



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE
CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021-22](#))

Members:

**DR M PATERSON (Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK (Deputy Chair)
MS L CASTLEY**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2021

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**Acting secretary to the committee:
Dr F Scott (Ph: 620 75498)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 1.35 pm.

Oakey, Ms Helen, Executive Director, Conservation Council ACT Region

THE CHAIR: I declare open the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity into the ACT budget 2021-22. During the proceedings today we will be hearing from community groups in relation to the ACT budget. On behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge that we meet today on the lands of Ngunnawal people. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution that they make to the life of this city and this region.

In this first session we will hear from Conservation Council ACT. On behalf of the committee, I welcome and thank Ms Helen Oakey for appearing today. I understand that you have been forwarded a copy of the privilege statement. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of this statement?

Ms Oakey: Yes, I can.

THE CHAIR: I remind you that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. When taking a question on notice it would be helpful to confirm with the words, “I will take that question on notice.” Before we go on to questions, do you have an opening statement or comments that you would like to make?

Ms Oakey: I do. Thank you very much for taking the time to hear from the Conservation Council ACT Region this afternoon. As you may be aware, the Conservation Council made a budget submission to the ACT government this year that focused on four key priority areas: firstly, the response to the climate emergency by expediting action to cut the ACT’s direct emissions from gas and transport; secondly, to reduce the ACT’s ecological footprint, including scope 3 emissions, which are the indirect emissions—waste, consumption and embodied energy; thirdly, to address climate adaptation preparedness and resilience from a whole-of-government perspective; and, fourthly, to invest in nature and the climate resilience that comes with that.

We acknowledge that there has been a strong focus on the COVID emergency over the past two years, but there is a longer, more insidious emergency that follows. The more that we can do to ameliorate that climate emergency and the more that we can prepare for it, the better off we will be. Indeed, strong climate and nature policy is a key part of a COVID recovery policy due to the flow-on outcomes for public health and a resilient community.

We welcome funding for specific initiatives that progress a number of issues that we identified in our budget submission and in other submissions. While it is clear that some of those have not been fully funded in this budget, we look forward to seeing that happen over the next three years during this term of government and the parliamentary and governing agreement.

Before we start on specifics, I would like to touch on two key things that we identified as being important in this budget and budgets going forward. The first one is to focus

on applying a climate and sustainability lens to all of our budget spending across all of the portfolios. If you look at where our budget expenditure goes, you can see in the charts in the budget papers that three per cent of environment and climate is identified as environment and climate spending. Of course, that is not the case, because we know that climate change spending, in particular, occurs across a range of other portfolios, including transport, housing, even emergency services and, particularly, in city services with regard to greening projects and things like that.

There is a really strong need to apply a lens to all spending. To give some examples of how that could happen, with regard to things like COVID recovery support for business development, it could include criteria about sustainability in the circular economy. Flexible work hubs and government facility refurbishments should include communications on active and public travel resources. Housing, clearly in terms of energy efficiency, could point landlords to resources or attendance at ACTsmart webinars.

Car parks should be incorporating best practice for water-sustainable urban design, permeable surfaces, biodiversity and climate-resilient plantings. There are car parks in the budget that are being proposed. These are things that triggered our thinking on this. Road duplications and upgrades must always have active travel corridors and put people first in their connection to services. School upgrades should include facilities in education about active travel. Construction trades annual licence renewals should require compulsory training about electrification to support the transition away from fossil gas. Investment in green spaces right across the spectrum, including things like dog parks, should be completed with consideration of environmental services, such as pollination and biodiversity connectivity.

We note that this budget appears to put a strong focus on capital spending and capital initiatives, perhaps without the attached prioritisation of community engagement. I think that would be one criticism—that the amount of money that we are seeing invested in some of the capital works is quite high. We really could supplement that with a clear direction about how the community is going to be engaged. A good case study of that would be, for example, that we are spending \$4 million on traffic lights on Parkes Way to manage the traffic disruption of light rail, but we cannot see any funding in there for community engagement on active travel, how to promote active travel during this disruption period and how commuters can be supported to change their travel behaviours. We need to think about the work-from-home options or work-from-hub options, potentially moving to e-bikes and other transport options. That is the first theme, which is thinking about the climate sustainability lens.

The second theme I want to touch on is the role of the environment community sector in supporting community engagement, knowing that the government has clearly identified that community action is going to be really important over the next steps in terms of reducing our emissions now that we have got the 100 per cent renewable electricity target in place. There does not seem to be enough additional funding for the deep community engagement that is going to support behaviour change.

We welcome the extension of the \$600,000 over four years for the community zero-emission grants, but in real terms that funding that stayed static, while it appears that the commitment from the community needs to increase. We note, when the

government funds the community to undertake community engagement—something that we are well placed to do—the amount of money that potentially gets spent on two government positions, such as \$856,000 for climate communication activities. While that is welcome, we know that the community, with the same amount of money or actually less, can achieve a great deal more. We would encourage the government to think about how to be a bit more ambitious in getting the community to actually support those community engagement programs in a way that has more longevity and that is ongoing and reaches deeply into the community.

Another example of this is funding for landcare groups. Again, it is welcome and it is welcome that it is ongoing. But the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment estimated the value of volunteer activity to be in excess of 22 per cent of total ACT government expenditure on the environment. The replacement cost in wages in 2015-16 for the volunteer sector was estimated at \$50.5 million. That is an investment that we are seeing this year of around half a million dollars in environmental volunteer programs. So you can see that the government gets a lot of value from the volunteer community. I know that our volunteers would want to keep volunteering. I think we need to give real consideration to the work that it takes to support, mobilise and maximise what volunteers can bring to that community space.

I will leave my opening comments there. We welcome a range of initiatives across the climate, transport and environment space. We can provide commentary on all of them, if I am asked to do so. I will not run through them now as it will probably eat into the rest of the 15 minutes. I can always come back to that, if we have time at the end.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ms Oakey. I will start by asking the first substantive question. Were there any glaring holes in the budget or areas that you felt were significantly missing?

Ms Oakey: One of the ongoing issues that we are concerned about is the scale of funding that is available to maintain and enhance biodiversity. That is within core funding. We see occasional allocations of funding for biodiversity, and we have received some in the last couple of years, primarily off the back of the bushfire and the damage to Namadgi. It is that core funding that does not routinely get extended.

We welcome the additional funding that was put aside for the management of invasive species, an additional \$2.9 million over four years. It takes annual spending up to about \$2.7 million per year. It probably needs to be at least \$3 million, a little bit more than that, in terms of the recovery funding for Namadgi but also given the rainfall that we have had in the last couple of years and the impact that that is going to have on the spread of weeds across the territory. It is probably not sufficient, and it often is not sufficient. It is an ongoing job that we really need to tackle head-on because, if you do not keep on top of it, as we all know, it gets ahead of you and then the job is twice as bad. It would be great to see that core funding for weeds lifted on an ongoing basis.

We were hoping to see an additional bucket, and I have touched on this a little. While it is welcome that the community zero-emission grant has been extended, it is very hard to see—and I think this is one of the gaps across the budget—where the community engagement programs are being funded so that we can have a deep engagement with people across different sectors of our community with regard to both

climate change and sustainability issues. I know that there are ongoing programs that are run by government through Actsmart, but, given the scale of the response that is expected and the challenge that we have to get transport emissions and gas emissions down—and you would know that when you go out into the community there is a big variation in people’s awareness and understanding about sustainability, about what is required and about how they can change their patterns of behaviour—it requires ongoing conversations. I do not think that we have invested in that as heavily as we could have. That would be the other really obvious gap, I think.

There are some programs where we saw the beginnings of funding. We saw \$5 million for the Vulnerable Household Energy Support scheme. We know that the commitment is 50 over the term of government. We also saw \$5 million for the Healthy Waterways program to be extended. That is very welcome, but over the term of government we know the commitment is \$30 million. So we will be looking forward to seeing that program extended in the budget next year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: With regard to the invasive species, you mentioned that \$3 million is not quite enough. What do you hope to see? What would you love the government to be offering in that area?

Ms Oakey: That is a really good question. What we want to do is to be effective. Often the people who are at the coalface know exactly how much they need. We put forward a proposal in the election policy last year that we would like to see \$3 million a year, plus some recovery funding for Namadgi, as baseline funding. We have not quite hit that point yet, unless we can leverage that to get some commonwealth funding as well. Even with \$3 million a year, or \$3½ million a year, we know that sometimes we are just touching the sides of the problem. We know we have not quite got on top of it. I do not think there is a definitive number, but we want to see that budget is not stretched. I think it is about asking the people at the coalface the question: “How are we getting through it; how are we progressing?”

Invasive species is one area where the government have really started to look at what they are achieving for the money that they invest. Particularly with regard to plant species, they have put their weed management plan online. So you can see what we are spending, where we are spending it and what we are getting for that outcome. I think that is really positive. Sometimes with environment spending it is very easy to say, “We might need this much; we might need that much.” We actually need to see that that spending has been effective and we need to be able to measure the effectiveness of the investment. That is what is happening with invasive species.

With biodiversity funding more generally, I think what we can say comfortably is that this is not an area that we invest in heavily as a community, as a government, because it is a little bit like out of sight, out of mind. We often spend money on infrastructure and on really specific programs, but we could do a lot to enhance the quality of the biodiversity, even within our nature reserve areas. What we see is funding going towards signs, repairing fences or clearing up but, in terms of actual biodiversity quality, there is a lot we could do to rehabilitate some of the areas that we have across the ACT, both in reserves and off reserves.

MS CASTLEY: You mentioned volunteers earlier and that you were hoping to see more of the volunteer funding, especially in terms of educating the community. What is the government response when you say, “We need lots of money. It’s all about the volunteers”? How do you go with your response from government on that?

Ms Oakey: The budget is probably the response from government. Certainly, the government has been very aware of the need to provide ongoing funding for the land care for the catchment groups. The regular nature of that funding is very welcome. As a result of the feedback that we have given about the community zero emission grants, I am hoping that we will see the grant funding there potentially look at projects that have more longevity or are a bit more sizeable. We need to be careful with grant funding that we are not funding short-term projects. They get up and running and there is a lot of energy put into them, but they are not actually carried across or utilised. The resources then do not end up being as valuable as they could be.

I think government are very conscious of the fact that they do need to support the community to do this, but I suspect that they are not really aware how much extra volunteer time people are putting in—even when you get grant funding, how many hours people are slogging away for and how much the community is contributing to that. It is hard work. It is exhausting work to get all of these things organised and to coordinate the governance around them, let alone to actually get the programs up and running.

MS CASTLEY: It is disappointing.

Ms Oakey: Yes. That is probably the main thing. I think we are at a point now where we need to have that conversation with government about what does it mean for the community to be involved in the climate change space, particularly going forward, around transport and gas emissions.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Braddock.

MR BRADDOCK: Do you think the level of funding and the plans by the government are adequate to meet the challenges of meeting our climate emissions reductions?

Ms Oakey: I think we are at an interesting point with regard to climate change. Clearly, we have dealt with the direct emissions coming from the energy sector, so we now have to tackle the transport and gas sectors. This is what I was touching on earlier. We welcome the Sustainable Household Scheme for its objectives in supporting people to phase out gas appliances—I think that is really important—the Vulnerable Household Energy Support scheme; all of the Actsmart schemes; the solar for low incomes scheme and the community clubs scheme. All of those things are really welcome.

We also note that there were some big-ticket items in the climate budget that were really positive but not likely to deliver the scale of emissions on a par with the money

that was put into them. There was a large amount of money for the Callam offices refit, obviously, but not necessarily a massive community-wide emission reduction. Regarding the electric vehicles for the ESA, it is fantastic that they are transitioning to electric vehicles. We really appreciate the commitment to do that and to potentially pay more for those vehicles than they would pay for non-electric vehicles at this point. Those were listed as the two big-ticket climate items in the budget. They take up \$28 million of the \$63 million climate expenditure, but the emissions across those two things are going to be fairly minimal and not widespread.

In relation to the scale of the money that is being put on the table, obviously a fair amount of that is through the government programs to support the community to make the shift. That is where we are saying that there should be a bit of a stronger investment in the community, engaging with the community to get them on board to do those things. We need people to take up those options; we need people to buy into those options. We need to reach deeply into the community, to people who are not thinking about this stuff all the time. That is where we would have liked to have seen a little more investment.

As I said, the climate initiatives obviously stretch across government portfolios. There are some things in the budget that are very interesting, such as the \$2.5 million to establish flexible work hubs. That is a really great initiative from a transport perspective. That will potentially reduce people's commutes. It means that they can commute to a local hub or work from home. Those things are really welcome. The money that has been put aside for free registration of zero emission vehicles, for example, will kickstart the uptake of electric vehicles. The funding for active travel infrastructure is really important in the transport space because, even with a behaviour change, we are going to need the infrastructure to support people.

It is going to be very important that, as I said earlier, we integrate the things that make behaviour change easy. We have to integrate that into all of these programs and projects as we roll them out, so that people are supported to make those changes as well—for example, end-of-trip facilities in the city if people are riding in or if they are taking their e-bikes in: those kinds of things.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: Do you have any idea what sort of KPIs you would like to see ACT parks have?

Ms Oakey: I would have to take that one on notice. That is a very complex question. Obviously, we would like ACT parks to have indicators around biodiversity outcomes, so biodiversity quality. We cannot just put natural areas aside and think that, just because they have got a fence around them and we have said they are a nature reserve, they actually have the qualities that we need them to have. There would probably be KPIs around that.

We could probably delve down a little and look at what does it take in terms of resource management to actually manage those land areas? What does our range of

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ratio look like? What does our community education look like within our reserves and within park's service? How are we actually bringing people into our parks? Where are they going? How do they use them? What can they use them for? It is a very big question. I would not like to sit here and profess that I know the answer to what those KPIs should probably be from here. Those are the kinds of issues that KPIs would probably want to touch on.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the ECCB committee, thank you very much for your attendance today. You will be sent a draft of the Hansard transcript for correction of minor errors. We just had that final question on notice. If you could please provide the answer to the committee secretary within five working days, that would be fantastic.

Short suspension.

BUTCHER, MRS LINDY, President, ACT Wildlife

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome and thank Mrs Lindy Butcher for representing ACT Wildlife today. The proceedings will be recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. When taking a question on notice it would be helpful to use the words, “I will take that question on notice.” This will help the committee and witnesses confirm which questions to respond to. I understand that you have been forwarded a copy of the privilege statement. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mrs Butcher: I have received that and read it; I understand it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Before we go to questions, do you have an opening statement that you would like to make?

Mrs Butcher: I do. I do not have a formal submission. I just wanted to acknowledge and thank the ACT government for the first time that we have had funding in the ACT budget. We have four years of recurrent funding and it is a great thing for our organisation. I just wanted to acknowledge and thank the government for that and then talk briefly about an ongoing need that we have, which we will continue to address as time goes by.

THE CHAIR: Fantastic.

Mrs Butcher: The funding that we received will be used for staffing. We are effectively a small business. We have two full-time equivalent staff and about 100 active volunteers, and we run that as a committee of 12 volunteers. As you can imagine, that is very much a full-time job and we are all volunteers. Many people still work full-time as well.

That funding will allow us some certainty into the future for employing some administrative staff. Currently we have two people who answer the phone for us, field questions from the public about wildlife issues in the Canberra region, provide information and organise for injured and orphaned wildlife to come to our 100 or so volunteers.

While this is great, we have one very large unmet need—which is for the future, I guess—and that is we do not have access to our own vet. Currently we rely on the goodwill of local vets. Given that we take about 12,000 calls a year from members of the public, a lot of the advice we give those members of the public is to take the injured animal to the nearest vet, where frequently it will be euthanised. One of the things we would like to have in future is our own wildlife vet and a wildlife vet clinic. It is a big dream we have. It is one we are constantly planning for.

The funding we have now gives us the opportunity to start putting some long-term plans in motion to take us towards eventually having our own wildlife vet and, hopefully, some administrative support for a lot of the work that goes into running the organisation. I do not know whether you had any questions you wanted to ask about how we do what we do. I really just wanted to just say thank you and talk about the

one big future need we have. If people have any questions for me, I am happy to take them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On your long-term plan about the vet, do you have data on the number of animals that get taken to local vets and what the need is for a specialised vet?

Mrs Butcher: We do; we have a database. We obviously do not collect the records from the vet. A couple of years ago I did a survey with a student as part of a science mentoring program. She surveyed local vets and, over six weeks, six vets took in 400 birds. We only did the survey on native birds. They took in and euthanised about 80 per cent of the 400 birds over a six-week period. That was just a very small survey we did of only half a dozen vets. The vets are not required to keep that kind of information for any reporting purposes, so we really only know the concerns we have.

When an injured animal comes in, we need to wait to find a vet who can see to that animal. Treatment obviously is expensive. The vets are incredibly generous with their time and their expertise and they charge us as little as possible, if anything at all. But obviously we are really relying on their goodwill. We know how overworked vets are. There is a lot of information around that at the moment. Having access to our own wildlife-specific vet would reduce the load on the local vets and also, we believe, improve the outcomes for a lot of wildlife if they can have regular vet attendance, rather than just when it is critical.

MS CASTLEY: With regard to the vet, what do you expect the cost of that would be?

Mrs Butcher: We did some costings a few years ago. This has been a very long-term dream. We were thinking that about \$400,000 would see us set up with a demountable clinic of some kind. We are fairly flexible about the accommodation we would use. For a vet and a vet nurse, it would probably be around \$200,000 a year for salaries and on-costs. It is a big expense and it is one that we have to put a lot of thinking into how we can manage that.

MS CASTLEY: With regard to the injuries of the animals that you are seeing, is it diseases; is it climate events? What is it that you deal with mostly?

Mrs Butcher: Predominantly it is intersection with humans. It is being caught in inappropriate netting, being hit by cars or being attacked by domestic animals. Those are the biggest things that bring animals into care with injuries. Frequently we have to have the animal euthanised because we are not able to get a vet who can do the vet work that needs to be done to save the animal's life. That is also difficult because wildlife do not tend to do well in captivity.

We are very reluctant to even ask to have any big treatment like surgery on an animal that may need six weeks in care, because we know they do not do well. Often baby animals do respond well. But we are still reluctant to ask vets to do this kind of work for us pro bono, and we know that it would cost us several hundred dollars if we were paying for it ourselves out of donated funds or out of our newly budgeted funds. It is to do with broken bones, predominantly, but we see a lot of animals, such as possums with dermatitis, which can be treated with antibiotics and care. We have quite a few

wombats in with mange. Again, mostly that is care. We have been very fortunate in getting a mange grant again this year. That allows us to treat our in-care wombats for mange as well. Those are the main things—antibiotics for animal attacks and then long-term care and antibiotics for entanglements and vehicle strikes.

THE CHAIR: Just around the wombat mange program, do you have sufficient funding to be able to address the mange problem in the ACT?

Mrs Butcher: For the moment we do. It has been really great. We just got a \$10,000 grant approved this week. Because we have been applying for grants over the last five years or so, we had one from the ACT government initially and then we had one from Australian Ethical. These allowed us to put the infrastructure in place to carry out mange treatments on wombats that are reported to us and we have done some population treatments.

This grant that we have just got for \$10,000 will allow us to treat roughly 300 wombats and their burrows. It is a very expensive treatment, unfortunately, but we now have the infrastructure. We have the cameras for monitoring progress and we have the frames that we put over the burrows for treatment. We have got a good team of volunteers. All of that is in place now. We can treat another 300 wombats in the local area. That has been really great.

MS CASTLEY: I note that there has been a grant to increase native wildlife across Canberra's backyards and there is a demonstration garden being built in Duffy. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Is there the hope that there will be more of these across Canberra?

Mrs Butcher: It is a great project. Sadly, it is on hold, as so many things are with COVID. The plan is to have a demonstration garden which will show members of the public how they can set up their gardens in such a way that it is friendly for our wildlife. We do live with wildlife in the suburbs and we can do it well with native plantings and domestic animal control. It will happen at Duffy. We rent a parcel of land there and it has our training rooms on it. It will also have different types of demonstration gardens so that people can see what it might look like in their backyard to have a wildlife-friendly garden. That should now be in place towards the middle of next year. It has all had to go on hold because of COVID.

THE CHAIR: Mr Braddock.

MR BRADDOCK: You mentioned you had 100 volunteers.

Mrs Butcher: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: Are you getting the support from the government that you need to train and equip those volunteers to be able to do their work?

Mrs Butcher: We have a really well-established volunteer training program. That is all provided by our volunteers. Our volunteers provide the training to new volunteers. What the funding goes towards, to an extent, is the rent on our training premises. Like everybody, we have had to be very creative in the last 12 months and we have been

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delivering our training online to the extent we can. Obviously, new volunteers are not able to see animals and get their hands on native animals in care or go and see other people's animal enclosures. That has all been put on hold. But we have still been able to deliver training. We do that using volunteers.

Most of the funding that we have just received for the next four years will go towards paying our staff who answer the phones and coordinate the volunteers and to relieve some of the administrative load from our committee. It is a huge administrative load and we would like to be able to pass that off to a paid person as well.

MR BRADDOCK: I assume that will allow you to focus your efforts on doing the service that you provide in terms of caring for wildlife.

Mrs Butcher: Exactly, and we could do more public awareness. It would allow us to get out and work with members of the public on how to set up their fruit trees with appropriate netting or how to not feed the native birds inappropriately. People love to interact with native birds, but it is not always in the birds' best interests. So we can do a lot more of that.

The end result would be fewer animals coming into our care as a result of human interactions, the wrong kind of interactions. That would free us up to do that kind of thing. I would love to be doing more animal care than I am. I find that my time is really taken up with the administrative role that I do now. It would be nice to have some of that shared. I hope that answered the question.

MR BRADDOCK: It did; thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, thank you for your commitment to ACT Wildlife and for the work that you and your volunteers do.

Mrs Butcher: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk about it. We look forward to staying in touch.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

Short suspension.

COOPER, DR MAXINE, Chair, Landcare ACT

PREUSS, MS KARISSA, Chief Executive Officer, Landcare ACT

LOLICATO, MR SANDY, Treasurer, Landcare ACT

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank Dr Maxine Cooper, Ms Karissa Preuss and Mr Sandy Lolicato for representing ACT Landcare ACT today. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. When taking a question on notice it would be helpful to use the words, “I will take that question on notice.” I understand that you have been forwarded a copy of the privilege statement. Can each of you please confirm, for the record, that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Cooper: I understand.

Ms Preuss: Yes.

Mr Lolicato: I understand.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Dr Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair, we would. In the shortness of time, I will just give an overview. Landcare ACT is the peak community body in the ACT for landcare. It is part of a national landcare network and works with Landcare Australia. Here in the ACT, we have over 70 groups and thousands and thousands of individuals volunteering their time to improve and maintain the environment.

LACT does not get any ACT government funding. Although we are the peak body, we get no funding from the ACT government. We are inclusive and we are a community-focused group. We support our member groups, some of whom do get funding from the ACT government. We try to think globally and act locally to address some of the really wicked problems of our time, related to the major issues such as climate change, environmental and community health and wellbeing.

In our introductory comments, we propose to cover a few things as succinctly as we can: funding for the ACT through catchment groups, who are member groups of Landcare ACT, the environmental grants funding, the \$14 million for urban trees, weeds funding, wellbeing, targeting young people to engage in Landcare ACT, healthy waterways, bushfire recovery and agricultural policy.

In the ACT the activities related to all of these occur, as we know, on Ngunnawal land. At this stage, as land carers, we would like to say we are privileged to be on Ngunnawal land, where traditional ways of knowledge-sharing and managing the lands and water have taken place for thousands of years. We acknowledge and pay our respects to Ngunnawal elders past, present and emerging, and recognise their continuing connection, and we extend our respect to all First Nations people.

I will just say something on the funding for the catchment groups. Landcare ACT really welcomes the current funding proposed for the catchment groups. We have supported this publicly. We have worked hard with the catchment groups to raise awareness about their importance. This funding really reflects support in the

Assembly for their work. Importantly, it allows long-term planning and means that the groups can now spend more time supporting the community volunteers rather than spending a large amount of their time annually trying to seek funding.

The groups are often described by volunteers as the glue that holds the smaller locally-based volunteer groups together. They do this through the catchment group sharing their key information, providing access to funding and helping these groups with fund application—in other words, doing the basic work that the local groups do not want to do because all the local groups want to do is go and plant, weed and chat about what is going on locally.

For this year, this budget's funding will benefit the region's natural environment through supporting our catchment groups. Landcare volunteers across the ACT contribute \$2 million in kind annually and also the catchment groups and ACT Landcare bring in around \$2 million in partnership grants per year.

With the funding for the catchment groups, they will be able to continue their work and ensure stewardship across the ACT. Landcare ACT and the catchment groups look forward to learning more about what is the precise funding amount and being reassured that this funding focuses on supporting local volunteer groups delivering environmental outcomes on the ground, something that we advocate strongly.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Cooper.

Mr Lolicato: Firstly, we acknowledge the additional funding towards an additional ParkCare ranger. This was called for by the ParkCare community and will value-add the work that all the volunteers do. I want to say some words about the Healthy Waterways initiative. The territory's lakes, rivers and wetlands are essential for biodiversity, as well as the wellbeing of Canberra, and \$1.5 million will be spent on clean catchments and clean waterways, building wetlands and installing pollutant traps to clean and filter water as it flows through the city and enters ACT lakes.

These aquatic ecosystems are a part of what makes Canberra a great place to live for people and wildlife, and it is important that we protect and restore them. It is not that long ago that we had problems with a lot of our polluted waterways, so we want to try to ameliorate that. This funding builds on the success of the ACT Healthy Waterways initiative, which spent around \$93.5 million on 25 new water quality infrastructure projects. We welcome this ongoing engagement in the program.

In relation to bushfire recovery, you are all aware of the big impact bushfires had on the region. Landcare has made a significant contribution to bushfire recovery in the ACT. Immediately following the bushfires, approximately 1,000 people signed up to be part of the Landcare bushfire recovery effort. Landcare ACT, with delivery partner Southern ACT Catchment Group, have sought a number of grants to coordinate community action in bushfire recovery in the region.

Landcare ACT is part of a broader Landcare-led bushfire recovery program. This \$14 million funding is being devolved through community landcare and associated organisations across Australia to deliver bushfire recovery actions. Within the ACT there has been over \$650,000 brought in through Landcare and under the auspices of

Landcare ACT. In addition, private donations have been organised through Southern ACT Catchment Group. We welcome the development of an agriculture policy and are interested in continuing engagement with the development of this.

Ms Preuss: We welcome the environment grants. We recognise that the environment grants have been increased by one-third, which is very welcome because they are often oversubscribed. The \$14 million urban tree announcement is also very welcome. Landcare is well-placed to be a delivery partner in this. When the adopt-a-park grant was run a few years ago, the catchment groups co-contributed towards 50 per cent of those adopted grants. We look forward to continuing that level of engagement. We would welcome greater integration between TCCS and EPSDD on this program and more broadly.

Community land care obviously makes a significant contribution towards weed control in the ACT. Weeds are an ongoing issue for community land carers. The weed funding has been very welcomed and particularly the cost-tenure approach to that weed funding. We are pleased that there will be roving biosecurity teams to control invasive species on reserve land, as well as other areas of the ACT.

We have recognised that, during COVID, people have flocked to our natural spaces for the wellbeing benefits that arise from that. Landcare ACT looks forward to building on that through our wellbeing program that is focused on connecting people with nature. Lastly—

THE CHAIR: Just to interrupt, Karissa. I am really sorry, but we might go to questions because we are about to run out of time. We do not get much time for this day, unfortunately. Mr Braddock.

MR BRADDOCK: Is the level of grants sufficient to allow you to get on top of weeds?

Dr Cooper: That is a million-dollar question. A billion dollars may not let us get on top of weeds. We have to approach it strategically. We have a weeds working group at the moment trying to do that. We are working in partnership with whoever within government wants to work with us and, essentially, more money is more help. Exactly how much we would want, I think it would be as much as anyone can give us. Is that a reasonable answer?

Mr Lolicato: Absolutely.

Dr Cooper: Thank you for that searching question.

MR BRADDOCK: I am not sure if you want that as an answer because it indicates that, no matter how much we can give you, it will not be enough.

Dr Cooper: I think, under climate change, we may actually be confronting a situation where this is one of the real wicked problems. So you need to target action in key areas to protect certain species and recognise that you may never be able to eradicate some weeds, but certainly it has to be done strategically.

THE CHAIR: Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: I probably have a million-dollar question as well. What environmental issue do you think is the most important one facing the ACT now? And do you believe the government is doing enough through funding to assist with this and policy et cetera?

Ms Preuss: My answer to that would be that stewardship of our natural resources is the most important, because that provides environmental outcomes but also wellbeing outcomes. Particularly following COVID, we have seen the importance of these local spaces. We are very much hoping that the funding that is provided to the catchment groups will be able to support those on-ground groups. At this stage there is a bit of a question mark in terms of exactly what that funding is for. Being able to support those on-ground volunteers who contribute approximately \$2 million in in-kind hours, from our perspective, is one of the issues.

Dr Cooper: Can I just add a specific target under that? We are particularly keen to get many more young people and many more of our Ngunnawal people and other Aboriginal people involved in Landcare activities. At the moment there is a gap in the involvement of young people.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank you and your member organisations and volunteers for the contribution that you make to the ACT community. We look forward to working with you over the next few years while we are in this role on the committee. Thank you very much for your attendance and your time. We will send a draft transcript for correction of minor errors.

The committee adjourned at 2.31 pm.