professionals who support them. This bill is grounded in human rights, informed by community experience and driven by a commitment to fairness and dignity. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3)

Debate resumed from 2 September 2025, on motion by **Mr Pettersson**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.34): The Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3) makes a range of changes across our workplace laws, from workers compensation to long service leave to work health and safety, and, on balance, the Canberra Liberals will not oppose it. There are parts of this legislation that are entirely sensible. There is the early payment scheme for families who lose a loved one to a workplace death. Frankly, that should have happened sooner. It is a practical, compassionate measure that gives families some financial relief during an unimaginably difficult time, and we support that. Also, the bill tightens definitions and closes gaps around incident notification and preservation of evidence. Those changes aim to reduce ambiguity and bring us in line with the national model, which again is a step in the right direction.

But this bill is not without its problems. The Canberra Liberals have some real concerns about the scope and scale of new enforcement powers being introduced, particularly around long service leave and work health and safety. And let's be clear: compulsion powers are being broadened; the privilege against self-incrimination is being abrogated; strict liability offences are being introduced; and there is now judicial discretion to prosecute outside the normal two-year time limit. These are not minor tweaks; these are significant expansions of compliance risk and investigatory reach, and they raise

legitimate questions about proportionality and privacy, especially when powers extend to digital records and records stored offsite.

We are also concerned about consistency. The government says these changes will bring work health and safety and long service leave enforcement into alignment, and to a degree that is true, but it is a two-edged sword. Standardisation is good, but it has to be accompanied with proper safeguards, not just a one-size-fits-all increase in investigatory muscle. We support safe workplaces. We support timely enforcement. But we also believe in fairness, due process and protecting the rights of individuals and businesses, along with those of workers, just like we do for customers and everyone else in our community. That is why I am placing these concerns on the record today.

The Canberra Liberals will not oppose the bill. Rather, we will take a wait-and-see approach and see how the government's reforms operate in practice, in the real world. We support the early payments. We understand the intent to clarify and consolidate. But we remain wary of the enforcement expansions and call on the government to engage with industry and ensure that implementation is both fair and measured.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.37): The Greens will support the intent of the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3) and the improvement it makes to our industrial relations laws. I commend the scrutiny committee for their diligent work and the minister for the briefing provided on this omnibus bill. We must always remember that workplace laws are, in many respects, written in blood. They exist because of the devastating lessons learned from past tragedies and underscore the critical importance of enforcement and compliance. We need to remain vigilant to ensure that history does not repeat itself and that we learn from the sins of the past.

In this regard, the Greens support the forward-looking disposition of this bill and its effort to proactively draw on precedents from other jurisdictions, such as the recent stone and marble case in New South Wales. By the same token, the bill drops a provision which originated, as I understand it, in New South Wales' legislation that discriminates against people with HIV. This is also commendable.

While this omnibus bill may have benefited from being dismantled into more refined individual bills, allowing for more detailed consideration of each reform, it nevertheless contains many measures worthy of support. Ultimately, I stand in support of this bill and its aim to enshrine sufficient safeguards for industrial relations.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.38): I too rise to speak in support of the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3). This bill includes several significant reforms to the territory's workplace legislation to ensure that Canberrans can remain safe at their workplaces, receive their entitlements, and are supported if they are injured at work. Everyone should be safe at work, and, when they are not, they and their family should be properly looked after. These reforms would ensure workplace laws remain contemporary and fit for purpose.

I particularly support several key amendments. The bill amends provisions under part 3 of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to strengthen the framework for incident notification. In 2022, the ACT government led the way by progressing early amendments to recognise sexual assaults as a notifiable incident. This was a significant

step forward in acknowledging the responsibility of employers to provide safe workplaces for all workers. Amendments in this bill would build on that foundation and ensure alignment with national policy recommendations.

Other amendments clarify the meaning of dangerous substances and serious injury or illness under the WHS Act, and require employers to notify other employers and persons with management in control of a workplace of notifiable incidents that occur. Through these changes, we can assist workplaces to respond to workplace incidents in a coordinated, considered and timely manner. The bill also amends section 232 of the WHS Act to ensure clarity and fairness in prosecuting serious breaches. It clarifies prosecution time limits to prevent cases from being dismissed due to narrow legal interpretations.

This bill recognises the profound impact a worker's death can have on their loved ones, including prolonged grief, emotional distress, and increased financial strain and hardship. Financial burden from the death of a worker more often than not creates long-term economic challenges for family members. Immediate financial support is an important step, not only in supporting families at a time of crisis, but also as an early measure of intervention for reducing risks of long-term financial hardship.

The bill will provide families and dependents with the ability to seek a lump-sum payment immediately after the death of a loved one. While nothing can make up for losing a loved one at work—and I cannot imagine what it is like to go through—this will help provide immediate financial relief at a really difficult time for families. Importantly, it is separate from other death benefit entitlements and will not prevent families from claiming and receiving death benefit entitlements, even if they receive the lump-sum payment.

Modernising statutes involves a contemporary approach which includes accessibility to the law. The bill includes amendments to section 60 of the Workers Compensation Act to remove the ambiguity and exclusionary provision relating to HIV/AIDS permanent impairment entitlements. Without the amendment, section 60 creates inconsistency in the way injury types are regarded and perpetuates unnecessary stigma against workers with HIV/AIDS. This is a historic provision that was inherited and needs to be modernised. The reform would shift the provision from being exclusionary to focusing on being a protective law by removing discriminatory principles. The amendment promotes accessibility and equality before the law. It also makes the legislation contemporary and aligns the ACT with other jurisdictions that have made similar reforms.

The bill also makes a technical amendment to correct an error on the ability of the regulator to commence prosecution from one to five years. This is specific to an offence for not holding a compulsory workers compensation policy, as mandated by the Workers Compensation Act. I am sure all of us in the chamber know how I feel about workers compensation, so I welcome this. The extension of the prosecution time limit is essential to supporting the regulator to effectively utilise the regulatory tools available to it, including, when necessary, prosecution. This ensures that cases are fully and comprehensively investigated and that material facts are obtained, and allows those being investigated due process.

I acknowledge and thank those who have contributed to this bill. There is Kay Catanzariti's tireless advocacy for those who have lost a loved one in a workplace. I admire her dedication to Ben's memory and all the work she puts in. And there are the organisations that provided technical input, commentary and views to ensure the operation of each amendment is a step towards progress and improving workplace conditions and entitlements to workers. I fully support this bill.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (4.43), in reply: I present the following paper:

Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3)—Revised explanatory statement.

I rise to speak to the Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3). The ACT government stands firm in its commitment to ensure every worker enjoys fair conditions, a safe workplace and access to dignity, care and support in the event of a workplace injury. This bill delivers several reforms in line with this commitment.

Amendments to the Workers Compensation Act 1951 strengthen the operation of the ACT's private sector workers compensation scheme. Importantly, this bill enables insurers and self-insurers to provide immediate compensation payments to the family of any worker who dies from a work injury. Compensation includes \$10,000 to a domestic partner, including a spouse, and \$5,000 for other family members who lived with the worker for some time within the six months prior to the death, including children, stepchildren, parents and step-parents.

While thankfully rare in the ACT, we know that workplace deaths significantly impact the lives of loved ones left behind. The last thing a grieving family should be concerned about is their finances. By requiring insurers to provide immediate payment, we can ensure that families and dependents are supported. These important reforms acknowledge that other death benefit payments can often arrive too late to provide immediate financial relief to grieving families. Importantly, these early compensation payments are made without prejudice and are required to be paid by the insurer within seven days of an application. Payments under this clause do not prevent persons from claiming other kinds of compensation payment under the act.

The changes in this bill are in large part thanks to the advocacy efforts of those who have experienced a family member's death from an incident at work, in particular Ms Kay Catanzariti, who was in this place when these amendments were introduced. They are positive changes that will have minimal impact on scheme costs, if any, but will have a profound impact on the lives of loved ones in the tragic event of a workplace death.

Our further amendment removes provisions that restrict a person who contracts HIV/AIDS in the course of their work from receiving a statutory lump sum compensation payment. These provisions are historical from when the Workers Compensation Act became an ordinance of the ACT on self-government. They were not designed by an ACT government, nor have they ever been debated in the Assembly.

The amendments take positive steps towards removing unnecessary stigma against a person who contracts HIV/AIDS in the course of their work.

The bill also makes several minor but important amendments to the act to ensure the workers compensation process is streamlined and efficient. This includes removing the need for a worker to receive medical referee certification to continue receiving weekly compensation payments if they are living outside Australia and have a permanent incapacity. This is not a change to the entitlement itself. An injured worker with a permanent incapacity is able to continue receiving weekly compensation while living overseas. This bill will move the express administrative step of requiring a medical referee to certify permanent incapacity to allow these payments to continue. If there is a dispute about whether an injured worker has a permanent incapacity, there are existing dispute mechanisms that can respond to this.

Turning to matters of work health and safety, this bill amends the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to strengthen the ACT's commitment to safe, respectful and accountable workplaces. These reforms are not just timely but necessary. Part 3 of the act outlines the requirements for notifiable incidents. They ensure that serious workplace incidents are brought to the attention of the regulator quickly, enabling timely investigations and interventions. At the national level, WHS ministers have agreed to strengthen these provisions. This includes clarifying the meaning and operation of current incident notification provisions.

As members will be aware, the ACT has already taken a proactive step. Through amendments to the Work Health and Safety Act in 2022, we became the first jurisdiction to include sexual assault as a notifiable incident. This bill builds on that leadership. It moves to introduce nationally-agreed clarifying and strengthening amendments to what are notifiable incidents.

This bill will also introduce a new obligation on persons conducting a business undertaking and persons with management or control of a workplace to inform one another of notifiable incidents. This is a practical reform. It promotes timely and coordinated responses, enhances information-sharing and improves regulatory visibility. This is particularly important for complex work environments or when multiple persons hold risk management duties. By having this duty as a strict liability offence, we reinforce the seriousness of compliance and the expectation that duty holders act swiftly and responsibly.

Finally, for the ACT's work health and safety framework to be effective, it must be enforceable. That means ensuring that serious breaches of duty can be prosecuted, even when the harm is not immediately apparent. Currently, section 232 provides that prosecutions must commence within two years of the regulator becoming aware of the offence or within one year of a coronial report or inquiry indicating an offence. However, recent events have exposed a potential and concerning gap in this framework.

In New South Wales, the case of *Prime Marble & Granite Pty Ltd v SafeWork NSW* highlighted the risks of a narrow interpretation of limitation periods. Despite a prosecution being launched within two years of the regulator learning of the deaths of two workers from silica exposure, the court ruled that the regulator had become aware of the offence years earlier, when it first issued improvement notices in 2018. As a

result, the case was dismissed on this technicality as out of time.

While the New South Wales case would not be authoritative case law in the ACT, should it be adopted, this would undermine the effectiveness of recent work health and safety reform and disregards the complexity of workplace investigations. It sends a message that technicalities can override the accountability of employers. Importantly, this amendment does not remove limitation periods altogether. It simply provides a safeguard against narrow interpretations that could prevent legitimate cases from proceeding. These changes ensure that duty holders remain accountable whilst reinforcing the seriousness of work health and safety obligations.

The bill also makes amendments to the Long Service Leave Act 1976. The ACT government is committed to ensuring that all workers, regardless of industry or employment type, can access their legal entitlements to leave and other workplace protections. For these entitlements to be meaningful, they must also be enforceable. WorkSafe ACT has experienced enforcement difficulties because of ineffective compliance tools under the act. An example of the inconsistent compliance is the confusion over the meaning of “as soon as possible after cessation”, leading to delays in some employees receiving their long service leave payments. In fact, it is a legal requirement that a worker is paid the entitlements to long service leave when they cease work.

This bill strengthens the compliance and enforcement provisions of the act. It introduces a strict liability offence for failing to pay long service leave entitlements within 90 days of employment ending, including in cases of resignation, termination or death. This is more than a technical fix; it is a statement of principle. It affirms that long service leave is not a discretionary benefit but a legal entitlement. Further amendments are made to the operation of powers to compel the provision of information and documents by the regulator when undertaking enforcement action under the LSL Act.

While strengthening existing investigative powers to ensure authorised officers can compel necessary information to uphold the objects of the LSL Act, amendments are also made to ensure safeguards are in place to capture circumstances where information or documents that are lawfully required cannot be used to incriminate the provider under other legislation. The enhanced investigatory and compliance powers are considered to be proportionate, directly linked to the purposes of the act, and the least restrictive means in establishing modern compliance and enforcement tools within the Long Service Leave Act.

There are also three changes being made to the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act 2008. The bill makes amendments to provide additional flexibility to applicants under the scheme. Currently, the ACT Long Service Leave Authority is required to pay an applicant not later than 21 days after the application is made. The bill makes amendments to grant workers more flexibility when they receive their payment. This can be either no later than 21 days after the application is made or within 14 days before their proposed long service leave is scheduled to be taken.

This bill also includes amendments to ensure the administration of the portable long service scheme for the services sector operates as intended. This relates to the expansion of the service industry and clarifies that the scheme only applies to employers who

operate predominantly within specific covered industries, rather than mixed businesses.

Finally, the bill makes minor amendments to the Public Sector Workers Compensation Fund Act 2018 to clarify that funds held in the fund's bank account can be spent on reasonable costs associated with the exercise of the commissioner's functions, including activities that promote and support injury prevention or activities across the ACT public service that aim to reduce the incidence of workplace injuries.

I close by acknowledging the significant work that has gone into these important reforms. I thank all stakeholders for their valuable input into the bill to ensure that all workers in the ACT are protected, respected and supported. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Statement by member Canberra-Nara sister city relationship

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.55): Over the weekend there was the annual celebration of the Canberra-Nara sister city relationship. The Canberra-Nara relationship has a long and joyous history. What began as a grassroots movement in 1993 evolved to become our first sister city agreement. Community ties between Canberra and Nara started through school exchange programs. These ties swiftly broadened to include a wide variety of exchanges across music, sport, business and the arts.

Next year we will see the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Japan and Australia, known as the Nara Treaty. This is a significant milestone in the relationship between Australia and Japan, and we look forward to those celebrations.

Today, though, we can report that a strong relationship between Canberra and Nara exists, with links between schools, cultural and sporting organisations, Rotary clubs, professional associations, businesses and government.

One of the most prominent aspects of our relationship with Nara is the annual Canberra Nara Candle Festival. I would like to thank the Canberra Nara Sister City Committee and its Chair, Bill Andrews, for all the work the committee has done in growing the event over recent years. I also thank Rotary, who were instrumental in the construction of the Peace Bell, and the Friends of Canberra-Nara Peace Park, who volunteer to aid the upkeep of this fantastic space.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Floriade 2025 Events

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.57): Floriade has celebrated its biggest ever year, reaffirming its position as Australia’s biggest celebration of spring and cementing its status as Canberra’s premier event. The festival attracted over half a million people through the gates, with just under 519,500 attendees over the month. This set a new all-time attendance record and surpassed the previous high in 2019. The October long weekend alone drew 102,571 visitors, which was the highest ever attendance recorded on a single weekend. NightFest continued its popularity, with close to 21,000 tickets sold. We also welcomed back Windows to the World, which saw 16 countries participate and a total attendance of just under 20,000 people.

Importantly, Floriade continues to attract a broad and diverse audience, with 44 per cent of attendees travelling from interstate to attend, providing a significant economic boost to Canberra. Floriade has also been recognised as a top five tourism event nationally, with judges from the recent Australian Event Awards remarking that “it is a nationally significant event, bringing together all generations and helping them fall in love with nature”.

I was also pleased to see the Enlighten Festival recognised in a similar way in the best cultural, arts or music event category, with judges noting that it stands apart and offers a point of difference in what is a crowded illumination festival market.

Looking forward, we can expect some other great events this year that will strike a chord with Canberrans. We can see locals turn upside down and inside out for Ricky Martin on 8 November; then they will be crying over Spilt Milk on 13 December.

Racism

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.59), by leave: I present the following paper:

Racism in ACT from CALD Perspectives: Evidence, Impacts, and Collective Actions—A Report by Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) Inc, dated October 2025.

The message in this report is clear: racism is real, pervasive and urgent. Canberra is often hailed as one of Australia’s most progressive cities, a place of equality, intellect and open-mindedness. But that reputation can too easily mask the lived realities of many people who call this city home.

For far too many culturally and linguistically diverse Canberrans, racism is here. It is

not loud or obvious; it is subtle, systemic and deeply ingrained. Yet right now we have almost no systemically collected information about the lived experiences of racism here in the ACT. Without that evidence, it is too easy for institutions to deny, deflect or downplay what communities already know—that racism in Canberra is systemic, under-recognised and inadequately addressed.

That is why this report, the first of its kind in the ACT, is such a critical step forward. It establishes our city as a national leader in evidence-driven, community-led approaches to combating racism. The findings are sobering. Ninety-two per cent of participants reported that they or their friends had experienced racism here in Canberra. Of those who reported it, 87 per cent were dissatisfied with the outcome. That should alarm every one of us.

This is not just about psychological harm; it is about exclusion from opportunity and participation. It is about CALD women facing layered gender and racial discrimination. It is about students who feel isolated or dismissed in their schools and universities. It is about workers overlooked for promotions, underpaid or locked out of professions entirely.

The report sets out five key priorities for reform, all of which deserve serious and immediate attention. Firstly, there is policy reform and enforcement. Our current anti-discrimination laws lack real teeth. They are symbolic unless they are enforced. We need stronger accountability mechanisms, standardised reporting systems, defined timelines for responses, and proper resourcing for community-led anti-racism programs.

Secondly, there is education and training. ACT schools and universities must embed cultural competency in anti-racism training. We must revise the curriculum to include histories that give global Indigenous perspectives and decolonisation frameworks. Students should see themselves reflected in their learning and understand the shared story that binds us all. That is how we grow a generation that values inclusion, empathy and justice.

Thirdly, there is workplace equity. We must mandate transparent recruitment, pay equity and promotion practices, require anti-racism and diversity training for managers and create pathways for CALD leadership. Business meeting diversity and inclusion targets should be recognised and celebrated.

Fourthly, there is community engagement. Racism cannot be solved by government alone. We need to expand funding for grassroots initiatives, amplify CALD voices in public campaigns and work with media to showcase the contributions of multicultural communities.

Finally, there are support networks. Experiencing racism is not just distressing; it is highly traumatic. We must ensure culturally safe mental health services and peer support networks are available and that bystander and allied training is successful.

If we want Canberra to live up to its reputation as a progressive, inclusive city, we must confront the racism that quietly undermines those ideals every day. Let us lead by example, not just in words or symbolism, but in measurable change, because a Canberra

that values every voice strengthens the very heart of Australia's democracy.

Health—Lesley's Place

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.03): Last week, I was delighted to join in celebrations following the completion of a major refurbishment of Lesley's Place, where Toora Women delivers a residential facility for women undertaking alcohol and other drug rehabilitation. We enjoyed a bright Canberra spring morning in the newly landscaped area, where we were welcomed to country by Auntie Serena Williams and heard about the transformational impact of Toora's residential service in residents' lives. We considered the thousands of women who have passed through the building over the life of the service as both a homelessness service and an alcohol and other drug service.

The \$800,000 upgrade has transformed the property, with functional and quality of life improvements to better support women in their recovery journey. Key improvements include a refreshed internal layout to improve practicality for shared living, full repainting inside and out, new flooring throughout, zoned reverse-cycle heating and cooling in each of the 10 bedrooms, a redesigned kitchen, laundry and bathrooms, including a new accessible bathroom, and enhanced outdoor areas.

The upgrades have created a calming, comfortable and supportive environment, with individual climate control in each bedroom and improved usability of shared spaces indoors and outdoors. These changes express physically the value that we place on the lives of women who are using Toora's services to change their own lives and the lives of their children, families and communities.

Since 1982, Toora has provided gender-specific services to women in the ACT and surrounding region. It offers specialist services to women with complex issues in their lives who have experienced past or present traumas, including alcohol and drug dependency, as well as homelessness and domestic violence services.

Supporting more than 500 women and children each year, Lesley's Place Drug and Alcohol Residential Service provides up to 12 months of supported accommodation for women, including those with accompanying babies and young children—and there were two babies at the event last week—and who are experiencing alcohol, tobacco and other drug problems.

In line with Toora's practice framework, the program operates in a safe, friendly and welcoming environment, with a culture of empowerment and equality, where clients feel valued, respected and have the right to choose. The combination of practical support and intensive, individually tailored case management and counselling offers clients encouragement, education and positive life skills to achieve long-term change.

I acknowledge the work of Kellie Friend, Toora's CEO, and her hardworking team for their enduring, tireless and caring work, supporting the women and children in their services.

The physical works on this project began in February 2025, and the property was

handed back to Toora Women weeks ahead of schedule on 13 June 2025, testament to the determination and hard work of all parties. Kellie particularly acknowledged the builder—Accelerate, I believe—for the sensitive way in which they had undertaken this project.

The refurbishment of Lesley's Place was led by the ACT government and funded through the commonwealth government's Community Health and Hospitals Program, which committed \$4.3 million for the expansion and modernisation of alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation services across the ACT. Of this \$4.3 million, \$2.2 million has also been spent on upgrades at the Karralika alcohol and other drug rehabilitation facilities in Fadden and Isabella Plains, which were completed in 2023. I acknowledge and thank the Australian government for this investment.

We know that recovery from alcohol and other drug dependency is a deeply personal and often challenging journey. That is why it is so important that the spaces where people heal are safe, comfortable and designed to support their wellbeing. The ACT government is proud to invest in services that make a real difference in people's lives.

Toora's trauma-informed, culturally safe approach is vital for women facing complex challenges, and these improvements will help to ensure they have the best possible chance at long-term recovery.

While there is always more to do, this government is proud that the ACT leads the nation through comprehensive evidence-based initiatives to minimise the harm caused by alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. I am also proud of the generations of feminists who have driven the development of shelters, safe spaces and services for women who experience disadvantage in our community.

Planning—Tuggeranong

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.08): I rise to share some of my thoughts about the ACT government's missing middle housing reforms currently underway and their implications for Tuggeranong. When you visit us in Tuggeranong, drive in on Erindale Drive or Isabella Drive and you will understand why we live here—the valley settings, the views, the liveability and, most importantly, the people. Tuggeranong has the most parks and recreation-zone land in the ACT. We are a vibrant and unashamedly family-friendly community.

However, population data paints a sobering picture. While Tuggeranong remains the second largest district in the ACT by area and population, we are not growing at the same pace as other districts. This is not a judgement on Tuggeranong; it is a plain fact of our location. We are constrained by the New South Wales border to the east and protected landscapes south and west.

If we want Tuggeranong to thrive, we must engage seriously with the government's proposed missing middle housing reforms. Without bold action, we might not grow at all. The only way is in. The missing middle is low-rise housing that falls between detached homes and high-rise apartments. Think about townhouses, duplexes and row houses. These are the kind of homes that offer more sustainable, community-oriented living options, allowing young families to buy into established suburbs and older

residents to downsize without leaving their neighbourhoods.

It is exactly what many older, wiser Tuggeranong residents have told me they are looking for when we chat at their front door. The kids have moved out. They do not need all of their rooms. They are sitting on big blocks which they would like to sell or could subdivide, and they want to stay in Tuggeranong. Their problem is that there are not yet enough smaller, more suitable, one-level properties to buy—gentle but more dense developments that allow communities to evolve without losing their character.

The ACT government's planning reforms, led by the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, is a step in the right direction. I have heard strong support for those reforms from Tuggeranong residents. In mid-July, the government confirmed that 72 per cent of Canberrans who attended the pop-up consultation events signalled that they were in favour of these changes.

These reforms are not about bulldozing backyards or cramming in concrete. They are about thoughtful, well-designed homes that fit seamlessly into our streetscapes. They are about giving people more choice, whether they are first homebuyers or growing families who will get every chance in a lovely place, or last homebuyers who want to grow older more easily within their community. Tuggeranong has the infrastructure, the green places and the community spirit to help make this happen.

We need political will to renew the middle spaces and unlock even more of our potential. If we do nothing, we risk becoming a district that young people cannot join and older residents must leave. If we act, we will build a Tuggeranong that is even more vibrant, more resilient and more inclusive for all generations, for generations to come.

Child care—Genius Childcare Gowrie

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.11): This year, the early childhood education sector has been in the headlines more often than not. Each time, the story becomes darker and more disturbing. This week, a new *Four Corners* investigation confirmed the gravity of child sexual abuse in our ECEC sector. As a parent, I am appalled, and I am frightened about the hands in which we place the very important job of care and education of our little ones.

ECEC, as most parents in the chamber will agree, is an invaluable resource upon which careers and our livelihoods depend. Why then do we treat those who receive the care and those who provide it in such a way? Not all ECEC educators and staff in Australia are perpetrators of the horrors we see in the headlines, but we seem to lump them all together, when there are those who want to do the right thing, all the same.

This afternoon I want to talk about ECEC in a different context. As we are all aware, ECEC in Canberra has been experiencing its own issues. In December last year, I stood in this chamber and moved my first motion, as reports emerged of Genius Childcare in Gowrie failing to pay staff wages, super and rent. It turned out that it was a national issue.

Genius ended up leaving the sector, but three centres in Canberra out of the original five remained. All of those three are in Tuggeranong, at Gowrie, Conder and Bonython.

The issue highlighted an inherent disregard of ECEC staff and educators, as Genius placed its corporate stakeholders and profitability priorities above the provision of a safe and compliant environment for children and adults, and failing to pay wages.

This week, I heard from a former Genius educator, still with a centre, who informed me that the services are still having issues with overall operations, and is concerned about an uncertain future while they wait for service approvals to happen. She told me it feels like the centres are being thrown around from one management to the next, being held onto by administrators, when there are buyers out there who want to make improvements, with a vision of quality, to do the right thing by our kids and by our educators.

The harmful corporate practices that triggered this prolonged situation have produced an unfortunate conclusion. It has been confirmed that Genius Gowrie will be closing, and I know I am not alone in feeling a profound sadness about this outcome, nearly 12 months on from when I first heard they were not paying educators. I have written to Minister Berry this afternoon and I had some quick discussions with her office, asking for further information about the future of the centre and what it means for the families and educators.

I understand there are 10 affected families at Gowrie who are being supported and have places either at Bonython or Conder, and the Education Directorate is working with them. My thoughts are with them and everyone involved. My thoughts are also with the educators regarding what comes next for them.

Throughout this year, it has been a long, protracted and highly stressful situation for families and educators across these centres. The implications this will have on our community are far-reaching. Families may need to completely restructure routines and face uncertainty with work. Educators say they fear what happens next for their future, and my thoughts are with them. I know we can work on a way forward, but it just compounds the increasing financial stress that began last year, when they were not being paid, and they are still facing uncertainty.

If you are an educator or a family at one of these centres, I would love to hear from you, to talk about what is next and what has been happening. Today we think about the families impacted by the closure of Genius Gowrie, and we think about the staff and their families who have suffered a turbulent year of uncertainty and missed wages, the ongoing impacts, and the staff and the families at the remaining centres in Conder and Bonython, regarding what happens next.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.15 pm.