



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

5 May 2026

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 **Wednesday, 27 May 2026**.

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Tuesday, 5 May 2026

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (10.00): Members:

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

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.

Absence of Clerk

Mr Speaker informed the Assembly that, due to the absence of the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk would act as Clerk.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Health—pelvic pain treatments—petition 79-25

By Ms Tough, from 301 residents:

To the speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the discontinuation of pelvic botulinum toxin injections (“pelvic botox”) as a treatment option within the ACT public health system.

Public pelvic botox procedures were introduced in the ACT in late 2023 but discontinued in early 2025, despite being routinely offered in other public health systems across Australia for a number of years, including at Westmead Hospital (NSW) and Gold Coast Hospital (QLD). This treatment is recognised nationally as an effective, evidence-based option for chronic pelvic pain and endometriosis. Pelvic botox injections relax pelvic floor muscles affected by chronic pain and tension, leading to reduced pain and improved function.

As noted by Dr Albert Jung, patients often benefit more from pelvic floor physiotherapy after this treatment, reducing the need for repeat surgeries such as laparoscopies. Leading experts—including Professor Jason Abbott, Dr Jason Chow, and Dr Albert Jung—support the safety and effectiveness of pelvic botox. Botulinum toxin is already used widely in other medical conditions such as migraines and urinary incontinence, and evidence shows low risk and strong

clinical benefit in pelvic pain management.

The discontinuation of this service in the ACT is deeply concerning, especially given that several public patients experienced significant improvements before it ceased—some of whom waited years for it to be available in the ACT public health system. With only one public trained specialist to do these injections, access was already limited—yet its early success demonstrates the urgent need to reinstate and expand this evidence-based treatment for ACT public patients.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the ACT government to reinstate pelvic botulinum toxin injections (“pelvic botox”) as a crucial treatment option in the ACT public health system, and expand the number of trained public specialists who can do them.

Isabella Plains—roads—petition 64-25

By Ms Tough, from 26 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the urgent need for traffic lights at the intersection of Drakeford Drive and Noorooma Street, Isabella Plains.

Newer residential developments in the area have increased traffic along Drakeford Drive and surrounding streets. The growing traffic pressure has turned this intersection into a serious safety risk. During peak hours, the only way many motorists can cross is by dangerously accelerating beyond the speed limit to make it through momentary gaps in traffic. This intersection has outlived its design capacity and can no longer adequately support the needs of a growing region. This intersection has been the site of multiple collisions, some of which are fatal, including:

- the death of an 18-year-old boy involved in a collision between a motorcycle and car in 2011; and
- the death of a 78-year-old woman involved in a collision between two cars in 2021.

Traffic lights at the intersection of Drakeford Drive and Noorooma Street would serve multiple purposes. Firstly, it would grant Isabella Plains motorists safer conditions to cross Drakeford Drive. Secondly, it would benefit Bonython residents needing to access Drakeford Drive via Barr Smith Avenue by slowing down traffic more broadly.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT government to act swiftly and decisively by installing traffic lights at the intersection of Drakeford Drive and Noorooma Street, Isabella Plains. It is time for the ACT Government to make the direly needed upgrades to traffic infrastructure that the growing Tuggeranong region demands.

Canberra Women’s Shed—funding—petitions 33-26 and 40-26

By Ms Tough, from 1767 and 17 residents:

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

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

Since 2020, the Women's Shed Canberra (WSC) has operated as the ACT's first and only women's shed, providing trade-based skills training as a social enterprise. It has become a safe space where women of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, orientations and abilities build confidence, independence and community connection through practical skills. Participants experience significant improvements in health and wellbeing. Thousands of women across the ACT have improved their lives by participating in shed activities and mobile workshops. In the 2025 financial year, WSC:

- supported 590 women through hands-on training;
- delivered 160 workshops and 504 hours of skills training to 160 members;
- achieved a 92 per cent recommendation rate.

WSC has achieved this entirely through volunteer commitment, without paid staff. Growing demand now requires essential operational, safety and program coordination roles that volunteers can no longer sustain, placing the organisation at risk of closure. Without core funding, the long-term viability of the women's shed is not possible.

The petitioners request that the Assembly call on the ACT government to provide core funding and multi-year support to the Women's Shed Canberra for continuing to empower women through trade skills and avoid closure.

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

Public schools—career guidance—petitions 78-25 and 41-26

By Miss Nuttall, from 266 and 687 residents, respectively:

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

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

- three of five year 7-10 students in ACT public schools do not have access to a qualified career adviser at their school;
- thirteen of 22 ACT public schools with years 7-10 do not employ a qualified, professional career practitioner in a career adviser's role at the school; and
- young people, the school community, industry, business, parents, higher and tertiary education institutions are calling out for high schools to make the employment of career advisers a priority.

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

- ensure professionally qualified career practitioners are employed in all ACT public schools with years 7-10 and resourced at one full-time equivalent (1 FTE) career practitioner to 450 students;
- offer targeted scholarships to school staff (teaching and non-teaching) who wish to gain professional level career qualifications to remove barriers to gaining a career qualification; and
- provide additional funding for schools for this strategy and requisite actions in recognition of budget pressures currently facing public schools in the ACT.

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that:

- two of three year 7-10 students in ACT public schools do not have access to a qualified career adviser at their school.
- fourteen of 22 ACT public schools with years 7-10 do not employ a qualified, professional career practitioner in a career adviser's role at the school.
- young people, the school community, industry, business, parents, higher and tertiary education institutions are calling out for high schools to make the employment of career advisers a priority.

These petitioners therefore request the Assembly to:

- ensure professionally qualified career practitioners are employed in all ACT public schools with years 7-10, and resourced at one full-time equivalent (1 FTE) career practitioner to 450 students.
- offer targeted scholarships to school staff (teaching and non-teaching) who wish to gain professional level career qualifications to remove barriers to gaining a career qualification.
- provide additional funding for schools for this strategy and requisite actions in recognition of budget pressures currently facing public schools in the ACT.

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.

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure—petition 72-25

By **Mr Barr**, Chief Minister, dated 1 May 2026, in response to a petition lodged by

Ms Lee concerning Theatre Lane parking.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for your letter concerning petition E-PET-072-25, lodged by Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA, regarding the request to retain partial access to the Theatre Lane car park during the construction of the new lyric theatre.

A number of measures have already been undertaken to address the requests outlined in the petition to government. These measures aim to provide a solution that supports the delivery of a new lyric theatre, light rail construction and access to the surrounding Canberra Civic and Cultural District.

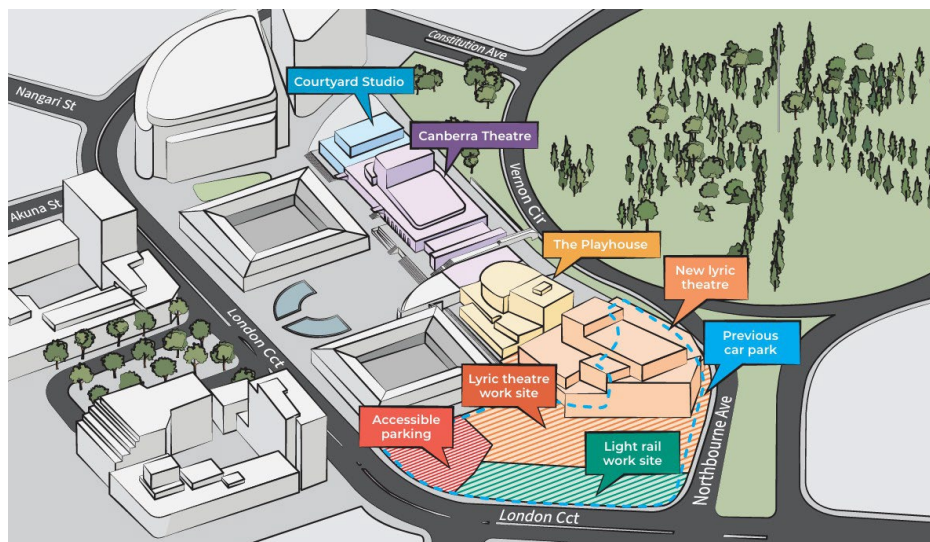
To provide you with an update on the ACT government's response to the petition, I have outlined how each request has already been addressed or their current consideration.

1. Adopt a partial access model for Theatre Lane car park, maintaining at least 60% of spaces throughout construction

The government has considered options to maintain partial access to the Theatre Lane car park during construction, including the proposal to retain at least 60% of spaces; however, this is not feasible.

A portion of the Theatre Lane car park is already being used as a construction work site for the light rail works. Of the remaining area, the spaces not currently being used for accessible parking are required in full as an active construction worksite to safely deliver the new theatre.

To provide visual context for these spaces, the map below outlines the overall usage of the Theatre Lane car park.



As shown in the image below, the theatre construction site must accommodate: the footprint of the new theatre; a heavy vehicle haulage route for construction vehicles; areas for material storage, handling and processing; worker facilities; and two tower cranes. The tower cranes require exclusion zones for safe lifting

operations, including to manage risks associated with crane swing and load movement. These exclusion zones apply whenever crane operations are occurring and mean that the area cannot be safely shared with public parking.



Even if some parking spaces could be preserved, the site planning and safety separation requirements for heavy vehicle movements and tower crane operations mean the area cannot be safely shared with public parking. Required controls for secure segregation, pedestrian access and emergency pathways cannot be maintained to an acceptable standard within the site layout. For these reasons, partial reopening of the theatre construction site during construction is not practicable.

2. Guarantee disability and short-stay parking in Civic cultural precinct during the build

The precinct is located immediately to the east of City Hill, bounded by Vernon Circle, London Circuit, Constitution Avenue and Northbourne Avenue. It includes Ainslie Place.

Infrastructure Canberra (iCBR) is working to reduce construction impacts and has introduced measures to support access such as:

- prioritising the provision of accessible parking in the available area by reconfiguring the temporary loading zone to six accessible permit spaces in the Theatre Lane car park;
- installing new drop-off zones on London Circuit at Civic Square and outside the Courtyard Studio;
- relocating accessible parking spaces to nearby public car parks; and
- regularly updating a map which shows locations of nearby alternative parking locations (with over 5000 car spaces), including accessible spaces, on the City Services web page

The government is continuing to implement the actions agreed in the ACT Legislative Assembly resolution of 30 October 2025, which focus on accessibility and parking in the city.

As works related to light rail construction progressively reach completion, additional parking, including accessible parking spaces, will be returned to the Theatre Lane car park. The final configuration of parking spaces is currently being

designed.

3. Accelerate the re-opening of the section of car park closed due to light rail works

iCBR prioritised completion of light rail works in the vicinity of the Bailey's Corner loading zone, which reopened before Christmas.

This enabled the temporary loading zone in the Theatre Lane car park (which included accessible spaces) to be converted back to additional accessible parking spaces. There are now six accessible parking spaces available at Theatre Lane.

The return of additional car parking in the Theatre Lane car park has already been discussed through the City Construction Information Group (CCIG) and at meetings with individual local businesses. At the CCIG, iCBR noted its intention to seek input from local businesses and other stakeholders on the most appropriate allocation of the additional parking as area suitable for that parking is progressively made available. This input will include consultation on, for example, the balance between short-stay parking (such as two to four hours), accessible parking and other needs, so that the final configuration supports access and activity in the city and informs the design work underway.

Canberra Metro is working to complete the work in the vicinity of the Sydney and Melbourne buildings and Theatre Lane car park by December this year. iCBR is working closely with the City and Environment Directorate to plan for the completion of the parking spaces mentioned above once Canberra Metro's works are completed by Q4 2026.

4. Publish monthly public reporting on construction progress and spaces retained

The government is keeping the community informed about construction progress and impacts on car parking. Publicly available updates will be provided at least monthly on any key changes to car parking resulting from project activities, including where spaces are removed, relocated or added, and the scheduled timing for that activity when confirmed.

Updates will be communicated through the ACT government website as the primary public source (updated at least monthly), supplemented by the City Construction Update (issued every second month and providing forward work forecasts) and the CCIG, held every one to two months. The CCIG is an interactive forum where projects are discussed and businesses and stakeholders can provide feedback, which is considered and acted upon where practicable in shaping mitigations and communications.

National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-26 and 11-26

From **Mr Steel**, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, dated 30 April 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Emerson concerning draft amendment 102 in the Hume Circle Precinct.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for your correspondence of 5 February 2026 regarding e-petition 005-

26 and petition 011-26, concerning Draft Amendment 102—Hume Circle Precinct (Staffordshire Terrace). Please accept this response to both petitions.

The National Capital Authority (NCA) has proposed the amendment to the National Capital Plan (NCP) to enable the renewal of the “Hume Circle Precinct” (DA102). Amendments to the NCP are administered entirely under commonwealth legislation, being the Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988 (the PALM Act), therefore I, as the ACT Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, do not have a role in assessing or approving amendments to the National Capital Plan.

I recognise that both petitions highlight community concerns about the adequacy of the consultation period, the lack of direct notification to affected residents, and that the re-zoning proposal covers existing low-rise residential development, such as Staffordshire Terrace.

Public consultation on DA102 was conducted by the NCA between 6 January 2026 and 17 February 2026, following an extension granted in response to requests from the Chief Minister and me, the Territory Planning Authority (TPA) and affected residents. Where feedback was sent to the TPA, these submissions were also forwarded directly to the NCA to ensure they were included in the official record. However, I acknowledge many community members have expressed the extended public consultation timeframe was still insufficient to fully understand the implications of the proposal.

While the ACT government cannot direct the NCA’s statutory processes or consultation timeframes, concerns regarding the consultation period were formally raised with the NCA through the ACT government’s submission on DA102.

The submission noted the petitioners’ request that the commonwealth minister amend DA102 to exclude existing low-rise residential complexes and their surrounds, and that matters related to established character, amenity and green space in this precinct should be closely examined in finalising the draft amendment.

The ACT government’s submission on DA102 is published on the NCA website here (pp. 314-337) and a copy is provided at [Attachments A-C](#) of this response for the benefit of members.

The NCA is now responsible for considering all submissions and determining whether to proceed with DA102, modify it, or withdraw it. The ACT government will continue to provide advice through the TPA as the process progresses, including highlighting infrastructure, amenity and neighbourhood-character issues raised during consultation and in these petitions.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway—petition 10-26

From **Ms Berry**, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs, dated 4 May 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Miss Nuttall concerning the bike path adjoining Waters Edge, Greenway.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for the petition PET-010-26 regarding the bike path adjoining Waters Edge, Greenway.

The path forms part of the Greenway Footbridge and Active Travel shared cycle path project. Completing the proposed works provides a safe connection and extension to the existing path network for adjacent residents and Lake Tuggeranong path users.

Development application approval (DA 202442924) was received for the design of the project in late 2025. The Suburban Land Agency will consult with residents throughout the detail design and construction stages. This engagement has already commenced.

The current DA included typical sections only which are indicative in nature and did not include specific heights or dimensions of the elevated terraces and walls overlooking the path from within the Water's Edge complex. Cross sections including the paths, terraces and wall heights will be reviewed in greater detail as part of the next phase of the project detail design.

I thank you for referring the petition for my consideration and trust the information clarifies the ACT government's current position.

Margaret Timpson Park—petitions 7-26, 9-26 and 17-26

From **Ms Berry**, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs, dated 4 May 2026, in response to petitions lodged by Mr Cain concerning Margaret Timpson Park.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Finlay

Thank you for providing petitions (E-PET-076-25, PET-007-26, PET-009-26 and PET-017-26) about Margaret Timpson Park and block 45 section 54 Belconnen.

The site at block 45 section 54 Belconnen has the potential to provide much needed community benefit through community housing close to public transport and the town centre. Development of the site is consistent with recommendations of the 2016 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan and the corresponding changes to the Territory Plan (with Variation 342). The re-zoning to CZ2 was made to accommodate future redevelopment of the site, with the CZ2 zoning permitting a range of future uses including residential and commercial. The zoning allows the delivery of a wide range of uses to deliver a best community outcome. This can be achieved through the delivery of a mixture of housing (including non-market housing) by the community housing providers in a prime location close to amenities, contribution to the activation of the adjacent site and opportunity to integrate with the Margaret Timpson Park.

The government will continue to consider opportunities for new and upgraded play spaces in the Belconnen Town Centre during future stages of our suburban infrastructure program. Consultation will be undertaken to ensure community needs and priorities are identified and incorporated.

I thank you for referring these petitions for my consideration and trust the information clarifies the ACT government's current position.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care—petition 65-25

From **Ms Stephen-Smith**, Minister for Health, dated 4 May 2026, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Rattenbury concerning access to health services for Aboriginal people in the north of Canberra.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to petition E-PET-65-25, which raises important matters regarding access to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Canberra's north.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have equitable access to culturally safe and high-quality health services. This commitment is reflected in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019 to 2028 and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. These agreements set out shared obligations to support self-determination, strengthen formal partnerships and build the Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector.

The petition calls for strengthened Aboriginal Community-Controlled primary health care, improved pathways to specialist services and locally available culturally safe options for residents in Canberra's north. These priorities align with the ACT government and commonwealth government's broader work and track record of investments to improve health outcomes, address structural barriers to care and support models of care that are led by, and developed with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities in the ACT and region.

Both governments recognise there is more to do, which is why the new National Health Reform Agreement, signed in February 2026, includes a Schedule developed through a Health Collaboration with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations and peak bodies. This Schedule builds on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031 and the Health Sector Strengthening Plan endorsed by the Joint Council for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in December 2021.

Comprehensive culturally appropriate primary health care

Primary health care funding is a commonwealth government responsibility. The commonwealth government administers, regulates and funds primary care through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), which is governed through the Health Insurance Act 1973 (HIA). Under section 19(2) of the HIA, Medicare rules preclude state or territory co-funding for services that receive funding under the MBS, unless this condition is waived through a ministerial decision (referred to as a 19(2) waivers).

While the ACT government can fund complementary activities undertaken by

primary care providers, if it directly funds the delivery of primary care the provider would be unable to claim through Medicare. This includes MBS items such as 715, which is raised as a key data point in the petition.

Should the ACT government choose to fund activity that would otherwise be MBS-eligible without a section 19(2) waiver, our funding would need to be sufficient to entirely replace commonwealth MBS funding, representing a significant cost-shift from the commonwealth to the ACT government.

The commonwealth government recognises the importance of comprehensive culturally appropriate primary care and provides supplementary funding to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme. The 145 ACCHOs funded across Australia to deliver culturally appropriate comprehensive primary health care receive section 19(2) waivers with obligations, including that all services are bulk-billed and series of reporting obligations to the commonwealth.

Noting that the responsibility rests with the commonwealth, the ACT government has long advocated for additional supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care in the ACT. The government has previously been successful securing an additional \$4.5 million from the commonwealth on top of the \$13.3 million from the ACT government to deliver Winnunga Nimmityjah's building in Narrabundah, which was completed in 2022.

Winnunga is a well-established ACCHO that provides comprehensive culturally appropriate healthcare to its approximately 6,000 service users, which are relatively equally distributed across Canberra and surrounding region.

However, notwithstanding the excellent service provision of Winnunga across the ACT and region, the government recognises the advocacy from the community as well as our own commitments to supporting community control and improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. To this end, I wrote to the Hon Mark Butler MP, Australian Minister for Health and Ageing in early February regarding the potential need for an additional Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service for the north of Canberra, and have also raised the matter in person.

Minister Butler has advised that there will be a grant opportunity in 2026-27 for new and existing community-controlled organisations to apply to expand the ACCHO footprint across Australia, based on comprehensive needs assessments. The Health and Community Services Directorate and Capital Health Network will continue to support community-controlled organisations in the ACT to engage in opportunities such as these.

ACT government's investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care

While recognising the commonwealth government's responsibility for the delivery of primary care, the ACT government takes its role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to health care seriously.

Between 2020-21 and 2024-25, the ACT government provided \$36.6 million in identifiable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care, allied health, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing related expenditure. This funding demonstrates sustained ACT government investment across the health service

system. This does not include capital investments and workforce.

These investments supplement the commonwealth's role in primary care, with a focus on key areas of concerns for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including:

- harm reduction, focussed on alcohol and other drugs services and tackling tobacco across a number of community-controlled providers;
- midwifery access providing antenatal and postnatal supports;
- hearing health programs for infant and young people;
- dental health programs; and
- a range of mental health and wellbeing programs delivered by community-controlled partners.

This list is not exhaustive, but it outlines where the ACT government provides supportive funding to bolster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service delivery in the community. It does not include the broader investments in developing and strengthening community-controlled organisations across the community sector, including in related areas such as child, youth and family services.

The ACT government is the only jurisdiction that partners with a local Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation to deliver health services (including 715 health check equivalent services) to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees. This funding reflects the fact that Medicare cannot be claimed in correctional facilities.

In the 2025-26 budget, the ACT government committed to the operationalisation of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential rehabilitation facility as part of the \$49 million Watson health precinct. Construction is expected to be complete in mid-2026 and will deliver the ACT's first culturally appropriate alcohol and other drug rehabilitation to support improved health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes in the ACT

The petitioner identifies the ACT's comparative lower use of MBS item 715 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Peoples Health Assessment) as an indicator for poorer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes in the ACT compared with the national average.

The 715 Health Check is designed to support the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations people of all ages. The aim of the 715 Health Check is to help ensure First Nations people receive primary health care matched to their needs, by encouraging early detection, diagnosis and intervention for common and treatable conditions that cause morbidity and early mortality. The 715 Health Check must be undertaken by a general practitioner.

While the 715 is a Medicare item designed to identify and treat health conditions that disproportionately affect First Nations people, access is limited by general practitioner availability. In response to advocacy from the Winnunga, I have recently written to Minister Butler to seek his consideration for Nurse Practitioners to be able to claim under this item. Minister Butler has responded to indicate that

this will be considered alongside broader MBS reform.

The ACT government's targeted supplementary investments in Aboriginal health services have contributed to improved outcomes compared with national experiences. Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) outlines that the ACT performs comparatively well on several measures relevant to primary health care and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Selected potentially preventable hospitalisations are a key indicator of primary and community health system effectiveness. The ACT recorded approximately 37 potentially preventable hospitalisations per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, compared with around 53 per 1,000 nationally, indicating substantially lower rates of avoidable hospitalisation.

The ACT also compares favourably on key prevention indicators. ACT has the lowest reported rate of smoking during pregnancy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, at approximately 34 per cent compared with around 43 per cent nationally. This reflects the ACT government's investments in access to midwifery in partnership with Winnunga, as well as targeted investment in harm reduction focussed on tackling smoking. However, the rates are still far too high and we have more to do. The ACT also records among the highest rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescent immunisation coverage, with HPV vaccination coverage at age 15 of approximately 88.5 per cent for females and 82.7 per cent for males, both above the national average. These outcomes indicate areas of relative strength in prevention, early engagement and aspects of primary health system effectiveness in the ACT. They also reflect the areas where the ACT government provides supplementary funding.

This does not mean that there is no need for further improved access to culturally safe, locally available and community-led primary health care services, particularly where people continue to experience barriers to access, fragmented service pathways and unmet need, including in Canberra's north. The ACT government will continue to focus on areas of need supported by evidence and community feedback, as well as advocating for strong engagement from the Commonwealth Government and Capital Health Network.

Conclusion

The ACT government recognises and advocates for the essential role of culturally safe, community-led primary health care in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We continue to work with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to improve access to culturally appropriate primary care, strengthen early support for families, and improve coordination across the health system so that services are easier to navigate.

The issues raised in the petition are taken seriously. The ACT government has a strong track record in delivering substantial investments to support Aboriginal health services across the ACT. The government will continue to collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to co-design, commission and deliver services that are culturally safe, place-based and responsive to community expectations, including in Canberra's north.

However, given the Legislative Assembly's ongoing focus on fiscal sustainability, and the clear requirement for ACT government investment in areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare for which we have responsibility, providing funding that sits clearly within the commonwealth government's responsibilities

is unlikely to represent the best use of limited resources.

I also note the correspondence from the CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah to all members regarding the petition and the concerns raised by the ACT affiliate to the National Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). Were the ACT government to provide funding to support community-controlled primary health services on the northside, officials would need to apply the probity and value for money processes set out in the Financial Management Act and Government Procurement Act.

Thank you again for bringing petition E-PET-65-25 to the government's attention. I acknowledge the commitment and effort of all those who contributed to this petition and reaffirm the ACT government's ongoing commitment to working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to support improved access to health care and strengthened wellbeing outcomes across the ACT.

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.

Margaret Timpson Park—petitions 7-26, 9-26 and 17-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.04): Just a few brief words about the response to the petition concerning Margaret Timpson Park. I note it comes from Minister Berry, the Minister for Housing, and it is disappointing, again, to see the government rejecting the whole opportunity to extend Margaret Timpson Park over what remains a hole in the ground.

And, again, it is disappointing to note the ongoing opposition by the ACT Greens to creating a bit more green space in an incredibly fast growing and densifying town centre. So the anti-green space Greens have again an opportunity to say something different and I really do urge them to do so.

It is just a bit of a disappointment, Mr Speaker, that the Minister for Housing has basically isolated this part of the Belconnen town centre for housing only, without actually consulting with the community.

If you ask the Belconnen Community Council and those who are living in those apartments—some of them families—if they would like a slightly bigger park in an increasingly densifying town centre, I think the answer would be rather obvious.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care— petition 65-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.06): Firstly, I want to comment on the petition response regarding draft amendment 102, the Hume Circle Precinct. I thank the minister for his response, for pointing the Assembly and the community to the submissions made by the ACT government, and for underlining the fact that responsibility for this proposal sits with the National Capital Authority.

In that vein, I want to make two comments. Firstly, I think the National Capital Authority got off to a really bad start on this project. They opened consultation in the first few days of January for just four weeks. This is not a good-faith act, in my view. It is almost the textbook example of exactly how you would do it, if you were trying to run a consultation that you did not really want people to participate in.

Now, I am not saying that was the NCA's motivation, but it is the textbook example of what it looks like, and that was very disappointing. I was pleased that after representations they did extend the timeframe a bit. That was a positive, but it is not a good reflection on the National Capital Authority. I really urge them to think in the future about their processes.

The second observation I want to make is we really just need a better outcome on this project. We need the National Capital Authority to provide some critical thinking and stand up for the community. In its current form, this proposal feels entirely proponent driven. While I am all up for some redevelopment in this area and at the moment there is plenty that could be done—there is a lot of potential—but what is being proposed is simply 50 shades of wrong.

Jan Gehl, the renowned Danish urbanist, who has visited Canberra and is a champion of people-oriented cities, refers to “bird shit architects” who fly around and plunk down high-rise buildings at random. That is what we are being served up here, bird shit architecture, and this city really does deserve better and the National Capital Authority needs to lift its game.

I would also like to speak to the petition about a northside Aboriginal health service. I thank the minister for her response to the petition on access to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Canberra's north. When tabling the petition, I made the case as to why we need more community-led health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, highlighted by the absence of a service north of the lake.

Let me reflect briefly on the practical and economic case for establishing an Aboriginal-controlled health centre on Canberra's northside. It is not merely a matter of principle, but of sensible health policy and economic management. When people cannot access healthcare services that are culturally appropriate and geographically accessible, they often delay seeking medical attention or skip it altogether. This leads to more serious health conditions that ultimately require hospitalisation, contributing to our territory's rising healthcare costs.

The current situation means we are spending excessive funds on emergency and acute care while not investing adequately in preventative and community-based health services. An Aboriginal-controlled health centre would help rebalance this equation by providing accessible, preventative care that keeps people healthier and reduces the need

for expensive hospital treatments.

The minister has provided a detailed response, particularly noting the responsibilities of the commonwealth in regard to primary health care. I understand all members have also received a letter from the CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah, Julie Tongs, in which she expresses a number of concerns, and highlights the contribution Winnunga continues to make to health care in the ACT. There is no doubt Winnunga provides a marvellous service. Like many members, I have seen it firsthand and I feel from that that I have some pretty good insight into its value and the contribution they make to supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community here in the ACT.

In all of this, the bottom line is quite simple. We need to increase access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. We know the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. We know there is much to be done to close the gap in the range of areas, including health care. And we know that these things will not be addressed without deliberate and focused action. We know there is now no dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health centre on the north side of Canberra, and that presents geographical barriers that see some people not accessing care.

We have seen a group of dedicated people endeavour to establish a service, and they have built a client base of nearly 500 people. That is a good thing. There are issues, there are technicalities, there are disagreements about how to move forward—and I hear those. I just want to see the delivery of increased access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. That is our job, and that is the only measure of success or failure here.

Health—pelvic pain treatments—petition 79-25

Isabella Plains—roads—petition 64-25

Canberra Women’s Shed—funding—petitions 33-26 and 40-26

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.11): I rise to speak on a number of petitions that I have sponsored on behalf of ACT residents. The petitions raise issues across community services, health and local infrastructure.

I am going to begin with the petition about the Women’s Shed. It has received strong backing from across the territory with well over 1000 signatures, and I want to commend Sunita and her team for the support that she has gathered for that petition, showing the strength and the value of the Women’s Shed across Canberra.

It has been operating for five years now as the ACT’s first and only women’s shed. It provides trade-based skills and training in a safe and inclusive environment. It supports women of all ages and backgrounds to build practical skills, confidence and social connection. For many participants, the shed also plays an important role in supporting mental health and wellbeing through that protective factor of community and coming together.

Over the last financial year, the organisation supported hundreds of women through workshops and training, delivering a substantial number of hours of skills-based

learning with consistently positive feedback from participants. This work has been delivered almost entirely through volunteer effort, which speaks to the commitment of those involved at the shed. As the shed continues to grow, petitioners note that there is increasing pressure on volunteers to manage coordination, safety and program delivery requirements. Once again, I want to thank Sunita and her team for all the work they have done at the Women's Shed and for showing how valuable it is to the community. I commend this petition.

Now, I want to speak briefly on the petition concerning pelvic botox injections in the ACT public health system, which was established by QENDO Canberra. The petition raises concerns about the discontinuation of this treatment, which had been introduced locally and is used in a couple of other hospitals across Australia as part of chronic pelvic pain and endometriosis management. The petitioners highlighted clinical evidence supporting its use, and note there are some patients who experienced positive outcomes while this service was available. And I want to thank minister Rachel Stephen-Smith for engaging on this, once this occurred and through the petition process.

The petitioners asked the government to consider whether reinstating the treatment and expanding specialist training could improve options for public patients here in Canberra. It raised broader questions about access to evidence-based care and service continuity within the public health system—and I suspect this is something that the social policies inquiry into endometriosis and pelvic pain will explore further when it holds hearings shortly. So, I thank the people that supported the petition and then went on to engage with the inquiry as well. It is very good timing for exploring treatment options, here in Canberra.

Finally, I am going to talk about a petition from the residents of Isabella Plains. It did not get a lot of signatures, and I know there were some contested views from people who live in Isabella Plains who struggled with the safety of turning in and out of Noorooma Street into Isabella Plains, and people who just use Drakeford Drive to drive straight and do not want to see another set of traffic lights. So, I appreciate there is a delicate balance here between the people who want to be able to enter and exit their suburb and feel safer, and the people who do not want another set of traffic lights along Drakeford Drive.

But as traffic volumes increase, local residents have raised concerns about the safety of this intersection—particularly during peak periods—turning onto a duplicated 80 kilometre road from a suburban street. And as someone who uses the intersection not too infrequently, at times it can be a bit worrying, a bit scary pulling out when people are flying down that street. I mentioned to my mum, who is not a resident of Canberra, and even she said, “That is a terrible intersection.”

So I thank the residents of Isabella Plains who fought this petition and raised this issue. They highlighted a history of serious accidents at the site, and suggest traffic lights as a means for improving safety. Really, they want to be a bit more confident in entering and exiting their suburb; considering whether traffic controls are appropriate or what would be the appropriate way for residents of Isabella Plains and, by extension, Bonython, feel safer in their suburb.

Each of these petitions bring forward issues grounded in lived experience and local

knowledge. And I thank all the petitioners across all three of those petitions for engaging in the process. I commend my petitions, thank you.

Public schools—career guidance—petitions 41-26 and 78-26

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.15): I rise today to speak in support of the petition put forward by the ACT Careers Association and the Career Development Association of Australia, and 953 Canberrans and counting—some of them in the gallery today. I would like to acknowledge them—hello! It calls on this government to make career guidance a right for every ACT year 7 to 10 public school student.

Certainly, the first question that many of us got when canvassing for this petition was, “Isn’t it already a right for every ACT high schooler?” Well, apparently not. Right now, three in every five years 7 to 10 students—so a comfortable majority—do not have access to career advisers at school, and 14 of our 22 public high schools do not employ a qualified, professional career practitioner in a career adviser’s role. Apparently, the number of qualified career practitioners in ACT schools has reached an all-time low. ACT Career Association’s own survey data shows that many remaining and experienced practitioners are intending to retire within five years, with no targeted effort by the ACT government to replace them.

I need people to understand how fundamental career development is to students when we ask them what they want their life to look like. People in this place will know that even if our job does not define us, it certainly dictates what most of our day looks like. For young people, years 7 to 10 is the perfect time to suss out what you genuinely like doing on the day-to-day—which subjects you want to study at college and whether that includes VET or tertiary education. Career advisers are crucial here. They help young people by making sure their education and work experience lines up, both with where they want to train and work, and with the broader employment market. They also encourage young people to manage their career decisions themselves.

It is important that students have access to professional career advisers for this. A professional career development practitioner is an expert with recognised post-graduate career development qualifications, who delivers career education information and guidance in accordance with national standards to support people all the way from early childhood, through to adolescence and through to adulthood. They are the ones with the connections to training and local employers and the skills to work with students to tap into their passion and drive.

Professional career development advisers instil confidence in their school’s students, families, local employers and the government that the support and advice being delivered is accurate, ethical and aligned with the needs of the workforce and the broader community. At a time when 36 per cent of students who are career-uncertain go on to experience poorer employment outcomes, and at a time when the job market here in Canberra is, to speak generously, “cooked”, and young people are asking a lot of questions about the future, having a professional in their corner should absolutely be an entitlement for every student. That should not be a suburb lottery. That should not be down to the foresight of your parents and carers to get you into the right school; it should be a base expectation for any public school. In the words of David Carney from the Career Industry Council of Australia, the message is simple:

We need to stop treating career guidance as an optional extra and start recognising it as a national investment in our future prosperity.

And, in the words of the ACT Careers Association: “The delivery of careers services in ACT schools is not an optional extra. They provide essential foundational infrastructure for student wellbeing, equity and workforce readiness that our community expects and should be universally delivered.”

This issue deserves Assembly action. Thank you.

Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure—petition 72-25

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.19): I rise to speak about the Theatre Lane car park petition, which is the result of the hard work of a number of local business owners who are incredibly frustrated by this government’s actions. They have felt ignored, dismissed and, frankly, abandoned by an increasingly arrogant Labor government that has shown little interest in listening to the people most affected by its decisions. And again, I thank Danny, Nesh and the many hardworking local business owners who drove this petition—a petition signed by over 800 Canberrans.

Let me be clear, Mr Speaker: the continuing impacts of the accessibility issues which are a direct result of the government closing the Theatre Lane car park are very real and continuing. But it is not just the closure of this one car park; the closure of the Theatre Lane car park is in addition to the closure by this government of the law courts car park, the construction work being done as part of the Garema Place revitalisation and, of course, the continuing light rail construction work.

There is no dispute in this place that major infrastructure projects bring disruption, but when that disruption stretches from months into years, and when any support or even understanding by this government falls well short of what businesses need to survive, let alone thrive, then it is no wonder that many of them are feeling abandoned by this government.

Many businesses in the city precinct have reported sustained loss of business. Road closures, fencing, reduced visibility, noise and severely constrained access have taken what once was a walkable destination for customers to a destination that is difficult to reach, difficult to navigate and, in some cases, needs to be avoided altogether. Several hospitality businesses have closed or have had to relocate due to not being able to sustain this significant and continuing loss in business.

This government needs to understand that there are jobs, livelihoods and decades of investment by local Canberrans at stake that is being affected. The government’s response to the issues that this petition raises is grossly inadequate. It does nothing to alleviate the concerns of the hundreds of Canberrans who signed this petition and the many local business owners who have suffered as a result of the decisions made by this government, with little meaningful consultation with the very businesses this impacts most.

Sadly, Mr Speaker, as many in this place would know and agree, this is a government that sees consultation as a procedural hurdle, a tick-box exercise, if you will, not a

genuine responsibility. Some business owners told me that they were blindsided by the closure of the Theatre Lane car park. Others learned of the closure through the media or word of mouth, not from their own government. That is not consultation; that is disrespect. The Theatre Lane car park is not a luxury; it is essential infrastructure. It supported access not just to hospitality venues in the precinct but to essential medical practices, particularly for older Canberrans and those living with a disability.

The Chief Minister's response says that Infrastructure Canberra is working with Canberra Metro and the City and Environment Directorate to plan for the return of additional car parking by the end of 2026. Sadly, for some of these businesses, it will be too late—too late for these hardworking Canberrans with staff depending on them and families to support.

A vibrant city centre is not guaranteed by infrastructure projects alone. It depends on the small businesses that employ Canberrans, and that contribute to Canberra's character and that make a huge difference to Canberra's economy, to actually survive through it. If these businesses do not survive, there will be little left to revitalise at the end.

Just a few notes on the Hume Circle precinct petition and the government's response. While I thank the minister for providing a response, what is most striking is that the response itself confirms the very concerns that prompted residents in my electorate to petition this Assembly in the first place—basically, that consultation was inadequate, rushed and failed to properly engage affected residents. The government acknowledges that the petition raised concerns about the short consultation period, the lack of direct notification and the inclusion of existing low-rise residential areas such as Staffordshire Terrace.

It also acknowledged that many community members felt that even the extended consultation period was still insufficient to understand the implications of the proposal in full. The response goes on to emphasise that responsibility for the process lies with the National Capital Authority and that the ACT government cannot direct the NCA's statutory timeframes. While that may be correct technically, it will offer little comfort to residents who feel blindsided by a proposal that could fundamentally change their neighbourhood. Simply forwarding submissions or raising concern after the fact is not the same as ensuring that consultation is robust, inclusive and fair from the outset.

Mr Speaker, when governments at any level pursue urban renewal without genuine early and direct engagement with affected communities, trust is eroded. People stop believing in their voices and that their voices matter, and that undermines confidence in both the planning system and the institutions responsible for it, regardless of which level of government holds the pen.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Ms Clay**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent debate to continue for an hour.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care—
petition 65-25**
Margaret Timpson Park—petitions 7-26, 9-26 and 17-26
Canberra Women’s Shed—funding—petitions 33-26 and 40-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.25): I would like to speak to a few of the petitions and responses this morning—first of all, the petition that has been tabled on access to Aboriginal health services on the north side. The ACT has a clear obligation to ensure health equity for all Canberrans, including our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As noted in our Closing the Gap agreements, Aboriginal people should have the same health outcomes as any other community members.

The statistics concerning Aboriginal health access in our territory are concerning. Between 2019 and 2024, most Aboriginal people in the ACT did not access even one health check from a GP, and only 17.3 per cent of the territory’s Indigenous population accessed this benefit in 2024-25 compared to 25.3 per cent nationally. These figures demonstrate a significant gap that requires urgent attention.

The recent Jumbunna report highlighted the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our criminal justice system, with several recommendations addressing health as a key factor. That report recognised that trauma, mental ill-health and disability are drivers of justice system contact, requiring therapeutic rather than punitive responses.

Australia has been a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights since 1972, which establishes access to primary health care as a core obligation. This covenant specifically acknowledges Indigenous peoples’ right to control their own health services to achieve health equity, but currently there is a gap in culturally appropriate healthcare services in Canberra’s north side.

An Aboriginal-controlled health centre would provide culturally safe care that builds trust within the community, lead to better health outcomes and reduce reliance on our emergency services. The establishment of such a centre, north side, would represent a practical step toward fulfilling our commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal communities, allowing them to provide solutions to their own health challenges based on their cultural understanding and community needs. I urge the Assembly to consider this important initiative as we work towards genuine health equity for all Canberrans.

I also want to speak briefly about the government response in relation to the Margaret Timpson Park and block 45 section 54. Housing is permitted on that site. Government has announced that it will provide housing there and, specifically, that it will provide community housing there. I am really excited to see what kind of community housing we get there. This might be a great site for essential worker housing, for instance.

But whatever it is, we are in desperate need of more public and community housing in Canberra. Our public housing waitlist is around 3,500 households. The cost-of-living and fuel crisis are pushing more and more Canberrans closer to the edge of despair. I share the Belconnen community’s frustration about how long government is taking to develop that hole in the ground. The SLA’s former demonstration project fell through. It is essential that this community project goes ahead and quickly, with good design that fits in well with the park and the community, and that activates the area, and has

community consultation.

I absolutely respect the view of some in our community that they would prefer to have a slightly larger park than community housing, and if the site were zoned for park and recreation and was not in a zone that allows housing, I might back that. But in a housing crisis, with a site that is zoned to allow housing that is now slated for a community housing development, the Greens cannot in good conscience call on government to cancel that community housing project. We simply need it to be done well, quickly, with good consultation with the community and with good design.

I also want to speak briefly about Ms Tough's petition for the Women's Shed. I have had the pleasure of working with Sunita on this enterprise of hers for a couple of years now. It is great to see them moving from strength to strength. They are working in the circular economy, and they are training women with essential skills and providing so much connection in our community. It is really, really good. I strongly support the calls for funding and multi-year supported from our government. This is how we support this ecosystem of circular economy and community sector businesses.

I also want to remind anyone who is listening who is interested in the Margaret Timpson Park designs that the designs for the upgrade of that park have now been released. I am really looking forward to that work starting and I am hoping everybody gets involved to have their say about how that proceeds.

National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.29): I rise to speak in response to the government's response to the Hume Circle petition. I thank the government for their response to this today. This petition pointed to an incredibly poor process, especially in relation to the timing of the consultation occurring over the summer break. That point has been well made in this place.

What information that the ACT government has provided, which is perhaps new, is incredibly interesting. It is that this proposal that has been put forward by the NCA would, in its current form, centre the most densely populated precinct in the ACT on what is the third or fourth most dangerous intersection we have here in Canberra. It might not inherently be problematic, except that there is no real plan included in the draft amendment for how to make that work for current and future residents. This is what we need to see, and that is the clear feedback that has been provided from community members and other stakeholders calling for an actual strategic plan to make this precinct a success.

The apparent lack of communication between the NCA and the ACT government prior to this draft amendment being issued is concerning. The ACT government's East Lake Place Plan anticipated 12,000 new residents in this area. The draft amendment proposes 23,000 new residents, which would require two new primary schools, two early learning centres and a new high school. This is a massive increase in density and, again, that might not be inherently problematic if it were not for the lack of plans for community infrastructure to make it a viable precinct.

I want to acknowledge that this process has caused immense stress for residents in the

area, particularly those who are within the area that is proposed to be rezoned, especially the Staffordshire Terrace residents who have put a lot of effort into advocating, meeting with multiple members—I am sure—of this Assembly, meeting with federal representatives, speaking with the NCA and speaking with their neighbours and saying, “Look, we welcome new neighbours into our neighbourhood. We are actually living in fantastic, ideal missing-middle housing; why haven’t we been part of a more collaborative process in determining the future of our area?”

I have spoken with those residents. I have also spoken with some landholders in the area and had a recent briefing from the NCA, which was very helpful. They have received a lot of feedback, of course, and seem to be taking that on board, so I look forward to the next steps from them.

I think, out of this, what we really need to focus on is that, as we densify, it is critical that we strategically plan these new precincts to make sure that they are liveable and that they are appealing to new residents and to the existing residents. When we do not do that, as Ms Lee reflected in earlier remarks, we risk creating, I suppose, social division and a loss of a mandate for that densification, and that is a real risk. We cannot just dismiss all the concerns that are raised by community members about proposed changes to their neighbourhoods as NIMBYism. It is not always NIMBYism. Sometimes these are very reasonable concerns, as was the case in this example, from residents: “How is this actually going to work? How is this going to work for us? How is this going to work for our new neighbours?”

I look forward to the feedback that is being provided by our community and by the ACT government through the consultation process. I look forward to that being incorporated and reflected in the NCA’s updated draft—if they are to put it forward—and to the next steps that they take, because I think that is absolutely critical.

Hopefully, out of this, we can also learn some lessons about the importance of cross-jurisdictional collaboration on issues that are going to have a significant impact on a significant number of people in our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Population growth Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.33): Population growth in our territory has always reflected a distinctive set of circumstances within Australia. As the national capital, Canberra’s growth has never simply followed the rise and fall of private markets. It has been shaped by national institutions, higher education, defence and security functions, public administration, research and, of course, policy decisions taken at both territory and commonwealth levels.

Today, those longstanding dynamics are entering a more complex and less predictable phase. Demographic trends that have been unfolding over decades are now intersecting with global uncertainty, shifting migration policy, and genuine constraints on infrastructure delivery. This does not require alarmism, but it does require realism,

discipline and foresight.

For many years, the ACT's population growth has rested on two reinforcing pillars—natural increase and migration. Together, these forces delivered steady labour force growth, supported economic resilience and maintained one of the youngest age profiles in Australia. This relative stability allowed governments to plan major investment in schools, hospitals, roads, public transport, utilities and community facilities, and to do so with a degree of confidence.

That context is now changing. Across advanced economies, birth rates are declining, and the ACT is no exception. At the same time, migration—particularly international migration—is becoming more variable and certainly more politically contested at the national level. Global economic shocks, geopolitical instability, housing constraints and changing public debate are all contributing to a less predictable environment.

The ACT's population has grown steadily over the last 15 years and now stands at just under half-a-million residents. Some projections suggest that it could approach 700,000 by mid-century. While some growth remains likely, the pace, composition and geography of that growth are now increasingly sensitive to migration policy, housing availability, labour markets and, critically, the practical capacity to deliver infrastructure under constrained local conditions. Responsible government requires that we recognise this complexity, rather than assume that projections drawn from a more stable past will still hold into the future.

At the centre of Canberra's demographic transition is fertility. The ACT has the lowest fertility rate of any state or territory. This is not the result of short-term shocks. It reflects deep structural characteristics of the territory—high levels of education, strong professional employment pathways, very high workforce participation, particularly amongst women, and later family formation.

These characteristics are clear strengths. They underpin productivity, income growth and social opportunity. But they also mean that natural population increase now contributes far less to our population growth than it once did. As a result, Canberra increasingly relies on migration to support labour force renewal and demographic balance. That reliance means population outcomes are more exposed to volatility and to external policy decisions. It also means that housing and infrastructure policy become central levers of demographic sustainability.

A persistent challenge in the ACT housing system is the undersupply of what is commonly described as “missing middle” housing—townhouses, terraces, duplexes and well-designed medium density homes within established suburbs. For many years, policy and market settings have favoured a more polarised outcome—detached housing on the urban fringe, or high-density apartments concentrated in the city and town centres.

This structural gap has real consequences. It limits options for students transitioning to work, for early career professionals forming households, for families seeking space, amenity and proximity to services. When choice is constrained, people delay decisions or they will leave the territory altogether. This weakens interstate migration flows, reduces workforce retention and places upward pressure on infrastructure demand in

fringe areas.

Growth on the urban fringe—such as in the Molonglo Valley, west Belconnen and future areas under planning—has an important role to play. These areas provide diversity of supply and support long-term growth. Of course, as we all know, they also require extensive new infrastructure—arterial roads, bridges, new schools and health facilities, active travel networks, stormwater management, and utility installation.

By contrast, well-planned infill and medium density development in areas already serviced by existing infrastructure—along corridors such as Northbourne Avenue, Constitution Avenue, the Belconnen, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and Woden town centres, emerging urban precincts such as the Acton waterfront, East Lake, the Kingston railway precinct and the new Molonglo town centre—allows population growth to be absorbed more efficiently and with greater resilience.

These land use choices matter even more at a time when infrastructure delivery is shaped by global fuel and energy constraints. Diesel is a critical input across the infrastructure system—road construction, freight logistics, waste collection, public transport, and heavy plant. Volatility in global fuel markets affects not just price, but availability, delivery timing and contractor risk. Supply disruptions translate directly into delayed projects, idle labour and equipment, and higher costs embedded in procurement contracts.

It is in this context that electrification is no longer a long-term aspiration. It is indeed a practical strategy for cost control, delivery certainty and resilience. Canberra's light rail system provides a clear example. Electrified rail is insulated from diesel price shocks and delivers high passenger capacity with consistent operating costs over time. It supports compact urban development along transport corridors, reducing long-term infrastructure costs per resident, and improving land use efficiency. As future stages are planned and integrated with land use decisions, light rail serves not only as a transport investment, but as a population-shaping asset, anchoring housing, employment and services in locations that are cheaper and more reliable to service.

The ongoing transition to electric buses delivers similar benefits. Electric buses consume significantly less energy per kilometre than diesel buses and require less maintenance due to fewer moving parts. Over time, this improves fleet availability and lowers operating costs. It also improves reliability during periods of fuel price volatility, which is an increasingly important consideration for a city that depends on public transport to support workforce participation, education and equitable access to services.

Fleet electrification needs to extend beyond public transport. The government's program to transition its vehicle fleet to electric vehicles reduces exposure to global oil markets and stabilises operating costs for agencies across health, community services, regulation and emergency management. For services that rely on vehicles every day, reliability and predictability are as important as headline costs.

Electrification also affects fixed infrastructure. Electric pumps, motors and control systems in water and wastewater treatment facilities experience far less mechanical wear, fewer failures and longer service lives than fuel-based or older systems. As the territory continues to upgrade assets such as sewage treatment plants, stormwater

systems and environmental infrastructure, electrified systems offer lower whole-of-life costs and more predictable maintenance schedules.

Health infrastructure provides another example. Major health facilities, such as expansions to Canberra Hospital, the new northside hospital, the new health centres we are building in growth areas, and upgrades to community facilities are all long-lived assets. Design choices made today affect operating costs for decades. Electrified heating, cooling and building systems significantly reduce energy use, lower exposure to future fuel volatility, and improve resilience during supply disruptions.

Schools and early learning facilities likewise benefit from electrification and high-performance design. As new schools are delivered in areas such as Molonglo and Gungahlin, and existing schools are upgraded, energy-efficient all-electric designs reduce long-term operating costs and improve indoor comfort and reliability.

These benefits compound when combined with compact urban growth. Medium density housing in established areas shortens travel distances, improves the viability of public and active transport and reduces energy demand per household. This lowers the per capita cost of infrastructure as the population grows and reduces dependence on long, fuel-intensive commuting patterns.

The ACT's fully renewable electricity supply strengthens this position. A locally secured and renewable electricity system supports electrification across transport, buildings and services, reducing exposure to international fuel markets and improving long-term operational certainty. Electrification also supports economic diversification and workforce development. Investment in electric transport systems, grid infrastructure, energy management and smart buildings creates demand for skilled electricians, engineers, planners and technicians. These roles align closely with Canberra's education and research strengths and provide career pathways that retain graduates and attract skilled workers.

These infrastructure dynamics intersect directly with population and migration policy. Migration affects housing demand, transport usage, school enrolments and health service needs. Sudden changes in migration settings, whether large increases or reductions, translate quickly into pressure points for infrastructure systems that must be planned and delivered years in advance.

It is therefore concerning that migration has become increasingly politicised at the national level. There is no doubt that the rise of One Nation has fuelled a more polarised debate in our country, and it is disappointing that, at the federal level, the Liberal Party has responded by proposing to reduce migration intake rather than addressing the underlying drivers of pressure—housing supply, planning reform and infrastructure readiness.

Reducing migration does not resolve fuel volatility. It does not make infrastructure projects easier to deliver, and it does not strengthen productivity in a jurisdiction with already low fertility. What it does inject is further uncertainty into workforce planning and population management, particularly for the ACT. Canberra has historically benefited from a steady inflow of international students, skilled migrants and temporary residents who transition into long-term settlement. Students at the ANU, the University

of Canberra, the University of NSW Canberra and the CIT arrive at formative life stages.

Skilled migrants contribute across public administration, defence, health, education and technology. Many of our caring sectors, such as aged care and disability services, are heavily reliant on a migrant workforce. Together, these cohorts smooth demand for housing and services rather than creating sharp spikes. Interstate migration also plays a crucial role. It is, of course, highly sensitive to housing affordability, transport reliability and quality of life.

Younger people are the most mobile. Cities that offer diverse housing, reliable infrastructure and confidence in future delivery are more competitive in attracting and retaining younger people. Attracting and retaining younger residents is therefore central, and a central strategic priority for the government.

Young people underpin labour force renewal, innovation and service sustainability. Their presence moderates population ageing and helps to maintain a balanced dependency ratio over time. Higher education is one of Canberra's greatest strengths in this regard. The ANU, UC, UNSW Canberra, ACU and the CIT anchor large numbers of young people in our city during critical life stages. Their research capacity and global connections link Canberra into international talent flows and support long-term settlement.

Equally important are pathways from education to employment. Canberra's innovation ecosystem, enabled by the CBR Innovation Network, supports research translation, startups and collaboration between government, academia and industry. Electrification, clean energy and advanced infrastructure systems create precisely the kinds of high-skill jobs that retain graduates and build long-term population stability.

Despite these strengths that our city has, demographic headwinds remain. Declining fertility and a more uncertain migration environment mean growth will be more variable than in the past. Even from the second youngest starting point of any Australian city, population ageing in Canberra will accelerate if inflows of younger people wane. From an infrastructure perspective, this reinforces the importance of flexibility and resilience. Demand for schools, transport, housing and health services will increasingly reflect cohort effects, migration cycles and economic shocks rather than smooth, long-term averages. Infrastructure systems that are electrified, compact and energy efficient are better suited to managing this complexity.

In conclusion, population growth in the ACT remains positive, but it is entering a much more uncertain and structurally constrained phase. Declining birth rates, global fuel and energy volatility, and a heavily contested national migration environment mean that planning discipline remains more important than ever. By expanding housing diversity, particularly missing middle housing, continuing to strengthen higher education, supporting innovation pathways, accelerating electrification across transport and services, and managing the territory's infrastructure pipeline with care and foresight, the ACT can continue to grow in a way that is resilient, that is livable and that is prepared for the realities of the decades ahead.

These challenges are shared. Meeting them requires steady, evidence-based, long-term

decision-making. The government is committed to that task and to ensuring that Canberra remains a city that can adapt, attract and thrive.

I present the following paper:

Population growth—Ministerial statement, 5 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.51): I welcome the Chief Minister's reflections on population growth and how we can accommodate it by retaining the elements of our bush capital that we all love so much. As someone who was born here, I love the way our city has changed over the course of my life. It is a much more diverse and culturally rich Canberra than it was when I was a kid. We can talk about some of the most obvious elements, like the food, as well as the new ideas and ways of doing things. I am certain that our city's best days are ahead of us, if we plan it right.

Having more missing middle throughout the city will offer more housing choices for the people who call Canberra home, and that is an excellent thing. The Greens took this policy to the last election. We are really pleased that Labor has adopted it and that Labor is now delivering it. But we are opposed to building endless bitumen out through every corner of our city. There are critical areas that we need to protect in our environment, both within our footprint and beyond our city limits. We need to do that work and also do the work to set our urban growth boundary.

We Greens have long advocated for missing middle solutions to our housing issues, and the Chief Minister mentioned a few places that would be good candidates for urban infill. I am sorry that he has overlooked the glaring missing middle hole in his home inner-north turf that is currently used by the racecourse. Once upon a time, that was at the edge of our city. It is now no longer at the edge of our city. It is now in a very central area in our city. As we are heading towards 700,000 people, that is not the right place to waste so much land. It is the perfect spot for a livable community that is well connected to existing infrastructure, including light rail.

It was good to hear the mention of our young demography. A generation of people who are living here have now been priced out of our housing market. This is heartbreaking. We talk about this a lot. The rents are too high. Buying a house is beyond reach for many. We are hoping that the federal government will start to do the right thing and end negative gearing, which is inflating the assets, for those who have them, and phase out the CGT discounts. We are seeing some positive moves in that direction, but we cannot afford to wait. We are currently leaving our younger generations with no hope of owning their own home and limited ability to even rent one.

The ACT government needs to ensure we are getting all the money that is available for the construction of more homes here, too. Both ACT and commonwealth governments are investing significant funding in community housing. It is really encouraging to see that local community housing providers are increasing our supply, but we need to work harder in that area.

Our young population also needs the right kind of health care. Federal Labor announced a billion dollars in new funding for headspace centres before the last election, and that funding was distributed the length and breadth of Australia, except for Canberra. That was a terrible overlooking of our actual needs. We have a younger population. A younger population has a higher propensity to make use of mental health services, and they need facilities to do that. Where is ACT Labor's advocacy on that, to make sure we get the same level of cover as the rest of the country?

The result of not having that funding is the immediate suffering of people who cannot get appointments on time at the two existing centres, and it means young people are showing up with worse issues in settings that just are not set up well for their care.

Mention was made by the Chief Minister of our population growth and, whether it is outpacing Australia's growth as a whole or falling short of it, how that population growth should result in a better GST share. The loss of income from undercounting our population in the past—around half-a-billion dollars over the past few years—is so big that we need to have that funding restored.

I have seen the Treasurer call for that funding. That is excellent to hear. We need federal finance minister Katy Gallagher to be doing more work in this area every day. I do not understand why she is not working harder to try and restore some of that funding for us, and it could come through any number of different commonwealth sources. We would love to hear a plan for the future about how we avoid that.

It is also disappointing that the commonwealth government has failed to engage properly with the sensible and popular gas export tax that the vast majority of Australians now understand that we need. That tax could be used to help properly fund all the states and territories, including the ACT, and it would bring Australia into line with the likes of Norway and Qatar. So many other countries have recognised the need to tax their own resources and to use that funding to pay for sensible things that their population needs, such as health, education and climate adaptation work.

We are still suffering from our inability to levy payroll tax on federal public servants. We do understand the constitutional barriers here, but we also understand the gap in funding. My Greens colleague Mr Rattenbury and I have pointed this out many times before. We are unique in the Anglosphere, here in Australia, in our inability to levy payroll tax on federal public servants. Most people can. We are also uniquely affected here in the ACT because we have such a high proportion of federal public servants. We do not accept that the commonwealth government is not able to adjust for this properly.

Dynamic and open cities like Canberra will grow, and we want to attract more people to live here, but we need to do so in a way that ensures sustainability of all kinds. We need to make sure that this place becomes better for Canberrans, particularly for our young Canberrans, and not a harder place to live.

I also want to make a few comments on the ACT's fertility rate. I chaired an inquiry into this in the last term. The Chief Minister spoke about some of the proactive and positive reasons that people in Canberra are having fewer babies, and there are reasons, such as higher education, different career options and different family options. All of

those are great, proactive choices.

In that inquiry, we certainly heard evidence about that, but what struck me the most is that we heard a couple of really negative reasons that young people now do not feel that they can have babies. We heard a lot about people's fears for the future. That was largely global instability and climate change. This was an inquiry that happened two years ago. I imagine that, if we conducted it now, those fears would be even greater than they were at the time. There was also the cost of living and housing—and, again, we are now further progressed in that regard. People would not have children if they did not have somewhere that they could live, if they did not see a clear course to get there.

It is important that we acknowledge that a lot of these changes are not necessarily positive changes that people are choosing; they are negative responses. We need to do whatever we can to help people through that and to adjust some of these economic settings, and some of these environmental settings that have led to this type of decision-making, or non-decision-making, happening.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Hospital—behavioural assessment unit—incident Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.58): I rise today to make a statement about the incident that occurred on Wednesday 22 April at the Behavioural Assessment Unit, BAU, in the Canberra Hospital emergency department. While no-one was physically injured, this was obviously a serious and traumatic incident for all involved. I want to start by thanking the CHS staff and ACT Policing for the way they managed the incident and supported one another, and also those who have supported the affected staff since the incident.

On Wednesday 22 April at about 10.45 am police brought in a male consumer who was in contravention of his psychiatric treatment order. The consumer's noncompliance with his PTO had led to a report to police on 17 April, which was why he was subsequently identified and picked up by police on 22 April and brought to the Canberra Hospital for treatment. Staff were informed by police on arrival that the consumer had been searched and a weapon removed. A physician attended the man 10 minutes after his arrival at the ED and medications were prescribed. However, the man refused these medications. A mental health clinician then came to assess the man and further medications were prescribed.

When the treating team tried to administer these medications, the man produced a knife from the vicinity of his ankle or sock. The knife was a fixed blade and he proceeded to threaten staff with the weapon. A Code Black was called and staff took action to protect their own safety, as they are trained to do. Some left the unit, while eight others went into the staff station and secured themselves in that area. The staff station in the BAU has been designed with safety glass and is a secure area for staff in a dangerous situation. The staff did exactly the right thing. They went to a known secure place and protected their own safety and police were called. The police were called at about

11.45 am and the Police Tactical Response Unit arrived about 10 minutes later.

At this point, the incident became a police operation and staff followed police direction. In line with protocol, and consistent with their commitment to supporting the dignity of individuals with whom they interact, police sought to negotiate with the consumer. ED staff outside the BAU were in contact with police throughout this time, and staff in the station were in visual contact with police, who were checking in on them. The staff were also in contact with CHS executives and team members throughout the negotiations and were being kept informed about actions. This continued until about 3.00 pm, when police sought approval to take an alternative approach, as negotiations had failed. Staff were pre-warned of the use of a flash device, as were staff and patients in the nearest ED pod, and the device was deployed at about 3.15 pm. Having been disoriented by the flash device, the patient was disarmed and sedated. Staff were then able to leave the staff station.

It is not acceptable that staff were placed in a situation where they were unable to leave the staff station to access bathrooms or food for more than three hours. Of course, any instance of occupational violence is unacceptable, but this incident has raised a number of questions and highlighted the importance of ensuring design decisions in an area of known risk account for all eventualities as far as possible. CHS has undertaken a series of follow-up actions since the incident.

After leaving the staff station on the day, staff participated in a “hot debrief”. This was a chance for the ED executive to talk through the incident with staff and for staff to share their thoughts and feelings and ask questions in the immediate aftermath. Support from the Employee Assistance Program was offered, with many staff taking up that opportunity. They were also reminded of the CHS occupational violence leave policy. Staff were told that there was no expectation for them to attend work the next day nor finish their shift if they were in the middle of their shift when the incident occurred. Staff also received food and drink.

On Friday 24 April, a further debrief was held with police, where the incident was stepped through and opportunity for improvements were identified. As a result of this, CHS has established a working group and action plan which is currently being implemented. The action plan focuses on formalisation of police pre-notification and structured handover via an MOU, including police calling ahead when incoming with a complex patient; revision of Code Black emergency management procedures to specifically cover weapon-related incidents; resolution of radio frequency failures that impacted police communications in Building 5; Digital Health Record changes to improve clinical risk visibility; and infrastructure mitigations to address BAU environmental constraints—that is, the lack of a rear exit from the staff station out of the BAU. I have to clarify: it has been described as a second exit, but there are in fact two exits from the staff station, but both of them enter into the broader BAU environment from which there are four separate exits.

The next item is development of a legislation-informed decision tree to support clinicians to withdraw care where work health and safety risks are unsafe and patient competence is present; and psychologist-led, in-situ workforce wellness support for staff. After the incident, CHS immediately implemented 24/7 wandering searches in the BAU, even if the patient had been previously searched. Security presence in the BAU

and across the emergency department has also been further strengthened to support staff.

Occupational violence is on the rise in our health system. CHS continues to manage high volumes of OV, with 2025-26 year-to-date data showing approximately 1,550 verbal incidents and around 1,000 physical incidents across all locations. Verbal aggression has increased slightly compared to 2024-25, while physical incidents have stabilised at a high but comparable level. CHS staff care for people with high needs who are often distressed. In many cases, staff are interacting with people who are experiencing one of the worst days of their lives. So it is easy to understand why some people may act out in a moment of stress; however, this sustained rise in OV and physical violence is completely unacceptable.

CHS has a dedicated team of security officers, who are an integral part of the hospital environment, particularly in high-risk areas such as the emergency department. Security officers are present in our emergency departments 24/7, with additional patrols during busier periods. Security personnel are routinely assigned to the Behavioural Assessment Unit, which is adjacent to the emergency department, to help maintain a safe environment and support clinical care when a consumer is admitted. They also patrol the broader hospital grounds to ensure safety and respond to any incidents that may arise outside the ED. This is in addition to CCTV systems and duress alarms installed throughout key areas.

Security officers played a critical role during the incident on 22 April, including supporting the immediate response to a Code Black involving a weapon, assisting staff and consumers and working closely with emergency services. All security officers undergo specific training to ensure they can handle a variety of challenging situations safely and appropriately. The training includes conflict de-escalation techniques, understanding when and how to apply force, and crisis intervention.

In addition to security, CHS has also put in place a series of actions to respond to OV, including those outlined in the CHS OV Action Plan 2024-2028, providing a structured, system-wide roadmap aligned to prevention, response and recovery. OV training is mandatory for all staff, with different levels of training delivered depending on the area of work. Specifically, staff in the BAU as well as security officers and wards persons have undertaken the highest level of OV training—known as tier 3. All staff are also trained in the use of the CHS code system. The code system utilises the codes set out in the Australian Standard “Planning for emergencies—Health care facilities”. More in-depth training is undertaken by wardens.

In this case, as noted earlier, a Code Black was called when staff were threatened with a knife. A Code Black should be activated when de-escalation techniques have failed or the person does not seem receptive to verbal de-escalation; and/or as soon as there is a threat of verbal or physical violence towards, staff, patients, or members of the public; and/or any actual physical violence towards others or objects. The Code Black plan states that if there is a firearm or bladed weapon, this is beyond the scope for security operations resources to directly resolve and will always necessitate a police response. In the circumstance of a firearm or bladed weapon, security will focus on a contain, isolate and evacuate strategy, where safe to do so. Any staff member may activate a Code Black. Unfortunately, we have seen a rise in Code Blacks across our hospitals, in

line with the rise in OV.

As I alerted to earlier, there has been discussion about the design of the BAU in Building 5, the newest building on the Canberra Hospital campus. Our health facilities are designed to the Australasian Health Facility Guidelines and the BAU is compliant with these. There are two entrances and exits from the staff station, which are able to be secured, and it is surrounded by safety glass. This staff station did what it was intended to do. It provided safety from a dangerous situation. However, both egress points from the staff station currently exit into the BAU and, in this case, staff could not use either of these points to exit as they would have exited into the same large space as the consumer.

As has been publicly discussed, staff had previously raised the issue of wanting an exit from the staff station into the main ED. Spaces may often work differently in practice than is understood during design and construction. In this case, I am advised that an architect had reviewed the area a few weeks before the incident and designs were being reviewed to address staff feedback. CHS will now move ahead with a security assessment of design options and undertaking these works.

Much has been made of my comments regarding the length of time police spent negotiating with the individual. Let me clarify, as I did on radio, that I was not seeking to second-guess the decisions of ACT Policing or pre-judge any review. My key point was that an incident lasting more than three hours had perhaps not been contemplated in designing the staff station as a safe space. However, I also consider that every part of the incident and response should be open for review. After such an incident, it is appropriate that all elements of the preceding events and the response are examined for lessons to be learnt and processes improved. This is why CHS and ACT Policing will continue to work together to consider these issues. I have also asked the Chief Psychiatrist to work with both organisations to ensure that any lessons to be learnt from any element of this incident are identified.

I would like to speak briefly about psychiatric treatment orders or PTOs and the management of mental health consumers with significant psychiatric illness. A PTO is type of mental health order that can be made under the Mental Health Act 2015 by the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, or ACAT. The objects of the Mental Health Act 2015 are to ensure that people with a mental health disorder or mental illness receive assessment and treatment, care or support in a way that is least restrictive or intrusive to them and in a way that recognises and respects their rights, inherent dignity and needs. A PTO does not mean people are required to be detained in hospital, and many people live and function in our community under PTOs. I can confirm that this consumer was known to CHS and had a history of aggressive behaviour. I can also advise that the consumer had not absconded from Canberra Hospital but was living in the community on a PTO.

More broadly, we know that mental illness is on the rise, particularly after COVID. To help members of our community with mental illness or experiencing a mental health crisis, the government initiated the PACER program in 2019. This is a model that brings together police, ambulance and mental health clinicians to support the safe assessment of people experiencing an acute mental health issue in the community, reducing the need for hospitalisation. PACER currently has two teams that operate seven days a

week, from 8.00 am to 12.30 am, and all PACER responses are activated through ACT Policing Communications. PACER has proven to be a pivotal point of mental health support for people in crisis in the ACT, through reducing restrictive practices, providing care in the community where practical and delivering a new level of community outreach where previous responses to crisis may have felt stigmatised or restrictive.

It is not just through this program that we have improved support for Canberrans experiencing mental illness. Between 2023 and 2025 there has been a 9.3 per cent increase in mental health presentations to our EDs. At the same time, there has been an 80 per cent reduction in mental health patients who spent more than 24 hours in the ED and a 69 per cent reduction in the length of time mental health patients wait for an inpatient bed, on average. There has also been a 10 per cent reduction in the time these consumers wait for clinical care in the ED. In the specific incident we are talking about today, as I mentioned earlier, it was about 10 minutes from when the consumer arrived at the ED until first being assessed by a doctor. The new MOU with police, where they call ahead, could see this further reduced for patients with the highest need.

The events of 22 April were confronting and distressing for the staff involved and, indeed, for our community, which values and respects our health workers. Our staff come to work every day to care for our community and should not be subjected to violence. I again want to thank all the staff, especially those in the BAU and who were involved in the incident. Thank you for your continued care of some of our most vulnerable and complex consumers. I am very glad that no-one was physically harmed, and I acknowledge the psychological impact of this and other OV incidents.

I also want to make sure that this incident does not serve to increase the stigma around mental health and our mental health patients. Delivering a public health service inevitably means our staff sometimes confront situations with consumers who have extremely complex needs and presentations. The staff who work in areas such as the BAU need to be acknowledged as the caring and highly-skilled professionals they are, and the consumers need to be acknowledged as members of our community who are very unwell and deserve dignity in the delivery of their care. Thank you to everyone who works in this environment.

Before I table a copy of the statement and seek to take note, I will also table a copy of the layout of the Behavioural Assessment Unit on Level 2 in Building 5 at Canberra Hospital, for the information of members to understand what we are talking about in terms of the physical layout.

I present the following papers:

Incident at the Behavioural Assessment Unit at Canberra Hospital—Ministerial statement, 5 May 2026.

Behavioural Assessment Unit—Building 5, Level 2, Canberra Hospital—Copy of extracts of Evacuation Floor Plan and Asset Location Plan, undated.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.14): I want to start by echoing the words of the minister regarding healthcare workers and frontline responders, who just turn up every day in extremely fluid, challenging and robust environments and just get it done, and, like the minister, I certainly pay tribute to them. I want to thank the minister and also Minister Paterson for graciously agreeing to some briefings on these incidents. Also, as minor as it may sound, I am really pleased that the minister has tabled a layout diagram of the Behavioural Assessment Unit, because I have never seen it—so it is quite helpful.

In responding to the minister's statement, I want to say that many frontline staff already know that this was not just an incident. Let's call it what it was: it was a siege. Eight healthcare workers barricaded themselves in a staff station for more than three hours. They were unable to leave, without access to food, water or bathrooms, while an armed individual moved freely in the unit. The minister should be very clear about the reality, because anything less diminishes what those staff endured.

I think what is most concerning is not just what happened, but how the government is attempting to describe it. The careful language, the procedural framing, the emphasis on protocols and post-incident reviews and the fact that it was not publicly reported for days after all point to a government trying to manage the narrative rather than confront the failure—because this was not, by any means, an unforeseeable event. The minister has confirmed that the individual was well known in the system, had a history of aggressive behaviour and that staff had already raised concerns about the design of the unit. So the question is unavoidable: if the risks were known, why weren't they fixed? Given there have been 128 incident reports, with 76 of those pertaining to occupational violence in the BAU since it opened less than two years ago, how is it possible that risks to staff and patient safety still have not been addressed?

Healthcare workers accept that their job is challenging. They do not accept that it should be unsafe; they do not accept being placed in environments where design flaws trap them in confined spaces with no safe exit; and they certainly do not accept being told after the fact that the system worked as intended, when they were the ones forced to lock themselves behind glass for hours waiting for help. If the incident involved police setting off what was widely described in media as a grenade—a flashbang—I am not sure that is how it was designed and that that is how it was intended to play out. Let me say this clearly: any attempt to downplay what occurred is not only inaccurate; it is also insulting to the staff who lived through it. From their perspective, this was not a controlled incident. It just was not. It was a prolonged, high-risk, deeply distressing situation and one that should never have escalated to that point.

That brings us to the most difficult truth: the incident was preventable. It was preventable if search protocols had been fail-safe, particularly in circumstances where individuals have a known history of aggressive behaviour; if infrastructure design had properly accounted for emergency egress; and if staff concerns had been acted on before, not after, the crisis. So, instead, we are left with a familiar pattern: warnings raised, reviews commissioned, action taken only once something goes wrong. The minister speaks about occupational violence rising across the system—and it absolutely is. But that makes it even more critical that high-risk environments like the BAU are designed, staffed and managed with absolute rigour—not assumptions, not minimum compliance, but best-practice safety. When the system falls short, it is not abstract; it is

nurses, doctors and staff who bear the consequences.

We all acknowledge the professionalism of the staff and the response of police, but gratitude from this government cannot be accepted as accountability and reviews are not prevention. What staff deserve, what they have always deserved, is a workplace where known risks are addressed and staff are listened to before they become crises, not after.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Light rail—stage 2B—update on environmental approvals Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.19): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on environmental approvals for the light rail stage 2B: Commonwealth Park to Woden project. Light rail stage 2B is one of the most complex infrastructure projects ever planned in the territory but it is necessary to connect the north and south of our growing city with mass transit.

The ACT government has undertaken extensive consultation with the ACT community and commonwealth stakeholders on the project's draft environmental impact statement—EIS—which is the first of several approvals required for the project. The EIS work undertaken has shown that, as more people call Canberra home, and projected capacity constraints along Canberra's north-south corridor increase, stage 2B will provide a reliable and efficient public transport route between the city and Woden and provide access to the significant employment and tourist destinations in between.

When I last updated the Assembly, the draft environmental impact statement was on public exhibition, allowing the community to have their say in shaping this once-in-a-generation project for Canberra. During this period, which ran from 5 July through to 7 September 2025, over 10,000 people used the digital EIS platform, which included an interactive map to help members of the community explore key project features and findings related to, amongst other things, transport, biodiversity and heritage in their local area. Around 250 people attended the drop-in information sessions held by Infrastructure Canberra and took the opportunity to speak with members of the project team and subject matter experts. A total of 230 unique and complete submissions were received, expressing a range of views and contributing local insight along the corridor.

Through the public exhibition process, we now have a better understanding of the community's views about the project. This engagement, alongside submissions and technical comments from referral entities, has strengthened the evidence base underpinning decisions about the stage 2B alignment and design.

I am pleased to update the Assembly that the ACT government has confirmed the alignment for stage 2B of light rail, Commonwealth Park to Woden, as the State Circle east alignment. This alignment was the option preferred by the government and will now be progressed to the final EIS stage.

The draft EIS for the project considered both the ACT government's preferred State

Circle east alignment through the national triangle and an alternative national triangle-Barton alignment in order to de-risk the project's progression through the environmental approvals.

Through the project's concept design, environmental and social benefits and impacts, and community and stakeholder feedback for both alignments considered through the draft EIS, the State Circle east alignment has been identified as the most technically viable option and presents fewer delivery risks, given its lesser interface with sensitive heritage areas and the busy Barton district. This will see light rail taken over a new span of Commonwealth Bridge, through the national triangle from Commonwealth Avenue, along State Circle east to Adelaide Avenue, then onto Yarra Glen Drive and into the new Woden interchange on Callam Street.

The confirmed alignment includes a 125-metre covered section to allow light rail to pass under southbound Commonwealth Avenue traffic lanes through to State Circle. This avoids directly impacting the State Circle cutting by placing light rail in the median under the Federation Mall bridge.

The nine proposed stops to be added to the light rail network will be located on Commonwealth Avenue at Albert Hall, and along State Circle at Kings, Sydney and Melbourne avenues, to be within a 10-minute walk of key business, residential and cultural destinations. There are other stops along the corridor down to Woden.

The alignment will provide the most direct route to Woden, while still providing good access to the major employment centre in Parkes and Barton. Not only will it ensure that we have high-quality public transport options for the south side; it will also unlock well-located housing in walkable neighbourhoods through access to new light rail stop and active travel infrastructure. Integrated land use planning is also underway in the southern gateway corridor, on which I look forward to updating the community in the near future.

The State Circle east alignment was initially identified as the ACT government's preferred route through the national triangle in response to a joint standing committee inquiry in 2018 and 2019. It has also been the alignment with in-principle support from the Australian government due to its consistency with the mapped intertown public transport system in the National Capital Plan. However, given the complexity of planning approvals processes required to deliver light rail through the national triangle, the alternative option through the national triangle-Barton was also progressed through the draft EIS process to avoid the need to recommence environmental approvals should the preferred State Circle east alignment have been found to be unfeasible.

With the route now confirmed, the final revised EIS is being completed and will be lodged with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water and the Territory Planning Authority next month. This will be accompanied by a copy of the submissions received and a submissions report which outlines and responds to the comments, issues and values identified through public exhibition of the draft EIS. Whilst the planning and approvals process—particularly through the national triangle—has presented challenges, this is an important milestone for stage 2B.

I would like to thank the community and stakeholders for their engagement over the

past two years while both alignments were assessed and considered. This has helped to shape the final EIS and ensure stage 2B delivers the best outcomes for Canberra now and for generations to come.

The community can expect to see some design changes in the final EIS which reflect the outcomes of further technical investigations, construction and operational requirements, and feedback from stakeholders and the community. This includes a revised “inner running” track arrangement on State Circle between Sydney Avenue and Adelaide Avenue, with the Melbourne Avenue stop moved to the inner verge to reduce construction impacts and avoid the removal of adjacent on-street parking.

The State Circle east alignment as exhibited in the draft EIS included a median-running light rail alignment on State Circle through the Parliament House precinct. The draft EIS also considered an inner-running light rail alignment as part of the national triangle-Barton alignment.

During the public exhibition, the community provided feedback concerned with the impacts to their properties as a result of the median running on State Circle. The light rail alignment on State Circle is now being refined to transition from median to inner-running south of Sydney Avenue until the transition onto Adelaide Avenue.

This refinement will result in the following benefits: reduced traffic disruption during construction, given that State Circle will no longer need to be adjusted once past Sydney Avenue, leading to reduced road closure durations; retention of the right-hand turn access to the Presbyterian Church of St Andrew; retention of the existing on-street parking and loading zone on State Circle between Hobart Avenue through to the west of Melbourne Avenue; and improved constructability, including reduced program and improved access.

Changes are also being made in the final EIS to the proposed location of traction power station 8—TPS-8. The draft EIS and accompanying public domain master plan outlined how several potential sites for TPS-8 were being assessed during the design development phase at locations spanning from north of Hopetoun Circuit to south of Kent Street. This assessment considered a number of locational factors, such as technical feasibility, land use and ownership, environmental and heritage factors, and proximity to residential areas. Subsequently, the site at Gunn Street in Yarralumla was proposed in the draft EIS as the indicative location for TPS-8.

We have heard the community’s feedback on the location through the consultation raised in both submissions on the draft EIS and through the petition put forward to the Assembly in October last year. Infrastructure Canberra has now held two additional community pop-ups in Deakin, following the closure of the public exhibition period, in order for members of the community to provide further feedback on an alternative site for TPS-8 in Deakin. In response, the final EIS will locate the traction power station in Denison Street, Deakin. This change improves environmental and socio-economic outcomes while responding directly to community input.

Following its submission, the final EIS will be assessed by both the Australian and ACT governments under their respective legislative frameworks, and we expect a determination will be made around the end of this year. Subject to a favourable

determination, the conditions attached to any environmental approval will play an important role in informing the next phases of planning and design for the delivery of light rail stage 2B and seeking further approvals. I look forward to updating the Assembly once the environmental approvals process has concluded.

I present the following paper:

Light Rail Stage 2B—Update on environmental approvals—Ministerial statement,
5 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.28): I am pleased to see that the Barton dogleg is no longer an option when it comes to stage 2B of the tram. I am not sure that it ever really was. In this statement we do not really find out much. We get confirmation that the project will, of course, come across the lake on a new span of the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. I bet that will be quite cheap, Mr Assistant Speaker; that is what I would be thinking!

We are talking also about a 125-metre covered section to allow light rail to pass under southbound Commonwealth Avenue traffic lanes through to State Circle. I do not think that would be all that expensive! Nine stops are to be added, and travel time on this most important route is to be increased for everyone taking public transport from the south of Canberra. We just do not quite know by how much.

We are pleased to get any news from government on this project because, when it comes to the sharing of information on this project, this government adopts, dare I say it, a Margot McNeill approach: “Don’t tell them anything. Don’t tell them anything, unless you have to. And even if you do, see if you can find a legal avenue to hide and delay until such time as it’s too late for them to change their mind.”

The two questions that this government refuses to answer on 2B are these: (a) How much longer will the tram take to navigate this route than the pre-roadworks rapid bus; and (b) How much will it actually cost? They are kind of important questions. When he was asked about the cost of the project on ABC Radio earlier in the week, the minister indicated that he did not want to condition the market, and that we could not talk about the cost until such time as all those negotiations were finalised.

Again, I want to make it clear, on behalf of the constituents of Canberra, given the parlous state of the finances, as outlined by Saul Eslake, among others, it is simply not acceptable for this government to sign up this generation and the coming generation, and probably the one after that, to more than \$5 billion worth of new debt without actually putting that number to the electorate.

The minister, in the media yesterday, said, “The Canberra Liberals don’t know how much this will cost.” I would say that most of the predictions that we have made have turned out to be quite accurate. If anything, the party that seems to not know how much things will cost is the minister’s.

I am stating here that, based on the information that we have obtained, it will cost at least \$5 billion to get the light rail to Woden. It is not good enough simply to say that our estimation is wrong, without providing an alternative figure. Until such time as the government gives an indication of cost—the minister is free to do that—I believe that members of the public should be working on \$5,000 million as the cost, all of which will need to be borrowed, all of which will add to our interest payments, which are already greater than all the residential rates collected in the ACT. I just want to point that out.

I thank the minister for the new information today.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.32): I welcome the government's route selection announcement for light rail stage 2B today. To be more specific, I welcome the fact that they have made a selection and are progressing this project. I know many people are tired of waiting for delivery of this important project, which is currently scheduled to become operational in 2033.

The State Circle east route has been selected as the most likely to receive commonwealth approvals, and that has our support. It is important that this project progresses, and we welcome the decision that has been made to progress through the EIS process.

I do have some technical questions regarding aspects, including the inner running on State Circle, stops servicing the suburb of Curtin and, of course, ensuring Mawson remains on the agenda. I will continue to advocate for 2B to go to Mawson to serve the southern section of the Woden Valley and open it up for Tuggeranong residents to be able to access light rail via the Mawson park-and-ride. I will be tabling a petition on this matter tomorrow. Whilst the Mawson leg is not required for the EIS, I will continue to advocate for this important issue.

Light rail stage 1 occurred in large part due to the tireless work of the Greens. It is a part of Mr Rattenbury's legacy that we are extremely proud of, but we will not be resting on our laurels as the journey continues into stages 2, 3 and beyond.

I note the opposition leader's comments, and I also direct him to the benefits realisation report for stage 1—that extremely popular light rail route linking Gungahlin to the town centre. As the MLA who has caught that light rail the most, I can tell him that it is extremely popular, and this is where the predictions of the Canberra Liberals have been repeatedly wrong in this space. They have been wrong about how popular light rail is, and how many people switch to utilising public transport when there is a light rail route available for them to use. That is why the Greens continue to support the expansion of the light rail network here in the ACT.

For the benefit of members, I would also like to let them know that I have started a petition to the federal House of Representatives. That petition notes that the federal parliament itself has a role in approving stage 2B, as it passes through national land. It calls on members of the house to voice their in-principle support for stage 2B, to convey that support to the National Capital Authority to encourage timely handling through its heritage and design standard assessments, and to support the project in future budgets.

Because this is traversing national capital land, it is important that we get federal government support for this project.

I would like to invite members to sign that petition, No EN9851, for reference. If members are interested, they can go to the House of Representatives e-petition portal. We have had more than enough delays on this particular project. Let us get it moving.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Illicit tobacco and vaping products—Operation Tempest 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) (11.36): I rise to provide the Assembly an update on the significant work that has been undertaken by the ACT government to tackle illicit tobacco in the territory through Operation Tempest.

The ACT government and this Assembly have consistently agreed that the provision of illicit tobacco to the community has serious consequences, not only for health and crime outcomes but also by negatively impacting businesses operating lawfully. The trade of illicit tobacco is a national problem impacting all states and territories. Data from the ATO reports that illicit tobacco in Australia has become a rapidly growing \$4 billion criminal market, with illegal products now making up half of all tobacco sales. The ATO and the Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Commissioner estimate between \$7.7 and \$11.8 billion is lost annually in evaded excise revenue.

The presence of cheaper illicit cigarettes, of \$10 to \$20 packs, makes it easier for people, including young and disadvantaged populations, to continue smoking instead of quitting, undermining public health efforts to reduce the smoking population. Illicit “chop-chop” or unbranded loose tobacco has been found to contain higher levels of toxic fungal spores and mould. This is caused by moist tobacco being stored in plastic bags prior to sale, an activity conducted to increase the tobacco weight for higher sale profits. It is for all these reasons that enforcement of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act was flagged as a key part of the Commissioner for Fair Trading’s *Statement of expectations* for this financial year.

As I have said in this place previously, enforcement regarding the sale of illicit tobacco is best undertaken in a coordinated response, utilising intelligence not only from our own regulatory and police agencies but also from the broader community and commonwealth agencies, such as the Australian Border Force and Therapeutic Goods Administration. The closer the agencies work together in a coordinated response, the better the intelligence basis for operations will be. That is why Access Canberra has been working with ACT Policing and various agencies to formulate a multi-agency response model for the ACT to disrupt illicit tobacco on the demand side, while significant efforts led by the commonwealth continue to address the situation at the source, where the greatest impact can be made, and that is by stopping mass importation of illicit tobacco at the Australian borders, and that work often involves international crime syndicates.

Operation Tempest, conducted from 20 to 25 April, was a planned multi-agency cross-border operation aimed at targeting and disrupting illicit tobacco sales in New South Wales and in the ACT. The Australian Border Force-led Illicit Tobacco National Disruption Group, which brings together 29 state and federal agencies to identify and disrupt illicit networks, has created the environment for sustained planning and preparation between agencies across the country. The local response was coordinated and conducted by Access Canberra, with support from local officers from the TGA and ACT Policing.

In accordance with section 22 of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1927, a person commits an offence if the person sells a prohibited smoking product. A prohibited smoking product includes a vaping good other than a therapeutic vaping good; a tobacco product that does not comply with a requirement under the Public Health Act relating to the packaging, naming, appearance, physical features or content of a tobacco product; a requirement under another law of the commonwealth relating to tobacco products that is prescribed by regulation; or a smoking product prescribed by regulation. The illicit sale of these products is a strict liability infringeable offence incurring a financial penalty of \$1,600 for an individual and \$8,000 for a corporation.

As the primary body responsible for the regulation of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act, authorised Access Canberra officers have various powers to regulate illicit tobacco and vape sales in the territory, including being able to apply to the court for a search warrant. Under a warrant, Access Canberra officers can enter premises and seize anything they believe to be connected with an offence against the act and enter premises with people who have knowledge or skills that could assist the authorised officer to carry out their functions. The TGA is responsible for the regulation of the Therapeutic Goods Act which, among other things, strictly regulates sale and supply of vapes in Australia, restricting them to pharmacy-only sales for therapeutic use. While the TGA can undertake compliance activities in relation to vapes and vaping products, they have no authority in regulating illicit tobacco.

Using shared intelligence, both Access Canberra and TGA officers obtained warrants for various tobacco retail outlets believed to be selling illicit tobacco or vaping products in the territory. Using their joint legislative powers, Access Canberra and TGA officers, supported by ACT Policing, executed warrants on six tobacco retail businesses believed to be selling illicit products in the ACT. This resulted in the seizure of over 456,000 illicit cigarettes, approximately 26 kilos of loose leaf tobacco, 6,288 cigars and 1,643 vaping devices. ACT Policing also seized approximately \$27,400 in cash, believed to be proceeds of crime generated from illicit tobacco and vaping sales. By the time of attending the sixth location on Friday 24 April, responding officers found the business shut down and the store completely empty. Investigations into the six targeted businesses and their illicit activity is ongoing. These outcomes could not have been achieved without the significant cooperation and intelligence sharing between each agency and it highlights that using coordinated intelligence provides the foundation for meaningful outcomes.

Enforcement activity like Operation Tempest takes a significant amount of planning and preparation. Contrary to some media claims, this operation was not in response to their coverage—and I do ask that the work of officials be respected and that we not pretend that this work came together in a matter of days. While the high-profile

enforcement activities for Operation Tempest are now complete, the local joint agency response model for targeting the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products in the territory has proven successful and it is ongoing. Access Canberra, local TGA officers and ACT Policing will continue to work together to target businesses and people believed to be selling illicit tobacco and illegal vaping products in the territory. I encourage anyone who is aware of or suspects the sale of illegal tobacco or vaping products to report their concerns to Access Canberra or through Crime Stoppers.

Of course, there is more work to be done. That is why Minister Stephen-Smith has previously flagged that further reforms in this space are being considered, and that is why Access Canberra will continue to work with partners to share intelligence, to coordinate activity and to support the active disruption of illicit tobacco and vape trade that has made its way to our city.

I present the following paper:

Operation Tempest—Ministerial statement, 5 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.43): I rise to speak in support of Ms Cheyne’s ministerial statement detailing Operation Tempest. As Minister Cheyne has outlined, this work is complex. It requires coordination across multiple jurisdictions and agencies, and it does not happen in a vacuum and it certainly does not happen overnight. This work takes months of careful planning, and I commend those involved in it.

We all know about the health effects of smoking tobacco. They are seen every day in GP clinics and hospitals around the country, including in cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic lung diseases, diabetes and a range of other conditions. Tobacco use remains a leading cause of preventable death and disease in Australia. It has a long tail, even with the progress we have made across Australia. Early exposure to nicotine, whether it be through vaping, smoking or other nicotine-containing products, negatively impacts adolescent brain development and increases the likelihood of long-term dependence, making quitting more difficult. The full health effects of vaping may not be seen for decades to come; however, there is increasing evidence linking e-cigarette use with serious lung injury and some cancers.

The ACT has the lowest smoking rate in Australia. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported the daily smoking rate in the ACT as 4.8 per cent for 2022-23—much lower than the national average of 8.3 per cent. This means the ACT is already meeting the National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030 target to reduce daily smoking to five per cent or less by 2030, but it does not mean there is not more to do. While vaping has become a significant public health concern for Australians in recent years, data from the 2025 ACT General Health Survey actually showed a decline amongst Canberrans aged over 18 years of age who report ever having vaped, from its peak of 21 per cent in 2024 to 17.9 per cent in 2025—again, too high and more to do, but going in the right

direction. Despite these promising figures, increased access to cheap illicit cigarettes and vaping goods risks undermining the decades of work that it took to get to this point. It makes it easier for new generations to become hooked on nicotine, can increase consumption by current smokers and undermines cessation efforts aimed at supporting people to quit smoking and vaping.

The scale of the illicit tobacco market presents a significant challenge in Australia as well as overseas and the regulatory environment across the country continues to evolve. The connection to organised crime means we need a broad enforcement approach, broader than the traditional government roles of licensing and compliance checks. Work is progressing in the ACT, and I continue to engage on these topics at a national level and of course with Minister Cheyne and other colleagues, as she has mentioned. The government is building on our regulatory framework and systems to ensure the ACT can effectively respond to illicit tobacco in our community. We achieved two stages of regulatory reform during 2025.

The first amendments commenced on 18 April 2025 to align the territory laws with the 2024 commonwealth vaping reforms, and additional legislative changes commenced on 16 December 2025 to further enhance our regulatory frameworks and provide graduated enforcement options for illicit tobacco and vapes in the ACT. As Minister Cheyne has mentioned and as I flagged previously, further regulatory reforms are in development and will be progressed this year to strengthen the ACT response to illicit tobacco and vaping goods. The Health and Community Services Directorate is leading development of these amendments to ensure that compliance and enforcement measures in the ACT remain effective and proportionate and reflect national priorities.

A coordinated national approach is essential to effectively combat the supply of illicit tobacco and vaping goods, as Minister Cheyne has emphasised. The ACT government works closely with the commonwealth and state and territory partners and senior officers participate in the National Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Coordination, NITEC, Forum, which is chaired by the Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette Commissioner and the Secretary of the New South Wales Ministry of Health. Enforcement has been strengthened through the Illicit Tobacco National Disruption Group, which was established by the Australian government in October last year, and the commonwealth's Combatting Illicit Tobacco Bill 2026 aims to disrupt the illicit tobacco trade in Australia by making it harder for criminals to profit from these activities. Introduced on 26 March 2026, it proposes new offences, stronger penalties, additional enforcement tools and measures to target unexplained wealth and the proceeds of crime.

Several things will affect the future regulation of illicit tobacco, vapes and other illicit nicotine products in Australia, including criminals adapting their methods to find new ways to profit from nicotine addiction. As the regulatory environment matures and further intelligence is gained on systems of supply, there are likely to be further changes of focus in the national approach to these illicit products. As such, I do not see any amendments to the ACT legislation as the final step but as a next step in our fight against these illicit products. On 27 November 2025, the Australian Senate asked the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee to conduct an inquiry into the illicit tobacco crisis in Australia. The inquiry will report in the middle of 2026. Outcomes from this inquiry may necessitate further regulatory change and potentially legislative change as jurisdictions adapt to the new methods that criminal networks continue to

adopt and operate throughout Australia.

Regulators across Australia are working hard to combat the supply of illicit tobacco and vaping goods. The sharing of intelligence across multiple agencies and collaborative enforcement operations are key in addressing the supply of illicit tobacco and vapes in our community. The ACT is working closely with our state, territory and federal colleagues to take a targeted and coordinated approach to illicit tobacco supply. We have been, we are and we will continue to do that. I want to commend and thank all of those involved in this effort.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

National Disability Insurance Scheme—changes Ministerial statement

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) (11.50): I rise today to provide an update following recent commonwealth announcements regarding the National Disability Insurance Scheme—the NDIS—as well as highlighting the strength, advocacy and leadership of people with disability. Their voices and lived experiences must continue to be central as the NDIS evolves.

On Wednesday, 22 April this year, the federal Minister for Disability and the NDIS addressed the National Press Club and made a series of announcements regarding the NDIS. These comments reflect a shared recognition across governments that the NDIS must be strengthened so that it can deliver on its promise—not just today, but for generations to come.

The goal of these reforms is clear: to ensure the NDIS remains fair, sustainable and focused on delivering genuine outcomes for people with disability. Minister Butler’s announcement has, however, raised several questions, and we know that many within our community will be concerned about what it means for them and their day-to-day wellbeing.

Many people I have spoken to have also shared that they feel that a damaging narrative is taking hold in the public discussion that is occurring—a narrative that attributes the fraud, misuse and cost blowouts in the scheme to individual participants rather than, as Minister Butler outlined in his address, the scheme design, administration or market operation.

This narrative has left people with disability feeling shattered, stigmatised and scapegoated for broader budget pressures that are not of their making. The ACT government supports reforms that strengthen the NDIS to ensure it remains viable for the future. But I want to be clear: supporting reform does not mean dismissing the real and serious concerns being raised by people with disability or excluding them from the way forward in delivering these changes.

Last week I met with the Disability Advisory Council—the DAC—to discuss the commonwealth’s announcements. Council members were very generous in what they

shared with me and incredibly articulate in expressing the concerns that they and the wider disability community have. In order to share with others, council members have provided me with statements for inclusion in this ministerial statement, which I will read out now. This is the personal statement of Griffin, a DAC member:

Disability advocates sometimes say that the NDIS saves lives. I want to talk about one way that it does that.

It came up in the royal commission that disabled Australians are more vulnerable to domestic and family violence than our non-disabled peers. One of those vulnerable disabled Australians is me. I had to live with abusive family members up until the age of 22, because my disabilities prevent me from being able to live alone. As much as I dreamt about escaping the moment I turned 18, it felt impossible to do that without risking my life. I had no choice but to rely on the income, the care, and the support of people who had hurt me. My opportunity to escape had to wait until I had a partner who was willing and able to support me.

22 is still pretty young. Some disabled people spend their whole lives in dangerous living situations because they rely on their abusers for care. Of course, this power dynamic is more pronounced for disabled Australians with higher care needs, but I am writing as someone with low to moderate support needs. There is an inherent vulnerability to relying on singular individuals for all your support. The NDIS has never been perfect, but at its heart, it has been about providing disabled Australians with choices. The choice to be more engaged with our communities, and to have the opportunity to build entire networks of support. The choice to hire care workers, and to have our needs met the way we want them met. With those choices comes the security of knowing you will still be supported if you choose to leave an abusive home environment. Disabled people deserve to be safe. For that to happen, we need autonomy over who looks after us, how they look after us, and for how long. We cannot be forced to rely on our families or our partners. That is just one way the NDIS has saved lives, and just one of the reasons the announced NDIS reforms terrify me. Thank you.

This is the personal statement of Jasmine, also a DAC member:

As an Autistic young woman raising a child with a disability, the announced changes to the NDIS really concern me. With the help of the NDIS, I'm able to be the best woman and mother I can be. I've been able to consistently work, finish university, advocate and parent. This world was not made for me or my community. We have struggled our whole lives for our essential needs. Myself and my community are not burdens, we are human. And like everyone else, with the right support, we can be a part of the community, gain employment and live meaningful lives. I stand with the Disabled community, and I advocate against the scapegoating by politics and the media. My worst fear as a parent is my son growing up believing he is "wrong" or "bad" due to what politicians and/or the media had said.

This is the personal statement of Lou, 63 yrs old, born with cerebral palsy, and a DAC member:

I have a lifetime of disability. I am a taxpayer, a parent, a partner. The NDIS has made it possible for me to age in place in my now wheelchair accessible home. The NDIS has provided funding for my power wheelchair which allows me to keep participating fully in my community.

I ask our ACT Ministers to please push back against the current vile narrative vilifying people with disabilities as frauds, cheats and drains on the economy. I work bloody hard and advocate for people with disabilities. I pay for equipment and services out of my own pocket when I can afford to do so.

When the media, and some members of parliament constantly use us as scapegoats and portray us so negatively when talking about the NDIS, it severely impacts our health and mental wellbeing. We are living people not just some line on a budget sheet that can be cut and discarded.

Many thousands of people on the scheme use their supports responsibly to live ordinary lives free of barriers and impediments, and they participate meaningfully in the community they are a part of. The purpose of the NDIS and our commitment to disability inclusion more broadly is for this very reason. I wish to be clear that living an ordinary life and participating meaningfully in our community is not something people with disability should be made to feel ashamed of or feel they need to apologise for.

In addition to the personal statements, the Disability Advisory Council has also provided a statement, which I will now read:

Australia has been a global leader in advancing the rights of people with disability, with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) representing a landmark commitment to dignity, independence, and participation. The ACT continues to uphold these values through legislation such as the Disability Inclusion Act 2024 (ACT). The NDIS, while not perfect, is an essential pillar of social infrastructure. It is strongly supported by people with disability, their families and carers because it enables independence, choice and control, and supports our social and economic participation. At its core, it ensures we can access the supports we need to live our lives.

We acknowledge the need for a sustainable NDIS. However, the recent announcements by the Hon Mark Butler at the National Press Club are concerning. While some details are clear, many are not. For us in the ACT disability community, these announcements have been distressing.

At our recent meeting, we spoke openly about what these changes mean. There was a shared sense of anxiety, uncertainty and fear. Many of us feel overwhelmed by the scale of the reforms and unclear about what comes next. The lack of meaningful consultation has left us feeling unheard and, at times, unsafe about our future.

We are also concerned about how these changes are being discussed publicly. The strong focus on cost and participant numbers is contributing to a narrative that risks portraying people with disability as a burden. This is not only inaccurate, it is harmful. We are already seeing the impact of this in our community through increased stigma, anxiety and fear.

We are not responsible for the pressures facing the scheme. Many of the challenges relate to system design, administration, and market operation. Reform must recognise this and ensure accountability is appropriately placed.

At its heart, the NDIS is an investment in people, families and communities. This

includes carers, many of whom are unpaid family members, including parents and siblings, who provide essential daily support. Their role is often invisible in policy settings, yet they carry significant responsibility. Without careful reform, there is a real risk that more responsibility will shift onto families without the support they need.

We also recognise the importance of the findings of the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*. These findings remind us that systems must be designed to uphold dignity, reduce harm, and ensure people with disability are not marginalised by the very systems intended to support them. If people are to move from the NDIS into territory and community-based supports, those supports must be properly designed, funded and co-designed with us to avoid gaps and harm.

For the NDIS to achieve its long-term objectives, we must be at the centre of its reform. The principle of “nothing about us without us”, now reflected in the Disability Inclusion Act 2024 (ACT), must guide what happens next.

We provide independent, community-informed advice and represent the perspectives of people with disability, our families and carers across the ACT. We are grateful to Minister Orr for supporting these voices to be heard. We remain committed to working constructively to ensure reforms are safe, equitable, and uphold the dignity and inclusion of all Canberrans.

The reforms announced by the commonwealth are extensive and, in some instances, unexpected. We know that not everything with the NDIS works, or works well, and that change is genuinely needed. Among the reforms announced by the commonwealth are many areas where improvement needs to be made and where this need is supported by a broad consensus.

One such area is scheme integrity. The commonwealth outlined a stronger crackdown on fraud and misuse, including expanded mandatory registration for higher risk supports, such as personal care, new digital payment systems to improve oversight of claims, and increased compliance and enforcement activity. These measures were described as necessary to improve transparency, safety and confidence in the scheme.

We know that there are providers who are not meeting the quality and safeguarding standards that NDIS services should reasonably be expected to have. The impact of below-standard service provision can be devastating and, at times, even fatal. For these reasons, reforms aimed at improving scheme integrity are among the most compelling of those flagged by the commonwealth. In addition, direct commissioning of supported independent living, local area coordinators and plan managers have the potential to further ensure the delivery of quality services and supports to participants.

Other areas of the reforms and how they might be achieved are, however, less known. The commonwealth has been very clear in the view that the NDIS’s rapid cost increases need to be curbed and that scheme eligibility requirements should reflect the original intent of supporting those with the highest needs.

In his Press Club address, Minister Butler indicated that reforms to this intent will reduce participant numbers from around 760,000 currently to approximately 600,000 by the end of the decade, with people assessed as having lower support needs supported

instead through services outside the NDIS. A central element of the proposed change to access to the NDIS would move away from diagnosis-based access lists towards standardised assessments focused on functional capacity and day-to-day impact.

I, along with my state and territory colleagues, continue to seek further detail from the commonwealth on the people most likely to be affected by and the timeframes for expected changes, as well as the options for service integration within and outside the NDIS.

Changes to participant plans were also announced, with average funding for social and community participation supports planned to reduce over time, with indicative figures returning closer to earlier funding levels. Greater controls on plan reassessments and spending were also outlined as part of efforts to moderate cost growth within the scheme.

The community inclusion initiative announced by Minister Butler in his address is, by all accounts, intended to provide for participation through more mainstream services. Community participation is a critical outcome of the NDIS, enabling people with disability to have meaningful and real connection to their communities. This funding must continue to focus on linking our most vulnerable with the communities they live in.

One aspect that came through strongly in the commonwealth announcement was the assumption of a larger role for state and territory governments, as well as mainstream systems, in delivering supports for people who do not meet revised NDIS access thresholds. Foundational Supports, which has been a focus of reform since 2023, and which includes the Thriving Kids initiative, is one example of a shift to a broader ecosystem of supports outside the NDIS. Such a shift can have benefits in providing supports sooner to people who need them, and we know this is an area of need within our community.

As the Disability Advisory Council reaffirmed to me last week, the NDIS, while not perfect, is an essential pillar in our social infrastructure. The NDIS has changed their life for the better by providing opportunities to live safer lives, free from family violence, to study, work and gain employment, and to raise children and strong families while meaningfully being connected to and participating in local and everyday community life.

While the reforms announced by the commonwealth are extensive, and it will take time to work through the detail and response, I remain committed to realising the genuine opportunities for improvement of the scheme. Reform done well can restore trust, reduce unnecessary complexity, and ensure supports reach those who need them most. The NDIS is not owned by one government. It is a shared national responsibility. I will continue to represent our community here in the ACT to seek the best possible outcomes for people with disability and the future of the NDIS.

I present the following paper:

Responding to NDIS changes—Ministerial statement, 5 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (12.06): I thank the minister for reading some of the impacts, as stated by the Disability Advisory Council and members thereof, of this scheme. I will do something similar. On behalf of the Australian Neurodivergent Parents Association, I would like to read a statement that they have provided to me this morning:

On review, particularly the sections dealing with reduced participant numbers and the proposed shift of children with “low and moderate support needs” into other systems, the central issue for the ACT is clear. Eligibility settings are to be tightened and reassessments will continue. In practical terms, some children will move out of the NDIS and into ACT and mainstream services.

That raises a number of questions which, at present, remain unanswered.

We do not have a clear picture of who these children are in practice, how many will be affected in the ACT, or what their day-to-day support needs look like. Nor is it clear whether the ACT has the funding or workforce capacity to meet those needs. There is also no settled, operational definition of “low and moderate support needs”. This must be clarified urgently as a matter of practicality. The ACT cannot meet needs it cannot anticipate through information.

The children currently in the Scheme are largely those with Autism Level 2 and 3, which the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual recognises as involving substantial and high support needs. If those children transition out of the NDIS, their needs will remain and will need to be met elsewhere.

At the same time, there is no published evidence base underpinning the proposed shift. In particular, we have not seen:

1. a risk and impact assessment, a workforce capacity assessment
2. clinical evidence supporting the appropriateness of the change
3. economic modelling across jurisdictions
4. or a clear legal analysis of consistency with the NDIS Act, our own State Disability Frameworks or Australia’s obligations under the CRPD and CRC.

In those circumstances, there is both a moral and a practical obligation on the ACT to ensure that no child is left without support.

It would be prudent for the ACT to seek this information as a matter of priority, and to ensure that any bilateral or implementation agreement is contingent on that information being provided and demonstrating that the system is ready.

That statement was provided to me this morning from the Australian Neurodivergent Parents Association.

I would like to pass on some of my own reflections on the minister’s speech this morning. It was interesting to me that the lead-in idea that the minister presented as the basis for these changes was scheme integrity. The minister led with, “The commonwealth needs to do something about fraud and misappropriation of funds,” et

cetera. That is all very true, but is that really the main message coming out of these changes? Surely, the main message, which she does touch on later—is this a lower priority message from the ACT government?—is that there will be 160,000 fewer people on the scheme. That is really the main message, surely, Minister. Yes, fraud should be dealt with, but it should be dealt with all the time, not with a massive announcement that has been coming for years. I wonder whether the minister is being rather sympathetic to her Labor counterpart in the federal government. Frankly, it would appear that way.

I have reached out to the minister's office for a briefing. Obviously, I will be relying on her, to a significant degree, to let me know what these commonwealth changes mean. As I have said on other occasions, including in the media, I welcome the voices of community members and community organisations who are directly impacted by these changes, in the ACT in particular. I welcome their message, their questions and their ideas on how the ACT could do something to step into the gap that has been created by a federal Labor decision.

I look forward to the minister briefing me fully, as the shadow minister for disability, and I ask her not to obscure what is really going on here, from her federal Labor counterparts; that is, we are seeing 160,000 people being taken out of support that they currently have. Surely, Minister, that is the main message.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (12.11): I would like to thank Minister Orr for her statement and commend her for bringing the voices of the Disability Advisory Council members into the chamber today. The generosity of those members whose stories we heard is immense, and it is absolutely essential that we listen to what they are telling us about the dangerous narrative being spun around people with disabilities and which many in government and media are playing into. It is a false narrative that uses people with disabilities as scapegoats—scapegoats for the cost of living and for a government who spends billions of taxpayer money on war and fossil fuel subsidies, yet it cannot manage to find enough to support its own people who need it.

The announcement on changes to the NDIS from the federal Labor government last week has sent shockwaves through our communities, as people do not know whether they will be one of the 160,000 people that Labor announced will be taken off the scheme. Can we all just take a second to consider what that would feel like? To have to keep going to work, living day to day, while not knowing if, in six months time, you will still have the necessary supports to do so?

It is horrendously irresponsible for a government to make such a huge announcement on a scheme used by thousands and thousands of Australians, yet provide no details about the changes. Critically, discussion around the mechanism which will assess functional capacity has been extremely opaque, and it is essential that the ACT government seeks more clarity from its federal counterparts.

In regard to what must be done in the wake of the announced changes, I would like to echo the calls from Advocacy for Inclusion, which are that the government must: ensure no-one is removed from the NDIS before genuine alternatives are fully in place and operational; guarantee that plan cuts do not affect the supports essential to daily living, safety and dignity; publish the full detail of how functional capacity assessments will

work, who will conduct them, and what appeal rights will exist before any legislation is passed; and honour the commitment to “nothing about us, without us” in substance, not just in language.

It is blaringly obvious that the government has only done the latter when it comes to upholding this principle. The unilateral decision to make massive cuts is evidence of this double-speak, and then to cry “co-design” for details that come after the substance has already been decided is deplorable.

We have repeatedly raised the urgent need for more transparency and timely communication to people with disabilities and those who support them when it comes to changes like the Thriving Kids program. It has been deeply concerning to hear the incongruence between the federal and ACT government when it comes to Thriving Kids, as Minister Butler described the program as “off and running”, while Minister Orr has said—I think rightly—that the ACT government still needs more information.

On this, we were also planning to read out a statement provided by the Australian Neurodivergent Parents Association, but, in the interests of time, Mr Cain has put those excellent words on the record.

I want once again to appreciate the genuine political courage shown by Minister Orr to platform the voices of community members actively critical of the federal Labor government’s approach. I also appreciate that, if it were unilaterally up to her, Minister Orr may well have made a different call on the NDIS, given the aftermath we have already witnessed before the cuts have officially come into effect. But it is not lost on the community that she is a minister in the same party that is making these cuts.

I think a lot of us wonder why, if they are members of the same party, the federal Labor government would not follow Minister Orr’s reasoning, provide more detail and think twice before cutting the services that secure basic human dignity for Canberrans with a disability. Certainly, what I have heard from the community, and what I believe myself, is that it is our ACT disability minister’s responsibility to be a fierce advocate for the disability community. We expect her to speak out publicly, we expect her to speak up in national ministerial council meetings, and we expect her to fight tooth and nail to have the supplementary systems in place so that our constituents, who are already having their plans reviewed and cut before their very eyes, at the very least have a safety net to catch them.

The federal changes to the NDIS also explicitly mean that the ACT government will hold greater responsibility for providing services and supports to people with disabilities in the ACT. The government must step up and demonstrate, through actions not words, that people with disabilities in the ACT will not be left behind as these national changes take effect.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.16): I thank the minister for her statement today and for sharing the voices of some of those who stand to have their lives turned upside down by these reforms. I also thank Miss Nuttall for her remarks and agree with them—great speech.

The NDIS has been a fundamental piece of social infrastructure, enabling Australians

with disability to participate fully and meaningfully in their community. It is clear, though, that changes to the scheme are necessary to ensure the financial viability and sustainability of the NDIS and also to ensure the continued social licence to provide life-changing supports to people with disability. But the burden of these changes should not fall on the shoulders of vulnerable Australians with so-called mild to moderate disability who need supports. Perhaps the NDIS is not the most appropriate mechanism to provide those supports in all circumstances, but many Canberrans are very concerned that these major reforms have been announced without appropriate supports having been set up to ensure no-one falls through the gaps.

This conversation between the federal government and states and territories has been ongoing for years now and, while I do not agree with the federal government's approach, which has fundamentally lacked transparency, the territory government likewise cannot wash its hands fully of responsibility here. The ACT government agreed at national capital in 2023 to deliver foundational supports for Canberrans with disability. The writing has been on the wall, so to speak, for years now and, as multiple members of this Assembly have raised in this chamber and in multiple different committee hearings, it is incumbent on the ACT government to take proactive steps, knowing what is coming down the pipeline—proactive steps to ensure those Canberrans who will find themselves without the NDIS supports that they rely on to enable them to meaningfully participate in community life have choice, control and independence in their lives.

This can be achieved if the ACT government ensure that those foundational supports and Thriving Kids programs that they agreed to set up are set up and actually ready to be delivered. As the ACT Disability Advisory Council stated, "People with disability are not responsible for the pressures facing the NDIS. These are the result of system design and administration failures. People with disability should not be punished for this." The council also said, "The NDIS at its heart is an investment in people, families and communities." While we have been put here in some respects due to decisions made by the federal government, we have to respond. This investment is a choice that the ACT government can and should make.

While I welcome the minister's comforting remarks today, I am concerned that Ms Orr's statement this morning appears to turn a blind eye to this choice and, in doing so, evades responsibility to an unreasonable extent. People with disability, their families, carers and service providers need assurance from the local government that they are not going to pass the buck on this but will provide clarity about what the ACT government will do and when to ensure Canberrans with disability will remain supported from the moment they become ineligible for the NDIS.

Miss Nuttall spoke of the importance of having a fierce advocate for people with disability in our community, and I agree completely. But, more than that, I think what our community deserves from their disability minister is a firm commitment that the ACT government will plug the gaps. I think that is what has been missing. The government must consult with Canberrans comprehensively, proactively and in good faith to do so and to get this right. I do appreciate that the minister's office has engaged positively with me and my office about this matter, and it sounds like she has with multiple other members of the Assembly, which is positive. I look forward to working with her to ensure the best possible outcomes for Canberrans who are currently facing

a very scary and uncertain future.

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) (12.20), in reply: I want to make a few quick comments on some of the reflections made in the debate on noting the speech. I am not quite sure that the way Mr Cain has linked some of the things I have said is a fair representation of what I have said. But I am sure, as we continue to work through this, Mr Cain will keep an open mind and engage with the detail and the nuance, not just the political attack.

Miss Nuttall made a comment that I might have made a different call on a lot of these reforms, or my position on them, if I were not a member of Labor. I would like to put on the record that, while it is very easy to make a statement that Labor will not criticise Labor at different levels of government, I do not think that is quite true. I can certainly say that I have made my thoughts on the approach to making these announcements very clear to my federal counterparts and I have given them lots of advice on how I believe they can improve on the way they communicate their message. I do not believe I am alone in that; I believe all states and territories have provided that information.

Miss Nuttall and Mr Emerson also made a number of comments about being bold and fighting and pushing back. The one thing I would like to point out from that is that the way one pushes back can come in many different styles. While I think it is very fair to say that my style might be different from that of Miss Nuttall's and even Mr Emerson's, that does not mean that I am not doing exactly what they have said.

I would also like to remind all members that, through this ongoing discussion on NDIS reforms, there is a genuine need for reform of the NDIS and we will need to, as members of this place, as leaders of our community, engage genuinely in what is before us and with the nuance and the detail of what is there. Certainly, when we can provide that information, when it is passed onto us, we will be looking to bring that to the Assembly—as I have done multiple times to date—and to the community. But these are large reforms. These are reforms that, for the most part, sit with the commonwealth, and we do need to allow time for those to be worked through so that what we are putting on the public record is accurate and is the best available information for everyone, rather than things that will see more confusion and uncertainty take hold.

Again, I look forward to working with everyone across our community on what will be a very long period of reform with quite extensive parts to it and a lot of detail to work through. I will be doing that, as I have said consistently, with an eye to what is best for our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspensions

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) (12.24): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Assembly business and Committee business scheduled for today being called on at a later hour this day.

I appreciate the goodwill on all sides in terms of managing the program today. Ultimately, we are moving all of this until this afternoon, and we will just intro the fuel bill now, just simply due to the large numbers of speakers on Assembly business and committee reports. That is the intention, Mr Speaker, and I will take your guidance, if this is approved by the Assembly, if I then need to move that all of it is scheduled to later today because I do not know.

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

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Fuel Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 being presented, called on and debated in the same sitting period.

Fuel Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

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) (12.26):
I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

On 28 February this year, Israel and the United States of America launched a series of strikes on Iran, the ramifications of which have been felt across the world. The Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed, disrupting global oil and gas supplies. The impacts of the conflict are wide reaching, and I am sure I am joined by all of us here in acknowledging the very real and significant impact this conflict has on people.

One such impact is that Australia's fuel supply is more uncertain. The ACT government has been working with our state and territory counterparts and the commonwealth on solidifying supply and making sure we have the necessary arrangements in place to manage future supply issues. A significant milestone in this work was Prime Minister Albanese's release of the National Fuel Security Plan on 30 March 2026. The plan contains four levels, each of which have actions for the commonwealth and state and territory governments. Today, we sit at level 2, "Keep Australia moving". Under level 2, "Keep Australia moving", fuel supply continues to operate effectively, but localised supply disruptions occur. The commonwealth government is taking precautionary actions to shore up fuel supply and consumers are encouraged to only buy the fuel they need and make voluntary choices to use less.

The commonwealth government is undertaking bilateral engagement with key trading partners to shore up domestic supply; underwriting additional fuel cargoes and other vital strategic reserves, such as urea and plastic resins, as needed; monitoring, reporting and sharing data and information, including the status of fuel imports; diverting supply to the domestic market through changes to fuel standards; and reserves under the Minimum Stockholding Obligation; and deliver equity in jurisdictional allocations. State and territory governments are using relevant legislative provisions to ensure timely data and information from industry and distributors; considering regulatory reforms to improve freight efficiency; monitoring and reporting fuel station supply, including the availability of diesel; and monitoring economic impacts on fuel-exposed industries. These combined efforts are ensuring fuel supplies continue to arrive in Australia and people can access fuel across Australia, including here in the ACT.

The regular coordination between jurisdictions is supporting a coordinated approach to the 2026 energy crisis. The coordination activity, led by the commonwealth in conjunction with all states and territories, is developing the tools necessary to respond to the specific challenges that would arise if the situation escalates to level 3 or level 4 of the National Fuel Plan. Critical to this coordination and planning is the timely provision of data and information from industry and distributors. This data and information allows commonwealth, state and territory governments to track and analyse fuel consumption behaviour, to inform planning activities under future stages and to provide clear evidence for if and when moving to future stages is needed.

In the ACT, we have sought in the first instance to work collaboratively with industry and distributors to collate this data and information. Unfortunately, the response we have received has been mixed. While we are very grateful to the operators who have willingly responded, the majority of operators have not adequately responded to our requests. As a result, we now need to invoke, as outlined in level 2, “Keep Australia moving”, the use of legislative provisions to ensure timely data and information from industry and distributors.

This is a challenge all states and territories are facing. In other jurisdictions we have seen fuel rationing or emergency declarations invoked to use legislative provisions for data and information sharing. The ACT Fuels Rationing Act allows me, as minister, to approve, declare or extend a fuel restriction scheme when it is necessary to do so. However, I am sure all people here would agree that I should not declare a fuel restriction scheme for the ACT unless I am satisfied that it is necessary to do so, and I am of the view, given the facts, that it would be premature to do that now. The Emergency Management Act also provides for data and information to inform planning; however, we are not in an emergency—and, again, I am sure most people here would agree that the use of this act and its provisions is not the best fit at this point in time.

Given all the above and as a proportionate and measured response, I am today introducing the Fuel Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. This bill contains amendments to the Fuels Rationing Act 2019 and the Fair Trading (Fuel Prices) Act 1993, along with creating a Magistrates Court regulation to set an infringement notice offence. Specifically, the bill creates a power for the minister to require a fuel seller to provide information in order to inform decisions about a fuel restriction scheme; requires the minister to provide at least 24 hours for the production of information; creates a strict

liability offence for not complying with the notice; makes it an offence for a person to use protected information, except in accordance with the act; changes the definition of “inspector” to be “an investigator” under the Fair Trading (Australian Consumer Law) Act 1992; and amends section 5A of the Fair Trading (Fuel Prices) Act 1993 to facilitate a future infringement notice scheme for the offence of price mismatching at petrol stations and increases the maximum penalty of the price mismatching offence from 20 penalty units to 50 penalty units.

The bill also creates the Magistrates Court (Fuels Rationing Infringement Notices) Regulation 2026, which sets an infringement notice for the offence of not complying with a notice under the new provision that allows the minister to require information. Under the bill, the minister will be able to compel fuel suppliers to provide information with 24 hours notice. The information requested must be necessary in order to approve, declare or extend a fuel restriction scheme and is limited to information relating to the production, supply, use or consumption of fuel. The bill requires that the minister provide written notice to fuel sellers and makes it an offence for them to fail to comply with that notice. The maximum penalty for this offence is 50 penalty units, and it is a strict liability offence. The new Magistrates Court regulation sets an infringement notice for this offence of \$1,600 for an individual or \$8,000 for a corporation.

I acknowledge that fuel sellers in the ACT may consider some of the information that they are required to provide to be commercially sensitive. To address concerns about the use or disclosure of commercial information, the bill includes several safeguards. New section 43A makes it an offence to use or disclose information, except in accordance with this act or another territory law. New section 43B allows the minister or an inspector to share information with an entity of a commonwealth or state if it is reasonably necessary to do so for the purpose of exercising a function relating to managing a fuel shortage or likely fuel shortage.

These changes are proportionate and necessary to ensure we are prepared to manage any future fuel shortage. I thank all the members for their engagement so far regarding this legislation, and I look forward to a productive debate.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Lee**) adjourned until 7 May 2026.

Sitting suspended from 12.33 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, I refer to the report to be tabled today, which is publicly available, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration’s inquiry into the CIT CEO recruitment process. The report found:

TAFE NSW would not provide the findings to CIT but authorised Dr McNeill to do so. The Committee is uncertain as to whether the CIT Board has seen a copy of findings of misconduct against Dr McNeill, or whether they have only received Dr McNeill’s account of what those findings are.

Minister, have you seen a copy of the TAFE NSW report into the conduct of Dr Margot McNeill which found that that she had breached the TAFE NSW code of conduct?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question. No, I have not.

MR PARTON: Minister, what action have you taken, as the minister responsible for the CIT, to gain a copy of the TAFE NSW report, given that the committee found that TAFE NSW had authorised Dr McNeill to reveal it?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question. I have not taken any action myself to try and gain access to that information. I understand that the CIT board have communicated numerous times with TAFE NSW to try and gain that information. I understand that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, in conducting their inquiry, have also sought to gain access to this information. That standing committee has access to the powers of this Assembly to compel witnesses and summon documents. They do not have access to this information. I appreciate the intense community interest in this information. I; the board, I think; all members in this place; and the wider community, share an intense interest in this matter, but no, I have not sought this information.

MS LEE: Minister, do you continue to retain confidence in the CIT CEO given the damning findings in the committee report?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Lee for the question. I do not—

Mr Parton: Do you?

MR PETTERSSON: I have had worse, Mr Parton.

I would like to thank Ms Lee for the question. I do not intend to offer a view of that nature in this place. As members are well aware, my direct relationship is to the independent governing board. They hold the direct employment relationship to the CEO. Based on my relationship with the board and the structure of the act, I do not think it is appropriate to offer a view or opinion of that nature.

Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, Canberra Health Services has confirmed staff and unions have repeatedly raised concerns about the single-exit design of the Behavioural Assessment Unit. Nonetheless, eight staff have now been held under siege at knife-point for hours. Minister, have you personally spoken to or visited any of the eight staff that were held under siege in the BAU?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, I have not personally visited or spoken to any of the eight staff, but I understand that they are getting—and I have been assured that they are getting—appropriate support.

Again, I want to reiterate my thanks to the staff. And, again, the Assembly's understanding is those staff were physically safe. Those staff work in the Behavioural Assessment Unit as part of their jobs, dealing every day with very challenging

consumers.

In relation to the physical infrastructure issue, I think Mr Parton said that there is a single exit. He is aware that there are two exits from the staff station. There are also four exits from the BAU. Staff were consulted on the design throughout the design and construction period; as were unions. I am advised that there is no record of unions raising concerns during the design and construction period. I have spoken with one staff member who indicates that there was a concern raised. But my understanding is that, primarily, concerns have been raised subsequent to the opening of the building. This is not an uncommon experience; that people look at a design, they walk through a space, and it is only once they start using the space that they realise that something could be improved. That is why Canberra Health Services was listening to that feedback from staff and had already engaged an architect to look at whether there could be a change. There are a couple of options on the table and that work will be done.

MR PARTON: Minister, do you not think that being held hostage for three hours warrants at least a call or some sort of direct contact from the health minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I take issue with the term “held hostage”. The staff were safe. They were being supported. Policing was making decisions about what the appropriate action was, and I am assured that police were checking in with staff.

“Held hostage” implies a motivation on the part of the individual. I do not believe that the individual had—

Ms Barry: It implies somebody can’t leave!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: “Held hostage” implies a motivation on the part of the individual, and I do not believe that there is any evidence of any kind of motivation on the part of the individual to hold anybody hostage.

Mr Parton: How often do we use grenades?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Parton is well aware that the use of “grenade” is not accurate. This is a flash-bang device. It was an unusual circumstance. It was absolutely an unusual circumstance. This is the first time in— (*Time expired.*)

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how many other known safety risks across Canberra Hospital are currently awaiting action? What assurance can you give staff that they will not have to wait for another serious incident before those risks are addressed or rectified?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, but I would reiterate, again, that there was no waiting. When Canberra Health Services became aware of the concerns that had been raised by staff, they had already brought in an architect to look at a solution to this issue.

I repeat, again: there are two exits from the staff station, and there are four exits from the BAU. Egress out of a space is something that I am highly conscious of. It is

something I often take note of. I have had a conversation with the chief psychiatrist as well the executive director of mental health, justice health, and the alcohol and drug service. The chief psychiatrist had not raised any concerns previously about the Behavioural Assessment Unit. And the ED of the mental health, justice health and ADS had also said that, when he visited the unit, this was not an immediately apparent risk in terms of his visiting the unit, either. This is something that was raised by staff after the unit started being in use. It was not, as far as we can tell, something that was considered during the design process. And it is something that is now being rectified.

Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, it has been confirmed through the media—and not through the robust and transparent information-sharing habits of this government!—that the knife-wielding man who held eight staff under siege at the Canberra Hospital was in breach of a psychiatric treatment order and therefore receiving mental health treatment involuntarily.

Minister, do you accept the Minister for Health deflecting the blame to ACT Policing for eight staff being held under siege.

DR PATERSON: I find it really deeply concerning the way Mr Parton just framed his question there. This is an individual in our society who is very unwell, who is requiring hospital support; he is a patient at the hospital. To talk about him like that and to talk about these issues like that in this chamber—just afford that individual some dignity.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: The minister has not actually made any effort to respond to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, on the point of order: you did criticise the question, but you did not actually turn to the answer. If I could ask that you be relevant in terms of actually responding. I appreciate that you do not like the question, but I would ask that you be relevant.

DR PATERSON: I feel quite offended by the question, so I will take it on notice.

MR PARTON: Minister, did ACT Policing officers who escorted the patient to hospital brief the nurse in charge of accepting him into care that they had found a knife during an initial search and that he was subject to a psychiatric treatment order?

DR PATERSON: I will take it on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, do you accept that had ACT Policing had the powers to conduct a more thorough search, or wand the patient, it might have prevented the siege?

DR PATERSON: No, I do not accept that. The Chief Police Officer has been very specific that wand and strip searching mental health patients is not part of their core

business.

Canberra Hospital—Behavioural Assessment Unit—incident

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in your ministerial statement earlier today, you stated that, since the siege at the Canberra Hospital on 22 April, Canberra Health Services has empowered security guards to conduct wand searches at the Behavioural Assessment Unit. Minister, what steps will CHS security take if a wand search uncovers a concealed weapon on admission to the BAU?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, to be sure, but I can only assume that they will remove the weapon. I will note that Mr Parton claimed that we did not advise that the individual was under a psychiatric treatment order. I did not want to directly contradict the Chief Police Officer on radio when he indicated that the person had absconded, and was only going to do so if asked, but I did in fact provide the information to the Assembly, and we provided information to the media, that the person had not absconded, as the Chief Police Officer originally claimed. I understand that there has been an explanation that he misspoke, and that is fine. We all misspeak from time to time. But to claim that we were somehow trying to hide the information that this individual was on a psychiatric treatment order is ridiculous.

I will take the rest of Mrs Morris's question on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, is it appropriate to shift more responsibilities onto hardworking frontline health workers, who now have to deal with potentially armed patients?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I reject the way that Mrs Morris has characterised this. This individual was brought to the Behavioural Assessment Unit by police in handcuffs, with advice that the individual had been searched. This is one extra step that the Canberra Health Services security staff can take to ensure that they are doing everything they can to support the safety of staff in the Behavioural Assessment Unit, recognising, as Dr Paterson said, that the staff there support some of the most complex and vulnerable people in our community, with heightened behaviour. The clue is in the name. It is called the Behavioural Assessment Unit for a reason. It is there to support people in acute psychiatric distress or whose behaviour is impacted by alcohol or other drug use for assessment, and to understand what the next steps in their care need to be. It is purpose-designed for that use, it is something that did not previously exist in the same way in the old emergency department, and it was designed specifically for this purpose.

MS BARRY: Minister, is this policy change simply a reactive response that ignores the conditions that led to the siege?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. There was both a hot debrief of staff immediately after the incident and a cold debrief with police—as I went through in my statement—on Friday, 24 April. This is one of the actions that came out of the cold debrief. There is always a review. In addition to that, as I said in my statement this morning, I have asked the Chief Psychiatrist to work with Canberra Health Services and ACT Policing to consider every element of this incident, how it occurred, how it escalated and the

appropriateness of the response to it, recognising that this individual was discharged from the Adult Mental Health Unit earlier in the month.

I have asked the Chief Psychiatrist and Canberra Health Services to go right back to that discharge from the Adult Mental Health Unit, through the support that this individual was receiving in the community, recognising that they were on a psychiatric treatment order, the contact with police to alert them to the fact that the individual was in breach of the psychiatric treatment order, the police response to that information, and what happened after police had identified and brought this person to the hospital.

Economy—population

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, what steps is the government taking to ensure Canberra continues to attract and retain young people as part of its long-term population and economic growth strategy?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. This is a really important priority for the government, and we are taking a coordinated approach to ensure that Canberra continues to attract and retain young people as part of a longer term population and economic growth strategy.

Higher education is critical to this strategy, and so we continue to invest in partnerships with our world-class higher education institutions. The centrepiece of this is the new UNSW Canberra City campus, a major expansion in our city's higher education sector. We are also working with the University of Canberra, the Australian National University, the CIT and the Australian Catholic University in our whole Study in Canberra effort.

We are strengthening pathways into employment by backing startups and supporting a strong ACT public service and by growing our innovation ecosystem so that graduates can build careers here in Canberra.

On the housing side, we have a very clear plan to enable 30,000 new homes in our city, unlocking opportunities for first homebuyers. We are structuring land release, the new Built Form Housing and our tax policies to support first homebuyers.

We are positioning ourselves at the forefront of industries of the future, including artificial intelligence, digital technology, cybersecurity and space industries, creating the sorts of high-skilled jobs that attract and retain young people in our city, whilst of course seeking to shape a highly liveable city with a strong social and cultural life.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what are the economic benefits of this approach?

MR BARR: This approach lifts productivity, it drives innovation and it strengthens key sectors like public administration, education and technology, all of which depend on a skilled and dynamic workforce. In turn, it supports a stronger and more diverse territory economy. Steady population growth supported by migration and the retention of young people also gives greater certainty for long-term investment in infrastructure, services and the broader economy.

Importantly, we seek to align with the commonwealth policy settings that are beginning to be outlined ahead of next week's federal budget that will strengthen the ACT economy and address intergenerational equity. Maintaining that strong and constructive partnership will support stronger delivery against our economic and population growth objectives.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what are the social benefits of this approach?

MR BARR: Beyond the economic benefits, we seek social benefits from this approach to attract and retain young people. Our strong social and cultural foundation includes important factors such as our city's national cultural institutions, our natural surroundings and an award-winning food and hospitality scene across the broader Canberra region. What really builds on the strong economy and the job opportunities is giving people the confidence to invest and to stay here—to build lives here.

For young people and new residents it is about having the basics—like jobs, housing and safety—but also being part of a city with a lively social scene, a city that is inclusive and accepting of people from all different backgrounds, from all different parts of the world, different sexualities and religions. Canberra is one of the great multicultural successes of this nation and of the world. In a time when our national migration policy debate is shrinking to make Australia a smaller and less inclusive space, let Canberra be a beacon for multiculturalism, for inclusion and—importantly—for young people. That is our city's future. That is what we are striving for.

Schools—Meals in Schools program

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, the Meals in Schools program is designed to ensure that children in the program have a meal and to make sure that that meal is a nutritious one. It provides kids in five ACT public schools free breakfasts and lunches three days a week, because evidence shows that kids learn better on a full stomach. A menu recently published by an ACT public school contains K-Time Twist bars as a breakfast option; however, these are classified as junk food by Nutrition Australia. They are actually higher in sugar and more ultra-processed than baklava. Minister, why are children being offered these bars for breakfast under the Meals in Schools Program?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Rattenbury for his question and his interest in the Meals in Schools program, which is there to support children with healthy food options. I am aware of the issue with regard to that particular food item. I will take the question on notice as to whether it is still being provided as an option. Of course, a selection of meals is provided as an option to schools within a range of areas, making sure that they are in line with the traffic light system that our schools use to ensure that their meals and food options are as healthy and nutritious as possible and that options that are not clearly identified under the “sometimes” food option. But I will take a bit more of that detail on notice, although I do understand that the menus that are provided do meet with the schools' menu policies and guidelines. However, I have had the issue raised with regard to the K-Time breakfast bars by at least one family. I have taken that inquiry, and I will take the question on notice regarding the issue about other options within our menus for free meals in our schools.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, who is responsible for deciding on the nutritional content of the meals being offered in the Meals in Schools program?

MS BERRY: As I said, it meets with the menus policy and it is assessed by a dietician. So it does have an eye cast over it by people who are experts within this space. I can see if there is any more information to satisfy Mr Rattenbury on his question on whether or not they are being assessed appropriately, but I am advised that the menu is assessed and approved by a dietician.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, you might have to take this on notice: how much is the government currently spending to deliver K-Time bars to kids in the Meals in Schools program?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice. The detail of the information may not be able to be broken down to the level of detail that Mr Braddock has been asking for today. I am happy to provide more information on the advice provided by the dietician on the menu. If I have that advice that satisfies members, I will bring that back to the Assembly for their information.

Macquarie—swimming pool

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. On 24 April, Access Canberra announced that it was not taking any further regulatory action against the owners of Big Splash and that it would not terminate the lease. The community are devastated and may have lost confidence that the government have done all they can to ensure compliance. What were the reasons that Access Canberra had for not terminating the lease?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly, I acknowledge that Access Canberra, as the independent regulator, did make an announcement in relation to their decision in relation to the notice of intention to terminate the lease of Block 1, Section 53, Macquarie. They issued a media release to the community and to the media announcing their decision. They noted that following engagement with the operators and multiple site inspections conducted in April, Access Canberra considered the substantive actions taken by the owners, including the site clean-up and repair of the pool infrastructure, to reopen the site as an aquatic facility by 1 November 2026. They noted that progress on the site to date supports that intention. They noted that it was important for the community that the operators have expressed their intention to continue operating the site as an aquatic facility, retaining the existing 50 metre pool and associated food amenities. They have also said that inspectors will remain actively engaged over coming months and intend to conduct regular site visits to ensure this progress continues. So that is the rationale they have put forward.

I understand that they have met with the Save the Big Splash group to talk through some of the reasons for their decisions and they have also committed to publish a longer version of the rationale for their decision in relation to this matter, which was not to terminate the Crown lease and to set aside the notice associated with potential lease termination. However, they also briefed me very soon after their decision that they still believe that this is a controlled activity, that they will continue to monitor compliance

on the site and that they retain the right to take regulatory action if necessary.

MS CLAY: What is the timeframe for Access Canberra to publish those reasons for their decisions?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am happy to come back on notice with some information about when they intend to publish that information. That is a commitment they gave to the Save the Big Splash group, to provide more information about that reasoning.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, has the ACT government considered a buyback of the site?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Now that Access Canberra has made their decision in relation to their regulatory action on the site, the government certainly has not ruled out any broader options available to us. But the government's view has always been that we want to see this aquatic facility open to the public as soon as possible and noting the decision by the independent regulator in relation to the lease and the commitment that the lessee has made to opening the 50 metre pool in November, we believe this is the quickest possible way to get the pool open.

I am also of the view that we should not be rewarding or encouraging bad behaviour by lessees, and as the government undertakes a review of regulatory powers available to Access Canberra under the Planning Act to be able to enforce lease conditions, we will certainly have that objective in mind.

Hospitals—staff uniforms

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health.

Minister, there has been much angst among Canberra's health workers in the last week or so, following communications that North Canberra Hospital and the Canberra Hospital were apparently embarking on a push to stop staff from wearing fun scrubs. CHS has in recent days attempted to retreat from that position, suggesting that this is confusion caused simply by the wording of several emails. Multiple individuals, including supervising staff from with CHS, have contacted my office to assure me that the very clear intent from management was to limit the wearing of fun scrubs across the workforce.

Minister, do you accept that this is a bad call?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We all love fun scrubs. I certainly accept that there was some unfortunate language in an email. I do not accept the way that Mr Parton has characterised this, however.

I have a copy of the email that went out to staff. The primary purpose of that email was in relation to the appropriate use of surgical scrubs—or theatre scrubs—reminding nurses and midwives that those scrubs are not to be worn outside the perioperative and procedural areas, and not across the general campus, for infection prevention and control.

The email did attach the existing *Nurses, Midwives and Assistants in Nursing – Dress, Uniform and Personal Appearance Policy*, which was finalised in 2022, I understand, in consultation with staff.

As part of the email it did say, “Fun scrubs are not part of the CHS uniform and as such are only permitted to be worn if there is an approved local agreement in place where you work.” That is a direct quote from the email. Many areas do have an approved local agreement in place for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to wear fun scrubs, and that should not have been an indication that those local approvals were going to change.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you confirm if CHS management emails to staff last week state, “Approved uniforms are provided at no cost and must be worn”?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am just looking through the email. I will have a look at that and come back, and take on that on notice at this point.

I think there was probably some confusion between the theatre scrubs issue and the general scrubs issue. Clearly, the email was not worded as well as it should have been, and there probably was no reason to include in the email a reference to fun scrubs in the first place.

We all make mistakes. I think this has been a fun issue to escalate through Reddit and Canberra Notice Board and their communities, but I also understand that for staff it was serious and people do take seriously when they think that changes are being made without any consultation. So, I do want to assure staff that is not the case.

The existing policy that was consulted on in 2022 does continue to be the policy. Canberra Health Services will review the policy. The current policy is due to expire in 2026 and be reviewed anyway, so it will be timely to do that.

MR CAIN: Minister, is it any wonder to you that Canberra Health Services is struggling to attract and retain staff?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I absolutely reject the premise of the question. Canberra Health Services is not struggling to attract and retain staff. Canberra Health Services has recruited significant numbers of staff, and we are actually seeing a good level of retention as well. After the experience post-COVID which Canberra Health Services shared with other health services, there was a significant amount of movement where people went home to where they came from, in large part. So, I think that is a response to Mr Cain’s question. *(Time expired.)*

Active travel—Garden City Cycleway

MR EMERSON: My question is for the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, on 7 April, the government issued a media release stating:

Construction of Stage 1D of the Garden City Cycleway has commenced on Cooyong Street in Braddon ...

On the same day, the Chief Minister posted on social media stating:

Works have started on stage 1D of the Garden City Cycleway on Cooyong Street in Braddon.

The *Our CBR* newsletter, published in April, stated:

Construction begins this month on the final section of Stage 1 of the Garden City Cycleway ...

I use the route multiple times per week and have been keeping my eyes peeled for the new works, but nothing appears to be happening. Minister, when will construction of stage 1D of the cycleway actually commence?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Emerson is right to ask this question, and I hope that my explanation will be sufficient. At the time the media release was approved, it was in early April or late March. When it was approved, we expected that construction would begin soon after Easter, so the media release was then scheduled to go out after Easter, accordingly. However, there were then some delays to construction commencing because of the impacts of fuel prices, and there needed to be some further engagement with the contractor. Ultimately, that information was still published while that further engagement was underway. So ultimately it was not correct, and I do take full responsibility for that, and I apologise for any confusion that that has generated within the community. Certainly, we should have picked up on that and adjusted our comms accordingly in the preceding period.

However, what I can say is that the construction contract is in place, and a start-up meeting was actually held today with the contractor, so works will commence as soon as the site approvals and the temporary transport traffic management plans are approved. So I do expect it to be imminent, and we will publish a clarification to that effect.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what processes are gone through on the day of a post to ensure that it is factually accurate?

MS CHEYNE: That extends beyond my direct responsibilities. So I am very happy to engage with our comms areas and to work through the timing of what is published when, to make sure that something like this does not happen again and to make sure that, at the very least, we have got procedures in place so that by the time something is about to be published, or issued, it is as accurate and as up-to-date as possible.

Phillip—stormwater infrastructure

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. On 7 February this year, more than 500 residents of the Ivy apartments in Phillip were severely impacted when the stormwater drains flooded, inundating two basement levels and lift wells, disabling critical building systems and leaving many residents, including elderly and mobility-impaired people, effectively confined to their homes for up to four days. This flooding is expected to lead to higher insurance premiums and excesses for

residents. The flooding occurred where Yarralumla Creek and Long Gully Creek join, and it was the site of the tragic loss of seven lives in 1971. I note this is also where the light rail stage 2B alignment is. Minister, will the government commit to installing an 80-metre wall along the western edge of government land to protect the building from floods?

MS CHEYNE: I am not sure that I can use question time to commit to anything, but I would note that Ms Carrick has a long interest in this area and, indeed, moved a motion in this place, which the government is required to report back on, regarding the re-naturalisation of the waterway, if that is possible, and any other stormwater upgrades. That is due later this year. I suspect that that will have, at least, an answer to that. But I cannot predict what that will say.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the government agree to have the ACT Insurance Authority fully cover the building insurance claim under insurance subrogation provisions, so that residents are not financially penalised for flooding linked to government stormwater infrastructure?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question on notice, noting that I do not have responsibility for ACTIA.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what actions has the government taken to ensure this building does not flood again?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. A brief to the Chief Officer of the ACT Ambulance Service in October states that staffing shortages have negatively impacted response times. Minister, when were you first advised that staffing shortages were impacting ACTAS response times?

DR PATERSON: I have not been advised of that.

MS MORRIS: Minister, why weren't the additional staff required to support the new roster fully funded in last year's budget?

DR PATERSON: In 2024, when the roster changed to the new roster position, the ACT government committed \$18 million over four years to invest in staffing for that roster. It was always known—because of the different shift profile moving from the previous roster to this one—that we would require further staffing. That investment was made over four years, a couple of years ago. In the last budget review process, there were eight full-time equivalent positions for clinical and enabling support for the Ambulance Service. We are currently going through a budgeting process, so this is a matter for cabinet consideration.

MR MILLIGAN: Is funding frontline responders a first order of business for government?

DR PATERSON: Absolutely. Funding our frontline emergency services, our schools and our health services are—absolutely—a priority for the ACT government.

Hybrid electric fire truck

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, in question time on 19 March you noted the work health and safety benefits of the hybrid electric fire truck. In the *Canberra Times* of 30 March, a firefighter and a United Firefighters Union spokesperson noted safety concerns about the EV fire truck, including unsafe seating arrangements, lack of airbags and excessive cabin noise interfering with communication between officers. Minister, have these concerns been resolved?

DR PATERSON: When that *Canberra Times* article came out, that was the first time that I or the ESA executive had heard those concerns, and we definitely encourage staff to report concerns that they might have. We are currently waiting to address the seatbelt concerns and are engaging with Rosenbauer on their electric fire truck in terms of getting this repaired as soon as possible. That has been the primary focus on where the negotiation has been and where the discussion has been in getting this truck back on the road.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what are your legal obligations with regard to the work, health and safety of Canberra's firefighters?

DR PATERSON: We absolutely have an obligation to the work, health and safety of our firefighters and emergency services, and that is something that we take very seriously. That is why we would encourage the workforce, if they see problems, to report them, and report them immediately, so that they can be addressed.

MR MILLIGAN: Is the EV fire truck operating today?

DR PATERSON: No, it is not. It is in training.

National Disability Insurance Scheme—changes

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, in the discussion following members' responses to your ministerial statement this morning, you said that you have made your position on the announced changes to the NDIS, including the substantial cuts to the scheme, clear to the federal government. Minister, could you please advise us of the position you made to the federal government?

MS ORR: For clarification, the statement I made earlier was around the form of communicating the proposed changes on behalf of the commonwealth. That was a discussion following the National Press Club address, where I made it known that I did not think the approach the commonwealth was taking, in putting a lot of information without detail out, was helpful in answering the many questions of the community nor in allaying the anxiety of the community. That is what I was referring to earlier today.

MISS NUTTALL: Can you please advise us what supports are currently being made

available to Canberrans affected by the government's cuts to the NDIS so that they are not left to fall through the gaps which are emerging from these changes?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I reject the premise of Miss Nuttall's question. The announced reforms, which have not commenced, would require supports to be in place right now. However, Mr Speaker, if you will indulge me to talk through some of the supports that are available to people with disability, just so they are on the record, there are a range of services across the ACT that people can link up to. These will go through a number of—usually not-for-profit—groups, advocacy groups and the like, and it will go to information, it will go to capacity building, it will go to initial supports for people and it will be looking at case management as well as advocacy.

In particular, going to the point of Miss Nuttall's question, if people have concerns around their current plans and changes that might be reflected through plan reassessments, I would recommend that they get in touch with the advocacy groups that the ACT government funds in order to provide individual advocacy on NDIS matters. Advocacy for Inclusion is a good place, and ADACAS is the other one that they can look to connect with, to have any supports and advocacy that they need around their current plan. That is separate to the changes that were announced by Minister Butler.

MS CLAY: Minister, have you asked the federal government to not cut 160,000 people from the NDIS?

MS ORR: The growth of the NDIS has been an ongoing discussion between all first ministers—the federal government, states and territories—and have been decisions of national cabinet.

Ms Clay: A point of order on relevance: the question was, "Have you asked?" I am not sure that was answered.

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, if you will indulge me, I am happy to add that I have not asked, as those decisions have been made by the first ministers. They have been made around the growth of the scheme and making sure that the scheme is sustainable into the future without the rapid growth that we are seeing here putting pressures on it now.

Illicit tobacco and vaping products—Operation Tempest

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services and relates to the ministerial statement on Operation Tempest. The Canberra Liberals have been calling for action on illicit tobacco in the ACT for some time, and we welcome last month's operation. Could the minister explain if this operation was the initiative of the ACT government?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Castley for the question. Operation Tempest was a joint national operation initiated through the National Disruption Group. That group is led by the Australian Border Force, and the ACT was invited to join that group late last year. The National Disruption Group is effectively the coordinator of that week of disruption, and the ACT, since it joined the group, has been working with the commonwealth and New South Wales agencies to prepare for this activity.

Think of it as: there is a national framework, but then the ACT government led and delivered the local enforcement response through Access Canberra and supported by ACT Policing and the TGA, using ACT powers under ACT law.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why has it taken the government this long to take real steps towards controlling the distribution and sale of illicit tobacco in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I reject the premise of that question. Work on this operation has been underway since late last year. Operations involving the commonwealth, New South Wales and ACT require some pretty detailed planning and collaboration. So, there has been a need for some proper intelligence development and information-sharing and collaboration. This becomes quite apparent because illicit tobacco enters at the border, which the Border Force is responsible for; it is a commonwealth government responsibility. Then when it enters the border, it is entering New South Wales. Then, almost certainly it is travelling through New South Wales before it arrives in the ACT. So you can see why there does need to be that joined-up approach.

At the same time, the ACT government has been clearly signalling enforcement and enforcement escalation. It was, I think, late last year that the Commissioner for Fair Trading wrote to all licensees and put them on notice that tobacco compliance was a priority for him for the 2025-26 financial year. Then there was further engagement this year with major commercial operators. So I do not agree that it has taken so long. I think that it reflects that this is a complex operation, and one that has proven successful. We will support ongoing enforcement.

MS BARRY: Is the minister aware of an increased organised crime presence in the ACT as a result of the delays in taking action on illicit tobacco?

DR PATERSON: I will take this one. I reject the premise of the question.

Ms Barry: There is no increase? In organised crime?

DR PATERSON: That there has been an increase. Yes. The briefing that I have last received on this states that there has been no increase, as has been seen in other jurisdictions, of organised crime and criminal activity. We have incredibly dedicated organised crime teams in ACT Policing, and our Criminal Asset Confiscation Team, which do fantastic work. Illicit tobacco falls under their remit. As of the last briefing that I have received, there has not been an increase in this activity in the ACT.

Fuel security

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, Canberran households continue to feel the impacts associated with the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including through rising fuel prices and other everyday costs. Can you update the Assembly on how the ACT government is supporting Canberrans to travel across the city and limit the impact on their household budgets?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The ACT government understands that many Canberra households are continuing to feel pressure from rising fuel prices and broader cost-of-living challenges, and that is why we have acted to

provide practical relief. We have assisted the commonwealth to reduce the fuel excise through a contribution from the GST, reducing the fuel excise by 5.7 cents per litre, on top of the commonwealth reducing the excise by 26.3 cents a litre.

We have also provided targeted relief by halving monthly public transport fare caps until 30 June this year. This initiative delivers real cost-of-living support now, while also helping Canberrans to reduce reliance on higher cost, private vehicle travel during a period of global fuel pressures. For people who may use public transport less regularly, it provides an incentive to use public transport more often. More importantly, it provides certainty: no Canberrans will pay more than \$68.20 per month to use public transport, no matter how often or when they take buses or light rail.

Cheaper fares are only part of the picture. We are also improving public transport services across Canberra. From early April there was a new timetable that has been applied to services, particularly services crossing Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, and that has helped to address early-running buses, and congestion and reliability issues raised by the community. Further improvements will be made to the bus network and timetable from term 3 to ensure that capacity meets demand on some of our busiest corridors.

Together, these changes will boost capacity, improve reliability and reduce costs for frequent users—a balanced approach that supports households now and encourages more people to choose public transport amid ongoing global fuel pressures. The government's response is striking the right balance between cost relief today and remaining prepared to respond to the rapidly developing and uncertain situation that we face.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how much could regular commuters, students and families save each month under these reduced fare caps?

MR STEEL: All MyWay+ users will now reach the monthly cap after just 20 paid trips, and students will benefit even further, with school and tertiary students reaching free travel after only 15 paid trips. Once the cap is reached, all further bus and light rail travel for the remainder of the month is free, and that gives commuters and families certainty that their travel costs are contained to a clear monthly maximum, helping households budget with confidence while encouraging greater use of affordable public transport.

Regular commuters who use public transport to get to work each day could save up to \$68.20 a month in fares under these changes. And for full time university or TAFE students, by reducing the monthly cap down even further—so more than halved—to 15 trips, this will bring the maximum cost of public transport for the month down to \$25.65. For school students, the change will bring costs down to less than \$5 a week for each student, with a maximum of \$19.35 per month.

Passengers who are eligible for other MyWay+ concession fares will have the monthly cap reduced from 40 to 20 paid trips. A number of other cohorts may also be eligible for benefits, such as all-day free travel, or free travel during off-peak periods, with further information available on the Transport Canberra website.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how is the ACT government monitoring the impacts on Canberra households of the conflict, including through the consideration of further measures in our public transport system?

MR STEEL: Thank you, Ms Tough, for your supplementary. The government will continue to closely monitor global fuel markets, local supply conditions and the impact of cost-of-living pressures on Canberra households. And I note in recent minutes the decision by the RBA to increase the cash rate by 25 basis points, which will, of course, provide no satisfaction to any Canberra household, particularly those with a mortgage.

We have made clear that we are assessing the situation every week. Our focus is on making public transport more accessible, reliable and convenient, not making promises that could weaken the system over time. A reduced fare cap keeps public transport costs affordable and predictable while allowing us to keep investing in the things that actually drive mode shift onto public transport over the long term, which include more buses, improved services, more frequent services and new public transport infrastructure.

Earlier today I spoke on the ACT government's work in confirming the State Circle east alignment for light rail stage 2B. Introducing mass transit options is a clear part of our strategy to invest in public transport and drive that mode shift, which we have seen, of course, most successfully in stage 1 of light rail, whilst also supporting our ambitions to support a zero-emissions transport system, with cleaner, quieter and more comfortable bus and light rail services.

We are also strengthening Canberra's bus network, of course, with 106 electric buses already in daily service cutting emissions, and that has been an important part of the resilience of Canberra's public transport system during this time of increased diesel costs. We are already backing the transition by buying 30 more electric buses powered by 100 per cent, Australian-produced renewable electricity, making our transport system much more resilient over time as we continue the transition to 2040.

Light rail—stage 2B

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, this morning you described a number of light rail 2B updates—firstly, moving the Melbourne Avenue stop to the inner verge. Did the ACT government consider the pedestrian impacts of this change, notably, the need for pedestrians to walk further and cross more road pavement to reach that particular light rail stop? How was this considered against the benefits to short-term construction impacts and the adjacent car parking, by contrast?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, that would impact pedestrians on one side of the road, and not the other. Of course, people on the other side of the road will have much easier access to a light rail stop that is in the verge. Infrastructure Canberra has balanced feedback from the community, including nearby residents, in relation to the stop. There are a range of other factors that were taken into account, which I mentioned in my ministerial statement this morning, which go to constructability and deliverability of the project.

Importantly, what this inner running means is that, because we will have light rail just

south of Sydney Avenue in the verge, light rail needs to go onto that side of the road, anyway, in order to cross Capital Circle, then move into the median strip of Adelaide Avenue. That transition has to be made, and it was, of course, included as one of the options within the draft EIS. The further technical work has now confirmed that that is the best solution to support the delivery of light rail and the transition of the light rail line into the median strip of Adelaide Avenue, to make sure it can then travel down to Woden.

Yes, pedestrian matters were considered, as well as a range of other factors, including constructability and delivery issues.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, did the ACT government receive any feedback about the proposed stop locations and their ability to serve the suburb of Curtin?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Certainly, one of the nine stops proposed is in Curtin, on Carruthers Street. It also serves the suburb of Hughes, and part of Deakin as well. Yes, that was a big part of the consultation on the draft EIS. In terms of the north Curtin residential area proposal, yes, we have received feedback from the community in relation to the opportunity for a future light rail stop there. That has also come up through the National Capital Authority's consultation in relation to the National Capital Plan amendment associated with the north Curtin residential area, which is currently out for consultation.

Infrastructure Canberra has been working closely with both the Suburban Land Agency and the City and Environment Directorate on future land use planning in the corridor, and we will be consulting, in a very short period of time, on the draft southern gateway planning and design framework, which will also be looking at the future opportunities to connect the north Curtin residential area with existing bus routes, particularly the rapid bus routes running on the Cotter Road currently, and the potential opportunity for a light rail stop there in future. I note that in that section of Yarra Glen Drive there is not currently any crossing infrastructure in place, as there is at some of the other stops that have been proposed as part of the EIS for stage 2B of light rail. That would need to be considered, and there will be the opportunity for further engagement with the community in relation to those matters.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, does the ACT government commit to the business case considering the final stop being in Mawson and not in the Woden town centre?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The EIS has been developed for the route down to Woden. That decision was made, noting that the environmental matters in the other section down to Mawson are not as complex. It is one of the reasons why we split stage 2 into two parts, with 2A being completed first, because of that section not being as complex, from an environmental and heritage point of view.

We will consider that potential extension as part of a business case, down to Mawson. But for the purposes of the environmental approvals, that is the section between Commonwealth Park and the Woden town centre that is being sought at this point in time.

MyWay+—retail outlets

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, recent *Canberra Times* reporting has once again brought the illegal tobacco epidemic into the public arena and into some ministerial statements and questions this morning.

Despite numerous stores being raided and nearly 200 kilograms of illicit tobacco seized, dozens of stores allegedly selling illegal tobacco—well, quite clearly selling illegal tobacco!—remain open across Canberra.

Minister, my office has uncovered that there are at least half a dozen retailers suspected of trading illegal tobacco products that the government has entrusted with the sale of MyWay+ cards and recharges. What due diligence, if any, does the government do before a retailer can become a MyWay+ outlet?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I will take the question on notice, but I note that there are a range of different outlets that can sign up to sell MyWay+ cards to the community.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR STEEL: Certainly, in the past, with the old MyWay system, it would not be unheard of to have a tobacconist selling a range of things including tobacco but also MyWay and transport cards.

There are a range of those retailers around. Of course, retailers need to comply with the law. I am sure that would be considered, but I will come back with some information to the Assembly.

MR PARTON: Minister, would the government reconsider its agreement with individual MyWay+ outlets if they were found to be selling illegal products?

MR STEEL: I will come back with some more information to the Assembly in relation to the current policy and guidelines, but I note that there are range of options that are now available that were never available before. With MyWay+ you do not have to go in to get a travel card; you can now pay with a debit or credit card or the other options available through MyWay+, rather than using a regular travel card. Those regular travel cards are still available, but that is not the only option available. So people do not have to go into one of the outlets that Mr Parton is asking about.

MR CAIN: Minister, given that these MyWay+ outlets suspected of selling illegal tobacco have operated for quite some time, is the government simply not interested in acting?

MR STEEL: No. The government is acting, but we are acting using a different regulatory framework to address the problem. That has been clearly reported on to the Assembly in the ministerial statement on Operation Tempest today.

Mr Barr: It has been a journey, Mr Speaker, but all further questions can now be placed on the notice paper.

MR SPEAKER: It is good to be back!

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Hospitals—staff uniforms

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In relation to Mr Parton’s question about the email about “fun scrubs”, I can confirm that the email includes one line saying, “While individual expression is respected, staff are required to wear the designated CHS uniform while on duty.” This is clearly not correct and, indeed, is contradicted by other information, both in the email and in the attachment.

I would strongly encourage staff, if they have concerns about the potential distribution of incorrect information, to seek clarity from their team leaders, from the leaders in their area or, indeed, from the individual who sent the email, again recognising that scrubs are an emotive issue for our staff, and that people would have been concerned. But the matter could have been clarified pretty quickly if somebody had asked the question.

Macquarie—swimming pool

MR STEEL: Earlier in question time, Ms Clay asked me about the timeframe for Access Canberra to publish their statement of reasons for their decisions regarding the termination of the lease for Big Splash. Access Canberra will be providing further information on the City and Environment Directorate website by 8 May.

Schools—Meals in Schools program

MS BERRY: I want to provide some additional information on the K-Time Twists that are provided as part of the Meals in Schools menu. The K-Time Twist bars are provided on the menu once a fortnight. They fall within the amber or yellow traffic light system, so they are not the green food, which is the anytime food, but they are a healthier option than perhaps a K-Bar, which is very much described as a junk food.

I have not been able to find this particular bar described as a junk food. It is a somewhat healthier option. Under the Food Standards Australia New Zealand assessments, it is a three-star-rated food item, out of a half and a five-star. As I said, the dieticians that have been providing advice on the menus for the Meals in Schools program provide advice on the whole menu. We use the Education Directorate’s policy on the traffic light system, ensuring that there is a balance of foods, and at times there will be some that will fall into the amber light system, like the K-Time Twist.

I am not, by making this statement, promoting it or suggesting that everybody should stock up on K-Time bars, but they are a somewhat healthier option than pure junk food, noting that they do have a higher sugar content. Some organisations say that they have a high sugar rating, which is why they fall into the amber colour in the traffic light system.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General’s Report—

No 3/2026—University of Canberra financial governance arrangements, dated 27 March 2026.

No 4/2026—Implementation of the Carers Recognition Act 2021, dated 30 April 2026.

Custodial Inspector Act, pursuant to section 30—Report of a Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services—Detained person on detained person assaults: 3 May, 9 August and 8 September 2025, dated May 2025.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—

Bill—Inquiry—Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, dated 2 April 2026.

Bills—Not inquired into—

City and Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2026—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, dated 13 April 2026.

Civil Law (Wrongs) Amendment Bill 2026—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 13 April 2026.

Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, dated 2 April 2026.

Standing order—

99B—Petitions—Referral advice—Correspondence—Inquiry—e-Pet-002-26—Firearms Reform – Evidence Based Policy and Proper Consultation—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 1 April 2026.

191—Amendments to the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2), dated 31 March 2026 and 1 April 2026.

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2025—Canberra Institute of Technology, dated April 2026.

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act—Close to the Edge—An investigation into the effects of urban expansion on the Environment of the ACT—Special Report—Government response—Corrigendum, undated.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—

Report 4—Inquiry into Petition 002 -25: Hawker Village Shops Redevelopment—Government response, undated.

Report 5—Inquiry into DPA-B: Forrest Section 19 Blocks 5, 6, 9, 11 and 12—Government response, dated May 2026.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 95—Freedom of Information (Accessibility of Government Information) Statement 2026 (No 1)—Notifiable Instrument NI2026-149, dated 24 March 2026.

Fuel supply crisis—Mitigation measures—Assembly resolution of 24 March

2026— Government response, dated May 2026.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—Report 3— Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral Act 1992—Interim report—Government response, dated May 2026.

Planning Act—

Pursuant to section 77—

Planning (Forrest) Major Plan Amendment 2026—Notifiable Instrument, dated 1 May 2026, together with a tabling statement.

Planning (Inner South Health Centre) Major Plan Amendment 2026—Notifiable Instrument, dated 30 April 2026, together with a tabling statement.

Pursuant to subsection 268(2)—Statement of Leases Granted for the period of 1 January to 31 March 2026, dated May 2026

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee—Report 5—Inquiry into Home Buyer Concession Scheme Administration—Government response, dated May 2026.

Remuneration Tribunal Act, pursuant to section 10—Part-time Public Office Holder— Co-Chairs and Members—ACT Reconciliation Council—Determination 5 of 2026, dated 14 April 2026, together with accompanying statement.

Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion—Interim Report, dated 30 April 2026.

University of Canberra Act, pursuant to section 36—University of Canberra—Annual Report—2025, dated April 2026.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act and Financial Management Act—

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Board Appointment 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-25 (LR, 23 March 2026).

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Board Appointment 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-26 (LR, 23 March 2026).

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act—

Civil Law (Wrongs) Australian Institute of Building Surveyors Professional Standards Scheme 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-29 (LR, 26 March 2026).

Civil Law (Wrongs) The Surveyors Australia Professional Standards Scheme 2026— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-28 (LR, 26 March 2026).

Education Act—

Education (Registration Standards Advisory Board) Appointment 2026 (No 1)— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-27 (LR, 23 March 2026).

Education (Registration Standards Advisory Board) Appointment 2026 (No 2)— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-30 (LR, 26 March 2026).

Education (Registration Standards Advisory Board) Appointment 2026 (No 3)— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-31 (LR, 26 March 2026).

Education (Registration Standards Advisory Board) Appointment 2026 (No 4)— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-32 (LR, 26 March 2026).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Lime Electric Scooter) Declaration 2026— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-24 (LR, 19 March 2026).

Taxation Administration Act—Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable— Utilities (Network Facilities Tax)) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-33 (LR, 31 March 2026).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Amendment Bill 2026

Mr Cocks, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.10): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The Canberra Liberals will always stand up for our local businesses and our local workers, and I am proud to continue that tradition today by presenting the Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Amendment Bill 2026.

This is a bill that will stop the government inflicting another bad tax on Canberra businesses until such time as it can prove, based on an independent review, that doing so will not adversely impact employers and employees. It is a bill that prioritises reality over ideology. It recognises the realities the government has chosen to ignore—the reality that so many Canberra businesses are already under serious pressure just trying to stay afloat, and the reality that many of them are now at breaking point.

The pressures are not just from this scheme. Canberra businesses are facing a wall of barriers, many of which have been erected by the government, a burden that threatens not just their profitability but their fundamental viability. For a lot of the businesses that I have spoken to, the government's plan to expand their so-called portable long service scheme may well be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

For months now, we have heard the warnings. We have heard them from hospitality venues in Civic and Braddon. We have heard them from suburban traders. We have heard them from family businesses that have served this city for decades, and we have heard them from employers who are trying to do the right thing by their staff, while also simply trying to keep the lights on.

Costs are up. Foot traffic is down. Construction disruption is getting in the way. Consumer confidence is weak. Energy bills are high. Fuel costs are high. Interest rates have risen. Insurance costs are crushing. Payroll tax has been expanded to more businesses than ever before; and, on top of all of that, this government has found yet another way to increase the cost of doing business in Canberra. This is the business environment in which this bill sits.

Our local businesses cannot keep paying for the government's broken ideology. Things

are starting to break. Our businesses now feel like they have to beg for help, for someone to reduce the burden that they face. They have been telling the government, this Assembly and our entire community very publicly now that they are not sure how much longer they can survive.

Last July, Bleachers and Bada Bing Dining Club closed their doors, citing unsustainable economic and construction pressures. There was Charcoal Grill, an institution of this city, a business with decades of history behind it, and what were we told? Because of uncertainty and disruption around London Circuit, they could only commit to a month-to-month lease, that trade had fallen dramatically—that a Canberra business which had survived for more than 60 years was now seriously asking whether it could keep going. The owner put it plainly, saying, “I don’t think we’re going to survive.”

We have heard from Bar Rochford that they were only breaking even once in eight weeks. That is not sustainable, no matter how resilient you are. We have heard from the LaLa Group, owners of some of the best-known hospitality venues in this city, saying they are losing around \$45,000 per month—\$45,000 every month—and that is after already having to close Bleachers.

During the night-time economy inquiry in March, operators, including Fiction, ONE22 and Vent Nightclub, talked about the structural barriers to viability that they are facing, including liquor licensing costs that they say are materially higher than those of comparable jurisdictions.

This is the real-world context for this bill. Businesses are struggling. Those businesses are the employers that provide the jobs that people depend on to pay their bills today. When those employers cut back on jobs to stay afloat, reduce employee hours or close entirely, everyone loses—the business owner, the employees and the community. But once again, Labor seem set on imposing yet another tax that ignores whether an employer is profitable or sustainable, and just takes whatever the government can get their hands on, in the name of a flawed and unnecessary scheme. And they will do it at the worst possible time.

The government keeps saying that it wants Canberra to be open for business. It says that it backs small business. It says that it understands the business sector, but what it does, its actions, says something else entirely. Whenever businesses try to draw attention to any flaw in Labor’s agenda, Labor turns a blind eye. It defaults to old, outdated ideology. What may be worse, it does so without delivering the benefits to the workers that the government claims to be supporting.

It is important to understand that this is not like superannuation. This is not a scheme where an employer pays into an account on their employee’s behalf and, when the time comes, the employee can draw down on that balance. This is a tax. The government will call it a levy. They are clearly the same thing, to this government, and it is a tax that is calculated based on an employer’s payroll and paid into a single special account held by the government. When you want to take your leave, you have to not only work it through with your employer; you have to apply to the special government agency that has been set up to run the scheme. If you do not stay in the industry, if you only work for a few years as a bartender while you study, or if you decide hairdressing is not your calling and you pursue another career, or if you take a job in Queanbeyan instead of the

ACT, the money paid in on your behalf is not yours. The government keeps it.

This Assembly has already debated this scheme on multiple occasions. The Canberra Liberals have repeatedly opposed Labor's bad tax and stood up for both employers and employees. I do not have time to re-run every part of that argument, but I want to say this very clearly: even if you accept the principles of the scheme—and I do not—it does not follow that this is the right time to impose it, not in this way, not on these businesses and not in these conditions.

If a scheme that is supposed to help workers ends up hurting the very businesses that employ them, forcing them to cut hours, delay wage growth, slow hiring, or forcing closures, this Assembly has an obligation to take stock and think again. That is what this bill does. It imposes a 12-month postponement—12 months to give businesses some breathing room, 12 months to allow economic conditions to improve, 12 months to allow the government to fix weaknesses in the design of the scheme, and 12 months during which the government should conduct a genuinely independent review. If that review finds that there truly will be no materially adverse effects on employers or employees, the minister can have his tax. It is that simple.

Surely, that does not seem that unreasonable, because there is simply no justification for pressing ahead with a scheme if there is credible evidence that it might hurt the very people it is supposed to help. I have spoken to business owners who are deeply concerned about this scheme, who genuinely deeply value their staff. They are worried about their staff. They do their best to look after them.

In many small hospitality businesses, the staff are like family. The owners know them, they train them, they back them, they want to pay them well, keep them on, and give them more hours, not less. They genuinely value their staff, and they depend on them. That is why they are willing to back them and put their money behind them.

But they also operate in the real world. In industries where margins are thin, sometimes only one or two per cent, wages are already the biggest cost. As I have said, energy is up, fuel is up, rent is up, and households are cutting back. When you are operating on those margins, the imposition of another cost, however small the government thinks it is, makes you think again about your hiring decision. It makes you think again about the hours and the pay rises that you can give to your staff. It makes you think again whether you can actually stay open.

This scheme will make it harder to give staff pay rises, harder to employ more people and harder to offer extra hours, because the money to pay for this scheme has to come from somewhere. If the consequence of this policy is fewer opportunities, fewer hours, slower wage growth or more closures, it is a policy failure.

I want to reiterate the broader point about Labor's attitude to government. In the last budget, Labor raised, increased or introduced more than 25 fees, taxes and charges. Labor has driven higher inflation, a higher cost of doing business and a higher cost of living. At the same time, Labor was unable even to improve its fiscal situation, with record debt and record interest expenses which now exceed the entire amount that the government collects through residential rates.

The books are under pressure, and Labor's choice once again was to extract more from the pockets of households and businesses. They chose to add more costs and to increase the barriers and the burden. And they seem to want businesses to absorb it. But Canberra businesses are telling us that they cannot do that anymore. They cannot keep absorbing the government's problems.

I would urge every member in this place to go out and speak directly to the businesses in their electorate. Walk through Civic and Braddon and look at the empty shopfronts. Walk around London Circuit and see what construction disruption has done to foot traffic and to the businesses that should be there. Get out there and talk to the operators trying to stay afloat in Weston, Woden, Belconnen, Manuka, Dickson, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin. People out there are trying to make a go of it. Talk to the cafés, the bars, the restaurants, the hairdressers and barbers, the clubs and the small local traders. Talk to them. It might just open your eyes.

Here are a few that you cannot talk to. The Meating Room in Weston has closed. The Hellenic Club in Canberra has shut its doors. The Vikings in Kambah have had to close. If a pattern of business closures is not a warning sign, I do not know what is.

This bill provides a chance to fix this problem with the scheme before it becomes terminal, with a 12-month postponement, an independent review and a basic recognition that policy should respond to the real conditions on the ground. It should respond to reality.

At a time when businesses are telling us they are doing it tough, when the evidence is visible in our city streets, and when more and more operators are questioning whether they can survive, we have to listen. Before this scheme comes into effect, we have to know whether it will genuinely help workers, how many will miss out because of it, and whether it might do more harm than good. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Knife crime—police powers

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.24): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the carrying of knives and other bladed weapons in public places presents a serious and preventable risk to community safety;
- (b) Canberra's CBD, Civic and Braddon nightlife precincts are among the Territory's busiest public places, particularly during the summer period;
- (c) frontline police should have modern, practical, non-invasive tools to detect and remove knives before they are used to harm members of the public, venue staff, police or the person carrying the weapon;
- (d) handheld metal-detection wands provide a less invasive means of detecting knives and other metal weapons than a physical search; and
- (e) the ACT should not wait for another serious knife attack before

- providing police with additional preventative tools;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) Jack’s Law-style wand powers now operate in several Australian jurisdictions;
 - (b) the ACT already has legislative precedent for scanning searches under the Major Events Act 2014, including searches conducted by passing an electronic or other device over a person;
 - (c) while the ACT has a scanning search precedent under the Major Events Act 2014, it does not have a general public-place knife wand model equivalent to other Australian jurisdictions; and
 - (d) any ACT wand model should be targeted, proportionate, evidence-based and subject to appropriate safeguards; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) fund the purchase, training, deployment and evaluation of handheld metal-detection wands for ACT Policing;
 - (b) table in the Assembly, by the final sitting day in June 2026, a detailed ACT knife-detection wand policy, including a clear implementation timeline;
 - (c) conduct a “Safer Summer” pilot program to enable knife-detection wand by ACT Policing in the CBD, including Civic and Braddon, commencing no later than 1 December 2026;
 - (d) Ensure the “Safer Summer” pilot allows ACT Policing to use handheld metal-detection wands:
 - (i) on a person in a public place where police reasonably suspect the person is carrying a knife, bladed implement, offensive weapon or other prescribed weapon;
 - (ii) in defined CBD trial areas during high-risk periods, including Friday and Saturday nights, major events and other periods identified by ACT Policing;
 - (iii) on a person in police care, where a wand check is reasonably necessary for safety; and
 - (iv) on bags or personal property carried by a person who is subject to a lawful wand check;
 - (e) evaluate and publicly report on the “Safer Summer” pilot, including:
 - (i) the number of people scanned;
 - (ii) the number and type of knives or bladed implements confiscated;
 - (iii) the number of cautions issued; and
 - (iv) the number of charges laid;
 - (f) use that evaluation to inform an evidence-based rollout of wands to the rest of the ACT; and
 - (g) introduce any required legislation by the end of the September 2026 sitting period.

I often talk in this place about my hope for Canberrans and for our city-state. My hope

is that Canberra can be a place where everyone has an opportunity to be prosperous, safe and free. I believe these three attributes—prosperity, safety and freedom—complement each other and are intrinsically linked. I have long contested that on each front, Canberra is regrettably going backwards. Government debt and deficit is out of control, hurting every Canberran responsible for footing the bill. Violent crimes against a person are at a decade high, while support for our police is at a decade low. When your financial and physical safety is undermined, are you actually free to live your life to the fullest?

This motion does not attempt to resolve all of the government's woes or even to address the full extent of crime in our community. Instead, it brings into focus yet again the harm inflicted in the community by the recent spate of knife attacks across Canberra. This is a specific but troubling development. In recent months, we have seen the Canberra Centre go into lockdown following reports of warring youth groups brandishing knives. We have seen altercations at Belconnen Westfield where 18 youths produced knives and hammers. We have seen a police officer stabbed in the line of duty. We have seen other police officers threatened with knives in the line of duty. We have seen eight hospital workers held hostage for three hours by a knife-wielding patient.

Canberra is a special city, but it is not so special that we can pretend that knife attacks are only a problem that other people in other jurisdictions must confront. The recent spate of knife attacks in Canberra clearly demonstrates that. Every time another serious knife incident occurs, the ACT government is very quick to assure the community that knife crime is not on the rise. We repeatedly hear from the government that there is not enough evidence to justify the expansion of search powers. That is cold comfort for our police, for our frontline health workers and for our innocent members of the community who were left to deal with the fallout of a knife attack.

In five years, from 2020 to 2025, there were 21 homicides and 360 assaults where a knife or a sharp instrument was involved. We should be grateful that these numbers are not increasing, but that does not mean we should be complacent. In 2024-25, police seized 467 knives and laid charges against 89 individuals for knife possession. Of these, 23 were under the age of 18 years old. Clearly, our police have been doing an incredible job and working very hard at addressing a pressing problem in the community. The commonsense solutions that I am putting forward today aim to reduce knife possession and the harm that knives can cause.

Police should have the tools that they need to detect and remove knives before they are used to harm members of the public, venue staff, hospital staff, police officers or the person who is carrying the weapon. A knife can turn a heated encounter, a drunken argument, a push outside a venue, a moment of bravado or a split-second loss of control into a lifelong tragedy. That is why this motion matters. That is why today we are putting forward commonsense solutions to ensure that Canberrans can safely enjoy a safer summer as part of a broader plan to help our police counter knife crime.

This motion effectively asks for the adoption of two commonsense measures. The first is to give our police modern tools to help them detect and remove knives and other bladed instruments off our streets. Metal detection wands give police a safe and dignified way to conduct a search without requiring a physical pat down or frisk of an

individual, as they are currently required to do. This component of the motion does not ask an expansion of powers; it asks for modern tools to help police do their job in a safe and dignified way. Police in the ACT already have the power to search a person in certain circumstances where they reasonably suspect a person is carrying a knife or a weapon. This motion is about making that process safer and more practical both for the police officer and for the individual that is being searched. This is a commonsense measure.

The second component of this motion calls for a safer summer pilot program in the CBD, including Civic and Braddon. We know that Civic and Braddon are amongst the busiest public places in the territory, particularly during the summertime. On Friday and Saturday nights, these precincts are full of people who just want to go out and have fun. They are going out for dinner, for drinks, for work, for live music and for a good night with friends. We want Canberrans to come out and enjoy the very best of Canberra, but we also want them to have the confidence that they can do that safely. Their new staff should be able to do their job safely, and police should have the tools that they need to keep the peace safely.

A pilot program is important, because it will allow the police and the government to assess the effectiveness of a modest expansion of search powers within a local context. We already accept scanning searches in other contexts, and the ACT does have legislative precedent under the Major Events Act for searches conducted by a wand. In the pilot program that we are proposing, the government should report on how many people were scanned, how many knives or bladed implements were confiscated, how many cautions were issued and how many charges were laid. This would be important information to inform any broader rollout of wanding. The ACT should not wait for another serious knife attack before giving police the modern tools that they need to keep Canberrans safe. This motion does not call for a broad, unchecked search power; it calls for a targeted, proportionate, evidence-based pilot program with safeguards and public reporting. Doing nothing should not be an option.

I note the Assembly had a debate on Jack's Law, moved by my colleague Mr Peter Cain, last year and, in response to that debate, the Attorney-General said that she would go away and review our current settings around knife crime in Canberra. At the end of the year, in December last year, she came back to the Assembly and she provided an update and I will just quote what she said:

The government will, however, explore possible legislative changes to allow police to conduct a scanning search where a wand is reasonably available to police and the existing search threshold of reasonable suspicion is met. Such changes have the potential to provide police with an additional tool to use for searching which might also be a less invasive or rights restrictive approach to searching in some circumstances. It may also address occupational health and safety risks that may be present in conducting some searches, and I intend to update the Assembly in 2026 on this work.

How good is that statement! That is absolutely something that the Canberra Liberals can get behind and support and that is exactly what this motion is about today. It is about providing police with an additional tool, "to use for searching which might also be a less intrusive or rights restrictive approach". Those are the words used by the Attorney-General. In the same debate, I also note that the Leader of the Greens also

firmly put on the record hesitation towards an expansion of powers but certainly left the door open to giving wands to police officers to conduct search, in acknowledgement that it is a safer and more dignified way for them to do their job.

This motion has taken those positions and that feedback from both the government and the Greens and has put that into a pragmatic approach that has found a middle road. We can work together and we can find common ground to keep our community safe. That is why we are calling for metal detection wands to be provided to police to use within their existing search powers and then, additionally to that, to conduct a safer summer pilot program.

Every knife removed from a public place is one less weapon that can be used in an argument, a robbery, an assault or a moment of bravado or stupidity. Every machete, every knife, every bladed instrument taken off our streets is a potential life saved. This is not about being heavy-handed; this is about prevention and finding common ground and moving forward to keep our community safe. The ACT government has been given every opportunity to act on this issue and is being given another opportunity today to act. If someone is carrying a knife without a reason in Canberra, police should have a practical and safe way to detect it and remove it before someone is harmed. This motion is reasonable and it includes safeguards. I commend it to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.36): I acknowledge Mrs Morris's notice of motion related to knife crime and thank her for bringing this item forward for debate today. While ACT Labor will not be supporting this motion today, we are in agreement that knife crime and its impacts are of serious ongoing concern. I echo the Chief Police Officer's sentiments that recent incidents, especially involving youth in public places, are concerning, and I understand why they have caused anxiety in the community. I want to be very clear: knives escalate situations rapidly and place not only victims but also bystanders and the person carrying the knife at significant risk. We saw this play out in the officer who was stabbed the other day.

The ACT government remains committed to ensuring Canberra remains the safest city in the country. I also emphasise the government's commitment to ensure ACT Policing are resourced adequately to continue to serve our community. We are voting against this motion today, as it essentially is the cart before the horse. As the Attorney-General said in December, the government continues to explore the possible expansion of police search powers where the threshold of reasonable suspicion is met.

The Attorney also stated that she intends to update the Assembly later on this year on this work. There have been two reviews on knife-related crime in the last two years, and I reiterate the government's commitment to exploring how we can further enhance community safety in Canberra in respect to knife crime. As the Attorney-General continues her work, it is important to point out some of the things that the ACT government will be balancing in the considerations: the rights of individuals and community safety; the liberty and security of individuals; the ability of ACT police officers to protect the peace in a way that allows society to flourish and allow citizens to go about their business without interference from the state; as well as evidence of wanding outcomes in other jurisdictions.

ACT Policing has statutory powers to conduct a search and seizure of knives where reasonable suspicion exists. Further, the ACT already allows the use of metal detection wands in limited circumstances. These are event-specific powers, not general public place policing powers. In practice, private security conduct most scanning searches at major events, with ACT Policing oversight. A scanning search means a search of a person by electronic or other means that does not require the person to remove their clothing or to be touched by someone else. There is no standing power for ACT Policing to conduct random or area-based wandering in everyday public places.

Data from the ABS and ACT Policing shows that rates of knife crime in the ACT remain low and there has been no increase in the rates of knife-related violence across different offence types over the past six years, unlike what has been seen in other Australian jurisdictions. The evidence does not support expanding police powers to search people at random. Such powers would unjustifiably interfere with individual rights, personal liberties and the ability to go about freely in society, while not significantly improving community safety, security or assist police to protect the peace.

In 2024, stakeholders consulted through the ACT government's work were mostly opposed to the introduction of Jack's Law. While a few stakeholders supported introducing the law based on principles of proactive policing, most stakeholders opposed, based on the lack of evidence to support the proposal and the potentially very significant impacts on human rights. In 2025, those views remained the same. The best available data on Queensland's implementation of Jack's Law also revealed a very low proportion of searches actually resulted in positive detections of a knife. In particular, a study by Griffith University showed in the Queensland Police Service's wandering trial at one location, a strike rate of 1.2 per cent while, at another, it was less than half a per cent.

The New South Wales government has also implemented legislation similar to Jack's Law. In March last year, the New South Wales government noted that, in the first three months of operation, they seized 91 weapons from 4,147 searches. This results in a hit rate of just over two per cent. However, weapons in this context also included tasers, slingshots and knuckledusters that were confiscated. If these were removed from the statistics, the proportion of knives would be consistent with that of the Queensland data.

There are also concerns about the effectiveness of the technology beyond the positive detection rate. Although the discussion is framed in terms of searching for concealed knives, searching with a wand detects metal and not strictly knives. Wearing a metal belt buckle, carrying a metal cigarette lighter or having a metal plate in your arm or hip would expose you to more invasive searches from police officers. Meanwhile, knives made from non-metals, sharpened resins and ceramics would not be detected. Wandering also would not detect, for example, ceramic knives, 3D printed knives made of acrylic and any other plastics. These can be just as dangerous as other knives, and any policy designed to specifically target knives should consider this.

Data from ACT Policing also suggests that the summer months do not show a disproportionate rate of knife-related crime that would warrant a specific trial. In the last two summers, there was an average of 11 apprehensions per month relating to the offence of possession of a knife without reasonable excuse. This is compared to an

average of nine in the months for the rest of the year—so only an increase of two apprehensions over the summer months. Additionally, the number of offences reported to ACT Policing where a knife or sharp instrument was involved in a licensed venue only accounted for up to three per cent of all reports in the last two years. This is in contrast to offences occurring in the home and other public places, which accounted for 66 per cent of all reports. I think it is also important to note that police carry significant amounts of equipment on them when they are out and about on the road. At times, this can be in excess of 20 kilos. Requiring police to carry more with them, such as wands, can present additional practical challenges for everyday policing.

In 2026, the ACT government has introduced a range of justice measures to respond to emerging threats of violence and to enhance community safety. These include a suite of reforms to the ACT firearms legislation in response to the tragic events in Bondi in December last year. The government is committed to exploring options to reduce all forms of violence and, in particular, multiple reforms in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence, and this also includes knife crime. We are committed to working with ACT Policing to identify measures that may provide safer outcomes and value for money for Canberrans. As stated in our response to the previous Assembly's motion, the ACT government remains of the view that scanning searches may have some merit as an alternative tool for ACT Policing to use in the context of existing police powers, which we will continue to explore throughout his year.

Although the ACT has comparatively low levels of knife-related crime and although I remain very aware of the devastating impact that knife-related crime can have on our community, I would like to reassure Canberrans of our commitment to doing what we can to keep our territory a safe and vibrant environment.

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) (3.44): I also thank Mrs Morris for bringing this motion forward, and I can echo, I think, what all of us will say in this place but certainly what has been said so far: we all agree that knife-related harm is serious. When a knife is produced, whether carried defensively, or offensively, situations can escalate rapidly and, of course, the consequences can be catastrophic.

But the question today is not whether knife violence is serious—of course it is. Rather, it is about what we are doing about it, and as I think will be reflected by all speakers today, I did announce at the end of last year that the government is exploring legislative change with a view to allowing scanning searches, where a wand is reasonably available and where the existing threshold of reasonable suspicion is met. Ultimately, though, if the government determines that this is a reasonable pathway, this will be because it is evidence-informed, targeted and accompanied by safeguards that are designed up-front, not added afterwards.

I do genuinely appreciate that this motion reflects a significant evolution in the position that the Canberra Liberals are taking when it comes to knife crime in recognising and seeking to preserve the important safeguard of reasonable suspicion. I think that is an important acknowledgment that Jack's Law cannot just be picked up and applied in the ACT. I do thank Mrs Morris for recognising how good my statement was, but in some ways, I guess that makes me question why she would try to circumvent that work, if

she thought that statement was so good.

Regardless, I recognise the genuine, good intent of the motion, but, ultimately, it is not taking away from the fact that it is prescriptive and premature. It is a timetable that assumes the answer before the work is actually done. It seeks to lock-in funding decisions, deployment, a pilot timetable, legislative deadlines and operational decision-making before careful policy and legal work have been completed.

We are not standing still, and we are not dismissing community concerns. We are progressing this work properly instead of on an arbitrary timeline. And it is a timeline which, on the face of it, in some ways, overstates the value that wandering would provide, especially when we know that there are real limitations and real risks: limitations in terms of what they detect, and risks in terms of the proximity to a person and likelihood of escalation, regardless of whether a wand is present or not.

I do caution against quoting selectively to serve an argument. The full quote from me includes an important qualification, so let me restate what I actually said for the record:

However, the government will explore possible legislative changes to allow police to conduct a scanning search where a wand is reasonably available to police and the existing search threshold of reasonable suspicion is met.

Such changes have the potential to provide police with an additional tool to use for searching, which might also be a less intrusive or less rights-restrictive approach to searching in some circumstances. It may also address occupational health and safety risks that may be present in conducting some searches. But in saying that, I do have particular regard for the views of the stakeholders that any metal on the person could result in an escalation with police too. So, this is something that we will explore and I intend to update the Assembly in 2026 on this work.

So, it is ultimately work that needs to be fleshed out, and despite the well-meaning intent, I do not think that setting a timetable, and a timetable crafted by the Canberra Liberals, is going to produce, necessarily, a better outcome. This needs some careful consideration and to be worked through, and I want to assure the Assembly that I remain committed to updating this place later this year as this work progresses.

While, again, I genuinely value the change in position from the Canberra Liberals, this motion is not quite the way that I would suggest going about it. I do genuinely wish to engage Mrs Morris, and any other interested member, as this work progresses so that we can get, ultimately, if it is possible, an outcome where we are in fierce agreement. But that is why we are not supporting this motion as it stands today.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.49): I too rise to speak in support of Mrs Morris's excellent motion calling for ACT police to have access to modern detection technology in the form of electronic wandering. It is quite disappointing to see that the government does not support this excellent motion, because the arguments in favour of this proposal are compelling; they are eloquent and they were eloquently described by Mrs Morris in her speech.

Now, there is a bit of confusion, Mr Speaker, as I sit and listen to the police minister

and the Attorney-General talk about “reasonable suspicion” and “reasonably required”, so it will be really interesting, and I will be looking forward to both ministers confirming, what the actual test is, because in one instance the test for policing powers is “reasonable suspicion” and then in another instance the government has indicated that the test is “reasonably required”. There is a bit of confusion here, and I would urge the government to take on a consistent approach, because that is important in ensuring and protecting the integrity of our systems.

Given we are seeing more and more reports on the increased use of knives and machetes in violent crime and gang violence in other jurisdictions, it makes sense to ensure that our police have the best equipment available to ensure our streets are safe. Canberra has not been immune to knife crime, and there is a real risk that we will start seeing the gang violence that is occurring elsewhere making its way into Canberra. There is an old saying that “prevention is better than cure”. We see the problems coming; we have the opportunity to do something about it, and we must do something about it. This motion is calling for exactly that.

Wands can deter and detect knife carrying in high-risk settings, including nightlife precincts, transport hubs, events and the list goes on. The visibility alone may discourage people from carrying weapons. There is a general saying that “general deterrence is better than actual offences”. Searches with wands are generally less intrusive than physical pat-downs. A quick scan avoids unnecessary bodily contact and can reduce complaints about inappropriate searches. That was all explored in Mrs Morris’s speech.

Early detection of weapons reduces the risk of escalation during encounters. It can also protect officers conducting searches or interacting with unknown individuals. The use of wands and electronic scanning has been normalised in many settings because it is effective. Anyone travelling through Canberra Airport has to pass through a whole-body scan and is subject to a wand scanning if any irregularities are detected, including any member of the public in the gallery today, who would have faced similar scanning to get into this building.

These arrangements are not controversial. They are quick, unobstructive and effective ways to provide safe environments. These arguments are so compelling, one would wonder why there would be any opposition to this proposal. But the reality is that there is. There are valid arguments against knife detection wands, and we should acknowledge them. Some may be concerned about breaches of human rights and police overreach of use of wands, which has been indicated here by the ministers. Others, particularly young people, migrant communities and First Nations communities may be concerned about the disproportionate use of wands by police and the impression that they are being targeted or discriminated against, even if this is not intentional. Clearly this could damage trust in policing.

This is why this motion is carefully crafted, not just to give police the technology to conduct searches with wands; it focuses strongly on ensuring we get the frameworks right to ensure they are used appropriately. We need to ensure that laws are not abused due to unclear limits or a lack of oversight. We absolutely need to ensure that their use is constrained to appropriate purposes. And we need to have a reporting regime with independent oversight to monitor their use over time. If thresholds and oversights are

weak, the power expands by default.

The experience in other jurisdictions where wands have been provided to police is very informative. Arguably, the strongest empirical argument comes from Queensland, which has conducted over 127,000 scans, which have resulted in over 1,000 weapons seized and around 2,000 arrests. The Victorian parliament noted that the use of scans had resulted in around 1,200 weapons being seized and 3,200 arrests in a year. That is not theoretical; it is a tangible removal of weapons from circulation.

Some may point to trends that knife crime is low—as has been pointed to—or declining, to justify voting against equipping police with wands. I think that is a logical fallacy. It is clear that knives are incredibly dangerous. It is clear that public expectation is that police provide safe environments. It is clear that we should be equipping our police with technology that allows them to conduct required searches in a safe and efficient manner with minimal impact on the innocent. As members in this place will recall, I am a strong advocate for visible community policing. Where police are visibly present, and where the likelihood of detection exists, impacts the behaviour of individuals. This is particularly important and effective for young people carrying knives “just in case”.

The proposal also goes to the potential large-scale use of wands in higher risk public places and events. The purpose of the use is to improve public confidence at those events and to reassure the public that they are safe to participate. It is not a punishment or an abuse of power; it is a protective measure to prevent harm. New South Wales Police have demonstrated in their operations that for each device, hundreds can be scanned quickly. Surely providing safe community places must be an important consideration for this government.

For these reasons, I strongly support this excellent motion which would provide police with the modern technology they need to keep us all safe. I particularly endorse the need for appropriate police policy development to govern the use of wands and the training of officers in that policy to ensure they are used appropriately. I call for the use of wands by the police to be appropriately monitored and to have external oversight. I believe these things can be achieved and I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.57): I rise to speak in response to Mrs Morris’s motion on knife detection in our community. As I think everyone has remarked, knife crime has no place in the ACT and no member of our community or frontline worker should have to fear for their safety when they are out and about in our city, going about their day or doing their job.

The questions I have in relation to this particular motion are: will the calls in this motion actually make our city safer and does the cost-benefit analysis here add up? It is critical that any response to knife crime and for any other safety issue be evidence-based, targeted and balanced. Luckily, we do not have to look far for the answers to these questions as this is an issue that has been considered a number of times in recent years in this place, as other members have remarked on.

In May 2024, Mr Cain brought a motion calling for the consideration of the introduction of Jack’s Law, Queensland’s police wand laws, in the ACT and requesting that the government report back. In August of that year, Mr Rattenbury, in his then role as

Attorney-General, did so and stepped through the apprehension of the government at time for such reforms. In early 2025, Mr Cain brought a motion calling once again for the implementation of these laws in the ACT. This motion was amended to require the government to evaluate the evidence base and report back. Ms Cheyne, as the now Attorney-General, reported back in December last year and provided further rationale for the government's continued apprehension for such reforms. Both of these reports back clearly stated that the introduction of such powers in a sweeping way is not supported by the available evidence. Ms Cheyne, as she reflected today, also outlined in her report back to the Assembly that the government is exploring possible legislative changes to allow police to conduct a scanning search where a wand is reasonably available to police and the existing search threshold of reasonable suspicion is met. We are awaiting a further update on this exploration.

I support the idea of providing police with an additional tool to do their job, particularly if this may reduce risk to officers and reduce the need for more invasive searches, as long as it does not inappropriately jeopardise personal liberties and due process. As I reflected on during the debate on Mr Cain's motion last March, evidence from interjurisdictional counterparts that have introduced such laws suggests that First Nations people, people of colour and other vulnerable cohorts have, in fact, been disproportionately targeted as a consequence of those laws. Griffith University's review of Queensland's police service wand search trial found that only one in 100 wandings detected a weapon and that racial profiling was evident in police decisions to search.

The last time this was debated, I proposed an amendment calling on the government to explore evidence-based wraparound programs to address the underlying causes of knife crime and other violent crime, such as poor mental health, poverty and substance use. Channelling resources into addressing the underlying reasons people carry and wish to use knives is the number one way we can minimise the risk of injury to community members and frontline workers—and it is true that this area has been chronically underfunded here in Canberra. In the ACT, a jurisdiction with very low levels of knife-related crime relative to other jurisdictions and given the lack of evidence that Jack's Law type measures actually work, it would be a much better investment for us to spend our money upstream if that money is available.

To be clear: if this was simply a matter of providing a tool to police officers that has been proven to reduce risks to officers, to our community and to people being searched, I would be supportive of that. My understanding is that the evidence does not necessarily demonstrate this to be the case when it comes to metal detection wands. But the motion before us does not aim to do just that; instead, it contains within it another push to expand policing powers to search people without reasonable suspicion. I am not convinced that is actually the Canberra we want, which is why I will not be supporting this motion today.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.02): I would like to thank Mrs Morris for bringing forward this important motion today to support our local police, local businesses and Canberra as a whole. There is something special about the autumn colours right now in Canberra. You can see what makes Canberra such a great place—families heading into the city for dinner, friends meeting up after work, people walking between restaurants, bars and events, enjoying the atmosphere and the buzz that the CBD has to offer. That is what the night economy should be like—right? It should feel safe and welcoming,

but it does not. That is why Mrs Morris has brought forward this motion today, to equip our police officers with the tools they need to ensure that our community is safe.

But, for that to happen, people expect to feel safe in the community. They expect to take their families out for lunch or dinner without that worry. They want to spend time with friends and enjoy the events and experience everything that Canberra has to offer. That sense of safety is not a big ask; it is a basic expectation. Mrs Morris's safer summer pilot is totally aimed at ensuring that the safety of the community is the number one priority of this government and expectations are met. It is about helping people feel confident to go out in our city, stay longer and enjoy themselves, especially over the busy summer period.

The issue we have here is the ACT government's lack of support for our police force. The laws that do allow our police to detect knives already exist, but our police officers are often under-resourced and not always equipped with the right tools. The Canberra Liberals understand that, and that is why Mrs Morris has brought this motion here today. We know that handheld metal detection wands provide a less invasive way to detect knives and other metal weapons. They are quicker to use and more respectful than physical searches, while helping police prevent harm before it happens.

I am sure the Minister for Police has been to and through our airport a number of times before and/or either entered into a secure building before, and no doubt she has walked through the metal detection area and probably been asked to step aside from time to time to be quickly checked with a wand. It is not invasive; it is easy. The security people will go over and ensure that she does not have any metal items on her and then she can walk on. There is no physical touch or anything and it is very easy to assess whether or not there are any threats or prohibited items. Why can't our uniformed officers have the same equipment? It is a basic piece of equipment that will make the job a lot easier and be better used in the community.

That is why we are here to support Mrs Morris's motion. That is why we are speaking to Mrs Morris's motion and supporting our police force and supporting the AFPA, who are calling on this type of equipment to be provided for their frontline officers. At the end of the day, it is about ensuring that our community is safe, that they are able to enjoy the night-time economy and that businesses get to thrive.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.06): I thank Mrs Morris for providing us the opportunity to once again discuss this matter, as I think Ms Emerson just provided in some detail. It is now the fifth time we have discussed this in the last couple of years. Each time, we have probably had a reasonably similar discussion. I think the general sentiment of everybody, that we want a safe city, is not disputed. People do want to feel safe in that community. I think the interesting question is how we get there and how we balance giving people their freedoms in our city and preventing the targeting of groups that are probably already overrepresented in their contact with the law versus ensuring that people are safe in the city and what is the right way to do that.

I have been very clear in the past around the reasons that we have real concerns about these kinds of laws. I go back to the discussion from March 2025 where I said that there was insufficient evidence supporting the need for these powers in the ACT; secondly, that there were real concerns from justice stakeholders about these powers; and, thirdly,

that there were significant concerns about the impacts of these powers on human rights under our Human Rights Act. We have spoken in previous debates about the work by Griffith University looking at the Queensland laws—which, again, Mr Emerson has spoken to in a bit of detail today. All of these things have continued to give me and the Greens real reservations about these types of powers.

Mrs Morris touched on the observation I had made in that there is a potential for the use of this technology to be less intrusive, and I think that is true. With the less intrusive ones, you have been stopped and searched. The intrusive part comes with the increased stopping and searching, which I think goes to undermine point that Mr Milligan was just trying to make about airports. This is about giving powers to stop and search people on the street.

Mr Parton: So you do not trust the police?

MR RATTENBURY: I have spoken to this before, Mr Parton. Mr Parton is making this interjection. I should not respond to him, but I will be doing it on this occasion. I have spoken about the fact that we do see a history of over-policing of certain groups in our community. That is an unfortunate reality. I am not being drawn into this, but I am being very clear about the fact that we do see profiling of certain groups. That is a recognised pattern in our community, and that is a problem—because, unfortunately, we have seen a demonstrated history of it.

The fact that the Attorney-General is still doing work on this is welcome. I think it speaks to an openness. We have said that we are waiting to see what comes back from that work. We supported the opportunity for her to do that work last year and she brought back a certain amount of research, and we will continue to keep an open mind to that. But in light of that, the Greens will not be supporting this motion today for the reasons that we have discussed in previous times in this place. We think the jury remains out on this one and there is not sufficient evidence to support these additional powers at this time.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.09): I am fully supportive of Mrs Morris's motion. When it comes to knife crime, it is very, very clear, based on the feedback that has come in from so many sources, that there is a problem. It is very clear. I know that Dr Paterson referred to police reporting figures. I make the point that we have the lowest number of police officers per capita than any jurisdiction in the country, that they are under-resourced, that they are stretched, that that situation has existed for a long time and that, at some point, that shortage and that inability of the officers on the ground before you respond to everything results in a distortion of figures, because individuals in this city eventually arrive at the conclusion that there is no point in calling and reporting this because the police will not come.

We have seen this in some areas of government—and I point to transport. We have seen in the public transport numbers that there has not been any new data presented to the public since before the last election, because we are aware that the data is not reflective of what is happening on the ground. The transport minister is happy to concede that the data that we are collecting is not actually representative of what is happening on the ground. So I do not know that we can cling to this belief that these figures say that knife crime is definitely falling.

Dr Paterson: How will the Canberra Liberals ever develop evidence-based policies?

MR PARTON: I would also say to the minister—if she can break from interjecting long enough to hear anything that I am saying—that, in the five years from 2020 to 2025, as pointed out by Mrs Morris, there were 21 homicides where a knife was involved. Mr Assistant Speaker, I dare the minister to sit with the families of those victims and explain to them, “It is all okay, because the statistics say that knife crime is decreasing; You were just unlucky.” That is what it is about. It is about people who are victims of crime. Mr Rattenbury spoke about the fact that this is a human rights debate, and I believe it is. I support the human right of not being stabbed. I certainly support this motion.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.12), in reply: I almost wanted to leave Mr Parton’s remarks as my closing remarks, because it was such a wonderful contribution and well meaning; thank you for that.

What are we to make of the government’s response today? They are saying and doing very different things. They are saying, on the one hand, that knife crime is serious and they “remain committed to exploring changes to scanning searches”. On the other hand, they proceeded to argue against wanding powers, claiming that knife crime is not on the rise and that the number of incidents in the city is not that bad. They then proceeded to cast doubt on the effectiveness of wands. The Attorney-General even said that we were overstating the value of wands. As a side note, why is Canberra Health Services currently giving wands to their security, to keep people safe, if we cannot trust their effectiveness in keeping people safe? What is going on there? You guys are all over the place.

The police minister went on to say that they are unreliable and heavy. On the one hand, they are trying to tell us, “No, it’s all good. We know this is a serious issue and we’re doing something.” On the other hand, they are saying, “Actually, there’s no evidence to do it. The wands are faulty and flawed, so you can’t trust them.” What are we to make of this? Are you committed to keeping Canberra safe and giving police the tools they need to do their job, or are you not?

When we are talking about the evidence, as Mr Parton has so eloquently put it, there have been 21 homicides in the space of five years.

Dr Paterson: Mostly in homes.

MRS MORRIS: My goodness; this is extraordinary. The police minister is trying to justify the involvement of knives in 21 homicides in Canberra. That is extraordinary. I cannot believe it. We are talking about people’s lives here, and we are talking about practical solutions to give police the tools they need to keep our community safe, and all that this government have to offer is to cast doubt on the threat of knife crime in the community, and on wands and their effectiveness. How can we possibly take them at their word when they say that they remain committed to dealing with knife crime in the community? Seriously, you cannot make this stuff up.

I have put forward today a sensible solution whereby we could gather local evidence.

Everyone is talking about there being a lack of evidence. Honestly, what evidence are you asking for? Would you like to see another homicide involving a knife or bladed instrument? Would you like to see another attack? What evidence are we asking for?

We are putting forward a proposal which would enable police to conduct a considered trial, a pilot program of a modest expansion of search powers. This is a very modest approach. When you compare it to other jurisdictions and the powers that they have already enforced and have in effect in their jurisdictions, which is taking knives off the street and saving lives, this is a basic ask.

I would have thought that, if the government were serious about this, they would have used this motion as an opportunity to instil more confidence in the community that they are doing what they said they were going to do, back in December, whereas they have effectively done the complete opposite, by undermining everything they have said, by saying, on one hand, that they remain committed, but, on the other hand, knife crime is not really a problem; it is not on the rise, and you cannot trust wands, anyway. Go figure.

It is a really disappointing outcome today. I probably should not be surprised, but I had hoped that we would find some common ground, given that we had taken quite seriously the feedback that had been provided from the Greens and from the government on this, and we had found a middle road. I am left to believe that this government lacks the political courage that it takes to keep our community safe and to give police the tools that they need to do their job.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain
Leanne Castley
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
James Milligan
Deborah Morris
Mark Parton

Noes 15

Yvette Berry
Andrew Braddock
Fiona Carrick
Tara Cheyne
Jo Clay
Thomas Emerson
Laura Nuttall
Suzanne Orr
Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson
Shane Rattenbury
Chris Steel
Rachel Stephen-Smith
Caitlin Tough
Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Question resolved in the negative.

Transport—electric vehicles, bikes and scooters

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) as a result of the fuel supply crisis, many Canberrans are searching for the means to change how they travel, including for work, education, shopping and recreation;
 - (b) an increasing number of Canberrans are looking to adopt electrified means of transportation, including electric vehicles, e-scooters and e-bikes;
 - (c) times of economic turmoil are opportunities to reform our economy and associated practices in ways that incentivise and establish good habits and which will materially improve people's lives;
 - (d) governments can make good use of fees, charges, rebates, taxes and subsidies to effectively discourage products and practices that produce poor community outcomes while fostering those that empower positive change; and
 - (e) our emissions reduction targets require that we favour electrified transport systems wherever possible and otherwise incentivise lower-emissions transport systems where electrification is not possible in the short- to medium-term; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) extend the Sustainable Household Scheme to include cargo bikes to support their uptake as a clean form of active travel which reduces congestion on our roads and our dependence on expensive fossil fuels;
 - (b) further provide government assistance for the adoption of e-bikes and e-scooters to support their use in substituting for short personal trips that would otherwise be taken in a private car;
 - (c) trial the application of low-cost pop-up cycle lanes to assess the emerging and enhanced demand for cycling along major transport routes and connector roads;
 - (d) continue and extend incentive schemes for the uptake of electric vehicles, reinforcing the ACT's strategy for 80-90 percent of new vehicle sales to be zero-emission vehicles by 2030, including through:
 - (i) ensuring vehicle registration and stamp duty settings consistently support the choice of a zero-emission option in the first instance, and otherwise the least polluting and fuel-dependent options that are available;
 - (ii) increasing the loan amount available for zero-emission vehicles under the Sustainable Household Scheme; and
 - (iii) providing for an expanding network of EV chargers across Canberra, including slow AC-charging sites; and
 - (e) report back to the Assembly on matters arising from this motion by no later than the second-last sitting day in September 2026.

On 28 February this year, the United States of America began what can only be described as an illegal war on the Islamic Republic of Iran. These aggressive actions have had significant and, unfortunately, predictable global consequences that are reverberating halfway across the world, to right here in Canberra. Iran and the United States are now effectively both blockading the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of global oil supplies pass, as well as fertiliser, helium and other essential goods.

This constriction of the global oil supply has forced oil-dependent countries to compete for other available sources. A global recession appears increasingly likely, and Australia is not immune. Our domestic experience in times of global disruptions has always followed the global trends, but in a way that reflects our national and local circumstances. We sit at the tail-end of a global petroleum supply chain, meaning that supply disruptions have not yet actually hit us. These impacts are expected later in May.

What we have experienced over the last two months has been a shock to confidence and a spike in fuel prices, well before the actual impacts of supply disruptions even arrive. Panic buying and market speculation pushed petrol prices up towards \$2.60 a litre and diesel to over \$3. A federal excise cut dropped the prices by 32c a litre, and prices for petrol have since receded to slightly above normal levels of \$1.80 a litre. The excise cut means taxpayers are effectively absorbing a lot of the cost-of-living consequences through the deteriorating budget position.

Consumers are also bearing the brunt of this spike. Australia's consumer price index rose by 1.1 per cent in March alone, and by 4.6 per cent for the 12 months to March. These statistics are reflected in the lived experience of Canberrans. Filling up at the petrol station is becoming a major financial decision. Grocery prices have been going up. The Reserve Bank today has just increased interest rates, hammering mortgage holders and, by extension, renters, in a way that will add further inflation in housing costs. Everything in the economy moves through the price dynamics of transport, housing and food, so everything will be affected.

That sets the scene, and I recognise there was a lot of doom and gloom in that, so let us pivot. While a crisis creates challenges, disruptions and forces us to change the way we would normally live, I believe it also shines a light on the opportunities before us. We have a choice—a choice to respond in ways that recognise the factors that leave us exposed to a crisis and therefore set us up to be better prepared for any future shock or put our heads in the sand and leave us exposed to the next iteration of chaos.

This crisis has exposed our society's reliance on fossil fuels and fossil fuel supply chains. Everyone can see it. Only fools would deny it. Yet I see hope when I look at how Canberrans are reacting. Canberrans are making choices that will reduce their own personal dependency on fossil fuels, which helps both themselves and their community by allowing fuel to be available for essential purposes—for the farmer who grows our food, the freight trucks to bring that food to our cities, and the emergency services that keep us safe.

Whether it be for commuting to work, getting to school, doing the shopping, or simply having fun—and we all need to have some fun in our lives; no-one wants to steal the weekend—people in Canberra are looking for better ways to get around. Every person that we can support to make a better choice will free up the fuel supplies for other essential purposes.

As governments of all levels respond to this crisis, as they inevitably must, including in the ACT, it is critical that we make decisions and take initiatives which reinforce this shift away from fossil fuels. This is what my motion today is all about. It is about supporting a shift to active travel and electrified transport tools. Canberra is in a mood for change, so let us make the most of it. Let us remember that our system of fees,

charges, rebates, taxes and subsidies sends significant and important economic signals to empower positive change and to discourage poor community outcomes. The good choices we can encourage range from significant, life-defining decisions all the way down to minor variations in lifestyles that add up to something far greater.

A central effort of the ACT in this field has been the Sustainable Household Scheme. It is a well-understood scheme, and the perfect mechanism through which to enhance our efforts on electrification. Very importantly, the scheme offers up-front finance to support people acquiring alternatives to fossil fuel dependent assets, and it is extremely useful during a cost-of-living crisis. If people can pay for a new asset over a period of time, rather than needing to front up with the cash at the very start, it becomes a lot easier to make a more sustainable choice while other bills are crunching.

I am calling for the government to extend the Sustainable Household Scheme to cargo bikes. For those unfamiliar with the concept, a cargo bike is one designed to transport a more significant load. They are necessarily built sturdier, frequently incorporate e-bike technology, and are significantly more expensive than your average bike or e-bike. As such, they are suitable candidates for supporting with low-interest loans under the Sustainable Household Scheme. Importantly, they can substitute for a private motor vehicle in a broader array of applications—notably, for things like doing the shopping. Their adoption will help to get cars off our roads, reduce our fuel dependency and, of course, reduce our emissions.

On top of that, I am also seeking further government assistance for the adoption of e-bikes and e-scooters generally. This technology is more physically accessible to a wide range of people beyond conventional pushbikes and has massive potential to shift peak-hour journeys away from private cars. I am open to what form that assistance takes. I would suggest \$500 vouchers or rebates would be a good place to start, as has been done in other jurisdictions. With a lot of people contemplating change, a small incentive can give people that little push they need to get out of a car and jump on a bike or scooter.

Of course, cars do remain a part of our transport landscape, and while we should be encouraging active travel in the first instance as the healthiest and most cost-effective form of travel, there are a lot of activities that still demand the use of a car. To keep reducing our fuel dependency and emissions, our cars need electrifying. The ACT has a target of ensuring at least 80 per cent of all new car sales are zero-emission vehicles by 2030, and we need to hit that, to get our emissions down. We should be deploying every tool we reasonably can in support of that objective, especially when other levels of government are moving counterproductively in the opposite direction.

The federal government's announcement today of changes to fringe benefits tax on novated leases of electric vehicles will reduce the level of federal incentives to buy an EV. Here in the ACT, we are not operating in a vacuum. To this end, the part of my motion relating to the amount available under the Sustainable Household Scheme for electric vehicle loans needing to be increased is particularly pertinent.

On top of that, we need to be continuously revisiting our settings on vehicle registration and stamp duty. I was glad to see some updates to the determination on registration fees last week, although I still believe there is more that can be done in this space. Our

system as a whole needs to steer people towards the less emitting and less fuel-dependent options across the board. This includes favouring smaller vehicles over medium-size vehicles, and particularly over massive SUVs and big American trucks. Hybrids should be favoured over conventional petrol and diesel vehicles, but zero-emission vehicles should be prioritised over hybrid vehicles, and this is particularly relevant to the second-hand market.

We also cannot afford to let up on the charging network. Charging anxiety remains a barrier to people making the switch, particularly in strata complexes, where residents do not have simple access to their own power point in a car parking bay. The charging network needs to continue to grow, and with a particular focus on slower but cheaper AC-charging facilities.

Coming back to active travel, I want to touch on pop-up cycle lanes. I know we discussed this to some degree in March, but I think it is worth revisiting. The point of a pop-up cycle lane is to test latent demand for cycling. If we were to put a cycle lane in this location, would it get used, and how would traffic behave? By throwing up some bollards and temporary lane markings, we get to find out, at a very low cost. Times when people are reassessing how they want to get around their city are the perfect times to test new cycle lane options. That is particularly true when we know we want to encourage active travel generally. Right now, it is the ideal opportunity to explore that further.

Pedal Power and the Greens have been advocating for a pop-up lane on Northbourne Avenue for decades, as a way of testing a direct and safe route for a large number of cyclists to use. It would be a fantastic response that would reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, whilst increasing the amenity of our city at the same time. Every time we get an opportunity to bolster the cycling network, we become able to further defer our need for costlier road expansions, sometimes permanently. Promoting cycling is good for people, good for the city, and it is good for the government's budget.

Putting a bit of effort into offering people the chance to demonstrate their interest in cycling, whether it be on a pushbike, an e-bike or even a cargo bike, can go a very long way. A number of cities around the world, notably in Germany, demonstrated how effective pop-up cycle lanes were as a tool during the pandemic. I would like the government to think of this as a testing and trialling tool and give it a try. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.33): We will not be opposing this motion from Mr Braddock. Despite the fact that Mr Braddock is a dynamic individual, the motion does not get my heart racing. I am understanding of the fact that, however we vote on this motion, it is getting up, because the Labor Party will be supporting it. They will be saying yes to it down here but they will not do any of it. They are about as enthused as we are. But they kind of have a supply agreement with the Greens and there are a number of things they have to explore. So, at the end of all of this, the ayes will have it. There will not be a division, and Mr Braddock can celebrate a big win. But there is as much chance of them doing this stuff as there is of them doing the landscaping and installing the street furniture out the front of Clarries at Tharwa, as they said they would do in 2018. This will get up, but they will not do any of it. We even thought about making some amendments, but I cannot really see the point, because

it is just a piece of parliamentary theatre that is playing out. It has been a long day already, and there is a fair bit more to come. So I am happy to stay out of it, and I know that decision is supported by the Attorney-General.

What is fascinating to consider is that both this government and the federal Labor government have some similar issues when it comes to debt—they have a fair bit of it. It is spiralling out of control. So, as we come up to budget time, both this government and the federal Labor government need to make some tough decisions. One of the things that the federal Treasurer has done is to signal that he is winding back EV subsidies, because we cannot afford them. The popular tax discount exempting electric vehicles from fringe benefits tax will be wound back next year, saving the government \$1.7 billion over four years. So, at the same time that federal Labor is winding back the subsidy to electric vehicle space, the Greens want us to ramp up. They want us to give away some more cash to anybody who wants to ride an e-bike or an e-scooter at a time when the federal government has absolutely blown the budget on EV subsidies.

When the Labor federal government has made the call that it must wind this back, the Greens want us to extend the Sustainable Household Scheme to include cargo bikes, to further provide government assistance for the adoption of e-bikes and e-scooters to support their use, to build bike lanes left, right and centre. At a time when the federal government is winding back the government assistance in this space, the Greens are calling not just for continuation but escalation—“There’s got to be some more cash there; let’s find some more money and get this done.” The Greens are effectively calling for those of us who are registering petrol-powered cars to subsidise EV owners. That is what they are calling for in the motion. When it says, “We want the EV to be lower,” that is what is going to happen.

As I sit back and reflect on the fact that my party and the Greens were in discussions over the summer about potentially sharing government for a period of time, I reflect on the fact that one of the reasons for such a move was the fiscal position that we find ourselves in, and I think about the role that the Greens have played in getting us here and whether they would have had the backbone or the will to help get us out.

This motion’s getting up, but they are not doing any of it. They are not even doing the things they really want to do. So they are not doing this. We will not be opposed it.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.38): I rise to support this motion and acknowledge the intent behind it, which is to help Canberrans respond to rising fuel costs, reduce emissions and access more affordable and sustainable transport options. This is at its core a practical conversation about cost of living, about climate responsibility and about giving people real choices in how they move around our city. The government agrees with the central premise of the motion: that moments of disruption, like the current fuel supply pressures, can accelerate better, more resilient ways of living.

At the same time, we need to be mindful that direct funding to support such behavioural changes has to come from somewhere. So there is a degree to which I support the comments that Mr Parton has made, recognising the fiscal constraints on the budget. In the context of the ACT government’s constrained fiscal environment, that somewhere

that money has to come from is either ACT taxpayers today or increasing debt to be paid by future ACT taxpayers.

The Sustainable Household Scheme, of course, is something we are able to provide at little cost to taxpayers. When it was established in a very low, broader interest rate environment, it provided zero-interest loans. Members will be aware that this was changed in the last budget to introduce a still low three per cent interest rate with zero interest for eligible low-income households. This decision ensures the net cost to government is contained. The Sustainable Household Scheme has been in place since 2021, and the results speak for themselves. Since its commencement, the scheme has supported more than 25,000 loans worth more than \$280 million. This means around one in eight households has now participated. It translates to more than \$100 million in cumulative household savings already—real money back into the pockets of Canberrans through lower energy bills and reduced transport costs. Importantly, those savings have been paired with meaningful emissions reductions.

The scheme is not just popular it is effective. This is a policy that is working exactly as intended—cutting emissions, lowering bills and making sustainable choices more accessible for households. But its continued success depends on discipline. We have made deliberate decisions to ensure the scheme remains financially sustainable and targeted to those who need it most. The transition to low-interest loans was part of that. It ensures we can keep supporting households over the longer term. That principle—targeting support where it delivers the greatest benefit—also shapes how we approach the proposals this motion.

On e-bikes and cargo bikes, we recognise their role. They are an important part of the broader active transport mix, and they absolutely have a place in a more sustainable Canberra. Indeed, I have an extended family member who has found a new sense of freedom in their e-bike, having some physical limitations on their capacity to ride a regular bicycle for any distance or in a hilly area. But we also need to be clear-eyed about their impact on emissions reduction and the impact of any subsidy on behaviour change. For most households, standard e-bikes will not replace a car; they will supplement one. In many cases, a trip by e-bike would replace travelling by regular bicycle or walking. That means the emissions reduction and cost-of-living benefits can be pretty variable.

In addition, the minimum loan amount under the Sustainable Household Scheme is \$2,000. Under this amount, the cost of administering the loan starts to really outweigh its benefits. There are now many models of standard e-bike available for less than \$2,000. So, if you are paying more than this, chances are you are making a choice to get a fancier one and you do not need a loan from the government. The same logic applies for e-scooters. Cargo bikes, however, are more expensive and come closer to being a genuine substitute for certain car trips, particularly things like school drop-offs, shopping and short-distance commuting where you have a bag and a change of clothes to juggle. That makes them more comparable to a vehicle replacement rather than a recreational or supplementary purchase. The argument could go either way—and I recognise that Mr Parton probably does not share that view—but it is certainly stronger for cargo bikes than standard e-bikes and e-scooters.

If we consider the Sustainable Household Scheme's future settings, this distinction

matters. It is not about dismissing new technologies or people's experiences; it is about ensuring that every dollar of public support is delivering the strongest possible return in emissions reduction and household savings. That also means ensuring that such support actually makes a behavioural difference. Mr Rattenbury would be well aware of my view that it is not a good use of taxpayers' money to give it to middle- to higher-income households to do something they would have done anyway. To do so is ultimately regressive policy, because all taxpayers carry the cost. In economic jargon, this type of policy carries a significant deadweight loss. I would encourage members who are very quick to cry, "We believe in evidence-based policy," when they have found a piece of evidence that supports their argument, to genuinely apply logic and evidence to their positions in this regard and this policy space. Of course, behaviour change and cost-of-living support are both going to be more meaningful and effective if you are lending money to people who would not otherwise afford the upfront cost of making changes to electrify their house, their car or an alternative travel option.

In speaking to Mr Braddock about this motion, he pointed out that renters, in particular, struggle to benefit from the current Sustainable Household Scheme settings unless they want to get an electric motor vehicle. For many renters, they do not necessarily have anywhere to park an electric vehicle or they do not really want to have the cost and expense of running a vehicle when, in fact, all they want to do is make short trips. An e-bike or an e-scooter or, indeed, a cargo bike may be much more effective for them and expand the opportunity for renters—who we know are often younger, are not benefiting from the wealth inherent in property ownership—to take advantage of the Sustainable Household Scheme.

Of course, we are already supporting access to active transport in other ways. Programs like SEE-Change's e-bike library allow Canberrans to trial these technologies at no cost. It is not a free ongoing service, but it does lower the barrier to entry and help people to make informed decisions about what is going to work for them. Shared mobility options, including e-bikes and e-scooters, are also expanding choice across the territory without a large upfront cost or the need for a place at home to store your bike or scooter.

In terms of emissions reductions, the evidence is strongest for electric vehicles. Transport remains the ACT's largest source of emissions. Supporting the transition to zero-emission vehicles is one of the most effective ways we can reduce our footprint while also lowering household transport costs. The ACT already leads the nation in this space. Our emissions-based stamp duty and registration settings provide strong incentive to choose low- and zero-emissions vehicles. The Sustainable Household Scheme offers accessible finance for both new and used EVs as well as charging infrastructure. We are seeing the results. In April this year, more than a third of new vehicle registrations in the ACT were electric—a record high. This is a remarkable shift in a relatively short period of time and, again, goes to the point that sometimes you need to incentivise change when a market is not established, but, once a market is established, need to rethink how you deliver those incentives and make sure that they are very well targeted. We are also continuing to invest in charging infrastructure, with hundreds of public charging bays already available and more on the way, including slower AC charging options that are well suited to commuter and residential use. So when we talk about extending and refining incentives, we are building on a strong foundation, not starting from scratch.

The ACT government's programs are delivering lower bills and more affordable transport for households; they are delivering reduced congestion, better health outcomes and improved equity for the community and they are delivering real measurable emissions reductions for the climate. The Sustainable Household Scheme has been a success, because it has balanced all three. As we consider ideas in this motion, that balance must remain our guide.

We support the motion, because it invites that next stage of consideration. It recognises the need to keep evolving, to test new approaches and to respond to changing circumstances. We will continue to do so carefully, ensuring that support is targeted, that investments are effective and that we deliver the greatest possible benefit for Canberrans. I again want to thank Mr Braddock for his motion and I particularly want to thank him and his office for their constructive engagement on this motion, as well as other members, including Mr Parton and Mr Emerson. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

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) (4.47): I am going to keep my remarks brief, given Minister Stephen-Smith has provided quite a lot of detail on the scheme and the reasons for the settings around what does and does not have access. What I would like to do is give a bit of a reflection on Mr Parton's contribution to the debate. After having listened to his speech, which as always was very entertaining, I am still at a bit of a loss as to the substantive policy position he holds on the proposals put forward by Mr Braddock.

While I have a lot of time for Mr Parton and we have had many a discussion and sat on committees together and have quite a good working relationship, I must say that, when it comes to the topic of cars and transitioning to a clean economy, Mr Parton does tend to get very enthusiastic for a particular point of view, which is to oppose at all means. So I think it is fair to say that I found Mr Parton's comments were a little bit harsh on Mr Braddock. I think Mr Braddock has brought forward a motion that is timely.

We know that people out in our community are considering options they have not previously considered because of global circumstances and how that is impacting our day-to-day decisions here in Australia and in the ACT, and I think it is, as I said, timely to be considering what settings we have in place that could further support that. But, much as Minister Stephen-Smith has outlined in her debate speech, it is a case of looking at where we can drive change, particularly when we are looking at reducing our emissions and getting more people who would not be choosing to opt into alternatives to opt into alternatives, rather than just supplementing what people might be doing of their own volition. That is a very important and needed part of getting the change we are looking at doing.

So, again, I am very supportive of Mr Braddock's timely and considered motion, and look forward to working with my colleague Minister Stephen-Smith as we continue to work through not just this motion but also what is fast becoming a very hotly debated topic within this Assembly term, mode shift and transitioning our transport system to a zero-emissions one.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.50): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing forward this motion today. It contains some really simple, tangible climate action. We need really simple, tangible climate action that we can actually take in the ACT at the moment. My daughter is 12. She is never going to see a normal year for the climate. She is growing up in a world of whiplash weather where, when we get reports out of government, they talk about things like 50-degree heatwaves, the impact on our built environment and vast swathes of the country becoming uninsurable. Many people are actually living through these sorts of conditions month to month or from one year to the next. Climate change is here and we have to act on it.

There are a few reasons to take simple, tangible actions like this and to empower people and change our system and our society so that they are easier to take. It actually helps people have hope for the future if there are things that they can do that have a meaningful impact. That is important. It reduces our emissions, helps reduce our impact on the climate and it will help us be less dependent on foreign fossil fuel. We cannot be this dependent on foreign fossil fuel. I think a lot of people have known this for a long time, and in the last couple of months a lot more people have suddenly caught up to some of the impacts of that.

There are some really great actions in this motion that will encourage people who cannot currently get access to a cargo bike to get one. They are amazing. I have seen them tootling around town. They are really, really fun. They are great for businesses. They are great for parents. I have a lot of friends who have got cargo bikes. I have tested them out. They are really, really fun to use. There is a bit of support in here for e-bikes, and I am afraid I do not share Labor's view that e-bikes cannot and will not replace a car. E-bikes do replace cars. They have replaced cars in my house. My partner has actually just switched to an e-bike. He is finding that easier to get around on these days. Again, they are really, really fun to use and there are lots of cities in the world that have been completely transformed by the uptake of e-bikes and cargo bikes.

I would suggest that, in particular, they are going to have a much bigger impact in some areas of Canberra. If you live in the inner north, for instance, if you want to walk or ride you probably will because your distances are very short. But, if you live in Belconnen, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong or Woden and need to get to Civic, an e-bike is suddenly transformative, because you are suddenly looking at rides of eight, 10, 12 and 15 kilometres. You might have some hills. You might find that you get sweaty on the way to work. If you can use an e-bike instead, that is transformative. That is why a lot of people who will not ride a bike will ride an e-bike. This has been the experience in quite a lot of cities that have actually got behind the transition. It is really great to see.

It is really good to see that we have some great support here for these measures. It is certainly better support than we have seen from our government for a little while—so that is great. A lot of places are looking at vouchers for e-bikes instead of loans. They find that a more efficient way to assist people. But I would note that there are still plenty of e-bikes that are over \$2,000. But, if you are looking at the cost of a second-hand car versus the cost of an e-bike, you are still going to find that an e-bike is a cheap purchase and cheap to run. So it is still a really good swap to make.

It is good to see that Mr Braddock has touched on some of the ways that we might

change our tax settings, and that will help raise some revenue. There are a couple of really obvious changes that we can make. I think at the national level there is a really great conversation happening at the moment about, “Why don’t we tax our gas exports?” Most countries do. You could raise \$17 billion. That would be really useful right about now. I think the vast majority of Australians now are on board with that plan, and we are very much hoping that our decision-makers federally catch up with why we should be taxing our own resources to pay for the things that we need in our own country.

There are also other great opportunities here that we could implement at a more local level, and it is great to see that Labor is looking at these and whether we can look at the settings that we have on stamp duty on vehicles. When somebody is buying a new car, that is the best time to influence them in which car they might buy. If you can influence them into buying an electric car instead of a fossil fuel car, it is great for the climate and great for the hip pocket. If there are ways that we can balance our revenue streams with that, that is really good.

We also have opportunities, of course, to be looking at the types of vehicles that maybe we want fewer of on our road, because they are large and because they are heavy. We are finding that ACT folk are quite responsive to some economic push factors in the EV transition at the moment. I note that, in the month of April, 34 per cent of new car sales were EVs. That is extremely high. That is clearly a direct result of the fuel crisis. I would say that, with bit more nudging, we could get that even higher. So it is clear that there is quite a lot of evidence that people are responsive to this and quite a lot of other countries have looked at this.

It is also great that we are rolling out chargers around the ACT. We still need more. We are finding, particularly in certain pockets in certain areas, there are still not enough charging. People in apartments need better access to charging. We need good access to slow AC chargers, the types of chargers that you will use if you live in an apartment and maybe want to pop to the shops for your weekly shop and leave your car to charge up for a few hours while you are doing that. That sort of charging is really useful for people. But things are progressing.

It is great to see that we are getting some progress here, and I am really pleased that we could come to agreement on so many of these measures. I thank Mr Braddock and the ACT government for working together on this one.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.56): I rise to speak in support of Mr Braddock’s motion and thank him for bringing these important matters to the Assembly today. I note Mr Parton said that this one did not get his heart racing—but it gets my heart racing. I love this stuff. I would be interested to hear what the 40-plus per cent of people who voted Liberal down in Mr Parton’s electorate feel about that, because that seems to be the response every time an active travel motion or something like this is brought. I think that across the ACT people actually want to see these measures implemented. They want to see their government investing more in alternative transport options. That is something that people who drive petrol cars should be supporting as well. The city is becoming more congested and it benefits all of us, including motorists, if we take steps to prevent that from worsening. So, yes, this one does get my heart racing, Mr

Braddock—thank you for that. thank you for that.

I would like to use my time to pick up on a couple of the items the motion contains. Of course, there are a range of proposed measures in here, including around electric vehicles, but I am going to focus on cycling in my remarks. First, the proposed inclusion of cargo bikes in the Sustainable Household Scheme represents a positive step forward, I think, in driving down the ACT's emissions, with 61.1 per cent of our emissions coming from ground transport. The latest ACT Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory concluded there has been no discernible trend in the reduction of per capita emissions in this area. The most recent ACT Household Travel Survey found the average number of occupants in a car in the ACT is 1.36. So you do not have to be anti-car to see that as inefficient.

We are, though, seriously car-dependent in Canberra, and my strong sense is that this car dependency does not actually align with what people in our community want for their lives and for our city for our future. We need practical solutions to address this, to reduce our car dependency. Of course, some trips will be taken by cars, and that is okay. But, where we can, we should be taking the steps that we could.

A number of local active travel and climate advocates have long called for the inclusion of e-bikes in the Sustainable Household Scheme, and I note that the ACT Greens have been doing so as well. Based on community feedback, I included this proposal in my submission to the government's consultation process on its next Climate Change Strategy and also in a letter I sent to the Chief Minister in late March with a range of community-backed proposals to respond to the fuel crisis.

I would personally be very happy to see the word "cargo" in 2(a) of this motion replaced with "electric" so that all e-bikes would be included. Frankly, I am bit confused still as to why the inclusion of cargo bikes rather than e-bikes in the scheme has been the position that has been landed on. I have an attachment for my regular bike, my push bike, that my kids can sit in. We call it a chariot. I am not sure what it is actually supposed to be called. We use it for preschool drop-offs. It has a great compartment for groceries, so we can use it for trips to the markets where we would otherwise use a car. I do not know if that makes my bike a cargo bike or not. I am not quite sure. I assume "cargo bikes" would capture electric cargo bikes or might even exclusively pertain to electric cargo bikes. An electric cargo bike is, of course, just an e-bike with the ability to carry additional loads or passengers—which is an e-bike. I am concerned that what still seems to me like an arbitrary distinction will prevent certain cohorts of people from accessing regular e-bikes.

Many non-cargo e-bikes are still cost prohibitive for many members of our community. I note we are debating the cost of e-bikes, and people have different perspectives. People in the know that I speak with who are looking at a solid standard e-bike talk about costs of \$2,500 to \$3,500. Bicycle Queensland estimates the reasonable price for an e-bike is around \$1,500 to \$3,000. A bike in this price range is not a top-of-the-line range luxury bike—those cost more like around \$8,000 plus—and it is still the kind of bike that someone could feasibly use for their groceries or on their commute each day, similar to how one would use a cargo bike. Of course, some people—and I am imagining here especially renters and apartment dwellers—might not have the space to store a cargo bike at home but could perhaps have space for a non-cargo e-bike.

So this is actually an equity measure. It is not about incentivising e-bike uptake among middle and higher wealth Canberrans who may already have access to the scheme, because they have already benefited from energy efficiency upgrades to their homes because they are homeowners or have perhaps already accessed the scheme to purchase an electric vehicle because that is feasible for them. This is actually about targeting people who might not be homeowners or people who cannot service an EV loan, even on a low-interest rate—that is just not feasible for them. For those people, a \$2,000 low-interest loan to pick up an e-bike, to reduce their car usage and their fuel costs and pay that down using the cost savings, would be a really great thing for the government to do. I note, despite Mr Parton's focus on the cost of investing in these sorts of incentives, this is only a \$900,000 measure, as it stands, in the budget this year or thereabouts. This is not a huge expense on the territory budget. It is actually a very cost-effective way of incentivising modal shift, reduced emissions and cost savings for Canberrans.

Yes, the rollout of Lime e-bikes and e-scooters across the ACT is one way of promoting e-bike usage outside of the Sustainable Household Scheme, as is SEE-Change's fantastic e-bike library, which the minister mentioned. But having reliable direct access to your own e-bike is a different dynamic, and I would love to see it supported by the government.

With all of that said, I note that the motion does provide for more government assistance to promote the uptake of e-bikes more generally. If the Sustainable Household Scheme is not the best mechanism for the promotion of e-bike uptake, I would welcome further details from the government on what is. Ms Clay has spoken to vouchers. If further assistance is an even more generous measure, fantastic. Mr Parton will be upset about it, but I will not. I am hopeful that is what we will see, but we will see, given the budget situation. If a more generous measure is not forthcoming, I urge the government to add e-bikes to the Sustainable Household Scheme after all.

I am really appreciative of both Minister Stephen-Smith's and Minister Orr's offices' engagement with me and my office on this motion. I am concerned that some of the data that has been shared to justify not including e-bikes in the Sustainable Household Scheme might not be applicable to the ACT or to this particular program. In discussions regarding this motion, market research from Transport for NSW was referenced to suggest that e-bikes would not be as effective in driving down emissions as they would replace trips that already use sustainable modes of transport—a fair argument. That research found that 34 per cent of e-bike riders had shifted from private vehicles, while 27 per cent shifted from public transport and 22 per cent replaced walking.

Firstly, a 34 per cent shift from private vehicles is actually a really positive shift. Secondly, it makes complete sense that 27 per cent of e-bike riders transitioned from public transport in somewhere like Sydney. Metropolitan Sydney, in particular, has incredibly dense and frequent public transport routes. But Canberra's transport system is completely different. So the uptake of e-bikes will inevitably have a different impact on mode shift in the ACT, which is borne out in research as well. Research from the Netherlands finds that existing studies on this topic suggest the choice of transportation mode replaced by e-bikes is heavily influenced by the specific circumstances of the area and, specifically, the other transportation options that are accessible.

For us here in the ACT, many people do not find public transport to be an accessible option for them. They might not be able to travel to work on a regular bike and they might not have change of end-of-trip facilities that they can access at the end of their trip, but they want to look at “How can I reduce my fuel use right now and, longer-term, how can I reduce my emissions and improve my wellbeing and spend more time outdoors pedalling,” and an e-bike is a viable option for that. So, if we are going to make evidence-based policy decisions about how best to make mode shift viable for Canberrans, we need to use either ACT-specific or appropriately comparable evidence.

The input I received from people across our community—sure, it is not evidence per se; let’s call it anecdotal—is that they would choose cycling rather than driving if appropriate incentives were in place to make that possible. So, along those lines, the second measure I am keen to reflect on—and I will do this a bit more quickly; that was a lot on e-bikes—is bike lanes. I am really pleased to see the trial of pop-up cycle lanes along major transport routes and connector roads featured in the Greens motion today. This is something I pushed for recently, with welcome support from Ms Carrick, Senator Pocock and the Greens, both here and in the Assembly and in federal parliament, surrounding the debate about how the ACT government should respond to the fuel crisis.

As I raised in previous debates, I would particularly like to see this trialled down key corridors like Northbourne Avenue, as would local organisations like Pedal Power ACT and many people in my electorate. Motorists have become familiar with lane closures on Northbourne Avenue over recent years. So I think now is the perfect time to replace a lane with a separated bike lane. We actually already have some pop-up cycle lanes on Northbourne Avenue because of the light rail works. We do this around construction all the time and we should be doing it more widely, I think, to incentivise modal shifts. This is a great option.

Active transport needs to be viable so people in our community can actually shift their behaviour without a massive cost inconvenience and so they feel safe. We know that perceptions of safety, in addition to access to alternative transport options like e-bikes, go hand in hand when it comes to increasing mode shift. Providing separated pop-up bike lanes is one simple, easy way of increasing safety for cyclists, especially when cycling next to cars as well as maximising convenience for them too. I think what we really want is for people driving down Northbourne Avenue to see cyclists gunning it, safely of course, down the cycle lane beside them and thinking, “Okay, maybe I should try cycling to work rather than driving.” I welcome Mr Braddock’s use of the phrase “latent demand”. I hope that we can tap into that with this measure. Like the Greens, I am really keen to see this particular measure implemented. My understanding is it will get up today, and I am excited to see the next steps and very much welcome any conversations on what they might look like.

Creating the policy settings to allow people to shift their behaviour to more climate-friendly, lower-cost, healthier travel options is a key way we can create the sustainable Canberra our community wants. We can model what real climate action looks like here in the capital of the country, improve community wellbeing and reduce the burden on our health system while doing so, as well as tackling the cost-of-living crisis in a way that actually enhances Canberrans’ quality of life in the long run as well. The measures in this motion that I have specifically spoken to and this motion more broadly I see as

a step in that direction. Perhaps I am more optimistic than Mr Parton that some of this will be implemented. I really hope it is. So, again, I thank Mr Braddock for bringing it to the Assembly today. I thank the government for supporting it, and I am very pleased to support it as well.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.08): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion before the Assembly. I support this motion, particularly the proposal to extend the Sustainable Household Scheme to include cargo bikes and to provide greater assistance for e-bikes and e-scooters. As the motion recognises, many Canberrans are rethinking how they travel, in response to fuel costs and economic pressure. For many people, e-bikes or e-scooters are a practical solution, especially for short journeys and for connecting with public transport. Along with car-share services, they can deliver real cost-of-living savings while reducing congestion, parking demand and transport emissions. There are also clear health benefits. Riding a bicycle, powered or otherwise, helps people build physical activity into their daily routines with minimal extra time or cost.

Infrastructure is critical if we want more people to make this shift. Secure storage for e-bikes and e-scooters is essential. In that context, I welcome the government's delivery of two new bike cages at the Woden Interchange, built to a high standard. I look forward to access being integrated with the MyWay+ system and to the network being expanded to other major interchanges and stops across Canberra. Safe, separated routes are equally important. While progress has been made, key gaps remain in our active travel network. The Coombs Link bridge has the potential to close one of those gaps, and I hope outstanding design concerns can be resolved quickly. The long-discussed Woden to Civic cycleway also needs clearer responsibility and momentum. It has been over 60 years and, if we really are serious about people using e-bikes to go those further distances from the suburbs, we really need a decent cycleway between the town centres and the city to be able to actually do it.

I also support this motion because it recognises that periods of disruption are opportunities to reduce costs, cut emissions and reshape how we move around our city. For those reasons, I support Mr Braddock's motion and thank him for bringing it forward.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.10), in reply: I would like to thank all members today for their support and, in particular, Ms Stephen-Smith and her office for leading negotiations on behalf of Labor. I think we have landed in a good place, in particular bringing cargo bikes into the Sustainable Household Scheme, which is something I have been wanting to see for quite a while. I am really glad we had the opportunity here to make it happen.

I want to talk to a couple of points that were raised during the debate. Firstly, I am, unusually for a Green, going to talk about a person called Charlie Munger, a self-made billionaire that I am sure Mr Parton would love to know. His quote was, "Show me the incentive and I will show you the outcome." So, in terms of the minister's interjections around showing the evidence of how these incentives actually change the behaviour, I will refer to the federal government and their announcements this week of the FBT changes, where they have been talking about the dramatic uptake of EV purchases as a result of the incentives that the Australian government had as part of their scheme.

There is evidence there of change of behaviour from the incentive.

Ms Stephen-Smith: That is a much bigger incentive than rego.

MR BRADDOCK: They all contribute. In fact, one of the most successful interventions that increased the uptake of EVs from the ACT government's perspective was the free rego for two years, which actually created a great incentive for people to do so before the federal government's FBT exemptions came into place.

I also was to clarify the point on the e-bike replacing a car. I think that is a false test we are setting up. What we are trying to do is reduce emissions and transport costs. The electric bike does not need to actually replace the car to achieve that goal. If it replaces a sufficient number of trips, it achieves that. It will reduce emissions, it will reduce transport costs, it will reduce vehicles on our roads and it will have achieved the objectives of the government. So I do not want to see a false test being put in there as to how the e-bike under any sort of incentive scheme should be evaluated in terms of whether it is achieving what the government is seeking to do.

I also want to clarify a point that was, let's just say, not presented in the same way I was trying to make the argument at the time, which was the majority of the Sustainable Household Scheme products are available to homeowners. These are things like panels for batteries or electrification of stovetops. These, unfortunately, are not available to renters. The issue is that the majority of the product line under the Sustainable Household Scheme is inaccessible to renters. Hence why I am seeking to have more product lines available for renters, so they can take steps to reduce their emissions while also reducing their transport costs. I am really glad to see that we seem to have gotten across the line the idea of pop-up cycling lanes. I think that would be a wonderful thing to see, and I look forward to seeing what we can do about that.

Ultimately, my motion today is about seizing the moment. You do not get too many junctures like the one before us. Ideally, they happen as infrequently as possible but, when they do, we do our best work when we support people in ways that set us up for a brighter future. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Report 6

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.15): I present the following report:

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee—Report 6—*Inquiry*

into the CIT CEO recruitment process, dated 4 May 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration for the Eleventh Assembly. For this inquiry, the committee held a public hearing on 30 March and an in-camera hearing on 1 April, the transcript for which was subsequently released. The committee considered documents provided by CIT, including those tabled by the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations, pursuant to Assembly resolution of 24 March 2026. The report has 11 findings and seven recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank those who participated in the committee's inquiry. We had a visiting member, and I would like to thank them for their participation. I would also like to thank the secretariat and Hansard for the work that they did for the inquiry.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.16): I am a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Administration that inquired into the CIT CEO recruitment process, but I am speaking now in my capacity as an MLA and member for Ginninderra.

It was an unusual inquiry. There is a history with CIT that most Canberrans will remember. In 2024, the previous CEO of CIT resigned during an ACT Integrity Commission investigation into CIT procurement activities. Ms Cover had been on paid leave for two years leading up to her resignation. After investigation in 2025, the Integrity Commissioner found Ms Cover and another executive to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct. Honesty and transparency with the board was at the heart of that issue. Ms Cover and the executive director failed to consult the CIT Board and concealed matters from them. A lack of honest and direct communication with the CIT Board and minister were central in these findings as well. This context matters because our community, the staff and the students are desperate for their trust in CIT to be restored after the former CIT CEO.

What our community needed and expected from this latest recruitment was a highly-skilled CEO operating with high integrity and complete transparency with the board and the minister. Only that could restore the reputational damage CIT has suffered. That is not what CIT or our community received. I would encourage members, the media and the community to read the full report. It is not long. Our evidence and questions are in the public domain, and this is my take on some of it.

In 2024, Dr McNeill was a senior executive with TAFE NSW. In October 2024, she was placed on alternate duties due to allegations of misconduct while an investigation took place. Dr McNeill said that she had received legal advice that she could not disclose information about the TAFE NSW investigation and that that this is why she did not disclose the investigation to CIT during the recruitment process. That may be

so for the recruitment process that took place in the first half of 2025, but it does not explain why Dr McNeill failed to disclose and, in fact, misled the CIT Board later in the year. From 16 June 2025, TAFE NSW had advised Dr McNeill in writing that she was “permitted to disclose limited information regarding the investigation to CIT on a confidential basis”. From this point on, she should have given full and accurate reports to the CIT Board about the investigation and subsequent findings, in confidence if necessary. The board—specifically the chair at the time, Kate Lundy—should then have been able to pass those on to the minister, in confidence if necessary.

Dr McNeill told our committee that, from her understanding, her involvement in the TAFE NSW misconduct investigation had ended and there were no findings against her. This does not match the evidence. From May to December 2025, Dr McNeill was still participating in that misconduct investigation. She knew it was on foot because she was participating in it. On 16 September 2025, Dr McNeill received findings of misconduct against her from TAFE NSW. She did not disclose these to the CIT Board. The board—specifically, the chair, Kate Lundy—did not therefore disclose them to the minister.

Later, in September 2025, CIT received an anonymous complaint alerting them to misconduct findings against Dr McNeill. Board chair Kate Lundy asked TAFE NSW for details and TAFE NSW told her to talk to Dr McNeill. Kate Lundy spoke to Dr McNeill, who said the anonymous complaint was false and there were no findings. That statement that there were no findings does not match the evidence that our committee received. In hearings, I questioned Dr McNeill about this discrepancy. Dr McNeill came back on notice after consideration and she said this:

On or about 24 September 2025, Ms Lundy informed me that a second anonymous complaint had been received by the ACT Integrity Commission. Ms Lundy asked me if I had received an outcome from TAFE NSW or words to that effect. I replied no, which was the truth as the investigation was not completed and there was no final outcome.

That is not what I saw in the evidence. There was an outcome in September. There were findings. Dr McNeill subsequently appealed those findings, but that does not mean that there were not findings made.

On 16 September, TAFE NSW notified Dr McNeill that the investigation was complete and it had found she had acted contrary to the TAFE NSW Code of Conduct. They further noted they intended to update the employment records to show she was terminated, not that she resigned. That is an outcome. It is quite a serious outcome. Dr McNeill failed to proactively inform her chair and board. She failed to provide written records. She actively misled them when directly asked eight days later if there were findings or an outcome. Everyone has the right to appeal a finding, but exercising your right of appeal does not negate the fact that a finding has been made against you. Until and unless the finding is overturned, the finding is the finding. g.

From 16 September, Dr McNeill should have immediately inform the chair and board of these finding. She should have provide full written records of them and then, of course, they should have been able to inform the minister. Dr McNeill could of course have presented her point of viewpoint at the time and explained that she was appealing. All of this could have been done in confidence if it needed to be.

Kate Lundy gave various accounts of the investigation. Kate Lundy's accounts minimised the nature of the complaints and the investigation. Kate Lundy told us in hearings that "misconduct can be minor". We asked her if she knew what the allegations were, and Kate Lundy said, "My general understanding is that the matter relates largely to the perceptions of conflict of interest and perceptions of conflict of interest in relation to employment and contracts." Kate Lundy provided similarly dismissive accounts of the allegations to the minister's office. In June, based on Dr McNeill's account, she told the minister the allegations related to disgruntled staff unhappy with a staff change program. In December, even after Kate Lundy knew there were findings and informed the minister of that, she continued to downplay them and repeated the view that "misconduct can be minor and it may have little bearing on work at CIT". I do not know why Kate Lundy took this view of the nature of the investigation and findings and presented it. It looks like Kate Lundy's information has largely been based on verbal conversations with Dr McNeill, who was herself the subject of the investigations. I have sat through this inquiry, and I still do not know if Kate Lundy or the CIT Board have seen a written official record of those findings.

Anonymous complaints in June gave quite a different account of the severity of the misconduct investigation and findings. One of those complaints said:

Initial findings were that out of the multiple complaints and PIDs submitted, there were over 40 categories of wrongdoing that warranted investigation and these included reports of maladministration of salaries budgets, maladministration of temporary and contract staff, chronic and substantial waste of public money (over \$100M), conflicts of interest in recruitment, conflicts of interest in procurement, improper engagement of private contractors, GIPA avoidance, misleading parliament, lying in Budget Estimate hearings, intentionally providing misleading information to Treasury, suppressing information from government agencies and committees, unethical behaviour, mismanagement of educational and institutional risks, and bullying and harassment.

If I received an anonymous complaint like this about the new CEO, particularly in light of the actions of the former CEO, I would certainly pay attention and I would do an awful lot of due diligence to try and find out whether that allegation was an accurate reflection of the investigation.

I do not know which of those two versions is close to the truth. But I cannot understand how any CIT chair or board could dismiss allegations of this nature, after what happened with the former CEO, Ms Cover, without conducting a great deal of due diligence, and I cannot understand how anyone could rely on a verbal description of fact, from the person who is themselves the subject of the investigation and findings, in light of complaints submitted to them like that. In any case, when Kate Lundy directly asked Dr McNeill about an outcome or findings, after those findings had been made, Dr McNeill misled her. I still to this day do not know if Dr McNeill has provided the CIT Board with full written records of the complaint or complaints lodged or of the findings. I do not know if she has provided copies. I do not know if former chair Kate Lundy or the Board have asked for these records. I still do not know exactly what information Dr McNeill disclosed to the board and to the former board chair Kate Lundy.

The minister was also concerned. He told CIT in June 2025 that they should seek a copy of the report and findings. He has repeatedly told them to obtain these details: “CIT Board, do you have these records? If you do not have those records, I think it is probably upon you to get those records.” Our committee asked for these records. We do not have them. We asked Dr McNeill to provide the findings. She did not provide them.

There are layers of dishonesty in Dr McNeill’s conduct. She was not open and transparent with her board or chair. She was also not open and transparent with our inquiry. Dr McNeill repeatedly claimed that she could not answer questions or provide information because matters were sub judice before the courts. There is a detailed section on that in our report, and our committee has taken a different view Dr McNeill’s on that.

Parliamentary committees have the ability to summon witnesses, but this power is rarely used. What happens in practice is we invite witnesses to attend our hearings, and they do. Dr McNeill refused to show up. Our committee found it necessary to summons her. Dr McNeill is the CEO of a territory authority. It is extraordinary that a public sector employee would not voluntarily choose to answer questions in a parliamentary inquiry and would require a summons to appear. On record, ACT parliamentary committees have only summonsed witnesses twice before, and neither were for a current employee in the public sector. We should not need to force a public official to answer questions about their role.

I do not know if Dr McNeill has been open and transparent with her regulator, ASQA. ASQA is Dr McNeill’s licensing authority and they have a fit and proper person test. I asked Dr McNeill to table all of her recent declarations. She tabled unsigned, undated declarations. So it was not possible for our committee to see when she changed the nature of her statements to ASQA, whether they were true at the time she made them and whether she made the appropriate declarations in a timely and transparent manner. Because of our very short reporting timeline, our committee was not able to go back and require Dr McNeill to table signed and dated copies and to check these with ASQA. We were not able to go back to Dr McNeill and require her to provide the misconduct findings. We were not able to ask former chair Kate Lundy or Dr McNeill further questions about this evidence. I suggest to the CIT Board that this is work they now need to do.

The committee also made findings that the recruitment process was not effective, and we made some recommendations to fix those. The committee found the governance arrangements of the CIT Board are not fit for purpose, and we recommended the minister hold the CIT Board to account and review those. There is a lot of work to do here to improve governance and restore trust.

The Canberra community has been through one saga with a highly paid CIT CEO who was on leave, at full pay, for two years, until a finding of serious corrupt conduct was made. We do not want a repeat. Dr McNeill’s salary is \$441,000 and she is on a five-year contract. That is almost \$2.5 million of public funding. Given the information already in the public domain, in a parliamentary committee report and in evidence, the Greens are calling for Dr McNeill to resign. The committee findings are serious. Please, do not make the community wait for years for a resolution to this. If Dr McNeill does not resign, the CIT Board should consider whether Dr McNeill remains a fit and proper

person to be the CEO for CIT and, if so, the board should be transparent with the minister and community about how they have made that decision is in the public interest.

But this situation is not just about one person; it highlights structural problems in how our higher education institutions are governed. We need to fix the system that allowed this to occur in the first place. That means serious consideration of governance reform for CIT, because what we have seen is the current system is not working. It is distracting from CIT as a pivotal place of learning in our community, and we owe it to CIT's staff and students to make sure this kind of accountability failure does not happen again. Across the sector and Canberra, we have seen the boards and councils of higher education and training fail to demonstrate accountability and fail to demonstrate good outcomes to their students, staff and the wider community. We need better systems that meet the needs and expectations of the people at the heart of our institutions.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.29): I would like to start by acknowledging the work of committee members on this inquiry, I also credit Mr Parton with pushing to stand it up. In retrospect, that was a very good decision; it was a good decision to do it urgently and to suspend the standing orders to make sure that this inquiry happened quickly.

I will touch on some of the most glaring or damning findings, many of which Ms Clay has spoken to, against Dr McNeill—as far as we can tell, the first active public sector employee ever to have to be summonsed to attend a committee hearing in the ACT Legislative Assembly. It looks like she is only the third witness who has ever had to be summonsed at all.

Initially, Dr McNeill was invited to make a submission and attend a hearing—standard practice, of course—and the secretariat, from what we can tell from the committee report, got a response, not from her but from her legal representatives. Dr McNeill declined to appear on 31 March, and she was summonsed to appear on 1 April, which the committee found extraordinary. I think we all found that quite extraordinary. The committee has also found that Dr McNeill actively misled the CIT Board by denying that there was a finding of misconduct that had been made against her. I will quote from the committee report:

Most troubling is the fact that when the anonymous complaint from 23 September 2025 alerted CIT to the misconduct findings—

made by TAFE New South Wales—

Dr McNeill denied it. This is despite her having been advised of the end of the investigation and the findings on 16 September 2025 and being clearly authorised to disclose in-confidence information about the investigation and findings to the CIT Board from 16 June. Dr McNeill did not disclose the findings to CIT until she had received legal advice and decided to challenge the findings in court some four months later.

Ms Clay also spoke about the statutory declarations, and I credit her with asking questions to get those released to the committee. There was a fit-and-proper-persons declaration submitted to the national vocational education and training regulator,

ASQA, by Dr McNeill, indicating that there was no information that may impact on the public's confidence in her, despite knowing at that time about the TAFE New South Wales misconduct findings against her. I repeat: no information that would impact on public confidence.

As Ms Clay pointed out, we do not know exactly when those declarations were lodged, because they have not been dated and they have not been signed, which I think also raises questions. I imagine that, if the committee had had more time, they would have asked those questions. On that form, she indicates there was no information that would bring into doubt and impact on the public's confidence in her. At the bottom of the form, you can see that there is a template form, and it says that it was released on 1 December 2025—that template form. We know that this happened after 16 September, which was the point in time at which Dr McNeill became aware of the misconduct findings that had been made against her.

I am confident that she would say that she was challenging those findings, and that is why she did not disclose them. That is not a good enough reason. They should have been disclosed on a statutory declaration to the national regulator. In fact, we are yet to discern what impact those declarations—including the one after it; once this became public, she did disclose that there might be some reasons that the public might not have confidence in her—have on CIT. She is in a critical role for accrediting the courses provided at CIT. What does ASQA do when it receives a declaration that suggests that perhaps the person in that role is not a fit and proper person? We are yet to find out.

The committee has recommended that the CRT Board take all steps possible to obtain the findings of misconduct made against Dr McNeill by TAFE NSW, with a view to considering whether Dr McNeill remains suitable to perform her role as CEO. It is a reasonable recommendation when taken on its own, but it is clear that it is impossible to argue at this point that the board does not already have all the information it needs to determine that Dr McNeill's position is no longer tenable.

The committee also made findings against the board's finding that the due diligence in the recruitment of Dr McNeill was ineffective and recommended that the board be held accountable for not fulfilling their duties appropriately. We will have to see what that looks like. It also made findings in relation to governance, finding that the governance arrangements of the CIT Board are not fit for purpose and recommending a review, which I note the minister has committed to. I am sure we will get some remarks on that this evening. There were no adverse findings made against the minister, which I am sure he will be pleased about, largely because he basically had no say in what was happening here. I think that warrants discussion as well.

Again, I want to thank everyone involved in this inquiry process, and I want to reflect a little bit further on some key takeaways. Two and a half weeks ago, I called for Dr McNeill to do the right thing by CIT and step down. Those calls have been echoed today, I understand, by the ACT Greens and the Canberra Liberals. I made that call after evidence emerged of the misleading statutory declaration.

Dr McNeill has not resigned, and I believe she has made public comments today reflecting that there are factual inaccuracies contained in the committee report, so I am not hopeful that she will. But with a parliamentary committee having found that

Dr McNeill actively misled the board, to which she is answerable, including by denying misconduct findings had been made against her, just one week after those findings had been made, and three months after TAFE New South Wales had confirmed she could disclose this matter to CIT, these are grounds for termination. Dr McNeill is contractually and legally obliged to exercise honesty in her role. Unsurprisingly, right? It seems like the bare minimum. Surely, actively misleading the board is a blatant violation of that obligation.

A document released by the committee even shows the minister saying, “There are a number of instances in which it appears that Dr McNeill may have acted dishonestly.” It appears that the minister has a similar view. I absolutely acknowledge and respect the right to procedural fairness. In this instance, though, the board now has evidence of clear violations of Dr McNeill’s employment contract and obligations as a public sector employee, which provides obvious grounds for her immediate dismissal.

The board has a new chair, and Mr Rogers and his colleagues on the board now need to show some leadership before further damage is done. Take action now and dismiss the CEO of CIT. We cannot make the same mistake that was made with CIT’s former CEO, Leanne Cover, for whom taxpayers forked out some \$1.2 million in paid leave and salary payouts, while she spent two years unsuccessfully disputing the Integrity Commission’s finding that she had engaged in serious corrupt conduct by misleading the board and the minister in relation to millions of dollars worth of contracts. Dr McNeill’s total remuneration package is \$441½ thousand per year. It is a five-year contract. Again, we cannot allow this to drag out any longer.

The CEO of CIT is required to do their job “with reasonable care and diligence, impartiality and honesty” under the Public Sector Management Act 1994 and to exercise “honesty, care and diligence” under the Financial Management Act 1996. Dr McNeill’s employment contract, which was released courtesy of the committee inquiry, requires her to do her job with reasonable care and diligence, impartiality and honesty, and not to behave in a way that undermines the integrity and reputation of CIT or its board.

The board can terminate the contract if it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that she has failed to comply with the conditions of her employment. It is abundantly clear from all the evidence unearthed through this inquiry that this has occurred. Dr McNeill failed to inform the board that misconduct findings had been made when asked directly by the board chair in mid-September 2025 and failed to inform the national regulator about the misconduct findings on a statutory declaration made some time after 1 December 2025.

We have multiple pieces of evidence of Dr McNeill behaving deceptively during her time as CEO of CIT. All of this is true and deeply concerning, regardless of the nature of the misconduct findings and regardless of the outcomes of any legal dispute Dr McNeill may be mounting in relation to those findings.

Former board chair Ms Kate Lundy confirmed that substantiated allegations going to the nature of those findings largely involve conflicts of interest in relation to employment and contract decisions. Again, you could not make this up; it is oddly similar to grounds for the Integrity Commission’s serious corruption finding in relation

to the conduct of the former CEO, whose serious corrupt conduct related, of course, to dodgy contracts awarded to a complexity thinker.

The former CEO was found to have deliberately concealed details of these contracts from the board and to have misled the minister. Her replacement, who has been tasked with turning things around, with enhancing the integrity and reputation of CIT, has been found to have misled the board in relation to misconduct findings from a previous employer. What were the findings? We still do not know.

In June 2025—Ms Clay reflected on this—an anonymous report was made to the ACT Integrity Commission, soon after Dr McNeill’s appointment was announced, which the commission passed on to the CIT Board. It is worth repeating. In that anonymous report, it was alleged that multiple complaints and PIDs had been submitted, spanning 40 categories of alleged wrongdoing, including maladministration of salaries’ budgets, maladministration of temporary and contract staff, chronic and substantial waste of public money—over \$100 million—conflicts of interest in recruitment, conflicts of interest in procurement, improper engagement of private contractors, misleading parliament, lying in budget estimates hearings, intentionally providing misleading information to Treasury, suppressing information from government agencies and committees, unethical behaviour, mismanagement of educational and institutional risks, and bullying and harassment.

I have heard from former TAFE New South Wales staff that there were hundreds of employees who could have made that anonymous report to the Integrity Commission, that it was reflective of broadly held views from employees across multiple areas of TAFE New South Wales, and that dozens of people could have made that anonymous report with tangible substantiating evidence.

The committee notes, though, that Dr McNeill told Ms Lundy that the allegations were a “tool” being used to interfere with the staff change program, implying that they were based on personal grievances, and that Ms Lundy noted in correspondence to the minister in December, once Dr McNeill confirmed that the misconduct allegations had been upheld, that “misconduct can be minor and it may have little bearing on Dr McNeill’s work at CIT”. We do need to grapple, in responding to this report, with just how much this was downplayed and why.

This saga has shown that governance arrangements at CIT are woefully inadequate. The independence of the board and, by extension, the CEO has been demonstrably problematic from the perspective of transparency, ministerial oversight of public expenditure, spending \$164 million in ACT government funding for CIT programs this financial year, and with respect to parliamentary scrutiny.

Dr McNeill attempted not to participate whatsoever in this inquiry and, when she was compelled to, repeatedly asserted that she could not provide the committee with certain pieces of evidence on confidentiality grounds. As Ms Clay noted, the committee remained concerned, at the conclusion of the inquiry, that there were findings of misconduct against Dr McNeill, but that this committee was unable to verify them. The committee was uncertain as to whether the CIT board have seen a copy of findings of misconduct against Dr McNeill, or whether they have only received Dr McNeill’s account of what those findings are. If governance arrangements are such that our

parliament is unable to determine the basic facts of a matter of such significant public importance, this is seriously problematic and needs to be addressed.

The CIT was founded almost 100 years ago, but the board has only been in place since 2015. The CIT Act was amended in 2014. Previously, there was an advisory council in place, and a director who reported to the minister. Now a board is appointed by the minister, and the board appoints a CEO who is answerable not to the minister but to the board. The then education minister, Joy Burch, said at the time—and I quote:

... the establishment of a new governing board with private and public sector expertise working together to ensure that CIT is best placed to meet the needs of the territory. A governing board, with powers delegated from the minister, will allow streamlining of decisions and the full application of fiduciary responsibilities to the conduct of CIT affairs.

Have these aims been achieved? CIT's reputation has been significantly damaged by the conduct of two successive CEOs appointed at arm's length by an independent governing board. These controversies have clearly undermined public confidence in CIT and are clearly distracting this critical public institution from its core function of delivering quality education and training for Canberrans.

We need to consider why CIT's governance arrangements have failed so spectacularly, twice now. Tinkering is not enough. We need to have a serious look at doing away with an independent board and making the minister ultimately responsible for what happens at CIT. The minister, on radio this morning, said, "I'm flying as blind as everyone else." I genuinely appreciate his candour, but what the? If the minister is flying blind, so too is this Assembly and so too is our community. That is clearly unacceptable, and it is something this Assembly can fix by bringing CIT back within government.

I would urge the government to look closely at pursuing this course of action. It would be very disappointing to see a response that involves simply trying to patch up a failing arrangement with minor tweaks. Fixing CIT requires real leadership, after a long time without it, and palming this issue off to an independent review without a clear direction forward is not leadership.

I want to take this opportunity to express my support for a more hands-on approach and encourage the government to take that approach. Have a mandate here. I also express support for and commitment to continued collaborative engagement across the Assembly to reintroduce strong ministerial oversight and parliamentary scrutiny of the Canberra Institute of Technology.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.44): I rise to speak briefly on this committee report—and I will be brief—as the Leader of the Opposition. I have been asked multiple times during the last few months whether I believe that Dr McNeill should continue in her role as the CEO of CIT. On each occasion I have shown the respect that I think this committee deserves, and respect for the process that they were undertaking, by not definitively answering that question.

Although this report does not call for her resignation as the CEO, after reading it for much of last night and again this morning, I have certainly arrived at the position that, in my belief, it is untenable for Dr McNeill to continue in the role. I do find it

extraordinary that a summons was required to get a public sector employee to attend a committee hearing in this place. I find that amazing—almost as extraordinary as the statement that came from Dr McNeill today. I am also gobsmacked that, even after this exhaustive process, we still have not seen the findings from TAFE New South Wales. As much as I would like it to fall on the minister, it does not. It falls on Dr McNeill.

There are some more complex matters to be considered when it comes to the governance of CIT and the board, and these matters are addressed in the report. Like the government, my party will be considering those findings and those recommendations in the context of the full report in coming weeks.

I want to thank the committee for allowing me to be a guest at hearings. I want to thank the secretariat and all those involved for conducting this process in a professional and robust manner, with a very short timeline. I do not know who was responsible for that. Thank you; I think you have done really well.

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) (5.46): I would like to begin by thanking all members who participated in the committee inquiry—both members and visiting members—as well as all members that have spoken today, for their contributions today. This is clearly an issue of great community interest and great community passion, and that is the case because Canberrans are, rightly, very proud of CIT. You have either studied there or you have worked there, or you know someone that has. We all have a stake in CIT, and we all want it to succeed.

I am not in a position, as I rise this evening, to respond fulsomely to the entire report. The government will, of course, undertake its usual processes and provide that formal response to the committee's report. I can, however, confirm that the government will undertake a review of governance at CIT. It is clear that the current governance arrangements have led to an appropriate level of cynicism. Both previous and current events have rightly been at the centre of much community discussion and concern. At the core of those concerns are issues of governance, so today I commit to that governance review.

I will seek to engage with members across the chamber on their vision and their views for what CIT should look like. But as important as we are in this place, I also want to put front and centre, in forming those views, the views of students and staff. I want to make sure that CIT truly lives up to the very high expectations that the entire community holds for it.

As has been referenced in the debate this evening, I did commission an independent review of the recruitment process. The committee reached out to me seeking an advance copy of that independent review. I was happy to provide that to the committee, and they have then gone on to publish that independent review. For the benefit of completeness, I would like to table the independent review that I commissioned, but I recognise that it is already public. I would like once again to thank all members for their hard work on this inquiry. I think it has been of tremendous benefit to the entirety of the ACT. I present the following paper:

Independent Review of the Recruitment Process for the Chief Executive Officer,
Canberra Institute of Technology, dated 22 April 2026.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 18

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.49): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny
Report 18, dated 28 April 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of
proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report No 18 contains the committee's comments on four bills, proposed amendments to one bill, six pieces of subordinate legislation, one national law and three government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Report 3

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.50): I present the following report:

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee—Report 3—Inquiry
into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25, dated 23 April 2026, together with
extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the third report of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation for the Eleventh Assembly. The 2024-25 annual and financial reports were presented in the Assembly on 21 October 2025. Clause 4 of the establishing resolution refers all calendar and financial year annual and financial reports to the relevant standing committee for inquiry and report by 12 May of the year after the presentation of the report to the Assembly, pursuant to the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004.

The committee held public hearings on 11, 14, 18, 19, 20 and 21 November 2025. Witnesses took 72 questions on notice. The report makes 22 recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to recognise ACT government directorates for their assistance to the committee and thank those who contributed to the committee's inquiry during the hearing, particularly the Hansard and broadcasting teams. The committee looks forward to implementation of the report's recommendations.

I thank the other members of the committee, Ms Fiona Carrick, Ms Elizabeth Lee, Mr Shane Rattenbury and Mr Thomas Emerson. I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.52): At its core, this report is about equity of access to community facilities and activity across Canberra. Where you live should not shape access to arts, sport and recreation. Too many facilities remain concentrated in the inner areas, while growth areas and outer districts are left waiting. This report responds by putting equity at the centre of planning and investment.

The report documents persistent gaps in everyday community infrastructure. In public art, for instance, Civic has a lot of artworks, while Gungahlin, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Molonglo remain significantly under-represented. That is why the committee recommends a more equitable distribution of public art across all regions. The same issue arises with fitness stations and recreation amenities, where provision is uneven and does not reflect population growth. These are simple, everyday facilities, but they matter for health, wellbeing and social connection.

In sport and recreation, the committee calls for long-term planning that prioritises community-level facilities, not just elite infrastructure. Whether it is aquatic centres, indoor sport or the long-delayed ice sports facility in Tuggeranong—which we want to keep in Woden—the message was consistent: communities want certainty and fairness. That principle is captured in our recommendation that the ACT government adopt an equitable distribution of a community facilities framework across town centres, so that future decisions are guided not by history, but by need. This report is about making sure that access to culture, sport and community life does not depend on postcode, but is shared across Canberra.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.54): I want to thank my committee colleagues for their work on this inquiry and on the report, as well as the secretariat and the witnesses. I had intended to speak to some of the recommendations but, given the hour, I do not think I will. I thank committee members. I strongly recommend that everyone read this report closely and that the government provides a fulsome response.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Report 6

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.54): I present the following report:

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—Report 6—Missing Middle Housing Reform—Inquiry into Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04, dated May 2026, including additional comments (Ms Clay, Ms Carrick, Ms Tough and Mr Cain), together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

I rise to table the report by the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning on the *Inquiry into Draft Major Plan Amendment to the Territory Plan 04—Middle Missing Housing Reform*. This is the committee's sixth report for the Eleventh Assembly.

The Assembly referred this inquiry to the committee on 28 October 2025, and the committee decided to adopt an inquiry on 6 November 2025. The committee's report was released on 30 April 2026, and a government response is due within four months. The committee received 26 submissions to this inquiry and held two public hearings in February 2026.

The committee's report recommends that the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development approve DPA-04, subject to the recommendations set out in its report. In addition, the report makes 17 further recommendations aimed at strengthening the implementation, monitoring and ongoing support of the reforms over time.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who participated in this inquiry and took the time to write submissions and appear at hearings. I also want to acknowledge and thank my fellow committee members for their valuable contributions and collegial approach to this inquiry. We want to thank our very hardworking committee secretariat, who know an awful lot more about planning than they ever wished to. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I was going to make some personal remarks. Given the lateness of the hour, I will not. I did lodge some additional comments, in my capacity as an MLA, to this report. The Greens are very keen to see the missing middle reforms progress. This is the way to give us more housing for our people, the homes that we need within our footprint, and to protect our environment as we do it.

We do need to get the balance right. We need to make sure we are not losing tree canopy cover. We need to make sure we are getting enough public and community housing. We need to make sure we are looking after the people in our suburbs, and that we are getting the infrastructure we need. Ms Carrick was speaking about this only this afternoon. We need to make sure we have the right transport, parks, playgrounds—all the facilities that we need as we grow. We need to make sure that we do this well, that government is monitoring the impacts as we go, and assessing and accommodating the cumulative impacts of these individual planning decisions. But we are pleased to see this body of work progress.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.57): I will keep it short and just cut to the second half of my speech, given the hour, so that should be pretty quick. Support for densification depends on certainty that livability will not be traded away. Clear safeguards for privacy, solar access and neighbourhood character, combined with transparent monitoring of cumulative impacts, are essential to maintaining trust in the planning system.

In the Woden town centre, we are now looking at another five residential towers on the pool site, seven on the pitch-and-putt, and a proposal for 17 towers up to 55 storeys around Westfield. This will bring us up to around 60 residential towers and over 10,000 apartments.

If we want missing middle reforms to succeed, we must move beyond a narrow focus on yield and approvals. Densification must be coordinated, deliberate and fair, guided by precinct planning, supported by infrastructure investment and grounded in long-term environmental and social outcomes.

Sites for community facilities need to be identified. While developers provide an opportunity to deliver community facilities, the government must use the levers it has with planning approval and the lease variation charge to ensure the best outcomes for the community, not the easiest thing for the developer. For example, we can do better than basketball courts above the DJs loading dock.

The southern gateway presents a significant opportunity to accommodate well-planned densification in a highly accessible location, provided it is guided by precinct-based planning rather than piecemeal development. Central to any densification of the southern gateway must be the protection and restoration of Yarralumla Creek and its flood plain as essential environmental infrastructure. The creek must be given sufficient room to flood safely during extreme rainfall events, reducing downstream flood risk while supporting riparian vegetation and biodiversity connectivity through the precinct.

Growth is inevitable; poorly planned growth is not. Done well, densification can strengthen our communities. Done badly, it risks undermining the very qualities that make Canberra such a livable city—the bush capital.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.59): As a committee member and as an MLA, I want to touch on my additional comments to the report, which, obviously, is a public document. I reiterate a concern I have: unless there are significant reviews and changes to the current tax and regulatory settings within this government, including the lease variation charge, the missing middle will mean that the middle will remain missing.

We have seen two striking demonstrations of that. With respect to the reforms in 2003-04 to allow RZ2 developments around otherwise RZ1 areas, near shopping centres and group centres, as the government has admitted, the uptake to populate around the shops and group centres with RZ2 medium density housing has not been high. The government has admitted this. That was a missing middle reform from over 20 years ago. It just has not worked.

With the very recent changes to allow RZ1 blocks to have a second dwelling at that one stage of only up to 120 square metres, the uptake was incredibly low. As the government has admitted, that missing middle reform was not effective. The middle was missing from that reform.

In my personal capacity as a member of this Assembly, while I am cautiously optimistic about these changes, I am not sure that they will produce significantly more housing, as the government no doubt will trumpet. Here we are, solving the problem of housing within our footprint, but if it does not actually change much, and if it does not actually add much, that is a promise without fulfilment. The middle will remain missing unless the government makes some other very significant changes. I draw the government's attention to my additional comments to the report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Report 7

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.02): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 7—*Inquiry into the Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*, dated 29 April 2026, including a dissenting report (*Ms Barry*), together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. The Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 was presented in the Assembly on 3 December 2025 and referred to the committee. The committee resolved to inquire into the bill on 10 December 2025.

The bill proposes general amendments to the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005, the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1991, the Family Violence Act 2016 and the Personal Violence Act 2016. It would introduce the Family Violence Notice Scheme to replace the current after-hour family violence order scheme, which would prevent any reduction of the severity of sentences for all sexual offences against children because of an offender’s “good character” and would allow a person to consent to disclosure of protected confidence evidence in civil proceedings. The committee received 18 submissions and held a public hearing on 20 March 2026. The committee makes 11 recommendations, including that the Assembly pass the bill, subject to amendments proposed in the report. There is one dissenting report from myself.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all who made submissions to the inquiry and appeared at the public hearing. I thank the members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbins and Mr Rattenbury, for their constructive engagement. I also thank the secretariate for all of the work that they had to do to put this report together.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker, by leave, I would also like to speak in my personal capacity. As I have indicated, I did include a dissenting report. I do not take the decision to write a dissenting report lightly at all. As a family lawyer in my career before entering this place and a long-standing advocate for better protections for victims of family and sexual violence, I am very aware of the limitations of the law. But I have strong concerns about this bill in its current form, particularly relating to the way it risks offending the separation of powers.

Laws need to be proportionate, justifiable and defensible. Significant aspects of this bill are not. My main concern, as my dissenting report identifies, is around the increase of victim-survivors potentially being misidentified through the operation of the Family

Violence Safety Notice scheme. The FVSN scheme creates more issues than it solves. It is, in my view, a flippant excuse by the government to give quasi-judicial powers to police without solving the epidemic problem of family and sexual violence. The consequence of ad-hoc decision-making without judicial oversight could have devastating impacts on victims. Many questions around the operations of the scheme remain unanswered. The FVSN scheme does not seemingly integrate with our existing legal process. The government seems to have no appreciation of that.

I have proposed a range of alternatives to address the issues that this bill purports to address. These issues can be fixed without offending core legal principles or putting more victims at risk. Indeed, these core legal principles are imperative to safeguarding trust and confidence in our legal system and consistency in its operation. They also ensure that rights are not arbitrarily violated for the sake of convenience. I will have much more to say about this in the debate, but I encourage the government to reflect on my dissenting report and concerns raised by stakeholders, who have more experience than most of us in this chamber, and consult with them and my office on changes to this bill before it is debated.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Report 8

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (6.08): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 8—*Inquiry into the management of strata properties*, dated 29 April 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. This inquiry commenced on 15 January 2025. The committee appreciates the large amount of interest that was generated with this inquiry, as it received a substantial amount of evidence, with the committee receiving 128 submissions. The committee also held public hearings across four days with over 50 witnesses. The committee makes one finding and 33 recommendations.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all those who made submissions to the inquiry. I would also like to thank interested stakeholders for their patience in waiting for the tabling of this report. I also want to thank my fellow committee members, Mr Werner-Gibbins and Mr Rattenbury, for such a constructive conversation. I am very proud of where this report has landed, and I look forward to the debate. I also want to thank the secretariate for all of the work that they had to do to put this report together.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.09): I want to make a few remarks about this

report, because it is a very substantial one and generated significant committee interest. The committee has made 33 recommendations. I think the focus of those is very much in a practical space where the government can move in a timely manner to implement a range of issues that will make the lives of those living in strata better. We received, as the chair spoke about, a substantial number of community submissions. I want to commend those who submitted, because these were not formed submissions; they were detailed submissions where people had given issues a lot of thought. They shared a lot of their experiences with us, and it was very valuable for the committee to work through all of those.

This is an incredibly important issue. We have just heard the report from the planning committee about missing middle reforms. We know that more and more Canberrans are living in strata properties. That means that this is not a niche issue, as one of our submitters made the point; this is an issue that we have to get right. We have to be evolving our strata law to deal with increasing numbers, increasing complexity and emerging issues, such as—and I point to an emerging issue—the charging of electric vehicles, which was one topic that got quite a bit of discussion during the process.

We initiated this inquiry way back at the start of 2025, and it has taken us some time. Part of me wants to apologise to the committee for that, because I know a lot of people have really been waiting for this. But, on the other hand, we have taken time because there was so much material that it has taken us quite a bit of time to sift through all of that and to think carefully about how we should conclude this committee. I want to take that point as an opportunity to thank the members of the committee secretariat, who really did work hard to get us through all of the issues that came up.

An enormous number of topics came in the report. We had feedback on the role of strata management and strata managers and real concerns coming from many people about the quality of strata management. Members will see, we have ended up recommending both licensing and training for strata managers. We have also taken the decision to recommend training for executive committee members. This was a point of some considerable debate, because the evidence pointed to the significant obligations on executive committee members and the fact that they are often responsible for what is clearly a multimillion dollar building and often a multi-million-dollar annual budget, particularly for the larger buildings. While the committee was reluctant to put a burden in place that might discourage people from volunteering for the executive committee, we did ultimately resolve—and the wording was quite important here—that we should require training, but it should not be a specific burden for volunteers. I will not speak for the committee but, for myself, I think many people who are going to volunteer would value getting a couple of hours of training that would help them understand the basics of the law, perhaps the basics of governance and the sorts of issues that they need to be mindful of, because they appreciate are significant responsibilities.

Another important area I wanted to touch on—and, mindful of the hour, I will endeavour to be quick—is the role of renters in strata. This was a quite contentious point amongst the range of submissions and when we asked questions in the public hearings. But, ultimately, the committee has resolved that renters should have the opportunity to play a role in strata. We were very mindful of the fact that owners obviously have the significant investment. They own the property. They pay for it. They are responsible for it. But, with more and more people renting long-term, there is an

opportunity here for renters to be a constructive contributor in a strata. We also believe it is appropriate that they have better access to the information of the strata. I support the recommendations that resolved that renters be allowed to come to the AGM as observers—the committee did not resolve that they should have some voting rights, but they should be able to attend the meeting and contribute to the conversation, as people who live in the building and often have good insights—and also that a body corporate can chose to amend their rules to allow for renters to be elected to the executive committee.

I have already had one email back from somebody saying, this really ignores the fact that these people have no financial stake in the building. But we heard examples—and I think we have all met these kinds of people—where someone who is living in a building has possibly been there for five or 10 years could be an excellent member of the executive committee. If they want to be involved—and they are probably well known by many other members of the building, because of their long-term residency—why not? We heard that often executive committees struggle to find good people. Just because somebody is a renter does not mean they cannot contribute very well to the executive committee. So I wanted to just take a little bit of time to speak to that. The committee, I think, was very clear that we should not step across that line of the financial ownership model, but there is definitely capability to allow renters to have a greater role.

I will not go on too much more, because there are a range of other detailed recommendations, but I want to touch on the issue of hardship provisions. This is something that was brought up by Care Financial and I think was quite an eye-opener for the committee. They talked about the need for flexible payment options, payment plans and a range of other things that do not currently exist. The evidence was quite extraordinary. Care explained to the committee, in their evidence, that, when somebody comes to them in financial difficulty, the number one thing they say is, “You should pay your strata.” They are less worried about rates, electricity bill, gas bills and phone bills, because all of those essential services have options for helping people who are in financial hardship. But there is no such mechanism, unless an individual body corporate decides to do so, to help people when it comes to struggling to pay their body corporate fees. Care provided a number of pieces of extraordinary data, which are in the report. One was that, in the year to 31 May 2025, half of all matters filed in bankruptcy lists of the federal court involved strata filings.

Basically, Care said that we have a situation where unit owners are being aggressively pursued with legal action, with a consequence that people are being declared bankrupt, they are losing their homes, and there are not clear and legislated mechanisms to require hardship provisions. This is quite extraordinary. I am very grateful that Care brought this evidence to the committee, because I think that, for a lot of people, it was a real eye opener and an area where, I think, legislative reform is required sooner rather than later to ensure that we do not see more people losing their homes.

I will finish my remarks by simply thanking my fellow committee members. This was a challenging inquiry, but I feel—and the chair made this point—really proud of where the committee report has landed. It has distilled a lot of evidence and a lot of complex issues into a series of recommendations that are there for the government. JACS and the minister will need to do some further work, but I think we have distilled a lot of

things. It presents a menu of options that can be dealt with in a reasonably timely manner. It is not going to solve everything in strata, but it is a good starting point on a range of important issues for those who live in bodies corporate.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.17): I thank the chair for the work that she has done on tabling this report and also thank the previous chair, Mr Cain, who started the work a long time ago at the start of 2025. I echo the words of Mr Rattenbury, the points that he has raised and the issues that have come out of this report. We have made a number of, I think, sensible and certainly thought-provoking recommendations. I would like to use this time, however, to thank extremely fulsomely the secretariat for the work that they have done in pulling this report together. After the inquiries and the submission we read, we had about 170 potential recommendations, four and a half Excel pages of recs in 12 font. It was a lot of work that the secretariat had to guide us through and work through as we bounced ideas backwards and forwards within the committee. There are two members of the secretariat who are still working here. I will not name them, but they know who they are. Kathleen de Kleuver, who, within a week and a half of the reports tabling, told us on the Monday that she was retiring and, on the Thursday, she retired. She was an amazing and very sensible and tolerant head of the secretariat, who helped us put the report together and get it tabled. The fact that we get to talk about the work that is done in this Assembly is because we are standing on the shoulders of some extremely diligent and professional people in the secretariat. In the legal affairs committee, this is the eighth report. So we have done a power of work, due mostly to the secretariat, and I thank them.

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) (6.20): As the relevant minister, I want to acknowledge the mountain of work that this committee has undertaken and all of the support that has been provided to this committee to get it done.

I think I made my position pretty clear. While all parties had effectively made election commitments about strata commissioners and looking into the issues with strata, very soon after—and I think through agreements across the floor as well—this committee began this inquiry and, rather than duplicating effort, put a lot of trust into this committee inquiry and wanted it to be able to work through all of the issues presented to it and provide those recommendations for government to then look at and do the extra work, as Mr Rattenbury said, and implement, rather than undertaking two bodies of work at the same time which potentially could have been at odds with each other.

That was risky. It could have been a pretty light-on piece of work ultimately. But I think it speaks volumes to the commitment of the committee and all those who participated, provided submissions and appeared, that it is work of this calibre. I think it is one of the best committee reports that I have read in this place. I look forward to giving it the attention and the thoroughness that the committee has given these issues as we look to progress these reforms.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Report 4

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (6.22): I present the following report:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 4—*Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25*, dated 28 April 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the Eleventh Assembly. The 2024-25 annual and financial reports were presented in the Assembly on 21 October 2025. Clause 4 of the establishing resolution refers all calendar and financial year annual and financial reports to the relevant standing committee for inquiry and report. The committee held public hearings between 10 and 21 November 2025, and 195 questions were placed or taken on notice. The committee makes 36 recommendations in this report.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all ministers, statutory officials, directorate officials and other witnesses for their assistance to the committee and their significant contributions to this inquiry. We also thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting the committee—and, of course, the secretariat, who refused to draft that into my speaking notes. We thank them as well. I thank the other members of the committee, Ms Barry, Miss Nuttall and Ms Tough.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

National Volunteer Week

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.24): I want to acknowledge that coming up, the week of 18 to 24 May, is one of the best weeks of the year: it is National Volunteer Week. This year is especially significant, with the United Nations naming 2026 as the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development, which recognises volunteers as central to strong, resilient communities. The theme, “Your Year to Volunteer”, is both a celebration and a call to action.

Volunteers are the backbone of our community. They support people in crisis, strengthen connections and deliver essential services. I want to thank the thousands of volunteers all across the ACT for their tireless work. Your contribution makes Canberra more connected, more compassionate and a better place to live. I also give a special shout-out to our dedicated Greens volunteers. Your commitment powers grassroots change and truly makes our community a better place.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (6.24): I rise to put on *Hansard* some extraordinary news that has come to light this afternoon regarding the Margot McNeill saga. Dr McNeill has, on many occasions, said that she sought to disclose the investigation from TAFE New South Wales to CIT during the recruitment process but had been advised on multiple occasions, both verbally and in writing, by TAFE New South Wales that she was not permitted to do so.

But in a statement late this afternoon, according to the ABC, TAFE New South Wales said that it never told Dr McNeill not to disclose to CIT that she was under investigation for serious misconduct. The statement goes on to say that their handling of this matter is consistent with the obligations under New South Wales privacy law.

TAFE NSW gave Dr McNeill permission to disclose any facts or circumstances connected with her employment at TAFE NSW and at no point specifically directed Dr McNeill not to disclose the existence of the investigation to CIT.

TAFE NSW is committed to promoting a culture where staff feel comfortable and confident reporting any known or suspected concerns.

And I note that this place has spent a lot of time investigating this issue but that everything you thought you knew about it has potentially turned upside down now. I felt I had to get that on the record on *Hansard*. Thank you.

Afghanistan—Embassy

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.26): I want to touch on correspondence I sent to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Penny Wong, a couple of weeks ago, calling on the federal government to make some efforts to keep the current site of the Afghan embassy open. Unfortunately, this is due to close at the end of June.

I note for members' information that the Afghan embassy that is now on the site is lived in by the former Afghan ambassador for the pre-Taliban government. As members would know, the Australian government has not recognised the Taliban government, so I have written a letter to the senator calling on her to make all efforts to reverse the decision to close the embassy and, at the very least, to make it available for cultural and community events.

I mention three of the advocacy groups for our Afghan community and for reform in Afghanistan to whom I have been in correspondence with about my letter: the Afghan Peace Foundation, the ZamZam Foundation and the Federation of Hazara Council of Australia. I want to thank them and their advocates for supporting democratic reform in Afghanistan and supporting our local community. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mulligans Flat

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.28): Today I want to talk about a gem in the crown of Canberra's north: Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary. Mulligans Flat is Australia's largest remaining area of critically endangered yellow box and Blakely's red gum grassy woodland, protected for conservation. It is a sanctuary for wildlife. It is surrounded by a fox- and cat-proof fence which protects several threatened species of flora and fauna. It has also allowed the reintroduction of species like bettongs and eastern quolls that used to be endemic in our region but were driven to extinction on the Australian mainland from the impacts of colonisation and the introduction of foxes and cats. These native species are now thriving in the safety provided by the Mulligans Flat Sanctuary.

Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve was established in 1992 after a coalition of local, environmental, non-government organisations proposed the idea to ACT government, with a view to it one day becoming a wildlife sanctuary.

In 2004, a partnership was created between the ACT government and the ANU's Fenner School of the Environment & Society, resulting in the Mulligans Flat-Goorooyarroo Woodland Experiment. This experiment has been hugely successful, and Mulligans Flat has proven essential to wildlife and environmental conservation in the ACT. Through this partnership with the ANU, they do innovative research and are able to experiment with environmental management.

The ACT government established the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust in 2012 as a tax-deductible not-for-profit entity to attract and channel investment to Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary and Jerrabomberra Wetlands. Over the past 14 years, the ACT government has made strategic investments in the trust. The trust has used that investment from the ACT government to leverage additional funds through fundraising and creating partnerships with foundations, universities and businesses, and sourcing grants and loans. Altogether, the ACT government's investment has leveraged a significantly larger amount of outside funding, which has also been used to deliver the conservation work of the Mulligans Flat sanctuary.

This conservation work has been so fruitful. Some of the conservation outcomes from this experimental management include adding dead wood to the sanctuary, which has improved habitat and biodiversity, and adding camera traps so they are able to photo monitor animals. They have also implemented a revegetation program guided by extensive vegetation mapping. And of course, there have been several successful species reintroductions, including the famous ecosystem engineer, the eastern bettong, in 2012; the bush-stone curlew, in 2014; and the eastern quoll, in 2016.

Through research and advocacy, Mulligans Flat seeks to inspire respect for the beauty, species and ecological processes of Australia's native woodlands. It is the only sanctuary in the country that is publicly accessible. It is the first sanctuary in an urban context. It is the only woodland environment in Australia free from the continuing impacts of foxes, cats, rabbits, hares, goats, deer and pigs.

They educate the community on the importance of protecting these sites through

engaging with thousands of community members through special events, tours, and by working with local schools. Children from all over the country, on their school excursions to Canberra, now have an educational and fun activity to do at night-time, with Mulligans Flat offering night-time tours where they can spotlight the nocturnal creatures out and about in their sanctuary home. Mulligans Flat has hundreds of volunteers and tens of thousands of followers on social media. It is a fantastic tourism drawcard for our Bush Capital.

In 2022 the engagement centre, Wildbark, was opened. Wildbark is a nature-based learning centre, and a joint effort of the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust, the ACT government, the ANU and the Suburban Land Agency. It is a contemporary, welcoming facility which celebrates a positive vision of pro-active restoration. It provides a gateway to the Australian landscape of 250 years ago, inspiring people of all ages to care for Australia's landscapes and wildlife. Wildbark showcases more than a decade of Australian government, ACT government, ANU and community partnership turning the tide on extinction.

In 2020, Greens Minister Vassarotti co-signed the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary Strategy 2050, which asked us to imagine a 2050 where nature and culture would be flourishing: a thriving grassy woodland on the edge of Canberra; a place for nature, community, culture and learning to flourish. I really hope that vision is realised. I hope the government appreciates what the community knows and the inputs from the community in making the place so special.

Mulligans Flat sanctuary is important to our Bush Capital, for our culture and for our community. It must be appropriately valued and protected now and for the future.

Mr Michael Sollis—tribute

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) (6.33): I rise today to acknowledge with deep sadness the passing of Michael Sollis, a remarkable Canberran, an extraordinary creative leader and a tireless advocate for the arts in our community and beyond. Michael was a rare and generous figure in Australia's cultural life: an interdisciplinary artist, an educator, a composer and a thinker whose work demonstrated the profound role the arts play in shaping how we understand ourselves and our world.

Born and raised in Canberra, his contribution to our city's artistic identity was significant. He believed deeply in the power of creativity to spark new ideas, to bring people together and to enable individuals and communities to discover their own unique voices. His leadership spanned many of Australia's most respected cultural institutions and initiatives.

He was the founder and artistic director of the Griffyn Ensemble, a group widely recognised for performances that challenged traditional artistic boundaries. Under his direction, the ensemble connected music with disciplines as diverse as science, history and community storytelling; it demonstrated his belief that creativity flourishes at the intersection of ideas.

Michael was also co-artistic director of the National Folk Festival, where he played a key role in renewing and revitalising one of Australia's most important cultural gatherings. He was seen at the festival just a few weeks ago, enjoying the warmth and community of an organisation he was proud to be a part of.

Education was also central to Michael's practice. In 2016, he was appointed by the late Richard Gill as the inaugural Artistic Director of Education at Musica Viva Australia, where he led the country's largest music education program, reaching more than 280,000 students each year. Through this work, he ensured that young people across Australia had meaningful opportunities to engage with music and discover their own creativity.

Michael was an inaugural member of the Minister's Creative Council, serving from 2018 to 2022. In this role, he provided thoughtful and informed advice to government at a critical time for the sector. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his insight helped shape programs that supported artists and arts organisations, and guided the recovery of the sector in its aftermath.

Held in deep respect by his peers, Michael played a key role in revitalising the Canberra Artists Action Group during the pandemic, giving Canberra artists a strong collective voice on the issues directly affecting their work and livelihoods. The sense of connection, information sharing and industry support that this group fostered was invaluable during a particularly challenging time.

He also served on the board of the Cultural Facilities Corporation from 2022 to 2025, a role he took up and embraced after his unexpected cancer diagnosis. He was a thoughtful and valuable member of the board, ensuring that artistic excellence and meaningful community engagement remained central to the organisation's strategic priorities.

What distinguished Michael was not only the breadth of his achievements, but the spirit in which he approached his work. He was deeply collaborative, bringing together artists, educators, scientists and communities in pursuit of common understanding. He believed in sharing diverse stories and perspectives, and in creating opportunities for people to engage creatively in ways that were meaningful to them.

Michael's commitment to creative practice, and to others, never wavered. He continued to build new work, including *Reticulum*, a powerful sound sculpture installed at the University of Canberra Hospital. Incorporating the voices and experiences of immunodeficient families, it is a work of deep human impact.

Michael leaves behind a legacy that will endure in the artists he supported, the audiences he inspired and the communities he helped to build. His influence will continue to be felt in the many lives he touched and in the creative spirit he championed.

On behalf of the government and the broader ACT community, I extend our sincere condolences to Michael's family, to his wife Kiri and his two sons, and to his friends, colleagues and all those who had the privilege of working with him. Vale, Michael Sollis, you will be greatly missed.

Macquarie—swimming pool

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.37): One thing that has become very clear through community activity and the media is that Big Splash in Belconnen is one of Canberra's and our region's most valued aquatic facilities—a unique facility. What has become very clear, particularly from a record-breaking petition, with the e-petition version reaching over 6,000 signatures in record time, is that the community want Big Splash. They do not want “little splash”.

We have been talking about this for quite a while. Ms Cheyne turns her back on me and looks at her phone. She should be listening. She is one of the key ministers. Very strangely, along with her colleague Minister Steel, she claims, “No, the independent Access Canberra are in control of this.” The last time I checked, they were a government department, and they had ministers responsible for them.

Hypothetically, if there were decisions coming out of Access Canberra that were being applauded by the community, I wonder what the ministers would be saying then. Would they be saying, “That independent Access Canberra have made some decisions that the community really likes”? I think the ministers might be saying something different. I think they might be saying, “As the ministers responsible for Access Canberra, we are so pleased to deliver something that is of such benefit to the community.”

But when it is going the other way, Access Canberra is an “independent part of government”, whatever that means. It is a fiction. Shame on both of them, senior ministers in this government, for claiming to be at a distance from a part of government that is under their direct ministerial responsibility. Shame on them.

We had the farcical situation of Minister Berry, at a public forum earlier this year, saying to a large community gathering, “Don't worry about Big Splash; it'll be back and it'll even be better.”

Ms Cheyne: That is not what she said.

MR CAIN: “Don't worry about Big Splash; we will get it back and it'll be better.” Watch the video yourself, Minister Cheyne. It is just embarrassing. We think that Big Splash is going to become “little splash”, but that is yet to be demonstrated. With respect to the promise of a pool by the end of the year, unfortunately, we have seen many promises coming from the current owner that have not really been fulfilled, unless there has been a bit of pressure put on; then, in the most minimal fashion possible, they cleaned the site up. We have not had Big Splash open, or any part of it open, for several summers, and that is a shame on this government.

It makes me wonder, Mr Speaker. Dickson Pool is a pool that is managed by the ACT government. It is owned and maintained by the government, under a contract for management, of course, in the Chief Minister's electorate. I am wondering, Mr Speaker; if Big Splash was in the Chief Minister's electorate, whether there would be much more effort made to keep it going. It is a question that the community should think about. The Dickson Pool is kept going by the government, and it is much valued by the community. I wonder, if the Chief Minister had Big Splash in his electorate, whether it would have gone down the same trajectory that it is going down at the moment.

I want to thank so many community advocates. I thank my Ginninderra colleagues, especially, of course, Ms Barry and Ms Clay, for their advocacy and efforts. I want to thank Save Big Splash, headed by Amelia Tattam, and her friends, colleagues and family. I hope that something different comes about than what has been promised.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.42): There is a numbers theme to what I am talking about today, four kinds of numbers—impressive numbers, horrific numbers, pathetic numbers, and numbers that build over time. I refer first to the impressive ones. It is estimated that more than 3,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people served in the Australian Defence Force during World War II, both in frontline roles and in support units. Add this figure to the estimated 1,000 or more who served in World War I, 500 who served in Vietnam and 80 who served in Korea, and we get a total that is around 5,000 or so.

Despite serving this country with honour, Indigenous soldiers returning home in 1919 did not receive any reward for their commitment to king and country. In response, Aboriginal political activism was born, in the form of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, founded in 1924. That journey of progress is by no means completed yet.

I turn next to the horrific numbers. Going further back, there is another series of wars we can look at, one in which our First Nations populations had no choice about their involvement—the frontier wars. The violent death toll from Australia's frontier wars tops 10,000, and this does not include the tens of thousands more who died from the new diseases that European colonisation brought to this land. According to a 1998 doctoral thesis by Peter Dowling:

During the period of Indigenous institutionalisation, infectious and respiratory diseases were responsible for over 50 per cent of recorded deaths on eight separate Aboriginal settlements in southeast Australia. These included tuberculosis, bronchitis, pneumonia, diarrhoea and dysentery.

Earlier death totals from disease are much harder to quantify, but we can remember that, for much of the 19th century, it was assumed that the entire Indigenous population would dwindle away—that First Nations people were a dying race.

I turn now to the pathetic numbers. We are jumping forward to this year's Anzac Day celebrations, during which Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country speeches at some prominent locations were booed for the second year in a row. The number of people who engaged in this disrespectful activity was pathetically small. I think it is very important to note this fact. The level of disrespect shown by the perpetrators of this disruptive and divisive action is hard to fathom. I trust the RSL will not bow to this thuggery by changing the ceremony or removing this important tradition from Anzac Day ceremonies.

The Greens condemned the conduct we saw by a small group on Anzac Day in the strongest terms, and I welcome the fact that both the Labor and Liberal parties have

also done this. But newly minted One Nation member Barnaby Joyce embodies a subtler and very destructive response that we need to be alert to. While not condoning the booing, he claimed, “People who have served our nation don’t need to be welcomed to their country.”

Word choices matter. Welcome to Country and “welcome to Australia” do not mean the same thing. Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country do not mean the same thing. We know this. Pretending that they do, in order to make Joyce’s point, is the kind of deliberate poisoning of our national discourse that we see in a lot of the language choices of the right. We know what “country” is. It is not the internationally recognised nation we know as Australia. It is something more abstract and spiritual and, in meaningful ways, richer.

As American ethnographer Deborah Bird Rose came to learn during her years spent with Ngarinman and Ngaliwurru speakers in the Northern Territory, people talk about country in the same way they talk about a person. They speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country.

We know the difference between a welcome and an acknowledgement, too. We know it partly because we have become steeped in these ideas about country, thanks to the ceremonies and words we have heard or spoken so many times.

Finally, I turn to the numbers that we need to build. In this Assembly, we have a responsibility to promote this precious idea of country and to do everything we can to ensure that this life-affirming and positive perspective is where the numbers build; that more and more Australians understand what country means and incorporate that understanding into the way they live their lives. That is a way we can strengthen cultural recognition and reconciliation in this country and help Australians to understand why what happened on Anzac Day was wrong.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.46 pm