



Debates

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Wednesday, 20 October 2010

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Wednesday, 20 October 2010

MR SPEAKER (Mr Rattenbury) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Education—proposed efficiency dividend cuts

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (10.01): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) education is key in fostering an inclusive community;
- (b) that the proposed efficiency dividend cuts will significantly affect vital services to the most vulnerable students in our school system;
- (c) that the proposed efficiency dividend cuts will further increase teacher workloads and responsibilities;
- (d) that the internal consultation process allocated an insufficient timeframe for responses and was scheduled a day before school vacations;
- (e) that there were no external consultations with school communities;
- (f) that a centralised resource centre is a valuable resource for both public and non-government school systems;
- (g) in many instances, technology should be utilised as a learning aid, and not a replacement for teachers and support staff; and
- (h) the importance of maintaining existing expertise in the school system and not losing it through job cuts;

(2) reaffirms its strong support for:

- (a) the public school sector;
- (b) funding for government schools; and
- (c) the rights of ACT students and parents to have access to quality public schools; and

(3) calls on the:

- (a) Minister for Education and Training to immediately quarantine all student and teacher support services and resources that are proposed for discontinuation as part of this efficiency dividend's cost saving measures;

- (b) Minister for Education and Training to recommence the consultation process and to include school community stakeholders;
- (c) ACT Government to disclose the evidence it used to deliberate on the proposed cuts; and
- (d) ACT Government to explore options on how to enhance future funding support to student and teacher support services and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in 2010.

Before I begin, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the members of the community who have shown up today to see their elected members debate this very important motion. It has been a tenuous and emotional several weeks for many of them, and we should commend them for their bravery in taking up their civic duties for the greater good of our school system. We thank you for your interest and your enthusiasm.

The philosopher Nietzsche once said: “Education is not meant to determine who the child should be but, rather, how children might fully become themselves.” Just as much as Australia is a country where you can be what you want to be and not just what you are born into, Nietzsche’s view on the empowering qualities of education has resonance. Teaching is, after all, the profession that teaches all other professions.

It is easy to talk about the historical context, the broader picture or, in this case, the money that has been invested into our education system, and now the money that needs to be taken out. Yet the only true context in our children’s education is that they can be what they aspire to be and that parents have the necessary support mechanisms to help their children reach those aspirations.

The government’s recent proposed efficiency dividend cuts—and, I would assume, with the minister’s consent—fly in the face of this empowering role that education plays in our children’s lives. A brief cross-slice of the initial proposed cuts is telling: two early intervention preschool support teachers; two support teachers for early childhood English as a second language program; one early childhood support teacher for behavioural management; four school counsellor positions of vacancies not filled; reclassification of student management consultants, and eight remaining positions to be relocated to schools; two hearing support positions from a headcount of 10.3 full-time equivalent teacher positions; one of four vision support teachers; post-school options teacher positions to be discontinued; two disability support officers discontinued; five classroom teacher positions and one SLC position in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy program discontinued; one SLC English as a second language position. The list continues.

Added to this is the closure/break-up of the CTL resource centre, which members of the entire school system, both public and private, and parents of home-school children have said should be kept centralised. There has been a reprieve for students requiring hearing and vision support services and some guarantee that the government will hire two of the four counsellor positions it had originally intended to discontinue. But this is piecemeal in light of the totality of the proposed cuts.

Where are the reassurances that these cuts can meet the present and future demand for school support services? And in the example of the counsellor positions, why the initial four positions and then a change to two after Monday's community consultations? Where is the evidence supporting any of these decisions, Mr Barr? This is made more sinister when a large share of these cuts involves positions that support students with disabilities and special needs and members of marginalised communities.

Education is the great leveller and enabler in our society. That is why the government needs to invest in the people element of our public schools. The support services being cut not only allow disabled and marginalised students to excel in school and life but also allow our teachers to be the best they can be in helping our children succeed. All too often, we hear of teachers having to work harder and harder in an under-appreciated profession. What kinds of thoughtful consultations would presuppose that a regular classroom teacher could teach braille, ESL and sign language, all at the same time?

Equally, the emphasis on new technologies like text-to-speech programs for visually impaired students as opposed to braille has caused consternation amongst parents of blind children. The government would learn of this if it had bothered to solicit community feedback before internally proposing service cuts. And I am sure that if the relevant support teachers were truly heard in the government's internal consultations they would advise that, unlike braille, speech output programs do not teach reading and writing skills to visually impaired students. In other words, the government would be, in essence, promoting illiteracy.

The backflip on these proposed cuts only occurred because of community outcry, highlighting the ludicrousness of these cuts. Noting the efficiency dividend review Q&A posted online, the government envisioned that technology will take up some of the slack from the support services. If there was anything to be learnt from Minister Barr's backflip on the Shepherd Centre, it was that a cochlear implant can allow a child to hear but that child still needs support in developing communication skills.

In short, technology is a learning aid. It is not, nor should it be, a panacea for teaching. You cannot replace teachers with technology, Mr Speaker. Our labour market has changed. As we move further along the path of being a knowledge economy, education is no longer a guarantee to moving up in life; it merely qualifies you to enter the job market.

The proposed cuts are telling: roughly speaking, 40 proposed reductions in departmental branches with support and/or student responsibilities, as opposed to 11.5 proposed cuts in departmental branches with non-support responsibilities. With respect to the two disability support officers to be axed, by the way, these are the only two disability support officers in a department of 5,608 people, which is a ratio of approximately one admin officer to 2.3 teachers.

The chief executive of DET has advised that they are working with DHCS on continued support for students with disabilities. But as of yesterday's question time

session in this Assembly, the minister for disability advised that she has not received a “full in-depth discussion” from the education portfolio. It is also very instructive to note that the minister for disability is not here to discuss the important elements of today’s motion. I am very unimpressed with Ms Burch’s non-appearance this morning.

Furthermore, in the same question time session, the minister for education went on record to state that these cuts are a “sensible measure”. A sensible measure? In short, what he is insinuating is “the hell with our most vulnerable students; we need to make up for ACT Labor’s fiscal imprudence”. This is at a time when revenue to government coffers has been at an all-time high but negated by this government’s spending on legacy projects.

Mr Speaker, you will recall yesterday that on the topic of these cuts the minister avoided answering questions regarding his involvement in and knowledge of the details of the cuts, laying accountability squarely on his department and, in particular, his chief executive. This is unfortunate. It is lacking in leadership and sincerity on the part of Minister Barr. It makes the chief executive a fall guy for decisions that ultimately should have been approved by a minister and it politicises the public service.

In short, hiding behind the government bureaucracy, we have a minister who believes that cuts to disability support services in the education system are sensible, and a disability minister who simply does not know or does not care, because they operate in silos. They sit next to each other in the Assembly. Their offices are next door to each other upstairs, yet the chasm between them—

Mr Barr: No, they are not.

MR DOSZPOT: I am sorry; two offices down. It makes a big difference, Mr Barr. We are in the same building, for God’s sake. If you cannot cross a corridor, if you cannot cross a floor, there is something further to be said here.

Obviously, this lack of consultation stems not just from these dividend cuts but from amongst ministerial portfolios too. But on the note of consultations, the process is not unbecoming of the minister’s standard procedure on the matter. With cynicism for the community by Minister Barr, we have witnessed a near replay of the school closures of 2006. The minister makes a decision, notifies some people, calls for consultations and allocates an unreasonable time frame—and preferably makes a key announcement a day before school holidays to throw the education community off-guard, as we saw just recently. Teachers had four days—four days, Mr Barr—to come back from their holidays and respond to your internal consultation.

History seems to be repeating itself again, and I shudder to think what the minister has in store for us in the subsequent dividend cuts to come. Minister Barr has said that these internal consultations are in accordance with the enterprise agreements with the unions, yet the Australian Education Union—who, by the way, attended the consultation that we had with the community on Monday—has already commented that the consultation “makes a mockery of the required consultative processes under the terms of the DET teaching staff enterprise agreement”. That is from your union, Mr Barr. The process is further made dubious—

Mr Barr: They are not my unions, though.

MR DOSZPOT: It is from the Education Union, Mr Barr, and I think you represent education. The process is further made dubious with the DET chief executive stating quite heatedly, in a radio interview regarding the legitimacy of the concerns felt by parents, “But I have described the process for you twice now, the process would have been had it not been in the public domain that we would have finalised the papers today.”

The efficiency dividend review consultation paper noted three consultation phases: branch discussions and development of proposals; a draft paper outlining proposals, staff and union feedback; and a final proposal outlined, transfer opportunities, formal consultations with unions for individual staff. However, there was no mention of public consultations in the review or in any media statements until the public school community raised concerns over the whole consultation process. Can you blame the parents and the community groups for thinking that this was a *fait accompli*? I think not. And they deserve the benefit of the doubt.

The first page of the government’s consultation paper states that “the department will work together with staff and stakeholders”. As such, the consultation should have considered parents and community groups in the consultation process. Considering that Minister Barr flagged cuts as early as the estimates hearings in May this year, clearly a fair and up-front consultation process could have been developed. Simply put, the school community has the right to know what is being planned. The present process has not been clearly articulated up front, which has caused the present angst and stress for parents and teachers alike.

This is truly regrettable. The consultation document became public for a reason, and the reason is encapsulated in this motion. The fact that the Canberra Liberals had to conduct a community forum on behalf of this government to allow people to voice their fears and concerns says much about this minister’s amateur time management of this issue. As such, given the rich feedback and unanimous agreement on this motion, as a result of the recent community consultations, this motion is our community’s gain.

It is acutely unfortunate that, due to ACT Labor’s addiction to spending and the minister’s wholesale buying in of the—to quote the minister—“many powerful reform currents in the contemporary Australian education debate”, fundamental portfolios like education and vital support services are the first to experience dividend cuts and be seen as a burden to the public purse.

In this context, and referring to the government’s strategic plan titled *Everyone matters*, one must question whether this is a sincere sentiment in light of the proposed cuts. And how do the recent developments underpin the government’s foundation principles of excellence, accountability and fairness stated in its *Excellence in disability education in the ACT public schools—strategic plan*? Has Minister Barr’s addiction to PR spin leached into the government; hence our most vulnerable students and their parents get nothing more than warm and fuzzy motherhood statements while the government wants to cut education support services? It was not long ago that a

PISA report noted that our school system was categorised as “low equity”. (*Time expired.*)

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (10.17): I rise this morning to speak on Mr Doszpot’s motion. I welcome it although, perhaps not surprisingly, Mr Speaker, I can advise the Assembly that the government will not be supporting it.

I welcome the motion this morning because it provides me with an opportunity to talk about the sound policy and processes being pursued by the government. As I indicated yesterday in question time and have put on the public record on a number of occasions—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR BARR: the government is committed to restoring a balanced budget. In 2009-10 we outlined a seven-year recovery strategy. We updated that in the 2010-11 budget and recast it to a five-year recovery strategy.

Let me make this very clear, Mr Speaker: the government remains committed to our fiscal strategy and to prudent financial management. Our budget recovery and the requisite adjustment task will take time. We have indicated a five-year process. It is interesting that in the budget debates—and we heard none of this from Mr Doszpot in his speech—the Canberra Liberals at that time called for more cuts faster. Now they take the entirely opposite position.

The government continues to take measured and long-term approaches to addressing our deficit. In doing this we have ensured that core services are maintained, that community wellbeing is not compromised, and that we are taking a prudent approach to risk mitigation and protection. That is what the community expects of the government and that is what we are delivering.

Part of doing this has been a government-wide, every-single-ACT-government-department efficiency dividend. That was contained in this year’s ACT budget and it was approved by this Assembly. Those members opposite have made a great show over the last couple of years of any attempt by me allegedly to defy the will of the Assembly. Yet that is exactly what they are asking me to do today. They also call on this government to return to surplus even sooner. So which is it? Which side of the street are you walking on today?

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Doszpot was barely interrupted in his speech and I expect Mr Barr to be extended the same courtesy. I call Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Indeed, the Canberra Liberals claim, and they do it through motions such as this, that one service or another must be quarantined or

must be provided with more funding. Yet what is their voting record? They voted against paying every single teacher in the ACT education system. They voted against providing an extra \$4 million to students with special needs in non-government schools and interestingly, Mr Speaker, they voted against the seven per cent increase in funding for the department of education in 2010-11. That is the voting record of the Canberra Liberals. It is against everything.

As I said earlier, the government is committed to delivering a balanced budget through the efficiency dividend that this place supported in the budget this year. All ACT government agencies are required to meet the efficiency dividend. The Department of Education and Training is required to achieve savings of one per cent in the current financial year, which translates into a \$4 million saving.

The efficiency dividend review undertaken by the department considered how best to structure its workforce whilst continuing to deliver on its commitments. This process has been conducted in accordance with the obligations the department has under the ACT Department of Education and Training staff enterprise agreement 2009-11. It is also being conducted under the obligations contained in the ACT Department of Education and Training staff union collective agreement 2007-10.

The department has been working with staff, principals, unions, key stakeholders and parent groups through the efficiency dividend review process. The department has met with relevant unions on a regular basis through this process and has spoken with or met with other key stakeholders and interest groups.

On 23 September the department circulated a consultation paper to employees and relevant unions which outlined proposals for modifications to central office staffing levels and associated functions. The paper noted that a key priority for the department through this process has been to minimise the impact on schools, which have been exempted from identifying savings. Proposals were therefore developed to ensure minimal impact, if any, in classrooms, with no school-based jobs being directly affected.

The initial consultation paper indicated that there would be some changes to the way central office supports schools, with most changes affecting the way services are delivered, rather than a reduction in the level of service. As a result of the proposals, a number of highly skilled teaching staff currently based in central office will be returning to schools.

An efficiency dividend review question and answer document was posted on the department's website providing more information on the ED review process and proposals. This responded to a number of concerns that had already been raised through the consultation period. The consultation period on the ED review paper was initially scheduled to close on 8 October but was extended until the 14th to provide for additional time.

Importantly, the timing of this process has been designed to ensure that the department could conclude its consultation in time to enable affected staff to be redeployed into schools and other positions with minimal disruption to those staff and to students.

In response to feedback received during the consultation period and the continued work of the department to find alternative ways to make efficiencies, the final staffing structure includes changes to some of the proposals outlined in the initial paper. Importantly, resources allocated directly to schools for support in areas such as disability, English as a second language, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support, counselling and pastoral care have not changed.

The department's final position and staffing structure have been circulated to staff. Changes to proposals in the initial consultation paper have been made through a range of ideas brought forward by staff and stakeholders during the consultation. Further savings have been identified in areas such as the use of consultants and contractors, the administration of travel and accommodation allowances, room hire costs and stationery purchases.

An important contribution to the efficiency dividend will also be achieved through a further rationalisation of the department's vehicle fleet. These new contributions will ensure that the department is able to meet its efficiency dividend for the 2010-11 financial year.

A key focus for the department will be on supporting staff affected by the changes and the quality teaching staff that will be transitioning from central office into schools. I am advised that the department has received positive feedback from the CPSU and individual staff for the way they have worked with individual staff potentially affected by the ED review.

There is a broader picture here. In the last five years the number of students accessing disability programs in ACT public schools has increased by over 12 per cent. But unfortunately, just like any area of government service, resources available are not unlimited. There has been new funding allocated in the most recent budget and more funding will be allocated in future budgets. However, in this area of education, as in all areas, we must review what we are doing to ensure that we get the best result for taxpayers and the best result in terms of educational outcomes for all students. An efficiency dividend is a small part of achieving this.

As education minister, I am committed to ensuring every child in the ACT gets the best education possible. I and the department are working with the community, parent groups, education professionals and industry to look at how we can ensure the education system continues to meet the needs of students in a changing world.

I would like to take this opportunity this morning to give a brief snapshot of the many reforms we are implementing and exploring for the benefit of students. Just a few months ago I announced that the government's investment in education would increase by \$59.5 million. This includes \$32 million in new recurrent funding and \$27 million in capital investment as part of the 2010-11 budget. That includes funding for more new schools, productivity places and skills, a national partnership initiative, the establishment of an ACT teacher quality institute, \$1.6 million in additional funding to support students with a disability, \$1.1 million to support our earn or learn policy—again another national partnership with the commonwealth—\$600,000 for

the implementation of the school-based management review, and \$300,000 for swimming and survival skills in ACT schools.

Again, it is worth noting that the ACT Liberals voted against all of those new initiatives. Most recently the ACT budget also provided \$27.7 million in capital funding, including more money to expand Red Hill primary school, expansion of the gymnasium at Harrison high school, forward design for a new school in Molonglo, a new school in Bonner, a new school in Franklin, \$1.4 million for various ICT initiatives including online student enrolments, upgrades to the board of senior secondary studies IT system and \$12.6 million in capital upgrades in schools, including provision for security fencing, environmentally sustainable designs, teaching area improvements and a variety of other school infrastructure improvements.

Unfortunately, again the ACT Liberals voted against all of those initiatives. The ACT government has invested record funding in upgrading all of our public schools as well as building new schools where they are needed most. We have made investments to lower class sizes for every year of schooling to ensure no student is left behind in literacy and numeracy.

We funded the Department of Education and Training to develop the school improvement directions plan 2010-13. This plan details the implementation of a comprehensive approach to school improvement based on the principle that the core work of all school leaders is to improve student learning outcomes. I have launched discussion papers to seek community views on further improving high schools and colleges to better meet the needs of students in the 21st century.

We are rolling out the new virtual learning environment. This is providing students with more resources and also providing parents with the opportunity to help their kids at school through the new parent portal. I am determined to give principals more say over who teaches at their school and to give them the ability to attract and keep the best teachers in their classrooms, with faster promotions and a salary structure that better reflects the professional standards, including the new professional standards that will be part of the education landscape from 2011 on. The key here is ensuring that we continue to attract and retain the very best teachers.

It is true that those opposite have no vision for the future of Canberra and it is nowhere more evident than in education. Once again they resort to their only doctrine, opposition for opposition's sake. The shadow minister has demonstrated very limited understanding of how the education system works or how the professional men and women who are striving in it provide even better education for Canberra kids. He has no idea why he voted against the last two ACT education budgets and it is very clear to see from his speech this morning that he still does not understand why he did that.

He has made no effort to acquaint himself with the facts. He has made no effort to acquaint himself—

Mr Hanson: Look around you, Andrew. Where are your friends?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: with the facts before attacking the Department of Education and Training.

Mrs Dunne: You are on your own.

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne!

MR BARR: The government is acting responsibly for all in the territory and we are not using this exercise in efficiency and in the efficient delivery of government services to score cheap political points. That does stand in marked contrast to the position of those opposite. Once again, they are walking both sides of the street. They have no stomach for economic reform, no stomach for micro-economic reform, no stomach at all, Mr Speaker, for making any difficult decisions. So their credibility on any economic matter, on any budget matter, is zero.

The people of Canberra know that and that was reflected through a series of editorials in the *Canberra Times* over the last few days. They have made it very clear, Mr Speaker—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: The people of Canberra have made it very clear time and time again that—

MR SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR BARR: The people of Canberra have made it very clear, Mr Speaker, time and time again that they will respect and return a government that is prepared to make difficult decisions. The difficult decisions are required from time to time, Mr Speaker—

Mr Doszpot: Not bad decisions.

Mrs Dunne: Not bad decisions.

Mr Doszpot: There is a difference between difficult and bad.

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mr Doszpot and Mrs Dunne, you are both warned for continuing to interject when I have asked you not to. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Again, I repeat that difficult decisions are required to return the territory budget to surplus. The government has outlined the plan. The Liberals criticised that plan at the time for not cutting hard enough and fast enough. Yet when it comes to the implementation of the government's more measured plan to return to surplus we have classic opposition for opposition's sake.

It is exactly the same tactic that they used in 2006. We saw the result of that in the 2008 election. Long may they—

Mr Smyth: Yes, you lost two seats.

MR BARR: And you lost a seat too. Your vote went backwards. So long may you continue with this approach to public policy because people see through it. They know that you are walking both sides of the street on this. You cannot simultaneously argue for harder and faster cuts to the territory budget and then when any proposals are put forward during a consultation process run little campaigns against it.

It is entirely predictable. It is what oppositions do. We are aware of that. Life goes on, Mr Speaker. The education department will continue to deliver high-quality services and they are committed to doing so into the future. (*Time expired.*)

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.32): Mr Speaker, we see here a reflection of the values of this government in this process, both in the way they have treated people within the ACT who require special support and in the way that they have got here and the way that Andrew Barr dismisses them.

We might just cast our minds back a couple of years to when the government refused to get its spending under control. It refused to look for savings. It refused to even make basic efficiencies in areas of clear wasteful government expenditure. What we said at that time was that if you do not find those basic savings, there will be much more pain down the track. This is the pain that is now being delivered on the community because of this government's mismanagement and because of its decision not to control spending over so many years.

Those are the values of this government. We can look at the raft of measures where they have wasted money; we can go through the long list. And they continue to do so, even in this year's budget. We can go through the list. There was the \$5 million on the busway and the \$5 million on FireLink, things that were not delivered. There was \$5 million on Rhodium again. There is \$26 million extra that they want to spend on the Arboretum over the next few years.

This is a government that says to us: "We are not going to save money on the arboretum. We are not going to save money on government advertising. We are not going to save money by making areas like TAMS more efficient when they blow their budget every year. What we will do is save money by going after disabled kids." They are the values that are being expressed by this government in its approach. It is saying: "Bad luck; you have to cop it. We are not going to look for the savings in other areas which have often been pointed out to us." It is saying that we are not going to get our spending under control in questionable areas of expenditure—the sorts of things that you might do in really good times but you certainly would not do when things are tight.

And because they have not bothered to do that, they are saying: "Well, lump it. Those kids who require special support—bad luck; things are tight." But they are not tight enough to not continue spending money on the public art on the roadside or save any money from the extra \$26 million that they are going to spend on the arboretum over the next four years. They are not that tight.

This government and this minister will impose these efficiency cuts on some of our most vulnerable citizens. This is a values test, a values test that they have

comprehensively failed. This is what happens when you waste money in all of those other areas, when you refuse to heed the warnings, when you say, “No, we are going to spend it because we like those things.”

Some people like those things. Some people like an arboretum. I get mixed views on the arboretum. Plenty of people say it is okay. Other people say that we do not need it. But in the end, these are the choices that this government have made. These are the choices. Imagine the \$77 million they wanted to toss away by buying a hospital they did not need to buy. These are the decisions they make—the poor decisions, one after the other. Now we have a situation where Andrew Barr is saying: “Look, that is bad luck. We are not going to make those savings in other areas, but we will make kids who need more support pay.” That is a values test, and they have failed it.

I would like to commend the work of Steve Doszpot in not just bringing this motion forward but taking the lead on this issue. This is not the first time that Steve Doszpot has taken on an issue and forced at least a partial backdown from this government, and particularly from this minister. We have seen another backflip. Well done to Steve Doszpot.

The forum that we hosted in the Assembly—that Steve Doszpot hosted in the Assembly—was an opportunity to hear directly from the community. It was an opportunity that was being denied them by this government. Why wasn’t the minister having a forum like this? Why wasn’t the minister bringing these people together and hearing from them? Did the minister not care? Did he not want to hear? He could have explained many of the arguments that he has tried to mount in this chamber. He could have looked them in the eye and said it. Maybe he did not have confidence that they carried enough weight. Maybe he did not have confidence that his argument was actually right. Maybe he could not look these people in the eye and say, “We are going to cut services for your kids.”

He could not do that, so he got the department to. I am not sure if the department looked them in the eye. We had this bodgie process that they put into place. In the end the minister is responsible for that. He can hide behind the department all he likes, but this minister and this government put in place the process where they did not want to listen. They did not want to listen.

You can sometimes tell from how your friends criticise you or treat you just how badly you are getting it wrong. You only have to look at the AEU’s submission on this. Ordinarily when we quote someone in this place, the response from the government is “Well, they’re Liberal Party stooges.” I have never heard anyone say that the people in the AEU ACT branch are Liberal Party stooges, and I defy anyone to say that they are. I will quote from their submission:

The timing of the release of the proposal and the very brief timeframe in which to respond is in keeping with the standard practise of the ACT Minister for Education and Training Andrew Barr. That is, a decision is made, (some) people are notified and there is an unreasonably brief response period set aside for so-called consultation. It presents a cynical regard for consultation with all stakeholders and makes a mockery of the required consultative processes under the terms of the DET Teaching Staff Enterprise Agreement ...

That is what his friends are saying about this process. It is not just the Liberal Party saying that this process is bad. It is not just the parents of the affected students saying that this process is a sham. It is also groups like the Australian Education Union saying that it is a sham.

We did hear from a number of parents and advocates at the forum this week, and I would like to acknowledge a number of them who are in the chamber here with us today. Their views should be heard. They should not be asked to bear this disproportionate burden because this government will not make savings in other areas, because this government has blown its budget, because this government cannot control its programs or its spending. They are saying: “Well, lump it. Vulnerable kids should have to cop it.”

And there are a number of other areas—this is why this motion is important and why it should be supported—which are still potentially on the chopping block. We have seen a partial backflip, but we still see the following positions that are uncertain: school counsellor; early intervention preschool support teacher; support teacher for English as a second language; teacher for behaviour management; post-school options classroom teacher; disability support officer; teacher and SLC positions allocated to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy program; and English as a second language. There are a number of these which are still on the chopping block.

This government has not been listening. I would like to quickly read out a letter from Isla Smith, a concerned parent, which was sent to Mr Barr. I hope it has now been responded to; I am not sure if it has. The letter is addressed to Mr Barr and it says:

I know you are a busy man and you must see hundreds of letters, much like the one I write to you—different appeals for different reasons. But I wanted to somehow pen some words that you might remember—that even stand out in your mind because, ultimately it is you that will sign off on whether our Vision Teachers are reduced from four to three.

Please do not do it Mr Barr. Please!

When you and I were at school we could see to read the text on the blackboards, or the words in books. We could write in our schoolbooks, see our teachers face, exchange funny looks with the girl or boy sitting next to us, and play equally in the playground.

However, there are a group of about 55 students at ACT schools who find it very difficult to do these simple things. My son is one of them. Moreover, there are four highly specialised Vision Teachers here in the ACT who make it possible for these beautiful children to do everything their sighted peers are doing. Everyday!

I know this because I am the mother of one of these students. My son, Rory is legally blind. I have seen first hand how the expertise of a dedicated and fully trained Vision Teacher makes it possible for my son not only to keep up with

what other students in his class are doing, but also to learn specialised skills like braille and touch typing which will assist him for the rest of his life.

A computer cannot teach my son how to read braille. A consultant, who doesn't know my son or has no idea about my son's level of vision and additional disabilities will ever be able to advise a classroom teacher the best way to help him to learn, or explain how he learns best. Each child is unique.

Please also ponder this recent true statistic. More than 70 per cent of people, who are blind or who have low vision want work, but cannot find employment.

Please, Mr Barr. I do not want my son to become a statistic and you have the power to make sure that does not happen.

Please retain all four of our ACT specialist Vision Teachers. Reducing the existing number of Vision Teachers will directly impact our children.

This is the values test that this government has failed. These are the people we will fight for. We will not allow them to bear the brunt of this government's poor decision making over the last few years.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.42): This is another sorry episode. We see Andrew Barr and his department presiding over another assault on the most disadvantaged people in our community. We have seen it before, and Mr Seselja touched on it. We need to remember what has gone before.

First of all, we had a proposal for the review of disability services only in government schools. Who was the person who led the charge to advocate for a change in this? There was eventually a change because of the work led by my colleague Mr Doszpot. Then there were the proposed cuts to the Shepherd Centre, an important organisation that provides assistance to hearing impaired children in our territory. The stay of execution on the Shepherd Centre funding was brought about because of a campaign led by my colleague Mr Doszpot.

Here we have yet another sorry example of heartlessness and lack of values. I applaud the comments made by my colleague Mr Seselja about the values test that has been failed here—the lack of care and lack of consideration for the most vulnerable people in the ACT education system. They are amongst the most vulnerable people. Who led the charge that resulted in the backflip? Our colleague Mr Doszpot.

Mr Barr must hate to get up in the morning and find that once again he has been bested by Mr Doszpot. He might like to consider his rhetoric in relation to this most effective member—this member who shows more heart, more courage and more commitment to the people that we are elected to represent than this minister has in his whole being. He has no heart, no sympathy and no courage to stand up for the people that he is paid to look after most, the vulnerable people in this community.

It was really interesting over the last few weeks to see what could be called a paradigm shift in the narrative in ACT politics. The standard left-right debate has always been that the Libs are on the right, and they are nasty economic rationalists

who do not care about people, and the parties on the left, the progressive parties, are the parties who care about the vulnerable in our community. If that left-right paradigm was ever thought to be correct, it has now been proved by Mr Barr, by his performance, to be absolutely and utterly incorrect. In the last term of this Assembly, who has consistently stood up for the disadvantaged and disabled people in the ACT community? It has been the Canberra Liberals, in the face of opposition from the government and, I am sorry to say, from the Greens, as can be seen by the amendment which has been circulated here today. It is a disgraceful proposal.

It is useful to contemplate some of the words that Mr Barr used in this debate recently. Yesterday in question time, under pressure, he said:

... it is the classic hypocritical stance of the Canberra Liberals for them to be arguing simultaneously for a return to surplus and then specifically opposing every sensible—

and I repeat the word “sensible”—

measure, through efficiency dividends and our budget plans, to return this budget to surplus.

I would rather be hypocritical than be as progressive and such an economic rationalist as Mr Barr over here—be prepared to cut funding to deaf and blind children in our education system.

Mr Barr went on to say that the government would not be deterred by the Canberra Liberals’ policy indifference. The Canberra Liberals’ policy is fair and square in support of the people in the ACT education system who are deaf and blind and in support of their parents and the teachers who do a fantastic job to support those children.

We will not be supporting cuts of the sort proposed by this economic rationalist minister. He is the sort of person who gives economic rationalists a bad name. Economic rationalists are people who look at the whole issue and say, “If we cut here or make changes here, what are the impacts; what are the flow-on effects?” They play the tape through to the end and they realise that if they cut here they will shift costs somewhere else. They do not say, “I will make my changes and I do not care about the impact that that will have on disability services elsewhere.” That is shown by the fact that this minister could not walk down the corridor and talk to his ministerial colleague who had responsibility for disability services.

But yesterday Mr Barr went further. He said:

We will not be deterred by the petty squabbings of those opposite ... their inability to embrace any form of microeconomic reform.

And he talked about it again today. If this is micro-economic reform, I do not think that we should be opposed to it.

Mr Barr: Efficient delivery of government services.

MRS DUNNE: So it is micro-economic reform to cut funding to deaf children and blind children in the ACT?

Mr Barr: To deliver services more efficiently.

Mr Seselja: A new definition. It is the Andrew micro-economic reform!

MRS DUNNE: A new definition of micro-economic reform? This is an example of micro-economic reform: cutting funding to deaf children and blind children in his department and shifting the cost somewhere else—shifting the cost to the parents and to Joy Burch's department, because he does not care. He went on to say:

This government remains committed to our budget target and to achieving the efficient delivery of public services across all ACT government departments.

If you have to be efficient by cutting funding to deaf children and blind children, you have got your priorities wrong.

It goes back to the point made by Mr Seselja. Mr Seselja made the point that they failed to cut years ago and that the people who are bearing the brunt of those cuts today are the most vulnerable in the community. And people are not off the hook. Mr Doszpot and Mr Seselja read out the list of functions inside the department of education—front-line functions that help vulnerable people but that are potentially going to be cut.

I, too, would like to share some of the thoughts of the parents involved in this situation with the Assembly. We have the permission of the writers to read these letters. This again is a letter to Mr Barr. It reads:

My daughter is a 13 year old year 7 student in the A.C.T public school system. She has a vision impairment. A description of her vision impairment is as follows, bilateral high myopia of -16 right and left eye, mild bilateral subluxation of her lenses, bilateral cataract significant on the right, extensive bilateral chorioretinal atrophy involving the macula of both eyes and right extropia with some horizontal nystagmus. Her visual acuity is less than 6/60.

Does this description give you any idea of the functional vision my daughter has?

It does not to me, because I am not an expert. The letter continues:

Does it give you any idea of the optimum way for curriculum to be presented in a mainstream classroom setting in order to achieve the best possible educational outcome for my daughter? Do you think your everyday classroom teacher would have any better idea? Would the teacher know what sort of modifications to text are necessary and what sort of formats can make it virtually impossible for any significant learning to occur? Would they know what sort of lighting, seating position in classrooms, expectations of output of work my daughter is capable of in a set period of time? Not to mention where do the difficulties presented by the visual impairment finish and learning difficulties that have nothing to do with poor vision begin? Unfortunately our experience shows that the answer is "No".

This letter writer, Mrs Anita Miller, goes on to discuss at length the implications of cutting the itinerant support vision teachers for people in the ACT. This letter shows how complex and difficult an issue this is. And we have the department, supported by the minister, just sweeping aside these complexities in the name of economic rationalism, in the name of making the budget cuts irrespective of where they are and without thought for the ongoing impact that such budget cuts will have.

I would rather put my money—and I think that the people of the ACT would rather put their money—into ensuring that blind children, vision-impaired children and hearing-impaired children get a better start in life than into planting more forests in the Canberra arboretum. That is where our priorities should be. Plant our arboretum when we have plenty of money left over, but until that is the case Andrew Barr and his colleagues, who are noticeable by their absence, should be standing up for the vulnerable in our community and not tearing them down.

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (10.52): I thank Mr Doszpot for tabling this motion in the Assembly today. The ACT Greens are concerned with the process that the Department of Education and Training followed in attempting to address a requirement to meet the one per cent efficiency dividend provided for in the 2010-11 ACT budget.

Stakeholders affected by the proposals in the internal working document raised these concerns with my office almost immediately, and details appeared in the *Canberra Times* on 25 September 2010. I then contacted the minister's office seeking a briefing. We were aware that the paper was an internal working document, but it was obviously out in the public domain and therefore causing other stakeholders and those who would be impacted by the proposed cuts great concern.

I received a briefing from the executive of the department on 12 October. At that meeting I was given a copy of the consultation paper for the first time. I thank the department and Mr Barr's staff for arranging this briefing and providing the paper. During the briefing I sought clarification from the department about the process being undertaken and I inquired about the consultation I expected to be undertaken with external stakeholders around possible cutbacks. I made it very clear that this consultation with any stakeholders affected must be part of the process. The fact that the paper had been made available to the public meant that this needed to be undertaken as soon as possible. I note—

Mr Doszpot: It wasn't made available to the public.

MS HUNTER: Well, the fact that it was out in the public domain meant that it needed to be undertaken. I think I have clarified that it was an internal document; it got out into the public domain, therefore, it was essential that all stakeholders and those impacted needed to be involved in the consultation.

I note that, as late as yesterday morning on ABC radio, when pressed on the issue, Mr Doszpot conceded he had not sought a briefing from the department on the issue. The concern I have with that is he then held a public forum on Monday with

stakeholders without having heard from the department exactly what was being proposed.

It seems to me that in doing that he was just making the situation worse for those who were going to be affected by the possible changes. To not have been briefed by those responsible for putting the paper together and those responsible for trying to meet the requirements of the efficiency dividend before going to the public is in line with the general approach taken by the Canberra Liberals of being opposition for opposition's sake, a point already made here this morning.

I consider the timing of the release of the paper during the school holidays was not appropriate, and I was pleased to see that an extension of this timetable was given to allow teachers in the first place to consider the implications of the cutbacks and consult with colleagues on their return from leave.

The one per cent efficiency dividend for government departments passed as part of the 2010-11 ACT budget is something the Department of Education and Training must manage now and into the next two financial years, with an additional 1.5 per cent efficiency dividend that will need to be found. The amount of funding is significant—\$4 million in this financial year. I was advised the consultation paper was developed after a comprehensive internal process within the key areas of the department aimed at resolving a way of operating within the reduced budget.

Late on Monday evening we heard through the media that the Department of Education and Training were revising their original consultation paper. Dr Watterston, the chief executive officer of the department, has indicated that this was part of the planning around the efficiency dividend consultation process. I do think that it is in part, and wisely so, in response to the concerns raised by stakeholders, by parents, when they had finally obtained copies of the paper.

While this was supposed to be an internal working document, I think it was very naive of the department to think that planned changes of the magnitude proposed would not have found their way to those most affected, and, in fact, should not have been kept from those most affected. It also seems that there was insufficient thought given in the department to the timing and content of the original paper, and we now wait with interest to see the consultation process following the release of the revised paper.

In regard to Mr Doszpot's motion today, the ACT Greens will not be supporting that particular motion. We consider things definitely could have been done better by the department. I have stated that quite clearly, and we are calling on them to improve the way they approach the efficiency dividend process. I mentioned earlier that achieving savings under this budget measure is difficult, and I am sure the department acted in good faith in coming up with measures they considered were worthy of putting out to teachers for consideration. It was the consultation phase with stakeholders in the school community that was not properly addressed in the process.

The ACT Greens will be putting forward an amendment to Mr Doszpot's motion. We are putting forward a shorter motion that seeks to acknowledge the importance of quality education for all students, the vital role of education in the community, the

need to properly address the efficiency dividend process in a timely manner and the need to consult with stakeholders and the school community during that process.

The amendment acknowledges the difficulty in finding efficiency dividend savings in the Department of Education and Training, and there is a distinction to be made in the types of services that are delivered by the education and health departments, for example, as opposed to those from Treasury and LAPS. Changes in health and education can have direct and significant consequences on many people. In the case of education, it is on students' lives.

It is appropriate that the Assembly exercise a level of control over the actions of the minister and the department to ensure that what they are doing is consistent with the ideas and values of the community. In doing that, however, we must ensure that we are fully aware of the situation and do so in a manner that allows ideas and proposals a fair hearing. We should be fostering not only creativity but also common sense within our government departments.

The department needs input from the broader school community, the families and the students that may be impacted to be able to properly appreciate where the greatest demand is and the role and impact that the current services actually have.

As with any consultation process, it is essential that all the necessary information is provided in a manner that facilitates understanding and allows for constructive feedback to ensure the best outcomes. We need to recognise that there are an increasing number of students with special needs coming into our education system. We need to ensure that the resources and the teachers are in place so that these children have the opportunity to achieve the best possible educational outcomes.

This year's education budget delivered increased disability services money of \$1.6 million over four years. I think it is really important to look at paragraph (3) of my amendment. It is very much about not supporting cuts to services and our teaching resources for students. It is very clear. That is what it states. The Greens do not support that as a way of going about finding the efficiency dividend cut.

I do note that the minister has said this morning—and I think it has been out in the media—that the department will be looking at other ways to achieve their efficiency dividend, such as consultancies, travel and accommodation, stationery and the car fleet. What I do find astounding—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS HUNTER: It is a little bit of a shame that I am trying to make a speech here, Madam Deputy Speaker.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

MS HUNTER: The minister has stated that the department will be looking at these other areas. What I find astounding is that the department did not start with these areas.

Mr Barr: It did, Meredith. It did.

MS HUNTER: Okay, I acknowledge that the minister has indicated that they were looked at. But I think that these are areas that very much need to be explored to find the cuts before we go to those sorts of supports and resources and teachers for those students who very much need our support to ensure that they can have the same sort of life opportunities that other children have.

There are a couple of other issues I want to raise. It was, in fact, the Greens that put into the ALP-Greens agreement that during the life of this Assembly, the Seventh Assembly, there be two inquiries around the achievement gap in education and around disability education in the ACT. The achievement gap inquiry has been undertaken. I have said that there is an increasing number of students with disabilities in our system. There also are students who are very much lagging behind their counterparts for a range of other reasons, usually related to coming from very poor households. That achievement gap inquiry has been tabled, and we look forward to seeing the important supports that are put in place to ensure, as I said, that those students can reach their potential.

The disability inquiry, I understand, will be reporting shortly. I very much hope that the government will seriously consider the recommendations that will be put forward, no doubt, by that committee. That was a process that very much engaged with parents, teachers and whole school communities around the needs, the gaps, the issues that need to be addressed. That is why I ask the government to seriously consider and look at in future budgets ensuring that ongoing, increasing and enhanced resources are provided for students with disability.

I would also like to pick up the point that there is an increasing number of students with disability coming into our system, and there is a very broad range of disabilities as well. Again, it is important that all of those students and their needs are taken into account and addressed by particular programs, specialist teachers, supports and so forth.

I would like to relate a story that I experienced going to visit one of our special needs schools here in the ACT. It picks up on a point that I think Mr Doszpot or Mrs Dunne made about the seeming lack of coordination between Therapy ACT and what is going on in the schools. When I visited the school, there was a young boy who was very excited. He had a communication device—this is a young boy who could not communicate—and that communication device he had got from a therapist through Therapy ACT, and he was very excited about showing it and bringing it out at school.

He showed me the device, but the issue, though, was that his teacher and the aides in the classroom had not been contacted and did not know how to use this device. So it was all very well for the young boy to have it, but there was no coordination about how those teachers and aides in the classroom who were assisting him were taught how to use it to ensure that it could be used to its fullest potential. I think there are real questions around the coordination between Therapy ACT, the department of education and the teachers in the classroom. We have good services there; it really is

about connecting those services to provide seamless service delivery for our young people, our children, who deserve our best support.

We have had a lot of yelling from the opposition today, but my amendment very clearly is not about supporting cuts to those most vulnerable in our education system. It is about understanding that the efficiency dividend is happening and that we need to ensure that it is not going to impact on those who need our assistance most. It also recognises, though, that the efficiency dividend needs to come into play. Those employees who will be affected need to know that in plenty of time before the end of the school year. They need to know where they may be redeployed. There needs to be those negotiations and those discussions. It cannot be dragged on further.

At the same time, I quite clearly state that the process needs to engage with the external stakeholders and the families and those areas that have also been mentioned around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, those children who have English as a second language and so forth. We need to ensure that it is not just kept as an internal discussion and that it engages with those who are impacted by it. We will be keeping a close eye on this to ensure that that does happen.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Hunter, you will need to move the amendment.

MS HUNTER: Yes. I am just getting to that. I think I have got six seconds left, thanks, Madam Deputy Speaker. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) education is key in fostering an inclusive community;
 - (b) efficiency dividend cuts in the Department of Education and Training will always be difficult and have the potential to adversely impact education outcomes;
 - (c) the original efficiency dividend consultation process was not sufficient to assure school communities that they would have the opportunity to raise their concerns; and
 - (d) any efficiency dividend reforms will need to be finalised well before the end of the school year;
- (2) reaffirms its commitment to the efficient delivery of high quality educational outcomes for all ACT students; and
- (3) calls on the Government to thoroughly consult with the broader school community and community organisations on the impact of any proposed changes to student services.”.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (11.08): Firstly, I congratulate Mr Doszpot on bringing this motion before the Assembly today and also on the resulting action, which has

been to prevent the cuts being made. Before I turn to the issue, I would like to comment on the contributions from Andrew Barr and Ms Hunter. Andrew Barr's was the sort of contribution you would expect from a minister who has essentially been caught with his pants down on this one. I found his interjection across the chamber that the education department is the only efficient area in the ACT government quite remarkable. I think that his colleagues—

Mr Barr: No, that wasn't what I said.

MR HANSON: I think that that is very close to what you said.

Mr Barr: I said the central office was the most efficient area within the department of education.

MR HANSON: Right. We will leave that one as it is then. Ms Hunter's speech was quite remarkable. The thing that stands out is her comment that Mr Doszpot has made the situation worse, that it is Mr Doszpot who is to blame for making the situation worse. The speech, in large part, was a longwinded, verbose, rambling excuse as to why she did nothing and why the ACT Greens failed to act on this issue. They had some dialogue and some discussions and so on. We hear a lot about dialogue and discussions from the Greens, and we might see the odd paper put out and lots of movement and colour and light, but what we do not see is the ability to hold this government to account and do something constructive for the people of Canberra, particularly those people who are affected by this issue—the most disadvantaged and the most in need students in our education system.

For Meredith Hunter to come into this place and attack Steve Doszpot for what he did and to excuse the government for their actions and the Greens for having done nothing is absolutely disgraceful. I use the word "disgraceful" deliberately because it was Amanda Bresnan who thought that our not giving a pair to the government for Jon Stanhope to go on a holiday was disgraceful. Of course, they believe that the government wanting to cut vital support to students with a disability is excusable and they say, "We'll just put in an amendment that basically excuses the government for what they are doing."

That is in great contrast, Madam Deputy Speaker, to Mr Doszpot. I would like to speak briefly about Mr Doszpot and what he does. He listens to the community. People go to Mr Doszpot because they know that he actually listens to them. He makes the time, he spends the time with them, because he is genuine and he cares about their issues. He genuinely cares about their issues and he gets things done. The AEU were at the consultations yesterday. They were there in force because they know that he will get things done. The parents and the disability support groups are here today. They were at the forums and they have been at other meetings with Mr Doszpot because they know that he will listen and that he will get the job done.

I remember the Shepherd Centre and Noah's Ark and when Mr Doszpot led on that issue. We went out there together. We saw what they were going to experience, particularly at the Shepherd Centre. If it were not for Mr Doszpot, Noah's Ark and the Shepherd Centre may well have not been able to continue with their vital work for this

community. That was one of the proudest moments I have had in the Assembly and I congratulate Mr Doszpot on that. What he does not do is chase the 24-hour media cycle. For those that inhabit that space and simply only understand politics from what is going on in the 24-hour media cycle, they do not realise Mr Doszpot's great advocacy for those in the education and disability sectors.

That is in stark contrast to Mr Barr, who does inhabit the 24-hour media cycle. He is the Assembly's greatest media tart, Madam Deputy Speaker. He absolutely chases every media opportunity he can, which makes it more obvious when he does not front up to the media. When there is some bad news to deliver or when he has been caught with his pants down on an issue, he sends out his departmental head. Everybody who watches the Assembly now realises that Mr Barr is there for the good times, for the happy snaps with the good media opportunities, and when there is a stuff-up he sends out his departmental heads.

Mr Barr does not listen. He does not take the time. He quite clearly does not care. This is the sort of Kevin Rudd approach that brought Kevin Rudd undone. It is about managing the media, the spin, the happy shots and trying to manipulate all the time, but it is a facade. What you have seen increasingly is that facade crumbling. It has been recognised by the Labor Party. Just look at the benches opposite. Look at his diminishing status within the Labor Party. It has been recognised by the union who are now coming to the opposition rather than to the government. It has been recognised by the parents and it has been recognised by the community.

What is also interesting in this debate is that the parents, the support groups, the union and others went to Mr Doszpot and not to Ms Burch. On the disability issues they did not say, "Let's go to the minister," because they know that she will do nothing. They went to Mr Doszpot. Although he has had great success here and the families and the parents and support groups have had great success, there are other vital services that hang in the balance.

I would like to touch on those because they affect one of my portfolios, and that is Indigenous affairs. It is really concerning that cuts would be considered in an area within our education system where we know the gap between the educational achievements of Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers is increasing. The national assessment program—literacy and numeracy figures show that more than 40 per cent of Indigenous students in the ACT are failing to meet the minimum standards by year 4. This is in comparison to less than 15 per cent of non-Indigenous students. In numeracy, more than 37 per cent are failing to meet the minimum standard compared with less than 10 per cent of their non-Indigenous peers. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is growing as they get older.

What is the government's plan? What are they going to do? What is Andrew Barr going to do to address this serious issue? He is going to cut the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy program. That is a program that is aimed at raising the achievement levels in literacy and numeracy by providing support officers to target kids from kindergarten to year 4. They are planning to cut the five classroom teachers and the position in headquarters to supervise that program. These positions provide vital support to the education system by placing the officers in schools for a

term where they work to build the classroom teacher's capacity and teaching methods that are best suited to Indigenous students' needs.

What has the Australian Education Union said about this? It has said that these cuts are concerning and that they fly in the face of federal initiatives to enhance the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Reducing the central positions will mean a loss in the systemic coordination of programs aimed at closing the gap and the ACT government's multicultural strategy. This is on the back of Terry Williams's statement—the chair of the IEB—at the estimates hearings when he said, "All I can say is that truly the allocation of funds directed to Indigenous people in the ACT is horrific." And here is Andrew Barr looking at making further cuts.

As Mr Seselja pointed out, this is about the failure of the government to make the hard decisions in the 2009-10 budget. They ducked the hard decisions then. Rather than the minister saying, "We're going to take responsibility; we're going to look at where these cuts should be made," they squibbed it. They put it off to another day. They handed it over to the department and said, "You look at where you can make the cuts." They called it an efficiency dividend because that sounded better than "cuts".

We now see the government reaping the rewards of what they sowed back in the budget in 2009-10. Rather than making the hard decisions about cutting the arboretum or government advertising or roadside art, affecting TAMS—those projects that Mr Seselja outlined—they squibbed it. The Greens are equally culpable and responsible for what we see today, which is this decision and the fruits of that decision to not take action.

The Liberals are often criticised for lacking vision and only being interested in cuts. They are characterised as mean and tricky. Let us be very clear about what we mean when we say we need to make cuts and we need to prioritise. If you fail to do that as a government or as a minister and you do not take responsibility then the consequence down the track is that the people who can least afford it in our society—the disadvantaged, the disabled, our Indigenous kids—are the ones that will pay the price. That solely and wholly comes back to a failure in leadership and the lack of ability to make the hard decisions by Mr Barr, the Treasurer, the Chief Minister and the complicit Greens who signed up to this strategy that is now reaping such terrible rewards for the students in our education system.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.18): I would like to say a couple of words about Ms Hunter's amendment because I think it is worth putting very clearly on the record what the amendment seeks to do. This amendment is writing a blank cheque to the government in its plans to make cuts in these areas. Mr Doszpot's motion says that there are certain areas that are so critical you should not be cutting in those areas. The Greens had the opportunity to support that. I would again urge them to withdraw this amendment because it is writing a blank cheque to the government.

Instead of quarantining those areas, those critical services, their amendment simply calls on the government to thoroughly consult with the broader school community on the impact of any proposed changes to student services. They cannot even use the

term which they are talking about, which is “cuts”. They cannot use the term. They say “on the impact of any proposed changes to student services”. They use weasel words in their amendment to effectively give the government a blank cheque in going about these cuts.

The Greens have been found wanting on this issue. They have been silent on this issue while Mr Doszpot has been doing the hard work. We saw that in the response from Ms Hunter today. Instead of joining with the community and, on behalf of the community, holding this government and this minister to account, she attacked Mr Doszpot for doing the work on their behalf. We have a situation where the government does not want to listen. It goes through a sham consultation process. The community are rightly concerned. Mr Doszpot, as the shadow minister, goes to those people and says, “How can I help?” He actually gets an outcome for them. It is not the total outcome we want, but he gets a significant outcome. What do the Greens do? They attack him.

If anything highlights how closely tied they are to this government, it came in Ms Hunter’s performance today. Why would you attack Mr Doszpot for standing up on behalf of these parents? Someone has to. Someone has to speak on their behalf. The government is not doing so. The government is treating them poorly. The Greens are not listening and Steve Doszpot stands up and takes up their case. This amendment should not be supported. It should be withdrawn.

Mrs Dunne: It is a disgrace.

MR SESELJA: It is a disgraceful amendment because it effectively endorses the government’s approach and allows them a blank cheque as they go about cutting these crucial areas. That is what this amendment does. We believe that vulnerable children should not be the ones who are bearing the brunt of the government’s mismanagement.

As we have pointed out time and time again, there are lots of areas of highly questionable spending, highly inefficient spending, which the government have not bothered to cut. What they are now proposing to do is to cut services to our most vulnerable. We say, “No, that should not happen.” We thought that we might have got some support in the Assembly for this position. I think that if you spoke to people in the community they would say that this is the last place you should be cutting. This is right down at the bottom of the list of where you should be making these savings and these cuts.

This government has made an art form of wasting our money on all sorts of projects. Start there; do not go down the path of saying, “Well, in order to get back to surplus this is the only way we can do it.” That is absolute rubbish and we all know it. As we have seen time and time again, every time the Auditor-General does a report into one of these departments she highlights the wasteful spending. Every time we see one of these projects fall over where millions of dollars have been spent and nothing has been delivered, it highlights the wasteful spending. Target those areas. Get those areas right and do not cut these critical services.

This amendment should not be supported. It should be withdrawn. Mr Doszpot’s motion as it stands should be supported because that is the only way the Assembly can

send the message to this government that these cuts are unacceptable, that these cuts are not the way to do it, that we as an Assembly do not believe that this is the way to go. The Liberal Party will stand up and do that. We will continue to do that regardless of how this vote goes, but I would urge members not to support this amendment.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.23): Speaking to the amendment, I noticed there was a sigh when I stood up from the Greens because the Greens are discomfited by this. This amendment is a disgrace. It is a cowardly departing from the field by the people who put themselves about in the communities as the people who stand up for the vulnerable. They say they stand up for the vulnerable. Acid was put on them today and they have departed the field. They are just as big a coward as Mr Barr is. Their behaviour is utterly and completely cowardly. They will not stand up for deaf children, blind children and people who need learning support in ACT schools.

Ms Hunter: Oh, Vicki!

MRS DUNNE: Ms Hunter is sitting there and doing her little interjections. My favourite one, the one that caused me to laugh, was: "What are you going to have us do? Do you want us to stay in deficit for a decade?"

It goes back to Mr Seselja's narrative. These Greens have tied themselves hip and thigh to this government. They do not hold this government to account. They support them. They prop them up. We are seeing it here today. They are prepared to prop them up to the extent that they will not go after them and say: "This is irresponsible spending in these areas. How about we cut back on roadside art? How about we cut back on the spending on the arboretum?" Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera!

But it is all right for the department of education to go and cut front-line services to people who have a whole range of learning disabilities. They contemplated cutting them to the blind and the deaf. There are a whole lot of people who still have the sword of Damocles hanging over them thanks to the Greens, in cahoots with Andrew Barr, who show that they do not care about vulnerable people, that their rhetoric is nothing more than that. Rhetoric is easy. Rhetoric is cheap.

But really what you should do is judge them by their acts. And the people of the ACT today can see exactly what the Greens are made of. The Greens are tied inexorably to this profligate Labor government, the profligate Labor government who for years and years, when there was money rolling in the door, was spending and spending and spending. We were saying: "You need to be careful. Put some money away for a rainy day." Here is the rainy day and perhaps we should be having some cuts. "No, we will put that off to another day. Tomorrow is another day." Tomorrow has come for the deaf children, the blind children and the children who need ESL support.

Andrew Barr is prepared to cut funding. And Meredith Hunter and the rest of the Greens are prepared to support them. That is the message and they are the actions on which the people of the ACT should judge this government and the people who keep them in government in coalition. That is how they should be judged.

Mr Seselja is right. There is not one word in this amendment that should be supported. If Ms Hunter wants to stand up here and seek leave to withdraw her amendment, we

will give her leave. It is very interesting to say, "Listen to what she said." She said, "I got a briefing and I had a little word and I was given some assurances."

What was Mr Doszpot's besetting failure in this whole matter? He did not go to the department first and get his riding orders from the department. His besetting failure was that he did not seek a briefing from the department to see the obvious. Mr Doszpot's actions have been implicitly and explicitly criticised by the leader of the Greens today.

Mr Doszpot, who listened, who saw the issues, who advocated on behalf of people, who got a result, a partial result, is the bogeyman in this issue. He is the bogeyman in this issue because he did not actually go to the department and get his riding instructions from the department first and foremost. He listened to the people. He listened to the people and he took his riding instructions from the people who pay his salary. The people who pay his wages came to him and said, "We have got a problem," and he acted on it. He did not bother to be cowed and put in his place like Ms Hunter was.

Ms Hunter's approach has been so ineffective that it has been an embarrassment. She has come in here today and highlighted the Greens' embarrassing performance on this issue—the party of the disadvantaged, the party of the downtrodden, the party that wants to bring us a softer polity, a more caring polity. I do not know that the people of the ACT are going to be very convinced about the softer kind of polity brought to the people of the ACT by the ACT Greens when blind children and deaf children and their concerns are cast aside on the basis of saying, "We had a briefing from the department and it is all right." This is a disgrace and does not deserve any support at all.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (11.29): I listened to Ms Hunter regarding her amendment. I am astounded at the amendment in the first place. The preamble, the discussion and the speech that she gave surrounding her rationale for this, I find incredible.

Ms Hunter, you asked whether we listened to your speech. I listened to your speech intently, Ms Hunter. You are not listening now.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, could you please refer your comments through me, not directly to Ms Hunter.

MR DOSZPOT: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker. Ms Hunter, I did listen to your speech. But, Ms Hunter, I note you are not listening to mine at the moment. There are a couple of points that I would really like to make that I think you should be aware of. The proposed cuts are telling in what this government wants to do to our most vulnerable. There are 40 proposed reductions in departmental branches with support and/or student responsibilities, as opposed to 11.5 proposed cuts in departmental branches with non-support responsibilities, Ms Hunter. So for all of your caring and sharing propaganda that you put out about how much you worry about the vulnerable in our community, is this not one of the most indicative factors? You are endorsing the government's attitude to our most vulnerable.

The other thing that Ms Hunter said was that I am to blame by making things worse. Ms Hunter also said that one of the wonderful things out of all this so far is that an extension has been granted by the department. Ms Hunter, the extension was our work. It was our agitation and our consultation with the community—through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to Ms Hunter. She is not listening because she does not want to hear the truth of what we are talking about.

The extension to this consultation period, this sham consultation period, was because the community was given a voice. That is the reason it happened. So you cannot have it both ways, Ms Hunter. If I am to blame, do I also get some credit for the extension? There is a total inconsistency in your rationale and all of your attitudes to this.

We also had a meeting with the department on 3 September, for the minister's edification, which he would be well aware of because we had to get permission from him. So we did, in fact, meet with the department on 3 September. If I recall correctly, the minister said the first consultation notification was sent out on 7 September. There was absolutely no mention to us regarding any of these proposed cuts or any of the issues that we are discussing today. You asked me why I did not meet with the department, Ms Hunter. I have met with the department. We have had these discussions but not discussions about the cuts.

I do not think there is much more to say on Ms Hunter's amendment. I think it really is beyond the pale. Ms Hunter gave us a story about how she was touched by the story of this young lad with a hearing implant and the way that he was handled by the people who were around him was not sufficient. I find that quite incredible because this is exactly what this discussion is all about.

Listen to one of the parents. Do not listen to me, Ms Hunter, but listen to one of the parents. Anita Miller wrote:

Would the A.C.T Labor Government staff a classroom in an A.C.T Public School with people that had been on a weekend workshop or had a 2 hour staff training on "How to Teach the mainstream student."? No! You wouldn't. It would be a totally unacceptable proposition. I would imagine if you had tried to do such a thing you would be thrown out of government in a flash! Yet you seem quite happy to do this to our children.

And you are endorsing this, Ms Hunter. Anita continued:

I can only think that there has been little, if at all any investigation let alone any possible understanding of just exactly what these specially trained teachers actually do for our children in your school system

Mr Barr, I do not think you have an idea of what we are talking about here. You should be consulting with the parents, understanding issues. Anita continued:

A child with a vision impairment already has a "Hard road to travel" so to speak. This road is made even harder by decisions like these. Many of our children are students in mainstream classes, they are expected to learn and achieve alongside

their fully sighted peers. They are not in Learning Support Units or Centres where the teacher to student ratio is much higher than in a mainstream class, if anything our children require more support than they are currently getting not less.

I have the same wish for both my children, that is that they do the best they can at school, make the most of every opportunity that comes their way, make their own opportunities and most of all that when their school days are over they will have the ability to make choices and decisions for their future. My biggest fear is that without the access to basic educational opportunities that most of us take for granted the choices for my daughter could be extremely limited.

Every child has the right to an education and what I hope we can all agree on is that we all want the best possible educational outcome for all children within the A.C.T School System.

Ms Hunter, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the reason that we are not going to support your amendment. We do want to listen to the people. We do want something to happen. And your amendment waters our motion down to a level that is unacceptable.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (11.35): I would like to speak to Ms Hunter's amendment to Mr Doszpot's motion. I want to point out some of the issues which Ms Hunter raised in her speech which quite clearly the Canberra Liberals have not listened to because they were too busy interjecting and shouting over the top of her so that they probably missed most of what she mentioned in her speech.

Ms Hunter quite clearly in her speech did not say she supported the cuts and, in fact, was critical of the way the process had been conducted, which I believe is one of the issues Mr Doszpot has also raised as being one of the key issues which are wrong with this whole process. Ms Hunter has then put into the amendment:

(3) calls on the Government to thoroughly consult with the broader school community and community organisations on the impact of any proposed changes to student services.

That quite clearly states that there needs to be thorough consultation with the community before any of these cuts or cuts of any sort proceed.

I also wish to speak to some of the, I think, fairly outrageous comments that have been made by various speakers from the Liberals that somehow Ms Hunter has attacked Mr Doszpot, which I find—

Mrs Dunne: She did.

MS BRESNAN: She has not attacked Mr Doszpot. I do believe that, possibly before having a forum, it would have been useful to have information from the department which could have informed the parents and could have allayed some of the fears that these families and parents had about what was happening.

We have briefings all the time before we go and meet with various groups and individuals. I have been to a couple of briefings with the Liberals on a number of

occasions about various issues. For them to suggest that receiving a briefing from the department is somehow being complicit in some sort of process is just ridiculous. It is about receiving information from the department and asking questions. Then you can choose to do with that information what you will. It is something we all do as members of this place. To suggest somehow that it has made this complicit with some sort of decision-making process is just a ridiculous claim.

I would like to point out that the Greens, through the parliamentary agreement, have actually achieved two key aims in looking at disability support services and what is happening to students who are vulnerable in the education system. That was through the achievement gap inquiry, which has already reported. Students with disability came up as being one of the key groups in that, and that came out in the report. There are recommendations in that which government will be obviously responsible to act on and to respond to.

Most recently we have had a number of hearings of the inquiry into services for students with a disability. That has been a key inquiry and has been looking at a range of disabilities and the services that are required and has provided an opportunity for parents, families, groups, various organisations and the department to come in and look at what are the issues for students with a disability. The committee also went and visited a number of programs in connection with this inquiry.

To say the Greens are somehow not taking into account the issues for students with a disability, again, is a ridiculous claim, given the Greens have succeeded in having these two inquiries before the Assembly. We have provided an opportunity to consider the intricacy, obviously, and the complexity that come with these sorts of issues and have provided an opportunity for a lot of parents to come and tell their stories and to provide submissions. None of this would have happened if the Greens had not put this forward.

Again, I do want to commend Ms Hunter for putting forward these sensible and, I believe, accurate amendments which are calling for what has been one of the key issues in this whole process. The consultation was not conducted in a thorough and appropriate manner. That is what the amendment has and that is what should be supported.

Question put:

That **Ms Hunter's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 6

Mr Barr	Ms Hunter	Mr Coe	Mr Hanson
Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur	Mr Doszpot	Mr Seselja
Ms Burch	Ms Porter	Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth
Mr Corbell	Mr Rattenbury		
Ms Gallagher			
Mr Hargreaves			

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (11.43): I stand to close this debate. I thank all participants in the debate. I must note that one of the glaring absentees during this debate has finally favoured us with her presence. The minister for disability is here finally but she has not said one word regarding one of the most heated debates we have had here for quite a while on community issues that we are representing. I find it quite incredible that this situation should have led to this minister appearing now but not taking any part in the debate that we had regarding this motion, regarding the issues surrounding children with special needs and disabilities. Thank you very much, Minister Burch. And I am sure the disability community thanks you for your efforts as well.

I do not think there are too many things that are left to be said, apart from underlining the fact that what you, Ms Hunter, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are talking about with your amendment is just acquiescing to the government's activities even though you have lightly tapped them on the wrist. "They should have done more. They should have done this. All in all, we are willing to go along with what the government is doing and the cuts. They have to come. That is the situation."

We have tried to put a moratorium on the couch. We have tried to put in place, through our motion, the ability for further consultation to arrive at a fair and equitable outcome. That obviously is going to be a lot harder now because of the way the Greens have amended our motion. Obviously, they do not support our motion.

The proposed cuts, 40 proposed reductions in departmental branches with support and student responsibilities, go ahead now, as opposed to the 11.5 per cent proposed cuts in departmental branches with non-support responsibilities. If that seems to be a fair and equitable way of looking at addressing the cuts that need to be made within education then I think there are some serious issues that still need to be debated.

Almost everyone has contributed and I thank them for their contributions. I now commend the motion that we brought before this Assembly. The Greens have one further opportunity to reconsider. I am asking for the support of the Greens for our motion to be carried so that there could be some accountability of this government for the way that they are doing things. But our third party, the community's third party, insurance is proving once again that the small print within the election promises and the election accounting by the third party was third party insurance for the government.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Planning—draft variations Nos 301 and 303

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (11.47): I rise today to talk about a subject that is very dear to my—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, you need to move—

MS LE COUTEUR: Sorry. I rise today to move the amendment circulated in my name.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion.

Mr Barr: No, to move the motion.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am sorry. Thank you, Assembly, for correcting me. I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) good passive solar design is important for reducing energy use for heating and cooling, decreasing ongoing energy costs, and increasing the comfort of dwellings;
- (b) draft variations to the Territory Plan numbers 301 and 303 both contain measures for improving solar access and solar passive design for new residential developments and dwellings;
- (c) the majority of community submissions received by ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) support the new solar access measures in draft variations to the Territory Plan numbers 301 and 303;
- (d) draft variations to the Territory Plan numbers 301 and 303 cover a wide variety of other more contentious measures and initiatives; and
- (e) the majority of community submissions received by ACTPLA expressed concern about the size of the draft variations, the lack of explanatory materials or comparative information with current planning rules and short timeframe for consideration; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) divide the current draft variations to the Territory Plan numbers 301 and 303 into two parts being the solar access provisions and the other non solar related provisions;
- (b) refer the solar access provisions to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services immediately;
- (c) following consideration by the ACTPLA Reference Panel, undertake further community consultation on the remaining parts of draft variations to the Territory Plan numbers 301 and 303; and
- (d) provide improved explanatory materials, such as comparative tables with current planning rules as part of that community consultation.

I was a bit carried away with myself because as all the Assembly knows by now, I am sure, solar access and solar passive design is a subject very dear to my heart and my enthusiasm carried me away.

The aim of my motion today is to ensure that solar access rights and passive solar design can be implemented quickly in the ACT. We had a very useful discussion yesterday about greenhouse gas reduction. Whether it be a reduction by 30 per cent or a reduction by 40 per cent, it is clear that buildings will have to be part of this. Buildings are 75 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT. One thing that we can do to make buildings better is to face them to the north and to use passive solar design. I will talk a little more about that in a minute.

At the beginning, I would just like to say that in introducing this motion we are not trying to say that we are anti scrutiny of the changes. We are totally in favour of the community consultation but we think that what we need to concentrate on here is the objectives which we are all going through. I will now go through the details of my motion and how this will achieve that.

The first thing we say is that the Assembly notes that good passive solar design is important for reducing energy use for heating and cooling, decreasing ongoing energy costs and increasing the comfort of buildings. Because we seem to have so much discussion on this I thought I would just briefly go through what good passive solar design is.

Good passive solar design has three elements. Firstly, it is getting sun into the building. As everyone in Canberra I hope knows, the sun basically is on the northern side. In the summer it is higher and in the winter it is lower. What that wonderful fact means is if you have a lot of northern glass you will get lots of sun in in the winter and with a small eave you will not get much sun in the summer. So passive solar design means that you are warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, which is what we want in Canberra.

The second part of passive solar design is insulation so that the heat you have got in in the winter stays in with insulation or in the summer with the insulation the heat that is outside stays out. The third part is thermal mass so that the heat that has got in or the cool that is there can be kept in the thermal mass. It seems to me that the Assembly unfortunately has not quite got the absolute brilliance of passive solar design. If it had, we would not be talking about it at such length.

It is not new. My parents' house was built in Canberra in 1957. It was built with passive solar design. It was built by the Australian National University. It had architects who knew that that works in Canberra. In fact, I remember their response to my mother who complained that there were not enough fireplaces. She had just come from England. They said, "Mrs Le Couteur, in Canberra the sun shines and this is all you need." They were right back then in 1957. The sun is still shining in Canberra. It is shining in exactly the same location and we could build houses that work.

We have to have these variations to the territory plan because, although we all know about passive solar design, unfortunately we only have to look at the houses that are

being built in Canberra. A lot of them are still not being built like this. They are not facing north. They face the street. Passive solar design is unfortunately not prioritised by the building industry sufficiently at present. That is why it is appropriate that the government has introduced the territory plan variations it has. I will now speak a little about the draft territory plan variation 301 and 303 which both contain measures for improving solar access and passive solar design.

Draft variation 301 covers residential block layout. It mandates that 95 per cent of blocks must be such that they, in effect, make passive solar design very easy—all but compulsory. They make it so that the builders do not even have to think about it. The easiest place to put the house will be such that it will have a good northern face and will get passive solar design by default, not because they had to particularly think about it.

Good block design makes passive solar design cheap and easy. Good block design and good block layout make achieving six stars for energy efficiency rating, which is now the requirement in the ACT, or in the future seven or eight stars, easy and cost effective. If we persist in having blocks which do not face north, yes, the people who are concerned about energy efficiency are correct to say that there are potentially cost imposts with highly efficient—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Clerk, could you stop the clock for a moment? Ms Le Couteur, could you just sit down for a moment, please? Ms Le Couteur's voice is quite soft. I am having a great deal of difficulty hearing what she is saying because of the conversations that are happening in the chamber. If you need to have conversations, would you please go outside and have them or could you just lower them a bit, please? I just cannot hear what Ms Le Couteur is saying. Thank you. Start the clock again. Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will also try and speak louder. I was talking about the fact that if we have our block design right then having highly energy efficient houses is cheap and easy to do. But as the building industry has not been doing this, ACTPLA is totally correct to put forward the draft variations that it has as far as the solar access parts are concerned.

Draft variation 303 provides for the concept of a solar fence. What it says is that no block should be overshadowed more than the shadow which would be cast by a fence 1.8 metres high on the boundary of the block. That is actually really important because the lack of guarantee of sun on your block severely discourages people in terms of doing the right thing by solar.

Why would you spend the money on putting PVs on your roof or a solar hot-water system on your roof if you are not assured that you will actually have sun on your roof so that they will work? Why would you bother doing a solar passive design for your house if you think that in a month or two your next-door neighbour's house will be built and you will lose all your sun? That is what can happen at present and it is addressed in draft variation 303. We think that is very important. The Greens are committed to solar access as a right for house owners and building owners in the ACT.

But looking at draft variations 301 and 303, what we are committed to with solar access and solar orientation is the outcomes, not the methods. It is important to look at the long-term and short-term affordability issues. In the long run, having good passive solar design makes a house cheaper to run. You do not have to spend money on heating it and cooling it, and it also makes it a lot more comfortable to live in.

A number of submissions to both of these draft territory plan variations have talked about integrated design as being one of the ways of achieving good solar access. We think that that is quite probably a good solution which will enable good passive solar design, good solar access and good affordability because it potentially allows more compact blocks at the same time as allowing the solar access. What the Greens are going for is the outcomes here, not the methodology.

My next point is that the majority of community submissions received by ACTPLA support the new solar access measures in draft variations 301 and 303. Speaking as someone who has read a lot of them, although not absolutely all of them, that is true. There were 30 subs on 301 and 97 on 303. I have to say that solar access, passive solar design, is the motherhood issue as far as planning is concerned. I think there is probably nothing else that everybody agrees to. Even the people who had concerns about the methodology were united in saying that solar access, passive solar design, is something that we must do.

My next point is that draft variations 301 and 303 to the territory plan cover a wide variety of other more contentious methods and initiatives. I would actually describe 303 as a grab bag of measures. It has got some interesting stuff about secondary dwellings. It has got some interesting stuff about minimum size of dwellings. It has got some really interesting and very controversial stuff about the residential character of RZ1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

These are all interesting topics which I think there needs to be a lot of community debate and consultation on. What they are doing is detracting from the one thing that the community is totally on the same page on—passive solar design and solar access. This is really necessary. Draft variation 301, although less divided, has a whole heap of road building exercises as well as the solar access.

My next point is that the majority of the community submissions received by ACTPLA express concern about the size of the draft variations, the lack of explanatory materials or comparative information with the current planning rules and the short time frame for consultation. The level of consultation on 303 has been very disappointing.

I wrote to the planning minister on 4 August to request that ACTPLA actually do some public information sessions so that people could ask questions and understand the variation. I am very surprised that ACTPLA did not have any public information sessions. The only public information session was hosted by the Woden Valley Community Council. It was only an hour. It was not long enough.

I am afraid that while draft variation 303 was a worthy planning document, it was for most of the community, including myself, very hard to read. It was almost

incomprehensible. I think it needs to be rewritten in a way that is comprehensible to the majority of the public. It needs to be written in such a way that it has a comparison of the old and the new so that people can understand what is actually being changed.

It needs to be written with objectives, because you have all these rules and criteria. You do not even know what they are trying to achieve. I think this could be described as a failure of ACTPLA consultation. ACTPLA usually does better than this and I am really surprised and disappointed that these two very important variations have been so poorly dealt with.

What I am calling on the government to do is to divide the draft variations into two parts. One would be the solar access part and two, or maybe more than two, the rest of it. This, I understand, is quite possible. Neil Savery, who is the chief planning executive, was quoted in the *Canberra Times* on 14 October as saying that this was technically possible and I was very pleased to hear that.

The article in which he was quoted was a discussion about the reference groups. I should mention that because these variations are so complicated, the government has had to set up a reference group to try and work out what to do with it. The article was about this. One thing it did say was that everyone thought passive solar orientation and solar access was important, but clearly there was division about the best way of achieving it.

The Greens acknowledge that there is not unanimity as to how it will be achieved. But there is unanimity that it is very important. I am saying that once ACTPLA has divided the variation in half, it would then be referred to the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services immediately. I am suggesting that the variation would still follow the normal procedures.

There has been public consultation by ACTPLA; it would then go to the planning committee as it normally does for the planning committee's consideration. This, I believe, is the way to do it. This would mean that we could have a result in 2011 because the referral could be done this year. My next point is that following consideration by ACTPLA's reference point there could be further community consultation on the remaining parts of the draft variations 301 and 303. Given that they are so complicated, I think this is an appropriate way to go. The consultation on those two variations has been poor whatever way you look at it.

I have been informed that the Labor and Liberal parties are planning to adjourn debate on this. I would like to say how disappointed I am if this is going to be the case. Yesterday, we spent a lot of time debating greenhouse gas reductions. Whether we believe that we should be reducing by 40 per cent or 30 per cent, I think this Assembly is united that we should be reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The building sector, as I said, is a substantial contributor to our emissions. Passive solar design is a win-win. It saves money and it reduces greenhouse gas emissions. If we are not prepared to do the things which are win/win for greenhouse gas emissions, what are we as an Assembly? What is the government going to actually do to address greenhouse gas emissions if this is not something which we are all prepared to embrace and fast track?

It is something which we should have been doing 40 or 50 years ago. But now is the time to act on it. Mr Barr said yesterday that climate change changes everything and that the implications of climate change for planning in Canberra are enormous. He said that the debate now should be on how to create solutions. The Greens agree with this and this is what we are trying to do today—create solutions.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (12.02): As Ms Le Couteur indicated at the tail end of her speech, I will, after a brief contribution, seek to adjourn debate on this matter, but I think it is important to explain—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, you cannot speak and adjourn, I am advised.

MR BARR: Okay, well, I will get someone else to adjourn the debate. It is important to explain that the government will seek to adjourn the debate this morning because there is already a process in place. The government has committed to a reference group to work through these issues. It may well be that, at the conclusion of that process, the recommendations from that group may be to split elements of the current draft variations. For the Assembly to vote to do that today would be to pre-empt the process that is already underway.

I acknowledge the point that Ms Le Couteur has made in her contribution that there is agreement broadly across all of the stakeholders that there needs to be a response in the territory plan around solar orientation, but it is very clear that we have not yet reached a consensus on the best way to put that forward through a territory plan variation and that there is some way to go.

The government's proposal, through DV 301, has its supporters. But there are also others who believe you could achieve similar outcomes or the same outcomes with a slightly different approach. I think we have to be open to that and allow the process that we have put in place to continue. I do not think a pre-emptive response from the Assembly today would in any way aid that. It would undermine the point of actually having this reference group and would say to them that their work is not valued. I do not think that is the right way to go about this particular issue.

The government, of course, having brought forward these variations, remains committed to the policy objectives, but it also remains committed to achieving them in an efficient manner and in a manner that will get the best outcomes and encompass the holistic range of issues that need to be addressed. Variations 301 and 303 were brought forward together as part of an integrated response not only for solar access but for a number of other issues. So it is important that we see that process through.

It may or may not involve withdrawing those variations and providing a new series of variations. Time will tell on that. But I do not think Ms Le Couteur's approach today would in any way speed up the process. Although I acknowledge her passion to achieve an outcome on solar orientation and the solar fence principle, I do not believe that the approach she has outlined today will necessarily achieve the outcome she

wants. It may, in fact, lead to the process being slowed down, and that would be disappointing.

In the context of the debate today, we do not need to finalise this matter. We should allow the reference group to continue its work, so my preference is to adjourn the debate today rather than to defeat Ms Le Couteur's motion, which is, I suppose, another option available to other parties in this chamber.

I acknowledge her disappointment that she is not going to get an outcome today, but I think it is important that we enable the existing processes to continue. It is the government's intention to seek to adjourn debate today and to resume the debate once the reference group has finished its work. That, I imagine, will be possible within this calendar year. We should give it that opportunity. This process has already started and the reference group has already met. We should enable it to complete its work, and then the government and the Assembly can make some decisions around the best way to proceed with the variations and the myriad issues that we need to address.

As I said in my speech yesterday on climate change, there is a whole range of issues that need to be tackled together. You cannot pick and choose; it cannot be a cafeteria approach where you will have that item off the menu, but because someone might object to another element and you are not sure in your own mind where you stand on the issue, you will just put that aside.

We need a total response here, and that means tackling some difficult issues. It is best to work through it in a holistic way, and that is the government's intent. When I sit down I will ask one of my colleagues to adjourn the debate.

Motion (by **Ms Gallagher**) put:

That the debate be adjourned.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 12

Noes 4

Mr Barr	Ms Gallagher	Ms Bresnan	Ms Le Couteur
Ms Burch	Mr Hanson	Ms Hunter	Mr Rattenbury
Mr Coe	Mr Hargreaves		
Mr Corbell	Ms Porter		
Mr Doszpot	Mr Seselja		
Mrs Dunne	Mr Smyth		

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Debate adjourned to the next sitting.

Tourism—events and festivals

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (12.11): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the findings by Peter Loxton and Associates, in the Report on the Review of ACT Government Events and Festivals that:
 - (a) current funding and scheduling arrangements lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination;
 - (b) event scheduling is not guided by a plan and gives an impression of disorganisation and clutter;
 - (c) there has been limited communication or sharing of knowledge and expertise between government agencies about planning and management of events and festivals; and
 - (d) this overall situation undermines the effectiveness and value of government investment; and
- (2) calls on the:
 - (a) ACT Government to set out what action the ACT Government is taking to respond to these adverse findings by Peter Loxton and Associates; and
 - (b) Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation to provide by the first sitting day in 2011:
 - (i) an annual plan for new events and festivals in the ACT;
 - (ii) a plan for new attractions for the ACT; and
 - (iii) a plan for the accommodation industry in the ACT.

This is a very important motion about a very important industry for this city. It is a motion about tourism in the broad using the Loxton report as a springboard, because the Loxton report highlights many of the failings of this government in their approach to tourism in general and, in the case of the report, events and festivals in particular.

This is a marker motion for the government. With nine years of Stanhope-Quinlan, Stanhope-Gallagher governments now behind us, it is interesting that we do not have strategies for festivals and events, accommodation or new attractions in the ACT. In that way it is disappointing to have to move this motion today, but, given the behaviour of the minister and his lack of interest in this portfolio, it is important to do so.

What we have in our city in which we all live is strong support for the range of tourism events and festivals that are held each year. Unfortunately, as the period under this government has stretched, it has become increasingly evident that this Labor government has failed our tourism industry. In this failure, the government has also failed the ACT community.

I note the sad demise of the internationally renowned balloon fiesta with up to 100 balloons and a 10-day event on the international tourist destination itinerary. It is now a pale shadow of what it was. We note the disruptive changes to the structure of

the Multicultural Festival, which used to go on for a week or so. Now it is just a long weekend. I note the fiasco over the proposed new autumn event, which was meant to start in 2009. The first experience of the new autumn event was in the summer of 2009-10 with the *Masterpieces* exhibition, more by luck than good management. We still await the detail on the new autumn event. We know the bureaucracy and the government and, in particular, the minister are struggling with this concept.

Just recently we noted the stupidity over the appalling approach to the commercial dealings with the operator of the concert organ for Floriade in 2010. We start by ignoring a person who has been attending Floriade for years, then, out of the blue, Floriade—the government—seek to charge him \$20,000 for the privilege of coming and entertaining the visitors to Floriade. It really does leave a bad taste in one's mouth.

This government clearly has little capacity to devise an effective approach to tourism matters, and this is sadly confirmed by the *Report on the review of ACT government events and festivals* prepared by Peter Loxton and Associates. I have listed a few of the comments in paragraph (1) of my motion. If members have not read it, they really should just read the executive summary. The second paragraph states:

There are a large number of events and festivals in the ACT receiving some form of funding or support from Government. Current funding and scheduling arrangements lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination. This has led to inconsistent, uneven funding and support from a variety of agencies based largely on ad hoc or historic arrangements. Event scheduling is not guided by a plan and gives an impression of disorganisation and clutter. There has been limited communication or sharing of knowledge and expertise between Government agencies about planning and management of events and festivals. This overall situation undermines the effectiveness and value of Government investment.

It goes on in the “Vision” section to say:

There are opportunities to build a vision for events and festivals around Canberra's clean environment, natural beauty and four seasons, and as a major centre for government, ideas, education, innovation, sport, and also importantly as ‘the Cultural Capital’.

It is an interesting review. Under “Leadership and coordination” on page 5 it says:

The time is right for consolidation, including bringing the events section of TAMS, and of most other agencies, together into ACT Events.

Members only need to read through the overview of the current situation on page 8, which says in paragraph 2:

There is an undoubted impression of disorganisation and clutter in the current scheduling of events and festivals.

Paragraph 3 says events have been delivered in an uncoordinated way through a variety of agencies across government. Paragraph 4 says funding seems to be spread unevenly. Paragraph 5 says there is very limited communication and very limited sharing. Paragraph 6 says event skills are spread quite thinly. Paragraph 8 says the

effectiveness of ACT events, funds and festivals could be improved. Paragraph 9 says there is the need for a clearer identity. Paragraph 10 says the strongest support for clearer future directions and policies comes from outside the government. So it goes on. It talks about people attempting to plan an event in the ACT flying blind and that events are being planned without any clear schedule or calendar for major events or any interactive online focal point.

That outlines the situation. This motion is about moving forward. I ask the ministers to consider this motion, and I say “ministers” because it is hard to point this motion at any particular minister, and that is part of the problem. We had the interesting situation on ABC radio where the station rang Mr Barr, but Mr Barr did not want to do it. Ms Gallagher said it was not her portfolio but she could do it as Acting Chief Minister. Ms Burch could have been asked. If the Chief Minister was here instead of being on holiday, he could have done it. That highlights the lack of coordination. For an industry as important as tourism to the future of this city—now that we know it is just a regional subsidy approach that the current government have been taking, thanks to Mr Barr’s comments yesterday—it is important that we get this right.

This government clearly has little capacity to devise an effective approach to tourism matters, and it is confirmed by the reports. No doubt, the minister and his colleagues will put the most positive spin on this report that they can, as, indeed, the Acting Chief Minister tried to do. I anticipate that with interest. But let us get to the heart of it and let us address the issue at the heart of this. Let us not hide the reality that this report should be a major wake-up call to this government to get its act together.

If a government lacks vision, lacks policy, lacks strategy and lacks coordination, as the consultant concludes, this does not leave much else for the government to make a mess of. What is even more concerning is that these damning findings relate to one of our most significant industries, and that is the sad bit. This is an industry that we should be bolstering, not hindering. I am hard pressed to recall a more damning set of findings, except perhaps for some of the conclusions that have been reached by the ACT Auditor-General.

The report does warrant close consideration, coming as it does after the release of the survey conducted by Tourism Research Australia in collaboration with Australian Capital Tourism in May this year. It found that a number of visitors to the ACT were not satisfied with their experience. The survey also found there was a dearth of appropriate accommodation options for visitors to the ACT and that many visitors faced difficulties in accessing appropriate transport within Canberra. The ACT community is still waiting for this government to provide a real response and a reasoned response to this survey. I suspect we will wait and wait and wait.

While we wait for that response, the report from Peter Loxton and Associates is yet another detailed insight into the problems faced by the ACT tourism industry. This report is another sign that this government is simply not delivering in planning for the future of the industry as well as planning for the future of Canberra as a major tourism destination. The damning content in this report is really what is set out by the consultants in the executive summary, as I have read.

The consultant provides an analysis of how an effective approach to events and festivals should be taken. He starts by saying there needs to be a vision and this must be a clear and unifying vision for events and festivals and that this vision must be based on the vision that we have for our city and our territory.

The consultant goes on to say there must be priorities established for events and festivals. Priorities are essential, obviously, and these priorities will help in allocating funding for each event and festival. The consultant emphasises the importance of two priorities—economic benefit and community benefit—supported by the need for the events and festivals to reinforce brand Canberra and to provide high-quality experiences for the local community as well as the visitors. A strategy is needed to provide a framework for events and festivals.

The suggestion is based on two key seasons—autumn and spring. The consultant says this strategy will provide a sound basis for marketing the events or festivals and to market Canberra. In a coherent strategy, it will enhance the capacity for attracting sponsorship. The consultant notes that the current autumn season of events and festivals is underutilised but powerful in name. Now, I agree to some extent, autumn—

Mr Barr: I knew when you would get to this moment you would have to disagree, because you're Mr Summer, aren't you?

MR SMYTH: I agree to some extent. You should listen more closely, Mr Barr.

Mr Barr: Yes, I knew you would have—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Barr, thank you. Please stop interjecting.

Mr Barr: Sorry.

Mr Hanson: Warn him.

MR SMYTH: Now, the problem is actually outlined in the report. The report lists a string of events that already exist in autumn. Autumn is full, and the accommodation is full. If you would match this up—and this highlights the need for the accommodation strategy—it is very difficult for a large proportion of visitors to actually get accommodation in the ACT in autumn, and that is the problem for the minister.

Unfortunately, the actions of this government have devalued the autumn season. The consultant has seen the mess this government has created with the way in which it has approached the autumn season. Again, this is a sad outcome for a series of events that were some of the nation's showpieces.

The consultant considers the approach of public funding to events and festivals to be erratic and inconsistent. Again, what an indictment of the government. It is difficult to understand how a government, any government, can get things so wrong—dealing with large amounts of funding and still not being effective.

The last major area that is dealt with by the consultant concerns the way in which events and festivals are managed across the ACT government. It notes the number of departments and agencies that deliver events and festivals and concludes that the time is right for consolidation, and we agree. The time is right for consolidation, and that is why we propose in my motion that we have a plan for events and festivals, that we have a plan for new attractions, that we have a plan for accommodation. They are the three legs. There is no point in having a strategy for events and festivals if people cannot get a room. There is no point in having people stay overnight if there are not other things to do. We need to constantly refresh what there is to do in the ACT with a long-term view. A 20 or 30-year strategy is what is really required to make sure—

Mr Barr: A national long-term tourism strategy, do you think, maybe?

MR SMYTH: Well, the minister goes to the national long-term tourism strategy. He is quite happy to let other people do his work. But every other state and jurisdiction has their own strategies as well, and that is the shame for this minister.

Mr Barr: Right. So we should do something different from the rest of the country.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order, Mr Barr has been interjecting. You have informally warned him two or three times now, and he is continuing to do so. I noticed that in the previous debate you formally warned both Mrs Dunne and Mr Doszpot for their interjections. I just ask that as this debate continues, if Mr Barr were to continue with his interjections, you apply the same consistency.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for your advice, Mr Hanson. Mr Smyth, you have the floor.

MR SMYTH: Well, there you go. It is important that we get it right. You just cannot say, “Well, we’ll get festivals right and we’ll get to the other parts of it later.” They work in concert, they work together, and they maximise community return and economic return when they are done together. That is the point of this motion.

You were there at the estimates hearings earlier this year, Mr Speaker, when I asked the minister about various aspects of his government’s strategy for tourism in the ACT. I have to say that I was not very happy with any of his answers. I asked, “Mr Barr, do you have an accommodation strategy?” Mr Barr said, “No, we have a land release schedule.” And I asked, “Is there a strategy for accommodation?” and he said, “It is part of the long-term tourism strategy, part of the government’s land release strategy.” He said it four times. I asked, “Is there an events plan?” He said, “It’s still before the government.”

This is the curious thing: if this minister actually did his job and actioned the events strategy that he has before him, the government might have avoided the embarrassing Loxton review. We know the minister has got this events plan, and he has had it since estimates. That is at least five months. But I am told that, following some of the roundtables and discussions in January, February and March 2009, the minister had a draft events schedule on his table. He has had that for about 15 months but has failed

to act, and that is the problem. That is why we are asking for it today. That is why we are saying we want it by February next year.

At the estimates hearings I asked, “Is there an attractions strategy?” What does Mr Barr say? “We’re not in the business of business welfare.” You only have to look at the last term of the federal Liberal government to see that in 2001 we finally got a national museum. It had been on the agenda for 20 years. We were quite lucky then to get the National Portrait Gallery.

This is the typical defence of the minister—he says I’m calling on the ACT purse. No, I am not. I am saying let us have a strategy. Let us work out what the holes are. Let us work out what the opportunities are. Let us work out what the potential is. Let us work out what is missing and start lobbying for these things. If we can help contribute to it, then so be it. But unless we are talking about it, unless we have a strategy and unless we know what is missing and what might possibly work in the ACT, it is not going to happen, and that is the problem with this minister.

This motion calls for two actions: first, the ACT government to provide a response to the findings of the Loxton report; second, to reinforce the call that I made at the estimates hearings this year that the minister for tourism set out an annual plan for events and festivals, provide a plan by which the ACT can encourage new attractions to become established in the ACT and provide a plan for all types of accommodation in the ACT.

Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.26 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Insurance—common law damages claims

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Attorney-General. The exposure drafts of the Workers Compensation Amendment Bill 2010 and the Road Transport (Third-Party Insurance) Amendment Bill 2010 seek to introduce thresholds below which an injured party would not be eligible to make a common law damages claim. Attorney, on 23 June 2006, you gave a keynote address to the Australian Lawyers Alliance (ACT Branch), conference. In that speech, did you indicate that the ACT government would not be introducing thresholds or caps or similar changes to access to common law? If yes, did those statements reflect government policy on the matter? If no, what did you say in relation to that matter?

MR CORBELL: That speech was, it sounds like, four years ago. I would have to go and check the record.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Attorney, since your speech on 23 June 2006, has the government changed its policy not to limit the rights of injured people to damages at common law. If yes, when did that policy change and why? If no, to

what extent are the two exposure draft bills in line with government policy on the matter?

MR CORBELL: I refer Mr Seselja to the Deputy Chief Minister and Treasurer. She has responsibility for that legislation.

MS GALLAGHER: I think you can see from the exposure draft released by the government that the government has outlined legislation which introduces thresholds both in road transport CTP insurance and in the area of workers compensation. We have done this, after having a different position, based on the information to date available to the government about the performance of both of those schemes. Now we are consulting and discussing this with a range of stakeholders and other service providers, including the insurers, the representatives of workers and the plaintiff lawyers across the ACT, and it is with the intention that we introduce this legislation, hopefully, in the December sittings.

MRS DUNNE: A supplementary question to the attorney on the original question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, why is it the case that you would not allow any recording of the speech that you made on 23 June 2006, and will you, by close of business today, table a copy of that address?

MR CORBELL: It may come as a surprise to those opposite that I give many speeches, and I am being asked about a speech that I gave nearly five years ago. I cannot recall the speech. As I have indicated to members, I will have to check the record and I will advise members accordingly. But, unlike those opposite, I do give more than one speech a year, and I simply cannot recall the contents of that speech or the circumstances of it or, indeed, where it occurred. But I am happy to check the record and advise members accordingly.

MRS DUNNE: A supplementary question, Mr Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! Mrs Dunne has the floor for a supplementary question.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how often in your busy career do you ask that there be no record kept of speeches that you make?

MR CORBELL: I do not accept the basis of the question because I simply cannot recall the circumstances of it. Until I have had the opportunity to check the record I am not in a position to indicate to Mrs Dunne an answer to that question.

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre—re-offenders

MS HUNTER: My question is to the Minister for Children and Young People and is in regard to young people exiting Bimberi. Minister, can you please advise the

Assembly what percentage of young people exiting Bimberi reoffend and are sentenced to the AMC?

MS BURCH: I do not have that detail about me, Ms Hunter, but I thank you for your interest in our vulnerable children, and that includes those exiting from Bimberi. I can take that on notice and bring back an answer.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Hunter?

MS HUNTER: Minister, what services does your department provide for former juvenile justice detainees and their families once they exit Bimberi, and for how long are these services provided?

Mr Coe: Get a briefing.

MS BURCH: Actually, it is a very strong suggestion from those over there that a briefing is “taken”. In fact, a briefing is offered to any over there, but not one time do I remember Mrs Dunne asking for a brief on care and protection matters or indeed—

Mr Hanson: Has Ms Hunter sought a briefing?

MS BURCH: I will get to Ms Hunter’s question. There are a range of services and support programs offered to young people who exit Bimberi and to their families. That would include support back into education or employment, the connection to family activities, health matters, mental health matters and individual client care and needs. As young people come through Bimberi a care plan is developed that looks at their needs for while they are in Bimberi but also for those that exit. Particular groups of those moving out of Bimberi may have particular needs, and so those connections are made.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are over-represented in Bimberi. I think the facts and figures tell us that, so we work quite closely with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. We have an Aboriginal liaison officer in Bimberi to help strengthen those connections as well. That work is ongoing.

As for the question of how long that is, I do not think there is a prescribed time, but I am quite happy, again, to come back with some advice. I think that would be relevant to the circumstances of the family and the circumstances of the young person and what they do.

MS LE COUTEUR: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. Minister, what access do community organisations have with juvenile justice detainees in Bimberi in order to establish a relationship with them before they are released?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. There are a surprising number of community-based organisations that have access and go through Bimberi to

provide support to those young people—from Lions clubs to designated groups. Regional community services have input in there. The drug and alcohol based-programs have access to Bimberi, as does Mental Health. There is indeed a range. Again, it is linked not only to the activity that they do when they go in there, whether it is program-based or whether it is linked. Forgive me if I am wrong, Mr Speaker, it is Lions or Rotary. I forget now the chap I spoke to when I hosted an afternoon tea here a number of months ago with the purpose of connecting those community groups that provide linkages through Bimberi. It was really quite heartening that this group offer a \$50 reward voucher for those that have performed their personal best in the education system. By that you can see, Ms Le Couteur, that there is a range of programs with a number of well-meaning community-based organisations that are really striving to do their best for the young folk in Bimberi.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what relationship does your department have with the corrections department for the purposes of continuing case management for former juvenile justice detainees that are transferred to the AMC or are imprisoned in the AMC due to re-offending?

MS BURCH: For those that have been in Bimberi that are now in AMC—is that the connection?—it has been known for Bimberi to actually keep a young person who is over the age of 18 in Bimberi because it is deemed to be best suited for them to be maintained at Bimberi, to meet their conditions. It could be because of maturity, risk or closeness to their release time. So there is not an automatic transfer. With respect to ongoing dialogue between corrections and the department regarding adults that may be in AMC, I am not clear on those connections. I can take some advice and give some back. But I think the message that I would like to give here is that Bimberi does not exit people once they reach 18, should they be on the cusp of a period in remand or detention.

Rhodium Asset Solutions Ltd—losses

MR SMYTH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the annual report for Rhodium for 2009-10 shows that this company recorded an operating loss of \$5.344 million. Rhodium's budget for the 2009-10 year estimated a loss of \$1.776 million. This loss has occurred at a time when the activities of Rhodium are being wound down. Treasurer, why did Rhodium record a loss of more than \$5 million during the 2009-10 financial year?

MS GALLAGHER: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the continuing work that this government does to fix really the structures and problems put in place under the previous government through Totalcare. Essentially, it is an offshoot of Totalcare, which was set up—

Mr Smyth: That is not true.

MS GALLAGHER: Yes, it is. I know that we do not like to talk about Totalcare very much—for good reasons, Mr Smyth. However, the costs associated with Rhodium have essentially been around the wind-up of the company and the costs of winding up the company and really go back to the issues around how we could not sell the company, how we have disposed of the leases and the costs associated with that.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, what actions are you taking to ensure that Rhodium does not continue to be a drain on the ACT budget?

MS GALLAGHER: We are winding it down. That is what we are doing. It is effectively finished. There is a shelf company remaining to manage a number of leases that we have not been able to move, but they will finish within the next short little while—a couple of years. So—

Mr Smyth: It's a couple of years now?

MS GALLAGHER: Well, there are a number of leases that did not agree to move across to new arrangements. I will check the exact time around when those leases finish, but effectively Rhodium has wound down, and that will stop Rhodium being a drain on the public purse.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

MR SESELJA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, will you guarantee no further losses associated with Rhodium?

MS GALLAGHER: There are certainly none that I am aware of at this point in time and effectively the wind-down has finished.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Seselja, a supplementary?

MR SESELJA: Treasurer, after Rhodium recorded a loss that was three times what had been estimated, how is it possible for the directors of Rhodium to attest that the company will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable?

MS GALLAGHER: The government is effectively covering any further losses of Rhodium. I am not aware of any further costs associated with Rhodium at this point in time. We have the Rhodium AGM coming up in the next two weeks, I believe, but I have not been advised of any further costs.

Planning—Civic cycle loop

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Acting Minister for Land and Property Services and concerns the government's new greater city area action plan and the Civic cycle loop. Minister, last week the government took credit for the Civic cycle loop being the top government priority, but it does not appear in the new city action

plan. Is it actually a priority? If so, when will it be implemented, and why is it not included in the city plan?

MR CORBELL: As Acting Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, I think Ms Le Couteur has a misunderstanding about the status of that project. The project has been rated as the priority project for the government in the city centre area when it comes to cycling infrastructure. It has been ranked as the highest priority. As I announced as acting minister, I think about a week ago, we will now be engaging in detailed discussion with stakeholders, including cycling groups, traders and others, to ensure that we are able to work through the details of that infrastructure project and its potential cost.

Obviously, it is only when that project is subsequently funded through a budget process that it will be identified for implementation through the document that Ms Le Couteur refers to.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: This is not actually a supplementary. Minister, could you please answer the question? Why is it not in the city action plan?

MR SPEAKER: I am sorry, Ms Le Couteur—

MS LE COUTEUR: It is not really a supplementary because he did not answer the question.

MR CORBELL: I do not know whether Ms Le Couteur heard but I will repeat what I just said, which is that the government is engaging now in a consultation process with stakeholders—cyclist groups, traders and others—to determine the detailed physical design of that project. That will inform a budget bid. If that budget bid is successful then the capital works project will be included in that action plan document.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What specific funding arrangements are in place for the upgrades and projects in the greater city plan and when will this funding start?

Mr Coe interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, can you repeat the question? Mr Coe, please do not interject while Ms Bresnan is asking the question.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. There are—

MR SPEAKER: Did you hear the question? I could not.

MS GALLAGHER: Okay.

MS BRESNAN: Am I asking the question again?

Mr Hanson: I heard it.

MR SPEAKER: I don't care what you could hear, Mr Hanson. I can't hear Ms Bresnan over Mr Coe's interjecting.

MS BRESNAN: What specific funding arrangements are in place for the upgrades and projects in the greater city plan and when will this funding start?

MS GALLAGHER: My understanding is that the ACT budget has allocated, over the next two years, \$30 million across the range of initiatives that are outlined in the Canberra city area action plan 2010-16. So there is money allocated in the budget.

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance. I understand this is a supplementary. When did the rules change so that supplementaries can be sent to different ministers?

MS GALLAGHER: I apologise if I have broken the rules.

Mr Corbell: Mr Speaker, the substantive question was directed to Ms Gallagher. I took the question because it related to my acting portfolio responsibilities. The supplementary questions have been directed to both me and Ms Gallagher. But Ms Gallagher is the responsible minister when it comes to the greater city action plan document, and that is what the supplementary question was about.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order, Mr Smyth. I think, between the responsibilities of the various acting ministers, it is in the interests of the Assembly that the minister most capable of answering the question takes the question. Ms Hunter, a supplementary?

MS HUNTER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Why does the city plan specifically propose widening the footpath along Bunda Street, when it directly conflicts with the rollout of the city cycle loop?

MS GALLAGHER: I will have to take that question on notice. I am just not across all the detail about why decisions have been made as they have been in the Canberra city area action plan, but I am sure that we can provide that information to the Assembly.

Taxation—congestion

MR DOSZPOT: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Treasurer. A report for the federal government into energy efficiency has suggested that states and territories introduce congestion taxes. Will you rule out the introduction of a congestion tax in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: I am not certain what report Mr Doszpot is alluding to. However, I am not going to stand here whilst we are undergoing a tax review and rule anything in or out.

Mr Seselja interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: The tax review panel has been given a fairly wide scope by me to have a good, hard look at all of our own-source revenue and provide information to government about the right way forward. Whether there are reforms included in that, whether there are new ideas and whether there are changes to existing revenue—that is the work of the taxation review panel.

I just do not think it is sensible, despite how easy it is when you do not rule something out, to see a media release issued saying that this is on the cards, and I can see the opportunities presented to you. But I am not going to stand here and rule anything in or out. It would not be the right thing to do; it would not be the mature thing to do. Unlike those opposite—who want to look for a political headline rather than actually look at the serious issues confronting this city, including how we afford to provide the services to this city into the future as our community grows and as our demands increase—I do not think it is the right thing for the government to do.

We do not have any plans to introduce a congestion tax, if that assists with the answer, but I will not rule anything in or out and I will await with eagerness the ACT taxation review panel's report that will be provided to government in August 2011.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Doszpot?

MR DOSZPOT: Has Treasury modelled the introduction of a congestion tax? If so, how much revenue would be raised by a congestion tax?

MS GALLAGHER: Not to my knowledge at all, Mr Doszpot.

MR SMYTH: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, what options for a congestion tax are under active consideration by the government?

MS GALLAGHER: None.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, a supplementary question?

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, would a congestion tax be an ACT government incompetence tax because of the mistakes the Stanhope-Gallagher government has made with the transport plan?

MS GALLAGHER: There is obviously an inability to rephrase the question based on answers given by ministers. There is no plan for a congestion tax. We have, to my knowledge, not modelled one; we have not looked at this issue at all.

Mr Smyth: But you won't rule it out?

MS GALLAGHER: That is right. I will not rule any tax in or out as we are undergoing an ACT taxation review. I think it would interfere with the work of the review panel. They have been given the opportunity to have an honest, hard look at our own-source revenue and to provide advice to government about whether or not reforms need to be made. That might be looking at current taxes and changing them, maybe abolishing some of them. Who knows? I am not going to rule that out or in either. It is just not sensible. This is the work that we have commissioned. I am sure it will inform future Assembly debates on the issue of own-source revenue and how we provide services to the Canberra community.

Housing—public

MR HARGREAVES: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services. Could the minister update the Assembly on how the ACT government is delivering on its election commitments in housing and homelessness, please?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Hargreaves for his continued interest in housing in the ACT. This Labor government has a proud record of achievement in the delivery of social housing and homelessness services to our community. At the last election we undertook to run an efficient and targeted public housing system and to increase the range of support programs for people experiencing homelessness. I am pleased to report that we have made significant progress against our promises.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, this Labor government is actually committed to growing the number of social housing dwellings through an increase in the supply of public, community and affordable housing. The number of public housing dwellings when we were elected in 2001 was 11,454. I am delighted to say that, as a result of activity under the nation building and jobs initiative, over 400 extra dwellings will be constructed. The ACT government has also invested in building more dwellings.

This program will leave us with nearly 12,000 houses when we finish this project in the middle of next year. This includes 297 two and three-bedroom units on the eight community facility sites to house older public housing tenants who wish to relocate from their existing properties that are too large for them. This is to say nothing of the support that the ACT government has provided CHC Affordable Housing, which will see a growth in the number of affordable housing rental stock by 500 dwellings over a 10-year period.

On environmental efficiency, I can confirm that all new stock constructed will have a minimum six-star energy rating. This will not only benefit the environment through lower energy consumption but also financially assist low income earners through reduced power bills. The ACT government has invested \$20 million over 10 years to improve the energy efficiency of existing public housing stock, and over 2,000 public housing dwellings have received energy efficiency improvements.

In addition to growing and improving our stock, a shared equity scheme has been implemented. This scheme is being delivered in partnership with IMB and has attracted over 40 applications, with four contracts being exchanged and 12 applicants active on a purchase path.

As part of our election commitments we undertook to house tenants into public housing as soon as possible. Notwithstanding our efforts to increase stock numbers, the demand continues to exceed supply. Housing ACT's allocation system aims to house those most in need within the shortest possible time. In the last financial year, over 96 per cent of allocations were priority and high needs allocations, with 65 per cent of priority housing applicants being housed within 90 days. As promised before the election, Housing ACT has enhanced support programs for tenants to support sustainable tenancies.

Housing ACT's youth housing program provides tenancy management and supports and assists young people's access to public housing. This program will be complemented by a youth foyer in 2011 which will provide a housing program linked to engagement with education, training or employment.

Housing ACT has also developed the helping our senior tenants program to undertake needs assessment for our tenants aged 85 years and over living in public housing. Housing ACT has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through a program which includes community outreach and a property extension program to address overcrowding. We have also developed a domestic violence manual to ensure consistent and best practice service provision for women who have experienced domestic violence.

Mr Speaker, you can see that these are a few initiatives that have shown that we have delivered on our commitments at the last election. But there is still time for more action. This work program reflects the government's strong and ongoing commitment to social justice in our community.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hargreaves, a supplementary question?

MR HARGREAVES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Minister, could you please give us a bit more detail on the program that you are going to be delivering?

MS BURCH: I am pleased to have the opportunity to inform the Assembly in more depth about the efforts to reduce homelessness in the ACT. The ACT is working, as part of a national effort, to halve homelessness by 2020, a goal that I am sure will be supported by all members in the Assembly. We are working closely with the homelessness and housing support services to create a comprehensive service system. It is not just new services that are going to reduce homelessness; it takes a community effort.

At the last election we committed to enhancing support to homeless individuals and families in our community. The street to home program, which has arisen from the government's commitment to outreach support to people sleeping rough in the

community, is operated by one of our largest community services partners, the St Vincent de Paul. This service began operations in February of this year.

We are also looking towards sustaining people in their tenancies, to break the cycle of homelessness. This is why the building housing partnerships support tenancy service is being established. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the new service will commence on 1 November of this year—that is the expected date—and will be delivered by a partnership arrangement involving Woden Community Services, Belconnen Community Services and the YWCA of Canberra. This service provides support to state tenancies across our community, breaking the cycle of homelessness and supporting people to stay in their homes. This service will be tenure neutral, providing support not only to people in public and community housing but also those in the private rental market.

The ACT government has provided seed funding to the Kids Under Cover organisation. To date, the kids under cover program has delivered two bungalows, which were installed in July of this year, and a third bungalow will be constructed with a donation from the Snow Foundation. By providing semi-independent bungalows, young people living in overcrowded or stressful family environments providing—(*Time expired.*)

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe?

MR COE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what progress has the ACT government made with regard to 10 per cent of public housing across the territory?

MS BURCH: We continue to invest in public housing and grow our stocks, as I think I alluded to in my response. Since we came to government in 2001, we have actually still been trying to make up to the 1,000 properties that were stripped out of our social housing stock by those opposite.

Ten per cent is a big target. We currently sit on about eight per cent of the total dwellings here in Canberra. We are the largest landlord. To increase that by 10 per cent, as has been discussed a number of times, is a very large commitment. But it is a commitment and it is an aspirational goal that we are going towards. We continue to invest in public housing. We continue to strengthen our partnerships with our social housing and community partners, and I think that is a good thing.

Our waiting lists at the moment sit on about 1,500, even with the new properties coming on line. The moving of older people out into more appropriate accommodation will take a third off our waiting list. But it still means that there is a long way to go. We will continue to invest in public and social housing. That is what this government will do.

MS BRESNAN: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: Minister, can you update the Assembly on the time frame for the ACT Housing asset management plan, given that the most recent plan has expired?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Bresnan for her question and her interest in public and social housing here in the ACT. You are right: the asset management plan has expired. It is something that we are working through. The principles of it, though, are maintained; that is, that we will work through maintaining quality stock. That involves, as a landlord and as an owner of an asset, moving through and selling properties as needed.

Part of that principle of managing an asset is also around breaking down concentration on the disadvantaged, which is what we are working through in the discussion around the redevelopment of the Currong, Bega and Allawah flats. It is a work in progress and I am hoping to be able to bring it forward. It is active work, but I agree that it is work that we need to bring forward to set a direction.

Disability service providers—accreditation

MS BRESNAN: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services and relates to the accreditation of service providers. Minister, in the last set of annual report hearing relating to Disability ACT, we were informed that the development and implementation of accreditation of disability-related service providers should be achieved by mid-2011. Minister, is this still the case, and, if not, why not?

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Bresnan for the question. Accreditation of services is a question that I think is also linked to the national disability standards. These standards are coming through, and they address issues around quality provision of care. This is something that I have a strong interest in. My health background drives me to have a particular interest in how services are provided to our most vulnerable, and that includes disability services.

We are looking at a purchasing framework which will include pre-qualifications, and that will set the bar very high for services to be funded under Disability ACT. So we are working towards a standard that will ensure quality and that will provide security and comfort to families of people with disability, whether they are receiving services or living in group homes. That is something I am committed to.

If we reach that by the middle of next year, I will be very pleased, but I can certainly say that it is something that I take very seriously and work with the department to ensure that we have every system that is available to us to make sure that we provide quality services.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Bresnan, a supplementary?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, will disability-related services provided by the government also have to be accredited to the same standard and, if not, why not?

MS BURCH: It is my personal view that, for any service provided to people with disability, whether it is a government service or a non-government service, there is the same expectation of quality of service being delivered.

MS LE COUTEUR: Supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Minister, what is the current protocol for engaging with service providers if the government has a concern about the service provider, including those who may be over the border?

Mr Hargreaves: Point of order, Mr Speaker. The question was about the accreditation of disability service providers. I did not hear any reference to that in this particular supplementary. Perhaps Ms Le Couteur could rephrase it a bit.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Le Couteur, can we hear your question again?

MS LE COUTEUR: Certainly. My question was: minister, what is the current protocol for engaging with service providers if the government has a concern about a service provider, including those over the border?

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order, Mr Hargreaves. Accreditation and the quality of services provided seem a fairly solid match to me.

MS BURCH: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. We have strong standards around the services we contract to provide services to. There have been significant improvements in our processes and protocols around that over time. As one would expect in any service delivery arm, over time you improve. That is just a standard quality cycle that goes to that. If the department is aware of or has concerns about any service, it is something that will be actively investigated. I am not prepared to stand here as a minister and say that Disability ACT would deliver services through a service that it had no faith in.

As to the processes about how we investigate or ascertain and ensure the quality and the safety of those that are there, that will depend on the circumstances. But rest assured that if any issue came to mind, Disability ACT would be very active to ensure the quality and safety of the program and service delivered.

MR HARGREAVES: A supplementary.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Hargreaves.

MR HARGREAVES: Minister, are the accreditation standards for disability services national standards or are they standards for individual jurisdictions? Is there any conflict between the two jurisdictions, the ACT and New South Wales?

MS BURCH: I do thank Mr Hargreaves for his interest in this matter. We are bound by existing purchasing disability agreements but we are also in the process of a national conversation around national disability standards, of which matters around quality, access, accreditation and all that are part.

Mrs Dunne: Indeed.

MS BURCH: Indeed, Mrs Dunne. A number of months ago, as part of that conversation on the national disability standards, I met with a number of disability providers.

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, on relevance, the question was very specific. It asked about conflict between the regimes in the ACT and New South Wales. I would ask you to ask the minister to actually answer the dorothy dixer.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Speaker, on the point of order, you allowed a certain latitude the last time we talked about being very specific about the accreditation. I would seek your generosity yet again.

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order, Mr Seselja. Ms Burch is responding to the question asked.

MS BURCH: Suffice to say that we are part of a national conversation around national disability services. By default, national standards would mean there would be very little conflict between jurisdictions.

Taxation—housing

MR COE: My question is directed to the Treasurer. Treasurer, housing rents increased by 10 per cent last year in Canberra, the biggest increase in Australia by far. The average rent for a three-bedroom house in Canberra is \$455 per week, more than \$145 more than the national average. Why is the government introducing a massive tax increase on housing given the problems with affordability of rental properties?

MS GALLAGHER: I presume Mr Coe is talking around the change of use charge codification project.

Mr Seselja: Are there others?

MS GALLAGHER: I presume that is what he is talking about because, if you look in the budget, the budget this year forecasts about an \$8 million increase in change of use charge payments. So I am just trying to understand whether that is the massive new tax that Mr Coe talks about; it is actually a very modest increase in the revenue that we expect to receive in change of use charge.

Mr Hanson: How much?

MS GALLAGHER: It is about \$8 million this year. As I have said in this place before, that is not to do with codification. This is not a new charge. This charge has existed in one form or another, and supported by members in this place, since self-government. There has been agreement about the need, and I am interested—

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, as it may assist the Treasurer in answering the question. The question was very specific about a massive tax increase. It is not about whether it is a new tax. Could she address the substance of the question rather than try to rewrite the question from Mr Coe.

MR SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Ms Gallagher, you have the floor.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The increases in revenue forecast in the budget are not to do with the codification project that is underway. They are to do with rectification and with applying the law as it was intended to apply when it passed this chamber. There was agreement that charges should apply for the extra development rights granted to developers to invest back in the community, based on the fact that they would benefit from those extra development rights. This government supports that policy. The Liberals do not. The Liberal Party believes that we should allow developers to make huge windfall gains and not actually provide a return to the community. That is not something this government supports. This government has a proud record on introducing measures around housing affordability—a very proud record—and an extensive plan that we will discuss in this place today.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members, there is excessive interjection.

MS GALLAGHER: I think our housing affordability action plan and the need to ensure a rightful return to the community on extra development rights granted to developers are good policy as well. We support the rectification of change of use charge. In relation to codification, there is more work being done and I will bring it to the Assembly in due course for further discussion around it.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe?

MR COE: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Treasurer, given that the receipts from that tax are increasing by 185 per cent, if that is not a massive tax increase, what would be?

MS GALLAGHER: Because the budget has not been receiving the money it should have been receiving. Our estimates going back over all of the development applications—

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Order! There is an excessive level of intervention while the Treasurer is seeking to answer the question. I call the Treasurer.

MS GALLAGHER: Our estimate of the revenue forgone to the community over the last five years or so has been in the order of \$20 million per annum. That is \$20 million that has not returned to the territory for the rights granted to developers.

Mr Smyth: 185 per cent is modest?

MS GALLAGHER: It is not acceptable that that continues. That is why there is a significant change in the forecasts. We have not changed the tax. Let us just understand that. We have not changed the tax but the changes are about operating the way the law, which passed this place, was always meant to operate. That is the change and that has resulted in us forecasting extra revenue coming to the territory.

Mr Smyth: It is modest.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth!

MS GALLAGHER: But it is interesting to know that those opposite do not support the change of use charge as it exists—

Mr Smyth: 185 per cent; dead right.

MS GALLAGHER: do not support the law that I presume that Mr Smyth voted on—

Mr Smyth: Modest; go and check my record.

MS GALLAGHER: and that what he actually wants is for us to ignore that law and not return the right amount of revenue to the community for the provision of services to the community by the ACT government.

Mr Smyth: So it is only modest.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, you are warned for continuing intervention when I asked for some silence for the Treasurer to be heard. Mr Seselja, a supplementary question?

MR SESELJA: Treasurer, how much will the rectification of the change of use charge add to the already very high average rents in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: The change of use charge should not impact on the price of rents in the ACT.

Mr Seselja: You are kidding.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, it should not.

Hospitals—funding

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the Prime Minister recently announced that the commonwealth would be spending \$1.8 billion on funding for regional health. Despite the Prime Minister using the Canberra Hospital as the backdrop to the announcement, it has been revealed that the Canberra Hospital will not actually be receiving any funding. Minister, who gave approval for the Prime Minister to use the Canberra Hospital as a backdrop for this announcement and were they aware at the time that the Canberra Hospital will not be receiving any additional funding?

MS GALLAGHER: I gave approval for the Prime Minister to attend the hospital, as I have with previous Liberal federal governments. In fact, I do not know that we actually approve it, because they are a part-funder of the hospital and, therefore, there are some—

Mr Seselja: You just said you did approve it.

Mr Hanson: Did you approve it or didn't you?

MS GALLAGHER: I was notified of an intention to visit, and I did not raise a problem with that. In fact, the hospital gets very excited when prime ministers of all colours visit, because the staff in the hospital are proud of their work and they are proud to have their work acknowledged—extremely proud—and it would be inappropriate for me to not allow a visit by the Prime Minister, so that she can actually go and see the hard work that our nurses and doctors are doing every day in this city, Mr Hanson. I would expect that the Canberra community would think very poorly of me if I had refused a request from the Prime Minister to visit the Canberra Hospital.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance, the question also asked—and she is not addressing this point in the question—whether, at the time that she approved the Prime Minister's visit, she was aware whether the Canberra Hospital would be receiving funding or not. I ask her to address that element of the question.

MS GALLAGHER: The announcement made by the Prime Minister was to open and request applications for the funds, so, at that point, no, I did not know. Canberra Hospital had not been promised any of the money in some backroom deal or anything like that. It was to announce the \$1.8 billion fund open. In terms of whether or not the Canberra Hospital or the ACT health system will benefit from any of this \$1.8 billion allocation, I did note the comments in the *Canberra Times*, I think, recording the visit. But, on that same day, I met with the federal health minister, not around that fund specifically, but around a number of issues, and we discussed the fund. If you look at the guidelines—if you actually take the time to read the guidelines—there is capacity under the criteria for hospitals in our area, in our category, to apply for money within that fund, and we intend to do just that.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Minister, what representations, beyond the discussions with the minister, have you made to the commonwealth on this issue, and when do you expect to have an answer on what funds will be secured for the Canberra Hospital or, indeed, for Calvary hospital in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: Nice quick amendment to the supplementary based on the fact that I have met with the federal health minister. I have also met and discussed this with our two new federal members for Fraser and Canberra, and I also have a meeting with Mike Kelly set up in the near future as the member for Eden-Monaro to discuss this. So I have made a number of representations. I have also written to the federal health minister, and I have discussed a suitable application for ACT Health to make on behalf of the ACT health system in applications for that fund.

MRS DUNNE: A supplementary question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, do you consider that the Canberra Hospital should be eligible for additional funding under this scheme, and what will you do to advocate on behalf of the Canberra Hospital?

MS GALLAGHER: I have just answered that. I am not going to pick the Canberra Hospital over Calvary hospital or, indeed, some of the community health programs we run. Do I think the ACT health system as a whole deserves to have access to some of that funding? Yes, I do. Have I made those representations known? Yes, I have. I hope that we are successful. For once, it would be nice if those opposite actually supported the government on something, supported the work that we are doing, and perhaps lobbied a few people and got themselves involved in trying to deliver an outcome to the people of the ACT, instead of sitting there, carping and hoping that we are not doing our job so that you can whack out a media release.

This issue is too important. This needs the whole of the Assembly to buy into the fact that we are a provider of health services to the regional community. Our health community is premised on 660,000 people, of whom 25 to 30 per cent do not live within our borders.

Mr Hanson: What have you got for us?

MS GALLAGHER: They are the arguments that I will be putting forward around why the ACT community should benefit from funds which are tagged for regional Australia.

Mr Hanson: What have you secured for us, Katy?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I have already indicated my expectations about interjections. You are now warned as well.

MRS DUNNE: A supplementary question, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, when do you expect an outcome from this application process for regional hospital funding and how much do you expect?

MS GALLAGHER: That will be determined by the commonwealth. It is their grants program.

Water—Murray-Darling Basin

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water. Minister, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has issued a guide to the proposed Murray-Darling Basin plan, which proposes significant reductions in sustainable diversion limits for the use of water in the ACT. The guide was issued following a long process involving the issuing of a concept statement, followed by issues papers, technical reports and stakeholder meetings. The ACT government is a

full voting member of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council. Minister, what involvement has the ACT government had in the development and implementation of the proposed plan?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Dunne for her question. It is pleasing that we have finally got to a question about water security from the opposition. The government is working closely with its state and territory counterparts on issues surrounding the development of the Murray-Darling Basin plan. Members would be aware that the guide to the plan was released by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority just over a week ago. My department has been closely examining the assumptions that underpin the directions outlined by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in its guide to the plan document.

In response directly to Mrs Dunne's question, officials of my department are members of the senior officials group that meets with water officials from other state and territory governments, the commonwealth and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Through that process of ongoing dialogue we have been involved to a degree in the development of this document, but it is important to note that the document is, in effect, a creature of the authority. The authority has developed the document. The territory, as with all other basin states, has not been privy to all of its discussions and considerations prior to the release of the plan.

My officials received a briefing on the guide to the plan just prior—about 24 hours prior—to its public release. We will be following it up with more detailed discussions with basin authority officials at officer level. I also anticipate that there will be discussions between me, other basin state ministers, the commonwealth minister and the authority in the coming months as we work through this very important process of consultation.

The government remains committed to protecting the interests of the territory when it comes to the overall allocation available to us under the basin plan, when that plan is finally released in a draft form and obviously in the final plan when it is made by the commonwealth minister. We believe that the current guide as outlined by the basin authority does not have proper regard to the particular circumstances of the territory as the largest inland settlement entirely dependent on water supply in the basin. We believe that the cap that is proposed in the guide to the draft plan is inadequate. It does not have proper regard to growth. That needs to occur so that our city can have certainty about how it uses water and what water is available to it into the future. These are matters that we will be pursuing further with the authority and with the commonwealth.

MRS DUNNE: A supplementary question, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, given your low-key response since the release of the guide, is this an indication of the vigour with which you will pursue the interests of the ACT in future negotiations?

MR CORBELL: Mrs Dunne can characterise my response in whatever way she wishes—she is usually inaccurate, and she is on this occasion as well. The government is taking a sensible and prudent approach to this issue. This is not a matter which warrants panic or overexaggeration. What we have before us is a guide to a draft plan—a guide to a draft plan. It is not even the draft plan required under the relevant commonwealth legislation, so we are many, many months away from a decision in relation to the draft plan let alone the final plan when it is made by the commonwealth minister.

The government will use the time available to us to pursue constructive and detailed discussions with the authority and with the commonwealth. That is what I indicated on day one. That remains our position.

MR SMYTH: A supplementary, Mr Speaker.

MR SMYTH: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what issues will the ACT government be putting forward on behalf of the ACT in the consultation process now underway?

MR CORBELL: I do not know whether Mr Smyth was listening to my previous answer, but if he had been, he would know that the key issue for the territory is the issue of the cap that is proposed to be reduced in the guide to the draft plan, and that is of significant concern to the territory. What that will mean to the territory is that, if that sort of cap is established for the territory, we will have to significantly increase environmental flows, we will have to—and this is an important consideration financially—purchase water entitlements from other places in the basin and use those to supplement our existing supply or we will have to curtail water use in some manner.

This is a long-term concern for the territory. It is not something that is going to impact on the territory overnight. But it is something that we have to deal with at this time, and that is why we will take the opportunity over the coming months, as the commonwealth goes through what is a very extensive consultation process, to raise our concerns with the commonwealth, to meet with the relevant commonwealth minister, to meet as a full voting member of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, and raise these issues.

I believe it is also very important that the territory adopts a constructive approach, because this is fundamentally an issue about the overall health of the basin. There is a need, a fundamental need, to restore flows within the basin, and we are supportive of achieving that outcome. So we will not be characterised, and I will not have the territory characterised, as a recalcitrant jurisdiction, as a jurisdiction that is sticking its head in the sand on this issue. We will adopt a constructive approach on this difficult area of reform. (*Time expired.*)

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, a supplementary question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, what community consultation will the ACT government be undertaking on the development of these issues that you will be taking forward so vigorously?

MR CORBELL: Consultation on the guide to the draft plan is a matter for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, and there are consultation processes that they have announced that will be able to engage the commonwealth community. This is not a territory proposal. This is a proposal from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and it is up to them to engage in the consultation process. We will represent the interests of the Canberra community in the forums available to us, through the ministerial council and through discussions with the commonwealth and other basin states.

Sport—Commonwealth Games

MS PORTER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training in his role as minister for sport and recreation. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the performance of local athlete Louise Ellery at the Commonwealth Games in Delhi?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Porter for her question and for her interest in the performance of ACT Academy of Sport athletes at the Commonwealth Games. I can advise the Assembly that a squad of 16 young men and women from the Academy of Sport went to Delhi and proudly represented the community at the Commonwealth Games. These athletes brought a great deal of pride to the territory and the surrounding region with their performances. Each athlete represented our community proudly. There were a number of special performances.

I am particularly pleased to update the Assembly on the outstanding performance of Louise Ellery. Louise has returned to Canberra as the F32 women's shot-put champion of the commonwealth. Many Canberrans may not have heard of Louise until her fame at the Commonwealth Games. As the *Canberra Times* put it recently, Louise's Commonwealth Games success has been 12 years in the making. In Delhi, Louise added four centimetres to her personal best, to achieve a new personal best of 6.17 metres.

Louise's story, though, is a remarkable and inspirational one. She suffered an acquired brain injury in 1998 as the result of a car accident. Initially her doctors feared it would leave her in a vegetative state. Through sheer willpower and with the support of her family and the staff at the ACT Academy of Sport, she has gone on to represent Australia and her city of Canberra in athletics at both the 2004 and 2008 Paralympic Games and, of course, at the most recent Commonwealth Games.

In Louise's case, her remarkable success has been a family affair. Louise's mum, June, is also her coach. I am sure they have shared a great deal of pride in her achievements in Delhi.

Today is also a proud day for both June and Louise. They both graduate today with their certificate III in business from the Canberra Institute of Technology. Today's graduation is a remarkable milestone in the journey that these two women have

embarked upon since that car accident 12 years ago. Louise and June are an inspiration to every Canberran. I am sure I am joined by all members of the Assembly and can speak on behalf of all members of the Assembly in congratulating both on their graduation today from the CIT and for the outstanding success that Louise has achieved in her athletics career.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Minister, can you advise what steps will be taken to recognise the achievements of Ms Ellery and her colleagues at the recent Commonwealth Games?

MR BARR: My department has been working with the ACT Academy of Sport to find a date when most athletes and families might be available to be recognised in the Assembly. It is a challenge because so many have gone straight from the Commonwealth Games on to other tournaments and other commitments.

However, I am pleased to announce that next Tuesday during the Assembly lunch break the Acting Chief Minister and I will host a reception for ACTAS athletes, their families, coaches and officials who have helped them along the road to Delhi. I would like to extend an invitation to all members of this place and hope that you will have the opportunity to attend during the luncheon break. I believe it is an important opportunity for each of us on behalf of the Canberra community to congratulate these athletes on their achievements and to thank all of those who have helped them to achieve excellence in their fields.

MR SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth?

Mr Smyth: No.

Ms Gallagher: I thought that you were doing a supplementary question, Brendan. I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper. I will not trust you next time, Brendan.

MR SPEAKER: He is allowed to get to his feet.

Mr Smyth: I had to get to my feet.

Ms Gallagher: I know but I thought you were doing a supplementary.

Mr Hargreaves: That is four times you have tried it, Brendan. Once you got away with it.

MR SPEAKER: Order, members!

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

ACT Policing—recruitment

MR CORBELL: In question time yesterday Ms Le Couteur asked me when the 2010-11 purchase agreement between the ACT government and the Australian

Federal Police would be available on the ACT Policing website. I can advise that that was made available from the website yesterday afternoon.

And yesterday in question time Ms Hunter asked me a question about how the ACT Policing recruitment drive is progressing. I can advise that as of today there have been 1,526 expressions of interest in the recruit positions on the ACT Policing website. Tomorrow ACT Policing will open their website for applications to commence. ACT Policing have scheduled three public information sessions to be held in coming weeks. These sessions were fully booked out as soon as they were made available, with 195 people interested in an ACT Policing career proposing to attend.

ACT Ambulance Service—recruitment

MR CORBELL: I have one other answer to a question I took on notice yesterday. Ms Le Couteur asked me a question relating to staffing of the ACT Ambulance Service. She asked me:

Can you update the Assembly on the success of the recruitment drives used to fill these new positions and how many of the 41 positions were filled?

I can advise that of the 41 additional positions funded by the government since 2007-08 the ACT Ambulance Service has so far recruited to 37 positions. It was anticipated that a number of individuals would be recruited during the current 2010-11 financial year to take up duties in the second half of the year. This is still expected to occur in the case of the four remaining positions.

Answer to question on notice Question No 1057

MS HUNTER: Under standing order 118A, I seek an explanation from the Acting Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs for unanswered question 1057, which was in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

MR CORBELL: Ms Hunter, that outstanding question on notice was brought to my attention today. Due to an administrative error in the department it was not presented to the minister in a timely fashion. That has now been rectified, and I have signed off an answer to that question. It should be with you this afternoon.

Legislative Assembly—unparliamentary language

MR SMYTH: Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on a matter that happened yesterday with the use of the word “jellyback”, which I was forced to withdraw. In searching the *Hansard* I noticed that on a number of occasions when Mr Stanhope used the word “jellyback” and it was brought to your attention, you simply made the statement, “Chief Minister, will you refer to other members by their names.” Could I have your guidance on why one part of this house gets to use members’ names and yet the other side of the house is forced to withdraw the word? And what is your ruling on the use of the word “jellyback”?

MR SPEAKER: Certainly, Mr Smyth. I have reflected on the comments that you made yesterday as well, and I think that you have a fair point. Certainly, that word will be considered unparliamentary in the future. Members will be asked to withdraw it. In Mr Stanhope's absence, I do trust that one of his colleagues will reflect that ruling to him on his return.

Mr Hargreaves: Consider it done, Mr Speaker.

Personal explanation

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella): I have one small correction to make to a comment I made during the speeches on the disability motion that I put. I mentioned during my speech that I met with the department on 3 September. In fact, it was on 2 September. I just make that point.

Answer to question on notice

Question No 1112

MR SESELJA: Under standing order 118A—I apologise; I do not have the number of the question—I raise a matter with Ms Burch. On the notice paper yesterday there was an outstanding question that I had asked, and I think the answer is about a month overdue. It is the only question I have outstanding from you, Ms Burch. It is in relation to loans and liabilities of your department.

MS BURCH: I am sure I signed that off just yesterday, so it is probably on its way to you. If not, I will follow it up, Mr Seselja.

Young people transitioning out of care

Paper and statement by member

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens): I seek leave to present a paper entitled *Strengthening our support of young people transitioning out of care: a new framework* and to make a brief statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

MS HUNTER: I present the following paper:

Strengthening our Support of Young People Transitioning Out of Care: A New Framework—Discussion paper, prepared by Meredith Hunter, ACT Greens MLA, dated October 2010.

I am very pleased to be presenting this paper in the Assembly today. It is a paper that I launched a few weeks ago now and it is about an issue that is very dear to my heart—to ensure that we do the best we can by our young people who, for one reason or another, have ended up in the care and protection system, in out-of-home care, and who need not just support up to the age of 18 but ongoing support into adulthood to assist them to achieve in areas of education, training, seeking employment and

ensuring that they have a roof over their heads. We know that many of these young people unfortunately do end up unemployed, homeless and having contact with the juvenile justice system or the correction system. They quite often have low levels of educational attainment. We need to really improve the lives of these young people.

I hosted a forum that went along with this paper. That was a couple of weeks ago here in the Assembly. It was a successful forum; around 40 people and organisations attended. That was a good start to a consultation process—trying to collect the experiences of and get feedback from young people who have been through the system, the organisations who work with them and the families that support them to see how we can improve the system.

What we have in many other states and territories is support that is available up until the age of 21 years or 25 years. As many of us who are parents know, children do not stop needing assistance at the age of 18. In fact, for many of us, we know our children are not going to be leaving home by the age of 25 in some cases. We certainly know that as parents our commitment is a lifetime commitment. So we really need to be looking at how we can support the kinship carers and the foster carers to be able to provide that ongoing support.

An important statement was made by one of the speakers at the forum, Annette Kelly-Egerton, who heads up Barnardos. She spoke about how their philosophy around foster carers was that foster-care families are forever families; it is not just until the age of 18. They put in place as best they can the programs and supports so that the young person is able to return to that family for a visit, to stay or to seek assistance.

We also need to be looking at what that actually means on the ground as far as after-care services are concerned and also what sort of funds are available that young people would be able to access to be able to pursue, for instance, their education and training. There is commonwealth assistance available at the moment. It is the transition to independent living allowance, the TILA. It is about \$1,500. It has been mainly for whitegoods and so forth; you can imagine that it does not go very far when you have turned 18 and need to be moving out somewhere independently. I believe that as part of this we need to have a fund in place, some sort of dedicated fund, where young people do not feel that they are going cap in hand and having to beg for some resources but where it is seen as a really important investment in setting them up for successful adulthood.

I am very pleased to be able to table this paper today. I note that yesterday Minister Burch tabled a paper on this same topic and gave a ministerial statement along with a discussion paper. The government will be consulting. I hope that this will ensure that this important issue remains at the top of the agenda for the next so many months and that it is seen as a priority going into the next few years as far as budget allocations and so forth are concerned so that we can do the right thing and so that when we do take our children away from families under the care and protection system, and there are many reasons why that happens, we take on that responsibility of the territory being the parent—that that does not just cease at 18 but we see it as an ongoing commitment.

MS BURCH (Brindabella—Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women), by leave: I thank Ms Hunter for her interest in this matter. I know she has had a long and solid interest in caring for the vulnerable in our community. It is good to see the two parties so committed to getting transitions right for young people in out-of-home care. It is unfortunate that I was not able to thank the opposition, who yesterday attempted to block my statement on transitions for vulnerable young people.

As a minister, I have been very vocal on the issue of getting transitions right for young people right from the get-go. It is one of my priorities and it will remain one of my priorities over the months to come. Earlier this year I said:

... I have a personal interest in doing this to find how the department best works with those quite fragile periods beyond 17, 18 and 19 ...

I said that, being a mother of three, I knew that young people did not become instantly wise and mature at 18 and I informed the Assembly that work had already started and I was talking with the department.

At a planning day earlier this year I tasked my department with developing a policy response to the issue, with the aim of developing an improved model. We are doing this in parallel with important national reforms. Work has already commenced, with a senior officer engaged earlier this year to discuss with agencies across government what extra services we could be providing for young people transitioning from care. And on the issue of determination of the age range for eligibility for these services, that will be a key part of the discussion. There will be some budgetary and legislative implications, and therefore we need to consider those as well.

The government discussion paper proposes some very appropriate and particular examples of the types of practical supports that young people may need in their transition. I note that Ms Hunter raised a concern yesterday. The purpose of this paper is not to exclude young people from existing services or from a program response; rather, it is about enhancing and engaging what we already do.

The government is developing an engagement plan to involve young people, carers, stakeholders and the broader community in this important conversation. The aim will be to utilise best practice consultative processes, ensuring the involvement of young people in care, to open up these issues. A practical way that I will be doing that will be by writing to young people, and indeed every carer and stakeholder, inviting them to engage in this discussion and to make written submissions or indeed just to knock on my door and have a conversation.

As Ms Hunter has identified, this is important work. That is why it has been on the backburner for me and in the department for some months. Coincidence and timings work in strange ways, but there could be a quite strong community conversation on this matter. It is a good opportunity for this important piece of work and I am looking forward to it.

Tourism—events and festivals

Debate resumed.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.17): The government welcome the opportunity to discuss the Loxton report into the review of ACT government events and festivals. This is a report that we commissioned at our instigation to ensure that our structures were in the right place in terms of where we want to be and where we want to head. This is a government that will look at new ideas, that will take constructive feedback. That is what we get when we have the opportunity for an external review of our own systems and processes.

It is not just happening in the events and festivals area. We have also had a review of the Heritage Act. We are having a review of the taxation system and Dr Hawke is also reviewing the structure of the ACT public service. I think this is a sign that the government wants to look at ways to continuously improve, to put our current structures and operations under scrutiny—and at that, independent scrutiny. It is doing this not only to gauge how we are performing now but where we want to be in the future. That was very much the reason behind the commissioning of the ACT government events and festivals report.

This report is out currently for consultation with the community. I know that there is a lot of interest in it, particularly from those involved in events and festivals across the ACT. We will gather their feedback before we make decisions. I think some of the recommendations are easier than others to implement and to respond to. Others will require, I think, careful consideration before the government is prepared to act.

This is certainly a report that we welcome and I think the debate in the Assembly is useful. I would like to say also though that when we listened to Mr Smyth's speech earlier just prior to lunch and his capacity to talk down the very promising and exciting calendar events that already exist in this city, it is disappointing. When you go back and look at Mr Smyth's record and expertise, when you go back and have a look at the existing record of Mr Smyth's achievements when in government around major events and tourism, I think people reviewing the *Hansard* will get a very different picture.

Mr Smyth would have you believe that the events and tourism system here in the ACT has declined compared to when he was managing the ship. I think all I have to do is give you a list of some of those decisions that your government took that had the tourism and events industry in chaos in the ACT. I will run through them quickly. I do not even need to explain anything further other than to name them because they are so notorious in terms of understanding by the Canberra community.

But let us have a look at the futsal slab and the Bruce Stadium. We can talk about how you painted the grass green and then invited journalists to come and have a look at the stadium before the paint was even dry. We saw article after article about the disastrous proposal to put the Multicultural Festival and the Canberra Festival

together. What about the V8 car race? What about that? What about the subsidies? We actually paid every person who went there essentially \$60 to go and have a look at it. It was a subsidy of \$60 for every spectator. There was a \$6 million cost blowout for that event over the years it ran here. Look at the debacle of the Australian international hotel school that again this government had to clean up. We had fees for Floriade. Every Canberran had to pay to go and see Floriade.

They are the record of your achievements. I think we need to look now at what we have done. Look at how we have built up Floriade. Look at the successful *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition of last year. Look at the community celebrations like Celebration in the Park, like Symphony in the Park, like the candle festival in our partnership with Nara. Look at the new year's celebration, the Australia Day celebrations, the world mountain bike championships.

Mr Smyth: We had new year's celebrations. We had Australia Day celebrations.

MS GALLAGHER: You did have celebrations on New Year's Eve. In preparing for this speech today, I was actually shocked to realise that it was a quarter of a million dollars for one midnight fireworks show. It cost a quarter of a million dollars for one midnight fireworks show. What a lot of money!

Our fireworks show, two events at 9 o'clock and midnight, cost \$50,000 a year 10 years after the event that you managed for a cost of a quarter of a million dollars. I cannot get my head around how many fireworks that is for \$250,000 for one event. Now we have an event at 9 o'clock in the city, we have a dance party and, in breaking news, this year we have the Whitlams coming. They will be on stage before 9 o'clock and after 9 o'clock. We will then have another celebration at midnight as well.

I think this review is useful in terms of paving a way forward. This government is putting a lot of energy into the centenary celebrations. That gives us the opportunity to build the events and festivals calendar in the lead-up to that celebration. That is what we intend to do and that is why these reviews are so important. The government is happy to provide an update to the Assembly on the government's response and the feedback we get from the community in terms of the discussions that we are having with them now. I do not think there is an issue with that.

I understand from amendments circulated but not yet moved that there is a further request for the government to outline a plan for new attractions for the ACT and a plan for the accommodation industry in the ACT. It does fall outside the Loxton report but I think the government is prepared to accept that and provide that information to the Assembly. I understand from advice provided to me that that work is already underway.

I think it is unfortunate when we talk down the festivals and events processes and the calendar of events and the work that goes into it. I know from the work that we all do in this place that there are thousands of Canberrans who work hard every year to individually deliver their own passion and their own area of interest.

I think the government accepts that our processes and, indeed, the calendar itself could be better coordinated and opportunity should be identified to focus in on, I

guess, the four seasons that Canberra has. We do very well in spring. In the autumn period we have had the *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition. The minister for tourism is working on announcing the autumn event, but there should be further opportunities identified around the winter and summer seasons.

I think that is all fairly sensible and in some respects straightforward. Some of the other changes around coordination and responsibilities within government are things that we will genuinely take very seriously. We will have a look at our own processes, because as a key partner in the provision of festivals and in support of tourism events it is important that we have our own house in order.

If processes and systems have over the years developed, due to no ill will by anybody, that need to be strengthened and better coordinated, that is something that this government is very able to respond to and will do so very quickly. Our idea of our role particularly in major events is to provide the environment for those major events to come, to flourish and to support our local economy. That is very much what I say to the tourism and events industry whenever I meet with them.

In relation to festivals, there are targets that are a little different. They are really targeted to local community events. The government does have a range of programs and support programs identified. If there are ways to improve on those, we are certainly open to that as well. But the Loxton review gives us the opportunity to improve. I think that was the intention of the government when we commissioned this work. It was not commissioned with the intention of giving Brendan Smyth a glory 15 minutes in the Assembly to criticise—

Mr Smyth: Always so negative, Katy.

MS GALLAGHER: It was not commissioned with the intention to provide another football for political discussion. It was commissioned with the sole purpose of looking at how we could improve on the current delivery of events and festivals within the ACT, particularly in the lead-up to the centenary. The report has come back. It has made a number of recommendations. We have released that to the community. I think from memory the close of community consultations is early November. That will inform the government's response to this report. We will be able to provide an update to the Assembly in February around those recommendations.

But I do not think it is fair to criticise the government for actually commissioning a piece of work that enabled us to focus on continuous improvement. I think we have a very proud record in delivering events. We do not have the lemons that have hung around as was the case with the previous government. We do not have the embarrassment of heavily subsidised events that were going nowhere or picking winners that went nowhere. We have targeted our assistance and to date it has been incredibly successful and has enabled us to showcase Canberra as the beautiful city that it is and that we all love.

So let us build on that proud record. Let us respond to these recommendations and invite community input. They will inform the government's response. Let us build up the best events and festivals calendar that we can in the lead-up to our city's 100th birthday celebrations.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (3.29): The Greens welcome Mr Smyth bringing forward this motion today and we support the general thrust of the motion because we believe the events and festival industry in Canberra is incredibly important. In fact, we all know more broadly when we talk about the tourism industry the importance of that industry for employment and economic results here in the ACT, with nearly 13,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the tourism sector, contributing about \$1.2 billion to the ACT's economy as well as the obvious tax revenue that that generates for both the state and federal governments which we then use for other purposes.

The importance of the sector is clear in its own right but it is also incredibly important in diversifying the ACT's economic base. We have often discussed in this place, even in my time, let alone before my time, the necessity of doing so. The motion circulated correctly, I think, highlights some of the adverse comments or adverse findings and observations contained in the Loxton report.

These include issues around the current funding and scheduling arrangements lacking vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination; event scheduling not being guided by a plan thus giving the impression of disorganisation and clutter; there being limited communication or sharing of knowledge and expertise between government agencies about planning and management of events and festivals; and that overall situation undermining the effectiveness and value of government investment. I think these are quite significant points and they are ones that I am sure the various ministers with responsibility have read with some concern and are no doubt currently thinking about how they are going to respond to.

The motion goes on to call on government to set out how it will respond to these adverse findings that I have just flagged. I trust that the government has already given that quite some consideration. We support that call because it is an important matter for this chamber to discuss what the government is going to do in response to these findings—findings that are very useful for all of us to consider.

However, while agreeing that the Loxton report does have some adverse findings, the Greens are also aware of the positive exciting vision suggested by the report for the future of Canberra's events and festivals. This vision centres on the creation of brand Canberra under which Canberra will be marketed and events promoted. The brand would strongly link the four seasons we experience in Canberra.

I note that this is something the Acting Chief Minister has just referred to. It is also touched upon in Australian Capital Tourism's five-year strategy plan for 2009-13. I would flag now that I am going to move a series of amendments to the motion. The first of those amendments does pick up this positive side of the equation.

I think it is valuable to reflect that in the motion in order to give us some guidance on where the opportunities also lie as well as some of the problems that need to be addressed. I may as well move them now, actually. First of all, I seek leave to move my amendments together as a group for the ease of the Assembly.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move the amendments circulated in my name:

(1) Insert new paragraph (1A):

“(1A) notes the Loxton report finding that there is potential for Brand Canberra to be developed based on:

- (a) being the ‘National Capital’ as well as the ‘Cultural Capital’; and
- (b) our clean environment, natural beauty and four seasons;”.

(2) Insert new paragraph (1B):

“(1B) notes:

- (a) the current consultation process running until 5 November which is seeking public submissions on the Loxton report; and
- (b) the Government’s commitment to a transparent consultation process by updating the Community Engagement website to make clear that all submissions made to the consultation will be available online;”.

(3) Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the ACT Government to set out by February 2011:

- (a) what actions it will undertake to respond to the findings of the Loxton report;
- (b) a plan for new attractions for the ACT; and
- (c) a plan for the accommodation industry in the ACT.”.

The first of the amendments, as I was just alluding to, inserts some of those opportunities identified in the Loxton report. As I say, I feel this offers completeness for the motion that Mr Smyth has put forward. The specific points in the Loxton report are that the Assembly notes the findings that there is potential for brand Canberra to be developed based on being the national capital as well as the cultural capital, and also our clean environment, natural beauty and four seasons.

I think these are all very good points. I do not think they particularly need to be stressed in this place because in some senses they are self-evident. Certainly, as I think I have said in this place before, my own experience of friends and relatives coming to Canberra is that they have a real sense of interest in the national capital, of this being a place of government and national institutions in Australia and I think, to some extent, a sense of ownership of this city as well. It sounds like an odd thing to say in some ways but many people are proud of this as our national capital in the same way that many Americans reflect positively on Washington DC.

The second amendment that we propose is to amend paragraph 2 of the motion. This paragraph calls on the government to report by February next year what actions it will undertake to respond to the findings of the Loxton report, a plan for new attractions for the ACT and a plan for the accommodation industry in the ACT. I understand that these second two points are an issue that Mr Smyth believes in and has talked about previously on a number of occasions.

I certainly recall—he touched on this earlier—the questions that he put to the minister for tourism during estimates last year. While the Loxton report does not deal with attractions or accommodation in its final recommendations, they are dealt with in the report. It is noted that they are an essential part of the overall equation of events in the capital as well as the overall picture of tourism of which events are a part.

We think it is appropriate that the government in responding to the Loxton report addresses these issues either with specific proposals or with an indication of where it is going with these. I think there is a range of possible ways in which the government would report back. But in terms of responding to the Assembly in February, it would be appropriate to address those points as well as part of the overall picture.

The Loxton report is the report of an expert consultancy firm specialising in government and media. At the moment the report is out for comment from the events and festivals industry and the wider community as well. There are two weeks to go in terms of the consultation. It closes on 5 November. That is also part of our view as to the timing and the framing of this motion because there are many other recommendations in the report. We look forward to government responding to all of the specific recommendations and responding in a way that takes on board some of the issues raised in the consultation and feedback process.

I note some of the other recommendations that are not picked up by Mr Smyth's motion which I think are also of interest in this report. That includes the creation of a new ACT events directorate in the Chief Minister's Department, the two key festival periods be set up—spring and autumn—that the 2013 centenary of Canberra celebration be used as a focal point for all planning from now on and that a major events funding model be developed.

Again, these are quite substantial recommendations. Certainly, in respect of the third of those that I just mentioned—using the centenary of Canberra as a focal point—having recently and today gone back over the Capital Tourism five-year strategic plan I think that there is a difference there. My sense from the five-year plan is that there are a couple of different phases focused on the domestic market and the international market. I note that 2013 is the phase in which Australian Capital Tourism looks to focus on the international market. I think that the centenary of Canberra will be, in fact, very much a domestic focus.

While I do not want to say that there are some contradictions, there are certainly some issues there that need to be worked through as part of looking at the Loxton report. It may be that, in fact, the final decision is not to accept some of those recommendations, in which case I think the government needs to come back and tell us why those recommendations are not being accepted.

The final amendment that we are proposing is noting the current consultation process, as I have touched on already. We think it is important to acknowledge that the Loxton report is out to consultation at the moment. But we have also asked the government—they have committed to this and we would like to reflect this in the motion—to place the submissions received as part of that consultation process on the community engagement website.

In taking up this debate next February when the government comes back on this matter, it will be valuable for all members of the chamber to be able to look at some of the submissions that have been made, to spend some time going through those submissions and to ensure a fully informed debate in the Assembly rather than perhaps, dare I be cynical, be in a situation where we only see those particular inputs that the government has found favour with.

I think it is important that we are able to see all of those inputs. Having explained some of those amendments, as I said the Greens welcome the fact that Mr Smyth has brought this motion forward today. I appreciate the discussions we have had with him in making some suggestions as to how to flesh out the motion a little. I look forward to support for those amendments in getting this matter passed.

I particularly look forward to the government's response next February on what is a very interesting topic and one which I think the ACT must continually strive on because it is such an important sector for this community.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing) (3.39): I will speak briefly on these matters as most of the issues have been extensively canvassed. One of the things that have clearly confused a number of people in relation to the Loxton report is that it was an inquiry into all events in the ACT and that there is a very clear delineation between tourism events and community-based events. The Loxton review was looking at a range of things. It is often misunderstood, and certainly by at least one ABC breakfast announcer, that the tourism portfolio only runs one event in Floriade and this was added to by an initiative of this government—the autumn event.

Australian Capital Tourism are responsible for two events out of the entire events calendar. We provide some financial assistance through the events assistance program to other organisations to run other events that have a tourism benefit, but the vast majority of events that are funded by the ACT government or that are run in the Australian Capital Territory are community based and have little or no tourism potential. I do not think anyone is coming to Canberra particularly for the Teddy Bears Picnic, Groovin' in Garema or the Dogs Day Out. They are all events that are municipal in nature that are run for the local community.

However, there is clearly a hierarchy of events. At the top of our hierarchy of events is Floriade, which is clearly the biggest tourism event in the city. We set in train a desire to have an autumn event that would rival Floriade over time, recognising that when Floriade started more than 20 years ago it was a very small event but it has

grown into Australia's premier celebration of spring. We hope that through the investment and the work that we are doing in the autumn period we will have an event that in 20 years time will be as strong a tourism drawcard for Canberra in autumn as Floriade is now. But it will take time, it will take patience and it will take a constructive working relationship with all parties in this place to ensure that that autumn event reaches that level. I think that is a very important distinction to draw.

There has been some criticism as to why I did not undertake particular media commitments in relation to this report. It is a whole-of-government matter and I am responsible for two events out of hundreds. It is not about tourism events; it is about all events. There is an opportunity through this report for a clearer delineation in terms of how government operates to structurally separate major events that have tourism potential from community-based events. That will be an important forum. I am happy to be on the record as saying that is what I will be arguing for. That is the position that I have adopted in my conversations with Mr Loxton. You will see that a number of his recommendations appear to reflect that particular view, so I am pleased that it was picked up by the reviewer in his considerations.

I want to respond to a couple of comments Mr Rattenbury made, most particularly around the centenary and the strategic plan for Australian Capital Tourism. I note his concern about Australian Capital Tourism's second phase of its five-year strategic plan having an international focus and that that would be during the centenary year. The reason for that, Mr Rattenbury, is that the airport goes international in that period. We will have direct flights. We are very optimistic and very confident that we will have direct flights into Canberra from New Zealand and possibly also Singapore or Hong Kong. With that opportunity, with the airport going international, I think it is a once in 50 or once in a 100-year opportunity for this city to take advantage of direct flights in.

That is why Australian Capital Tourism's focus, once the airport redevelopment is complete, will be to look at those international markets. There may indeed be new markets that will open up for us with direct flights and hence it makes sense to be focusing our efforts there. We will, of course, have a fantastic year of activities and events in that initial period when the airport goes international. We will have a magnificent program to offer visitors both domestically and internationally at that time. The challenge is to build on some of the new events that will be run for the first time either in the lead-up to the centenary or in the centenary year and create some legacies out of that.

The Loxton review provides, I think, some useful guidance in terms of a seasonal approach. We continue to work in partnership with the national institutions, most particularly the National Gallery, around the summer content, given the success of the *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition.

In light of some of the decisions that I have had to take as tourism minister in relation to cutting funding from underperforming tourism events, it is interesting to contrast the returns. With the V8 supercar race there was something like \$18 million worth of losses to Canberra ratepayers. It was described as an open-ended agreement with private promoters which placed all financial liability on the ACT taxpayer. No risk

analysis was done and no risk management was undertaken. No risks were factored in. There was no attempt to negotiate shared risks with the promoter. We have a poor history.

I think it would be fair to say that we have a poor history in some of these events. The government subsidised the Rally of Canberra at \$750,000 a year. In its final year 1,264 tourists came to Canberra as a result of that event. Contrast that with \$500,000 for the *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition, which brought—what?—400,000 people. So \$750,000 went into that rally, bringing 1,200 people, and \$500,000 went into the exhibition, bringing 400,000 people.

There are decisions that the government has to make. There will always be a reflection, ultimately, on the minister and the government of the day around which events we choose to invest in. One of the interesting recommendations from Loxton is to have an annual fund that can be invested in particular events and opportunities as they come up from time to time. As I am sure Mr Smyth would acknowledge, sometimes these opportunities emerge very quickly and you need to act quickly in order to secure them for your city. That is a recommendation that I think has considerable merit and it is certainly one that I will be pursuing. It is indeed in line with the thinking of Australian Capital Tourism.

Just to wrap up, we need to ensure that we understand the distinction between major tourism events and those community-based events. As minister for tourism, with the greatest of respect to those community events, I do not seek to run them and nor do I think it is appropriate for the tourism portfolio to be running those sorts of events. But there is, I believe, an appropriate role for the tourism portfolio to have in major events that attract people to our city.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (3:47): I thank Mr Rattenbury for his amendments. New paragraph (1A), which talks about the potential for brand Canberra, is important. It is certainly something that needs to be done. The gentleman who is perhaps talking about brand development the most around the world and with the most authority is an Englishman called Simon Anholt. Mr Anholt talks about three elements: to have a successful strategy, to develop the brand and the notion of place. He has got a lot of work on brand identity and brand development. He says you must have a strategy, you must have substance and you must have significant and ongoing action to continue to prove that you have got a strategy and you have got substance. At the heart of what I am trying to do with this motion today is to get some of that in place.

I believe Canberra is a substantial place both as a city and the nation's capital and as a city of the world. The things we do here can have an effect. People often talk about Canberra being the "test tube". In a way, perhaps we are as a city-state, but we can do things and show the world how things can be done. Part of what we should be doing is developing the brand of Canberra as a substantial place. And it is a substantial place. It has got Australia's best university as one of the five universities that we have here—the ANU, the University of Canberra, the Australian Catholic University, the University of New South Wales at ADFA and Charles Sturt University. It is a substantial academic place.

Culturally—as Mr Barr pointed out by lifting the words “cultural capital” from the report—we have the national icons. But it is not just about the national icons. At, say, a territory level, we have a substantial number of individuals contributing to the national wellbeing through their pursuit of cultural activities. Locally, when you get down to the suburbs, there are people out there who perform their arts and do their craft—whatever it is that they do that adds to the sum of us all. A cultural capital is a significant thing. I used the words “creative capital” several years ago. It is a creative capital as well.

We have got to work on the substance and then we have got to tell people what we do. That is where we are lacking, and that is the point of this motion. There is no strategy. There is no strategy to develop the events. We know that the minister has had this probably for something like 15 months. That is 15 months gone and it is 15 months that contribute to the poor result that is the Loxton report. We know, for instance, that we have a number of national attractions. In 2005 we had a forum here. Those people from the industry who attended the forum had been told by people who had visited Canberra that the area they thought Canberra was deficient in was not having an Aboriginal museum and an Aboriginal gallery—Indigenous history and Indigenous Art. That was top of the list at that forum. We now see the outcome of the National Gallery. It was commenced by the Howard government, which had a strong commitment to the attractions and building Canberra as a national capital.

But I suspect it is not enough. It certainly puts on display some of the art, but think of the tens of thousands of pieces that the gallery has. From an anthropological sense, the Strehlow map of Indigenous people of Australia says there are about 381 tribes. One piece of art from each tribe would fill the gallery in itself, so there is potential there. The Indigenous sections at the National Museum are welcome but, again, there are 381 tribes. It is unique to Australia. We are the nation’s capital. People come here looking for that sort of facility in the nation’s capital and they cannot find enough of it. It was raised when we did the forum in 2004-05. It is important that we keep talking about these issues; otherwise they will go away or they will not occur.

Something that I am particularly interested in is the University of Canberra architectural school. It does a project each year which is often on display at GAD, the Gallery of Australian Design, down at Commonwealth Place. In this year’s project they asked students to design some plans and build a model for a museum of natural history. Again, it is unique to Australia. It is what people come to look for, but we do not celebrate it. If you do not celebrate it, you do not understand it. These are concepts that we could follow through.

I have spoken often about a bushfire museum. The bushfire phenomenon is very much unique to Australia in the way that it occurs. Again, we will not understand it if we do not talk about it and look at it, and we will not remember it. We will repeat the mistakes of the past if we do not remember it.

There are a number of things that can go into such a strategy. I have never asked for the ACT government to fund such a strategy. Ideally, philanthropy and the federal government, assisted by the ACT government, would make these things happen. We

need to talk about the convention centre, which I have been speaking about for years, which we are still yet to get. It is something which we desperately need, something commensurate with our position as the nation's capital.

The Australia forum concept is to be commended. It lifts from beyond being just a convention centre to a place where people come together, where people meet, where ideas are exchanged, where new ways are explored of addressing problems. We have a responsibility here in the nation's capital to explore new ways of doing things, of addressing problems and fixing things. We used to call it business tourism. It should never be called business tourism. It is business events, but it is part of the essential infrastructure and it is important that we get on with it.

New paragraph (1A) is quite acceptable. Again, you cannot disagree with (b)—our assets: our clean environment, natural beauty and the four seasons. Let us use all four seasons. Why are we concentrating on just two? The two seasons that we have have a significant number of events in them. If the minister was out talking to the industry he would understand that their concerns are about summer and winter. They are the ones where the gaps are. January is a fantastic month in Canberra. The city is quite empty. You can travel anywhere so much faster because there is no traffic. There is potential there to capitalise on it. We must have a discussion about events and festivals in January, or in the summer in particular, and in winter. What do you do in winter? Everybody says it is too cold and they will not come here. Let us find something. There are winter festivals all over the world.

Mr Barr: Yes, we've got the Fireside Festival.

MR SMYTH: I give you the Fireside Festival. It is a great start, but we need to fill up the calendar. They are the two periods when you could run new events because you have got, in effect, capacity in the accommodation sector. The spring and the autumn are the two occasions when we have good visitation. We have good capacities, but if you do not have an accommodation strategy then you would not know that. A list of sites for potential hotels is not a strategy.

New paragraph (1B) just says that we are noting the current process and that the submissions will go up on the community website. That is a good thing. Paragraph (2) details three things. The Loxton report talks about accommodation and there are a number of references in the Loxton report to accommodation. On page 15 it talks about the availability of accommodation, taking account of the availability of accommodation and the consistent demand for accommodation. To do that, you need a strategy. You need the data and you need the facts. You have got to plug the holes and work on what needs to be worked on.

On page 21 at point 6 under "Business and Conventions" it says that it will also be essential to plan future accommodation. The Loxton review is saying, "Let's do the planning." It does not come up as a recommendation as such in the recommendations that start on page 45, but Loxton says that it will also be essential to plan future accommodation and other infrastructure requirements for tourism events. In that regard the recommendation—which matches mine—that we have a plan for accommodation is welcome. I have made the case for the attractions.

Paragraph (2)(a) is slightly different from what I have in my motion. It says that the government set out by February 2011 what actions they will take to respond to the findings of the Loxton report. That is not as much as I would have hoped. I would have hoped that they would have the events and festivals strategy in place by February 2011. The work has been done. The minister has the work. He told the estimates committee that he had the report on his desk. It is before the government. It should not be hard, in the light of the Loxton report, to have that on the table by February next year. In that regard we will accept Mr Rattenbury's amendments. I think they enhance the motion and for that I thank members.

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (3.57): I thank Mr Smyth for bringing this motion before us today and I feel quite disappointed that this motion has to be raised. But after nearly 10 years of this Stanhope government and its litany of failures across various sectors, here is yet another report that delivers some hard messages, messages that highlight the failure of the Stanhope government and Minister Barr in particular in the leadership that he has provided to the tourism industry. As Mr Smyth has stated, under the Stanhope government and its musical-chair-playing ministers, it is becoming increasingly evident that this government has failed the tourism industry and, through this failure, the Stanhope-Gallagher government has also failed the ACT community.

An editorial on page 9 of the *Canberra Times* on 12 October stated:

The recent Loxton review of ACT events and festivals says the Government's funding and scheduling decisions "lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination." "This has led to inconsistent, uneven funding and support from a variety of agencies based largely on ad hoc or historic arrangements."

These are strong words in anyone's language, and it is quite instructive to re-examine some of the words from the report:

...“lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination.” “This has led to inconsistent, uneven funding and support from a variety of agencies ...”

These words can also be used, and in fact similar criticisms have been made, about a number of Stanhope government projects; similar words: “lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination”. The GDE, the ACT prison, the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and so on all come to mind. But these words, “lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination”, are fast becoming synonymous with the Stanhope government.

Mention the Stanhope government and what springs to mind? “Lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination.” Mention “lack vision, policy direction, strategy and coordination” and what comes to mind? The Stanhope government. One follows the other. It is becoming very synonymous. These words and stronger ones have been used about this government's handling of and contribution to the ACT tourism industry.

The Loxton report says, at page 8, overview point 5:

There also appears to have been very limited communication between various Government agencies about the planning and management of events and festivals. While there is a good deal of experience and capability in different agencies, there seems to have been very little sharing of knowledge and expertise.

This portion of the report also needs a little closer scrutiny:

There also appears to have been very limited communication between various government agencies ... there seems to have been very little sharing of knowledge and expertise.

Under normal circumstances, when ministers with different but related portfolios are required to communicate about their portfolios with fellow ministers, there would be no excuse for not sharing the knowledge and the expertise. But in the case of Mr Barr, the mind boggles. Mr Barr is the minister for tourism, sport, education, racing, planning and there is no possible excuse for him not consulting himself, except perhaps that he has lost interest—a suggestion that seems to be getting a lot of currency these days.

Interestingly, Mr Barr pulled me up when I spoke in another debate this morning about his closeness, his proximity, to Joy Burch, sitting next to each other in the Assembly. Apparently I made a mistake and said that they sit next door to each other in adjoining offices. “That is not right,” Mr Barr said. “We’re not next door. We’re a couple of doors apart.” The lack of communication between these government ministers is absolutely incredible. We have seen that this morning between disability and education—no communication whatsoever. Of course, Mr Barr’s very interesting note that he does not sit close to Ms Burch or his office is two doors down goes to the heart of this whole matter. It does not matter if they sat on each other’s lap. They would not be able to communicate, as we can see.

We have a tired Chief Minister who needs to take holidays during the major sitting days of the Assembly. We have a seemingly uninterested minister for tourism, an education minister who is so disconnected from his department that he will not even front the media to face serious questions on a consultation that he, himself, proudly announced a few weeks ago. Where is the ministerial responsibility or where is the courage? Or is this just pure cowardice when this minister leaves the public servants to try to clear up the mess that he has created? And where is the leadership of the government? Where is the leadership of the government in pulling this minister into line, reminding him of his ministerial responsibilities?

There is a sense of *deja vu* here. I seem to recall asking a similar question of the Chief Minister and now I am asking the same question of the Acting Chief Minister. Back then I was asking the Chief Minister when Minister Barr came close to being censured for misrepresentation about 12 months ago. The story has not changed. We have got an Acting Chief Minister who obviously is quite happy to allow Mr Barr’s happy meanderings to continue. The Chief Minister is tired and is overseas, and the Acting Chief Minister, Ms Gallagher, is apparently uninterested in or tired of asking some more hard questions of an uninterested Andrew Barr.

The *Report on the review of ACT government events and festivals* prepared by Peter Loxton and Associates pulls no punches and confirms for us, as if we need further confirmation after their litany of failures, that this government clearly has little capacity to devise an effective approach to anything, let alone to tourism matters. Even the master of spin, the minister for tourism, will find it difficult to put a positive spin on this report.

While this is a wake-up call to this government, I think it is also a wake-up call to the ACT community to finally see through the spin that has been created by the Stanhope government over the past decade and which you, Madam Assistant Speaker, and the Greens seem to be happy to keep endorsing. But it seems it is time for the ACT community to see through this charade and to realise that no amount of spin, no number of Barr backflips, can cover the reality. The reality is that this government lacks vision, lacks policy, lacks strategy, lacks coordination and lacks discipline. I think “discipline” is one we can add as well. Perhaps this is why the Chief Minister has made the very un-chief-minister-like decision to leave his troops from the left and the right floundering while he takes his holiday overseas, bike-riding in Spain, while in Canberra the threads begin to unravel and reveal that the emperor has no new clothes or new ideas, for that matter.

I thank Mr Smyth for bringing his motion before us today and urge our Assembly colleagues to join us and call on the ACT government to set out what action the ACT government is taking to respond to these adverse findings by Peter Loxton and Associates. I also thank Mr Rattenbury for his amendments, which I understand Mr Smyth will be accepting.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4.06): In estimates this year, we asked these questions of the minister: where was the event strategy? Where was the accommodation strategy? Where was the attraction strategy? We got an answer that was very unsatisfactory and, in the dissenting report that Mr Seselja and I put forward, recommendations 3.20.1 and 3.20.22 talk about a need for a strategy for attractions, events and accommodation.

These are important. These are the three pillars, in many ways, of the future of a tourism industry and are about looking to the future and realising the potential of the current assets we have both in the built form and in the intellectual capability of the people that we have in the ACT. The government laments often the lack of an economic base but this is one area of the economic base that could be expanded significantly without a great deal of effort. But what it does require is leadership. What it does require is a strategy. And that is what we are asking of the government today.

One of my concerns is that we now know that somewhere between five and 15 months ago the minister for tourism did get a draft event strategy and nothing has happened with it. We have not seen it. We were told in May it was before the government. So I assume it is still before the government five months later. In the Loxton report which has been received, there is a section that talks about leadership. That could well and truly be aimed at the minister for tourism. The delays are unacceptable and are without valid reason.

There are some fears in the community about what the report may mean in terms of funding. Some groups have raised with me concerns that it may see the diversion of tourism dollars or dollars that are currently being spent on actual events into the bureaucracy. It is something that I will certainly monitor closely because we know the minister, Mr Barr, during estimates on 26 May this year, when we were asking him about this, said, "There will be no further funding for events in this term of government."

We have a review that says, "Develop a calendar of events"—some are for spring and autumn in particular—"and look at something for summer and winter." But, according to Mr Barr's statement, it will be done within existing resources. The plan proposes an additional three committees. It sounds a bit bureaucratic to me. I am sure the point should be that we need to be working towards the outcomes that we desire and then set up a structure to meet those outcomes, rather than say, "Let us set up some bureaucracies that will give us an outcome." It is cart-before-the-horse stuff.

What do we want to achieve? How far do we want to take this? What is the potential? How do we realise that? How do we get the dividend from that? How does the community get the benefit from it? How does the industry grow under it? We should not say, "Let us set up another three committees."

I think we all agree it should be streamlined. Mr Barr and I might even agree on that some day. But to say we are going to streamline it and then put what could be potentially three speed humps in front of the streamlining process seems a bit odd to me. And it will be interesting to see, when the government give us their plan in February, how they address that.

This is an opportunity to get the industry well and truly involved. I have the minutes from the meeting in 2005 where the industry sat around and said: "What do we want? Here are the attractions. Here are the events. Here is the training. Here is the infrastructure." If the minister has not got the minutes of that meeting, I can get them to him. Most of this is still relevant today because most of it has not been done.

Mr Barr: They are hopelessly out of date.

MR SMYTH: "They are hopelessly out of date," says the minister. There you go. We are just going to write it off. Without even reading it, you just write it off. The top two recommendations, Minister Barr, are for an Indigenous gallery and an Indigenous museum of some description. "Hopelessly out of date"! We just opened one but it is hopelessly out of date. That is probably why.

The only negative person here today has been Mr Barr, in many ways. Even Ms Gallagher could not rise to it. She said, "Mr Smyth said a few negative things." But she could not point to a single word that I had said. But there is Mr Barr, as always. It has been a constructive debate, apart from Mr Barr. It is about moving towards something very special, and that is the future of the ACT tourism industry.

But there are funds. There are the dollars. In particular, there is a reference:

It is strongly suggested that this funding should be wrapped into the development of a new Canberra Festival ...

So there are questions about taking it from the government's autumn festival. Is the autumn festival disappearing and a Canberra festival appearing? Is the autumn festival staying and then some of the money going to a Canberra festival?

There are concerns that additional bureaucracy and wrapping tourism dollars into something else will lead to a lessening of the budget for tourism. That would be unfortunate and, I truly believe, unacceptable.

Concerns have also been raised with me about the lack of consultation during the process. I have asked a number of the accommodation providers whether they were consulted and I am yet to find one who said that the accommodation industry was asked for their opinion on how these events would work. A number of those people have said to me that in spring and in autumn—

Mr Barr: Because it was not about tourism, Brendan, it was about community events.

MR SMYTH: Mr Barr says it was not about them. It is about them because the report actually talks—

Mr Barr: The Loxton review is about events, not just tourism events. Didn't you listen to anything I said?

MR SMYTH: He says it is not about tourism. Events and festivals are tourism. Mr Barr said earlier, "Some of these things have little or no tourism potential." The question is: have you tried? How do you know that? Have you talked to the accommodation sector, for instance, and asked them how it affects them? When there is a festival or something on, does it get people out and while they are out they go to another attraction? I would suspect the minister does not know because a lot of people I speak to see the potential in some of the smaller community events as things that build. Mr Barr said: "Floriade started as a small event. Look at it now."

You will not know until you have got a strategy to test, under reasonable grounds—and the Loxton report suggests economic and community benefit would be the two—

Mr Barr: But surely not even you are suggesting that the Father's Day event is a tourism event?

MR SMYTH: No, I am not suggesting that. That is the negativity of the minister: "Are you suggesting that every event will become a tourism event?" No, I did not say that. You know I did not say it. But Mr Negative over there, the man who cannot ever be wrong, has to make ridiculous statements every time we say it. The man who can never be wrong, the man who can never apologise and the man who cannot stand up and admit his mistakes, is lecturing me and others in this place. We did not hear from him earlier in the week, when the backflip was performed on his behalf by the department. "It is all the department's fault." That is the calibre of this man. He cannot stand up and say, "I have got it wrong."

Give Ms Gallagher her due—and I have said this several times—she got something wrong in this place one day and she did the right thing. She came back the next day and made the apology and corrected the record. Mr Barr is never seen when he is wrong. His sitting there, giving us a lecture, is most unfortunate, particularly when most people in this debate have been quite positive. That is the problem.

To get back to accommodation, any event, any festival, has the potential to have an effect on the accommodation sector but it was not consulted. On at least three different pages, it says that it will be critical to take account of the availability of accommodation. But Mr Barr says they did not have to be consulted. These can greatly assist in ensuring even more and consistent demand for accommodation. That will have an impact on this sector. This is my favourite, page 21, paragraph 6:

It will also be essential to plan future accommodation and other infrastructure requirements for tourism and events.

It does have an impact. Mr Loxton says it does. He says, “Plan for it, get ready for it, it is coming.” If we build this up, one of the things you have to account for is where they will sleep. Will they be like the people who came to the *Masterpieces*, which was fabulous, but did not stay because they could not get a bed? That is the problem. You need to plan for all three. I look forward to seeing these plans.

The Assembly has called on the government to do this. I expect the government to deliver in February their response to Loxton and their plan for festivals and events. I expect to see their plan for developing new attractions in the ACT and I expect to see tabled in this place their plan for the accommodation industry in the ACT as per the wishes of the Assembly expressed today.

Mr Barr: Why don't we nationalise it? The accommodation industry, we will nationalise it. There's a thought!

MR SMYTH: Again, more insincere comments, insipid comments, from the minister who has no interest whatsoever in this portfolio. And that is a shame.

I certainly thank the Greens for their support in this. I note that there has been no massive attack or counterattack or any reasons put forward by the government for this not to go ahead; so we take that as tacit agreement that it will go ahead. I look forward to seeing tabled in this place in February three plans that will assist the attractions, the events and the accommodation industries in the ACT go forward.

Amendments agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Health—breast cancer

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (4.16): I move:

That this Assembly notes:

- (1) that October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month;
- (2) that according to the 2010 ACT Chief Health Officer's report, the most common cause of cancer related death in females was breast cancer at 18.6 per cent of all deaths;
- (3) the recently released Breast Cancer Treatment Group ten year report indicates that the ACT has the highest age-standardised incidence of breast cancer in Australia, however despite this, breast cancer outcomes in the ACT are excellent, both in terms of disease-free survival and overall mortality from breast cancer;
- (4) that BreastScreen ACT and South East NSW is a population-based screening program aimed at detecting abnormalities early for well women over the age of 40 and targeted specifically to those women in the 50-69 age group;
- (5) that in the 2009-10 financial year, BreastScreen ACT and NSW exceeded their target of 12 000 screens by 909 screens (8 per cent);
- (6) The Canberra Hospital now provides a Diagnostic Breast Imaging Service which will provide x-ray and ultrasound assessment for patients for the first time in the ACT; and
- (7) the recent rollout of the \$5.7 million digital breast screening technology across BreastScreen clinics in the ACT which will provide high quality images and will enable electronic processing of screening images, improving diagnostic times for women in the ACT.

As many of you in this place will be aware, October is known as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and Pink Ribbon Day is Monday, 25 October—that is, next Monday. Breast cancer is the most common invasive cancer in females and is responsible for the highest death rate. Although uncommon in males, one in 583 men may be affected. Over 12,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia each year. Sadly, more than 2,500 women are expected to lose their battle with breast cancer each year.

In the ACT, breast cancer represents 34.5 per cent of all cancers, with an average of 205 new cases per year over the five-year period 2002-06. Yearly rates have not changed significantly since 2002. Breast cancer accounted for five per cent of all deaths in women in the ACT over the same five-year period 2002-06. In this period, one in 10 women in the ACT developed breast cancer before 75 years of age and one in seven before 85 years of age. Rates of breast cancer in the ACT were significantly higher than the national rates between 2002 and 2004. Since the year 2000, rates of breast cancer in the ACT have been consistently higher than the national rates, although this difference was only statistically significant in the years 2000 to 2004.

These women are our mothers, grandmothers, daughter, sisters, aunts, cousins, nieces, work colleagues and friends. For example, my daughter-in-law in Alice Springs was thought to have a possible malignant tumour in her breast tissue not so long ago. However, and fortunately, after undergoing further tests, this was found not to be the

case. She has close a family history of breast cancer, so this was extremely stressful for her, as it was for all her family, as you can imagine. I also have a close friend who, about two years ago, had a double mastectomy. She is recovering well I am glad to say. Again, she had a family history. I am sure I am not the only one who has detected breast lumps and have gone through the necessary further tests and have had that anxious waiting time before a diagnosis has been confirmed or ruled out. I am sure I am not the only one in this place who has lost friends through breast cancer.

Increasing age, family history, inheritance of mutations in certain genes, exposure to natural and administered female hormones, obesity due to poor diet and lack of exercise, and excess alcohol consumption are all associated with breast cancer. Women in the ACT have a high prevalence of other risk factors for breast cancer compared with the Australian population. These include being older at the birth of their first child, a higher proportion of women who have never given birth, a higher socioeconomic status and a higher proportion of alcohol consumption at irregular or risky levels.

What then are the likely outcomes following a diagnosis of breast cancer? If the cancer is limited to the breast, 98 per cent of all patients will survive. Survival is considered as being free of cancer five years after the cancer is detected. This figure excludes those with breast cancer who die from other diseases. If the cancer has spread to the regional lymph nodes, survival rates are 83 per cent. On average, 35 women in the ACT die each year from breast cancer-related illness. In 2002-06, the crude mortality rate was 21 deaths per 100,000 females.

According to the 2010 ACT Chief Health Officer's report, the most common cause of cancer related deaths in females was breast cancer, at 18.6 per cent of all deaths. Mortality rates have remained stable over time and are similar to rates in the rest of Australia's population. The risk of dying from breast cancer in the ACT was one in 61 females before the age of 65 years and one in 41 females before the age of 85 years.

Survival from breast cancer has significantly improved. Over the 10 years between 1995 and 2004, survival has increased from 87 per cent in 1995-99 to 92 per cent in 2000-04. The ACT has one of the highest survival rates of all jurisdictions.

Unfortunately there is no proven method of prevention. Women at higher risk, particularly those with very strong family history, can however benefit from hormones, such as Tamoxifen, usually administered over five years. Bilateral prophylactic mastectomy can be considered in high risk women with genome mutations.

The best defence remains in early detection through self-examination and screening. This is why it is so important for women to take this seriously and make sure they undertake the recommended screening. Breast screening every two years is recommended for women aged 50 to 69 years, although it is available to women from 40 years of age. Younger women in high risk groups may also be screened.

Between 1996 and 2006, an average of 55 to 60 per cent of women in the targeted age group—that is 50 to 69 years—participated in the ACT national breast screen

program. This does not include women who choose to be screened in the private sector. The detection rate of the ACT breast screen program for small or all-size invasive breast cancers in the target women was higher than the aims for the national accreditation standard and higher than that for the Australian detection rate. During 1996 to 2003, the ACT breast screen program had high program sensitivity—that is, 90 to 95 per cent—indicating that few cancers are missed by screening.

Depending on the type of breast cancer and its severity, treatment ranges from surgery to removal of all or part of the breast and surrounding lymph nodes, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. During 1997 to 2008, of the breast cancer patients who had invasive cancer and who underwent surgery in the ACT and south-east New South Wales region, about half had mastectomies—that is, 53 per cent—and the rest had breast conserving surgery—that is, 47 per cent. Over 90 per cent of these patients received additional treatment such as chemotherapy, hormone therapy, radiation therapy and immunotherapy. Most of the small-size invasive breast cancers were detected by the breast screen program—that is, 50 per cent. Detection by other mammogram screening programs was 16 per cent and/or patient self-examination, 29 per cent.

As I have said, in the absence of prevention, early detection is vital. BreastScreen ACT South East New South Wales is a population-based screening program aimed at detecting abnormalities early for well women over the age of 40 and targeted specifically to women in the 50 to 69 year age group. This is a vital service, as breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer for women in the ACT as well as women Australia-wide.

Early detection of breast cancer can improve the chances of successful treatment and recovery and can result in greater treatment options for women. Early detection is also important in lowering the potential need for more aggressive surgical procedures. Research has shown that regular screening of women in the target age group of 50 to 69 years has been effective in reducing deaths from breast cancer through early detection.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report of May 2008 shows that in 2005 more than half of the invasive breast cancers detected through the breast screening program were small diameter cancers. The ACT Health annual report for 2009-10 shows that BreastScreen ACT South East New South Wales exceeded their target of 12,000 screens by 999 screens—over target by eight per cent. The report states that the higher numbers are a reflection of the ongoing strong demand for breast screening services.

I would like to congratulate the government and ACT Health on all their initiatives over the past few years in relation to services that support detection and treatment of breast cancer. These initiatives include the upgrade of the BreastScreen ACT and South East New South Wales mammogram X-ray machines from analogue to digital machines, which I understand provides lower dose screening and higher quality images that can be transferred and viewed electronically by clinics and other medical professionals.

Another fantastic initiative is the new diagnostic breast imaging service which was officially launched this month. Run through the Canberra Hospital medical imaging

department, I understand that this service provides mammography, breast ultrasound and biopsy, and breast MRI to women who are symptomatic, high risk or receiving post-surgery follow-up. These women previously had to access these services from a private provider, which, of course, is often costly.

Once again I congratulate ACT Health and the government on their fantastic services that are provided to combat this terrible disease. I thank all the staff who work either in direct service delivery or care behind the scenes in providing screening or working with women undergoing treatment.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month each October and the Pink Ribbon Day on 25 October is an important opportunity to promote self-examination and screening. It is also a time to recognise and thank all those in the non-government sector who provide support services for those who have been diagnosed, such as Bosom Buddies, the wig service, Dragons Abreast and also groups such as the ACT Eden-Monaro Cancer Support Group.

This is a time we can recognise and join with those who are raising important funds for research by attending breakfasts or taking part in other fundraising activities such as the Pink Ribbon Motorcycle Ride. I would particularly like to thank the numerous volunteers, who are often survivors of breast cancer themselves, who work tirelessly to raise much-needed funds for research or in providing important practical and emotional support to women and their families.

I also recognise there are many women living with and undergoing treatment for breast cancer, and these women and their families face numerous issues in relation to living with cancer on a daily basis, not just during one month of the year. This is why it is so important that the ACT government has taken the measures that it has taken. I urge all members in the Assembly to support this important initiative.

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (4.28): I would like to firstly thank Ms Porter for bringing this important motion forward today and thank her for her words. It is important to indicate that the opposition will be supporting this motion. Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which we are in at the moment, is an important tool for exposing and promoting the importance of breast cancer detection, prevention and treatment in the community. It is an international annual event that aims to increase the awareness of the disease and raise crucial funds for research.

Breast cancer is indiscriminate. There is no reason why our mothers, our sisters, our daughters or our aunts may be struck by this cancer. Whilst vital research has brought us valuable information on risk factors and preventative measures, we still cannot predict who may be the victim of breast cancer and when.

One in nine Australian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer before the age of 85. The incidence of breast cancer has risen by 20 per cent in the last 10 years and mortality rates have remained largely unchanged. Traditionally we have thought of breast cancer as being an affliction of older women, but there is a growing awareness that breast cancer also affects younger women—struck in their prime, raising young families, travelling the world or climbing the corporate ladder. Approximately 25 per cent of breast cancer diagnosis is for those less than 50 years of age.

Whilst the percentage of young women diagnosed with breast cancer may be small, the impact is huge. Diagnosis for young women is difficult and often thwarted by the fact that they are perceived as low risk. They are not caught by national screening programs and therefore community awareness of the need for early detection is even more vital. I congratulate the ACT Cancer Council on their Girls Night In events, which raise awareness amongst young women whilst also being a valuable fundraising opportunity. I take this opportunity to note that Brigitte Morten, who has joined the staff in my office, held a Girls Night In event last Friday, in which she raised \$300 for the Cancer Council. I congratulate her on that event.

In the ACT we are fortunate to experience one of the highest rates of breast cancer survival in Australia. However, we also experience one of the highest rates of breast cancer diagnosis in Australia. Every year in the ACT, 200 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in women and one new case in men. A 2008 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report predicted that there would be an increase of 22 per cent in the number of all cancers being diagnosed in the ACT each year. This is a result of not only our growing population but also our ageing population.

BreastScreen ACT and New South Wales exceeded their targets for the number of breast cancer screenings in the 2009-10 financial year. I congratulate them on doing so. Whilst this may be good news for the service, it does not reflect the fact that there are still disturbing gaps in the government's provision of breast screening. The percentage of women in the target range of 50 to 69 years who have had a breast screen in the past 24 months is unchanged.

In the 2008-09 financial year, only 55 per cent of women in the target range of 50 to 69 years had a breast screen in the past 24 months. In the 2009 financial year, this percentage is unchanged. This is a frightening result given that the average age of first diagnosis for breast cancer is 60, and that 51 per cent of all breast cancer diagnoses occur in this age range. The need for focused policy and awareness of the need for screening in this age range is widely recognised internationally and domestically, but the ACT government has been ineffectual in actually bringing about necessary changes to ensure that this group is receiving adequate services.

Unfortunately, in the same year 70 per cent of women who requested a breast screening appointment did not receive that appointment within 28 days—not only failing ACT Health's target but failing the women of the ACT. With an increase in the demand and need for these services, along with the highest incidence of breast cancer in Australia, we must be proactive in service provision.

The ACT government have been quick to promote that they are establishing new facilities and investment in digital breast screening technology. However, without the staff for these facilities, their impact on breast screening rates, and therefore survival rates, will be minimal. The ACT Health annual report for 2009-10 states that, with the shortage of radiographers, there will continue to be an impact on waiting time for appointments and assessments for breast screening services. Without a focused effort by the ACT government to train and recruit radiographers in the ACT, there will be little or no gain.

This is why I foreshadow an amendment that I have circulated and will be moving that notes the ACT government's continued failure to meet breast screen participation rates for women aged 50 to 69 and the failure to meet the target for women to receive a breast screen within 28 days of making an appointment. I believe that the Greens will not be supporting that amendment. I am not sure what the response will be from the government—

Ms Gallagher: Did you talk to us?

MR HANSON: I circulated the amendment. I would encourage both the Greens and the government to support that amendment. It simply outlines where the government is not achieving some targets. The motion as it stands outlines some of the successes, and I congratulate the government on those, but it is important that in any motion, in any debate in this place, we acknowledge not only where things are going right but where there are gaps in the service and where we are not achieving the targets.

If we were to pass a motion in this place that did not acknowledge the fact that there are gaps in the provision of service at the moment and that we are not meeting some important targets for women in particular age groups who are not getting the screening, or getting the screening within a certain period of time, that would be disappointing. I ask the Greens to reconsider their position and I encourage the government to support the amendment.

Cancer support agencies in the ACT can do only so much. They can raise awareness and provide information on the need for breast screening tests, but without the backup of the government their work is redundant. We cannot let the valuable work of the ACT cancer support agencies go without results. The thousands of volunteer hours that go into awareness programs in the ACT cannot be wasted because the government cannot back them up with targeted screening and adequate screening facilities being made available.

From the government's perspective, I believe that there is always more that can be done. Even though the government is failing to meet its current targets in some areas, I ask for us to consider whether these self-determined targets for breast cancer screening are in some cases too conservative. With the growing awareness of the burden that breast cancer places on young women, and also men diagnosed with breast cancer, it may be time to evaluate whether we are setting our targets too low in some cases. Breast cancer is the most common cancer amongst Australian women, accounting for almost a third of all cancer diagnoses. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, breast cancer is the most common cancer experienced. And for men, the number of men diagnosed with breast cancer each year between 1996 and 2006 almost doubled.

As the majority of breast cancer in young women is the result of genetic predisposition, we can enhance the areas of high-risk surveillance, genetic counsellor services and genetic testing. We can aid research into effective screening techniques for those less than 40 years of age and research into the devastating impacts that the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer have on fertility and the increased risk of

further cancer development. The focus of breast screening targets and the awareness of early detection could be expanded so that breast cancer in young women is detected earlier, increasing their chances of survival and decreasing the rate of subsidiary complications. It is important to remember that the breast screening policy of the current government would have done little to help people like Kylie Minogue or Jane McGrath, the people who are now seen as the human face of breast cancer in Australia.

The US preventative task force last year departed from their longstanding recommendation that women aged 40 and older should be screened every one or two years. They now recommend breast screening for all women under 50. In Australia the BreastScreen Australia Evaluation Advisory Committee recommended to the federal Health Ministers Advisory Council that women aged 45 to 75 should be targeted, which is significantly broader than ACT Health's target age group of 50 to 69. Recent research into the mammogram program provided in Sweden showed that breast cancer mortality for women aged 40 to 49 was significantly reduced with regular mammograms. Studies in Australia have found that providing free mammograms for the currently targeted age group of 50 to 69 years has decreased the mortality rates by 21 to 28 per cent. Imagine the results if this program was extended further.

Breast screening should form the focus of our breast cancer policy. While awareness and information on self-examination is important, research by the Medical Journal of Australia shows that screening has the highest impact on mortality rates.

Across Australia, the participation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in screening programs is lower than among their Indigenous peers, with only 38.1 per cent of Indigenous women having received a breast screening test in the last 24 months. It can be argued that more focused and tailored programs could increase this participation rate.

It is clear that there is much more that can be done in the ACT to reach current targets and that ACT Health should consider expanding current programs to ensure a more focused and effective fight against breast cancer. It is important to acknowledge the part that passionate advocates play in bringing breast cancer to the forefront of our minds, some of whom are survivors and others who are, sadly, no longer with us. The fact that I have risen today to speak on this topic is the result of years of dedication, thousands of hours of volunteer work and an unrelenting commitment by many to change the perception of breast cancer.

Once, breast cancer was a secret women's problem to be talked about in hushed tones; now, it is publicised and discussed on almost every level and by almost every individual. I can only imagine that those early advocates could only dream that Old Parliament House would be lit up in pink or that local AFL players would take to the field with pink ribbons around their arms. These passionate people, largely volunteers, largely removed the veil from breast cancer and gave it the level of awareness that is, sadly, all too necessary.

In the ACT we are lucky to have passionate advocates amongst us. Not only do they raise vital awareness in the community but their support for local breast cancer

sufferers is invaluable. The ACT Cancer Council provides valuable work and support through research, patient support and the provision of information, prevention, treatment and advocacy for women living with breast cancer. The ACT Eden Monaro Cancer Support Group offers practical, emotional and financial support to breast cancer patients and their families to help them through the tumultuous time of diagnosis and treatment.

Bosom Buddies and Dragons Abreast ACT are great examples of non-profit organisations that support women living with breast cancer, working to provide emotional and practical support whilst raising awareness in the community. I would like to mention that there are a number of people in this room who will often get out and support those organisations. The linkages among the Assembly in a tripartisan sense are to be welcomed. I remember last year going to the Dragons Abreast event, which I got this pink bracelet from. Kate Lundy and I were there presenting the prizes together, and I will be there with Senator Kate Lundy at the Bosom Buddies event on Monday night in recognition.

I know that other members of the Assembly from all parties will be participating in many events over the coming week to support, recognise and acknowledge the hard work done by the many hundreds, or maybe thousands, of volunteers in recognition of the people suffering from breast cancer in the ACT. I do acknowledge that this is a very tripartisan endeavour. The organisations I spoke about are just the tip of the iceberg of organisations and individuals who do work in the ACT community to support those living with breast cancer. Their work is often unseen to us but it is very precious to many.

Whilst breast cancer may wage its war on an individual's body, it will be defeated only by a team. In the ACT, this team is made up of caring practitioners, from doctors to nurses and radiologists, who strive for the best medical outcomes; of the family and friends who rally around to support the individual in their fight; and of the many volunteer-based agencies that jump in to provide the vital information and emotional and financial support.

I want to reiterate my support and admiration for the very hardworking and dedicated staff that we have throughout the ACT, and in particular those dedicated and hardworking staff in ACT Health who make a real difference for people suffering from breast cancer and who aid young women and older women by supporting them in preventative measures. I have been lucky enough to meet a number of them through the opportunities I have had to visit ACT Health, and I thank the minister for her gracious support in allowing me to go out and meet with staff through those opportunities.

As we celebrate Breast Cancer Awareness Month this October, I ask that we not only recognise individual survivors and those we have, sadly, lost, but also acknowledge these many unspoken heroes who have striven to bring breast cancer awareness to the forefronts of our mind.

I reiterate that the Canberra Liberals welcome Ms Porter's motion. We will be supporting it. I have circulated an amendment which I ask the government and the Greens to consider supporting. I move:

Insert the following new paragraphs”

“(5A) that the ACT Government has continued to fail in meeting its target for breast screen participation for women aged 50-69 years;

(5B) that the ACT Government has failed to meet its target in providing women with a breast screen within 28 days of making an appointment;”.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (4.43): I will speak to the motion and the amendment. I thank Ms Porter for bringing on this motion today. The Greens will support the motion. The Greens recognise the distressing impact breast cancer can have on both women and men, their families and their community. The Greens agree that the government has been providing quality treatment and services to people experiencing breast cancer and we note the results of the 10-year quality assurance project that was recently made public.

We do have a high rate of diagnosis in the ACT. Perhaps because of the successful diagnostic services provided, detected malignancies are becoming smaller, with fewer lymph nodes involved. It is hard to know from which angle to approach the subject of breast cancer because while there has been great success in improving treatment, there remain a number of people who still lose their lives to the disease.

Over the 10 years that the recent study was conducted, 176 out of 2,829 patients that were being followed lost their lives to breast cancer. Behind every woman or sometimes man that is lost, there is a family and community that is left to cope. As Ms Porter said, there will be few people who do not know someone who has had breast cancer or lost their life to breast cancer. My auntie actually lost her life to breast cancer; so I have seen the impact it has on family and friends.

This can be especially devastating where a woman did not have the chance to live a full life and when the immediate family left behind have difficulty coping. While I acknowledge that the government is providing quality treatment, there are some areas of treatment that Bosom Buddies, a very important voluntary and peer support service, is concerned about.

For example, here in the ACT we have three breast cancer nurses employed by Calvary Health Care. One of these nurses is currently on extended leave and the remaining two must meet a high level of demand. When one of the two remaining nurses does go on holidays or takes leave, there is only one nurse left to carry the burden. The role these nurses find themselves in appears to be very stressful and there is concern about the sustainability of the workflow for the staff.

The lymphoedema clinic at Calvary hospital located with the physiotherapy department was established several years ago after advocacy by local groups including Bosom Buddies and local members of the Breast Cancer Network of Australia. Bosom Buddies volunteers were able to raise funds and donate a laser machine to the clinic. Today the clinic serves about 25 new referrals every month. Once a woman experiences lymphoedema she will most likely need ongoing support and treatment by the clinic.

In recent times the demand for this service has become untenable for the two lymphoedema physiotherapists at the Calvary clinic. The results of this are problematic for patients. In a recent letter to the Minister for Health, Bosom Buddies pointed out that women with symptoms of lymphoedema are advised to seek treatment early, but in some cases they are being asked to wait a number of weeks where in the past they could have accessed the service sooner.

This does mean that there is a potential for conditions to advance before they receive intervention treatment. Women may also wait a number of weeks for appointments to get much needed replacement lymphoedema sleeves. There are very limited other sources for them in the ACT. Due to constantly growing demand, patients cannot get frequent enough laser and other treatment from the lymphoedema physiotherapist. Laser treatment is in fact rarely offered to patients due to the limited number of trained staff and the ever-increasing patient numbers.

Bosom Buddies is also aware of new methods for early diagnosis that are being used in many hospitals in Sydney and other parts of New South Wales. This method is known as bioimpedance and uses special equipment. When ACT Health management were told that this equipment was providing best practice diagnosis, management advised that people would have to most likely look into fund raising options to obtain the equipment. I do hope that a better and more sustainable outcome can be worked out.

I would like to touch on the social determinants of health, because this concept recognises the different health outcomes people from income profiles have. The lower income profiles, of course, are suffering lower life expectancy. Research based on US data has found that the lower income women are less likely to survive breast cancer than their affluent counterparts, most likely because of later diagnosis and lower rates of recommended treatment.

When socioeconomics were considered alone in the research, women in the poorest areas were almost one-third more likely to die during the study period than those living in higher income areas. Although I do appreciate that the US does have a different type of healthcare system to our own, one could expect that the findings could possibly translate to a degree to our local population, especially given the high cost of living we do experience in the ACT.

Being diagnosed with breast cancer is expensive. Women have to pay for an ultrasound, mammogram and two needle biopsies as well as a number of GP visits and specialist visits to receive a diagnosis. If they do not have the funds available to afford this, they may forgo various tests, living with the fact that they may have a breast cancer but cannot afford diagnosis. If a woman has a family history of breast cancer and wishes to be checked prior to the age of 40 in order to be precautionary, it is also sometimes the case that she may not be able to afford some of the screening.

Once a person is diagnosed as having breast cancer there is the associated cost of treatment, doctors appointments, medication during treatment, time off work, childcare and ongoing hormone treatment. With regard to women having

mastectomies, women can receive Medicare payments for prosthetics but they have to make the payment up front and then be reimbursed. The prosthetics are not cheap and sometimes women cannot afford them.

For a time Bosom Buddies were able to run a loan scheme where they assisted women with the up-front payment, but as this scheme required ongoing fundraising, Bosom Buddies were not able to continue with the service. There is also the issue of follow-up for patients post cancer. Until recently screening was very expensive for women but a new service has been opened by the government that covers this. I have no doubt that many women will be very thankful for this.

Looking at the health services, in particular cancer services, that are provided by the ACT government, we believe that the government is doing a good job overall with regard to providing breast cancer treatment. In fact, there are a number of other areas of the Health portfolio that could require the same level of attention.

Recent research has shown that lung cancer is overtaking breast cancer as the highest cause of mortality for women in both New South Wales and Victoria. This is not yet the case in the ACT but it is a trend that may occur locally. Although the rate of men dying from lung cancer has declined since its high in the early 1980s, women's mortality rates are only just reaching their peak. This is because women's smoking rates were at their highest much later than that of men. I should also note that suicide is the highest cause of mortality for women under the age of 34 nationally. That is an area that requires greater attention.

According to our latest Chief Health Officer's report, breast cancer remains the largest cause of cancer-related death for women at 18.6 per cent of all deaths, followed by colorectal cancer at 13.5 per cent and lung cancer at 12.6 per cent. The Chief Health Officer notes that female breast cancer has shown a statistically significant increase in survival rates. This is because of the good work that has been done in advancing the treatment of breast cancer. Other groups are looking to adopt the same model.

I note that the Prostate Cancer Support Group is seeking support from the government to have positions similar to those of the breast cancer nurses. The support group has put in budget submissions asking for three special prostate cancer nurses to be appointed and funded by ACT Health. Prostate cancer has become the most prolific form of cancer when looking at the rates of cancer for men. That is compared to women as well.

Given that two of the five urologists in the ACT recently retired and as a territory and a nation we are making a move to better utilise the knowledge and assistance that nurses can provide, the funding of three specialist prostate cancer nurses for the ACT would significantly assist those men who are dealing with prostate cancer treatment and require much greater information and assistance in making choices about that treatment and dealing with the side effects.

Possibly many groups are looking to a campaign such as the highly successful Pink Ribbon campaign to use as a model for raising awareness and increasing support. It has been a long-term campaign by many women to get to this point. Breast cancer in

the early 20th century was a dramatically different disease from what we see today. Women very often watched lumps in their breasts grow without seeking help and there was no sense of urgency about what to do because many women did see it as a death sentence. By the time women made it to the doctor, tumours were often at a size which was untreatable.

In the mid-60s and 70s, however, there was a significant feminist movement in relation to health and women became much more actively involved as consumers. A feminist healthcare movement started to take an active role in addressing breast cancer. Many physicians were men and they decided during the surgery whether a radical mastectomy should be performed. But by the 1970s, as feminism and women's liberation were emerging, this type of arrangement was increasingly unsatisfactory for many women.

Women had also begun to question other areas of their health care. Most notably, women had begun to question the ability of male doctors to make decisions during reproduction and when women were giving birth. In the case of breast cancer, the same occurred. Women became involved in deciding what type of treatment they should receive. The women suffering breast cancer at that stage did much through their activism for all women, no matter what disease they were suffering from.

The activism informed other women through magazine and newspaper articles that they should ask their doctor questions, they should research the issues themselves and share their experiences with other women. The improvement in breast cancer treatment over the last 50 years is a testament to those women who were involved in the campaign and I do support the words that Mr Hanson noted about all those women that, through their tireless work, have really had an impact on the sort of campaigns we see now and the awareness that has been raised about breast cancer for women across the world.

I will speak briefly to Mr Hanson's amendment to the motion. We will not be supporting the amendment from Mr Hanson. While it may be partly true, there are mitigating reasons for the two points. Point (5A) is a national target and the ACT is the highest performer in the country against this target. Regarding point (5B), this is typically due to the way that breast screens are booked.

We did speak to Bosom Buddies about what were the key issues for them currently. I outlined these earlier in my speech but I will just say that they said the key issues for them were regarding the number of breast cancer nurses, the lymphoedema clinic at Calvary hospital and also the access to the lymphoedema physiotherapist.

I do take Mr Hanson's point that there are still issues that need to be addressed. I have actually raised a number of these in my speech, but there are reasons behind the two parts of the amendment put forward by Mr Hanson that are not straightforward. I actually think it could be potentially misleading if they were included.

I would just like to note that the amendment was not circulated prior to being tabled in the chamber. I think that it would have been a common courtesy, as is typically the practice, to circulate it, particularly to Ms Porter, as she was the mover of this motion.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.56): I will speak to both the motion and the amendment. I do thank Ms Porter for bringing this important motion here today. Indeed, I thank the other speakers who have gone before me and who have spoken very well on the issue of breast cancer, its impact on our community and its impact on families.

It is also an opportunity to acknowledge the work that is done in the government, non-government and private sector in relation to supporting women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer and who are recovering from that diagnosis or who are being treated for that diagnosis. I think that is really what Breast Cancer Awareness Month—indeed, 25 October is Breast Cancer Awareness Day—does. It actually provides us with that opportunity.

The government has been working hard to identify, and to work with those stakeholders who also identify, current gaps and pressure in our system. Indeed, the opening of the new Canberra Hospital diagnostic breast imaging service was very much a gap that had been identified by women who had recovered from breast cancer and who had to undergo often yearly or two-yearly X-ray and ultrasound assessments to follow their progress post treatment. For many women, cost is an inhibitor to seeking those tests and follow-up. Not having a public service was identified as a gap, and a gap that I agreed with. Indeed, we sought to fill that gap and we have opened the new service in the last month, but it had been operating for some time before that.

We have also moved to improve the quality of the technology used in the BreastScreen clinics in the ACT to allow for improved and also speedier diagnoses for women. Almost \$6 million has gone into improving the technology over three sites—or two sites but in three services—for women undergoing breast screening. I had a look at that last week and was very much impressed with the technology and the partnerships that have been implemented to actually deliver that service to women.

Over the last three years we have committed significant additional funding to ACT Health for several initiatives, two of which I have just spoken on, to increase services for women in relation to the detection and treatment of breast cancer. We do provide an excellent service through BreastScreen ACT and South East New South Wales, as well as this new public diagnostic breast imaging service.

Unless they know a little bit about breast screening, people can misunderstand the role of BreastScreen. BreastScreen is a service for well women. So once you have been identified with an abnormality or a cancer that requires further treatment, you are no longer eligible to go through the BreastScreen service. It does provide a free screening service for women over the age of 40. However, our target years are women aged between 50 and 69.

I listened to Mr Hanson's comments around focusing more on younger women aged 40 to 50. There has been some recent work done. In fact, there was a national report done into how BreastScreen operates across the country that did look at this issue of targeting women 40 years and up and changing the target years. I think that amongst

the clinicians there are very strong and mixed views around whether that is the right thing to do, and whether for the small amount of women identified—small but still important—in the 40 to 50 years target group, that should be the focus of a free universal screening system. So it is not an easy one. Here in the ACT it is available for women. They do not get recalled. So between 40 and 50, it is at their own initiative to book a screen and then to follow up. But once you hit the target years, you are followed up every two years.

With the BreastScreen program, all mammograms are taken by specially trained female radiographers. All mammograms are read independently by two radiologists who are experienced in reading and interpreting breast X-rays. Assessment clinics for women who have been recalled for further tests are run by a multidisciplinary team, including radiographers, radiologists, breast surgeons, pathologists and nurse counsellors. Nurse counsellors are available at the clinic to provide support and information to women at any stage of the screening and assessment process.

Demand for breast screening services has been consistently high for several years now. In order to allow for those additional screenings and to provide better access for women who live on the south side of Canberra, we opened a new screening site at Phillip Health Centre in November 2008. The establishment of this screening site has allowed the program to increase both our screening and assessment capacity.

We also provided funding of almost \$6 million for the implementation of an integrated breast screen information system with a picture archival communication system and digital mammography equipment to support the operational environment of BreastScreen ACT and South East New South Wales. This solution resulted from a joint venture between the commonwealth-funded national digital mammography program and a single ACT Health project which is responsible for the establishment of streamlined business processes across BreastScreen ACT and South East New South Wales.

This project involves the replacement of all mammography equipment in the ACT from the current analog systems to a digital system and the establishment of a long-term archival system for image storage. All the women who are currently going to BreastScreen have had their previous screen loaded on this system, and what it means now is that when you have your next screen it comes up on the screen alongside the screen you had two years ago. As that archival system works, they will be able to bring up your last three screens plus your new one, so that the experts are able to see straightaway whether there have been any changes to tissue or other aspects of the breast when they are doing that screening.

That means during that screen, if they need to see more of a particular area, they can do that straightaway. That really does revolutionise the system when you think that at the moment the analog system is film based. It then gets couriered to Sydney for a second screening. This gives the opportunity to email those screens interstate and that turnaround time changes consistently.

I accept that in the area of cancer we certainly have to continue our work and do more. This is an area of growth. I completely agree with Ms Bresnan's comments around

lung cancer, which is why it is so important to keep tobacco control on our legislative agenda. Lung cancer and smoking-related cancers, the numbers of them and the peaking for women are extremely disturbing.

We will not support Mr Hanson's amendment. When we look at the latest data, the total breast screens target for the ACT is 12,000. At 31 March this year, it was 17 per cent above the annual target, and there is no doubt that the annual target will be and was exceeded. With respect to the total number of breast screens for women aged 50 to 69, we target 10½ thousand women. That target will be met. With respect to the results for women getting their breast screens within 28 days, the target is 100 per cent. At the end of the March quarter, it was 99 per cent for the year.

In the area of making an appointment for a breast screen within 28 days, I think that is a national measure but I am not sure it is the most useful measure. Our target is 90 per cent. By the end of March it was 30 per cent. It has been there for some time now. Some of that is to do with how women choose to have their appointments. Our experience is that they like to book ahead. So I am not sure how useful that is as a measure of performance. But I will take further advice on that.

With respect to the percentage of women receiving an assessment within 28 days, the target is 90 per cent and at the end of March it was 85 per cent. There was a slowdown in January, so we do expect that to pick up.

I think that, on the whole, BreastScreen ACT does a fabulous job. We work very hard to encourage women to undertake this screening program but it is a voluntary screening program. Certainly, discussions like this in the Assembly, along with the work that the breast cancer organisations do—and I pay my respects to Bosom Buddies and the other breast-care organisations—will go a long way to raising awareness and to encourage women to have their screens.

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (5.07): I thank members for their support for this motion. Mr Hanson spoke about the numbers of young women being diagnosed and the importance of self-examination. Mr Hanson also spoke about the number of screenings and the targets. I was glad to hear him also speak about the support groups but he did mention that they can do very little other than to raise awareness. I would suggest that, important as raising awareness is, it is definitely not the only area in which these groups are important. Their support of women living with cancer and their support of families are extremely important. Because of that awareness being so critical, it is very important that these groups continue to do their work in that awareness area.

Unfortunately—and I am sure members will not be surprised to hear me say this—even though we have a number of high-profile women who have recently been diagnosed and have been the subject of much publicity and there has been much discussion about breast cancer in the media, women still neglect to undergo regular screening. You meet people every day of the week who say that they have not had a screen perhaps ever in their lives or very infrequently. Often, it is a friend or a relative that can encourage women to take up the free screening that is available to them. We must also recognise that some women choose to pay privately for screening. Therefore, as I said before, those figures that are quoted do not tell the full story.

I thank Ms Bresnan for her support, for reinforcing the effect that this disease has on individuals and friends and, indeed, for sharing her own close family experience.

I thank the minister for her support and for the work she has undertaken in relation to detection and treatment of breast cancer. As I said in my speech, it is very pleasing to see the developments in this area of late. As the minister said, the jury is still out on the routine screening of younger women. However, I am sure that she will remain vigilant in keeping herself informed of developments in this area. Of course, we have much work to do, as she said, in all areas of cancer detection and in treatment for both women and men in order to achieve optimum results. However, as the minister said, she will continue to work on this area, as she has always done. I am really grateful for the work she has been doing, particularly with regard to the women's and children's hospital, which I think is a great advance.

I thank members for their support. We will not, as the minister has said, be supporting Mr Hanson's amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

Water—conservation

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (5:10): I seek leave to amend the notice standing in my name on the notice paper in the terms circulated. I point out that the revised version also has the full text so as to make it more explicit.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: I move the amended notice relating to water conservation and restrictions in the ACT:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT was on level three water restrictions for the period 16 December 2006 to 31 August 2010;
- (b) ACTEW Corporation eased water restrictions from level three to level two on 1 September 2010;
- (c) the ACT's water storage at that time was approximately 60 per cent of capacity; and
- (d) level two restrictions remain in force notwithstanding the ACT's water storage is approaching 90 per cent capacity;

(2) welcomes the decision, announced today, to end temporary water restrictions in favour of permanent water conservation measures as from 1 November 2010;

- (3) supports the objectives of National Water Week, which occurs from 17 to 23 October 2010, to raise public awareness and improve understanding of water issues in Australia; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) mount a public awareness campaign about permanent water conservation measures and the benefits such measures bring to the people of the ACT;
 - (b) in consultation with the public, conduct a review of water conservation and restriction measures to ensure such measures are contemporary to the:
 - (i) needs and aspirations of the community;
 - (ii) future growth of the ACT and the region; and
 - (iii) aims and objectives of the major water security projects;
 - (c) establish and publish clear points at which water restriction levels are triggered;
 - (d) assess and respond to the impact of the proposed Murray-Darling Basin Plan on future water restrictions for the ACT; and
 - (e) report to the Assembly on the matters outlined in parts 4(b), (4)(c) and 4(d) by the last sitting day in June 2011.

I thank members for their indulgence in granting leave. I had not anticipated that when, again, the Canberra Liberals called for a relaxation of water restrictions, our call would be quite so effective quite so soon. I thought it was appropriate that we amended this motion to bring it up to date.

Water is an issue of most concern to people in our community. It is right up there with health, education, roads, rates, rubbish, police and security. It is something that is talked about at social gatherings and around the family dinner table every day of the year.

Why is that? Over a number of years now, water has been brought up to become a top-of-mind issue through a number of factors. The most recent of these is the proposed Murray-Darling Basin plan which has caused so much angst and uncertainty right across the basin, including the ACT. That plan, if it is implemented, will have a significant impact on the amount of water that will be available to ACT residents. The implications will be broad ranging. Will it mean permanent water restrictions? What does it do to the economic viability of the major water security projects to enlarge the Cotter Dam, build the Murrumbidgee to Googong transfer or even secure water rights from Tantangara Reservoir? What will it do to the future growth and prosperity of our city and the surrounding region? What will happen to our future food security if agriculture in the basin is stifled? How much water will we have to send down the Murrumbidgee from our storage system in the ACT? People are talking about these issues all the time.

And then there is the subject of the major water security projects themselves. Over the past several years, there has been much controversy over the cost and management of these projects. The enlarged Cotter Dam started life in 2005 with a price tag of \$120 million. Now the project is well underway, but with a price tag of \$363 million—three times the original estimate. The enlarged Cotter Dam will increase our storage from four gegalitres to 78 gegalitres, but if the proposed Murray-Darling Basin plan is implemented, will we actually be able to use the water that we have in that increased storage?

Does our increased storage capacity mean that it will be unlikely that stage 2 water restrictions will be introduced any time soon? Actew's managing director, Mr Sullivan, told us as much this morning in the media. He said:

We're doing this with a view that we should not have to move back to higher levels of restrictions.

People are talking about these things.

This leads us to the major issue today—the central topic of my motion—that people have been talking about in relation to water; that is, water restrictions. There is no doubt that we have experienced extraordinarily good late winter and spring rains. That has led many people to approach me in a variety of circumstances to say, “When are we going to have our water restrictions lifted?” On the other side, there are many people who say that under no circumstances should we change our water restrictions and lighten things up for people. There is a clear diversity of views in the community.

Water restrictions have been a topic of conversation in our community for many years. People have talked about their dying gardens. They have talked about the fact that their kids can no longer play under a sprinkler as they used to when some of us here were younger. They also lament the fact that it is very hard to maintain even a small piece of lawn for kids to play on—kick around a football or hit a cricket ball. And they talk about poorly managed environmental flows from our dams.

And people have talked about the mixed messages that come from the authorities—that they have been getting from Actew and from the government—about water restrictions, and when they will be imposed and when they will be lifted. It is very useful just to look at the media statements in relation to this issue. If we go back even a month, to 29 September—less than a month ago—we find that Mr Sullivan said on ABC radio that it was “too early to consider reducing the current stage 2 restrictions”. He said:

We'd like to see what Summer brings. We'd like to see what the impact is if we have a sprinkler exemption over the Christmas holidays, what that means. Look at our water levels come the beginning of autumn ...

So on 29 September there was no prospect of lifting stage 2 water restrictions until autumn. Last week, on 14 October, in the *Canberra Times*, Mr Sullivan was quoted as saying that Actew would enter a consultation period of about two weeks before deciding whether to revert to stage 1 water restrictions. So there was a consultation

period of two weeks which began a week ago. And on page 2 of today's *Canberra Times*, Mr Sullivan is reported to have said, when he was launching a program at Rosary primary school:

We're very proud to have committed to this ground breaking project—the results of which we'll see in our sustainable lawn and turf areas in future years.

Then he went on to say:

Dam levels are nearing 90 per cent and a relaxation in water restrictions which will remove the ban on sprinkler use on lawn watering is likely to occur soon ...

In fact, it was so soon that on page 1 of the *Canberra Times*, the same paper, we had a “stunning turnaround”, as it was called by the journalist who wrote the story called “Watershed moment as restrictions end”. On page 2 the head of Actew was reported as saying, at a launch of an event sometime yesterday, “Sometime soon we may lift water restrictions.” He had previously said that it would not happen until autumn next year, and he had told my staff and other members of the Legislative Assembly that there was to be a consultation period.

We now have a new definition of “soon” which exceeds even the definition provided previously in this place by Mr Quinlan. In Mr Quinlan's parlance, “soon” meant “tomorrow”. But for Mr Sullivan “soon” means “sometime after I make this announcement”. Sometime yesterday he changed his mind.

There have been and there are clear mixed messages coming from this government in relation to water policy. People have talked about the fact that they do not have any real warning system. The people of the ACT tell us that they do not have any real warning system that tells them when changes from one restriction level to another might be triggered. They have waited for the government and Actew to tell them how the proposed Murray-Darling Basin plan might impact on their future—and there again the messages are mixed.

Most importantly of all, a divergence of views is emerging in our community as to whether or not water restrictions should be eased. Indeed, there are questions in the community about whether we should have a range of restriction levels and whether we should have one simple set of permanent measures from which we never move regardless of the amount of water we have stored. These views are important, but the government does not seem to be listening or even to be cognisant of them.

These views are important because they underscore the need for a review of our water conservation arrangements. The government are going to tell us today that they are already doing that. I certainly acknowledge that they are doing some things internally. Indeed, Mr Sullivan told my staff a week ago, at a briefing which I was unable to attend because I was ill, that he was consulting with government departments on the question of whether to ease restrictions from stage 2 water restrictions.

I am talking here about a process that looks at where we have been, what we have learned, what future influences there are and how the community feels about these things. We need to know what the community thinks about its future needs and

aspirations and we need to know what the community thinks it can do of its own volition to conserve water use in the future.

In short, the community needs to own this policy on water conservation measures, because it requires the community to take action for it to be effective. Our community needs to own that policy because we as a community need to be able to uphold that policy and to do something to which all of the community can contribute. Neither the government nor Actew is walking down that path at present. They certainly are not walking with the community down that path.

As my motion notes, this week is National Water Week. The objective of that program is to raise public awareness and improve understanding of water issues in Australia. The program carries a range of programs and resources to underpin that objective. One of them is headlined quite simply, and I quote from the Water Week website, "Anyone can get involved". That should be our slogan in the ACT when it comes to water restrictions. It should be one that engages the community and provides the community with every opportunity to be engaged, to participate in this policy.

The bottom line of our motion is for the government and Actew to take a step back from what has gone before, to look at what the future holds, to review our water conservation policy, to fully engage the community in that process and to report back to the Assembly on that process. We need a policy that, even against all the external influences and with the present divergence of views in the community, provides us with a sustainable future in our water use, one that allows for our future growth and development as a major city and a major player in the region.

The objective of this motion, and what I hope to see in the policy that would develop from it, is to encourage our community as a whole to get behind and support our water conservation policy and to encourage those in our community to, as it were, sing from the same song sheet. At the moment, they are not. The only way we can achieve this is through a transparent, open process with measurable accountability and community engagement initiatives.

There is much that the community wants to have a conversation about, and it depends where you go. The divergence of views is well represented in this place. Over the lunch break, Mr Speaker, I heard you talking about how we need to be careful about these issues and make sure that we do not get ahead of ourselves and be too profligate with our water. We have heard the minister for water say that we must pull our weight in the basin. I have heard from both sides in the community—some people saying that, no, we should not change our water restrictions regime, and other people crying out for it.

It is time that we found a middle road. There is a general level of agreement that the current permanent water conservation measures are a little outdated. They do send a message that in going from a stage 2 water restriction to stage 1, it is all right to use your sprinkler every day. No horticulturalist will tell you that it is all right to use your sprinkler every day. Any horticulturalist worth their salt will say, "Water your garden deeply—once a week possibly, unless it is extraordinarily hot." That is the way you maintain a healthy garden.

These issues are not directly addressed by what are called permanent water conservation measures. It does create a situation where people may get the impression that the pressure is now off and it is perfectly all right to use water willy-nilly—perhaps in the way satirised in the Pope cartoon yesterday or the day before in the *Canberra Times*. We do not want to send the message that it is all right to get rid of your water efficient showerheads and replace them with great big suckers because we are now out of water restrictions.

This is a message that we need to get out to the community, and we need to find a middle ground between those people who do not want to change anything, who think it is all right to have dead grass, and those people who want to improve the look of their own property and improve the look of the city that we have come to love as a garden city.

This motion today welcomes the announced changes. It is quite interesting that the changes which were going to be part of a two-week consultation a week ago suddenly were brought forward some time after Mr Sullivan launched a program at Rosary primary school but before the *Canberra Times* went to press. I have a sneaking suspicion that there was suddenly an impetus from the government to do something about water restrictions after they saw the program for today and the motion from the Canberra Liberals. Of course, that will be denied, but members of the public and members of the Assembly can make up their own minds on that.

We welcome the changes to the water restrictions regime but we believe that there needs to be a thorough review. I have been calling for a thorough review of water restriction regimes since 2003. I have been in this place too long and talking about water too long, but I will continue to talk about water and talk about the need for a rational approach and a better approach to water restrictions than the one that we currently have under permanent water conservation measures. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.26): I move the amendment circulated in my name to Mrs Dunne’s motion:

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

“(1) notes:

(a) that the ACT has been on water restrictions as follows:

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Storage Level</i>	<i>Date</i>
Stage 1	56.3%	16 December 2002 – 28 April 2003
Stage 2	44.3%	29 April 2003 – 30 September 2003
Stage 3	52.3%	1 October 2003 – 29 February 2004
Stage 2	55.4%	1 March 2004 – 31 August 2004
Stage 3	43.7%	1 September 2004 – 28 February 2005
Stage 2	50.1%	1 March 2005 – 31 October 2005

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Storage Level</i>	<i>Date</i>
Stage 1 WCM (Water Conservation Measures)*	63.5%	1 November 2005 – 30 March 2006
PWCM *change to Permanent Water Conservation Measures	56.2%	31 March 2006 – 31 October 2006
Stage 2	45.1%	1 November 2006 – 15 December 2006
Stage 3	40.6%	16 December 2006 – 31 August 2010
Stage 2	66.2%	1 September 2010 – 31 October 2010
PWCM	87%	1 November 2010

- (b) water restrictions in the ACT are managed through a transparent and clearly defined process under the *Utilities (Water Conservation) Regulation 2006*. This requires ACTEW to consult with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and inform the Minister before moving between stages;
- (2) welcomes the decision, announced today, that the ACT will move from Stage 2 Temporary Water Restrictions (TWR) to Permanent Water Conservation Measures (PWCM) on 1 November 2010 with water storage levels now at 87%;
- (3) notes:
- (a) ACTEW and the Government are continuing the comprehensive public awareness campaigns that have been underway to educate and inform ACT residents on the Permanent Water Conservation Measures and sustainable water use;
- (b) ACTEW will be undertaking a comprehensive consultation program with the public and all affected stakeholders to review the TWR and PWCM Schemes. This will be completed within the next year;
- (c) the Government's *Think water, act water* was written over a period of 15 months at a time of emerging, ongoing drought and the aftermath of the impacts of the 2003 bushfires. *Think water, act water* is a long-term strategy setting directions for the Territory's water resource management until 2050. It is a requirement that the strategy be reviewed and rewritten every five years to maintain relevance and effectiveness;
- (d) a review of *Think water, act water* commenced in 2010 and will extend over more than 12 months incorporating an extensive public consultation process. The revised strategy will take into account recent local developments, updated research and data over the last five years, as well as external policy development and factors such as the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, aspects of the National Water Initiative Agreement and COAG water reforms; and
- (e) the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has released the Guide only. The Government will assess the impacts of the Basin Plan on the ACT and will be making a strong submission to the Murray-Darling

Basin Authority and the Commonwealth Minister for Water to protect the ACT's water needs; and

- (4) notes the Government will report to the Assembly on progress on the matters raised in (3) (c), (d) and (e) by the last sitting day in June 2011.”.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue of water here in the Assembly this evening. It is interesting to note that Mrs Dunne continues her nasty and personal vendetta against Mr Sullivan, one that she failed to achieve any success with in the complete debacle of the privileges committee investigation into Mr Sullivan.

Mr Seselja: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR CORBELL: Of course, Mr Seselja rushes to her defence.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, resume your seat, thank you. Stop the clock, thank you, clerks.

Mr Seselja: Mr Speaker, we dealt with this. It was Mr Corbell who forced a withdrawal from Mrs Dunne yesterday for using the term “vendetta”. He knows that, and he has gone and used it deliberately. I would ask you to ask him to withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. Mr Corbell, if you would withdraw the—

MR CORBELL: I am happy to withdraw, Mr Speaker, but there is no doubt that Mrs Dunne has got it in for Mr Sullivan. That seems quite clear, and that was repeated today in the nasty and personal reflections that she made on him during her speech earlier today.

The government is committed to delivering a strong level of water security for the ACT. We have been fortunate to experience good winter and spring rainfall, with rainfall so far above the annual average. Our storage levels in our dams are now over 87 per cent capacity, and the government and the water utility are well aware of the situation and the need to determine whether the ACT's temporary water restrictions should be maintained.

I note Mrs Dunne's criticism of the process for determining this. But, in fact, if she was aware, she would know that the restrictions regime sets out the considerations and the relative levels that trigger certain levels of restriction. We are well over those minimum levels when it comes to the decision to revert to permanent water conservation measures.

Mrs Dunne seems to seek to have it both ways in this debate—criticising the government for not relaxing restrictions sooner but then also criticising the government for the relaxation being too generous. It really is a glass-half-empty, walk-both-sides-of-the-road sort of approach from Mrs Dunne.

Mr Smyth: You're mixing your metaphors, Simon.

MR CORBELL: Well, unfortunately, it is the case that both of those metaphors apply to Mrs Dunne. She criticises the government for relaxing restrictions too slowly and then also criticises the government, saying the relaxation to a particular level is too generous. Of course, she does not outline what her alternative would be. She does not outline how she would develop a certain set of permanent water conservation measures. She just basically says that if it comes from the government it is bad and if Mrs Dunne suggests it, it is good. That is simply the basis of her approach when it comes to policy.

The government has, after careful consideration, decided to revoke the current stage 2 temporary water restrictions and revert to permanent water conservation measures. It has been four years since these measures were last in operation, and we have learned much in that period about how to make efficient use of water without impinging on our lifestyles and the look of the city.

Actew, in consultation with industry bodies and businesses reviewing current scientific literature and talking with government bodies, has undertaken an extensive review already of the permanent water conservation measures which will take effect on 1 November. Following this review, the Actew board has endorsed the introduction of a new water conservation measure scheme.

As the responsible minister under the Utilities Act and under the Utilities (Water Conservation) Regulation, I will be giving consideration to the updated scheme that has been endorsed by the Actew board before determining whether or not to give effect to the revised measures. I can indicate to members that I am generally supportive of the proposals that have been put to me by the Actew board.

This updated scheme will be introduced with an emphasis not only on household water practices but also on non-domestic users. Actew and the ACT government have been working to revise the permanent water conservation measures scheme to develop a more efficient and equitable scheme. To aid water users, the new scheme will be more explicit across the range of measures, and the updated scheme will be put in place on a trial basis. What we will be doing over the next 12 months is implementing the permanent water conservation measures, reviewing the operation of those over the next 12 months to ensure that they are appropriately placed in terms of the range of responses that they are designed to invoke and, if necessary, revise those further after 12 months of operation.

To that end, Actew will conduct a comprehensive consultation activity with all affected householders looking at the operation of these new water conservation measures and, indeed, the existing temporary water restriction scheme. This includes the intention to have a specific non-residential customers program. The updated scheme will, in fact, as I have said, be trialled over the next 12 months to get an understanding of the requirements and allow time for industry and the community to develop and put in place measures that will bring about the intended savings.

The reviews of the schemes will also inform our review of the think water, act water strategy so that we can continue to track towards the long-term water use reduction

target of 25 per cent by 2023. It is pleasing to note that we are within one per cent of our target on meeting this saving, and the revised scheme is expected to ensure we meet or exceed that target. As required under the Utilities (Water Conservation) Regulation, the Environment Protection Authority has been consulted on the change to the new water conservation measures scheme, and in terms of environmental outcomes it supports the proposed changes. I will be taking those issues into account as I make a decision on the new determination.

For our community, a clear implication of the easing of water restrictions will mean that the onus of responsible water use will transfer to the community rather than being determined by a mandated policy that is applied under the temporary restrictions regime. The government's position remains that the mandated outcomes should only be imposed once in 20 years on average. So that is the guiding principle the government has established—restrictions one year in every 20. That is the principle that we have outlined for making decisions about water security projects moving forward.

The government is very pleased that the community has responded so strongly to the water restrictions regime. I appreciate that there are some in the community who now believe that we should retain restrictions even though our storages are at such a strong level. The government's view is this: water restrictions are, by their very nature, temporary. They are not meant to be a permanent change in the way we use water. The permanent change is to use water wisely. Whilst restrictions may be needed from time to time when we are facing shortages in supply, permanent water conservation measures, using water wisely, is a permanent and ongoing approach that all Canberrans need to adopt, and that is the big difference.

Permanent water conservation measures are just that—they are permanent. Temporary restrictions are just that—they are temporary to respond to particular circumstances where, because of changes in rainfall, we see shortages in supply and significant pressure on our water catchments. That is the approach that we adopt.

I think there are real questions to be raised if we were to retain water restrictions even in this period of relatively healthy catchments. What would it mean for the ongoing ability and the willingness of large sectors of the community to comply with a restrictions regime? If we continued to insist on a level of restrictions at a time when catchments were healthy and water supply was strong, I think there would be a growing level of non-compliance. We really need Canberrans to respond to restrictions at times when they are needed. We should not squander that goodwill and that willingness of people to abide by restrictions by imposing restrictions on them even at times when the water supply is in a strong condition.

That is an important consideration for the government because, at the end of the day, compliance is driven by the voluntary actions of hundreds of thousands of Canberrans. It is very difficult for the government and the water utility to enforce compliance, although we do have measures to do that to the extent that it is practicable. But, at the end of the day, restrictions are very much based on the compact between the government, the utility and the broader community and in circumstances where it is justified, and it is difficult to justify restrictions where your water catchments are at

almost 90 per cent capacity. What you can justify, though, are ongoing, permanent measures and directions to use water wisely. That is what the permanent water conservation measures regime is designed to achieve.

An editorial in the *Canberra Times* as recently as 15 October pointed out that even though two of the city's four dams are at capacity, we need the Canberra community not to be complacent. Indeed, government agrees. That is why permanent water conservation measures will be a fact of life, and community awareness through government and Actew will be an important element of reminding Canberrans about why permanent water conservation measures should be a fact of life.

Turning to the issue of the Murray-Darling Basin plan, this is a critical issue for the city. The government will be continuing the very detailed analysis that it is currently undertaking in relation to the plan and the guide to the plan that has been released by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Indeed, today, officers of my department were again at meetings with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, working through the issues and getting a stronger understanding of the authority's views about the sustainable diversion limits it believes should be in place for the territory.

We will adopt a constructive approach in these discussions. We will not be recalcitrant. We will not say that there is not a range of difficult issues that needs to be addressed, because there simply is, and we need to be constructive in that negotiation and in that process. The pleasing thing, of course, is that there is an extended period of time for engagement and discussion on these issues. There will be a meeting of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council late this year—I think it is programmed for some time in early December. The government, along with all the other basin states, will have a formal opportunity to discuss these issues in some detail with both the authority and the commonwealth minister at that time. But this will not preclude the territory, my officials and myself from progressing those issues out of session with the relevant basin authority officials, with senior members of the authority and, indeed, with the commonwealth minister.

As we have said, we do not want to see a situation where the government and the territory are in a state of permanent water restrictions as a result of changes to our sustainable diversion limit. We believe that can be avoided, and we will be pushing the case very strongly that there needs to be recognition of the natural population growth that is occurring in our city. That must be taken account of in terms of the sustainable diversion limit available to us for our water resources.

The government and Actew have been proactive in managing the ACT's water use. We have adopted a range of policies and measures to ensure and maintain efficient use of our water resources. Major water security projects are underway. We have achieved significant reductions.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: The problem with this opposition is that they like to be heard in silence, but when anyone else seeks to contradict their view of the world, they try to shout you down. They try to wreck debate in this place. That is their continual

approach. It is bullying behaviour; it is behaviour demeaning of a credible opposition. They are not a credible opposition, because they simply seek to shout down, belittle and diminish the—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR CORBELL: See, here they go again, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Seselja: I take a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, regarding relevance. Mr Corbell is speaking about the opposition. I know he does not like us. I know he is apparently intimidated by us, but it is not relevant to the motion, which is about water and water restrictions. I would ask you to ask the minister to return to the subject matter at hand.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sorry, I was in discussion with the Clerk at the time so I did not hear what he said. I am sure he will continue to be relevant to the motion. He has only got 21 seconds to go, and he has to move his amendment. Mr Corbell, would you please continue.

MR CORBELL: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course, I was responding to the interjections that you get from the members on the other side of this chamber whenever you say something that they happen to disagree with. It is typical of their behaviour in this place, and they are starting to wear the penalty for their behaviour.

The government is committed to strong and sustainable water use into the future, and I thank Mrs Dunne for proposing this debate today.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Corbell, are you moving your amendment?

MR CORBELL: I have moved my amendment.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, thank you very much. You probably did that in the middle of that hullabaloo.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (5:42): I suppose it is not surprising that Mr Corbell is so sensitive to criticism on water issues. We saw that in the last part of his speech when a couple of little interjections were enough to really set him off. He feels bullied by the other side. We very much feel for Simon. It is worth reflecting on why the ACT community has had to suffer restrictions for as long as it has. Simon Corbell talks about restrictions being the exception and being, by their nature, temporary. Well, not under this government. The reality is that, whilst the drought has been the—

Mr Corbell: So we're responsible for the drought as well, are we?

MR SESELJA: He is interjecting, Madam Deputy Speaker. Whilst the drought has been the main contributor, there is no doubt that the response—and it has been a very slow response—of this government to the drought has been a further contributor. It has exacerbated the situation. When you are in a situation beyond your control, such

as a drought, you can respond or you can do nothing. For the first few years this government chose to do nothing. That is part of the reason we are in the situation we are in now. If the government had acted early we would have a dam by now. It would probably be full by now. I imagine with the recent rains that it would be.

Mrs Dunne: If we'd started building it in 2004 when Mr Smyth and I said we should, it would be full.

MR SESELJA: Indeed. If they had responded to the calls of the Liberal Party, we would be in a very different situation. We would not have been waiting years before we had the extra storage that we need to survive the next drought. Water restrictions would have been behind us long ago. But they did not do so.

The Chief Minister sat in this place and said just a few years ago—I think it was in 2006, so well into this drought—“We may never have to build another dam.” That was the thinking of the government. Their first response was to do nothing. It was to avoid taking action. It was to hope beyond hope that it would just start raining again, and they got caught out. It needs to be put on the record that Canberra families have suffered far more than they should have as a result of this drought because of the inaction of the government and the slow action of the government. It was only several years after the severity of this drought that they actually started to take action on this issue.

I welcome Mrs Dunne's motion. Mrs Dunne has led the way on this issue and we see the government responding time and time again. We have spoken about the calls for a dam in 2004, but Mrs Dunne has long been advocating that the government get on with it. We saw Mrs Dunne calling for the easing of restrictions again last week. We saw the very hurried response, it seems, of the government to the listing of this motion on the notice paper. Suddenly water restrictions were lifted once it became known that there would be a motion calling for that to happen.

However that came about, we are pleased that the people of Canberra can now start to have reasonable use of water in their backyards. We are very pleased that the families of the ACT and many of the elderly in our community who so enjoy their gardens, who have put so many years of effort and so much of their own money and time into their gardens, can again have reasonable use of those gardens. They can again have the water that they need to maintain a beautiful garden, which is so important to many people.

I would like to talk about that a little bit. Many of us have young families. For those with young families it is a reasonable expectation to have your own patch of grass in the backyard. I do not think that is something that we should be denying families in Canberra. We should always have policies that seek to allow families to have that patch of grass for their kids to run around on. It is one of the wonderful things about Australian life. You can compare us to many other countries. When you travel around the world, to parts of Asia or Europe in particular, for many the norm is living in an apartment, even with young kids. The norm is having a very small abode with very little private open space.

One of the great things about Canberra and Australia is that families can have that expectation, and they should have that expectation. That is something that has been denied them over the last few years because of the drought—and also over the last couple of years, I think it is fair to say, because of the slow response of this government. As Canberrans, we are very pleased today that water restrictions will now be lifted. Mrs Dunne has appropriately put it out there that it needs to be said that we are not going to advocate returning to the ways of previous years.

We have a great deal of confidence in Canberrans. There is a role for government to play in leading the debate. We have a great deal of confidence that Canberrans will use water more sensibly than might have been the case 10 or 15 years ago when we became complacent about water use. It is fair to say that many of the water use practices were not appropriate. But, at the same time, reasonable water usage—watering one's lawn, watering one's garden in dry times, in hot times, and being able to keep that garden, those trees and that grass alive—is a fantastic thing.

I think we should take a moment to be grateful for the fact that we have finally put this behind us. I think that it will take leadership and ongoing work to ensure that we continue to use water wisely so that the next time there is a dry spell—and the next drought will come; it may come next year or it may come in five, 10 or 15 years time, but we hope it is a long way away—hopefully we will have learnt the lessons from this one.

Yes, we will have more water storage, and that is a good thing, but we also need to learn the lesson that in using water more efficiently we do not see the sudden downturns in our water storages that we saw in this dry spell. No-one would have anticipated the low inflows a few years ago. We may get them again. We hope that will be a once in 50 years or a once in a hundred years event. We hope that it will not happen but, if it does, the role now for government, very importantly, is to ensure that we continue to work on water efficiency measures and continue to encourage sensible water use.

At the same time, people need to have some confidence going forward that they can invest in their gardens and in these things which actually bring them pleasure. It is worth reflecting on some of the benefits of gardening to many Canberrans. I think we forget just how important it is to tens of thousands of people in our city tending their garden. It is a range of people right across the community. It is young and old. Many, of course, are our retirees. That is one of their great hobbies or great passions and one of the things they spend a lot of time on.

We know there are a lot of benefits of that. It is an enjoyable form of exercise. It increases levels of physical activity, particularly for the elderly, and maintains mobility and flexibility. For the elderly it encourages the use of motor skills. It improves endurance and strength. It helps prevent diseases like osteoporosis and it reduces stress levels and promotes relaxation. For our young families it is part of our lifestyle and it is a part of our lifestyle that I believe we should protect.

As we rightly move to a regime where Canberrans can again enjoy their gardens and can again use water in their gardens and in their backyards, the challenge for us now

is to put in place the kinds of measures—whether it is through the sensible use of water, whether it is through water efficiency or whether it is through investigating future storage needs—to ensure that we do not ever go through a period like this again.

Droughts will come again, but it is up to us—it is up to leaders in this town, the government and others—to ensure that the next time the drought comes we are far better prepared and we respond far better so that we do not have these years and years of water restrictions which I think have put a dampener on the city. I think they have made it difficult for families and the elderly and they have affected businesses.

We welcome this change. I commend Mrs Dunne for the work that she has done. I think she has been a real leader in this area over a long period of time. It is good to see the government responding to that now. But we need to learn from these last few years and make sure that we do not experience the same in future when the inevitable dry spell comes about again.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (5.52): I thank Mrs Dunne for bringing on this motion today. It is clearly a very important topic and one in which the community has a great interest. Her motion is very timely, or it may be that the overnight announcement was very timely; I am not sure which is which. Nonetheless, something was timely there. This certainly follows on nicely from the MPI my colleague Ms Hunter debated here in the last sitting on the ongoing importance of water efficiency.

Canberrans have made a big effort to save water over the past seven years, changing their behaviours to minimise consumption in response to a number of government-initiated and Actew-initiated strategies. In 1997-98, our water consumption peaked at around 78 gegalitres. By 2007-08, it was down to 43.5 gegalitres. That is an extraordinarily turnaround. I think we all know how much the community has got behind this effort of being water conscious and being very aware that each of us needs to make our own contribution. I think Mrs Dunne touched on it right at the start of her speech. We have all been to those barbecues and sat around those dining tables where people have talked proudly about the things they have done to minimise their water use.

Mr Hanson: No, I haven't been to one of those.

MR RATTENBURY: You should get out more, Mr Hanson. You would probably learn a lot from it. We all appreciate that the recent rains have not only left our city looking greener than it has for some time but also left our dams at 87 per cent capacity. I think this opens up some real questions about what is the macro landscape on water. If you look at that very simple statement that the city is green and our dams are almost full, you could draw one set of conclusions. But if you look at the big picture you may well draw a different set of conclusions.

I think some of those macro factors that we need to consider are that there is major infrastructure under development—the Cotter Dam extension, which is obviously underway, and the Murrumbidgee to Googong pipeline, which is not yet approved but clearly on Actew's program. There are the well-discussed—and there is a lot of discussion to come—changes to the Murray-Darling Basin allocation that has

predicted that the ACT will need to make significant cuts to our water allocation. That is certainly a very significant factor for us.

The factors that have not had so much consideration are the climate scenarios that predict that catchment inflows will continue to reduce in the years ahead, including a long-term scenario from the CSIRO of a 50 per cent reduction to inflows for the ACT. Of course, as others have commented, in a growing city that will inevitably mean that our water demand will increase. All of these factors are the big picture in which we really need to consider our future water security.

So where are we now? We are coming out of a period where we have seen significantly reduced inflows into our catchment. I know the minister has made statements here before, but we have seen a period where our inflows were at around 25 per cent of historic levels. This year, after seven years of drought, we are experiencing an El Nino weather year, a weather pattern that brings above average rainfall to much of Australia, particularly inland eastern regions.

It is not just us that are benefiting from the extra rain this season. Right across the region people are revelling in the wet. We have seen those stories in the press, although for some it has been a little too wet. I think even those people in flooded communities have probably appreciated the bigger picture of the breaking rain. They just wished it might have been more evenly distributed.

As has been highlighted in the last week or so, we are sitting in a catchment—the Murray-Darling Basin—that is facing some very serious water challenges over the long term. The risk of reducing water restrictions is that we change the culture of being a water-saving community. When we look at those long-term issues, we are going to need to continue to be a water-saving community. We will face water stress in future. We have built a culture in the ACT of being water aware. I think that is a healthy place for a community such as ours to be in because of that likely long-term future water stress.

We cannot necessarily measure the benefits of this change of culture or the water awareness or exactly how much has been invested in getting the community to this place. But we do not want to lose this appreciation by the community of water saving and water efficiency and we cannot afford to become complacent. Certainly some people in the community—and we have heard this on talkback radio and in letters to the editor—are somewhat bamboozled by a sense that everything is now okay. We have got the head of Actew out there saying, “You’ll be able to have lawns again into the future.” That is obviously based on assumptions around the Cotter Dam as well. I think some people are finding it genuinely confusing as to where we are up to, what is happening, why we have made all this effort and suddenly it is all okay.

The Greens are comfortable that Actew have made a prudent decision in relation to stage 2 restrictions. I would encourage them to be equally prudent and timely in taking their decisions when it comes to increasing restrictions if we return to dry conditions, which seems to be a likely scenario. Canberrans need not be afraid of increased restrictions. We have demonstrated that we are more than capable of handling them.

One issue that is exercising my mind at the moment—and it is challenging to get to exactly where things are up to—is the detail of the permanent water conservation measures as well as the temporary water restrictions. Temporary water restrictions have been effective in reducing consumption. That is very clear. But now that we have moved back to the baseline we need to check that the permanent measures are still meeting community expectations.

In deciding what permanent water conservation measures should look like, we need to make sure that we fully consult with the community. I think even reflecting on feedback from radio callers this morning there are a wide range of opinions in regard to the benefits or otherwise of lifting restrictions. Some people say that it is madness to ever lift restrictions, whilst others say, “Thank goodness. It’s about time we lifted them, given how much rain we’ve had and how green the city appears to be.”

We have talked earlier—and I spoke about it in the recent MPI discussion—about the fact that different people put different value on water. They want to use water for different things. There are people who like to grow a lawn. There are those that have shifted across to no lawn, just natives. There are people who like to wash their cars and there are those who take some pride in the fact that they drive around all year with a dirty car because they see it as their contribution to saving water in this dry climate.

Understanding how people value water differently will also give us guidance as to how we set permanent conservation measures. What would be useful information to have is a clear sense of which measures deliver the most benefits in terms of savings. We know, for example, that a study of domestic water consumption in the ACT from 2006 indicated that Canberrans used around 64 per cent of their water outdoors, which is why there has been so much focus on gardens. I note with some amusement that Mrs Dunne is almost becoming the city’s resident horticultural adviser with her comments on radio this morning.

At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

Sitting suspended from 6 to 7.30 pm.

MR RATTENBURY: Just before the dinner break I was about to comment on Mrs Dunne’s new-found status as Canberra’s horticultural adviser but I should turn back to the matter at hand. I had been talking about the fact that we really cannot turn our back on efficiency measures, despite the current, I guess, good fortune we have had in having some decent rainfall. I think we do need to continue to evaluate the permanent water restrictions. I note that, as I said earlier, we are still trying to get up to date on exactly where things are at. I believe there have been some adjustments to the permanent water restrictions but I am not sure that the community has been terribly involved in that and I think that is a point of concern.

But in looking at the future, we really need to focus on best practice water sensitive urban design, particularly in new developments. East Lake and Molonglo and the remaining areas that are to be developed in Gungahlin stand out as the real

opportunities. It does seem to me an obvious thing that all the new houses in Molonglo and places like East Lake should be built with built-in grey water systems.

I have seen various technological models which I think are quite exciting in terms of the opportunities they offer Canberrans to have nice gardens into the future, at the same time not using a potable water supply to achieve that. It is not the time today but there are certainly some really interesting models that are household scale but that can also be built into the town water supply system in terms of being able to manipulate them to flush the system. There are various other models. But there is the potential to set up a grey water authority to maintain those systems and the like. There is a whole lot of work that can be done there. My sense is that we are not being that bold or that visionary at the moment.

We should be considering the prospective challenges in the Murray-Darling Basin and the cuts we have seen suggested for Canberra. These are the measures we need to be putting in place now. With a growing population, to some extent, no matter how good the rainfall, we cannot keep promising people they can have all the water they want.

We do need to continue to develop urban ponds to manage our storm water better so as to deliver water to our playing fields, the community green space and treed streetscapes. These are all things that, as a community, we value and we do need to find the water, particularly to ensure those green spaces are maintained. We have debated Green Square in Kingston of course in this place before. As we live in denser urban landscapes, those community spaces are more important to residents and I think it is justifiable to spend water on those common spaces because many more people are using them than you would get in a single-household backyard.

We need to continue to push household efficiency measures, the really obvious things that people now take for granted. We need to continue to roll out low-flow taps, low-flow toilets, low-flush toilets.

One thing I did want to comment on while we are talking about water is the opportunities that are presented by the current good rainfall season. I think it is a time in which we should be considering building our resilience in our urban landscape for future dry periods and future hot, dry periods. We believe this has potential and we would like see whether the government could explore whether we should be undertaking a large amount of new tree planting now and really accelerating the program because it is a season in which the new plantings can take hold but also, if they take hold, they can provide that resilience in the future so that when the hot, dry periods come back we have got a landscape more capable of dealing with it.

I know the government has a tree planting program. I guess the question is: is this a year when we want to spend some money and some time, because this is a chance to really enable these young specimens to get a foothold?

I think I should wrap up. In conclusion, I simply want to say that the water channels for the ACT, I believe, will remain for the foreseeable future. The scenarios outlined by the CSIRO, which I touched on earlier, of 50 per cent lower inflows into the future are sobering. The ACT government and the community must continue to be vigilant and committed to water efficiency measures. In whatever steps we take to adjust to

permanent water conservation measures, to adjust the thresholds in water restrictions, it is right that we taken the community with us.

We have seen the reaction today. I hear on Twitter there was quite some discussion about the removal of water restrictions. A lot of people are saying, "Why are we removing them? We are used to them. Let us just keep going and be prudent for the future." I think there is quite a debate to come and it is clearly a debate the community is engaged on.

Finally, before I sit down, I have circulated three separate amendments. I think there is some difficulty with the numbering around those, in light of Mr Corbell's amendment. I seek some guidance from the chair on the best way to proceed with these, whether I should move them now or whether I should come back to them at a later time. I am happy to come back to them by leave it if that seems sensible.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): Mr Rattenbury, I understand that we should deal with Mr Corbell's amendment first and then come back to yours.

MR RATTENBURY: That is fine, thank you.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (7.37): Speaking to the amendment, I am a bit at cross-purposes, dare I say it, on the issue of Mr Corbell's amendment. I mean that in a technical term, in the debating term. It is pretty standard Labor Party practice to come in and delete all the words after "that" and substitute a whole lot of other words. In many ways, this amendment is similar in sentiment. I think that one of things that it is useful to note is that there is a higher level of agreement about the way forward here. And I am not really prepared to die in a ditch as to what version of this goes forward because there is some general agreement.

I am concerned at the government's performance on water. It is pretty much the government's position that, if anyone else has an idea on water, it has to be rejected and resisted at all costs. Especially if the Canberra Liberals have an idea on water, the ACT Labor Party reject and resist it all costs. That is what they did in 2004 and it took them until 2007 to come to the position that we did actually need more water storage in the ACT. But that is a story for another day.

One of the principal areas that Mr Corbell succeeds in taking out, which I think is very important that we keep in, is the notion that we need to make it very clear to people when water restrictions kick in or do not kick in. And in throwing out the baby with the bathwater, Mr Corbell has thrown out the words in my original motion that call for trigger points to be made clear to the community. Paragraph (4)(c) states:

establish and publish clear points at which water restriction levels are triggered;

The necessity for that is borne out by Mr Corbell's amendment. People keep saying to me, "Once upon a time there used to be trigger points in the water restrictions regime and we had some certainty about where we go." The water restrictions regime has changed in some ways and not in others.

In this little historical table, which is part 1(a) of Mr Corbell's amendment, we see just how changeable the rules are and have been in relation to stage 1 water restrictions. We see that we first went to stage 1 water restrictions; that is, some water restrictions—stage 1 no longer exists in that form—at 56.3 per cent of storage levels. Then we went to stage 2 at 44.3 per cent. We went to stage 3, according to Mr Corbell's little table—my memory does not serve me that well—at 52.3 per cent in October 2003. In March 2004, we went back to stage 2. It went up and down. Stage 3 was at 47 per cent. We went back to stage 2 at 50 per cent. We went to stage 1 water conservation measures in 2005 when we introduced the first version of stage 1 water conservation measures at 63 per cent. Then it goes on. We continued with different permanent water conservation measures at 56 per cent, then to stage 2 at 45 per cent, to stage 3 at 40 per cent.

But this year, after all this drought, it took us until 66 per cent to go back to stage 2, and 87 per cent today to go back to permanent water conservation measures. That shows that there is a very inconsistent approach to this. There is no policy guidance. And the point that I have made in these remarks today and elsewhere is that we actually need much more policy guidance and much clearer indicators and easily understood and acceptable descriptions and reasons for why we do things under water restriction regimes at various stages.

You might say at stage 3, "We are moving into stage 3 because," and we need to say, "Use only x amount of water or only use y amount of water because." We need to articulate and communicate with the community so that the community will embrace this policy and put it into practice. It is not for the government, it is not for some agency, to put this policy into practice. It is for individuals across the community to put it into practice. They have to be on board and they have to understand why.

I think it is most unfortunate that, in the attorney's intent to throw out everything because they were the words suggested by the Liberal Party, he has thrown out this important measure. I think the issue of trigger points is very important and I notice that Mr Rattenbury has some words in relation to trigger points as well. They are slightly different words and I am not going to quibble over the words.

I think that we have quite a difficult way forward here, just technically, because there are so many sets of amendments flying around. In hindsight, the parties might have sat down and talked earlier in the day about how we might have had a better way forward. We are going to have to either adjourn this and come back to it or fly by the seat of our pants and probably come up with an ungrammatical hotchpotch as a result.

I would at this stage keep an open mind on whether or not to support Mr Corbell's amendment but perhaps, as there is no-one else here to move to the next item, we cannot really adjourn it either. I think I am getting the nod around the room that we should proceed and try not to mess it up too much as we go along.

I think that Mr Corbell's amendment is useful. Some of the stuff in it is useful but there is stuff that has been thrown out. I think that what we are going to do is probably pass Mr Corbell's amendment and then come back and re-amend some shape into it, which is a pretty unfortunate way of going about it.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne, you do not wish to move any amendments to Mr Corbell's amendment at this point?

MRS DUNNE: Not yet.

Amendment agreed to.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (7.44): I seek leave to move amendments Nos 1 to 3 circulated in my name together.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Excuse me, I have just been told you cannot do that. The good point is made that Mr Corbell's amendment took everything out of the original motion; so your amendments do not quite make sense because they were based on—

MR RATTENBURY: I am aware of that and I would like to propose a change in numbering if and when I get to speak. I seek leave to move amendments Nos 1 to 3 together.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I am aware that in my amendments now there are some slight numbering difficulties. As I move through them, I will make some proposals as I go, if that is agreeable and possible.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: I move:

(1) Insert new paragraph (1)(c):

“(c) that CSIRO has predicted an almost 50% reduction in average long-term inflows into the ACT's catchments;”.

(2) Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) welcomes the recent high rainfall as a result of this year's La Nina weather pattern and the opportunity to enjoy the temporary benefits of moving from Stage 2 Water Restrictions to Permanent Water Conservation Measures on 1 November with water storage levels now at 87%;”.

(3) Insert new paragraph (3)(f):

“(f) publish on the ACTEW website clear information about when changes to water restrictions are triggered;”.

Amendment 1 simply picks up the observation that I made in my earlier speech. I think it is valuable to note the CSIRO predictions and the impact that they will have on our long-term inflows. I think it is self-explanatory.

In relation to amendment No 2, I simply add this: I think it is part of the macro context that I was talking about before on this motion. The fact that we are in a La Nina weather year presents a particular weather pattern for us and, again, I think provides some context for the debate we are having.

Amendment No 3 picks up on the point Mrs Dunne was making before. I believe, the Greens believe, there is some value in being transparent about the triggers that set off the various levels of water restriction. As Mrs Dunne said, she has a similar set of words. I am not aware of the language but it is simply that point that the public has a great interest in this. I think the compliance is increased by having greater transparency. It makes it easier for members of this place to debate it and the like. I was simply seeking to make that information publicly available. It is not that Actew has declined to do this or anything similar. I think it is simply making the observation and making the suggestion that this is a useful thing to do.

I thank members for their indulgence perhaps in helping us work through these couple of little steps as we try to sort through the technicalities.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (7.48): Madam Assistant Speaker, the government would be pleased to support amendments Nos 1 and 3 that Mr Rattenbury has circulated. These amendments provide some further context in relation to the CSIRO assessments, which I think is valuable. In relation to the triggers for water restrictions, again the government accepts that the amendment adds value.

In fact, I think it is worth clarifying that the existing instruments that are available publicly do give a clear indication at what point the implementation of restrictions is triggered—that is, from lower levels to higher levels. But I accept that more guidance could be given as to the point at which restrictions are reduced. There is, I think, not as clear guidance on that, although I think Actew have been quite public about the considerations that they take into account in determining a relaxation on restrictions.

For that reason I am happy to support amendment No 3 also. The government will not support amendment No 2. I do not feel that it adds very much to the context of the motion. Other members may disagree, but the government will agree to amendments 1 and 3.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (7.50): I will speak to Mr Rattenbury's amendments. I also seek your guidance, Madam Assistant Speaker. I have circulated some amendments. Should we deal with Mr Rattenbury's amendments and then look at what is left over?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Le Couteur): I believe that might be the easiest course, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you, Madam Assistant Speaker. The Canberra Liberals will be happy to support Mr Rattenbury's amendments in their entirety. I think that

amendments 1 and 2 do add context. I could be pedantic and amend “La Nina” to put a tilde over the second “n”, but we will not worry about that. I hope we can pronounce it correctly.

I am happy there is broad agreement that there should be more information about what triggers changes in water restrictions. I am not going to quibble over the words—whether it is my version or Mr Rattenbury’s version. I am quite happy to support those amendments as they stand.

These are three separate amendments; so is it the case that we can vote on them separately, Madam Assistant Speaker?

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I thought they were moved together.

Mr Corbell: We can divide them.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: If the wish of the Assembly is to split them, we can do so, but I believe Mr Rattenbury actually moved them in one lot; so the Assembly needs to order that the motion be divided.

Ordered that the question be divided.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (752): Just as a clarification, Madam Assistant Speaker, I believe I did actually make a small error before. My amendment No 2 is in fact designed to replace Mr Corbell’s paragraph (2), not to be an additional paragraph. So I did suggest before it would be paragraph (1A). It would in fact be paragraph (2). It is a substitution, not an additional paragraph. I clarify that for members.

Mrs Dunne: I would be happy to support it if it was paragraph (1A), but not so much if it was paragraph (2).

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Okay, so where was—

MR RATTENBURY: It actually repeats a lot of what is in paragraph (2).

Mrs Dunne: So you want it to be 2?

MR RATTENBURY: Yes.

Mrs Dunne: Okay.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: As the motion has been divided, we will now deal with it amendment by amendment.

Mr Rattenbury’s amendment No 1 agreed to.

Mr Rattenbury’s amendment No 2 negatived.

Mr Rattenbury’s amendment No 3 agreed to.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: So now the question is that the motion, as amended twice, be agreed to.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (7.53): I would like to move the amendments circulated in my name on the smaller piece of paper which is headed “Private members business notice No 5”. There are four items on that page, Madam Assistant Speaker but I seek leave to move three amendments together. I would like to treat them as four separate amendments, but only move three of them together.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Sorry, I am confused.

MRS DUNNE: Okay, can you consider that the—

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I was on a different page. No wonder I am confused.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry. Are we all on the one page now? I seek leave to move amendments 1, 2 and 3 together.

Leave granted.

MRS DUNNE: I move amendments 1, 2 and 4 circulated in my name together:

(1) Insert new paragraph (2A):

“(2A) supports the objectives of National Water Week, which occurs from 17 to 23 October 2010, to raise public awareness and improve understanding of water issues in Australia;”.

(2) Omit paragraph (3)(a), substitute:

“(a) mount a public awareness campaign about permanent water conservation measures and the benefits such measures bring to the people of the ACT;”.

(3) In paragraph (4), omit “(c), (d) and (e)”.

Madam Assistant Speaker, this is again putting more of the content back into Mr Corbell’s amendment after he took some aspects out. I am not moving amendment 3 because Mr Rattenbury has already put that content back in. This is National Water Week. It is important. The rain has been falling, everything has been filling up et cetera. It is important to note that this is National Water Week and it is an appropriate time to be discussing these issues.

I believe that the words I am proposing for Mr Corbell’s part (3)(a) are better than the ones that are there. It is a bit of a moot point. Mr Corbell’s amendment says:

ACTEW and the Government are continuing comprehensive public awareness ...
to ...inform ACT residents on the Permanent Water Conservation Measures ...

Permanent water conservation measures were only announced today. It was pointed out to me today that some information has gone up fairly frantically on the Actew webpage today to reflect that. I do not call that a continuing comprehensive public awareness campaign. The tenor of what I have been talking about and what we have been talking about here is something a little more than a few things on Actew's webpage. I would recommend to members that the words that I have suggested are superior.

Mr Rattenbury has added some words to paragraph (3) by adding a new paragraph (3)(f), which we have agreed to. Basically, what we are doing is calling on the government to report progress on this motion rather than particular parts of this motion. This is because we have actually added other things which need to be reported on by the last sitting day in June.

I think that will not be the completion of the process. The minister has said that by that stage they will only be part the way through an evaluation of the current water conservation measures et cetera. We do not expect that that is the end of it, but that is a reasonable point at which we should report. However, I think that there are now other things that need to be reported on; so we should not limit ourselves in that way. I commend the amendments to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (7.57): I will speak briefly. I propose that the vote be divided and that we take each of Mrs Dunne's amendments separately.

Ordered that the question be divided.

MR RATTENBURY: I thank the Assembly. I will speak to the amendments briefly. The Greens will be supporting Mrs Dunne's amendments 1 and 3. I do not have a particular beef with her amendment 2, but in the context that paragraph 3 now "notes" it grammatically does not work. It was framed in the context of "calls on". So I think it is probably best leaving it as it currently is. That is the basis on which we will not be supporting No 2.

Mrs Dunne's amendment No 1 agreed to.

Mrs Dunne's amendment No 2 negatived.

Mrs Dunne's amendment No 3 agreed to.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (7.59): I want to thank members for their cooperation and spirit in this. This has been a useful debate. It is useful to comment on and to note the high level of agreement on this matter. I think that with a reasonable level of agreement on this matter here in the Assembly we can progress a better conversation and end up with a better approach to water conservation measures and to our water restrictions in the ACT going forward.

However, there are a couple of things that I need to comment on. It is a little disappointing that Mr Corbell has to take an issue where there seems to be a high level of agreement and sort of start off with a slanging match, be forced to withdraw words and accuse me of making personal reflections upon Mr Sullivan.

I did not do anything of the sort. I notice that Mr Speaker was surprised at the assertion that I had made personal reflections on Mr Sullivan. I did point out that there had been inconsistencies in the message that is coming from Actew about when water restrictions should be lifted. For the benefit of members and the community, I will highlight them again.

On 29 September on ABC Radio, Mr Sullivan said that Actew would look at water restrictions at the beginning of autumn. He said, "We would like to see what summer brings. We would like to see what the impact is if we have a sprinkler exemption over Christmas holidays, what that means and look at our water levels come the beginning of autumn." This is what was reported by the ABC. I recall hearing that broadcast at the time. I thought that that was a surprising position given that I was actually driving through the rain at the time.

On 14 October in the *Canberra Times* Mr Sullivan was reported as saying that there would be two weeks consultation before deciding whether to revert to stage 1 water restrictions. Today, on page 2 of the *Canberra Times*, Mr Sullivan was reported as saying that soon there would be a lifting of exemptions on the use of sprinklers. But on page 1 of today's *Canberra Times* there was a report of "a stunning turnaround". It was stated that we would see the end of water restrictions and a return to "permanent water conservation measures".

It is a pretty stunning turnaround if you started reading at the back of the paper and moved forward. You would have thought that it is in the offing and when you get to the front of the paper there is a different message. I am not quite sure how that came about, but there was certainly a change of mind yesterday amongst the people who manage water. It was a mixed message and it adds to the mixed messages that we have seen in the past. It adds to the mixed messages that we see when we look at the table that Mr Corbell has inserted in this amendment, which shows the way we have chopped and changed about when we go into particular levels of water restrictions. I think more than anything we do need some clarity.

The minister is running a particular line, as all of the Labor Party are doing this week. They think that they are on a winner when they say that the Liberal Party does not have any policy. The Liberal Party have had policy in relation to water restrictions since 2004. Our policy has been consistent and it has been consistently expressed by us. I went back to the original water conservation document that was released in the run up to the 2004 election.

It was reinforced at the 2008 election and it still stands as our policy. It clearly says in that document that we should have a thorough reassessment of water restrictions, that they should be reviewed, that we should move away from the random and arbitrary odds and even system and that we should move to a system where we encourage people, especially when we are at stage 1, to practise good horticultural practices and

water their gardens infrequently but well, rather than superficially and often. That will have a whole lot of benefits. We would use less water and we would get better growth for it.

Mr Corbell might want to sling off at people and say that Mrs Dunne is setting herself up as an expert. This is not the view that I have determined by myself. This is the constant advice that we have received from horticulturists. It is pleasing to see that there has been much progress. The community, Actew and other organisations have been looking at better ways to do that. That is bought out by the article on page 2 in today's paper.

I recall my former colleague Mr Stefaniak, as the shadow minister for sport, making suggestions rather like the initiative that was launched at Rosary primary school yesterday. He was saying that we need to find the right sort of grasses that do not use as much water, but which are still not too hard on the kids. We need to cultivate them. Mr Stefaniak said that in and out of season for years and years. There is a clear position.

Mr Corbell can use the current playbook phrases if he likes, but he cannot deny the fact that the Canberra Liberals have consistently and over a long period of time called for a more rational approach to water restriction, a more rational approach to permanent conservation measures. Mr Rattenbury was asked today whether he thought that the permanent conservation measures were too generous. I think he said that the Greens did, and I agree with him. We should not be encouraging people to water their lawns every day. It is not good. It is not good for their lawns and it is not good for our water supply.

As Mr Seselja said that we are not proposing a willy-nilly return to the old days. I have been very careful in the words that I have used. People have said to me, "Do you want to go back to no restrictions?" I have actually called for an easing of restrictions, not an abolition of restrictions. I think that there is general agreement that there will always be some level of restriction. We do not want to call it a restriction because that is punitive. It will be a permanent conservation measure. People in the community need to own those permanent conservation measures, understand them and embrace them because it is for them to implement that policy.

I think it is unfortunate that the minister should respond in that way. It is still disappointing. The permanent conservation measures have always since they were first introduced in about 2004 had the same major tenet: we can use sprinklers every day between 7 am and 10 am—whatever times they are. There are two times twice a day and that particular tenet has always been there. There has been no modification. I have been calling for a modification to that measure since 2004. It has been embedded in our policy since 2004. It remains our policy and it is part of the motivation of why we are here today.

Generally speaking, Madam Assistant Speaker, I thank members for the spirit of this debate and I thank members for their generosity in allowing us to manoeuvre our way through a range of amendments. It could have been quite messy. It did take some thought and some consideration. I think it was done with generosity. I thank members for their support of this very important issue.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Housing—affordability

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (8:08): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) is concerned about the lack of affordable housing available to households earning below the median income;
- (2) notes that the:
 - (a) ACT Government will conduct a review of its Affordable Housing Action Plan before the end of 2010;
 - (b) Affordable Housing Action Plan and its progress reports lack clear definitions and measures of affordable housing; and
 - (c) ACT Government has publicly been using terminology and measures which fail to reflect what is affordable for households that earn below the median income, including the costs of running a house; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) commit to using affordable housing related terminology and measures which reflect the position of those households that earn below the median income; and
 - (b) include in its *Affordable Housing Action Plan* review:
 - (i) a definition for “affordable housing”, which incorporates running costs such as utilities bills; and
 - (ii) assessments against measures, such as the 30/40 rule as used by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute and National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, that provide a more accurate reflection of housing stress and housing affordability in the ACT.

Over the last 10 years there has been a growing problem with housing affordability in the ACT. House prices and rents have increased at high rates leaving many people, especially those who earn below the median income, in difficult positions. We have also seen over the last 10 years an ongoing discourse about housing affordability and the strategies that should be used to assist in overcoming the market values that exist.

Today I move a motion that seeks to address one of the latest problems we have been seeing in the affordable housing debate—that is, the terminology and measures which are referred to the government in public discourse. The Greens are concerned, as are others, that the government’s understanding of what constitutes affordable housing no longer reflects that which has been felt by those in the community who suffer the highest levels of housing stress.

I believe that if we in our community are to have a strong, accurate, informed debate about the state of affordable housing in the ACT, we must call on the government to develop and use more accurate terminology. Government's choice of language is important, because it can influence people's understanding of a problem and possible solutions to it. The choice of language can also guide where the government chooses to invest significant resources in addressing the problem.

One of the central tenets of this motion and the government work in this area is the affordable housing action plan from 2007. I note that the Greens first called on the government to develop an affordable housing action plan back in 2005 through a motion in this chamber, as Canberra was already exhibiting strong signs of difficulty in the housing market. Unfortunately, the government rejected the motion at the time but did eventually release the action plan in 2007.

Three years on and many people, including government members, are reflecting on what has and has not been achieved. Change does take time, but it is fair to say that, in three years, we have seen some of the impact the action plan is having and can begin to make some strong comments. The comments we have and are receiving is that the government's commentary on affordable housing is missing the mark and it does not represent what constituents and housing consumers are experiencing.

I wish to make it very clear to both the government and the opposition that my motion is focused on the terminology and measures we use in the affordable housing debate. We cannot debate strategies when there is such a high degree of misrepresentative language being used. The doublespeak needs to end before we can have a clear discourse with the public on this subject. For that reason, developing an accurate definition is imperative.

This is also very much about the demand side of the housing equation. Since the affordable housing action plan was launched in 2007, we have heard the Chief Minister many times refer to housing in the ACT as the most affordable in Australia. This analysis is based on whether households earning median incomes can afford median house prices, including rentals. Such commentaries are inaccurate because, as the government well knows, having a high median income means that people earning lower incomes are further behind. When the government talks about housing affordability, it should really be talking about those families in the most housing stress rather than how households and many incomes are travelling. In fact, many people in the lower median income bracket would also be struggling under current rent and house prices.

The government has indicated that it plans to conduct a full review of the affordable housing action plan prior to end of the year. This review appears to have been kicked off by the slum housing that was discovered several months ago. The Greens support the government's decision to renew and reinvigorate the affordable housing action plan, and we are moving this motion today to ensure that the government's understanding of affordable housing reflects the policy development of those bodies which are leading the way, such as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, known as AHURI, and the National Centre for Social Economic Modelling, or NATSEM.

We also want to ensure that the government's review reflects the comments that have been made by the community. One of the major comments the Greens are hearing is about who the government is talking about when it promotes its affordable housing programs. Is it really developing products that are aimed at those people in the most housing stress? This is where terminology and measures become important as they can assist in ensuring the government is hitting the target, something we do not believe has been consistently occurring.

The government's actions on affordable housing appear to have been focusing on those households that have two adults who earn a moderate income and wish to buy a house. But work done by groups like AHURI show that low income renters are the largest group of households experiencing an affordability problem, and for 70 per cent of them home ownership is not something they see as likely.

AHURI has also found that the polarised housing market is likely to worsen across Australia and there will be growing reliance on private rentals into the future. In the ACT, rents have risen over 10 per cent in the last year compared to a national average of 2.8 per cent, and recent commentary on the market has signalled that rental prices here are likely to continue to increase.

Looking at what is currently available for rent in Canberra, there are few one-bedroom dwellings available for less than \$300 a week, and \$300 is the cheapest available for two bedrooms. For a three-bedroom house, the lowest rent listed is \$350 a week. If we were to use a strict 30 per cent rule where a household is classified as being in housing stress if it spends more than 30 per cent of its gross income on rent, a single parent with two children living in a two-bedroom flat would have to be earning at least \$47,000 a year, something I expect would be quite difficult for many single parents.

With the government's 2007 affordable housing action plan and subsequent progress reports, I note there is an absence of definitions of "affordable housing" and how it is measured. A previous report provided by the affordable housing steering group to inform the action plan had limited discussion of theoretical definitions and measures, and I note that the paper states that the report focuses on providing policy responses rather than analysis of the housing market. So while some analysis was conducted, it was not extensive and it appears little work was done to ensure the government's actions were evidence based and well targeted.

This omission may not have been seen to be a serious issue at the time, but three years later we are now noticing this. For example, the government has used a range of figures publicly when referring to what constitutes affordable housing. In the case of purchasers, it refers to \$322,000 for a property, and for rentals it uses a calculation of 74.9 per cent of market rent. But the questions remain: who can afford these prices and who is being targeted?

Both these reference points—\$322,000 for a dwelling or 74.9 per cent of market rent—imply that the government is using definitions derived from the supply of housing. \$322,000 is something the government and developers can or want to

provide, and 74.9 per cent is based on a figure brought about by commonwealth tax concessions for not-for-profit housing. Such measures do not, however, reflect what is affordable for the consumer and where it needs to be put into reflecting what is affordable from the demand side of the market.

Earlier this year I was contacted by a couple who were in their 30s with a new-born child. The couple were interested in the OwnPlace and land rent scheme. The government used a cut-off point of around \$75,000 per annum earnings for a household to determine eligibility for these schemes. Although the family earned a small amount above this, they found that they were likely to be paying above 50 per cent of their disposable income on housing costs and, as such, could not afford the scheme. It seems a household has to be earning closer to \$100,000 a year to be able to afford the scheme, some 30 per cent higher than the \$75,000 measure. Looking yesterday at the OwnPlace website, I see the eligibility criteria are currently under review, and I wonder if the government has received significant comment on the criteria from the community.

With regard to the rental market, the government committed to incorporate around five per cent of affordable housing in City West as the area was redeveloped. Yet several years later, the government is stating that student housing in City West that costs about \$400 a week is delivering affordable housing. Because \$400 a week is considered 74.9 per cent of market rent, it is quoted as being affordable. It is fair to say that some of us were amazed that the government had the confidence to quote such a figure as being affordable when it is clearly out of the realms of many students and others.

I asked the Chief Minister to clarify his definition of “affordable housing”. There was some improvement on the City West example, as the Chief Minister replied that the government defines “affordable housing” as housing that is safe, appropriate and accessible and where housing services are purchased for 30 per cent or less of household gross income.

We are calling on the government today to develop a more accurate definition of “affordable housing”, as we have recently heard of cases or comments where the government has ignored the affordability of running a house. We have been told that large families at risk of homelessness have been placed in houses which have large utilities bills and that the Chief Minister would choose to avoid solar access in pursuit of cheaper construction options.

This is not an either/or debate. Utility costs are integral to the running and affordability of a home. There is no point in constructing cheap houses if people cannot afford the bills that come with the house. It is a known fact that building more efficient homes and providing houses with high energy efficiency levels are much cheaper to live in, have very low energy bills and are more comfortable to live in.

Looking to New South Wales as an example, its office of affordable housing defines “affordable housing” as housing that is appropriate to the needs of a household and is within their means to pay. The means or capacity of a household to pay for their housing depends on three primary factors: the income of the household, the cost of

appropriate housing and the cost of other essential living costs to be met by the household, such as food and household goods, transport, education and health care.

I also wish to draw on the work undertaken by ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter specifically from their 2006 report, *The wealth of home*, which provides a very strong discussion of the issues of terminology and measures. The report noted that we should not use just one definition for “affordable housing”; rather, we should use a series of concepts and measures in unison, for any one measure by itself cannot capture the diverse nature of what constitutes affordable housing.

The wealth of home also suggests that measures of affordable housing should be changed so that they are based more on who needs to receive affordable housing. That will mean that we apply tests of affordability to those people who are in the most housing stress, nominally people who earn below the median income.

Looking at work undertaken by AHURI and the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, they have used the 34-40 principle, which focuses on those households spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing while earning in the bottom 40 per cent of the income range. Work by NATSEM using such principles shows that housing stress is hitting people in Australia disproportionately. It is most affecting those who earn a low income, the unemployed, sole-parent families, first homebuyers and young people.

NATSEM notes that young people and first homebuyers have a long-term potential to work themselves out of housing stress. The AHURI report entitled *Approaches to evaluation of affordable housing initiatives in Australia* notes that the use of evaluation processes remain undeveloped in Australia with regard to housing and that there is a tendency to avoid evaluation of major programs. This carries some weight when we look at the ACT example, because all too often we will see reports that focus on managerial site outputs and supply measures but not on outcomes which focused on demand.

In closing, I hope the government and opposition will support my motion—although it does not seem that is going to happen—as what I am asking for is not just about language and calculation but, most essentially, evidence-based policy. If we do not develop and use an accurate definition of what is affordable housing, then we will not get the type of plan that is needed for the Canberra community, and a significant proportion of the population will be left out of the debate.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8:21): The government welcomes the opportunity to debate affordable housing in the Assembly this evening. Indeed, Ms Bresnan, whilst the government will be opposing this motion tonight, we are not opposing the sentiment of the motion. We could not agree with some of the wording in the motion, and efforts have been made today to try and reconcile those differences—without success, as is going to happen in this place from time to time. We have a pretty good rate of agreement around amendments most of the time, but today that was not to be delivered. But the government accepts what you are asking it to do in your motion and will consider it as part of the review.

I am unclear as to what the Liberal Party are doing on this motion. We expected some amendments from them, but I have not seen any amendments. Our amendments were unacceptable, as far as I understood it, but I am not sure what their position is. If this motion does pass tonight along the lines of what you are calling on the government to do, it will be incorporated into the review, whatever the outcome of this evening's debate is.

The government do have a sound record in responding to the challenge of housing affordability, but we also acknowledge that we need to maintain a level of vigilance as economic and social issues continue to emerge. It needs to be recognised that housing affordability is a long-term challenge that requires long-term and comprehensive solutions. That is why, a couple of years ago, we did release a comprehensive plan to tackle the barriers to affordability through a housing continuum that caters for the needs of Canberrans at every stage of their lives.

The government's action plan addresses all aspects of affordable housing, including planning reform, land release, public and community housing, aged persons housing and homelessness. It has been carefully calibrated to tackle issues of housing affordability and homelessness on all levels. The government continues to refine its affordable housing initiatives to ensure that the policy outcomes are well targeted.

Whilst it is a commendable contribution to the debate on housing affordability, I doubt that the Greens' motion today to redefine affordable housing will have any practical impact on access to affordable, appropriate and safe housing in the ACT. The issues around the definition of affordable housing are legitimate, but a definitional change does not deliver one extra rental property or one more social housing property. A definitional change would not affect waiting times for public housing or change the number of people looking for housing who are homeless in the ACT.

On the issue of definitions—and Ms Bresnan did go to this—in the *Wealth of home* report, ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter agreed that there is no single adequate measure of housing affordability and that virtually all indicators can produce a number of methodological or classification problems. The current definition of housing affordability used by the ACT government is consistent with the 30-40 rule recommended by the Greens and used by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. The rule considers the bottom 40 per cent of income earners who are paying more than 30 per cent of income on housing. The ACT government's definition, however, goes further and expands on the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute definition by acknowledging that for households on higher incomes a figure of 40 per cent of gross income is considered reasonable.

These clearly stated definitions are contained within the Affordable Housing Steering Group report, which is available on the government's affordable housing website. These definitions adopted by the government have been used since 2007 to frame the objectives within the affordable housing action plan and aim to provide a mix of housing types across different income ranges.

The motion calling for a review to incorporate running costs such as utilities bills when measuring housing affordability is a departure from the standard definition used by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, which refers to absolute residual income once housing costs have been met or a ratio measure specifying the acceptable proportion to be spent on housing. Utilities can vary considerably from household to household, depending on a range of influences. The most obvious of course, is household structure. It is for this practical reason that the modelling of individual living costs across a range of incomes and housing types has not been undertaken by the ACT or any other jurisdiction in Australia. However, we are mindful of the impact of essential non-housing costs, particularly on those on lower incomes, and we have introduced a range of measures to ensure that those on low incomes receive appropriate assistance.

For example, in the 2007-08 budget, the government committed \$20 million for energy efficient measures in public housing, and improvements to 2,424 properties have been undertaken. The work done under this plan includes wall and ceiling insulation, draught seals and high-efficiency hot-water systems for new and existing dwellings. Pelmet and curtain rods are being installed in all houses as they become vacant from August 2010 onwards. A photovoltaic electricity generation system has been installed at two apartment complexes. The hot-water systems being installed, where suitable, are five-star gas, electric-boosted solar hot-water systems or electric heat pumps. The hot-water systems are being installed upon failure of the existing systems.

The government also provides a range of concessions to low income earners in the ACT. In the last budget we funded an increase of \$20 in energy concessions, with a maximum annual rebate of \$214.87.

In terms of the \$328,000 affordable home purchase initiative, this is just one part of the affordable housing action plan, which contains 84 objectives across a range of policy areas which include planning reform, land release, public and community house, aged persons housing and homelessness. The affordable home purchase initiative is just one of those 84 objectives within the plan and is aimed at singles and couples on median incomes aspiring to home purchase. To isolate this objective as the government's only measure of housing affordability for all ACT households is both incorrect and misleading. There are other important thresholds which exist within the action plan for those on lower incomes. These include the entry point to public housing and the entry point into community housing. In both instances, pathways to home purchase from these entry points are either in place or being developed.

We are also working closely with the federal government to increase the ACT social housing stock to 12,000 by mid-2011, and scoping has commenced for the redevelopment of Allawah flats, Bega flats and the Currong apartments.

And let me give an update on the land rent scheme as well. As part of the housing affordability action plan, the ACT government's land rent scheme is designed for a person or family on a low income in the ACT so that they can purchase a home. The land rent scheme does enable families and singles on lower than average incomes to

get their foot on the first step towards home ownership. For a typical three-bedroom home valued at \$328,000, mortgage repayments are reduced from around \$523 per week to \$317 per week by utilising the land rent scheme. The land rent scheme is increasingly popular; more than 100 affordable land rent blocks have been settled and 404 blocks have been exchanged and are awaiting settlement.

Other initiatives already in place or being developed for households of the lowest 40 per cent of income earners include the availability of shared equity schemes for tenants in public and community housing to enable affordable and progressive home purchase and the provision of a \$50 million loan facility to CHC Affordable Housing for the delivery of affordable rental and for sale dwellings. To date, the first 200 community housing dwellings delivered by CHC in partnership with the government have welcomed new tenants or owners, and another 365 dwellings have been put out to the market.

There is also the introduction, through Communities@Work, of a home share program to provide accommodation for low income singles or students and support older people to remain in their homes, and conveyance duty and land payment deferral for first homebuyers. Housing ACT is undergoing a stock restructuring program to increase the proportion of two-bedroom dwellings, including the purchase of new stand-alone house and land packages. Also, there are accommodation options to accommodate workers on a short-term basis and to respond to peaks in industry demand. There are supported accommodation services for the elderly or frail homeless or older people at risk of homelessness; the development of options to implement a program to increase tenancy and clinical support for tenants with a mental illness; and the introduction of a youth foyer model in the territory, linking youth housing with opportunities for employment and training.

In addressing the complexities of housing affordability, the government is tackling the wider issues, which include land release, the land supply pipe line, and planning and building regulation. Significant progress has been made against these objectives, including more than 13,500 residential dwelling sites being released since 2006-07, including the first sites in the new estate of Molonglo. There is a commitment to releasing another 17,000 dwelling sites over the next four years, with 20 per cent of blocks, houses and units in every new estate now reserved for affordable housing.

In addition to the already substantial expenditure on land by the Land Development Agency, over \$70 million in capital and \$15 million in recurrent funding has been committed through the last budget to support the release of land. The first proud homeowners have moved into 106 affordable dwellings delivered under the OwnPlace initiative and another 141 are under construction.

In conclusion, let me say that the government agrees with the Greens around the importance of affordable housing as a major issue for governments across Australia and for the ACT. We did recognise this issue at an early stage, and we responded with wide-ranging policy action which has delivered, and will continue to deliver, real housing outcomes for hundreds of Canberra families.

There are 84 initiatives across the affordable housing action plan, and the government does not intend to stop there. We are reviewing and monitoring the plan, and we are

willing to consider new ideas from whatever source. But the ideas need to build on the foundation of the initiatives in place since 2007. The Chief Minister continues to meet with the industry and community sectors to identify possible refinements or new initiatives that could be incorporated into the ACT's affordable housing action plan. We recognise that social and economic trends change, that new data becomes available. The government will respond in any way it can to improve access to affordable housing for young families and other Canberrans seeking to enter the housing market.

In conclusion, I repeat that we agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment of the motion. Difficulties around trying to sort out appropriate wording have meant that we are unable to support the motion today, but I will make sure that issues raised in this debate are part of the review of the affordable housing action plan, including whether there needs to be some clarity around the appropriate definition—or should I say definitions?—used for affordable housing to make sure that it is clear which target groups each initiative is aimed at.

MR SESELJA (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (8:34): I would like to start by saying that we did circulate an amendment some time ago to both the Greens' offices and the government. We were asked by the Chief Minister's office, because we did not know who would be dealing with this, and we provided them, I understand, with the amendment which I will be moving. So that has been provided to both other parties in the Assembly.

The Liberal Party will not be supporting this motion today, and there are a number of reasons for that. We agree that housing affordability is a critical issue and is of critical importance to the people of the ACT. There is no doubt that under this government housing has become far less affordable. It has become more and more difficult for first homebuyers in the ACT over the last several years, and particularly over the last nine years of this government, to purchase a home.

It is worth going through some of the numbers and looking at the stark price increases and the difficulties that I think young families now face in purchasing a home. There are a number of ways you can look at this. One is the median price, which does not give you necessarily a complete picture of affordability but gives you a bit of an indication. There are also reports like the HIA-Commonwealth Bank report, which looked very closely at how first homebuyers fare in terms of purchase. I think that always continues to need to be the target because first homebuyers and renters are the people who are made vulnerable in this equation rather than people buying their second or third home or in other situations.

If you look at the median house price, in March 2002 the median house price, according to the ABS, in the ACT was \$245,000. In the December quarter of 2009, it was \$525,000. So we have gone from—

Ms Gallagher: Can we get your amendment?

MR SESELJA: Sure; I am happy to circulate it.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think the Clerk has your amendment either, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Sorry, my apologies. I did provide it to each of the offices.

MR SPEAKER: If you could hand it over now, that would be good.

MR SELSEJA: Yes, I am happy to hand it over and I will be happy to move it in a moment. But it can be circulated.

So the median house price went from, in 2002, \$245,000 to \$525,000 in 2009. I think that gives some indication of just how things have changed in the Canberra market and the difficulties that many people face in purchasing in those circumstances. With that more than doubling of the median price, there is no doubt that, in those 7½ years from March 2002 to December 2009, wages have not doubled and that the cost of living of other things has also gone up. So the burden of purchasing a house now for a first homebuyer in that kind of environment is far greater than it was. We need to look at some of the reasons for that.

Before we look at some of those reasons, it is worth looking at the most recent land release from the government, which is in Molonglo. We asked some questions about this, about the cost per square metre of a block in Molonglo. We asked this question and had this answer: with respect to the average sale price for a block sold in Molonglo, the average sale price per square metre was \$701. That is a significant amount of money. To put that into context, that would mean a 500-metre block would be roughly \$350,000. In anyone's language, that is a significant investment. If you talk about the main land release now in the south of Canberra, and the only land release now in the south of Canberra, you are talking about paying \$700 per square metre if you want to purchase a block of land in that area.

The HIA-Commonwealth Bank figures show that, in fact, affordability continues to be a problem in the ACT, that over the past year, on the latest figures, there was a 14.7 per cent deterioration in affordability and that families now purchasing a home need about \$3,000 a month in order to service the average mortgage. Three thousand dollars a month just in mortgage repayments is something that most people on an average income are not going to be able to service—or, if they are, it is going to be with a significant degree of difficulty.

That is the scale of the problem. There is no doubt that if you are a young family now, unless you are on a particularly high income, and even those on good incomes, on what we would consider to be medium to high incomes, will struggle with those kinds of numbers. That is the feedback that I get from the community, and I think the numbers and the statistics bear that out.

The question is: why has it become so? And there are a number of reasons. But there are a lot of things that the government contributes to. The government is not responsible for all of this, but for the government in the ACT, I think it would be difficult to argue against the fact that the ACT government would be the government that has the most ability to influence prices of any jurisdiction. I think it is fair to say that, given our unique system here in the ACT, where you have the government owning all of the unleased land, the government, as the largest landowner and

responsible for virtually all of the greenfields release in the territory, has a significant responsibility and plays a significant role in the kind of cost burdens that there are for Canberrans.

If you look back at the ABS figures in terms of those median prices, we saw this massive hike from March 2002 to March 2003 to March 2004. We saw the median price go from \$245,000 to \$300,000 to \$372,000 in the space of just two years, so going up by roughly 50 per cent in two years, and we also saw a very slow land release around the same period. So we had a government that was actively restricting land release at a time when the commonwealth public service was growing significantly in the ACT. The combination of those two things, a combination of strong employment growth during that time and land shortage created by the ACT government, pushed those prices up in a very steep manner, and ACT first homeowners have never quite recovered from that.

Not only do the ACT government control land release, but of course they are also a developer. In fact, for a significant period they were the only developer of residential land in the territory, of greenfields residential sites. They were either doing them in their own right or they were doing them as joint ventures. Since then they have gone to a partial privatisation where they will do about one-third of land release as an englobo, but there seem to be moves by the ACT government to move away from that and to do more of it themselves.

The other thing that I think has been a really important contributor is the slow rollout of infrastructure. One of the things that really slow these land releases is infrastructure and the provision of infrastructure to these subdivisions. We see in the answer to the question on notice on Molonglo, when asked when construction of homes on these blocks will be able to commence, that the answer was mid-2011. Of course, I do not recall the government ever meeting one of these targets, yet we are talking about people who paid \$700 per square metre for blocks in Molonglo some time ago and who are looking to, at the very earliest, one would say, mid-2011, and more likely, on recent form, late 2011 or some time into 2012, before they actually get to start building on these blocks.

With those kinds of numbers, you can understand why we do not see the kind of land release that the government touts making a real difference to affordability, because there is such a lag time on actually bringing these blocks to market. There has been that stifling of competition that we have seen, and the stifling of competition has come about through the preponderance of the Land Development Agency, through the way that this government has conducted land release. That has not helped.

So we have the issues about land release, about the speed of land release, about the government developing the land. We have problems with the provision of infrastructure. We have planning problems in ACTPLA and how much that slows things down. And now we also have this issue around the government actually looking to make things worse. I now move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “income” in paragraph (1), substitute:

“(2) notes:

- (a) that first homeowners in the ACT are disproportionately affected by rising home prices;
 - (b) that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the median house price in Canberra in March 2002 was \$245,000 but by December 2009 it was \$525,000;
 - (c) that the Housing Industry Association—Commonwealth Bank survey shows that the ACT is one of the least affordable jurisdictions for first home owners, with the most recent report on the June quarter showing that housing affordability for first home owners has fallen by 14.7 per cent in annual terms;
 - (d) the Labor Government constraints on the housing market which put significant pressure on house prices, including:
 - (i) lack of competition in land development;
 - (ii) slow land release programs;
 - (iii) bureaucratic and slow planning processes;
 - (iv) the slow roll out of infrastructure in greenfields developments;
 - (v) the significantly increased change of use charge, which is a tax on units and urban infill; and
 - (vi) the continued imposition of stamp duty;
 - (e) the Greens Party policies that put further significant pressure on the cost of a home, including support for the increased change of use charge, an impediment for apartments and infill; and
- (3) calls on the Government to immediately address the issues in (2)(d) in order to have a genuine impact on housing affordability in the ACT.”.

My amendment goes to some of these issues. It is all well and good for the Greens to say, “What we’ll do is we’ll reclassify this,” but I do agree to an extent with what Katy Gallagher had to say in her speech, which is that simply reclassifying is not likely to actually deliver more affordable housing to the people of the ACT.

When you actually look at the policies of this government, which include massively increasing the tax on homes, these are all putting upward pressure on prices. We had, I think, the completely incredible answer from the Treasurer today in question time, saying that apparently it will have no impact on rents. That is not what anyone in industry believes. You cannot get anyone to back up that claim that you can see taxes go up to \$50,000 for a unit in Braddon—\$50,000 per unit—and that is somehow going to have no impact on rents. It is absurd. If that was the case, you could make it \$100,000, you could make it \$150,000 or \$200,000 and apparently it would have no impact. Of course it will have an impact. It is a significant tax. It is therefore a significant cost.

Either that will make some developments uneconomic, in which case they do not go ahead, and so we see a stifling of supply, or they will go ahead and they will seek to pass that on. People do not develop land so that they cannot make money out of it. There is a profit motive, and they will make those decisions. But if they make decisions not to go ahead with that development then there is less supply, and that will create further pressures. Quite apart from the issues around seeking to have more urban infill, we will see a situation where that will be discouraged and prices will be pushed up—prices for rents and prices for buying. So there is a whole range of things where the government has contributed to this situation.

The Greens actually—and it is mentioned in my amendment—support this tax. So the question for them is: do they actually buy the government's analysis, which no-one else does, that apparently you can put a massive tax on and it will have no impact? We have seen this in the submission to Treasury from the Independent Property Group:

The logic to determine these numbers—

in terms of the codification—

appears to fail simple mathematics, and appears not to have taken into consideration the significant costs and lengthy delays a developer does ordinarily experience as they negotiate the planning system, public consultation and a possible ACAT appeals process.

The HIA says:

The fees are generally too high, and in many instances excessive, and will prevent development and redevelopment from occurring ...

All of these industry groups have made compelling cases as to how this will play out, yet this government wants to push ahead with it. This government, and this alliance between the Labor Party and the Greens, wants to push ahead with a tax which is sure to create a greater burden on Canberra families. It is sure to create a burden on purchasers and a burden on renters. Anyone who tries to argue that putting a \$50,000 tax on a unit will have no impact simply does not understand how the market works. Even the Treasury acknowledged that it would likely be borne across the board, which means that developers might take a bit of a hit on their profits, sellers of land might take a bit of a hit, and buyers and renters might take a bit of a hit. You would argue that the chances are that it will be all three. It is very unlikely that the developer is going to take the whole hit, and that is what the government appears to be arguing.

In conclusion, the government's record on this is demonstrated in the figures. They can talk about all the schemes that they have, but they have a significant amount of control and under them they have made things far worse. The Greens' motion does not seek to address that, and in fact simply seeks to reclassify words, and I do not believe it will have that kind of impact. I think these policies, and some of the policy changes that are set out in the amendment, would be a far greater contribution. They would make a far more significant contribution to making housing more affordable.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (8.49): While I do support some of the statements in Mr Seselja's amendment, we will not be supporting the amendment. For example, paragraphs (2)(b) and (c) support the sentiment of the motion, but paragraph (2)(a) misses the point in that it is private renters, especially those who are just outside the public housing eligibility criteria, that are facing the most housing stress. We know that through the research which has been done by a number of groups. Even if the market was, say, flooded tomorrow with land sales, those people still would not be able to afford to buy homes, and they are the ones that are suffering the most right now, and we know that. My motion is very much about the demand side, and that is the point we have been trying to make today. If we do not get that right, many people in Canberra will be left out of the equation.

I will go to paragraph (2)(e) of Mr Seselja's amendment, which refers to the Greens. I would just like to point out that, as Mr Seselja should be aware, we had a flat fee change of use charge for many years with dual occupancies as an example, and the prices did not go down. In fact, they kept going up. So subparagraph (e) has absolutely no factual basis at all, and that is something Mr Seselja should know.

I would also like to refer to the 30 June debate on Mr Seselja's motion on change of use. The Greens, through Ms Hunter, put forward amendments to that to have an evaluation of the impacts of the change of use charge and that this be undertaken as part of the codification of the change of use charge process to ensure that it does not create an unreasonable barrier to urban densification. Further to that, the government has agreed to provide a full evaluation of the impacts of the codification of the change of use charge, including an assessment of the impacts on urban densification, a cost-benefit analysis and a regulatory impact statement. I just wanted to point that out.

My motion is calling for evidence-based policy. That is something we do not believe we have with the 2007 action plan and something we certainly do not get with Mr Seselja's amendment.

MS LE COUTEUR (Molonglo) (8.52): I would like to speak briefly, largely on the amendment but, first, on the substance of the motion that Ms Bresnan has moved. I think it is very important to actually define what we mean by "affordable", because otherwise we can say that every house in Canberra is affordable. Someone in Canberra is going to buy it, therefore someone can afford it. We need to have some more useful definition of "affordable housing", and Ms Bresnan has made a very positive contribution to getting a definition of "affordable" which would align with the sorts of things that the people of Canberra think is affordable, not the definitions that the government is currently using.

But I mainly wanted to talk about Mr Seselja's amendment, specifically paragraph (2)(e). Ms Bresnan has spoken about the change of use charge, but I would also like to point out that the Greens have been doing a lot of work around the issues of long-term housing affordability, which relate not just to the initial cost of the house but to the cost of living in the house afterwards. I will look at a number of things.

This morning the Liberal and Labor parties combined to stop debate on the subject of solar access and passive solar design. Passive solar design and solar access are

designed to reduce the long-term costs of heating and cooling in houses. This is the sort of direction the Greens think we should be going in. It was very disappointing to find that that was not the direction the rest of the Assembly thought we should be going in.

Water is another significant cost and is another item which we have been debating in this Assembly today. This is an area where Mr Rattenbury, in particular, has been doing a lot of work. In Molonglo we have been attempting to get grey water provision from the beginning and, again, this is proving to be an uphill battle.

Transport is an area where both Ms Bresnan and I have been working. Mr Seselja has talked about Molonglo a lot, and one of the things in our agreement with the Labor Party was to have public transport in Molonglo at the same time as the people arrive. We want families all through Canberra to be in the position where they do not have to have two cars because the public transport and the active transport system is so bad. We want families in Canberra to be in the position where they can do what they need to do as a one-car family or a no-car family.

As members will appreciate, owning a car is quite expensive. It costs at least \$5,000 a year to own a car. If we build Canberra with a good public transport system, with good cycleways, with good footpaths, we will save money for people in the long run. This is what makes housing actually affordable. This is what makes the difference between people finding themselves in a house that is possibly cheaper to buy in the suburbs but one where the running costs become impossible. With transport, as well as being more affordable in terms of running costs, it also becomes a lot more affordable in terms of health costs as people in Canberra have some exercise with walking and riding. Given the time, I will not speak any longer, but I just wanted to make it clear that the Greens are the party working to make the long-term costs of ownership affordable.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Health and Minister for Industrial Relations) (8:56): I will be brief because we are adjourning in a couple of minutes. The government will not be supporting this amendment. It really shows the short-sightedness of the Liberal Party that they would circulate an amendment at 8 o'clock after we have spent the whole day trying to negotiate with them around suitable amendments. They circulated it at 8 o'clock, five minutes before we started the debate, but we still did not get the final amendment until about 8.30, whilst we were debating it.

There are elements of Mr Seselja's amendment you could support and where you think, "Oh yes," but then it gets nasty. Paragraphs (2)(d) and (e) are the usual Liberal strategy of wrecking and spoiling and making something that other parties in this place cannot agree to. That is the strategy you guys have employed, and I wonder at what point in the four-year cycle you will realise that it is just not working and that you are not actually changing the debate or influencing the debate at all. That is why the government will not be supporting the amendment today.

Question put:

That **Mr Seselja's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 6

Noes 10

Mr Coe	Mr Smyth	Mr Barr	Mr Hargreaves
Mr Doszpot		Ms Bresnan	Ms Hunter
Mrs Dunne		Ms Burch	Ms Le Couteur
Mr Hanson		Mr Corbell	Ms Porter
Mr Seselja		Ms Gallagher	Mr Rattenbury

Question so resolved in the negative.

Amendment negatived.

MS BRESNAN (Brindabella) (9.00): I will be very quick, because I know it is late. I just wanted to say it is a shame that this motion is going to go down today because I think it would have made a very positive contribution to the whole debate. What a definitional change will do is ensure people on lower incomes, including those in the lower medium income bracket, are accounted for. The anecdotes I provided in my speech, including that of the family interested—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, there is an agreement between the three parties in this place that the Assembly will adjourn at 9 o'clock. I call for you to ask that the question be put immediately, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, there is nothing in the standing orders that can require me to do that, so there is no point of order.

MS BRESNAN: I am just wrapping up, Mr Speaker. I did say I would be quick. We have 10 minutes. The anecdotes I provided in my speech, including that of the family interested in the land rent scheme and OwnPlace, show that there are a significant number of people who do not qualify for these programs, who cannot afford to purchase a home in the general market and who also do not qualify for public housing. The Acting Chief Minister said a change of definition will not increase the number of properties, but I will say again that, in order to consider the ongoing affordability of a home, we need to consider who are the people in danger of being in housing stress and not being able to make rent or mortgage payments and also pay bills and meet the daily costs of living.

I will note again that other jurisdictions, primarily New South Wales and Queensland, are including running costs as a basic policy principle. If we do not adopt an accurate definition of what actually is affordable then properties might increase regardless of what the definition is, but we will continue to have properties that will be unaffordable for people to live in.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Noes 12

Ms Bresnan
Ms Hunter

Ms Le Couteur
Mr Rattenbury

Mr Barr
Ms Burch
Mr Coe
Mr Corbell
Mr Doszpot
Mrs Dunne

Ms Gallagher
Mr Hanson
Mr Hargreaves
Ms Porter
Mr Seselja
Mr Smyth

Question so resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

Adjournment

Motion by **Mr Corbell** proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Self Help Organisations United Together open day Women's Royal Australian Naval Service Association

MR HANSON (Molonglo) (9.05): Mr Speaker—

Mr Barr: You've been to an event?

MR HANSON: I have been to many events. I do not simply go to events where there are media opportunities. Often I will go to events that do not suit. You probably would not understand that.

I recently had the opportunity to attend a Self Help Organisations United Together open day, that is, a SHOUT open day, and pay a visit to their facility in Pearce. The open day that they held was at the Weston Creek Community Centre and the awareness day was an opportunity for the self-help and support groups to showcase and celebrate the valuable and indispensable work that they conduct for the wellbeing of the community.

Margaret Reid, former senator for the ACT, spoke, and the 2010 edition of the ACT directory of self-help support groups and community services was launched. Copies were made available free on the day. Twenty-two groups were present and I had the chance to meet all of the groups. I must say that I was very impressed with what I saw and with the people I met—people out in the community helping each other in the most commendable way.

The groups represented included the ACT Down Syndrome Association, the ACT Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Society, the Asthma Foundation of the ACT, the Arthritis Association of the ACT, Autism Asperger ACT, Better Hearing Australia Canberra Support Group, Bosom Buddies, the Canberra/Queanbeyan ADD Support Group, Friends of Brain Injured Children, Heart

Support ACT, Health Care Consumers Association of the ACT, Lung Life Support Group, MS Australia, Parkinsons ACT, People with Disabilities ACT, Prostate Cancer Support Group, RSI and Overuse Injury Association of the ACT, Sleep Apnoea Association, Solace Association ACT, Stroke Association of the ACT, Alzheimers Association ACT and the ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre.

I would like to say well done to all of the organisations that form SHOUT and that put on the awareness day. To Amanda and all the other staff, well done. SHOUT certainly is a great organisation and it allows small self-help groups who form its membership to punch well above their weight in our community.

I also visited the headquarters in Pearce, as I said, and was very impressed with the operations that they run there in support of all the organisations they support. And they do so on the smallest amount of funding. It is characteristic of the small volunteer-based groups that they do provide a tremendous amount of support to the people in the community that they represent on the smallest amount of money.

I also recently, on Saturday, 16 October, attended the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service Association of the ACT memorial service at HMAS *Harman*. This annual event recognises the service of women who served in the RAN. I would like to commend this small but dedicated group of women and their supporters for remembering the important service rendered by all WRANS over the years.

The naval personnel who attended and the cadets are to be commended for their participation and stoicism in what, I think, can be best described as inclement conditions. I am not sure whether it was hail, snow or sleet but we were wiping ice off ourselves throughout the event. It is characteristic of Canberra's peculiar weather at this time of year that at the same event last year it was incredibly hot.

But well done to the president of the WRANS Association, Keryn Northrope, and all the members on, again, holding a successful memorial service and keeping alive the memory of the great service that WRANS contributed in the service of our nation.

Anti-Poverty Week

MS HUNTER (Ginninderra—Parliamentary Convenor, ACT Greens) (9:09): I am rising tonight to acknowledge that this week is Anti-Poverty Week. It runs from 17 to 23 October each year and does have a national steering committee and an ACT committee. That committee at the moment is co-chaired by Hilary Martin from Marymead and Di Jay from the Red Cross. And the committee has put together a fantastic week of events. Seventeen events in all will be running in the next few days.

To go back to the purpose of Anti-Poverty Week, it is about strengthening public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia. It also encourages research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments.

This is a fantastic initiative that has been up and running for some years now across Australia. I had the privilege of being the co-chair of Anti-Poverty Week for two

years running, and it really is an important event for many of us to realise and understand the impact of poverty but also, regardless of the fact that we live in a city that is quite well off by many standards, one in 10 of us in this community are experiencing poverty, are experiencing tough times, hard times. And we always need to ensure that those vulnerable people are given the opportunities that others in our community, the rest of us, enjoy.

I hosted on Monday the launch of Anti-Poverty Week at the Legislative Assembly. It was a fantastic morning that involved a couple of guest speakers, including Dr Helen Watchirs, who of course, we know, is the Commissioner for Human Rights and Discrimination. She also happens to be the patron of Anti-Poverty Week this year. Helen gave a very moving address looking at the issues of poverty.

We also had the director of the Australia Institute, Dr Richard Denniss. Richard focused on some research that the Australia Institute has recently completed, and that research focuses on the number of people in Australia who are entitled to certain benefits and who are missing out on those benefits because they are not applying for them. This is for many reasons, including lack of awareness. It is about stigma. It is about, I guess, the obstacles and difficulties people have in filling out forms and accessing those payments.

There was something like \$658 million a year of unclaimed or unpaid benefits that really should be accessed by people who may be carers. It could be a parenting allowance, a disability allowance, a bereavement allowance. They were the four that this research particularly focused on. But it just goes to show that we need to also play our part in ensuring that those people who are living on the margins, who do have extremely low incomes, who are facing these issues of poverty, are supported to access the entitlements. That is right: they are entitlements. They need to be able to access those in order to be able to get by. As I said, I was very pleased to have hosted that event.

I congratulate all of those who are involved in organising the 17 events, everything from displays about poverty and hardship to food drives. There are displays and donations. There are discussions. There was a family picnic day for tenants of the housing support unit, who met for lunch and games at Weston Park. I believe that was on yesterday. I do encourage people to go to the Anti-Poverty Week website to have a look at the list of activities, to see whether you are able to support or attend the rest of the activities that will be conducted throughout this week.

Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services Sailability Australia

MR DOSZPOT (Brindabella) (9.14): A few weeks ago I attended the AGM of Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT, in company with Ms Amanda Bresnan. I would like to congratulate the chair, Mr Jim Andriopoulos, and his board, as well as manager, Dewani Bakkum, and all the employees and volunteers and pay tribute to their dedication and loyalty to MARSS. They are a top-class team with a great record of providing settlement and other essential services to migrant, refugee and humanitarian entrants. Their efforts have not gone unnoticed and are obviously greatly appreciated.

I understand that it has been customary over the years that the multicultural minister of the day says a few words at the AGM. In Minister Burch's absence, I was given the opportunity, as shadow multicultural minister, to say a few words. I would like to reiterate that—

Ms Burch: If you could share them with me, Steve?

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you. I wish you would give me some citizenships as well, thank you. We will talk about that later. I would like to reiterate what I said on the night. I think Mr Andriopoulos and his board deserve our thanks for the work that they do.

I would like to mention that the board is comprised of a number of very long-serving individuals. One of them did not renominate this time. Raewyn Bastion did not renominate. Jim Andriopoulos paid tribute on the night to the work that Raewyn has contributed over the years. I would also like to second that sentiment. I think she has been a great contributor and I think she will be sorely missed. I am sure that she will still play a part in MARSS activities.

Other members of the board of management are John Owusu, Nim Osborne, Adrian Arulanandam, David Ng, Frank Pangallo and Simon Ng. I would also like to congratulate Mr Adrian Arulanandam for being elected to the position of deputy chair of Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services.

On 26 September, I attended another AGM. This time it was the AGM of Sailability. On a beautiful sunny Canberra Sunday morning, the AGM saw the re-election of most of the board, with a new vice-chairman and a new committee member also joining the board. I would like to congratulate the chairperson, Mr Peter Brown, and his committee for their contributions to a very positive 2009-2010. The committee of management includes Mr Peter Brown, Mr Gerard Meli, Ms Gerda Lambeck, Mr Bob Woodman, Ms Stephanie Brown, Mr Steven Lomasney and Ms Bronwyn Ibbotson.

I would also like to quote from the AGM document that was put out. It talks about the vision of Sailability. The vision is:

To Provide people of the greater Canberra region, access to the experience of the joy of sailing in safety, regardless of ability, and to further our aspirations to provide members and visitors with the feeling of; 'Freedom on the water regardless of ability'

I was also very much taken with a brief poem, which was very heartfelt, from the person who wrote it, who is wheelchair bound, and I would like to finish my adjournment speech tonight about Sailability with this brief poem:

When I sit in a sailboat I'm no longer wheelchair bound. I use my knowledge and skill to deflect the wind to propel me where I want to go. There is a rhythm to the wind and waves that stays with me for hours after I return my boat to its berth and my body to the wheelchair.

That is by Zoltan Pegan and is a wonderful poem.

I would like to extend my congratulations once again for the work that Sailability provides to the Canberra community. It provides a quality grassroots sailing program for all members of the community regardless of age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, ability or disability. It undertakes, as a primary function, the provision of programs for people with a disability. Members of Sailability Australia work towards fostering and maintaining within Sailability ACT resources, strong ties with like organisations through support, recognition, assistance and promotion.

Sailability ACT endeavours to nurture those sailors who may choose to progress further in the sport at a more competitive level, while continuing to support its members at their new-found level of sailing skills at club level. I commend all involved with Sailability.

Cranleigh school

MR COE (Ginninderra) (9.20): Indeed it is a pleasure this evening to rise to put on the record my admiration for the staff, families, children and friends of the Cranleigh school in my electorate of Ginninderra. Cranleigh is an amazing place, a place which is indicative of just how good a place Canberra is. It is a school I know my colleagues, especially Steve Doszpot, also have great respect for. Cranleigh provides wonderful opportunities for students to the age of 12 who have moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, including students with physical and complex issues.

Whilst tax dollars can do a lot in providing resources, the entire school community is dependent upon the generosity, patience and commitment of the wonderful staff led by the principal, Karin Wetselaar, and the deputy principal, Sue Roche.

I also thank and commend the Parents and Citizens Association and the officer bearers: Sheree Henley, the president; Anne Dunstan, the vice-president; Karna O'Dea, the secretary; and Greg Sydney-Smith, the treasurer. I think the way the school community extends beyond the staff, families and students to businesses, community groups and other schools is a wonderful demonstration of how all schools should operate.

I would like to acknowledge the great partnership Cranleigh has with Radford college. This partnership is one where students from Radford assist with different activities at the school, which I know is of great benefit to all involved. Such activities include the walkathon, hydrotherapy, smart board activities, water play day, drama productions and more. I know Cranleigh also has strong relationships with Belconnen high school, Mount Rogers primary school and other schools.

Cranleigh is also well known for its annual art show. The show is a great demonstration of the creativity of the students and the talent of local artists. It facilitates the coming together of the broader school community. It raises awareness of the school and the facilities and is also a good fundraising event for the P&C. The 2010 show was held last weekend, 15 to 17 October. I would like to commend the art show committee for making the event happen. They are Sheree Henley, the

coordinator, Brionie Robins, Laurie Fiddian, Jenny Coulston, Isla Patterson, Anne-Marie Vogt, Helen Maguire, Karin Wetselaar and Sue Roche.

I would also like to thank the sponsors who came on board to support the school, in particular Capital Chemist Group for their ongoing premier sponsorship, in particular Melita Flynn, who announced continued sponsorship in 2011, also to Bio Zoom, Broadlex, Kippax Fair, Mount Majura Wines, Paragon Printers, Rotary, Schmooze, Territory Energy and Westfield Belconnen.

The students at the Woden school did a great job with the catering. Greg Bayliss from the ABC officially opened the event. Radford college, Lucy McCarthy, Lyn Cottingham, David Hatton, Isla Patterson and Cynthia and Rhett Bunnell assisted with the coordination of artwork, raffles, photography, PowerPoint presentation, music and more.

Finally, I would like to encourage members of the Assembly and indeed all Canberrans to get behind an event taking place on 29 October. This year, Cranleigh will be the beneficiary of the Peter Blackshaw Real Estate Belconnen annual charity gala dinner and fundraising auction. The agency should be commended on this wonderful, ongoing commitment to our community. I thank Peter Blackshaw Real Estate Belconnen for choosing the Cranleigh school and hope that a considerable amount of money can be raised. More information about the fundraising event can be found at the Cranleigh primary school website.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Assembly adjourned at 9.23 pm.